

Urban Gender-Based Violence Risk Assessment Guidance: Identifying Risk Factors for Urban Refugees

Urban Risks

Refugees living in cities face high risks of gender-based violence (GBV), often on a daily basis. Some of these risks affect members of the host community as well. Where refugee women, for instance, experience sexual harassment or unwanted touching when taking public transportation, it may be the case that *all* women in that city encounter similar threats whenever they board a bus or take the metro.

It is also common, however, for refugees to face especially high levels of violence because of intersecting risk factors related to their status as refugees or being displaced. Refugees may stand out in urban crowds because of the language they speak, the way they dress, or the color of their skin. Refugees may be targeted for violence because it is assumed, often correctly, that they are unlikely to report incidents of violence, out of fear of drawing unwanted attention to themselves, or because they are unfamiliar with the local legal system. Certain subgroups of refugees may also face heightened risks because of where they live or the work they do, their age, or other traits like disability or diverse gender or sexual identities (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) refugees).

Urban GBV Risk Assessment Guidance

The Women's Refugee Commission's (WRC) Urban GBV Risk Assessment Guidance contains essential urban risk questions that are intended to supplement whatever GBV risk assessment tools are currently being used by humanitarian practitioners in urban areas.¹ The questions are based upon input provided by urban refugees themselves, collected by WRC through focus group discussions and interviews conducted in four cities throughout 2015: Beirut, Lebanon; Kampala, Uganda; Quito, Ecuador; and Delhi, India.

The first section of the Guidance contains risk assessment questions relevant for all urban refugees; these are grouped by common risks such as those related to "Employment," "Public Transportation," "Housing," and "Urban Isolation." These questions can be asked of individual refugees, to identify an individual's Key GBV Risks and Potential Risk Mitigation Strategies that could be beneficial to them, including specialized referrals or their participation in certain programs or activities. Answers can also spotlight areas where refugees could use assistance in mitigating

1. For instance, this Urban GBV Risk Assessment Guidance is intended to complement, rather than substitute for, UNHCR's Heightened Risk Assessment Tool (Version 2), available at www.refworld.org/pdfid/4c46c6860.pdf.



an isolated GBV risk, such as insecure housing or threats from an employer. Answers are also intended to help program staff identify trends in refugees' vulnerabilities that must be addressed on a programmatic or community-wide level.

The next section of the Guidance contains additional questions for different groups of refugees. These are subgroups that face heightened risks of GBV: children and adolescent refugees, LGBTI individuals, persons with disabilities, refugees engaged in sex work, male survivors, and elderly refugees. These questions can be used either as a supplement to the general questions in the first section, or they can be used to frame or rephrase those questions. The essential point is that service providers ask tailored questions that demonstrate knowledge and sensitivity around the primary sources of risk and sites of violence reported by at-risk refugees themselves.

The answers to this Guidance are intended to serve two purposes:

- (1) To inform individual case management and service provision, including referrals and generate discussions about individual risk mitigation; and
- (2) To identify trends in GBV risks that are unique to a particular refugee subpopulation. Answers can then be used in developing short- and long-term risk mitigation strategies that are tailored to that subpopulation, and designed in consultation with them, and which can then be implemented on a programmatic or community-wide level.

For instance, if LGBTI refugees report feeling socially and physically isolated, then a short-term risk mitigation strategy at the programmatic level might be to start a support group for LGBTI refugees, and a long-term strategy, also at the programmatic level, might involve building linkages and referral pathways to local LGBTI organizations, while also mainstreaming LGBTI inclusion in broader programming.

Tips for Using This Guidance

These questions are intended to be incorporated into existing risk assessments and can be integrated into tools used by programmers and/or case managers. As the questions are sensitive, this Guidance should be framed within larger ethical considerations of informed consent and referral pathways, and conducted by personnel trained in working with at-risk populations.

These questions can be asked on an individual level, or in consideration of a larger community or refugee subgroup. For instance, these questions might be asked directly to an individual (e.g., "Do you feel safe?"), or they can be asked about a subgroup in general (e.g., "Where do LGBTI individuals/adolescent girls/women with disabilities feel safe?").

This Guidance switches back and forth between these modes to illustrate that it is possible, but not always necessary or desirable, to ask personal questions when assessing urban GBV risks. Since adolescent girls, for instance, may be interviewed in the presence of their parents, they can be invited to speak generally about certain issues, and answer questions on behalf of their peers. To offer another example, given stigmas associated with sex work, it may be more appropriate to phrase questions about sex workers' GBV risks and access to information in general, rather than to direct them personally to a particular individual.



