



Challenges & Difficulties

Faced by Newly Arriving Refugee Women* in Germany



Rally from Women in Exile at the German-Polish border: Women Moving Against Lager Systems and Racism*

It's not new to us that when refugees come to Germany, they face enormous obstacles: The language barrier, isolation, access to medical services, cultural differences etc. They also experience multiple forms of discrimination, e.g. through patriarchy and restrictive residence laws and racism. Many refugee women* experience gender-specific traumas because they are exposed to sexualized harassment and violence.

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This is the story of a family from Burundi. The elderly mother and her three daughters, two of whom already have their own children (four in total) while the third one is expecting, have just arrived. This family had lived in one of the biggest camp in Kenya (Kakuma) for almost 10 years. There they had also been segregated from society thus forcing them to be dependent on aid, unable to work and acquire education for the children.

The family arrived in Berlin on the 30th September 2021 through a humanitarian program. Unfortunately, it is only one member of the family (the eldest daughter) who is capable of communicating in Swahili and none of them is able to communicate in English.

Despite the many challenges refugee women* and their children face in this country, one can only imagine the situation of this family whose native language (Kirundi) is not understood by any of the residents in the camp, let alone the people working there.

It's quite unfortunate that the family is even facing discrimination from other house mates,

basically because of their incompetence in speaking either German or English and their skin color. During their small talks with us, they mention and emphasize that they're already traumatized from their past. Again they live in a foreign country. They wanted to get acquainted with their neighbors at least by either waving or saying "hello". But the neighbors were unkind and full of despise towards them.

Women in Exile try very hard to support the family whenever we can because our work is concerned with women's self-determination. Furthermore, we strive to make it more visible to the public.

This family needs more attention and support, especially as regards translation and accompanying them to the authorities. We would appreciate support, also from feminists groups whose goals are not to only to treat the symptoms of inequality, but also to empower this family and many other women* as well, in order for them to believe in themselves and fight together for structural change.

NEW PROJECT:

Bridging Refugee Women* into the World of Media Technology

During the Corona pandemic lockdowns, refugee women* living in the lagers in Brandenburg were more isolated than ever and excluded from the rest of society. Most of the lagers are located in rural areas, often with no or poor internet access, which exacerbates the isolation.

In times when most things had to be switched to online, technical know-how is indispensable - for booking appointments, communicating with authorities, school, work, etc. In view of the pandemic situation that will persist in the future

and the accompanying digitalization push, it is more important than ever to develop and expand digital media skills. The project ties in with this need: By visiting lagers, passing on necessary information and holding a series of (self-)empowerment workshops



Photo from pexels.com/@gabby-k



Self-empowerment workshops will be essential to the new project

(for 10-15 women) in digital literacy and the refugee women* learn technical know-how.

What is special about Women in Exile (WiE) is that the women* learn not as consumers, but in the context of self-empowerment. Women* who are already active serve as peer educators for the new ones and share their experiences with each other. A social media team is being established with the particularly interested and active women* in the workshop series to make the voices of refugee women* and their situation in lagers more visible to the public. The project manager and her assistant coordinate the project, provide initial advice and support to the women* and the information channels of WiE (newsletter & website) will be expanded to a digital format for smartphones.

Empowerment in digital education & communication will break the isolation of refugee women* and aim to strengthen their self-confidence & self-efficacy. The knowledge helps them (and their children) on different levels: in everyday life, in learning the German language, in school and work. The project works to expand (digital) access and social participation for refugee women* and to enable them to participate in social life, to access leisure & educational opportunities as well as to be able to perceive the labor market. In other words: to participate and build a life in the German society. Through the multiplier approach of the project we achieve a sustainable, long-term effect. The participating refugee women*, strengthened by the qualification experience, share their newly acquired knowledge with other women* in their environment. In addition, we expect that this will lead to more refugee women* entering the (digital) public sphere and talking about their experiences - via our association's channels, their own profiles or other groups. This helps to raise awareness and exchange with society.

The project started on 01.07.2021 and is mainly aimed at adult refugee women*, regardless of their residence status, age, marital status or country of origin. The central goal of the project is to break the isolation of refugee women* through digital education, communication and to expand (digital) access and social participation for refugee women.

