



Practice concept of the social educational work with refugee women* and their children at the women's shelter

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Counselling, support and shelter for women* affected by domestic violence and their children



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Development of a diversity-sensitive practice

Content

1. Preface.....	2
2. Context and history of the development of the concept	3
3. The target group	5
3.1 Particular vulnerability	5
3.2 Own empirical studies: Needs of the target group	6
4. Derived measures	10
4.1 Direct implementation measures	11
4.2 Cooperation projects and networks	12
4.3 Demands on organisational policy	13
5. Intercultural opening of the women’s shelter	14
5.1 Self-conception of the house	15
5.2 Diversity Management	16
5.3 Visibility of diversity	16
6. Work with interpreters	17
7. Cooperation projects	18
8. Quality assurance	19

1. Preface

Since nearly 40 years now, women*¹ and children affected by violence have been finding protection and support at the Marburg women's shelter. Since the beginning, we have been working with women* having most different educational backgrounds, ethnic origins and possibly a history of flight or migration. Against this background, it is our major concern that all women* and their children feel safe and welcome here.

We attach great importance to offering differentiated assistance and support services to suit the diversity and heterogeneity of the women* seeking support, but it is quite problematic to further develop our offer in the tight daily work routine and to respond to social challenges in an innovative and creative manner. Therefore, we are very happy that the EU project "Marburg ohne Partnergewalt" (Marburg without intimate partner violence) explicitly provides us with the space and the resources to further develop the offer at the women's shelter, responding to the different needs of the women* and children. In particular, the analysis of the life situations of refugee women* and their children, their challenges and the resulting needs for action are a main focus of the project.

In this respect, it is our aspiration to avoid prejudice in the contact with the women* and children with experience of flight, and not to identify them as homogeneous group - at the same time recognizing their special vulnerability caused by the entanglement of different forms of violence and the resulting need for assistance and support.

Also the Istanbul Convention, the "Treaty to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence", which entered into force in Germany already in 2018, states that refugee women* are particularly affected by violence, thus requiring adequate protection: "Migrant women, including undocumented migrant women, and women asylum-seekers form two sub-categories of women that are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence."²

In the context of the EU project "Marburg ohne Partnergewalt" (Marburg without domestic violence), the association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. responds to this aspect of the Istanbul Convention: The development of a concept explicitly addressing the needs and situations of refugee women* and their children enables us to systematize our social educational work and complement it by new creative and diversity-sensitive approaches. In this concept, we attach

¹ The gender asterisk (*) is intended to show that being a women does not depend on a certain physicality, thus confusing the social-hegemonic dualism of men and women.

² Cf. Istanbul Convention, explanatory report, chapter VII, 298.

great importance to the fact that it is based on the perspective of the refugee women* and that they act as experts in their living environments.

This concept is to be understood as first sub-goal of the EU project. Furthermore, another written concept will be developed in the second year of the project (October 2020 - September 2021), discussing the question which access barriers exist for women* with experience of flight seeking support, and how to eliminate such barriers by target group-specific outreach activities and a low-threshold access to our services.

2. Context and history of the concept development

Since many decades, women* with a flight history have been coming to our women's shelter. Migration and flight are, therefore, no new subjects. At the same time, since summer 2015 and the subsequent political developments, more and more refugee women* have been seeking protection in women's shelters. Statistics of the past years show that the majority of the residents of women's shelters have a history of flight or migration.³ The statistics of the women's shelter of Marburg lead to similar results.⁴ The increasing share *cannot* be explained by domestic violence being a migrant or class-specific phenomenon. Domestic violence is found in all parts of society. Socio-economic factors must be considered to explain the statistics of women's shelters: Women* and girls* with experience of flight or migration are particularly affected by forms of violence and their entanglement. In addition to gender-specific violence, they are also faced with structural disadvantages, like for instance an uncertain residence status, language problems, everyday racism and traumas of flight. This entanglement of different forms of discrimination makes refugee women* particularly vulnerable, so that the women's shelter is often the only option to get out of the violent situation.

