

Report on Regional Exchange

«Different experiences - joint answers? The intersections between gender-based political, social and domestic violence - a regional exchange on psychosocial practices of supporting refugee and host community women affected by violence», May 2017, Duhok, Kurdistan-Iraq

Organized by: *medica mondiale e.V. and HAUKARI Germany e.V. with the social and cultural centre for women KHANZAD, Sulaymaniah, Kurdistan/Iraq*

Amended by input from further exchange with participants after the workshops and on-the-job observations after the workshop until September 2017.

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Introduction – background and goals of the exchange meeting

The current situation in the region of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon is marked by the increasing fragmentation of societies along ethnic and religious lines, by violence, conflict and open war in Syria and parts of Iraq. Millions of people throughout the region have been exposed to war and violence and/or forced to leave their homes, and live scattered throughout the region as internally displaced people or cross-border refugees in camps and provisional shelters. In this escalated context, women are exposed to various forms of war- and conflict-related violence, displacement and humanitarian disaster, entangled with specific experiences of conflict-related gender-based violence (as for example in the case of Yazidi women in Iraq, who were enslaved by ISIS). In addition, women are exposed to social, domestic and family violence inherent in the affected societies, which is as currently increasing against the background of militarization processes and uncertainty and precarious life conditions in IDP/refugee camps and host communities.

In midst of the crisis, multiple international and local actors, civil society organisations and local government structures are engaged in assisting and supporting women affected by gender-based violence and offer psychosocial and trauma counselling, legal, social and economic support and raise awareness and campaign against GBV and for protective structures for women.

Against this background, the regional exchange meeting in Duhok in May 2017 brought together female practitioners from a range of actors in the realm of psychosocial assistance to women affected by GBV in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), among them:

- Delegates from organisations with long standing engagement and activities against gender-based violence and for gender equality in their countries, which have now extended their programmes to reach women victims of current war and conflict and women in IDP and refugees camps
- Delegates from local NGOs with a broader range of humanitarian and development activities and specific branches/projects addressing women survivors of gender-based violence
- Delegates from NGOs which have been founded explicitly in response to the current crisis
- Delegates from NGOs with explicit psychological, trauma related activities
- Delegates from the Kurdistan Regional Government's Directorate of Combating Violence against Women

(For details on the participating organisations see page 27).

The variety of organizational profiles present in the workshop can be considered representative for the broad range of actors currently engaged in the field of assistance to women survivors of GBV.

The regional exchange meeting was designed to offer an opportunity to the practitioners:

- to exchange experiences, approaches and practice in assisting women of political and social violence
- to learn from each other's realities and approaches and thus reflect and sharpen their own approach and practice
- to promote mutual understanding and networking

Questions raised for the exchange meeting were:

- What are main challenges in supporting women and girls, survivors of family-, society- and conflict-related violence in your specific work context?
- Which different answers and approaches have you found and probed?
- What are lessons learned of this process that you would like to share with your colleagues? Based on your experience, what are the preconditions for successfully supporting women survivors of violence?

The exchange was organised by the German based NGOs medica mondiale e.V. and HAUKARI e.V. and the KHANZAD women centre, Sulaimania, Kurdistan/Iraq; all three cooperate in the project “strengthening local governmental and civil society protection and counselling structures for women and girls affected by gender based violence in IDP shelters and host communities in Duhok and the Garmyan region, Kurdistan/Iraq”, funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 2016 – 2018 (Project-No. 2016.1828.9). The three-level-program combines psychosocial counselling, awareness and vocational training for women in IDP camps and host communities (micro-level) with infrastructural help to local counselling structures and training of local professionals and police (meso-level) and advocacy for ethical and professional standards in the realm of psychosocial assistance. The regional exchange workshop in Duhok was funded by GIZ's Regional Program “Psychosocial Support for Syrian and Iraqi Refugees and IDP”.

The here presented report gives an overview on the main topics and challenges discussed in the conference, on similarities and differences of context and working strategies in the various regions as well as joint perspectives and recommendations for continuing the exchange. This part is informed by the debate in the conference as well as further talks and interviews with participants in the weeks and months after until September 2017. It includes also some examples of practice from organisations, which did not participate in the workshop.

I. Similarities, differences, challenges, lessons learnt and recommendations

I.1. Impact of the current crisis on women's lives, women's rights and women spaces

All workshop participants and interviewees reported on how heavily the current political, military, humanitarian and economic crisis in their countries impacts on women's lives and rights.

In Syria and some regions of Iraq, hundred thousand of women are facing daily bombardments and combats, terror by ISIS and other militias and are deprived from access to education, public sphere, basic rights and mobility.

In the Syrian and Iraqi regions, which were controlled by ISIS for months or even years, thousands of mostly Yazidi women have been raped and enslaved. Horrible atrocities have been committed and witnessed by men, women and children with long term impact on their minds, lives and social structures. ISIS installed a regime of utmost cruelty subjugating and repressing women and expelling them from the public sphere and brutally sanctioning any act of disobedience or disloyalty. Women were stoned publicly, female physicians and teachers executed; enslavement and trafficking of women was deliberately used by ISIS to violate the sense of honour among the population and crash family ties and values. This and the systematic implantation of a culture of violence and masculine priority in children and young people by ISIS will have a long-term impact on future generations.

The very liberation from ISIS and the period after brought further violence actors such as Shia militias taking brutal revenge on Sunni communities for their alleged support of ISIS.

Throughout the region millions of men and women were forced to leave their homes and continue to live in provisional situations in IDP and refugee camps and shelters, deprived from privacy, in economic poverty, instability and without perspectives of return to their homelands. Lebanon alone hosts approx. 1,5 Million refugees from Syria. In Iraq, up to 3 Million IPDs were counted at the peak of the crisis, 1,5 Mio. of them seek refuge in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

In the IDP and refugee camps and provisional shelters dire life conditions, lack of privacy and lack of perspectives translate into a high prevalence of violence against women, forced prostitution, forced and early marriages etc. With the crisis ongoing, tensions and hostilities between IDPs and host communities are on the rise.

More generally war and conflict go along with economic crisis, deteriorating life conditions and the daily struggle for survival of large parts of the population throughout the region.

Against the background of war, displacement and ethnic and religious conflicts, militarist, nationalist and fundamentalist discourses are on the rise and push the debate on women rights off the political agenda. Already achieved legal reforms that protect women from violence and enlarge their rights and spaces, see a roll back and erode. Especially in war regions and regions with high number of IDPs and refugees, different law systems clash and/or “lawless” spaces are developing (see also I.6.).

The general **sense of impunity** for perpetrators of crimes and atrocities was an important theme discussed in the regional meeting. The sense of impunity encourages further violence and increases feelings of powerlessness and fear among the population. Given the scale and number of crimes committed in the current conflicts, it is a huge challenge to bring perpetrators to justice and a highly contested issue due to multiple violence actors and conflicting interests at stake in the justice process. Currently in Iraq there is consent of the need to bring ISIS perpetrators to justice, but there is a major struggle ongoing about related procedures and responsibilities involved. Based on anti-terror laws, thousands of ISIS fighters and supporters are detained by the KRG and the Iraqi Government’s authority and brought before anti-terror-courts. In December 2017, Human Rights Watch reported about at least 7374 convicted and 92 executed ISIS fighters in Iraq¹, most of them convicted for the pure membership in ISIS, not for specific crimes. Yet there is no national strategy of dealing with ISIS crimes, rarely any public debate on the current trials and no victim-participation; thus, the need of

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/05/iraq-flawed-prosecution-isis-suspects>

justice of individual victims remains unaddressed. Attempts of the KRG's Anfal Ministry to bring the case of the massacres against the Yazidi population as genocidal crime to the International Criminal Court in Le Hague failed due to a series of jurisdictional constraints, among them the non-membership of Iraq and Syria at the ICC. In September 2017, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution prepared by the UK and Iraqi governments to establish an investigative team to collect evidence on crimes committed by ISIS. However, the resolution did not address any of the abuses and crimes committed by multiple other actors such as the Shia militias.²

The lack of transparent national procedures in investigating crimes translates also in difficulties for institutions and NGOs working with the victims. The survivors centre in Duhok for example had women survivors of ISIS captivity initially fill formats for testimonies according to UN guidelines, but were then asked to change according to Iraqi Court Rules, thus having to bring women to testify on their ordeal several times.

This leads to another issue: the multiple problems women victims of ISIS atrocities and their children – born from rape and in slavery - face in the aftermath: From voyeuristic and sensationalist media coverage of their cases to political exploitation and stigmatization even within their own communities.

