

A Hand- book on

Empowering Refugee Survivors
of Gender-Based Violence
and/or Individuals at high risk
of GBV to Reclaim their Story

**A Guidebook for Field Practitioners
and Professionals who want to
integrate a gender and cultural
sensitized approach into
empowerment activities, targeting
refugee and migrant GVB survivors
and/or individuals at high risk of GBV**

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Credits

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Introduction

After almost five years since the beginning of the so called “refugee crisis”, the situation in Greece today is still characterized by a series of upheavals and challenges and/or persisting gaps regarding protection mechanisms as well as accessibility and quality issues of services provided to refugees.

After almost five years since the beginning of the so called “refugee crisis”, the situation in Greece today is still characterized by a series of upheavals and challenges and/or persisting gaps regarding protection mechanisms as well as accessibility and quality issues of services provided to refugees. Gender-Based Violence has been consistently identified as an acute problem in refugee and migrant populations for women and girls, as well as for men and, particularly, for adolescent unaccompanied boys. This reality has been documented throughout the “refugee crisis” in Greece and efforts have been made to increase the feeling of stability and perspective for GBV survivors and/or individuals at high risk of GBV. The aforementioned reality increases people’s feeling of insecurity and uncertainty for the future, thus has a negative impact on their integration into the host society, adding to the fact that these vulnerable groups have still very limited outlets in terms of individual and professional development, self-protection skills as well as education, empowerment and support.

Within this context, CRWI Diotima had the opportunity to implement, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Project **“Assisting Professionals to Support and Empower Refugee Women and Men”**, from April until December 2019. As a capacity building centre, DIOTIMA often received the feedback from professionals, active both at the public as well as at the NGO sector, that the quality of GBV service provision is adversely affected by the absence of empowerment and rehabilitation programmes. GBV survivors are often deprived of the opportunity to get knowledge about how to

secure their livelihood on their own means and, in the absence of other financial support and/or social network resources, they often end up returning to the abusive environment. Further on, what makes the situation even more difficult is that **empowerment and integration activities, specifically tailored to support GBV survivors’ autonomous living**, are in large non-existent. To underline the above, field professionals very frequently shared that, even in the case of the already established empowerment initiatives, the difficulties and the challenges are very strong due to the absence of specialised **capacity building on gender and cultural diversification** that staff receives in order to be able to cope with the particularities of refugee and migrant GBV survivors and/or persons that are at high risk of GBV.

On the occasion of the aforementioned observations and through the building of a strong and trustful synergy with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, CRWI Diotima received funding in order to implement this project that aimed at offering an added value to the programmes and valuable efforts made by a range of organisations that are working together with the refugee and migrant communities with the sole aim to support and assist these communities to explore together all possible ways to integrate into the society. More in particular, **“Assisting Professionals to Support and Empower Refugee Women and Men”** aimed at increasing the response ability of professionals, public officers, policy makers, as well as front line staff, through, firstly, actively listening to and constructively gathering the needs of the beneficiaries themselves and, afterwards, systematically communicating ways, methodologies,

activities and tools that can help meet those needs effectively. Therefore, the project followed the **below-mentioned stages of implementation** that gradually resulted to this handbook.

Having as a final goal the design of a Guidebook for Field Practitioners and Professionals who want to integrate a more gender and cultural sensitized approach into their activities, **during the first stage** of project implementation, CRWI Diotima professionals set as a primary goal to actively engage and involve refugee and migrant women and men, GBV survivors and/or at high risk of GBV, in key stages of empowerment and integration programming, though the conduct of a series of **needs assessments**. In the form of **Focus Group Discussions**, field staff working out of different roles with the beneficiaries (indicatively: Communication Responsible, Empowerment Advisor, Male Engagement Expert) constructively gathered and systematically recorded the particular needs of diverse groups of refugee and migrant either GBV survivors or at risk of GBV (women, men, girls, adolescent boys, individuals with a diverse background in terms of gender, age, national or ethnic origin and culture, intersecting with variant stages of integration procedure). Parallel to the above, and as a complementary methodology, key informant individual interviews with the aforementioned target groups, especially with representatives from the different communities, have been conducted. This outreach became possible through CRWI Diotima’s already running project, *“SGBV prevention, response, and legal aid to refugees in Athens and Thessaloniki urban areas, as well as Moria on Lesbos”*, funded by UNHCR.

Introductory Note:

During the second stage of programme implementation, after the needs have been gathered, CRWI Diotima enriched with those outcomes its already wide empowerment and male engagement methodological approach, and implemented several experiential, inspirational and participatory **learning processes** with the different teams that took part in the Focus Group Discussions, in order to identify the practices that are standing out as the most impactful ones.

Parallel with the above, **the third stage** took place, during which the team worked more in depth with one of the most active empowerment groups, and created the context for the women that participated, to identify, record and declare the most important **messages** that they have been withholding in relation to what do they actually need, so that they can feel empowered and truly integrated into the society.

The procedures and processes that took place during all stages of project implementation aimed at gathering the required information and knowledge in order to bring it together to this handbook. Its purpose is **to support professionals who are interested in adopting gender and cultural sensitized approaches and methods**, in particular tailor-made for refugee and migrant GBV survivors and/or persons at high risk of GBV. It seeks to describe a method of empowerment for assisting refugee women and men who have already experienced Gender-Based Violence or are exposed at a high risk of experiencing violence as such. The idea behind has been to collect qualitative data in relation to the needs of the aforementioned target group to the extent it concerns their rehabilitation and/or empowerment process, as well as their integration journey.

As professionals and practitioners we have at times the tendency to have an opinion upon the phenomena that we encounter at our field work. Especially, when we find ourselves being active at a similar field for longer periods of time, the risk arises that we might automatically claim that these opinions are right and start projecting them to the reality around us. During the journey of the creation of this handbook we had to be confronted with such kind of automatic thoughts that are continuously formed and re-formed in our minds while encountering the women and men that we worked together with. And we forced ourselves, through the process of active listening to their needs and exploring ways to be creatively responsive and not just reactive to what we listened to, to figure out ways on how we can become fair witnesses of the path that these people want and desire to take. And we discovered that no matter how strong our internal processes might be, our fundamental question is crucial to remain "how can I stand next to another in need and get the best out of her/him, and on the path of this investment, how can my ego come along, but not stand in the way". Therefore, the pages of the guidebook that follow do not intend to offer solutions that can be widely applicable and do not seek to pretend that these solutions do exist. What they do intend to do is to share observations made, knowledge acquired and methodological approaches that might enable us to maintain present in the field of our work, to make the suitable distinctions and to create the basis for a gender-, culturally-sensitized approach, that aims to be constantly enriched through the adaptations that will be needed to be made each time for the different individuals and groups.