For this reason, explicitly the needs and situations of refugee women* are analysed in the course of the EU project. This allows to derive both, actions for the social educational work as well as for target group-specific outreach activities. It is the objective of the two-year project and the resulting concepts to achieve the intercultural opening of the women's shelter and of the counselling and intervention centre, which is also run by the association.

³ Cf. Residents statistics of the association for women's shelter coordination Frauenhauskoordination e.V. of the year 2019

⁴ Cf. Annual report 2019 of the association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V.

The preparatory work for the project and the application for a project funding by the EU funding programme "Rights, Equality and Citizenship" commenced already in 2017. In August 2019, after some labour-intensive ups and downs, we - in the project network with the city of Marburg and JUKO Marburg e.V. - received the EU's final approval and are now pleased to participate in the overall project "Marburg ohne Partnergewalt" (Marburg without domestic violence) with a total volume of 430,000 euros, thus being in a position to represent one of the three practical modules of the project.

In the first year of the project, this practice concept was developed for the social educational work with refugee women* and their children at the women's shelter. It is our self-expectation to meet the needs and demands of refugee women* and children. However, we have also clear and set limits which we want and have to observe. This, for instance, relates to aspects of psycho- or trauma therapy. If the topic of experience of violence and trauma sequelae is openly discussed at the women's shelter, we refer to appropriate centres to avoid re-traumatisation. Another example are questions related to asylum law, aliens law, but also integration in the labour market, German language courses, etc.. To be able to meet the requirements of the highly complex life situations and difficulties faced by the women* and children, we are transparent towards everybody involved when it comes to the subject "limits of our work": Domestic violence is our core issue. We offer support in everyday matters, jointly develop new perspectives and provide support to the affected persons in freeing themselves from previous dependencies. But we do not claim to be able to resolve the complex problems in an all-encompassing way, because they need to be addressed in a political and also in a social context. This project rather aims at finding out how coping with domestic violence and the work at the women's shelter can be developed in a diversity-sensitive way.

3. The target group

The target group of the practice concepts are refugee women* and their children. Both, social educational support and also outreach activities shall be adapted and developed to suit their concrete needs and life situations.

First of all a critical note on the defined target group: Often, terms like "refugee woman*" are external ascriptions, which the women* themselves would not choose, because such terms tend to stigmatise and homogenise.⁵ On the one hand, these concepts have a victimising effect, because the woman* is shown as passive and the helpless "other one". On the other hand, these are collective terms not considering the individual experiences and biographies, thus forming an apparently homogeneous group. The term is not suited to reflect the variety of life plans and the complexity of cultural factors. There is nothing like *the* refugee women*. In fact, women* can live in completely different cultural and personal contexts. They dispose of individual experiences and backgrounds. Despite the justified and relevant criticism, we talk about the target group "women* with experience of flight" or "refugee women*", as it can be assumed, that this group in particular, even if they are not homogeneous and "the others", need the support of the women's shelter in a different way because of their particular vulnerability.

3.1 Particular vulnerability

The fact that women* and children with experience of flight are particularly vulnerable and require different support by the women's shelter can be explained by the structural disadvantages, the resulting multiple discrimination and its entanglement: Structural disadvantages become obvious, for instance, by a not clarified or uncertain residence permit⁶, missing social relationships, everyday racism and language barriers. This has fundamental consequences for refugee women*: For refugee women*, the option to stand up for oneself is limited in every

⁵ Cf. 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.

⁶ On this subject matter, the Dachverband der Migrantinnen*organisationen e.V. (Confederation of migrant organisations DaMigra) published "Schattenbericht zur Umsetzung der Istanbul-Konvention in Deutschland" (2020) (Shadow report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany). This report explains how the German legal system fails to protect migrant and refugee women* against violence.

respect.⁷ At the same time, structural disadvantages will further aggravate violence. Structural disadvantages make it more difficult to cope with challenging situations, and this is why refugee women* (are forced to) tolerate violence for a longer time.