In Iraq, current impunity of perpetrators adds to a more general sense of impunity lingering in the Iraqi society. The process of transitional justice that was initiated started after the fall of the Baath-regime in 2003 to address the latter's genocidal crimes, has been pushed off the political agenda by new waves of violence. The same is true for accountability processes in regard of crimes committed by occupation forces after 2003. Thus, in Iraq current conflicts evolve in communities, that have already gone through various episodes of violence in the past, most of which have not sufficiently been addressed by political, societal and judicial accountability processes. In many locations, former perpetrator groups become victims and vice versa. An example are the Kurdish Iraqi communities affected by the genocidal Anfal operations in 1988 which are now hosting tens of thousands of Sunni Arab families from former Baath-party-strongholds in Anbar and Salahaddin, who fled from ISIS and Shia militias.

Against this background, workshop participants and interviewees took a critical stance on current international donors' funding policies and their - often - exclusive focus on the survivors of current conflict and IDP/refugees. They appealed instead for a more inclusive approach addressing IDP/refugees AND host communities and victims of past AND current violence in order not to fuel tensions and hierarchies between different victim groups. They highlighted, that the current international funding policy pushes local NGOs, which are engaged against gender-based violence, towards an engagement in IDP/refugee contexts if they want to uphold their structures. There is instead a lack of funding for the NGOs' long-term key activities, the development of sustainable counselling and protection structures for women in the host communities. Participants underlined, that instead investment in sustainable local protection and counselling structures will help women in IDP/refugee communities AND local host communities.

Note: The above description of the impact of the crisis on women describes phenomena and gives only few solid data and figures. Indeed, several participants stressed the lack of data and figures on GBV in the current conflict and the importance to collect and exchange data so to be able to respond

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/21/iraq-missed-opportunity-comprehensive-justice>

more immediately to critical developments in certain regions and also to underpin claims towards law and policy makers and international donors.

I.2. Working with women victims of complex, persistent, extreme and overlapping violence

As stated above, workshop participants and interviewees have different professional and organizational histories. Some NGOs have a background of long-standing work for against gender-based violence and for women rights (ABAAD and KAFA, Lebanon; KHANZAD and WRO, KRI), other of broader humanitarian support for marginalised groups and women and youth empowerment (Al Amal Association, Iraq; PDO, KRI), others again of more specific psychological approaches (Jiyan Foundation, KRI), and have recently extended their activities to reach women survivors of current violence and IDP/refugees contexts. Other NGOs have explicitly been founded in response to the current crisis and to specifically address women survivors of conflict related sexualised violence (Lotus Flower, medica mondiale/Duhok, KRI) or more generally marginalised groups including youth and women (PEL – Civil Waves, Syria).

Turkey based organisations among the participants are mostly engaged in aid programmes for Syrian refugees in Turkey with gender-based-violence-components within larger humanitarian programmes (Global Communities, Khayr Foundation, Syrian Relief and Development).

However, most organisations have currently an inclusive approach to women in IDP/refugee camps AND host communities affected by

- conflict- and war-related violence
- conflict and war related gender based and sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking
- Gender-based, patriarchal violence inherent to their societies and aggravated by the current crisis

Within the Kurdistan Regional Government structures, the Ministry and Directorates of Health (DOH) are mandated for granting medical and psychological assistance to survivors of ISIS terror and current conflicts and have set up a Women and Family Centre (Survivor Centre) in Duhok that explicitly addresses survivors of ISIS captivity, most of them Yezidi women. The Directorate of Combating Violence against Women (DCVAW), established under the KRG Interior Ministry, is instead mandated to assist women victims of gender-based violence. However, as political and social/domestic violence overlap, the distinction of tasks among the various governmental departments is permeable and DCVAW- and DOH-referral points in IDP/refugee camps and host communities deal with women survivors of all kinds of violence and with often overlapping political and social/gender-based and sexualised violence (for details on DCVAW see I.6.)

Thus, the local staff of participating and interviewed organisations is on a daily base confronted with women survivors of multiple and complex violence:

- Women who have survived extremely traumatic and often multiple conflict-related episodes of extreme violence, witnessed and suffered brutal atrocities, suffered from conflict-related long time exposure to sexual violence, enslavement, rape , exploitation and trafficking (e.g. Yezidi women who - after having witnessed massacres of their relatives – were abducted, raped and enslaved for months and years by ISIS; Arab Sunni and Shia as well as Kurdish

women, Christian, Muslim and Yezidi women who witnessed horrible atrocities such as public decapitations, stoning to death and massacres in the ISIS controlled areas, have suffered multiple losses of relatives and were exposed to extreme fear and subjugation for years; Kurdish women who have been exposed to poison gas attacks and Anfal operations under the Baath-regime and have been once again displaced in the current crisis);

- Women whose already traumatic experience is prolonged by precarious life situations, poverty, lack of mobility, jobs and education, lack of perspectives as in IDP/refugee camps and/or who are stigmatised and marginalised and/or further exploited by their communities as a response to the violence suffered (as Yezidi women and their children born in captivity, who face rejection and stigmatization in their communities);
- women who suffer from structural, domestic, social violence in their respective societies, women beaten up and raped within the family, women and girls forced into marriage or prostitution; women imprisoned for adultery or prostitution, women threatened by honour killing, women who see suicide as only way to escape punishment and marginalisation by their families.

Many of the women seeking protection and counselling are in life threatening situations and at a risk of honour killing or suicide. This puts an enormous responsibility on the women involved in GBV-projects. For most of the organisations which participated in the workshop, creating safe spaces for women and young people is a key element of their work. Turkey based organisations working with Syrian refugees create women and children friendly safe spaces within refugee camps. KAFA and ABAAD run spaces of refuge (shelters) in Lebanon. KHANZAD, PDO and other Kurdish-Iraqi and Iraqi organisations closely cooperate with governmental shelters.

Most organisations closely cooperate with their local government, police and judiciary for offering physical safety to the concerned women. ABAAD and KAFA/Lebanon and Al Amal and KHANZAD /Iraq/KRI offer trainings and workshops for police and judicial staff. Police trainings include training on GBV legal frameworks, social and psychological aspects of GBV, early recognition of GBV-situations; conflict preventive and trauma-sensitive communication in GBV situations; and – in KRI – also training in investigative techniques and methods for getting hold of perpetrators.

I.3. Holistic approach – multi-sectoral assistance to women survivors of GBV

Given the complex violent context and the interweavement of GBV, conflict-related violence and humanitarian and economic crisis, most organisations present in the workshop (even those who started with a specific focus, e.g. KAFA with advocacy for law reforms or Jiyān Foundation with a focus on psychological and psychotherapeutic trauma care for victims of torture) have come to develop **holistic and multi-sectoral approaches** for assisting women survivors of violence: They provide safe spaces, where women receive medical and legal aid, social and psychosocial counselling, participate in educational, recreative activities and get support in developing new and safe life perspectives by vocational training and income generating projects. In this multi-sectoral and holistic approach, psychological and psychotherapeutic help is one of many aspects and cannot be considered isolated from other levels of support (economic, medical, social, educational).

This holistic approach goes along with a criticism towards narrow psychological trauma concepts and projects that focus exclusively on psychological help without further steps for providing safety and stable life conditions for the concerned women. It offers instead a multi-sectoral assistance for improving the women's health and psychological situation, legal status and economic and social life perspectives.

Example 1: Women and Family Centre, Duhok (known as Survivor Centre) – Working with women survivors of ISIS captivity

The Survivor Centre was established in 2014 in Duhok Governorate as an immediate response to the needs of female survivors returning from ISIS captivity, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. It is a compartment of the Directorate of Health Duhok, Department of Preventive Health and funded and supported by UNFPA and medica mondiale. A multidisciplinary professional team of medical doctors (general practitioners and gynaecologists), lawyers, psychologists, psychotherapists and psychosocial counsellors, social and outreach workers offer multi-sectoral support in a **one-stop-centre** (with mobile teams and home visits for women who are not willing or able to come to the centre). The support includes:

- Medical examination and treatment (overall examination, treatment and documentation of injuries and illnesses)
- Social and psychological support:
 - Psychological assessment, set up of individual psychotherapy plan; referral to psychiatric help if needed
 - Psychosocial support groups with other women with similar experience
 - Sports and creative activities as stress relief
 - Referral to community centres and activists in the respective communities
- Legal consultation
 - information of the women on all legal aspects of their case
 - training the women in how to deal with media to prevent voyeuristic and endangering media coverage
 - preparing formats and testimonies on their case for the future persecution of perpetrators
- Referral to other specialised services (maternity hospital, children's services etc.)

Until the end of 2016 a total number of 824 women had been assisted by the centre. In addition, the centre assigned psychologists to work among survivors in IDP camps.

Beside the survivor centre which is meant to be a first central reference point for all ISIS-captivity-survivors in terms of assessment and documentation, there are various other organisations working with Yezidi women survivors, such as PDO (People's Development Organisation), who runs a community centre for mostly Yezidi women in the Khanke IDP camp/Duhok or Jiyan Foundation, who runs a trauma clinic for Yezidi Women, offering 24-hours multi-disciplinary assistance to the women and their children.