This handbook is dedicated to these refugee women and men that allowed us to get a glimpse of their struggles, their dreams, their hopes and fears, and enabled us to enrich our background of observation.

Θέλω να ενταχθώ
στην ελληνική
κοινωνία

ΝΑ ΜΑΘΩ ΤΗ ΓΛΩΣΣΑ
ΓΙΑ ΝΑ ΜΠΟΡΩ
ΝΑ ΠΗΓΑΙΝΩ
ΣΕ ΕΝΑΝ ΟΡΓΑΝΙΣΜΟ,
ΕΝΑ ΝΟΣΟΚΟΜΕΙΟ,
ΣΕ ΜΙΑ ΥΠΗΡΕΣΙΑ
**ΧΩΡΙΣ ΝΑ ΧΡΕΙΑΖΟΜΑΙ
ΔΙΕΡΜΗΝΕΑ**

CHAPTER ONE:

Needs Assessments & Creative Responses

The needs assessments have been conducted primarily in Athens urban area, as well as at the other two (2) locations where DIOTIMA provides prevention services to refugee GBV survivors and individuals at high risk of GBV (Thessaloniki and Lesvos). More in particular, the **Empowerment Advisor together with**

the Communication Responsible –in close collaboration with the other members of DIOTIMA’s prevention team, the **Male Engagement Expert** (based in Athens), who works with refugee men and adolescent boys that are at high risk of GBV as well as GBV survivors, the **Prevention Officer** (based in Thessaloniki) who conducts awareness raising, empowerment, and male engagement interventions with either survivors or individuals at high GBV risk (women and men), as well as with the **Team Leader** (based in Lesvos) who organizes and delivers empowerment and awareness raising workshops on the island- conducted a

series of Focus Group Discussions and Individual Key Informant Interviews, and gathered from all the locations (**Athens, Thessaloniki, Lesvos**) and the different groups (**women, men, adolescent boys and girls, mainly but not exclusively Farsi-, Arabic-, and French-speaking**), the needs that these individuals are having in relation to their empowerment, as well as to their pre-integration and/or integration process.



The needs recorded differentiated according to several factors, such as ethnicity, cultural background, refugee status (waiting for the interview, waiting for the results of the interview, being already recognized as a refugee), living conditions (being homeless, being hosted at a friend, living in a squat, living at a shelter, living

at a shared apartment), educational background, as well as gender and age. Another major factor that formed the nature of the needs expressed has been also the distance –either chronological and/or emotional- from the violent event, as well as the distinctive characteristics of the Gender-Based Violence that they have experienced (domestic violence while residing already in Greece, fleeing from their country of origin due to Gender-Based Violence, other types of GBV such as rape during their journey, back in their home countries and/or while living in Greece, presence of the perpetrator and/or his relatives also in Greece or not, already raised-awareness

in relation to human rights, women’s rights, legal framework).

In the general picture, the **needs expressed could be divided into two (2) different categories.** They either indicated that the individuals and/or the groups desired to be empowered and supported in order to transition themselves from the abusive situation towards

the reinforcement of the next stage of their life so that they could gain autonomy and achieve self-sufficiency or they indicated that the individuals in question wanted to be gradually supported in order to integrate into the Greek society, mainly by recognizing as exploitable and accessible the available resources. In other words, based on the aforementioned factors, what was openly and clearly expressed symbolized either that the refugee women and men GBV survivors and/or at high risk of GBV were still in need of support to go through and complete their **rehabilitation process** or they were seeking to be empowered and assisted in order to successfully undergo their **pre-integration**

pathway. These categories could be best described through the examples and more detailed presentations of the outcomes of the needs assessments that follow below.

A Farsi-speaking group of women residing in Athens urban area

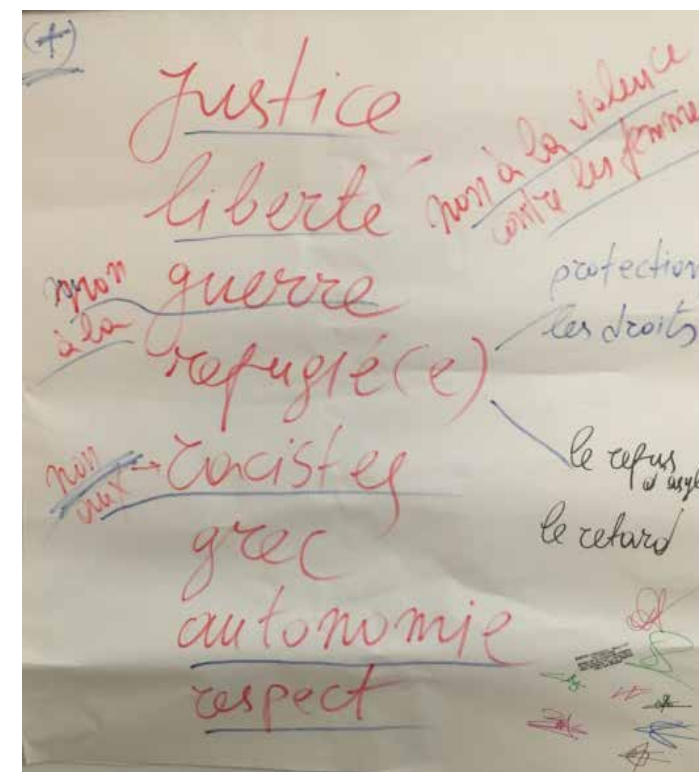
(mainly from Iran, as well as from Afghanistan, all GBV survivors) expressed self-care as one of their basic common needs. From what the women shared from the beginning, it became obvious that they were still at the stage of their rehabilitation, wanting to deal with the violence that they have experienced. Therefore, the sessions focused on how to build trust in oneself and towards each other, how to strengthen self-esteem, how to overcome fears, how to navigate in the city, how to freely walk around the different neighborhoods of the city-center, as well as on how to master emotions in such a manner so that they could re-connect with their inner power. The women wanted to have the opportunity to design as a

group their own symbol of representation (a woman that looks like a water lily, a flower strong enough to hold even a baby on its leaf, as it can be seen on the above picture), followed tailor-made sessions about communication skills, goal-setting tools, trust building exercises; moreover, together with the whole team, they had the chance to visit different places of Athens, such as Plaka, Monastiraki, Psyrri, Varvakeio Market, terraces to have the overview of the whole center, and info-sessions about the history of Athens, excursions that enabled them to overcome the fear of walking again carefree on the streets of the city center and provided them with a different frame of perceiving

the city’s daily reality. Parallel with the above, along the need of learning how to take care of themselves, they expressed the desire to follow self-defense lessons. The lessons had been an added value, since that experience, in combination with the aforementioned themes tackled during the sessions, filled them up with confidence and strength for the future.