It becomes obvious, that women* with flight experience face different, entangled types of discrimination, what makes them a particularly vulnerable group. Also in the prevalence study of 2004, published by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the researchers of the principal study state as conclusion of their analysis that there is a significant need for assistance and support of migrant women* affected by violence.⁸ As a consequence, the support offer of the women's shelters becomes relevant to them in a very special way, requiring parallel action on different levels.

3.2 Own empirical studies: Needs of the target group

To achieve the goal of the first year of the project, i.e. further adapting the work and support offer at the women's shelter to the demands and needs of refugee women*, we requested the women* to describe their needs on the occasion of group discussions. Group discussion as specific form of a group interview plays an important methodical role in gender and migration research, because this survey method gives people the opportunity to exchange their views, to describe their own experiences and to express their demands and opinions. For this reason, we decided to make use of this method. We attached great importance to directly address the refugee women* in a participatory approach in order to consult them as experts in their own living environment. We regard it as imperative to develop an understanding of the needs of refugee women*, reflecting the perspective of the refugees themselves.⁹

Four group discussions with a total of twelve women* were held. In the group discussions, the participants had the opportunity to talk about the situation and to state their needs in person, instead of other people doing that for them. Our special thanks go to the (former) residents of

⁷ Cf. Atmaca, Delal and 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.

⁸ Cf. Castro de Varela, Maria (2006): Qualität in der Arbeit mit von Gewalt betroffenen Migrantinnen. Berlin: Interkulturelle Initiative – Schutz, Beratung und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit für misshandelte Frauen und ihre Kinder e.V. p. 13.

⁹ Although on average half of the residents at the women's shelter are children, the research findings only reflect the perspective and needs of the women*. This is due to the fact that only the refugee women* and not their children participated in the group discussions.

the Marburg women's shelter, we participated in the discussions with a great deal of enthusiasm!

The methodology of the project as well as the organisation of the group discussions are inspired by the research project "Gender, Flucht, Aufnahmepolitiken" (Gender, Flight, Admission Policy) of the university of Göttingen.¹⁰ After the group discussions, seven general cross-sectional topics can be summarised, which reflect the needs of the refugee residents. This summary is followed by the description of measures for the social educational work in the next chapter.

1. Cross-sectional topic: Staff members:

In the group discussions, it became obvious that the role of the staff members is highly relevant to the refugee women* resident at the women's shelter. As a consequence, they need a special contact to the staff members. In particular, the personal contact system at the Marburg women's shelter, in which one resident works closely together with a staff member, is highly appreciated. In the discussions, the women* repeatedly expressed their gratitude for the support.

"Without her [the staff member] I wouldn't have been able to make it, without her, I would now be back and live with my husband again. I think a lot about her."

In their appreciation of the support provided by the staff members, they often also express the desire for even more closeness. In particular, after leaving the women's shelter, they would like to enjoy a more intense follow-up support than the one already offered.

2. Cross-sectional topic: Demands

Another outcome of the group discussions is that the majority of the women* regard the linguistic and cultural challenges as positive. This result is largely different from relevant literature and research¹¹: A linguistic and cultural diversity in the team is not explicitly wanted by the residents: The group discussions revealed that the women* advocate German as hegemonic language, because this way, they are urged to learn it. They also regard it as positive to get to know and practice the western Christian culture.

¹⁰ Vgl. Hille, Katrin und Elle, Johanna (2019): „Risiken, Gefahren, Bedürfnisse – Geflüchtete Frauen* diskutieren in partizipativen Gesprächsrunden. In: „Wir wollen Sicherheit“ Anregungen für eine gender- und fluchtsensible Praxis im Umgang mit geflüchteten Frauen*. S. 22-39.