All organisations work with challenging cases of women who have recently returned from years-long captivity, many of them with one or more children born in captivity. Some are in emotional uproar because they left their children behind. Others returned with their children, but their families and communities reject the integration of the children. The mothers are torn between leaving the children for adoption or leaving the community; both choices related to extreme suffering. Some women seek protection from their own families, because themselves or their children are rejected. On the other hand, families and communities who have accepted the return of women and children from captivity often hide them away and thus hinder consultation or treatment.

Staff members working with these complex cases are themselves often under pressure and threat by the women's communities and not rarely in need of specific security measures. The complexity of working with women returning from captivity needs utmost sensitivity and confidentiality, a multidisciplinary approach and a close cooperation between government and community actors to protect the women's and children's lives and develop future life perspectives for them within their communities or in other protective structures. Indeed, an important milestone for Yezidi women survivors was a decision made by the Yezidi's highest religious authority, Baba Sheikh, in September 2015, who stated that the women are not to blame and have to be "welcomed back into Yezidi faith" even after forcibly conversion to Islam and to be re-integrated into the Yezidi community.

Example 2: Women Centre KHANZAD, People's Development Organisation (PDO) and Directorate of Combating Violence against Women (DCVAW) Garmyan: Working with Arab Sunni women in IDP camps in the Garmyan region, Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Garmyan region is an infrastructurally neglected rural area at the South East of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In 1988, Garmyan was heavily affected by the so called Anfal operations of the Iraqi Baath-regime, during which thousands of villages were destroyed, more than one-hundred thousand men and young women abducted and killed and tens of thousands of survivors detained and forcibly resettled thereafter. To this day, the region suffers from the long-term impact of extreme violence and loss. In 2014, Garmyan was at the frontline of the fights against ISIS militias and once again lost fighters and civilians. Ever since, the region has been hosting some ten-thousands of Internally Displaced People from the Arabi Sunni dominated provinces Anbar, Salahaddin and Dyala seeking refuge from ISIS militias and Shia militias in their home regions. From the perspective of Anfal survivors, these IDP belong to the previous perpetrator group.

While approx. four thousand families (20 000 people) live in the IDP camps in Alwand (Khanaqin)³, Tazade and Qoratu (Kalar), others are scattered in the towns of the region (Khanaqin, Kalar, Kifri). Since 2014, KHANZAD and PDO have assisted women among the IDPs. Since 2016, the support has been extended within the BMZ-funded cooperation project of HAUKARI and medica mondiale.

³ In October 2017 the Iraqi Government took control over Khanaqin, which had been previously controlled by Kurdish peshmerga since 2014

Within the project the women centre KHANZAD supports the Directorate of Combating Violence against Women (DCVAW) in Garmyan in running reference points with both police and civil staff in the IDP camps. KHANZADs support these points and the DCVAW-points in district towns of the region by infrastructural and logistic support, training and regular supervision of their staff and reinforces local DCVAW-teams through expertise, on the job-training and joint social and legal follow-up of complex cases of GBV in camps and host communities. As for IDP women it is difficult to openly visit DCVAW points, KHANZAD and PDO run awareness and educational/vocational programmes in the camps, offering one-day-meetings on health issues, child education, nutrition, as well as on and GBV-related topics such as early and forced marriages. They also inform women on legal frameworks and counselling possibilities in the Kurdistan region. The average number of participants of such awareness meetings is 50. In addition, they offer one- to three-months educational/vocational courses (literacy, handicraft, hairdressing, sewing) for an average of 15-20 participants. These courses offer the women a possibility to step out of male and family control, exchange experience with other women and seek counselling in cases of GBV or family conflict in a protected and non-stigmatised space. Many IDP women are originally from rural and tribal structures in Anbar and Salahaddin provinces, and state that participation in these programmes is their first step out of the family and a main reason for them for not wanting to return to their home regions. When in March 2017 a debate in the Iraqi Parliament on eventually rewarding men financially when taking second wives caused some uproar in the camps, women who participated in an awareness programme stood up jointly against their husbands who welcomed the suggestion.

Awareness meetings and educational/vocational courses are also offered to men and have developed into a forum not only for raising awareness on women rights and GBV, but also for reflecting masculine and patriarchal patterns and roles and for encouraging men to speak out on own experiences of sexual and family violence and seek support in this regard.

Women and men in situations of family conflict and violence are followed by joint teams as of DCVAW and PDO/KHANZAD and receive psychological counselling and legal consultation and representation. The latter is complicated due to the hybrid law situation, with IDPs adhering to Iraqi legislation but residing in Kurdistan with differing legislation regarding GBV. In most cases, the counselling teams enter in family mediation processes to help the women to solve their problems within their family and social contexts (from calling men to the DCVAW points informing them about possible sanctions, doing home (tent) visits following-up GBV situations to complex family mediation processes).

Case example: In an IDP camp a new-born baby was found – hardly alive – at a rubbish site. The baby was transferred to the hospital and survived. DCVAW could – with police support – identify both mother and father, who were not married. The mother was taken to a shelter and assisted psychologically; the man was taken into police custody, so that both could not be killed by their families. DCVAW/KHANZAD entered in a consultation process with both the mother's and father's families and could convince them to agree on the young couple's marriage. However, the families insisted, that the couple left the IDP camp and returned to their home-town in order to avoid "shame" and gossiping for both families in the camps.

The case shows the interweavement of legal and police action, health and psychological assistance and family mediation and the multi-disciplinary approach required. It also shows the enormous pressure and responsibility lying on the involved counsellors. It ultimately shows the importance of

stakeholder networks in various sectors involved. Indeed, besides direct services in the IDP camps and host communities the project includes also training for local police and judiciary and the strengthening of local stakeholder networks from the education and health sector, police, judiciary and media for violence prevention in Garman.

Example 3: KAFA - Enough Violence and Exploitation: Support Centres (previously: Listening and Counselling Centres), Beirut and Chtaura- Bekaa

Since 2005 the Lebanese NGO KAFA has been running a Listening and Counselling Centre (LCC) in Beirut which aims at “providing women victims of violence free counselling, support and referral services, guided by the principles of empowerment and support for self-independence”⁴ and adopts a holistic approach in assisting women victims of violence. A multi-disciplinary team of lawyers, physicians, psychosocial counsellors and social workers adopts a holistic approach in addressing the needs of women survivors of violence and provides legal consultation, assists women in achieving restrain orders or punishment for perpetrators, gives social and psychological counselling including psychotherapy and offers art, drama and dance courses which are designed as therapeutic spaces and spaces for the women to exchange their experience and empower themselves as a group.

Women clients refer proactively to the centres or through the 24-hours-hotline for women run by KAFA or are referred to the centres by police stations and other civil society actors. After the passing of the Law on Protection of Women and Family members from domestic violence in 2014, the number of women seeking legal and psychosocial assistance at the LCC has increased to an average of 60 women monthly. In 2018, the average number of new cases assisted by the Support Centre was 98 per month. Women who are in urgent need of physical protection from perpetrators are referred to the “Amara” shelter run by KAFA itself, which provides temporary housing and support to women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation or for forced domestic labour in a location unknown to the public. The shelter was named after a trafficked migrant domestic worker who survived forced labour in Lebanon. Indeed, KAFA has large advocacy and assistance programme for female foreign domestic workers in Lebanon, who are often forcibly brought to the country, underpaid, sexually abused, exploited and in lawless situations.

A second Support Centre in Chtaura-Bekaa has been opened in 2014 with a similar holistic approach and a focus on addressing women among the large number of Syrian refugees. The centre offers legal, social, psychological counselling and adolescent friendly spaces including vocational and educational training awareness raising for young women and men.

While both centres offer holistic support to women, the differences in education, individual freedom and mobility between women in Beirut on the one hand and women from refugee contexts on the other hand, lead to different foci: The Beirut centre has as larger request from women for legal representation and consultation and support in achieving restraining order against abusers and for individual and group psychotherapy. In Bekaa, the focus is more on psychosocial support, creating spaces for exchange, recreating, education and family support.

⁴ <http://www.kafa.org.lb/StudiesPublicationPDF/PRpdf-82-635689245975040950.pdf>

Case example from the Beirut Support Centre⁵

L. left her original home country in Africa after the death of her parents to come to stay with her uncle in Lebanon. She came together with one sister, while separated from her other siblings. During her childhood, she had been denied basic rights and sexually abused by one of her uncle's friend at the age of eight. At the age of 18, she started to work as a janitor in a hospital. At the age of 30, she got married. In the marriage, she suffered from physical, psychological and sexual violence and abuse for years. The physical abuse abruptly stopped when she started working as a dentist assistant, thus gaining financial autonomy and becoming the main financial provider of the family. Once her son turned 14, he started abusing her psychologically and – after some time – also physically. She decided to seek help when her son turned 15 and took him to a psychologist and to an NGO that works with children. Yet the violence rather intensified. She came to KAFA in 2013. She was followed by the social worker and had psychotherapeutic sessions. She gradually became more assertive, gained emotional autonomy, and felt more empowered. She was able to confront her husband and son and learned to protect herself. Leaving her husband was a very difficult decision for her, as it would mean leaving her son. In addition, she was legally dependent on her husband, as she had no papers and had to renew her residency permit as his wife. However, she decided to no longer be a victim and ultimately left her husband. She found a better job, rented a house, and was even able to obtain aliments from her husband. She became a strong, confident, self-sufficient, independent woman. She has maintained a relationship with her son, sees him occasionally and makes sure he is continuing to see his psychotherapist and psychiatrist.