A French-speaking group of women, living in Athens,

expressed needs that differentiated to a large extend in comparison with the Farsi-speaking women group. The women –mainly coming from Cameroun and Congo and being in their majority DIOTIMA’s beneficiaries, GBV survivors- seemed to be more into a pre-integrational stage rather than into a rehabilitation one, since they were clearly focused from the beginning on the here and now of their reality and had a strong goal to make their daily life in Athens work effectively for themselves. Therefore, based on the needs they communicated, the sessions were designed accordingly. After the women filled in a questionnaire about what they would like to achieve through the empowerment sessions,



they put together a team contract (as it can be seen on the picture on the right) that included all the values that are important for them and to which they commit themselves as an individual, and as a team-member. The women of this group followed a dynamic curriculum, tailor-made upon the needs they expressed, that consisted of the following topics/activities: Women's Rights, exploring the city of Athens, knowledge and information about the history of Athens, as well as about the current political system and situation, guidelines for an effective navigation around the public services, as well as a couple of sessions where they had the opportunity to work on the acknowledgement of their own identity (who they used to be, who they are, which are their strong points) and on their own vision and goals for the future. Further on, based on their strong need to integrate into the society, during many sessions the women had the opportunity to practice Greek Language through a specific, interactive and effective method that aimed to support and enable them to become confident to interact and communicate in Greek throughout their daily life.

A group of Arabic-speaking women, residing in Athens urban area (most of them GBV survivors) expressed the need to get involved into activities that connect with art, in order for them to be able to get in contact with and to express their emotions in a manner that would work for them and for their surroundings, fact that indicated that they were into their rehabilitation process. For this purpose, they followed a series of Art Workshops during which they had the opportunity to

connect with their feelings, to share their stories and to create a support system among each other.

Another two groups of Arabic- and Farsi-speaking women, living in Thessaloniki urban area, in their vast majority either GBV survivors or women that are at high risk of experiencing GBV, expressed the need to identify and work on their strengths and skills. Therefore, the sessions were designed based on the fact that these women were into their pre-integration process and most of them have been delivered under the theme "Preparing Ourselves for the Labor Market", subject that has been approached and tackled through multiple ways and angles.



A French-speaking group of women, residing inside Section C in Moria on Lesbos Island, most of them GBV survivors and all of them exposed daily at high risk of experiencing GBV, expressed their need to write since they were all experiencing strongly a desire to reclaim their stories.

Therefore, a series of Creative Writing Workshops have been designed and delivered, through which women had the opportunity and the space to express their emotions, write and re-write their past and unconditionally dream upon their future.

In relation to refugee men and adolescent boys, most of the information with regards to their needs in relation to empowerment and integration has been gathered through needs assessments that have been conducted with refugee unaccompanied adolescent boys and young men residing in the urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki. **In Athens, Focus Group Discussions**

have been implemented with refugee adolescent boys and young men, mainly between the age of 16 and 21 years old, from different ethnicities (coming from Iran, Bangladesh, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Syria) that are connected with the organization Velos Youth (an organization that provides safe spaces for unaccompanied children and young people on the move). There, DIOTIMA's Male Engagement Expert gathered the needs of this target group, among which most of the individuals are at high risk of experiencing GBV and possibly many of them are already survivors of Gender-Based Violence. Most of the youngsters expressed the need to know more about gender roles, gender equality, gender stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence. Further on, in their vast majority they were very willing to engage into activities that could be self-fulfilling, as well as educational, and to get connected through those activities with the local society.

Creative responses to those needs can be best presented through the following examples. **Most of the groups** got engaged into workshops about gender roles and stereotypes, during which they had the space and the opportunity to share their own experiences, their family and cultural background, as well as to re-define their way of perception and to enrich their perspective upon these topics. During these workshops the following issues are handled through an interactive discussion which is based on examples and sharing of experiences coming from the personal and the cultural facilitator's background and knowledge: differences between violence and Gender-Based Violence, types of GBV, causes of deterioration of GBV, as well as legislation context. **To another group of adolescent boys** a Djing Workshop was delivered. This group became familiar with the console and other relevant equipment and, afterwards, visited an internet radio station, in order to have the opportunity to observe a radio broadcast the moment it is happening. The youngsters were very enthusiastic, especially with the fact that there is such a technology through which they can reach out globally to their beloved ones who are either back home or also

on the move. **One group of youngsters coming from Afghanistan, Syria, Sierra Leone and Bangladesh**, based on the needs that they have expressed, participated at a series of workshops where they had the opportunity to engage into a conversation about gender equality, gender roles, gender stereotypes, how they are formed and performed, how they demonstrate themselves inside the Greek society, as well as how they are appearing in the context of the societies that these young men are coming from. The module included also elements about housekeeping, such as who bears the burden of the household, as well as which are the gender stereotypes that relate to these roles and responsibilities.

In Thessaloniki, the needs have been gathered from unaccompanied children and young men who are residing either in shelters or at safe zones.

These boys and young men expressed to a large extent similar needs to the ones that had been systematically recorded in Athens. Most of the youngsters, mainly expressed that in order to feel empowered and more integrated they would like to receive knowledge in relation to gender identity (masculinity/femininity), their role based on their gender in this specific societal context that they are currently living in, the gender stereotypes that do exist also in Greece and the ways that they can cope with all the above. Those youngsters are highly exposed to Gender-Based Violence, as recorded by many organizations and research projects since the beginning of the "refugee crisis". Knowledge and information about these issues fills them up with confidence and gives them strength to engage with the local society. One of the groups expressed the need to write. Therefore, a **Creative writing workshop** has been arranged and implemented. The idea for this workshop came from the adolescent boys during a needs assessment that has been conducted at their shelter, where they expressed the need to get the opportunity to share their story through different ways, such as writing. The workshop was very effective; the youngsters that participated were enthusiastic.

“I want a house. I am in Greece for more than a year. Even though I am a recognized refugee, I am homeless.”

As conclusion of the above and before moving to the next chapter about the methodological basis upon which the aforementioned creative responses (tools, workshops, discussions, sessions, and interventions) have been designed, the **importance of needs assessment** as an absolutely necessary step of working with and supporting these individuals and groups becomes clearly visible. As regards working with women and men, either GBV survivors and/or at high risk of GBV, professionals and field practitioners might be tempted to focus on how to label the consequences of the violence that they have experienced or their fear of possible exposure to violence. Once energy and effort are put to this direction, it could be misleading. Instead, it is important to try to understand how the person experiences those consequences in order to be able to respond with individually tailored assistance and service. The needs assessment **actually starts the empowerment process** since each participant becomes accountable for her/his desires, takes ownership to express them openly and is invited to take a stand about what would be supportive for her/him in order to move forward. Further on, it gives precious and necessary time to the professional to undertake the following important

actions: to observe, to actively listen, to start to get to know the ones working together with, to let her-/himself to be surprised, as well as to take the opportunity to clarify from the beginning what can and what cannot be offered and provided in order to avoid making false promises that might cause mistrust and disappointments in the future.

