

# Transnational Guide on diverse SGBV working methods

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## Credits

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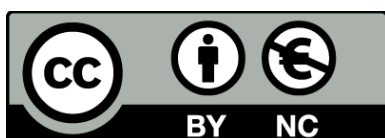
Differenza Donna (Italy)

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## Introduction

Welcome to the “Transnational Guide on diverse SGBV working methods”. This guide is a result of the “**Building a Safety Net for Refugee and Migrant Women**” a project which is funded by the **European Union – Daphne Strand** and implemented in 2017-2018 through 5 partners in 3 different countries.

### *Purpose and Audience*

This guide aims to advance the capacity of relevant stakeholders and key professionals to better support survivors through integrated and diverse methodologies that cater to their diversified needs. It is intended to serve as a reference material to the SGBV practitioners and trainers as well as policy makers and advocacy officers, focusing specifically on those who work with migrant and refugee women and girls. It is drafted along international guidelines and standards and corresponds to the needs expressed in the context of what has been described as a “refugee crisis” in the Mediterranean region.

Topics included serve to set standards for quality and compassionate care for SGBV survivors as well as to provide professionals with information and guidance to establish and provide quality services to SGBV survivors.

By creating this guide, our aim is to move one step closer to meeting the protection needs of female survivors. Our ultimate goal is to enhance the guarantees that the EU and national legal frameworks – the ones that provide the full respect of the rights of migrant and refugee women who have survived or are experiencing SGBV of all kinds (physical, psychological, financial)- will

be implemented, ensuring the avoidance of their re-victimization.

### **The main objectives of the guide are:**

- To map out existing practices for supporting SGBV survivors, informed by the diverse approaches of the different project partners
- To promote effective action for both prevention and response to SGBV;



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## Glossary of Terms

**BELIEF:** An idea that is accepted as true. It may or may not be supported by facts. Beliefs may stem from or be influenced by religion, education, culture and personal experience.

**CONSENT:** approval or assent after throughout consideration. The consenting person understands fully the consequences of consent and agrees freely, without any force or coercion.

**DISCLOSURE:** The process of revealing information. Disclosure in the context of sexual abuse refers specifically to how a non-offending person (for example, a caregiver, teacher or helper) learns about a person's experience with sexual abuse.

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV):** An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will; it is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. Gender-based violence encompasses a wide range of human rights violations, including sexual abuse of children, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and several harmful traditional practices, including forced, early marriage.

**INFORMED CONSENT:** Informed consent is the voluntary agreement of an individual who has the legal capacity to give consent. To provide informed consent, the individual must have the capacity and maturity to know about and understand the services being offered and be legally able to give their consent.

**PERPETRATOR:** A person who directly inflicts or supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against his/her will.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** For the purposes of these guidelines sexual violence includes at least rape/attempted rape, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless or relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse and forced abortion.

**SURVIVOR/VICTIM:** Person who has experienced Gender--based violence. The terms "victim" and "survivor" can be used interchangeably. "Victim" is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. "Survivor" is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resilience.



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## 1. Chapter One: Gender Based Violence affecting refugee and migrant women

Gender power imbalances lie at the heart of the lived experience of women and girls worldwide, at their home communities but also during the migratory routes they might have to take. In light of the so called “refugee crisis”, since early 2015, Greece, Italy, and Spain have continued to be entry gates to Europe for millions of persons, a significant number of whom are women and girls. For them, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) remains a major concern. Prevention of and response to SGBV is one step towards every person’s right to an independent and autonomous life, the right to their body and the right to self-determination and self-fulfillment.

SGBV happens everywhere and at all times. SGBV happens next to us. It has also been common knowledge that persecution and migration are extensively gendered. Migration and forced migration contributes to the creation or the exaggeration of power imbalance. Crossing borders is risky for everyone but also includes particular risks for women.

Women remain disproportionately affected by SSGBV prior being forced to migrate. It has even been argued that asylum seeking, refugee and migrant women are over-represented among SGBV survivors<sup>1</sup> as well as that SGBV is one of the most common migration drivers for women and girls. A significant percentage of women who are forced to migrate have faced SGBV at their place of origin and have fled to seek protection from it. They might have also been

further victimized or shamed by the community or by state services that are lenient towards perpetrators. With limited opportunities to seek protection within their countries of origin and restrictions on international travel, many female survivors are forced take the risks of violence in their quest for safety. Oftentimes women also travel alone or with their children, without a support network and with limited access to resources. Women fleeing violence at home commonly end up being sexually exploited, psychologically or physically abused and trafficked during the journey to safety. They are often forced to engage in survival sex when seeking safe passage.