¹¹ For instance, Nausikaa Schirilla writes in her book "Migration und Flucht: Orientierungswissen für die soziale Arbeit" of the year 2016: "Als wichtiger Motor für interkulturelle Öffnung fungiert die Beschäftigung von Fachkräften mit Migrationshintergrund" (Schirilla 2016: 170). (The employment of qualified staff with migrant background works as significant motor of intercultural opening)

"At the women's shelter I HAVE TO speak German. That's the only reason why I've learned it. The mobile phone enabled us to translate a lot, that's another thing I've learned. I have many Arabian girl friends. It is a good thing, that not all of them are at the women's shelter, otherwise I would never have learnt it."

In addition to the positive evaluation of the cultural and linguistic challenges, it turned out that the assigned tasks, which the women* have to do independently in the women's shelter, lead to self-organisation and self-efficacy.

"She [the staff member] only showed me once: Here is the town hall, next time, you will go alone. And when there was a phone call regarding the job centre or my application for asylum, she just gave me the mobile, and I had to cope with it alone. That gave me self-confidence."

3. Cross-sectional topic: Participation

Furthermore, the need for active participation became obvious. Most of the residents want to participate and actively exert influence on decisions which affect them. A prerequisite is that all women* are well informed to be able to participate in the decision-making and to consider individual and joint interests.

Although German as hegemonic language is regarded as positive, there is also the need for language mediation to enable the women* to participate in the decisions that affect them. The relevance of language mediation becomes particularly obvious in situations of sanction: Decisions must be comprehensible and transparent to the women*, because otherwise they will feel powerless and helpless.

"Language is a problem. I was at another women's shelter before. For unknown reasons, I have been relocated here, and I didn't know where they would take me to."

Another aspect frequently mentioned in the group discussions was the wish for greater involvement in organisational processes and in the planning of activities. This is an important aspect, as in this area the empowering demands of the women* become visible: They want to empower themselves and appear as person with the ability to act.

4. Cross-sectional topic: Cultural context

Another clear outcome is the need for living and experiencing the culture of the home country. Although becoming familiar with the western Christian culture is perceived as positive, there is still the wish to celebrate religious and cultural festivals of the home country and to

share them with the other residents. In the course of such joint activities and participation in cultural and religious festivals, the women* feel themselves appreciated and noticed.

"On my birthday, I got flowers [...] for present. That was really nice! I felt: I mean something to her, she thought of me, I am a bit special (laughing). Maybe other women feel like that as well, when they get something for New Year's Day, just a tiny present, a chocolate or something like that."

They also say that in addition to learning the western Christian culture, also living and celebrating one's "own" culture is important, particularly for the socialisation of the children.

"That's a problem for the kids! In Germany, it is not easy to explain to them what the Sweet Festival eid-al-fitr is. My son does still not understand why we do not have a Christmas tree as in the women's shelter, and it makes him sad."

In this context, religion-related needs were expressed that affect the everyday life of some refugee women*: They need to know when they can take off their Hijab. In this context, it was uttered that boys* older than twelve years are still not welcome, and that the consequent announcement of male craftsmen is necessary. Another wish related to kitchen equipment which does not come into contact with pork.

5. Cross-sectional topic: Discrimination

It also becomes obvious that despite spatial narrowness and permanent presence of all residents discrimination among the residents does not seem to be a matter of concern. The structural level of the women's shelter has a protective effect, as in case of discriminating behaviour, house rules can be referred to and the support of staff members can be sought.

As indirect and structural discrimination can be found in all areas of life, and also social workers are not free from ethical prejudices, it is of particular importance to the women* concerned that they can make their voice heard. They say in the group discussions that discriminating situations in the women's shelter present themselves by the feeling of "not being heard" and a resulting feeling of powerlessness.

"The staff members did not hear what we said, just what the German woman said. They did not take us seriously, although we didn't do anything wrong."

6. Crosssectional topic: Togetherness

Another topic raised was the wish for a more intensive and constant togetherness. This wish refers to both, the residents among each other and to the staff members. The women* want to celebrate together, share their realities and develop an understanding for each other and others.