REPORTS FROM BELARUS, LITHUANIA AND POLAND

At a meeting of African refugee women in Eisenhüttenstadt
on November 5, 2021, we received the following reports:*

My name is M., I am 18 years old. I tell you my ordeal while passing through Lithuania and Poland. I have been arrested ten times, that is to say, we were arrested at the border with Poland and

put in prison. After three weeks, we were sent back to a refugee camp in Lithuania. Nearly 300 women are accommodated in this Medininkai camp. The conditions are really terrible. The camp was opened

in August on the site of a border guard school. It is 40 kilometers from Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital. In the Lithuanian camp, the camp management discriminated against refugees. African refugees are prohibited from visiting and leaving the camp, while refugees of color are allowed to visit and leave the camp. We fled this camp towards the Polish border. They arrested us again. We were therefore arrested 10 times in the end. We were mistreated by the Polish police. So we fled again to Lithuania. But because of the inhumane treatment in this Lithuanian camp, we returned to the Polish border. While we were sleeping in the forest, we were again arrested by the Polish police, who also arrested us. We were mistreated, there were tents to sleep in, but no toilets. They gave us stale food and took away our money and cell phones. The treatment we received was truly dramatic. Some of our brothers and sisters died as a result of the torture. We fled and separated as a group. So we finally reached Germany. Here we live in a refugee camp in Eisenhüttenstadt. We have foot injuries from the breakout and we cannot walk well. We are traumatized, we cannot sleep and we spend sleepless nights thinking, we are isolated, abandoned to ourselves. We live in fear, especially at this time of the Coronavirus health crisis that is raging around the world.



We ask souls of good will to come to our aid. Thank you for reading this and kindly supporting us.

Interview with Jade, Who Lives with a Disability in a Deportation Camp

Jade (not her real name) narrates how her life turned upside down, shortly before she had permission to leave the deportation camp in Brandenburg. Her story shows what it means to live in a camp with disability.

Women in Exile: We have known you since December 2019; how have you been fairing?

Jade: I applied for asylum in December 2019 and lived in a deportation camp till September 2020. I got my transfer letter and was to leave the deportation camp for a collective home at the end of September 2020. However, this did not happen because, as fate had it, I had an accident in mid-September 2020.

I was rushed to the nearest hospital and was immediately taken for x-rays. I was diagnosed with a fracture on my left leg. I was immediately admitted to hospital and an operation was scheduled. The operation was to take 2 hours but due to the complexity of the fracture the operation lasted 4 hours. 2 surgical plates were inserted on my left leg.

WIE: What happened next?

J: After my treatment in hospital I was taken back to the camp and my transfer was canceled as I needed intensive medical care which included physiotherapy sessions. The treatment continued for five consecutive months, then I got another transfer to a collective home in Brandenburg, where I continued with physiotherapy sessions.

WIE: What challenges did you face and are you still facing living in a refugee collective home?

J: Near the new home, there is a bus operating every 2 hours. With my physical disability this was quite challenging with crutches and knee prostheses. The Heim is situated far from all amenities, the distance to the supermarket is 1.8 kms, physiotherapy 3.5 kms, orthopedic specialist 15.9 kms, to collect social welfare benefits 67 kms. I organized all this on my own, through friends and sometimes paid a taxi. I did not get any assistance from any officials.

During one of my visits to my orthopedic specialist, I was referred to Charité Mitte in Berlin for a CT scan. The scan detected an anomaly on my left leg which needed corrective surgery, arthroscopy and osteotomy. This meant, I had to use two crutches for at least six weeks after the operation and needed a disabled friendly environment which my Heim didn't offer. The bathroom and toilet in the Heim are not disabled friendly. The kitchen is communal and would be difficult to use while on crutches.

WIE: Did you receive any assistance from authorities, individuals or groups?

J: Bearing all this in mind, I approached the Refugee Law Clinic team to assist me in writing an Umverteilungsantrag (application for relocation) to my Ausländerbehörde. However there was no response from them. Time was running out as my operation was scheduled for early September. I talked to the social worker at the Heim about the delay and they advised me, that if I have a friend in Berlin, I should rather discuss my situation with them and ask for help. I discussed my situation with Women in Exile and they found a solution for me.

I am scheduled for another operation in 3 months though we have to wait and see the CT scan results by end of October. I am still on physiotherapy sessions which cost 40 € per six sessions and several medications to relieve the pain. The surgical plates have not been removed as the orthopedic specialist is of the opinion that it needs another six months though it was to be removed after one year.



We visited Jade (right) at the deportation camp

Scan this QR code to
view the fundraiser
on [betterplace.org](https://www.betterplace.org)



Support our safe space for refugee women*

Hermannstraße 22 has become very important to refugee women* in our group, especially those living in the isolated camps in Brandenburg and those in Berlin who are always seeking for advice in one way or the other. It is a meeting place to exchange, learn and getting connected to new women*.

Please, donate generously, to assist us to keep the space running:

www.betterplace.org/en/projects/103716

JOIN AN EVENT

<https://www.women-in-exile.net/en/events/>

KEEP IN TOUCH

Website: [women-in-exile.net](https://www.women-in-exile.net)

Facebook: "Women in Exile & Friends"

Twitter: https://twitter.com/women_in_exile

Tel: 0331-24348233

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