



Migrant and refugee child-friendly support
services in cases of sexual and GBV



Co-funded by the Rights,
Equality and Citizenship
Programme of the European Union

Comparative report on focus Groups with Migrant Women (WP2_D2.5)

Acknowledgements & Disclaimer

This document has been produced within the framework of the project BASE: Migrant and refugee child-friendly support services in cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Rights, Equality and Citizenship Work Programme of the European Commission, Reference Number: REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2017/ 809952.

It has been produced with the financial support of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Work Programme, of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

Original citation

BASE partnership. 2019. *BASE Focus Groups Comparative Summary Tables 01*. BASE: Migrant & refugee child-friendly support services in cases of sexual and gender-based violence, Rights, Equality and Citizenship Work Programme of the European Commission, Reference Number: REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2017/ 809952.

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1. Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the fieldwork in eight European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and United Kingdom within the project *BASE: Migrant & refugee child-friendly support services in cases of sexual and gender-based violence*. The aim of this comparative report is to (1) address the power relations and sociocultural characteristics of GBV within migrant communities (men/women), (2) the support (or repression) for women's autonomy and equality, (3) the social mechanisms in place to provide support in cases of oppression/violence (who is available to listen, what measures can be taken), steps to enhance safety and equality, (4) their views on the quality and scope of available support services, the role played by authorities in addressing GBV and (5) the definition of the role of cultural advisor.

2. The parameters of the field research

Data collection followed steps that were pre-agreed by partners. The focus groups were conducted by reference to the guidelines prepared by the WP leader (ZRS Koper) and agreed by other partners participating in the BASE project. Focus groups were implemented among migrant women living in the partner states. Conversations in focus groups were mainly recorded, transcribed and finally coded in terms of fitting predetermined topics. Obtained research data is presented in a way which assures disidentification of the participants involved in the focus groups and interviews. Regarding the latter, it is important to mention that partners from Slovenia had difficulties finding enough migrant women who would be willing to participate in two focus groups. Therefore, they implemented one focus group and conducted seven additional individual interviews with migrant women, in which questions from focus groups were used.

Prior to field work an ethical protocol relating to the implementation of research with migrant women was drawn up and approved by all research partners. Afterwards, the focus groups participants were provided with the consent form for participating in the research project. The consent form has been prepared in English for the use of the project consortium and

translated by each partner in their national language. Migrant women participating in the focus groups and interviews were asked to sign the consent and the list of participants as well.

From the methodological point of view, it is important to mention that in all involved countries prevail migrant women with different cultural background, consequently findings presented in this report have generalization limitations, therefore for certain issues (below presented in the summary table) country relevance is added.

Researched topics addressed in focus groups and interviews with migrant women were:

- power relations within the community (men/women),
- support (or repression) for women's autonomy and equality,
- social mechanisms in place to provide support in cases of oppression/violence (who is available to listen, what can be done),
- steps to enhance safety and equality,
- views on the quality and scope of support services available,
- role played by authorities in addressing GBV and
- role of cultural advisor.

3. Description of the field work by partner countries

AUSTRIA

A total of 10 migrant women from 5 different countries (Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Chechnya) participated in the focus group and all of them had Muslim cultural background.

BULGARIA

A total of 10 participants in the focus groups were from Syria, Iran and Afghanistan.

CYPRUS

In Cyprus a total of 10 migrant women participated in two focus groups. They were from: the Philippines, Italy (2), Zimbabwe/Portugal and Cape Verde (with a long-term permit of an EU state), Sri Lanka, India, France, Ethiopia/UK and Romania. They all moved to Cyprus seeking better quality of life due to financial issues.

GREECE

Two focus groups were conducted with 18 migrant women, who are victims or guardians of girls who are victims of SGBV, coming from Iran, Afghanistan, Soudan, Nigeria, Egypt and Cameroon.

ITALY

Two focus groups with 14 participants were implemented in Italy. All migrant women who participated in the focus group were coming from Nigeria. The group was chosen because Nigerian women in Palermo comprise the highest number of victims and survivors of SGBV and human trafficking.