Empowerment? As the examples show, the holistic approach to GBV counselling is not merely aimed at assisting women survivors of GBV in dealing with their traumatic experience, but at empowering them individually and as groups for regaining control on their lives and develop new and safe perspectives for themselves and their children. Indeed, **women empowerment** is a key term in the self-description of many of the participating organisations (ABAAD, KAFA, Jiyān Foundation, WRO, KHANZAD, PDO, CPEL-Civil Waves). It was explicitly stated in the workshop that also within rather short-term involvement in IDP and refugee contexts assistance to women should go beyond humanitarian support and short-term-stabilization but aim at their empowerment to stand against violence in future.

Beyond this, more “general” understanding of empowerment some workshop participants also stated that women victims of conflict related GBV should be empowered:

- to breaking the silence and finding the courage to bring perpetrators to justice and thus contribute to a justice process
- to taking an active role in future peace-building processes and become “agents of change in a post-repressive society” (Jiyān Foundation)⁶

Personal note by the author Karin Mlodoč: While I do see the empowerment concept as a central

⁵ The case example has been taken from the KAFA annual report 2015, kafa.org.lb/studies-publications/60/5/kafas-annual-report-2015-highlights

⁶ www.jiyān-foundation.org/programs/women

pillar of our own work, I think one should be careful in not raising specific expectations on what women shall be empowered for and thus once again patronize them and drive them into directions rather dictated by own agendas (peace building, security). It is implicit to the very empowerment concept, that the women decide themselves what to do with their regained power.

1.4. Social and cultural norms - family and community counselling as solution-focused method

In all countries concerned, the struggle for gender equality and against GBV conflicts with social, cultural and religious values and norms inherent in the respective societies, which limit women's mobility and their possibilities of developing new life perspectives beyond violent family and community contexts. Certainly, the grade of dominance of these values on women's lives differs between urban centres and rural communities as well as between Lebanon and Turkey marked by rather stable governmental and administrative institutions despite conflict on the one hand, and the conflict and war ridden regions in Syria and Iraq on the other hand. Yet even in the region's urban centres such as Beirut, Baghdad or Sulaimania, where many women are engaged in political and civil society activism, have access to education and professional careers and enjoy mobility in the public sphere, women are at the same time confronted with traditional family values in their private and family life. Here they are subjugated to the men of their family and expected to follow a strict code of conduct dominated by the concept of honour and shame. The latter considers the family's girls' virginity and the women's virtue and loyalty as constitutive for the men's honour.

In large parts of the region the given social, cultural and religious norms do not foresee independent life perspectives for women without consent of their fathers' and/or husbands' families. In addition, social control is too net as to allow women to live with alternative identities anonymously out of reach of their families. In Kurdistan-Iraq for example women who live in women shelters and cannot reconnect to their family context, might spend years in shelters in often prison-like conditions or are bound to leave the region and find refuge in Europe.

Thus, the focus in counselling for women who escape honour-killing threats, forced marriages and violent family contexts lies on finding solutions for them to return to their family and social contexts. Family reunion is not always the best choice for the individual woman, but often a precondition to save her life. Consequently, methods of psychosocial counselling **family and community counselling and mediation** are central strategies for most organisations, which participated in the workshop. Psychosocial counsellors and NGOs throughout the region have an impressively rich experience and variety of tools in this regard. However, it would be too short-sighted to see family counselling as a tool merely "dictated" by restrictive social norms and thus a "no-other-choice" approach. Instead, as societies are structured largely along family systems and lines, family is the central stage of social life and the source of happiness, emotional support, acknowledgement and pride. Thus many women, though desperately wanting to leave a violent or repressive family setting, consider a life outside the family senseless and unhappy.⁷ Indeed, women NGOs' family and community counselling and

⁷ It is against this background that some local activists take a critical stance towards projects that encourage women survivors of GBV or conflict-related violence to leave their families and communities and go abroad for treatment

mediation approaches build upon traditional community mediation processes which are inherent in the local history and culture, but here used with an explicit woman-centred focus and driven by women's interest.

Practice example – the women centres KHANZAD's approach to family counselling and mediation.

In all counselling processes run by the KHANZAD women centre Sulaymaniah, a minimum of two social counsellors from the KHANZAD-team work together and meet with women clients so to 1. reduce dependencies of clients on one specific counsellor and 2. – as every counsellor has different ways of communication and approaches - to have two different perspectives on the case and thus give the concerned woman more choice between e.g. a more reconciliatory or a more radical legal response to her situation.

Many of the women referring to the KHANZAD women centre for counselling seek support in situations of domestic violence by husbands, fathers, brothers, fathers-in-law, sometimes the entire family including the female family members. Domestic violence is understood as both, psychological pressure and marginalisation (being blamed, neglected, humiliated, disdained) and/or physical violence (beating, tormenting) and/or sexual violence (marital rape, abuse, trafficking, forced prostitution). In a first talk with the concerned woman the KHANZAD team informs her on the various legal possibilities of divorce and criminal complaints against the perpetrator and tries to find out if she wants to take legal measures (divorce, seeking legal protection etc.) or rather conciliatory approaches to find a solution with her family. Many women do not escape from violent husbands, because neither their husband's nor their father's family agree and the latter rejects "retaking" a divorced daughter home. In addition, women fear to lose their children when asking for divorce. In most of these cases legal action and family counselling go parallel: At first KHANZAD counsellors work with the woman concerned on family/conflict mappings, thus identifying supportive and non-supportive members of the family and possible strategies for consultation. They will then visit or invite fathers, mothers, husbands etc. as well as supportive members of the extended family for individual or group talks. Using a combination of announcement/threat of legal sanctions on the one hand and conciliatory approaches on the other hand (mediation talks, outlining for example the impact of violence and/or divorce on children), they step by step negotiate solutions. Solutions might be the reconciliation of wife and husband under condition of continuous follow-ups by KHANZAD and DCVAW; or a father's family consent on their daughters' divorce with guarantees on reintegrating her into the family etc. In addition, KHANZAD will accompany the woman through the legal procedures of divorce, achieving child custody etc. and support her psychologically in this process.

In many cases women refer to KHANZAD because they have extra-marital or pre-marital relations and fear discovery. In the "easier cases", KHANZAD will try to negotiate solutions such as the consent of both families for the young people to marry. Yet often the young woman or both man and woman are threatened by honour killing by their families. In these cases, safety has priority, and KHANZAD approaches police and Family Court for transferring the woman to the governmental shelter and the man to police custody, while KHANZAD starts a mediation process with both families.

Case example: Once KHANZAD engaged in a nine-month-lasting mediation processes for the case of a young couple having a pre-marital relation, both off-spring of powerful clans in a remote region, which had already tense relations to each other. Both clans had clearly announced to kill the young man and the young woman. Both were in safety: The young woman in the governmental shelter; the boy hidden in an unknown place. KHANZAD visited, partly with police accompaniment, both families, first separately, later in joint meetings and involved also religious leaders of the region and political stakeholders interested in avoiding an inter-tribal clash. After nine months of initially harsh rejection of any conciliatory solution, it was ultimately negotiated that the couple could marry, but had to leave the region and cut all ties to the respective clans and never return back to their villages. The couple lives in a different place now and is followed up by KHANZAD. Both fathers signed a paper at the Court that they will restrain from killing their children.

It might surprise, that a paper signed at the Court trumps over a tribal honour killing verdict. But indeed, KHANZAD often refers to this legal tool and it works in many occasions. The mechanism at work here is, that fathers/brothers who intend to kill their daughters/sisters do this to fulfil expectations of their peer group in order to restore their violated honour. In the very moment organisations like KHANZAD, accompanied by police, enter in negotiations including family AND external stakeholders, such as local authorities and religious leaders, the issue is brought from a private family business into a semi-public sphere. The intervention itself thus opens a door for the fathers/brothers to restrain from murder by pointing to the political interest, damage for their region or legal sanctions involved. Once they restrain from the honour killing decision, the door is open for a conciliatory solution, and in some cases, even for the return of the respective woman into her family and the restoration of family ties.

Certainly, for many women the return to previous abusers or harassers is not the first choice, but often due to the lack of alternatives. KHANZAD and other local NGOs are therefore continuously pointing at the need of social and economic reforms to allow women for independent life perspectives.