"It would be nice if the women celebrated all feasts together. Everyone could bring a meal from their home country, and all could eat together. It does not have to be a great party, just having a little dinner together. We would like to invite the staff members as well and show them something of our culture."

7. Cross-sectional topic: Integration

The last but central topic expressed by the women* is the wish for integration. Integration is a need that aims at several areas: The women* want to attend German language courses in a concentrated manner, they wish to practice their profession or complete the training, find childcare, be financially independent and live in a secure environment.

These needs, however, go beyond the capacities of women's shelter work, as they are part of a long-term macrosocial political need for action. Nevertheless, it is our concern to make this need visible. At the same time, we dissociate ourselves from an integration discourse that exclusively makes refugees responsible for a working immigrant society.

4. Derived measures

In the first step, the goal of the project was to explain the situation and needs of refugee women*. The participatory structure of the discussion allowed the women* to be the ones to set the focus topics, thus expressing which needs are to the fore and why. Having listed the seven cross-sectional topics, a summary of the measures derived for the social educational work at the women's shelter is provided in the following: It is our firm commitment to take the outcome of the project seriously and to take it as impulse for concrete and direct implementation measures, new cooperation projects and other projects, at the same time reflecting the challenges and limitations of the results and to specify demands on organisational policy.

4.1 Direct implementation measures

Several measures can be derived from the refugee women's* needs learnt in the course of the discussions, which can immediately be integrated in the social educational work of the women's shelter.

The following implementation measures result from the wish for living and experiencing the culture of the home country. The first major measure is the establishment of an intercultural calendar, in which the women*, when they move in, can enter their birthday and a festival which is important to them. This measure makes it possible to jointly celebrate and experience cultural, religious and private festivals, and the women* are appreciated and enjoy recognition of their cultural needs.

Furthermore, more importance will be attached to providing multilingual magazines, brochures, posters and signs in the entrance area and in the common rooms. This makes it possible to visualise the diversity in the house and it is also a response to the linguistic and cultural needs of women* with experience of flight. Furthermore, relevant documents like the sublease agreement, the house rules and the data protection statement are provided in different languages. This serves to make the work and the rules at the women's shelter accessible and transparent to all women*, despite any language differences and barriers.

In addition to this, kitchen equipment will be provided in the women's shelter, which has not yet come into contact with pork. Another point is to announce male craftsmen in a more transparent manner to give the women* the chance to plan the times when they can take off their headscarf. These measures serve to more consequently consider religion-related needs. The outcome of the group discussions also shows that discrimination at the women's shelter must be explicitly forbidden at structural level. For this reason, the house rules have been amended by one sentence.

Another measure for the diversity-sensitive work at the women's shelter is a training for staff members, which is scheduled for the second year of the project. It is the purpose of this training to have a critical look at one's own imprinting, one's own values and standards. It is intended to question possible stereotypes and appreciations in value and to reflect on power structures and one's own speaking position. The process to be triggered by this training has to be understood as an ongoing one.

4.2 Cooperation projects and networks

Apart from the measures which can immediately be implemented, it is obvious that women* with experience of flight need a connection to the local assistance and support system for refugees. For this reason, the association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. cooperates e.g. with the initiative Afghanisches Hilfswerk e.V. and the project "Seele in Bewegung".

It also became obvious that language mediation represents a particularly significant need of refugee women*. For this reason, we closely cooperate with the interpreting service agency DolMa. Furthermore, the EU project and the related financial means enabled the successful completion of an interpreter training.

Additionally, the group discussions showed that increasing response to entangled forms of discrimination is necessary and that an external Ombuds office for women* affected by multiple discrimination is indispensable. We, therefore, attach great importance to further developing the cooperation with Shaima Ghafury¹², the ombudswoman for refugees in the university town of Marburg. Additionally, a cooperation with the Ausländerbeirat (Foreigners' Advisory Council) has been started. When moving into the women's shelter, women* with experience of flight are informed that there are centres to report to in case of a structural, institutional or private discrimination. It is the objective to ensure a critical view on existing conditions and to compensate structural power hierarchies.