The dangers to refugee women continue after arriving in European territory. Reception facilities, detention camps or “hotspots” lack of simple security measures, which in turn creates serious protection problems for women. What is important, though, is that the risk of (re)victimisation in the destination country is heightened by the circumstances and processes related to seeking asylum. Unclear legal status, including remaining undocumented due to lack of access to the process, makes women vulnerable to SSGBV. Single women or women who are perceived as lacking a “male protector” might experience sexual harassment and stalking both within the reception or accommodation centres and in the streets. Unstable access to funds and resources occasionally forces women to survival sex or forced prostitution, which might also result to further psychological violence by the refugee community and the host community.

For those who do not travel alone, SGBV takes the often the form of domestic violence, at the hands of partners and husbands, fathers, brothers or other close male relatives. It should be noted that for a

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Briefing\\_-\\_experiences\\_of\\_refugee\\_women\\_in\\_the\\_UK.pdf](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Briefing_-_experiences_of_refugee_women_in_the_UK.pdf)



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percentage of the women who are migrating or forced to flee, forced or early marriages pre-exist, thus further increasing the power imbalances they face. On occasion project partners have supported women who had violence perpetrated to them by female relatives. Seeking refugee has been identified as a triggering factor for violence, keeping in mind that violence is not excusable at any circumstance and it remains the perpetrator's choice and responsibility.

For refugee and migrant women asking for help in case of SGBV involves additional barriers, such as lack of sufficient language skills, lack of trust and fear of authorities, perceived dependency by the perpetrator, community pressure as well as prejudiced and un-sensitive attitudes of the responsible state actors. These place them at risk of remaining at dangerous and harmful situations and might also hinder their quest for seeking asylum and integrating in the local community.

## 2. Chapter Two: Core findings of the transnational analysis and mapping of existing legal and policy framework related to Gender Based Violence – Greece, Spain, Italy and Germany

Within the scope of the project, a the cross-country situation and capacity analysis in SGBV was conducted, aiming to identify gaps and challenges but also good practices, as well as develop recommendations for a more comprehensive and better equipped prevention and response strategy towards SGBV.

A comparison of four different national approaches (Spain, Greece, Italy and

Germany) to SGBV, revealed an urgent need to effectively mainstream gender in all policies and programmes addressing migrants and refugee, with an emphasis on risks of gender-based violence.

A second finding was that of a compelling need to fund the development of a comprehensive SGBV data collection system that disaggregates data by gender, age, nationality, forms of violence as well as services provided, to improve knowledge about the different aspects of the phenomenon both at the national and the European level and to design more targeted interventions to combat SGBV, in particular, among the newly arrived populations.

Moreover, the analysis indicated that the procedures for processing asylum applications should be accelerated as a matter of priority, to ameliorate the situation of women asylum seekers especially during hearings and to minimise the risks of SGBV by providing a secure status of stay and the possibility for family reunification. The number of available places in reception centres should be increased and the safety standards for refugees and asylum seekers should be enhanced, with particular attention to the needs of women and girls. The principle of non-refoulement must be strictly upheld in respect of all women and girls in need of international protection, on the basis of individualised risk assessment in line with the National Plans on Trafficking in Human Beings (NPA) and the Istanbul Convention ratified by all partner countries.

The SGBV response systems in all four countries need to become **more inclusive** and reach out to diverse and particularly vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI survivors, trafficked persons, but also victims of FGM, forced marriages or those engaged in survival sex; specific programmes and services as well



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as legal provisions to address more particular forms of SGBV still need to put in place.

### 3. Chapter Three: Working With SGBV Survivors

Working with refugee and migrant SGBV survivors involves significant challenges and considerations for professionals who wish to offer high quality, inclusive and sensitive services. The benefits of a survivor centered approach<sup>2</sup> have been emphasized and shared widely. With such an umbrella approach, opportunities are provided for survivors to reclaim the power that was taken away from them in the context of their abuse. This is achieved by listening to the demands, desires, and needs of the survivor, considering how they might further harm them, and ensuring that the survivor can make truly informed decisions on how to recover from trauma. The survivor-centred approach is based on a set of principles and skills designed to guide professionals who work with survivors to create a supportive environment in which the survivor's rights are respected and in which they are treated with dignity and respect.

Several more detailed methodologies can be identified when operationalising the survivor-centred approach. During the “Building a Safety Net for Refugee and Migrant Women” project the partners identified and shared among them the following practices, which are already part of their comprehensive approach.

*Supporting the survivor  
in the context of  
multidisciplinary teams*

Our evidence suggests that a multidisciplinary team, including different professionals such as psychologists, lawyers, social workers and interpreters, is the most efficient approach in addressing the challenges female refugee SGBV survivors face. Effective SGBV prevention and response needs a multifaceted and multisectoral approach. On the one hand, it is apparent that teamwork and the incorporation of different professional viewpoints improve the quality of counseling and also allowing space for the team members to support each other. The fusion of legal, psychosocial and psycho-educational services and capacity building can also be rather effective as it represents a holistic approach to the prevention of SGBV. Moreover, it facilitates better coordination of the interventions that survivors of violence need. It has also been observed through the project partners (CRWI Diotima, SURT and Differenza Donna) that providing these interventions in the same building/area further facilitates the general coordination of responses.

