



PasserElles Buissonnières: Implementing the Istanbul Protocol

PasserElles Buissonnières offers social and medical support to women in Lyon made vulnerable by illness or exile in order to help them lead active lives again. Since January 2018, the association has initiated an experimental laboratory for the implementation of the Istanbul Protocol on torture victims.



Meeting musicians in Lyon.

Exile and illness serve to isolate women in their social and professional lives, as well as causing a loss of self-confidence, a temporary inability to work and an imbalance in family relationships. These impacts arise from each person's unique experience, which is directly addressed by PasserElles Buissonnières, an association created in 2012 to enable each woman to take back control of her life.

A global support method

PasserElles Buissonnières has developed an innovative, unique system and actions to support employment through an integrated holistic approach. Despite the mechanisms that push for the categorisation and segmentation of interventions in the social field, the association has chosen a multidisciplinary approach that includes the cross-fertilisation of skills to provide support that covers all the issues that hinder women's ability to be autonomous. To this end, it focuses on three essential and interlinking axes: personal reconstruction, relationships with other people and appropriation of one's community.

Run by two employees and more than 30 volunteers, the association offers women made vulnerable by illness or exile:

- 1) **individual personalised support** based on regular appointments made in pairs by a doctor and a lawyer in collaboration with partners in the field of professional integration. Each woman, at her own pace, can thus (re)think her professional project by integrating her skills, aspirations and constraints;
- 2) **collective workshops** based on three themes: health and well-being, expression and self-assertion, and integration and training. The objective is to relieve social isolation, promote the exchange of knowledge and know-how, offer everyone a new place, and strengthen self-esteem; and
- 3) **external activities** through cultural visits, monthly urban walks, meetings with economic actors, bi-monthly meals open to members, partners and citizens to get to know the community in all its potentialities (cultural, social, economic) and establish new relationships, and share one's project (five women supported by PasserElles Buissonnières have chosen to help the artist Jenny Feal to prepare her [work produced for La Biennale de Lyon / Art](#)).



Helping the artist Jenny Feal to prepare La Biennale de Lyon / Art.

Laboratory

On the strength of this experience, PasserElles Buissonnières initiated a 'laboratory' for the implementation of the [Istanbul Protocol](#) relating to victims of torture. For the women in Lyon coming from all continents, who have been supported for seven years, the problem of applying for asylum is especially important. This problem is linked to a very high level of precariousness and vulnerability stemming from life stories marked by violence, particularly sexual violence.

Since January 2018, around 10 women seeking asylum have been supported in their legal and care procedures through this holistic and multidisciplinary approach.

The laboratory brings together many professionals – lawyers specialising in refugee law, professionals from the medical and social services and gynaecology department of a major

hospital, private doctors (general and EMDR¹ practitioners), psychologists, osteopaths, reflexologists, mindfulness meditation instructors. Each woman entering the laboratory is accompanied in the drafting of her asylum application, the preparation for interviews with the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) and is put in contact with these different professionals who will accompany her throughout the procedure – e.g. a lawyer over specific periods of time, such as that required to prepare medical certificates or for accessing additional care not covered by the French health insurance system.

The Istanbul Protocol

The Istanbul Protocol defines the international standards for carrying out thorough medical examinations to determine the credibility of allegations of torture or other ill-treatment.

The '[Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)' was published in 1999, on the initiative of the Union of Physicians of Turkey, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey and Physicians for Human Rights. The text was drafted over three years by doctors, forensic scientists, psychologists, human rights observers and lawyers. In the end, no less than 75 experts were involved, representing more than 40 organisations from 15 different countries.

In addition to proposing international legal and medico-ethical standards for an effective investigation of torture, the Protocol describes methods for questioning alleged victims and for identifying the existence of physical and psychological sequelae that may prove the reality of the torture alleged. The Protocol provides guidelines for several examinations and indicates which of them are useful and effective in relation to the alleged ill-treatment (beatings, electroshock, rape, etc.). On the other hand, it accurately describes the psychological consequences that victims of torture may have. Finally, the Protocol has four annexes containing instructions for practitioners wishing to conduct an investigation in accordance with the requirements of this Manual.

Since its adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1999, the Istanbul Protocol has been part of the organisation's official treaties. The UN Human Rights Council, the European Union and the African Commission on Human Rights have also adopted this document. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Istanbul Protocol establishes comprehensive guidelines on international legal standards and ethical obligations relating to torture investigations. The International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges has also recognised the Istanbul Protocol as providing 'best practice'.

International events are planned to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Protocol in spring 2020.

<https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=50c83f6d>

To enable effective multidisciplinary action and for building an intervention method, professionals meet several times a year to mutually enrich their practices, share training time and cross-fertilise their skills. The result is an approach that allows women to experience their procedure in a climate of trust.

Ginette Guillet, volunteer and administrator, gives a concrete example: *"We met Mrs G. from Burundi, who fled to France with only one of her three children after having suffered serious*

¹ EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) is a method of treating **post-traumatic stress disorder** that uses **eye movement**.

violence. When we first received her, Mrs G. had no accommodation and her daughter was waiting for a school assignment. We helped her by offering her a place to stay, and by integrating her with her daughter in the workshops. The legal support allowed her to better develop her asylum story, and to access a real follow-up of administrative actions. The specialist doctor and the additional care offered at PasserElles Buissonnières have helped her in her physical recovery. She is still being followed by the association."

This experimental project, which has been fully integrated into the actions and activities of PasserElles Buissonnières, will run until 2020, with a knowledge capitalisation objective. It concentrates the values and choices that have been its own since the association's creation: to make a long-time scale one of the essential elements of support for vulnerable people in order to better overcome problems; and to favour a multidisciplinary approach to interventions in order to address all issues of each situation.

PasserElles Buissonnières

26, rue des Capucins, 69001 – Lyon, France

www.passerellesbuissonnieres.org

T. +33 4 26 17 47 18

contact@passerellesbuissonnieres.org



Helping to prepare La Biennale de Lyon / Art.

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