Furthermore, additional local offers shall be embedded in the social environment of women* with experience of flight. We continue working on cooperation projects with migrant organisations to develop projects and actions that take consideration of the perspectives and life situations of refugee women*. We believe that it is important to involve the women* in different educational, collaborative and intercultural project activities. We regard tandem or peer-to-peer projects, in which women* with experience of flight will meet, share their experience and history, provide support to each other and give tips for everyday life, as a good tool to satisfy this claim.

Another concern is to regularly introduce sporting and leisure activities offered in the vicinity of the women's shelter, encouraging the residents to jointly attend such events. The research results, however, reveal that there is the wish for more of such opportunities. The association

¹² Shaima Ghafury is social consultant and debt advisor with the Bewohnernetzwerk für soziale Fragen (residents' network for social matters, BFS) in Richtsberg and has started manifold voluntary initiatives for the intercultural dialogue as well as for girls* and women's* work in her home country since 1994.

Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. is hardly able to satisfy this demand, because they do not dispose of sufficient human resources.

4.3 Demands on organisational policy

With regard to some expressed demands, however, we are facing challenges and limitations, as the derived measures require additional financial and personnel resources.

We strive for a structural change at the women's shelter, but this has to be understood as ongoing process: Again and again, working methods and offers have to be reviewed for accessibility and be modified accordingly. Likewise, discriminating exclusions have to be eliminated as well. The refugee women* shall be involved in this process of change. To make the voices of the women* with experience of flight better heard in the everyday life of the women's shelter, thus achieving a structural change within the women's shelter, it is necessary to appoint a person, who will incorporate the conceptual ideas, developed in a participative process, in the regulations of the women's shelter. Thus, additional personnel resources are needed to hire a contact person who will be internally responsible for this process and be equipped with the necessary competencies. The need for additional human resources becomes also visible with regard to the women's* wish for more contact with the staff members.

The group discussions further showed that the wish for social integration is particularly predominant. This regards aspects like asylum law, aliens law, but also integration in the labour market and German language courses. The social work of the women's shelter is not able to change these aspects. Political and legal framework conditions need to be made a subject of discussion, expounded and changed by the society.

In addition to the expounding of legal and political conditions, also the organisation of offers, like for instance German language courses, have to be made a subject of discussion and be changed accordingly: Refugee women* with children are often prevented from taking advantage of such offers, when there is no childcare facility available in parallel. Exceedingly few children have access to a day care centre or school. Exceedingly few mothers can resort to a family support system. For this reason, we demand a consequent organisation of childcare, as this is the only way for many women* to make use of offers and courses.

Also the derived measure to satisfy the need for more intensive aftercare requires financial and human resources. It became obvious in the group discussions that there is a demand for

regular follow-up support. A monthly meeting in a cafe would be useful in this respect. Apart from a professional follow-up support, this would enable an in-depth and helpful exchange among the women* with regard to many different topics. Due to the scarce human and spatial resources, however, we are presently not in a position to implement such an offer.

So it becomes clear that in addition to the measures immediately implemented in our social work and the cooperation projects we can start, also the city of Marburg as well as communal agencies have to respond to the special needs of refugee women*: On the one hand, access to the labour market and participation in German language courses (and other offers) has to be made easier by means of childcare services. On the other hand, the association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. needs additional financial and human resources to facilitate a long-term and diversity-sensitive expansion of the assistance and support system!

5. Intercultural opening of the women's shelter

It is the objective of the in-house survey on the needs of women* with experience of flight and of the derived measures to provide a diversity-sensitive social educational work as well as an intercultural opening at the women's shelter.