Coordination of the team's efforts falls to the case manager, who is the person taking care of a case from the beginning until the beneficiary no longer needs or wants assistance. It is advisable to develop a shared understanding of SGBV among the multidisciplinary team members, as well as to improve information-sharing and risk assessment through the development of common standards, guidelines and protocols. This can also be mainstreamed to the team's coordination and cooperation with other relevant actors in the field of refugee and migrant protection. Development of such systems and protocols further minimises the possibility of (re)victimisation, as the case manager can share any information the survivor consents to with the other professionals.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/652-survivor-centred-approach.html>





## *Intersectionality*

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Social reality is complex but, as many researchers have shown, policies and services are still mostly single sided. To counter this, project partners have integrated the concept of intersectionality in their approach. Intersectionality is a complex term that appears as a tool to identify how multiple factors and identities relate with each other to explain social oppression, and also to understand how these sets of identities cross and influence access to rights and opportunities or deny them, as they cannot be examined separately. It contributes to the understanding of the ways in which gender interacts with other identities and how these interbreeding contributes to unique experiences of oppression, including more various forms of social stratification such as social class, race, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, skin color, culture, geographic location and status as indigenous, refugee or migrant, as to questioning power relations and how privilege is articulated.

An intersectional view is important, not only because it would help the professionals to address the different realities in a more comprehensive way, but also because it would help visualising power relations that would otherwise stay hidden. Intersectionality is a comprehensive framework – which actually includes many authors with different views – of which professionals can take advantage.

First of all, putting the intersectional perspective to practice, requires specific attention towards diagnosis, meaning towards reflexivity. To get started it is essential to critically reflect on how stereotypes and prejudices influence our way of looking at «the other» and also to question

dominant narratives and imaginaries. It urges the professional to put her/his objectivity under question and to acknowledge that we are crosscut in unequal power relations. This reflexivity exercise aims to acknowledge our position as professionals, thus to identify how sexism, racism, classism, LGBTIphobia, islamophobia etc. are articulated in our actions, both at institutional and individual levels.

Secondly, power relations should be contextualized. As complex as the social world is, intersectionality does not refer to oppressions as fixed social categories, but rather highlights how different elements are intertwined and generate multiple oppressions that interact in varying ways in a given situation.

Finally, we should take into consideration the importance of listening, asking questions, and recognizing the people we work with. An essential part of working with people in situations of discriminations is to truly recognize them. On one hand, to understand how their experience of discrimination and privilege is configured and on the other hand, to acknowledge the multiplicity of voices and agencies that are involved. Intersectionality recognises today the failure to address these issues individually in early social justice movements, and exists as a tool to understand the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society.

## *Enhancement of autonomy through empowerment*

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Data and research indicate that SGBV experiences, previous or current, hinder the processes of emancipation and empowerment, and limit the possibilities of social change and redress for refugee and



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migrant women. The enhancement of their autonomy through empowerment aims at enhancing their knowledge of the national system –including education, healthcare, employment opportunities and the legal system,–improving their language skills, and empowering them to stand up for their rights.

Within the project, the tool of Ludopedagogy was identified. It can be used to promote women's rights and foster participation of both adult and young people. It is based on participatory processes and experiential learning, which seek to engage participants in playful activities and encourage the exchange of ideas, experiences and emotions. Ludopedagogy is delivered in the form of seminar that can include various topics related to the participants' interest and they include active and creative exercises, individual work and group activities, and plenary sessions. In this context activities might include

- Legal literacy (key technical words, the legal system and processes in the residing country);
- Tools to recognise and address gender-based violence (SGBV);
- Social and family relationships;
- Vocational education, capacity-building training courses;
- Non-linguistic learning tools and activities, *e.g.* participatory photography and visits to local sites;
- Healthcare system for women and their children;
- Sexuality and gender identity and relationship issues;
- Housing, the school system, mobility;
- Long-term planning

This active teaching method fosters interpersonal and communication skills, and promotes the development of self-assessment skills. Different tools can be used during the seminars, which ultimately contribute to the women's empowerment. MRW's experiences are very complex and diverse. Through the process the different origins of survivors, their different desires, values, expectations and life stories can be given the space and value they deserve and professionals can promote the creation of a safe space where women are able to build relationships and share their experiences making their own voice heard.

## 4. Chapter Four: Conclusions

Gender-based violence in all of its forms is a devastating social problem that has a long history and very real consequences for persons who have experienced it. Its importance in the context of mixed migratory movements has been acknowledged and often highlighted. However, despite this acknowledgement, more steps can be taken by service providers in the practices they employ to support survivors and to prevent further SGBV instances.

Understanding how the existing support systems operate, promoting SGBV prevention, challenging harmful norms and practices that condone SGBV and empowering survivors to both achieve their maximum autonomy and to reinforce community-based SGBV prevention should be key to all programming in the EU.



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