Moreover, having conducted a needs assessment **involves the participants in the design of the curriculum in a participatory and balanced manner**. Facilitators afterwards are enabled to design learning opportunities in which participants will have the space to reflect on and develop further existing skills and resources. A curriculum that is designed on the basis of expressed needs, especially when this process relates to a certain target group about which there are a lot of preconceptions (GBV survivors, from different cultures, living in another country), can make learning more relevant to real life situations. Since it is based on previous existing knowledge and resources and through this relative advantage it allows the participants to **flexibly and actively apply the skills and knowledge they acquire to a variety of situations**, fact that is of high importance when a person is in the process of reclaiming her/his own story, re-connecting with her/his own power and actively applying ways **to integrate into an away-from-home society**.



Θέλω ένα σπίτι.

ΕΙΜΑΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ ΠΑΝΩ ΑΠΟ ΕΝΑΝ ΧΡΟΝΟ
ΚΑΙ ΕΧΩ ΛΑΒΕΙ ΚΑΘΕΣΤΩΣ ΠΡΟΣΦΥΓΑ,
ΠΑΡΟΛΑ ΑΥΤΑ ΠΑΡΑΜΕΝΩ ΑΣΤΕΓΗ.

CHAPTER TWO:

“My Integration Message”

During this project inside the project, “**My Integration Message**”, participants from one of the empowerment groups of French-speaking women, had the opportunity to declare the messages that they are having in relation to their integration. Driven by questions such as “Which are the needs of women who survived Gender-Based Violence, who left their country of origin and now they are in Greece?”, “What do they dream of?”, “What do they miss?”, “What might be that they mostly need?”, “What are they craving for?”, “How much do they struggle every day?”, “The coverage of which ones of their needs, might have significant impact on their integration into the Greek society?”, CRWI Diotima’s Communication Responsible mapped out the needs of this particular group, by encouraging them to record them themselves. This side project sought to create the context for these women for their own voices to be heard, so that they can be the **ambassadors of the vulnerable, excluded community in which they belong to**.

During the course of six (6) months, a series of group meetings fully focused on this purpose have been conducted. Through this process the women wrote down not only the conditions in which they are living, but also **what do they need in order to seamlessly integrate, they as well as their children, into the society**. Most of the women mentioned the following bottlenecks and desires: the lack of housing, the financial and material deprivation that they are experiencing, the need to have legal documents, as well as the strong desire to learn the language, to study, to work so that they can achieve their dream, to freely live in a society where they will experience no violence and no racism.

The following are few of the messages that have been extracted from their extensive written narratives:

“I want to achieve family reunification. My children are still in Congo. I miss them so much”

“I want to be respected. I do not want people to look at the color of my skin”

“I want legal papers. I want to have an identity”

“I want to have a home. I am in Greece more than one year, together with my little baby. Even though I was recognized as a refugee, I am still homeless”

“I left my four-year old daughter back in my home country. I would love to have her by my side”

“I would very much like to work in order to be able to cover my needs by myself”

“I really do love Greece. I would like to learn the language, work, and be able to pay my taxes”

“I want to have a nice job, so that I can have a home, with one room, a living room and a bathroom, for me and my child”

“I want to respect and follow the laws of the state, because I really love the fact that in this country human rights are respected”

“I want to work as a nurse, to be an independent woman, to be able to pay taxes. To be able to support myself and my family”



More in particular, after the trust was built between this Community and the Communication Responsible and a strong relationship has been established, the women put down on paper the messages they have, through a creative writing process. This whole process followed several stages until it gradually reached its goal. At the beginning women had the need to share their story. Many of the women shared stories and moments from their lives back in their country of origin, whereas others shared stories from their journey. A couple of women shared their experiences from the Gender-Based Violence incidents that they have been through. During this early stage, women seemed to have the need to first **express and let go of stories from the past**.



Trustful relationships have been established among the members of the group, as well as with the facilitator. Afterwards, women started the actual creative writing process. During this second stage of this side-project, participants in their vast majority felt the need to write about a variety of topics, until their **integration message** could become clear. They wrote about the needs they have, about the wishes and desires they withhold, about

the goals they are setting for the upcoming years, for themselves, as well as for their children. After they have written down everything on paper, the whole process entered a **theatrical context**, within which women wanted to speak out their messages for their integration to the rest of the group, while imagining that they are presenting those messages to the government and to the relevant ministries.



The whole process of the project “My Integration Message” brought to the surface a lot of parallel processes to the women that had been empowering and strongly impactful. Through this writing journey, women had the chance to reframe their past stories and experiences, they had the space to dream about what they want from where they are standing in the now, but also –parallel to the above- they had the opportunity to declare what they need in order to achieve what they desire. Recognizing the reality that integration does not depend merely on the actions that they will plan and undertake as an individual, but has also to do with advocating for and claiming their rights.

CHAPTER THREE:

Methodological Background

While working with refugee women and men, survivors or at high risk of Gender-Based Violence in the context of their empowerment, their engagement with themselves and others, as well as towards their integration, activities are aiming at **responding to the abolition of gender and other discriminations that these individuals are facing**, in order to enable them to access to and exercise their rights. The sessions in most of the occasions seek to support in multiple ways refugee women and men to obtain those resources that will allow them to decode the facts of their individual, as well as of their collective way of being in Greece and to creatively connect the reality of their country of origin, the experience of their journey and the reality of the “here” and “now” that they are confronted with. In addition to the above, it has been recorded that women’s empowerment as well as male engagement activities encourage and facilitate disclosures, and, therefore, act as GBV prevention tool.

As described in details in the previous chapter, it has been recorded that the individuals of this specific target group are either into **a rehabilitation process**, during which they desire to transition themselves from the abusive experience to the reinforcement of the next stage of their life, seeking to gain autonomy and self-confidence, to reconnect with their power, to redefine themselves from the point that they are standing on the now, and to achieve as much as possible self-sufficiency or get into **a pre-integration process**, during which they are mainly exploring the best possible ways to achieve their gradual integration into the society.