“Interkulturelle Öffnung ist [...] als einen Prozess der Veränderung von Organisationen und damit als ein Element von Organisationsentwicklungen zu sehen, denn sie setzt ja eine Anpassung der Organisation an veränderte gesellschaftliche Rahmenbedingungen und veränderte Klientengruppen voraus.“ (Schirilla 2016: 171)

[Intercultural opening is [...] to be seen as a process of change of organisations and thus as an element of organisational development, because it requires adaptation of the organisation to changed social framework conditions and changed groups of clients.]

The concept of intercultural opening is based on an analysis of the concept of culture, which shall be briefly explained here: Culture is not understood as static and uniform entity here, but refers to the fact that cultures are dynamic, subject to change and that they are inconsistent. This means, that cultural values and standards are subject of negotiation processes, thus they are subject to change, adjustment and overlap. At the same time, cultures are also developed from historically given and socially caused opportunities and constraints.¹³

¹³ Melter, Claus (2018): „Soziale Arbeit zwischen zuschreibender Kulturalisierung und einer diskriminierungs- und rassistuskritischen Migrationspädagogik sowie der Orientierung an der Integrität jedes Menschen“ [Social work between attributing culturalisation and a discrimination and racism-critical migration pedagogy as well as the orientation towards the integrity of every person] In: Nivedita Prasad (editor): Soziale Arbeit mit Geflüchteten. p. 226-247.

In addition to the development of a participatory concept to specifically respond to the needs of the refugee women*, also the aspects mentioned in the following chapters are relevant to strive for an intercultural opening of the women's shelter. We are permanently aware of the fact that intercultural opening and a diversity-sensitive work is not capable of eliminating the multicomplex problematic situations of women* with experience of flight. Furthermore, it must be criticised that an equitable social participation of women* and children with experience of flight cannot be achieved just by changing the women's shelter.¹⁴

5.1 Self-conception of the house

Domestic violence is not a rare marginal phenomenon but is found in all parts of society. Women* who experience violence come from all cultural backgrounds, with or without experience of migration or flight and are of different age. According to the Istanbul Convention, all women* affected by violence have a right to be protected and supported. We regard it as a social and political task to provide sufficient places and financial resources.

It is important for our work that we can fund training courses for our staff members to further develop our intercultural competence and opening. We want to broaden our knowledge to be able to provide refugee women* with adequate support in their existentially insecure life situations, at the same time critically reflecting our own role. We also strive for a discrimination-sensitive social work, making it an issue to what extent self-conceptions and conduct of individuals, groups, institutions and structures are marked by racism or serve to reinforce racism. We want to live diversity in the team, strengthen our personal attitudes and further develop possibilities for action.

Furthermore, we regard it as our task to design our support offers in such a way at an institutional meso-level that they are low-threshold and comprehensible and accessible to all women* and children. It is our task to make sure that promotion and outreach activities provide the preconditions for participation and that barriers to participation are eliminated. The project year to come will be dedicated to this task in particular.

¹⁴ Cf.. Schirilla, Nausikaa (2016): „Migration und Flucht: Orientierungswissen für die soziale Arbeit“, p. 171.

5.2 Diversity Management

Diversity management is another aspect of intercultural opening of the women's shelter. The previously described measures for achieving intercultural opening are characterised by response to the living environments of the refugee women*, whereas diversity management rather focuses on the appreciation of differences and how to promote and benefit from such differences in the best possible way.¹⁵

As regards the heterogeneous age structure and multi-professionalism of our staff members, we benefit from the diversity within our team: We learn from the different values gained by experience and from different approaches to the work at the women's shelter. Also the linguistic diversity of the staff members turns out to be useful in many situations. At present, a majority of the staff members is fluent in English, two are fluent in Spanish and one staff member speaks Dutch. Additionally, the association strives for becoming more heterogeneous when hiring new employees, so that the team will reflect the diversity of society and of the residents. In our job postings, we point out in a targeted and active manner, that we want to encourage women of colour with or without experience of migration and flight, women* with disabilities as well as trans-women* to file an application.

