

## Let's Talk!

### How to Prevent Gender-Based Violence in German Refugee Camps - Experiences from the Global North and South

Johanna Damböck, Laura Kübke, Lukas Nagel, Fanni Zentai

Finding shelter in Germany does not necessarily end the misery of every refugee. Especially women and members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-, Trans-, Intersexual and Queer (LGBTIQ) community can face gender-based violence (GBV) such as physical assault, exploitation and sexual harassment at every stage of their journey. Their traumatic experiences do not end at the doorstep of the supposedly safe refugee camps, e.g. in Germany. Instead, bedrooms and sanitary facilities without sex-separation and proper locks or insufficient surveillance can increase the probability of incidents of sexual violence. The following briefing paper aims to address the problem of GBV and identifies - from different perspectives - challenges and possibilities to prevent GBV in German refugee housing. To improve the conditions in refugee camps and to achieve long-term solutions, a mixture of measures needs to be applied. It is crucial to raise awareness and empower refugees to fight against GBV as well as to sensitize the public, political institutions and staff working in the refugee centres for this issue. Additionally, more intensive cooperation and exchange of ideas is needed between international and local actors in Germany to protect and guarantee the rights of refugees and to create a safe and secure environment.

Keywords: Flight, Refugees, Refugee camps, Gender-based violence, Migration, LGBTIQ

#### 1. Flight and Gender-based violence

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that globally, nearly 60 million people were fleeing their homes in 2015. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 240.000 first instance applications have been received in 2016 which is 138,3% more than in the year before (BAMF 2016, 2). The reasons for fleeing their homes are very diverse and complex. Conditions during flight are most often inhumane and people are exposed to different kinds of violence. Particularly women and Lesbian, Gay, Bi-, Trans- and Intersexual and Queer (LGBTIQ) are exposed to

any kind of gender-based violence (GBV). This includes physical and sexual attempts and threats based on gender, e.g. physical assault, sexual violence (including sexual exploitation and abuse), forced prostitution, child marriage and harmful traditional practices (such as female genital mutilation and honour killings). It furthermore contains emotional and psychological forms (humiliation, exclusion, and denial of resources) as well as mixed forms, e.g. domestic violence (IASC 2005, 7-8). This might be prior to their flight, during their flight (e.g. an Afghani women facing violence on the Balkans road) or even in their destination country (e.g. an Iraqi

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woman being raped in a refugee camp in Bavaria).

## 2. Gender-based violence in the country of asylum

When arriving in the country of destination, in this case in Germany, people have to overcome various obstacles ranging from finding a home to starting the application

an equal basis with men and boys (UNHCR 2006).

Currently there is only little data available about reported GBV acts. Therefore, it might become difficult to apply expedient measures. Nevertheless, many refugees become a victim of the different forms of GBV on a daily basis in Germany. Moreover, the data seems to indicate that a large refugee camp may increase risks and probabilities of GBV incidents (Spohr 2016, 5).

## 3. Main risk factors in refugee accommodations

Among the most important risk factors for GBV are lack of space and privacy, bedrooms and sanitary facilities without sex-separation or proper locks, insufficient surveillance, little sanctioning and lack of knowledge about judicial consequences (Spohr 2016, 9).

Very often women do not report experienced GBV because they fear that it could negatively affect the outcome of their asylum claim.

In Germany, the often-criticised obligation of residency (the so-called "Residenzpflicht") dramatically curtails the refugees right to move freely which makes it difficult or impossible to visit family and friends in other federal states and thus, increases the danger of social isolation and mental illness (MacLean 2015, 32f). Additionally, no employment opportunities and isolation are crucial risk factors that can potentially contribute to a violent atmosphere.

Another major problem is the long duration of the asylum process and the long stay in the Initial Reception Centres ("Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung") which creates uncertainty and frustration. Different ethnic, religious, national and cultural backgrounds can lead to tensions and to aggressive incidents in refugee shelters, suggesting that conflicts from home are

### Glossary (Gender, Sex, GBV)

**Sex:** Refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia (APA, 2011) .

**Gender:** The term gender refers to the social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures. Gender determines the roles, power and resources for females and males in any culture (IASC, 2006: 1) .

**Gender-based violence (GBV):** Violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals against their will on the basis of their gender, especially women and LGBTBIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-, Trans- and Intersexual and Queer).

**Five types of GBV :** Sexual violence; Physical violence; Emotional and psychological violence; Harmful traditional practices; Socio-economic violence

for asylum. Due to the - quite often - traumatic experiences during their flight, individuals from any gender identity may be psychologically instable. Furthermore, a lack of prospects, an unfamiliar socio-political framework, the sorrow for missing family, an intimidating bureaucracy and cultural shocks are interconnected factors which may lead to an environment characterised by violence. While forcibly displaced men and boys can also face protection problems, the challenges women and girls face are very often different and more severe.

Women can be exposed to particular protection problems not only based on their gender, but also on their cultural and socio-economic position and their legal status, and therefore being less able to exercise their rights compared to men and boys. Thus, specific actions in favour of women and girls may be necessary to ensure they have assured protection and assistance on

reflected and reinvented in refugee camps (Breitenbach 2015). From international experiences, security actors may be a potential risk increasing the occurrence of GBV, too. Instead of providing safety within the accommodations, the security staff may be corrupt and allow trafficking or prostitution of women.