All LGBTI		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p><i>Access to information. At the end of each question, ask if this is a topic they would like more information about:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you know any LGBTI organizations in the city? Which ones?• Do you know your legal rights as LGBTI? What do you understand them to be?• Do you know what to say if you get arrested? Is there anyone you know you can call for assistance if you get arrested?• Do you know of any place to go, e.g., a shelter that's LGBTI friendly, if you are evicted or homeless?• Do you know any places to go for LGBTI-friendly medical treatment and sexual health services? Which ones• Do you know any service providers who are LGBTI friendly or knowledgeable?• Do you have anyone you would contact or trust in case of an emergency?		
<p><i>Are there any other related topics you would like more information about?</i></p>		
<p><i>What can we do to increase LGBTI refugees' access to information on these topics?</i></p>		



Tailored Questions (continued)	Answer	Notes
<p><i>Is it risky for LGBTI refugees to be “out” – to share with others that they are gay, lesbian, bi, trans or intersex?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the risks of being “out” as an LGBTI individual? • Is something you want to be guarded by service providers/are worried might be divulged and put you in danger? • Do you and/or other LGBTI feel at risk sharing this information with service providers? Why? 		
<p><i>Do you know any other LGBTI refugees? Any host-community LGBTI individuals?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do host-community LGBTI regard LGBTI refugees? 		
<p><i>Are there any places in the city that are safe for LGBTI? What are they?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any particular neighborhoods that are safer? Stores? Employers? • Any particular clubs? Community centers? • How do LGBTI refugees learn about safe places, or learn what places are unsafe for them? 		
<p><i>Do you feel you are ever targeted for violence or discrimination in the city because you are LGBTI? (This can be physical, sexual, or emotional violence?)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How so, and by whom? • By neighbors, police, landlords, family, fellow refugees, teachers, public officials, bus or taxi drivers? • By service providers? • What are some things you do to feel safer or less at risk? Do you ever feel unsafe around other members of the LGBTI community? • Would you feel comfortable reporting this violence and discrimination anywhere? (e.g., to police, to refugee service providers, to friends, etc.) 		



Tailored Questions (continued)	Answer	Notes
<p><i>Do you feel respected and treated with dignity while accessing services?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you feel you are treated differently because you are LGBTI?</i></p>		
<p><i>How does being LGBTI affect your access to basic necessities, like food, shelter, and employment?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of shelter are available to LGBTI refugees? • What kinds of employment are available to LGBTI refugees? 		
<p><i>Have you ever engaged in sex work, or know other LGBTI refugees who have?*</i> (*If yes, if they would be willing to answer more questions about this so we can understand more about what risks they face, whether their rights are respected, and what access to services they may need, see “Additional Questions: Refugees Engaged in Sex Work”)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel it is more dangerous to be an LGBTI sex worker than a “straight” or non-LGBTI sex worker? 		
<p><i>Access and inclusion in refugee programs and services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do LGBTI refugees participate in programs and services for refugees in general? Which ones? • Do LGBTI refugees feel able and welcome to participate in programs for refugees? (Other women refugees, livelihood programs, language classes, etc.) • What are the barriers or obstacles to LGBTI persons’ participation? • What could we do to make these programs safer or more inclusive of LGBTI refugees? 		
<p><i>Depending on how an individual refugee self-identifies, proceed to the additional questions for L, G, B, T and/or I individuals. Then complete the subsequent Analysis and Notes section.</i></p>		



Lesbians		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p><i>What are some challenges or risks lesbian refugees may face that are different from other LGBTI refugees?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From within the refugee community? • From within the LGBTI community? • From within the host community? • When trying to access services? 		
<p><i>Do you fear any violence from your family or others because you are gay?</i></p>		
<p><i>How does being a gay woman make you feel at greater risk of discrimination and violence in general?</i></p>		
<p><i>Is “corrective rape” something that happens in this community to gay women?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you know of any groups or organizations that exist specifically for lesbians? Either for lesbian refugees or for lesbians within the host community?</i></p> <p><i>How did you learn of these?</i></p> <p><i>What barriers might lesbian refugees face in accessing these groups or participating in their activities?</i></p>		



Tailored Questions (continued)	Answer	Notes
<p><i>Are there any service providers you wish were more informed about what it means to be a gay woman?</i></p> <p><i>What could we do to make information about lesbian-friendly groups and services more available to lesbian refugees?</i></p>		