PORTUGAL

In Portugal three focus groups with 17 migrant women were implemented. Participants were from Brazil (6x), Spain (2x), North Macedonia, Iran, Macao, Mozambique, S. Tome and Principe, Timor Leste, Russia, Ukraine and Georgia.

SLOVENIA

One focus group with 3 participants was implemented. The reason for the low number of participants was the disinterest of migrant women who were not willing to participate in the focus group. Therefore, 7 additional individual interviews with migrant women were conducted. Migrant women participating in the research were from Serbia (2x), Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia (2x), North Macedonia, Kosovo (2x), United Kingdom and Ukraine. The great majority of migrant women in Slovenia come from the territories of the former Yugoslav republics, which reflects in the sample of women participating in the focus group and interviews.

UNITED KINGDOM

Two focus groups with 10 participants were implemented. Migrant women were of the following ethnicities; Iraqi, Moroccan, Kurdish, Turkish, Somalian and Syrian.

The whole qualitative field work was implemented in the period ranging from June 2019 to 15th July 2019. In total, 99 migrant women participated in focus groups and interviews.

A summary of all focus groups results is presented in the following table.

Topics	Issues	Summary of answers (key information)
<p><i>Power relations within the community (men/women)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roles of women and men in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of traditional roles (work and care within the family is role of the women, men are employed), absence of equal rights for women and men, therefore, the decision-making within the family is mostly made by male members of the family. Girls are socialized for this subordinate role from an early age. This is relevant for all countries involved in the project except for Slovenia, where migrant women stated that men and women are equal and also decisions in households are taken together on equal basis. • The decision-making power of men generally exists and relates to practical aspects of everyday life in families but also, for example, to participation opportunities granted to women (clothing style, going out alone, visiting a swimming pool and similar, education opportunities, child/forced marriage). • If women violate the social norms associated with their role, it is seen as a violation of family honour and women risk punishment (e.g. psychological abuse, the removal or destruction of the mobile phone, beatings or house arrest) and stigmatization. • The role of women is related to ensuring the family wellbeing and the role of men is to leading the family.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a man is talking, woman should keep quiet, an expression of an opinion or disagreement with a man is likely to result in punishment by beating (the case of migrants from Nigeria living in Italy). • Some respondents living in Portugal declared that relationships between men and women within their families are starting to become more equal, especially from the moment women started working and became financially independent. • Men are seen as 'superior' and they believe this themselves. In a relationship, everything must be legally in the man's name.
<i>Social mechanisms in place to provide support in cases of oppression/violence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with GBV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many (young) women living in families with traditional roles are victims of various forms of GBV. In many cases, however, they are not even aware that they suffer from GBV, as the issue is accepted as "normal" behaviour of men. • Among migrant women living in Cyprus, the main form of oppression they face is in regard to their workload and salary, as well as domestic violence and sexual harassment and abuse during their trip to the host country. • In Greece migrant women of younger generations seem to be more intolerant towards violence.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to seek help in case of GBV. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the case of Greece, it is important to consider the living conditions of migrant women as the base of the problems, for example, as five families might be living in the same room a general climate of insecurity prevails, especially for underage girls. • In Cyprus and Portugal migrant women are facing stereotypes, prejudice and discriminatory behaviours. • When they are in danger, migrant women in Cyprus, Italy and UK seek for support mostly from NGOs and not from public authorities, sometimes due to their previous negative experience (or their friends' experiences with the public authorities). • In case they need help, migrant women in Slovenia would seek support and assistance from the police or the social welfare services at first and then from NGOs. • In Cyprus and Greece for women from the African region (i.e. Nigeria), it is not common to seek for advice and/or support since the rest of the community will know and might shame (especially when in regards of violence). • In cases of oppression or violence, some migrant women living in Austria, Cyprus and Greece tend to keep the problem for themselves, avoiding confiding it to anyone.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some migrant women living in Portugal, even if they know some institutions that support victims of GBV, they consider that informal networks are usually the best solution. They consider these to be affectively more welcome and understanding, thus ask for help in volunteers' groups, <i>WhatsApp</i> groups of friends, or women's collectives.