Recently, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the case of V. deeply shattered women activists and NGOs. V had been in a relation with a man against her father's will and the father threatened to kill her. She found refuge in shelter, but could not stand the prison-like situation. She set up relation to a man via internet and – against the advice of her counsellors – decided to marry him and leave the shelter. After some time, she was shot in public at daylight. Despite multiple testimonies pointing at the father's responsibility for her murder, he has not been arrested to this day.

Another case was 15-year-old A. ,who was pregnant, sought refuge in a shelter and testified that she had been raped by her brother. She gave birth to the baby but did not support the shelter conditions and left the shelter upon promises by her family not to harm her. Upon her return for the family, she was shot by her second brother for having brought shame on the family by testifying on her first brother's guilt.

The murder of V. and A. were both followed by a wave of protests by women and human rights organisations and activists against the Family Court, the poor shelter conditions and the impunity for perpetrators. They also led to a stronger involvement of women NGOs with the governmental shelters to jointly improve the conditions in the shelters.

KHANZAD also works with women in the prisons of Sulymaniah, many of whom are detained for prostitution and adultery. In most of the cases, the women have been banned by both their husband's and their father's family and risk marginalisation or honour killing after their release from prison. KHANZAD visits the women regularly and - as they have no relatives to support them - provides cloths, hygienic articles etc. and organises educational and recreative courses (for all detained women independently from the reason of detainment). In addition, KHANZAD trains police and security staff in the prisons in trauma and conflict sensitive approaches to the women. KHANZAD also grants legal consultation and court representation to the concerned women and discusses possible solutions for their situation and future life scenarios after the release from detainment.

As stated above, many local NGOs have similar approaches to family counselling as KHANZAD. KHANZAD does not offer psychotherapeutic assistance but refers women in need of such support to specialised services. Others, like Jiyan Foundation or KAFA include specific psychotherapeutic offers in their programme.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq also governmental counselling centres from DCVAW and shelters focus on family and community counselling and mediation in GBV situations. Currently, HAUKARI and KHANZAD support the DCVAW Garmyan in strengthening specific Family Counselling Centres, which offer low-access services and counselling. The civil character of these centres shall encourage women in conflict situation to ask for help at an early stage and shall address also those women who are sceptical towards or restraining from police and judicial measures against perpetrators. The Family Counselling Centres shall also engage in GBV prevention by training social workers in schools and hospitals in GBV-prevention and establishing multi-stakeholder networks for early warning and prevention of GBV.

Most NGOs combine counselling work with advocacy or social, economic and legal reforms for enlarging women's social and economic possibilities for developing independent life perspectives beyond their families. They campaign for young people's free choice of marriage partners, for economic grants for women who ask for divorce etc. They also take a watchdog function on the judiciary observing trials again GBV perpetrators or organising protests when perpetrators escape punishment as in V's case.

I.5. Training for local psychosocial counselling staff (notes by the author KM)

As shown above, local NGOs have an enormous richness off experience and expertise in family counselling processes in complex and violent family conflicts. In this regard, some interviewees expressed criticism towards the current boom of internationally funded trauma and psychological trainings courses and workshops for local practitioners, which often do not meet their needs:

1. Often trainers come from West European contexts and are not familiar with working conditions of local counsellors and the complexity of cases they are working with
2. Often, they introduce rather individual psychotherapeutic or trauma counselling approaches which fail to meet the needs of local counsellors for improving group and family counselling methods
3. Some of the methods introduced in trainings for working with victims of extreme conflict-related escalated violence, such as trauma exposure therapies, might even be dangerous

when used in precarious life conditions and under conditions of ongoing violence as in IDP camps

It is therefore recommended that trainings:

1. Include on-the-job visits of trainers to be more aware of the working conditions of local counsellors
2. Bring trainers from contexts which are similar to the region's context, where local practitioners have developed community and family-based counselling methods such as South Africa, Rwanda etc. thus, encouraging a South-South exchange of expertise.
3. Organise trainings that enable local practitioners to systematise their own approaches and link them to academic psychological debates instead of importing tools developed in Western contexts

I.6. Legal and institutional frameworks

Differences and similarities in legal and institutional frameworks for working with victims of GBV were discussed at length in the workshop and following talks.

Several organisations combine individual counselling and assistance to women victims of violence with advocacy and campaigning for legal, political and social reforms, that enlarge women spaces, rights and participation and set up legal and institutional protection mechanisms against GBV. ABAAD, KAFA, Al Amal, PDO and KHANZAD have a long record in lobbying for and contributing to legal and institutional reforms in their regions: The first draft of the Lebanese Law on Protection of Women and Families from Domestic Violence from 2014 had been originally written by KAFA. And in Kurdistan-Iraq PDO and KHANZAD had an active role in the debate on the reforms of the Personal Status Law in 2008 and the Family Law of 2011.

All exchange participants and interviewees stressed the importance of government-civil society cooperation in the struggle against GBV and underline the specific importance of raising awareness among and cooperating with police and judiciary for achieving long time changes towards the physical and legal protection of women from GBV. ABAAD and KAFA in Lebanon, Al Amal in Iraq and KHANZAD in Iraqi Kurdistan include training of police and judiciary as a key component in their activities.

In the workshop as well as informal talks there was a specifically intense exchange on the details and exact mechanism of the various institutional and legislative frameworks, e.g. the functioning of DCVAW in Kurdistan/Iraq, the role of the Social Ministry in Lebanon etc.

Lebanon:

While Article Seven of the Lebanese Constitution guarantees equality of rights, obligations and duties to all citizens, the constitution delegates personal status law matters (marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody, alimony, etc) to the various religious courts. Against the background of high rates of domestic violence (KAFA alone received 5254 calls in cases of domestic violence through its hotline in 2018, and 24 women were killed in the same year) Lebanese women NGOs and activists campaigned

for a domestic violence law for years; KAFA submitted the initial draft for a legal reform; in April 2014, the law No. 293 of Protection of women and families from domestic violence was passed. The Law sanctions domestic violence, gives women the possibility to get a restraining order against abusers, calls for temporary shelters, establishes district based public prosecutors specifically addressing domestic violence crimes and sets up specialised family violence units within the Domestic Police and the Internal Security Forces. However, women activists criticised the law for having altered original draft submitted by KAFA, for adopting a too narrow definition of domestic violence, for not criminalizing marital rape, but instead referring to a “marital right to intercourse” and for keeping bureaucratic obstacles for women in getting immediate protection in case of threat and violence.⁸ After another powerful campaign of women organisations led to the partly abolition of Article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code, that allows rapists to escape punishment, if they marry the victim, in December 2016.⁹ As parts of the law were reintroduced in other articles, a campaign for the total abolishment of Article 522 is ongoing and a new law amendment draft has been submitted to the Parliament.

Campaigning continues for the abolishment of the contested “right to marital intercourse” from the law and for a reform of the Personal Status Laws that govern divorce, child custody, financial rights of spouses, marital age and polygamy. While Article Seven of the Lebanese Constitution guarantees equality of rights, obligations and duties to all citizens, the constitution delegates all personal status law matters to the various religious courts. Currently there are 15 co-existing Personal Status Laws differing for the various religious communities. While e.g. in Christian communities polygamy is forbidden, it is allowed in Muslim communities, and not rarely Christian men, who want to marry a second wife, convert to Islam.¹⁰ KAFA and ABAAD see the lack of a unified governmental framework as main obstacle for women to achieve individual freedom and protection from GBV and campaign for a unified and reformed Personal Status Law that among other provisions raises the marital age to 18. However, multiple pathways are followed by the various NGOs within the campaign: KAFA e.g. lobbies directly with Lebanese members of Parliament for a civil unified personal status law; ABAAD involves religious leaders for a reform of existing laws.

However, KAFA and ABAAD use the current legal spaces, legally assist women in obtaining restraining order against abusers and in submitting cases to the special prosecutors. They cooperate with the family violence units within Police and Security Forces, train police and journalists in the provision of the law and discuss further law amendments with judges and special prosecutors and receive governmental funding for running shelters. ABAAD is the co-chair of the National Technical Task Force to end GBV against women and girls (chaired by the Lebanon Ministry of Social Affairs).

Turkey

On the 8th of March 2012 the Turkish Parliament adopted the “Law for the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women”. Other than the previous domestic violence law, the law

⁸ See Human Rights watch 2014. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/03/lebanon-domestic-violence-law-good-incomplete>

⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40947448>

¹⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/19/interview-women-unequal-under-lebanons-law>

sanctions domestic and gender-based violence and extends not only to married women but to all women independent from their marital status. It further enlarges the possibilities for victims of GBV to immediately get protection from the perpetrator by authorizing the police to use imprisonment, restraining orders and technical tools like ankle bracelets etc. to keep the perpetrator away for three days even without a court decision.