One of the key words that connect to both of the aforementioned processes is citizenship. **Enhancing citizenship** is a reference point for accessing and exercising rights and, at the same time, constitutes a central factor as regards the discrimination and the categorization of subjects. For refugee and migrant women and men, social integration means the chances offered so as to explore, shape and formulate their new identity, life plan and aims. And as social integration is a process, empowerment –as a stage of social integration- is not a tool, but a goal on itself. Moreover, the empowerment process is embedded in biographical procedures and, therefore, the distinction between surviving and actual planning of one’s life, while being in a refugee status, becomes no longer obvious. In this context, it is required that individuals are empowered to achieve their integration regarding different areas and aspects of it: **structural integration** (rights, acquisition of integrational resources), **social integration** (relationships, community activities, interaction with the local population), **cultural** (knowledge of everyday living, understanding of social norms), **identity** (change of perception of oneself, new sense of belonging, social recognition). Empowerment evidently is a gendered process and should be the very notion of any activity and interaction within it.

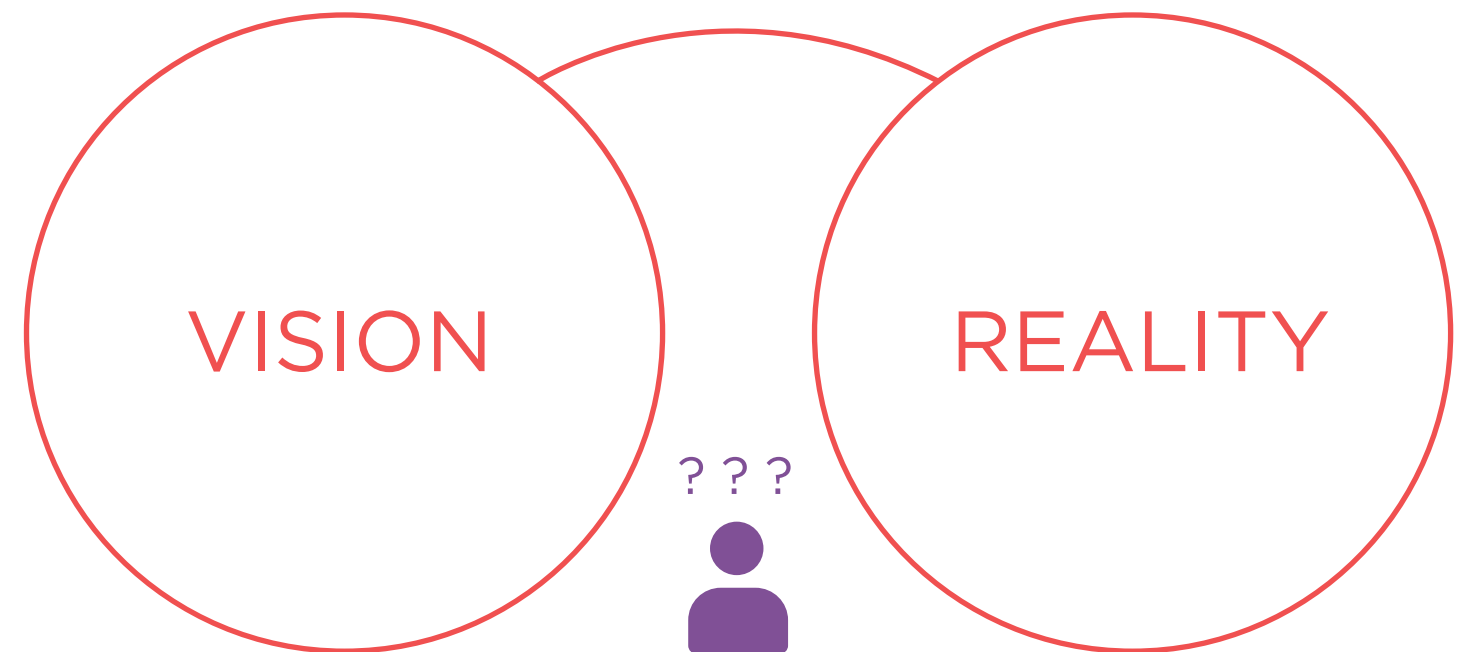
The empowerment activities are best to be synthetically based on educational, learning, psycho-supportive and cognitive procedures. In this manner they can strive to respond to the need that refugee and migrant women and men have for mobilization through the re-

framing of their life experiences and their motivation to outline life plans that will enable new beginnings. The individuals are approached taking into account their particular social and psychological needs, the performance of their roles within a culturally diversified context and their particular experiences, away from an “us and you” approach and with gender and cultural sensitivity, grounded on respect of the human rights.

The empowerment can be designed to be conducted **in groups and, if needed, individually**. **Group activities** involve principles of consulting and support of teams, the method “project” and the identification of the experiences of all the participants, with the aim to encourage them to interact with themselves, with the other members and, through this practice, with the wider social context equally well. **Individual sessions**, when necessary, mostly aim at the empowerment of women and men to increase their

self-confidence, to reflect and to regain their energy and potential, through the provision of structural tools that will enable them to take the required steps that will lead them towards the integration they desire.

Referring back to the distinction previously made between the rehabilitation and the pre-integration stages, once it is identified that the ones participating are in need to go through **a rehabilitation process** the following frame of observation might be supportive as a methodological basis upon which field practitioners and facilitators can build activities, select tools and design sessions. Women, men and adolescent boys and girls that are survivors of GBV and are still strongly under the influence of the violent event, usually find themselves in a gap between how they envision themselves and how they experience themselves in their own reality, as it can be seen in the chart that follows:

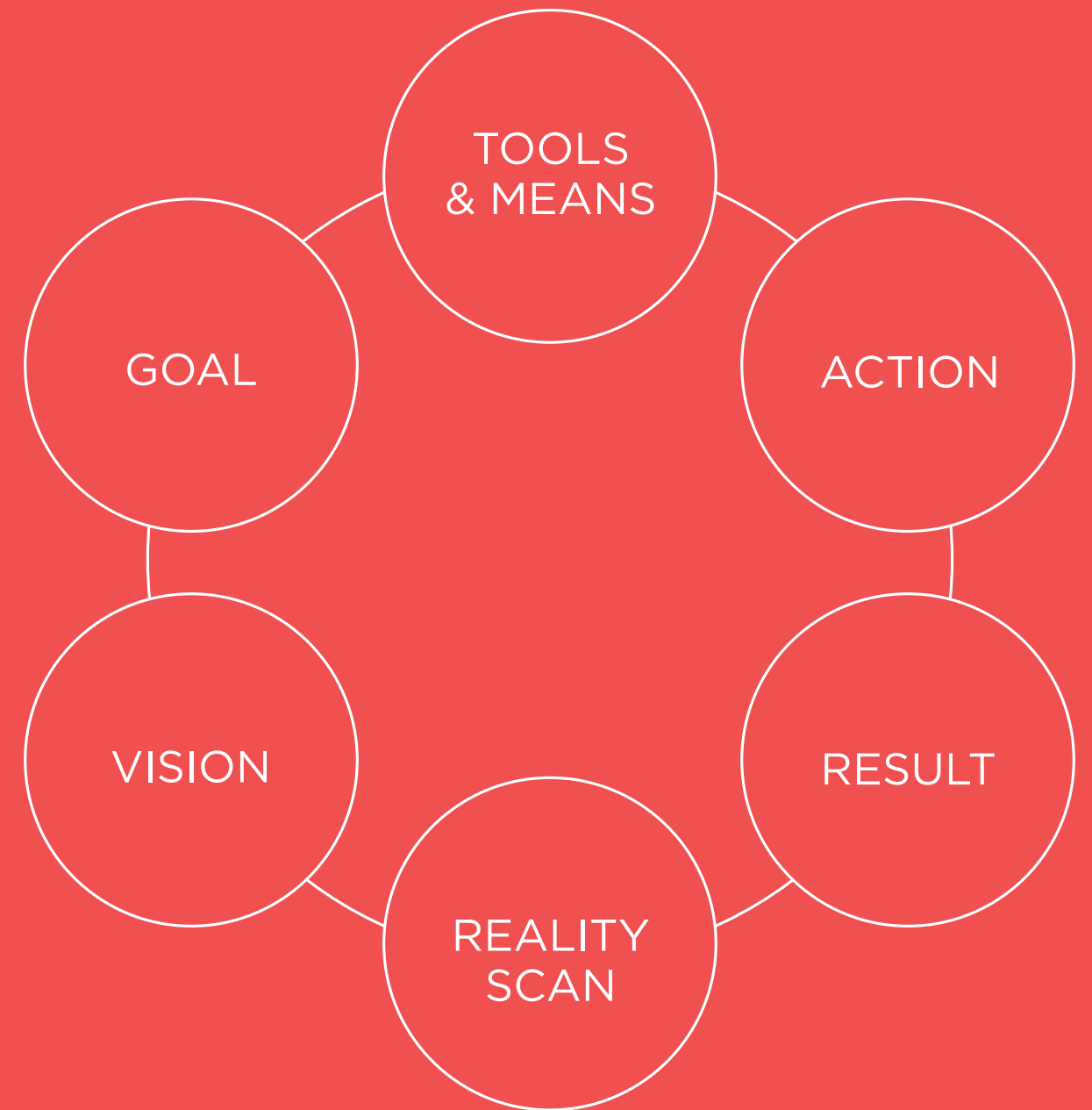


Inside this gap, they have developed **a language of description**, which starts to shape who they are, how they look at themselves and the choices they are and are not making, ending up living in this exact language. For example, many of the refugee women and men that took part in the Focus Group Discussions, as well as in the sessions afterwards, who have been traumatized from a violent experience, they expressed openly that they find themselves stuck in this gap between where they are and where they would like to be with regards to the way that they are experiencing the relationship with themselves, with their own thoughts, beliefs and emotions, as well as to the way that they are relating to others.

Inside this gap most of their everyday actions and activities become a struggle or an effort and there is a constant sense that something is missing. As a facilitator there are chances, once trust is built with each individual and with the whole group, to assist the ones participating **to create a breakthrough beyond these thoughts and feelings that keep them in this gap**, by supporting them to identify what impact do these concepts have on the quality of their life, which are the ones that are limiting them to move forward, as well as which are those that can empower them to achieve what they desire and will **get them out of the gap and bring them closer to their vision of themselves**. Through processes, activities and tools, tailor-made for each special occasion and by having the above presented chart as a basis, group facilitators can achieve significant impact. In most of the cases, participants do realize in their own tempo and assisted also by one another within the group that these self-conceptualizations are coming from the past and they are not serving them anymore. Once this realization is there, the transition from the abusive experience to the next stage in their lives becomes possible and achievable. Women and men that have been survivors of GBV re-connect with their inner power, realize that they cannot control what

have happened or what might happen, but **what they can control, reshape and reclaim is their response to what happens**. Through this dynamic process, and after following a series of sessions, participants are enabled to get on the top of their thinking and observe it. Out of this position, they give themselves the chance to go through a self-reflection process and conceive a new point of viewing themselves in the social reality, and from that point on **a whole new process of transformation starts to take place**.

In case that it becomes obvious, clear and consensual that the refugee women and/or the men, as well as the youngsters that have already experienced Gender-Based Violence or are living in conditions in which they are highly exposed to violence as such, are ready for entering **a pre-integrational stage**, and they are ready to engage themselves with the effort to pave the way to get a place in a new societal context, then **a structurally different methodological lens** might support facilitators and field practitioners to effectively respond to the needs that arise. In many occasions, individuals and/or groups, who have already taken a clear stand that this is the society they want to live in and are willing to direct their energy and efforts towards the steps that they need to take in order to get empowered and gradually achieve integration, are getting very focused on the result and the outcome. As it is widely observed, integration into the society, especially for the vulnerable ones, is a very challenging process, a long procedure with many pitfalls, bottlenecks and challenges, as well as many external factors that are constantly re-directing the efforts of the individual. Therefore, it becomes important to assist the ones involved in this process not to start from focusing on the wanted result and having this as a starting point, but concentrating instead on what is their **factual reality right now** and how they can constructively create while having this exact reality as a basis for their actions, as it is demonstrated in the following chart:



“I want to be independent and autonomous.

To be able to support my family.

To be able to pay my taxes”

