

## **Abstract**

Aiming to support social workers during police operations in residential youth care facilities, this praxis project created an accessible and intuitive guideline. To provide the best possible assistance, the project integrates and combines insights from practice-based experience, as well as research and collective exchanges with professional networks. The developed guideline addresses the tension that stems from having to interact – often unexpectedly – with law enforcement, while adhering to the primary principle of safeguarding clients' rights, which often characterizes interactions between social workers and police. The resulting guideline is therefore designed to be user-friendly and provide step-by-step guidance, communication strategies, and legally informed responses, to be helpful even in high-stress situations.

The project furthermore analyzes studies and news articles through the frameworks of intersectionality, to show how marginalized youth, and unaccompanied minor refugees in particular, are disproportionately affected by harmful and discriminatory policing practices. This analysis demonstrates the necessity to support professionals in protecting the rights of their clients by increasing their confidence and capability to navigate those encounters.

## **Introduction**

The project is situated in the field of residential youth care, where social workers provide daily support to young people living in facilities. The young residents are often affected by marginalization, trauma and experiences of violence and discrimination. The specific facility where the idea for this project was developed, currently provides space for 34 clients, all of whom are male, in between 16 and 21 years old and came to Germany as unaccompanied minor refugees. At that facility, a team of 12 social workers provides care for the residents 24h a day.

Within such care settings, encounters with the police are not uncommon. Police interventions might occur in response to a conflict situation, because of alleged criminalized behavior, or as result of racial profiling. These interventions often constitute high-stress situations for the social workers, but especially for the residents as the presence of police authority often interferes with the principle of maintaining the facility as a safe space for the residents. In those situations, social workers find themselves amidst the tension of being obligated to interact or even cooperate with the police, while on the other hand their main concern and responsibility is the protection of the residents, their dignity, rights and privacy. This pre-existing tension is often exacerbated by the immediate power imbalance that characterizes those situations. Police