Gay Men		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p><i>Do you know of any organizations or groups that exist specifically for gay men?</i></p>		
<p><i>What are some challenges or risks gay men refugees may face that are different from other LGBTI refugees?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From within the refugee community? • From within the LGBTI community? • From within the host community? • When trying to access services? 		
<p><i>Are there any service providers you wish were more informed about what it means to be a gay man?</i></p> <p><i>What could we do to make information about gay-friendly groups and services more available to gay men refugees?</i></p>		



Bisexuals		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p><i>What are some challenges or risks bisexual refugees may face that are different from other LGBTI refugees?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From within the refugee community? • From within the LGBTI community? • From within the host community? • When trying to access services? 		
<p><i>Do you feel service providers understand what being bisexual means, treat bisexual refugees with dignity and respect, and can give appropriate referrals?</i></p>		
<p><i>What can we do to increase access to information about bisexual-friendly services?</i></p>		

Trans Persons (transwomen + transmen)		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p><i>In what ways might trans individuals be treated differently from other LGBTI individuals? Within the refugee community? Within the host community? By service providers?</i></p> <p><i>Do you know any trans health care or trans-friendly service providers?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you know of any groups or organizations that exist specifically for trans persons?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you know any other trans refugees? Trans members of host community?</i></p>		



Tailored Questions (continued)	Answer	Notes
<i>Do you feel respected and treated with dignity by other LGBTI refugees, gay men, and lesbians?</i>		
<i>Do you feel especially at risk or targeted for violence because you're trans? By whom? Under what circumstances?</i>		
<i>Are there any service providers you wish were more informed about trans rights or what it means to be trans? Do you feel they are transphobic? In what ways?</i>		
<i>Do you ever feel you need to change how you look or dress (i.e., to appear gender-conforming) for reasons of personal safety?</i>		
<p>Trans Youth:</p> <p><i>What additional challenges or risks might trans youth face, compared to trans adults?</i></p> <p><i>Is there any information available about local organizations, services, programs, or hotlines that can support trans youth?</i></p> <p><i>What can we do to make more information about such support available to trans youth?</i></p>		



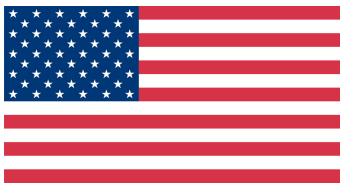
Intersex		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p><i>What are some challenges or risks intersex refugees may face that are different from other LGBTI refugees?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From within the refugee community? • From within the LGBTI community? • From within the host community? • When trying to access services? 		
<p><i>Are intersex persons especially vulnerable to physical, emotional, or sexual violence or verbal abuse because they are intersex? From whom?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you ever feel discriminated against or mistreated because you are intersex? Under what circumstances and by whom?</i></p>		
<p><i>What might be some additional risks or challenges faced by intersex children or youth?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you feel service providers understand what being intersex means and can give appropriate referrals?</i></p>		
<p><i>What can we do to improve service provision for Intersex persons?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you know any intersex-knowledgeable health practitioners? (For infants or children, if talking to a parent)</i></p>		
<p><i>Are there any service providers you wish were more informed about what it means to be intersex?</i></p>		
<p><i>Do you feel that you have access to all the information you would like to have about what it means to be intersex? Do you know of any places you can go to get more information, including online?</i></p>		



Tailored Questions (continued)	Answer	Notes
<p><i>What can we do to increase access to information about intersex-friendly groups and services?</i></p>		
<p><i>Analysis and Notes for all LGBTI</i></p> <p>Based on the information above, including answers to the “All Populations” questions and any supplemental questions they were asked as an LGBTI individual:</p> <p><i>Biggest GBV risks:</i> What are the largest GBV risks for this individual refugee? As an LGBTI refugee and/or as an L, G, B, T, or I person, specifically?</p> <p><i>Individual risk mitigation strategies:</i> What options for risk mitigation could you explore with the individual? Discuss both the potential benefits and unintended risks of each strategy with the individual.</p> <p><i>Programmatic or community risk mitigation strategies:</i> What recommendations do they have for how your activities should be adapted for all LGBTI individuals and/or for L, G, B, T, or I persons, considering them separately? What strategies could be implemented to make LGBTI and/or L, G, B, T or I persons safer in the community?</p>		



The Women's Refugee Commission improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.



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