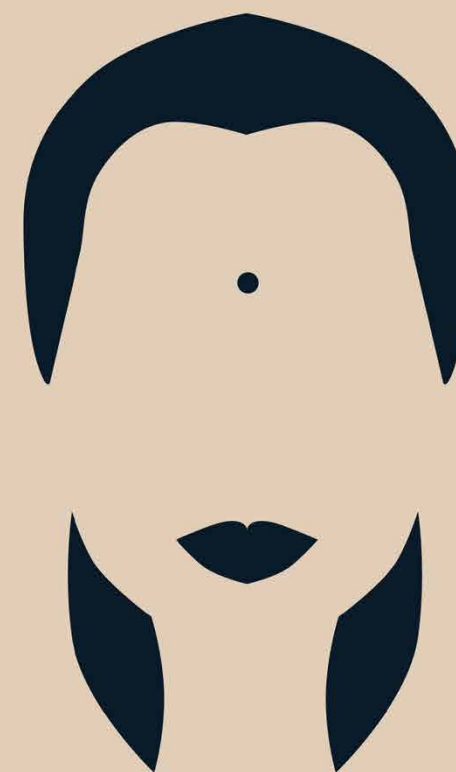
The above chart forms a **methodological circle of creativity** and suggests that the starting point –for the individual and/or the group that wants to set a goal, especially a long term one- is best to be a **reality scan**. During this stage, a facilitator can assist the person in question to identify the reality in which she/he is in, through observing and identifying in details the facts and neither the emotions nor the opinions about and around this reality. For example: identification of which are my strong points, which are my weak points, where do I live, how many family members are we, which skills do I have, what knowledge do I have, but not do I like this reality or not, do I find it supportive or not. During this first step, pure scanning of the internal and external facts is recommended. Afterwards, the participant can **set a vision**, a personal drive. This vision is an abstract statement, such as “I care for myself”, “I am proud and strong”, “I am powerful” that it can be fulfilled ever and never. It is not something measurable and touchable; rather it has the function of a driving force. Then, a **concrete and measurable goal** can be described in details. As a next step (tools & means) the person writes down all **the available resources and the support system** that are available and relevant to the goal that she/he sets. Moving forward, after having taken all the previous steps, **action starts** and this action **brings results** that are leading to another reality. And the circle

goes on with corrections, additions and adaptations.

In regards to the above methodological proposal, it is important to mention that although it can be used as a tool as well, within the context of this handbook is suggested as a methodological approach that gives a framework about how to best assist refugee women and men, mainly survivors of GBV, to take the correct steps while being at a pre-integration stage. The added value that this methodology brings is a shift of focus that can make a significant difference. One of the most **common pitfalls** that participants of this target group, but also facilitators and field staff might experience is to focus on the wanted result that is missing and **start the planning backwards**. In this case the thinking process builds up as follows and therefore it brings stress and anxiety and ends up to be unproductive: “If I get a proper house, then I will start to learn the language, and then I will be able to find a job, and only then I will feel empowered and happy and my reality will be as I want it”. Instead the approach described above, suggest encouraging the ones that receive empowerment assistance to start from what they are, explore what they want to have and take actions in order to achieve it. That opens up a whole new perspective due to the fact that **it allows the design of goals to take place on the basis of empowering believes, instead of being built upon feelings of discomfort and disappointment**.



Θέλω να σπουδάσω
στον ιατρικό τομέα
για να βρω δουλειά



ΝΑ ΕΙΜΑΙ **ΑΝΕΞΑΡΤΗΤΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΝΟΜΗ**,
ΝΑ ΣΤΗΡΙΖΩ ΕΜΕΝΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙΑ ΜΟΥ,
ΝΑ ΠΛΗΡΩΝΩ ΤΟΥΣ ΦΟΡΟΥΣ.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Powerful Interventions

In the following chapter three (3) different examples of interventions that have been taken place together with women survivors of Gender-Based Violence are being presented. The purpose for this presentation is to underline and demonstrate which is the thinking and the method behind that make these interventions powerful and inspirational for the women involved, as well as for the local communities. It is worth mentioning that all of the actions and activities presented below were suggested and initiated by the women themselves in the context of their empowerment meetings.

In Athens, the group of the French-speaking women that followed the side-project “My Integration Message”, had the opportunity to represent their community at an **Event** that took place on the **occasion of the International Human Rights Day** and **the last day of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence**. During the event these women had the opportunity to take the empowering step and share those messages (one of them even shared her message in Greek) to the ones that were present: other members of the refugee community from different organizations, field-professionals, other actors that joined and –most importantly for the women, as they expressed afterwards– straight to the Ambassador of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, who also took the chance to ask them back questions and further clarifications.

In Thessaloniki, a woman from Iran, an activist of Women’s Rights that fled from her country because of Gender-Based Violence, took the chance on the occasion of **the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women**, during an event where ninety (90) people were present, to share her powerful story and to spoke out loud one of her poems:

I pass through all that fear and frustration; My tired voice is the beginning of the victory

I’m Jasmine’s voice, I’m Noushin’s voice; I’m the jubilation voice of sad girls

I’m your mother’s voice, Rachele; Don’t see my silence, I’m full of jubilation

I’m Saba, I’m Atefe, I’m Neda, I’m Nahid; I’m tired, I miss Nasih. How is in smile corner

I’m Marzie’s voice, I’m Mojgan’s voice; I’m the voice of free people in Iran, one by one; I’m the voice of a girl whom you ordered her beating and

Torturing for the sake of freedom; Shine! Majesty of the sun! Remove the veil (hijab)

Look how beautiful our dance is, on top of the gallows; Because of your laughter and your dance, the city is more beautiful; Sing, dance, from now until the last minute; Dance, although the dance is forbidden in this city

Everything is forbidden for women; Speak, laugh, dance, break this silence; This homeland is our whole being; Don’t be afraid, don’t be tired, rise! As if you are Sepide

Rise! You are Neda, Golrokh and hundreds of Monire; Pass through all fears and frustrations; To be homophonic! This is the beginning of victory

In Lesvos, on the occasion of the **International Human Rights Day**, women from Cameroun and Congo that had followed a series of Creative Writing Workshops had the opportunity to present their text at a book store in the city center of Mytilene to an audience of eighty (80) guests. The presentation was named “Pousse Pion”: “My favourite game was Pousse Pion. We were designing squares on the floor, we were taking the insides of the mangos, we were making them flat and kicking them from one square to the other”. “After all will pass, I will laugh with all my power, and, only then I will know that I am still alive”.



What the aforementioned interventions have in common is the **active and unmediated participation** of refugee women, GBV survivors, at events that are taking place within the local different communities, where they take the space to share, to take their stands, to claim their rights, and to be impactful and inspirational for others. These actions have supported the women that participated to those interventions to redefine, even temporarily, their role into the society, to listen to their own narration in an absolutely new context and through all the above **to have the embodied experience of the fact that they are powerful enough to reclaim their story**.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Challenges and Bottlenecks