Despite these legal provisions, gender-based violence has been on the rise in the years after. With the consolidation of the AKP's power under President Erdoğan since 2014 and the erosion of democratic rights and spaces, especially after the attempted coup-d'état in July 2016, the range of agency for civil society and women activists has been shrinking.

Polygamy was outlawed by Turkish law in 1926 already. However, currently with the great influx of refugees from Syria, where polygamy is allowed, women organisations report an increasing number of Turkish men going for a second wife from Syrian refugees' communities.

Syria

The Syrian government has not yet adopted a specific law to ban gender-based and domestic violence. Like in Lebanon there is a plurality of **personal status laws** and courts. The different religious communities have the right to regulate their family relations according to their respective religious laws, most importantly in matters related to marriage and divorce.

However, with the war situation in Syria, there is currently no legal framework or rule of law to refer to. Instead, armed militias and political parties are governing the political and social life in the various regions. In the YPG and PYD controlled Kurdish areas in Syria – the Rojava Cantons – the 2014 constitution of Rojava foresees gender equality as a central building stone of democracy and establishes gender parity throughout the military, political and social institutions. Women organisations working here like PEL-Civil Waves can on the one hand find support in a women-supportive framework but work on the other hand under party dominance and struggle for independent spaces.

Iraq

The US-British-led military invasion in Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent fall of Saddam Hussein and his Baath-regime resulted led to a fragmentation of Iraqi society and multiple political conflicts to this day. In many regions, the security situation for women has been deteriorating (see a high number of abductions and assassinations of women). However, in the Kurdish and Shia regions, which had been suffering from the Baath-regime's terror for decades, the Baath-regime's demise was lived as a liberation by women, too.

The Iraqi Constitution from 2005 guarantees gender equality in the preamble. It prohibits gender discrimination (Article 14), all forms of violence in private and public spaces (Article 29) and outlaws forced labour, slavery, sex trade and trafficking (Article 37). Yet, there are a series of ambivalent paragraphs in which Islamic Law (Shari'a) overrides constitutional law and thus encourages parallel religious and tribal structures to govern family relations.

The Iraqi Personal Status Laws from 1959 has not yet been amended. It is based on Shari'a law, allows polygamy under certain conditions and allows marriage at the age of 15 with a judge's consent.

Also, the Iraqi Penal Code from 1969 is still valid. It considers wife beating a private matter of disciplining one's spouse (Article 41). The Code does not criminalize marital rape. Rape is outlawed but is persecuted by the state only upon a complaint by the victim of her guardian. Rapists can escape punishment when marrying the victim. Iraq's Penal Code minimizes penalty for "honour killing" (Article 409) if a judge finds it motivated by the victim's adultery.¹¹

Iraqi women activists and NGOs have been lobbying for legal reforms, that sanction and ban gender-based and sexual violence for years and had a close cooperation with women and UN-organisation in this regard. Yet, in the current crisis and against the background of an increasing influence of militias and fundamentalist groups, there is instead a further roll back of women rights. In December 2017, the Iraqi Parliament started a debate on more explicitly allowing religious communities in various Iraqi regions to follow their own civil codes, thus for example allowing the reduction of the marital age to 9 years in some regions. The debate caused a wave of protest of women and human rights activists throughout the country. The suggestion was withdrawn for the time being.

Kurdistan-Iraq

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as well, legal reforms have been achieved in response to powerful campaigning and lobby work of local women NGOs and activists after the fall of the Baath-regime in 2003. Women organisations have been actively involved in drafting legislation and discussing it with policy and law makers and religious and community delegates.

Throughout Iraq including the Kurdistan Region, the Iraqi Personal Status Law from 1959 and the Iraqi Penal Code from 1969 are still the valid legal framework to refer to. Yet the Kurdistan region has passed a series of amendments valid for the Kurdistan Region: The articles foreseeing mitigated punishment for homicide for reasons of honour have been suspended; the death penalty is being inflicted but not executed. In 2008, the Kurdistan Regional Parliament passed a reform of the Personal Status Law, that enlarges women's rights in divorce, child custody, their financial rights as spouses during and after marriage. However, women organization's hope for an end of polygamy was deceived: polygamy is still possible though only under certain conditions (illness and infertility of the first wife; consent of the first wife; court decision). In 2011, the so-called Family Law was adopted by the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. The Law presents a broad definition of family violence including the prevention from education. It sanctions all forms of physical and psychological violence, provides sanctions not only for executing female genital mutilation, but also for inciting or witnessing it.

In 2009, the KRG founded the High Council of Women's Affairs bringing together delegates from all Ministries relevant for gender issues (presidency, justice, education, health, interior etc.) and women parliamentarians and activists. In 2012, the Council submitted a 5-years-plan for combating violence against women with a strong focus on civil society-government cooperation. Under the umbrella of the Interior Ministry the General Directorate of Combating Violence against Women was established (DCVAW). The DCVAW runs referral points for women affected by GBV in all major and many district cities of the region with both police and civil staff combining counselling for women and perpetrator

¹¹UNFPA Report on GBV assessment in conflict affected governorates in Iraq, 2016. <http://iraq.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/The%20GBV%20Assesment.pdf>

persecution. In the current crisis, the DCVAW has extended its work to the IDP/Refugee camps. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs runs three women shelters in Erbil. Duhok and Sulaimania and a 72-hours-transitional shelters in Kalar in the Garmyan region. Especially in the region of Sulaimania, there is close cooperation between women NGOs and governmental structures.

After the Referendum for Kurdish Independence held in the Kurdistan Region in September 2017, conflict escalated between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Government. The Iraqi Army and Iraqi backed Shiite Hashd-al-Shaabi-militias advanced to previously Kurdish controlled areas. Iraqi Kurdish women fear, that with increasing influence of the Iraqi government, legal reforms achieved for women in the KRI might be eroded.

Throughout the region legal and institutional reforms banning GBV are poorly and slowly implemented and constantly under attack by conservative religious and traditional actors and communities. Women's life realities significantly differ between urban centres and rural areas, and legal reforms are rather poorly implemented in rural areas where traditional and religious authority are influential. In addition, due to conflict and war the issue of women rights and GBV has been pushed off the political agenda. Fundamentalist groups, militias and tribal and religious structures gain influence. There is a general roll back in awareness on women's rights and protection and an erosion of existing frameworks and governmental structures in the current crisis (see below). Precarious life situations and economic pressure throughout the region make people withdraw to traditional and customary rules and restrict women's mobility and possibility for independence. With huge numbers of IDP and refugees different law systems and values clash; lawless spaces and impunity grow around IDP/refugee camps. In Kurdistan-Iraq Kurdish men, who cannot marry second wives, go to camps to marry Arab women. Kurdish perpetrators of GBV crimes flee to Iraqi controlled areas to escape punishment. In Turkey, men marry second wives from Syrian refugee camps.

I.7. Specific topics: Work with men, religious leaders, and the role of media

Work with men

All participants and interviewees agreed on the importance of working with men for changing patriarchal and abusive behaviour in men for combating GBV in the long run. Most NGOs have components of awareness raising among men on women's rights, gender equality and the background and impact of gender-based violence in their programs. Some organisations focus more explicitly on working with men (e.g. ABAAD, PDO, KHANZAD, PEL – Civil Waves) and create spaces, courses and centres for them to reflect on masculinity, on dominant masculine codes of honour and shame and on behavioural changes. They also tackle men's and boys' own experiences of political, social and sexual violence. The latter issue has become virulent for example in KHANZAD's and PDO's work in the IDP camps where numerous boys and young men have referred to women counselling points in search of assistance after suffering violence and/or sexual abuse and exploitation within their families or communities. In ABAAD's programme and activities, the masculinity programme that invites to reflecting and revisiting men's roles and values is a crosscutting issue in working with men and women.

ABAAD has been pioneering in opening a men-centre in Beirut in 2012 that aims at “improving men’s reactions and emotions due to daily stress, and to support them in better dealing with and managing this stress. Three psychotherapists receive men, who voluntarily seek out the Centre’s confidential and anonymous services and offer them one-on-one psychosocial support sessions. ABAAD has been running the Centre in a private and inconspicuous location. Through catchy public campaigns and active work towards institutional referral systems, ABAAD has, to date, reached over 347 men”.¹² (Figures from 2017)

Some participants of the workshop drew attention to the need of working with “brainwashed” boys and young men that live under ISIS control your year e.g. in Mosul. The issue was not deepened in the workshop but could be addressed in a future continuation of the exchange.

Religious leaders – potential allies or part of the problem?

