

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.



Refugees Engaged in Sex Work ⁵		
Tailored Questions	Answer	Notes
<p>Stigma and discrimination</p> <p><i>What are attitudes within the community about people engaged in selling sex to make money?</i></p> <p><i>Is this something that is talked about within the community or by service providers?</i></p> <p><i>Is there a stigma around sex work – are there mostly negative attitudes around it?</i></p>		
<p><i>How might these attitudes affect a sex worker's safety? How might they affect their willingness to access services or access information, including about health or GBV?</i></p>		
<p><i>What types of peer support exist for refugees doing this work?</i></p> <p><i>What could we do to make programs and services more welcoming and less stigmatizing for refugees engaged in this work?</i></p>		
<p>Access to information</p> <p><i>Are there any programs, trainings (health or protection trainings), or local services for individuals involved in selling sex? Are refugees able to access them?</i></p>		
<p><i>What information do sex workers have about their legal rights, or about what the laws here say about selling sex?</i></p> <p><i>Would someone who got arrested or detained by the police for selling sex know what to say, or have anyone they could contact for help?</i></p>		

5. "Sex Work" is defined here as consensual sex between adults. "Sex workers" are "Female, male, and transgender adults and young people (over 18 years of age) who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally," World Health Organization, et al. Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers (2013) (internal citation omitted), available at www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex_worker_implementation/en/



Tailored Questions (continued)	Answer	Notes
<i>What information do sex workers have about GBV?</i>		
<i>What information do they have about sexual and reproductive health? Do they know where they can get tested for STIs, including HIV, and where they can get resources for safe sex, such as free condoms?</i>		
<p>GBV risks</p> <p><i>What are some risks of violence sex workers experience when working? Risks from clients? Risks from police?</i></p>		
<i>Would a sex worker ever report an incident of GBV or seek GBV services if the violence was related to their work? Why or why not?</i>		
<p><i>What could we do to ensure that refugees engaged in sex work have access to information on GBV, safety, peer support, and sexual and reproductive health?</i></p> <p><i>What kinds of outreach might be effective?</i></p>		
<p>Analysis and Notes — FOR OFFICE USE ONLY</p> <p>Based on the information above, including answers to the “All Populations” questions and any supplemental questions they were asked as a refugee engaged in sex work:</p> <p><i>Biggest GBV risks:</i></p> <p>What are the largest GBV risks for an individual refugee? For this at-risk population group?</p>		



Individual risk mitigation strategies:

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.

Programmatic or community risk mitigation strategies:

What recommendations do they have for how your activities should be adapted for refugees engaged in sex work? What strategies could be implemented to make them safer in the community?



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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