<i>Views on the quality and scope of support services available</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarity with help providers and experiences with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Austria and Slovenia formal support offers are seen positively, there are many providers that migrant women can turn to if they need help, and help is available quickly. Many affected migrant women have great inhibitions about seeking the support of authorities or support services. There are various reasons for this: shame of talking to people they don't know about intimate experiences, taking the problem to the outside world is regarded as a betrayal of the family and there is fear that the situation of the woman could worsen, language barriers, fear concerning one's own children (e.g. involvement of the youth welfare office and taking away their children), economic dependence on the perpetrator etc. Migrant women are aware of some services but not in detail.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The major issue in fact is the language and professionals (especially from social welfare services and hospitals) who seem insensitive about migrant women`s needs and their stories and therefore unable to provide support. • Focus groups participants in Greece reported that organizations are discriminative against some women, as several populations and situations are usually prioritized (e.g. people from Syria are usually prioritized, as they have suffered from war). • Migrant women have a desire to know more about the support services and their rights, they want to be more informed and aware, and be able to help other girls who can find themselves in danger.
<i>Role played by authorities in addressing GBV</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinions about the role of the police, school, religious community, social welfare, community centers in addressing oppression/violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Cyprus and Portugal migrant women face difficulties with public authorities and they constantly face or witness discrimination or racism. • In Cyprus migrant women feel that their problems regarding GBV are underestimated. • Migrant women are, due to the language barrier, not completely aware of and do not understand the official procedures and the possible outcomes.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorities, such as police, schools, religious communities and social welfare, do not have an active role in addressing and tackling GBV in Greece • Migrant women would like to be treated with the same respect as native women and ask for equal rights. • In UK migrant women are treated with ignorance when they are seen to be living in a refuge and some services would not respond well to them, unless they were supported by a professional worker.
<i>Steps to enhance safety and equality</i>	On ways to raise awareness and enhance safety and gender equality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is considered to be the best form of prevention of GBV. • GBV should be addressed more strongly in the public discourse. • In order for support offers to be accepted or for migrant women to be able to open up, continuous mother-tongue counselling is necessary. • Importance of raising awareness about gender equality among (migrant) woman and men in all countries. • It would be good to train migrant men and their leaders inside the community on women's rights and on the legal system against violence in the host country. • It is necessary to inform migrant women about their rights and about the importance of reporting when they experience GBV.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On introduction of cultural advisor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and spreading examples of migrant women who had the strength and courage to report their perpetrators and trusted the institutions that helped to save their life. • Introduction of more intervention programmes, methods and specific services to deal with more sensitive issues like homophobia, racism and domestic violence. • A good cultural advisor is very important to support other women in cases of violence. Introduction of a cultural advisor would be seen as very good. • There are some cases when migrant women (former victims who received support from NGO's) take on the role of a cultural advisor on their own initiative and informally support other victims (information about legal rights, information about support providers).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On the profile and personal characteristics of cultural advisor. 	<p>Personal characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decency and humanity; - high level of empathy; - patience; - in cases of women victims it should be a woman to make migrant women feel more comfortable; - kindness; - open-mindedness, - In regards of cultural background, it does not matter if they are of migrant/refugee background or not, since the locals would be able to help them with public authorities. <p>Skills and knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specific academic background (Social Sciences); - someone educated and sensitive to cultural differences, and who is also willing to learn and adapt; - a broad understanding of violence/oppression such as a psychologist or a social worker; - able to report, monitor and do follow ups;
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- able to create a climate of trust using a language which is simple, full of concrete examples and past experiences;- knowledge of the victim`s culture;- can indicate and explain necessary administrative procedures;- may work as an interpreter with the local services;- can help people feel welcome and integrated;- skills to use and understand body language;- beside knowing victim`s language they must also know spoken and written local language.
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