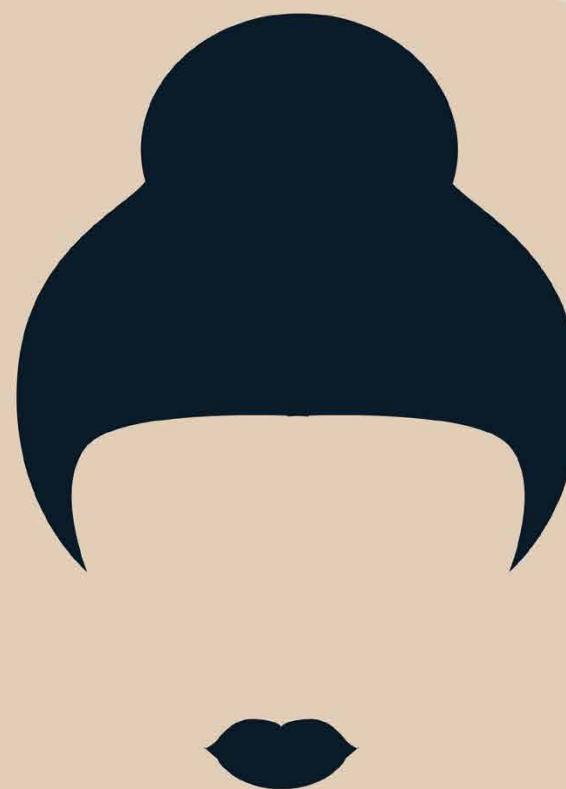
In this last chapter, a couple of challenges are briefly presented which might occur while working, planning and arranging activities with refugee women, men and adolescent boys and girls that are either GBV survivors and/or are exposed to high risk of Gender-Based Violence. The below-mentioned challenges are through the lens of the experiences within the context of this project and, therefore limited and unavoidable subjective and occasional. More in particular:

- There might be challenges in relation to the **formulation of some groups** (either empowerment and/or male engagement) regarding being able to demonstrate regular and consistent participation. These challenges connect each time with different reasons (different per location as well), such as, population on the move (leaving the island, family re-unification, moving between different cities); getting back to the abusive environment (in cases of GBV survivors), having other basic needs unfulfilled and not setting these type of activities as a priority (being homeless, living in harsh settings, not getting access to specialized doctors for severe health problems). It is supportive to be ready for it and insist on asking commitment of participation.
- In case of collaboration and synergies with **other actors**, there might be times when the organizations have difficulties to commit in the long run for activities and mutual action plans, as well as to keep agreements that have been once

made. Making clear agreements prior to the actual implementation with regard to the **methodological approach** and regular and ongoing communication might be very supportive.

- Further on, there might be challenges in regards to the **spaces** where the activities have to be conducted. For example, a small room where it is difficult to conduct more experiential processes during which participants can move, form couples and/or work in smaller groups. In addition, many of the women might come together with their babies, as they have no access to child-care services, a fact that makes the situation even more challenging.
- The **workload** of colleagues that could contribute to these types of interventions might be very high, fact that makes it technically difficult to align planning and curriculum requests with availability. Setting a **clear Work-Plan** in details for and maintaining alert and open to changes and adaptations according to what occurs can turn out to be very effective and make it possible to receive precious support and input.
- Occasionally, it might become difficult to respond effectively to highly important –though very **specific and individualized requests/questions/needs-** that several participants are bringing up due to the group context. In most of these cases, the question/request is recommended to be handled individually after a session.

Θέλω να με σέβονται
και να μην κοιτάνε
το χρώμα του δέρματος μου.



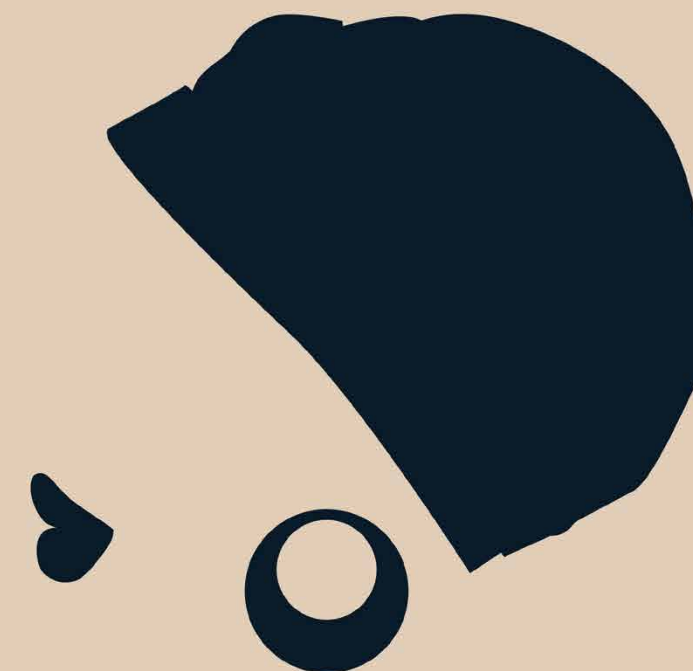
Conclusions

The conducted project –part of which is this handbook- aimed at contributing to increase the capacity of professionals and field practitioners in order to better address the empowerment and integration needs of refugee and migrant women and men, GBV survivors or at high risk of GBV, as they constitute a distinct group facing multiple vulnerabilities, and, therefore, are in need of more targeted and gender sensitive integration interventions. Field professionals from both state and non-state actors are constantly confronted with the specific population whose integration needs are not adequately trained to deal with.

The intention is that the Project “**Assisting Professionals to Support and Empower Refugee Women and Men**”, with the actions that have been already undertaken and, especially, with the dissemination of this Handbook might contribute to the direction of an upgraded service provision to this specific target group. Moreover, CRWI Diotima will perceive the steps taken so far through the conducted project as a starting point for further investigation of how to constantly improve the support provided to the refugees in relation to their empowerment and integration, as well as for keeping on creating space and opportunities for the voices of the community members to be heard and listened to.


Closure Note:

The photo has been taken by one of the women from the empowerment groups, during one of the many mornings of the COVID-19 lockdown. The woman sent the photo to the whole group as a message of hope and calmness and with the note that everything can co-exist, as does the moon with the sunrise. Perhaps, co-existence as the state and the act of being together at the same time and space is the key to empowerment, whereas as the policy of living peacefully with others, despite differences and disagreements might be the basic requirement for integration to become possible.



**Θέλω να κάνω
οικογενειακή επανένωση**

**ΤΑ ΠΑΙΔΙΑ ΜΟΥ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΣΤΟ ΚΟΝΓΚΟ.
ΣΚΕΦΤΟΜΑΙ ΝΑ ΖΗΣΟΥΜΕ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ,
ΕΠΕΙΔΗ Η ΧΩΡΑ ΣΕΒΕΤΑΙ ΤΑ **ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΝΑ ΔΙΚΑΙΩΜΑΤΑ**.**



We hope that you have found this handbook useful and you have been inspired to incorporate some aspects of it in your own work.

We are very keen to hear about your experiences on working with refugee women, men, boys, and girls either survivors of GBV or those ones that are at high risk. Please, feel free to drop us a line.



Contact us at: diotima@otenet.gr
and/or <https://www.facebook.com/NGOdiotima/>