Another controversial debate evolved on the role of religious leaders. On the background of raising religious fundamentalism some participants suggested to work more closely with moderate religious leaders who disseminate non-fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and Quran so to reach out to religious and traditional communities. Indeed, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, local NGOs frequently involve religious leaders in family consultation processes; moderate religious leaders did have an important role in unravelling resistance of religious communities against the changes of the Personal Status Law in 2008 and the new Family Law in 2011. KHANZAD and DCVAW Garmyan organised round tables with religious leaders and women organisations in 2017 for joint action in GBV prevention. Al Amal Association also reported on positive achievements in negotiating on measures against GBV with tribal elders in Najaf province more recently.

Others argued that such involvement might even strengthen the role of religious leaders in the community and can thus turn against the women. Women organisations should instead consequently offer a secular perspective. Others again argued, that women should not give into the increasing role of religion in the society, develop more trust in their own secular viewpoints and alliances with religious leaders should be entered only from very strong and clear positions so not to compromise own feminist and secular positions.

Role of media and social media

Some attention was given to the role of media in reporting about conflict related sexualised violence. The example of voyeuristic and sensationalist media coverage (from both local and international media) on Yezidi women’s fate in ISIS slavery shows the traumatising and stigmatising impact of insensitive reporting. It was also stressed, that while Kurdish and international media very much focus on Yezidi women, there was only minor coverage from Iraq and regional Arab media.

In addition, Yezidi women’s fate was exploited by both Kurdish and Yezidi political factions, abusing them as subjects of sectarian strife and conflict between religious groups.

The role of the Iraqi media and the Arab media was weak and very shy in covering women's issues.

¹² <http://www.abaadmena.org/direct-services/men-centre>

A controversial debate evolved around the role of the media in combating gender-based and domestic violence. Participants from Lebanon stressed the close cooperation between women organisations and media and the latter's important role in raising awareness on GBV and challenge patriarchal and traditional gender patterns. Participants from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq rather pointed at the media's ambivalent role. On the one hand, they can be allies in raising awareness; on the other hand, they often break rules of discretion and confidentiality and/or report in voyeuristic and scandalising ways on gender-based violence, thus further endangering and stigmatising the women concerned. This was specifically the case with Yazidi women returning from captivity under ISIS. Participants and interviewees called for specific trainings for journalists and media representatives so to reflect on their way of reporting and put it at service of the struggle against GBV.

The DCVAW Garmyan and KHANZAD have organised round tables with women activists and journalists and specific training for journalists in GBV-sensitive reporting and victim protection. KAFA Lebanon has conducted focus groups with 10 journalists each to discuss the issue of media and violence against women and published a manual on the media coverage's role in family violence to be distributed among journalists and students.

In this context, also the negative impact of the widespread use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, was discussed. DCVAW, PDO and KHANZAD deal with many cases in the Garmyan area, where men force women into unwanted relations by threatening them with displaying their photos on Facebook; others take "revenge" on women who reject their advances by discrediting their reputation with false Twitter or Facebook messages.

When women refer to counselling centres for such harassments, it is often difficult for the police to prove the harasser's authorship of Facebook posts and bring him to justice. Indeed, meanwhile the KHANZAD women centre has included the topic of new investigation methods and techniques for internet-based crimes in the curricula for police trainings. DCVAW, PDO and KHANZAD organise workshops for boys and men on a responsible and GBV-sensitive use of social media.

1.8. Workload, working conditions, need of supervision, stable working conditions and planning security

All workshop participants work in extremely difficult and often life-threatening situations. They are in daily contact with women who have gone through extremely traumatic experiences or face violence and honour killing. They are themselves threatened (especially in Syria and Iraq) by terror and combat situations; they are in addition often harassed by family members of their clients. They are facing disapproval and stigmatisation in their social environments and families for being in contact with marginalised and stigmatised groups of women (e.g. detainees, women accused of adultery and prostitution).

All participants stated that they consider their work rewarding when successful; but they all know tormenting feelings of self-blame and responsibility when their interventions fail and women clients stay in or go back to circles of violence or are even killed. KHANZAD centre staff and other local women NGOs in Sulaimania went through a tormenting process of self-blame and self-reflection when one of

their clients, who had been in the shelter due to honour killing threats by her father was shot after being released from the shelter.

Against the background of these multiple challenges, threats and stress factors, workshop participants stressed the urgency of supervision. In Kurdistan/Iraq only few organisations – among them KHANZAD and PDO in Sulaimania and DCVAW structures in Garmyan - do have regular supervision by now, within projects funded by HAUKARI and the German government.

In Lebanon, ABAAD staff has regular case supervision and team coaching; KAFA has set up multidisciplinary coaching groups with staff members from other organisations for mutual counselling and reflections on specific cases.

All organisations underline the importance of additional recreative and stress-reducing activities for the staff beyond case supervision and team coaching, as for example joint staff activities and excursions.

Ultimately it was stressed that staff friendly working conditions and planning security are key elements for reducing stress of staff. In this regard there was an appeal to international donors for long-term-investments in sustainable local counselling structures instead of short-term funding of emergency projects and for including staff care and supervision as permanent integrated elements in all psychosocial counselling projects.

I.9. Final comments

Throughout the conflict-ridden region and in midst of war, conflict and humanitarian and economic crisis, women organisations and development NGO offer protection, medical and legal aid and psychosocial counselling to women survivors of political and gender-based violence and take enormous workload and responsibility on their shoulders to deal with the impact of current war and conflict on women's lives. At the same time, the crisis shows, that previously achieved reforms and already conquered social and political spaces for women cannot at all be taken for granted and are currently threatened by a roll back. The conference ended with an appeal to form strong regional women networks for

- defending legal and social spaces for women and combating GBV
- standing up against fundamentalism and ethnic and religious divisions
- jointly engaging for peace and multi-ethnic dialogue.

Some, but not all the participants, shared also a vision of a strong role of women in a future secular society.

I.10. Feed-back by the participants

Against the background of the above described stressful and hard work the women do, it was a surprising and encouraging experience to see the power- and resourceful atmosphere during the workshop and the determination and commitment of the participants as well as their pride of their successes.

The participants' feedback on the workshop was unanimously positive. All participants welcomed the meeting as an occasion not only for professional exchange and reflection on their own work but also an empowering experience of meeting women with similar ideas. There was a particularly positive feed-back on the intensity of the group discussions, the organisation (location, breaks etc.) and the relaxed and solidary atmosphere of the whole day. In various occasions of the workshop, participants groups were asked to choose symbols for characterising their work or earmarking their working groups. While in the introductory morning sessions, most women chose symbols pointing at challenges and workload, the afternoon working groups chose powerful, proud and self-confident symbols. This shift somehow reflects the strengthening impact of the work exchange itself.

Many participants found a one-day-meeting too short for entering in a detailed exchange and suggested to schedule minimum two-days for a next exchange and to include visits of working situations and counselling projects in the location of the host organization. Indeed, two Lebanese colleagues from KAFA and one Syrian colleague from PEL /Civil Waves visited the women centre KHANZAD and the DCVAW after the workshop; the visit gave the guests a concrete idea of the working situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and led to intense discussion among Kurdish, Syrian and Lebanese colleagues on specific legal and psychological work aspects.

Some participants suggested to invite also media, judges and decision-makers to next meetings.

Critical comments/notes on the workshop were:

- Disparities in the contribution of participants to the discussion (with some women scarcely involved)
- One participant criticised that the programme had been made available only short before the conference so that a detailed preparation to the single topics was not possible.
- The translation was not good enough and related in parts only fragments of the discussion.

I.11. Recommendations for continuing the regional exchange

It is recommended to continue the regional exchange. A next meeting should possibly involve the same group of participants so to build up on the first workshop and pass from general exchange of approaches to more intense work meetings on specific topics that came up in the first workshop. Indeed, the group of participants in the workshop was very diverse, from feminist women activist organisations with a specific focus on and longstanding experience in combating GBV to NGOs which have been founded more recently in response to the current crisis and have larger humanitarian programs with GBV components. After a first successful start of exchange which laid a common ground of shared values and approaches, further discussion will be needed to deepen the exchange and come up eventually with joint recommendations, campaigns or activities.

Suggestions for topics to focus on in a next workshop:

- Working with men – experience, tools, risks
- Religious leaders – allies in combating GBV or part of the problem? (with one session involving religious leaders)

- The ambivalent role of media in combating GBV (such workshop could include one working sessions with journalists)
- How to break the silence and encourage women survivors of GBV to speak up and go to court? Impunity and Transitional Justice.

The next workshop should last at least two days, combine once again inputs and working groups, have eventually sessions with external guests (decision-makers, journalists, judges, religious leaders) and include the opportunity of visiting work situations and projects in the host location

One session should be dedicated to supervision: exchange of experience with supervision; introduction of tools for team coaching, intravision and intervision.