#### 4. What are best practices?

Generally, the concept of GBV against refugees is a rather new concept in Germany. Some experiences regarding prevention have already been developed since the beginning of the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015.

Regarding the still existing grievances in German refugee shelters, one can extrapolate best practices from international experiences, where the problem has been realized and tackled since a long time to combat GBV. However, one has to bear essential differences in mind. What deviates in Germany is the fact that the state is responsible for refugee housing. This becomes important regarding legal responsibilities when applying best practices. Some of these best practices and experiences will be outlined below.

To begin with, THE typical German refugee shelter does not exist. The 16 different German federal states have very different approaches, models and experiences, which differ variously. Related to LGBTIQ, a few sex-separated accommodations, such as the LGBTIQ refugee shelter in Berlin Treptow were established, where members are entitled to special treatment (e.g. psychosocial care, language courses, sport activities, etc.) and protection (Hassino 2016).

However, it is utterly clear that this separation by sex/gender is by no means a long-term solution. Moreover, the artificial separation of different groups does also carry the risk to create new problems such as social stigmatization or families being torn apart if men and women are housed separately. To achieve and secure mid- and long-term solutions, it is crucial to em-

power and raise awareness for GBV. Empowering refugees to fight against GBV (e.g. through self-empowered organizations) can put some pressure on the government to seriously tackle this problem. Also, social networks where refugees can exchange experiences as well as refugee protest movements are utterly important (Langa 2016).

The public, politicians, policemen, and staff working in the refugee accommodations have to be sensitized for traumatic experiences, GBV, cultural norms, rights and conventions for vulnerable groups and conflict-deescalating measures (Spohr 2016, 14). In addition, there is need for better selection procedures for staff in refugee accommodations (Hartmann 2016).

An important lesson learned from international development cooperation is the importance of dignity and empowerment. Main findings of gender inequality in relation to GBV are that the categories violence, privilege, injustice and impunity are intimately linked and that throughout the last centuries, violent behaviour was perceived as being an integral part of male behaviour (Women's Commission 2005, 11-16).

On top of already stressed gender relations comes the finding that refugee camps are "political spaces" in which gender relations are (re-)negotiated and (re-)defined (Krause 2014, 48). Very often, life in refugee camps causes a feeling of degradation, especially for men, who cannot follow their traditionally learned role as "male-breadwinner" or "provider" to the family. As a result, this feeling of degradation is compensated by using violence against women or other vulnerable groups (ibid., 45).

On the international field, a valuable tool to guarantee a stable security situation in refugee camps is the so called "community-based security" which is already implemented in refugee camps in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda (Oelke 2016). Community policing is based on the active cooperation between the local police force and refugees. One central element of it is educati-

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on and awareness-raising of all involved actors concerning their individual rights and duties. It is also important to increase the number of female police officers and refugee guards to build trust and confidence between refugee women and security personnel. Additionally, confidential persons within the police and refugee guards are needed to help female victims during the process of reporting their cases to the police. Thus, this tool can guarantee a more stable security situation through the close cooperation of all security actors (Oelke 2009). In these measures and concepts, men are also regarded as an integral part and important “change agents” in combatting GBV (Oelke 2016).

## 5. Quo vadis Germany?

Since there are many lessons learned and best practices, there is probably no „one-size fits all“- solution. Rather a mixture or combination of measures can prevent GBV on a long-term basis and thus, create a safe and secure environment. Sensitization, awareness raising and empowerment measures can improve conditions in refugee camps. However, for a holistic approach to protect and guarantee the rights of refugees and support the process of integration in Germany, more intensive cooperation and exchange of ideas and knowledge is needed between international and local actors in Germany (e.g. politi-

cal institutions and German civil society, academia, self-empowered refugee organizations, etc.). It is very important to give refugees the feeling of dignity and also the power to make their own choices in life back, especially as refugees are not a homogenous group, but have very different needs and demands. Such measures will help to reduce the feeling of degradation and might thus be helpful to prevent gender-based violence. In order to avoid the negative connotation associated with “refugees”, a first step could be to replace the term entirely. Moreover, quick integration and language courses could help to include and integrate refugees into (German) society.

Finally, it is worth to reconsider or even change European and German asylum regulations and laws that restrict refugees in their rights and self-determination (e.g. obligation of residence, no right to seek for work, no access to public services, such as medical care and school, etc.).

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This briefing paper was developed as part of the panel discussion on May 11th, 2016 at the Development Policy Discussion Days (EPDT), an annual event realized by the SLE and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung. The speakers were:

### **Bino Byansi Byakuleka**

African Refugees Union (ARU) and “Wearebornfree! HUMANITY MATTERS

### **Napuli Paul Görlich**

“Blacks & Whites together for Human Rights e.V.” and “Kunst darf alles e.V.”

### **Mahmoud Hassino**

Queer Refugees Project / Schwulenberatung Berlin

### **Melanie Hartmann**

PhD scholar at the International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture at the University of Gießen and affiliate at the Centre for Conflict Studies at the University of Marburg/Germany

### **Sandra Oelke**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)