5.3 Visibility of diversity

In the course of the intercultural opening of the women's shelter, we also attach particular importance to everyday visibility of diversity of realities. To make diversity visible and tangible, we apply the concept of "multicultural education"¹⁶. That means, that we provide spaces where different perspectives, values and behaviour patterns will encounter each other. It is our intention to make the residents reflect on their own positions, to recognise other views and to find compromises.

It is necessary, for instance, to integrate the diversity of countries, languages and religion into the everyday life of the women* and children to create opportunities to make visible the diversity of the lifestyles found at the women's shelter and to create appreciative encounters. We make a point of providing magazines, posters and signs in different languages in the en-

¹⁵ Vgl. Schirilla, Nausikaa (2016): „Migration und Flucht: Orientierungswissen für die soziale Arbeit.“ S. 192.

¹⁶ Vgl. James A. Banks „Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives“ (1989).

trance area and in the common rooms. Likewise, we make sure that toys, books and dolls in the children's area reflect the diversity of society and of the residents. Also the celebration of different cultural and religious festivals serves to make the diversity of real lives visible. Additionally, we conducted a creative project with (former) residents in the summer of 2020: They addressed courageous and motivating messages in different languages to the future residents of the women's shelter. These messages were framed and will be posted in the entrance area of the women's shelter.

The association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. will continue to do everything to integrate the visibility of diversity in the everyday life of the women's shelter.

6. Work with interpreters

The work with interpreters is essential to remove barriers to women's shelters and to preferably provide all women' with immediate and non-bureaucratic access to the support services.¹⁷ Language mediation is necessary to offer refugee women*, who do not or only hardly speak the German language, psychosocial counselling and support in situations of acute crisis. This is the only way we can act in a supporting and stabilising manner, offer psychoeducation and jointly reflect on dynamics of violence, and develop new perspectives. Accordingly, we depend on a sound financial endowment and close cooperation with interpreting services. At the same time, we are aware that the work with interpreters involves a double structure: At structural level, we as women's shelter and counselling centre depend on the language mediation by interpreters to meet the requirements of the life situations of the women* and their children. At individual level, it is a challenging task to translate experiences of violence, to intensively deal with life situations, at the same time being able to distance oneself. A relevant task in translation processes, therefore, is to ensure the mental safety of the interpreters and to prevent a potential secondary traumatising.

The EU project and the financial means provided enabled us to successfully conduct a training course for interpreters. It was the objective to offer a training to deepen knowledge and skills related to the topic "domestic violence". Another focus was on the reflection of one's own role and self-care opportunities in translation processes. In the course of this training, the

¹⁷ 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. 69.

twelve participants were also given the opportunity to communicate how they handle difficult topics of violence and to specify the resulting needs for distancing and self-care. The association Frauen helfen Frauen e.V. is now in a position to respond by taking appropriate action.

We try to offer preliminary briefings and follow-up reviews with the interpreters and maintain a close cooperation with the interpreting service DolMa, who also offer supervisory consultations to their employees. In this context, the association developed a leaflet informing the interpreters about the topic to be translated. At this point, we want to say thank you to the interpreters for their important and excellent work!

7. Cooperation projects

It became obvious, that the needs and life situations of the women* go beyond the subject matter of "domestic violence", so that a cooperation and connection with the corresponding centres is essential:

- Immigration authorities
- Interpreting service DolMa
- Foreigners' Council + legal aid office of the Foreigners' Council
- Mosques
- Initiative Afghanisches Hilfswerk e.V.
- Project "Seele in Bewegung"
- German language courses at the adult education centre VHS
- Initiatives of the individual urban districts

8. Quality assurance

The association is a member of the Bundesverband der Frauenberatungsstellen und Frauennotrufe Frauen gegen Gewalt e.V. (bbf) and the Zentrale Informationsstelle Autonomer Frauenhäuser (ZIF) and its work is subject to their quality standards. The preparation of an annual statistics at the relevant institutions of the association serves to evaluate and check the quality of the concept.

The continuous development of the concept and further development is the association's objective, particularly considering migratory issues and socio-political discussions as well as scientific studies.