II. Brief introduction of participating organisations¹³

Lebanon

ABAAD - Resource Centre for Gender Equality, Beirut, Lebanon

ABAAD was founded in 2011 for “promoting sustainable social and economic development in the MENA region through equality, protection and empowerment of marginalised groups, especially women”. ABAAD runs three shelters (Al Dar emergency safe shelters) in three governorates of Lebanon granting women in escalated violence situations temporary refuge and eight so called “Safe spaces” where women receive holistic support (medical, psychological, social, legal). ABAAD also runs Men Centres, where men are invited to reflect on masculinity and abusive behaviour. ABAAD engages in advocacy campaigns for legal reforms and political and social change for equality. ABAAD is funded by the Lebanon Ministry of Social Affairs, UN organisations, the European Union and international governmental and NGO donors. ABAAD is co-chairing the Lebanon National Task Force to End GBV against Women and Girls (chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs). www.abaadmena.org

KAFA – (Enough) Violence and Exploitation

KAFA was founded in 2005 as a feminist and secular NGO “seeking to create a society free of social, economic and legal patriarchal structures that discriminate against women”. KAFA has a strong focus on advocacy for law reforms and policy changes, societal awareness raising and training of stakeholders in the public sector, combined with empowerment of women and children victims of violence and trafficking by providing social, legal and psychological support. KAFA runs a hotline and the “AMARA” temporary safe shelter. KAFA also runs support centres, some of them with specific child- and adolescent-participatory approaches where women, adolescent and children receive social and legal counselling as well as psychotherapeutic assistance (art therapy, psychodrama etc.)

¹³ For reasons of data protection, the names of individual workshop participants are not mentioned in the published version of the report.

KAFA is funded by UN organisations and international organisations namely Norwegian's People Aid, Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden and AMICA e.V., Germany. www.kafa.org.lb

Turkey

Khayr Charity Organization, Gaziantep

Khayr is a UK registered charity organization with offices and activities aiming at alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis. It provides those in need with funds and resources allowing them to rebuild their communities and support themselves.

Global Communities, Gaziantep

Global Communities (previously CHF International and Cooperative Housing Foundation) is an over 60 years old US based development organisation working with „vulnerable communities for sustainable development“ in more than 20 countries world-wide. In Turkey, Global Communities is providing a broad range of aid to Syrian refugees, ranging from food, shelter, agricultural tools and water & sanitation to child friendly spaces, women and girls friendly spaces and awareness-raising on social issues for men and women. Global Communities is an implementing partner to the US government and US-aid. www.globalcommunities.org

Syria Relief and Development, Gaziantep

Syria Relief and Development (SRD) is a US based non-profit organization with offices in Amman and Gaziantep. It was founded by US-Syrians in 2011, in response to the humanitarian crisis inside Syria. SRD works inside Syria as well as with Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey. Since then, SRD has worked among others to provide food security, health care, nutrition, protection or shelter to Syrian families in need. Their programs also include a SGBV protection component, providing social and psychological counselling to affected women. www.srd.ngo

Syria

Note: due to difficulties of travelling, there was only one participant coming directly from Syria.

PEL – (Peace, Equality, Liberties) - Civil Waves, Qamishly

Founded in 2011 under the name “Assembly of Syrian Kurdish Youth (ASKYA)” at a youth conference held in the building of the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm with participation of 50 young people from Syria. ASKYA's aim was to support the civil movement in the Kurdish region of Syria. ASKYA provided help to Kurdish Syrian people through financial and logistic assistance and training workshops. The organisation's name was changed to PEL-Civil Waves at its second conference, held in June 2013 Berlin in Germany. PEL-Civil Waves support projects in realm of democracy and peacebuilding (awareness courses about human rights, diversity, the struggle against corruption). PEL also provides aid to women in distress and raises awareness and campaigns against GBV in cities and

villages of the Kurdish areas in Syria, e.g. Qamishly, Hasaka etc. The empowerment of youth remains a central goal. <http://pel-civilwaves.net/>

Iraq

Al Amal Association, Baghdad

Iraqi Al Amal Association is a non-sectarian NGO and founded in 1992 by Iraqis in exile in Kurdistan-Iraq with the aim of providing aid to suffering Iraqi people and “establish a just and democratic society for Kurds, Arabs and other nationalities in Iraq.” Al Amal combines political advocacy for a democratic secular Iraq and gender equality with aid and assistance programmes for women, children and youth through family centres. www.iraqi-alamal.org

Media in Cooperation and Transition, MiCT, Erbil/Mosul

MiCT – Media in Cooperation and Transition is an internationally working organisation headquartered in Berlin/Germany that implements media development projects in crisis regions. MiCT has been active in Iraq since 2004 and the organisation runs offices in Baghdad and Erbil. MiCT’s activities in Iraq include the Media Academy Iraq, which offers professional training and management consulting for Iraqi media producers. Activities focus on the interplay between conflict, media coverage and reconciliation. MiCT’s services comprise the training of journalists and media producers, programme and content development, radio and film production, magazine and book publishing, as well as media research and monitoring in conflict regions. At the headquarters in Berlin, Germany, an international team of more than 20 full-time staff members coordinates MICT’s activities in 15 different countries. www.mict-international.org/countries/iraq/

Kurdistan/Iraq

Directorate of Combating Violence against Women/Ministry of Interior, Kurdistan Regional Government (DCVAW), Erbil and Duhok

The directorate has been established by the Kurdistan Ministry of Interior to provide the support needed to the VAW and GBV survivors from across the Kurdish region. DCVAW runs reference points for women victims of GBV in province centres and district towns of the region, where police and civil staff combine investigation and persecution of perpetrators with counselling of the concerned women.

People’s Development Organization, Sulaimania, Kalar and Duhok

PDO was established in 2007 with support of the international organization Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA). PDO works as an independent and non-governmental organization. Besides its main office in Sulaimania, PDO has branches in Erbil, Kirkuk and Duhok and two centres for combating violence against women in Kalar and Raniya districts. PDO engages against GBV and aims to promote human rights, political participation of women and youth as well as peace and freedom of expression. PDO is also engaged in improving women’s life conditions. Currently PDO assists women in IDP camps in the

Duhok, Sulaimania and the Garmyan region. <http://chawyxelk.org/>; Facebook: People's Development Organization

KHANZAD social and cultural centre for women, Sulaimania

The KHANZAD women centre was founded in 1996 by a group of non-partisan Kurdish women and supported by the German based NGO HAUKARI. KHANZAD combines direct counselling to women in situations of crisis and violence, in prisons, governmental shelters and more recently in IDP camps and host communities in the Garmyan area with training of local police and governmental employees and advocacy for legal and political reforms that protect and empower women. KHANZAD closely works with DCVAW and governmental shelters and aims to strengthen cooperation between government and civil society in assisting and protecting women. KHANZAD is funded by HAUKARI e.V. Germany with funds from the German government and German private donors and foundations. www.khanzad.org

Family Counselling Centre Duhok

The family counselling centre Duhok is a department of DCVAW- Duhok founded in 2011. It is a reference centre for families in conflict and crisis situations, focusing on family counselling and family mediation, counselling in case of marital problems, divorce, dealing with children from divorced relations etc.

Women Rehabilitation Organization, WRO, Duhok

WRO is a local NGO founded in 2003 and based in Erbil with offices in Duhok and Ninive and working in Iraq and Kurdistan-Iraq. WRO focuses on prevention of and response to sexual/gender-based violence and addresses the needs of women and children in crisis situations "by increasing their access to quality economic, protection, food, health, education, shelter and legal services". In the current crisis, WRO engages in aid activities in the IDP and refugee contexts. WRO is funded by UN agencies, international governmental donors (e.g Germany and Japan). www.wroiraq.org

Lotus Flower, Duhok

Lotus Flower is a UK registered and backed NGO founded in 2016 in response to terror and displacement suffered by women in Kurdistan and Iraq. Lotus flower focuses on supporting women survivors of ISIS terror, war and conflict in reconstructing their lives. www.thelotusflower.org

Jiyan Foundation, Duhok

Jiyan Foundation was founded by staff members of the Berlin based Centre for Torture Victims (BZFO) in 2005 and initially opened centres in Kirkuk, Erbil and Sulaimania specialised on psychotherapeutic support to victims of torture. In the current crisis Jiyan foundation engages in humanitarian and psychological aid in IDP and refugee camps in the Kurdistan region with a specific focus on survivors of ISIS terror and trains local professional in trauma care and psychotherapy. The Foundation is funded by the German government. www.jiyan-foundation.org

Women for a Better Healthy Life, Duhok

WFBH is a non-governmental organization for women and girls, independent of their ethnicity, religion, status or resident location. The organization was founded in Duhok Governorate, KRI, in September 2015 and offers social, educational and income-generating services to help building a healthy, peaceful and inclusive society/community. WFBH believes that women are a core pillar of a healthy society. Currently WFBH is in the process of setting up a women and girls centre in Duhok city and runs a programme for female IS-captivity survivors in six IDP camps of the region.

Germany

medica mondiale e.V. Köln and Duhok

HAUKARI e.V., Berlin/Frankfurt/Main

GIZ, Eschborn