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Policy guidelines for work with men with migrant backgrounds

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1. Introduction

These policy guidelines draw on a range of outputs produced by the European Network for Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP EN) over the past few years, most notably: the expert paper "Working With(in) Migrant Populations" (2018); the assessment of needs and good practices in working within(in) migrant populations (2019); resources produced in the framework of EU Project Focus on Men: FOMEN, focusing on gender sensitivity and prevention of gender-based violence following intersectional approaches, on which WWP is a partner; and finally, the proceedings of the 2021 Annual Conference: "Migration and barriers to perpetrator work – developing pathways to engagement".

The overarching goal of this document is to lay out useful recommendations for stakeholders working on issues of sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) with men with migrant backgrounds. By person with a migrant background we intend someone who has: "(a) migrated into their present country of residence; and / or (b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and / or (c) at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant."(EMN, 2020: 48). We are aware that the term describes a wide range of experiences, migrant generations, legal status and trajectories, and that the considerations contained herein may thus apply in different ways to different individuals or communities.

The intended audience of these policy guidelines are:

- member organisations that already work with male perpetrators with migrant backgrounds and are eager to give further structure to their interventions;
- member organisations that work with male perpetrators of SGBV and wish to expand their services, so as to better cater for men with migrant backgrounds;
- practitioners working with clients from migrant populations;
- policy-makers;
- researchers.

1.1. Why the need for dedicated policy guidelines for work with men with migrant backgrounds?

In recent years, a host of international research has shed light on the prevalence of manifold forms of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of migration and displacement (Freedman, 2003; Parish, 2017). There is mounting awareness about the multiple and interlocking forms of violence that affect migrants during their journeys. Violence in migration is often a cumulative experience, where harm is suffered in the home country, in transit and

following arrival. While women and sexual minorities are disproportionately impacted by violence in migration, migrant men are also at risk of victimization.

Traumas attached to displacement can have a bearing on offending patterns and violent behaviours. It has been argued that repeat exposure to violence, particularly earlier on in life, can complicate emotion management and give rise to aggressive behaviours (Ardino, 2012). Moreover, systemic exclusion, discrimination and lived injustices in host countries intersect in complex ways with gender identities and expectations. While shame stemming from the perceived failure to fulfil one's prescribed gender role can be experienced by men (Bryant & Garnham, 2014) regardless of their migratory experience, multiple deprivation exacerbates frustrated masculinity. Men belonging to minority ethnic groups may resort to violence as a strategy to reaffirm their masculinity and perform their gender roles in an alternative way (De Coster & Heimer, 2006). Oftentimes, rage is directed at individuals with whom they entertain close relationships, such as their female partners or children.

The testimonies of migrant women survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) reveal that there are distinctive issues underlying the migration experience that can engender men's abusive behaviours. Many male migrants may be resentful of their wives when they prosper financially in the host country. A sense of betrayal compounded by hostility towards female partners, perceived as breaching traditional gender roles, leads to arguments and violent attitudes at the hands of men. Once abroad, migrant men may also acquire novel interests that fuel aggressive behaviours. Alcohol and drug use or gambling, habits that they may have refrained from at home, particularly in countries where they are less culturally tolerated, enhance risks of IPV for partners (Erez et al., 2009). It becomes apparent that the issue of violence among people with migrant backgrounds is not cultural, rather it can be traced back to the process of migration itself (Killias & Lukash, 2020). Given the complexities that underlie many migratory experiences, prevention initiatives and interventions aimed at perpetrators should involve concerted efforts among stakeholders with different expertise.

2. Working with men with migrant backgrounds

2.1. Core principles

Work with men with migrant backgrounds should span primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, thus engaging the general migrant population, men who may be at risk of abusive behaviours, and finally, men who have committed violence. The present recommendations focus primarily on secondary and tertiary prevention. Two core principles should guide work with men with migrant backgrounds at different levels of prevention: cultural sensitivity and anti-racism. Cultural sensitivity is rooted in awareness and appreciation of difference among cultural, ethnic, racial groups that do not coincide with one's own (APA, 2020). It contributes to creating a space for people to openly share their differences. Being aware and sensitive to different cultural beliefs cannot entail, under any circumstance, condoning violence. Abusive behaviours are never acceptable and culture should never be instrumentalised to justify aggression. Work with men with migrant backgrounds should strive to reduce any culturally relativist rationalisation, which may be shored up to eschew responsibility for one's attitudes or actions.

Anti-racism involves recognising one's privilege and actively working to combat racism in organisational processes, procedures and systems (Puvanendran et al., 2021). Anti-racism can help practitioners question and address their own biases, which risk to negatively impact their work. Cultural sensitivity – which paves the way for cultural competence – and anti-racism are pivotal both at the individual and organisational levels. They are essential for trust-building and help give ownership of the process back to participants and service users. They serve to bolster the overall legitimacy of the intervention, including in the eyes of migrant organisations and communities.

Secondary prevention initiatives should focus on psychosocial support, strengthening healthy behaviours and shedding light on positive models of masculinity. They should adopt a participatory approach that leaves room for the men's perspectives to be shared and considered. Other practical considerations, such as convenient location, accessibility and safety, need to be addressed (Theuretzbacher & Scambor, 2021). Tertiary prevention programs should follow general guidelines for programs with perpetrators[1], with specific contents being adapted with the support of cultural mediators and/or community leaders to better cater for the migrant target group.

2.1.1 Overarching objectives

Programs for men with migrant backgrounds should be geared first and foremost towards protecting women and children, either by preventing violence from taking place altogether or by reducing risks of escalation and repeat victimization. Interventions should concurrently aim to address the complex needs of men with migrant backgrounds, particularly in terms of mental health issues experienced as result of migration.

2.1.2 Overcoming language and cultural barriers

Language and cultural barriers often get in the way of effective interventions with men with migrant backgrounds. Organisations may hold back from engaging with this target group due to lack of financial resources to hire interpreters or cultural mediators, or limited knowledge of the specific needs and cultural beliefs of the migrant populations. Clear communication in a language that is understandable to participants and in a manner that is respectful of their cultural beliefs, is paramount. It is necessary in first instance to ensure adequate information-provision about the program or intervention, ground rules, procedures and expectations. Linguistic and cultural knowledge is instrumental to explore an array of issues that must necessarily lie at heart of any program on SGBV, such as gender roles, masculinities, relationships and legislation. Working with interpreters or cultural mediators is conducive to appropriate interventions with this target group.

[1] See WWP's Guidelines to Develop Standards for Programmes Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence - Working Document (2018), available at: https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/resources/guidelines

However, even in cases where organizations are in the position to rely on these professionals, caution should be exercised. It is vital that interpreters and cultural mediators are qualified and are thus warranted to exercise their profession. In addition, they should receive ad-hoc training in SGBV and perpetrator work prior to commencing collaboration, in conjunction with refreshers at later stages. Interpretation and cultural mediation services are beneficial at every phase of the intervention – from awareness-raising and outreach (through translation of flyers, social media posts and other, or through direct interaction with members of the community), to implementation (via translation, interpretation, potential adjustment of program contents, and culturally-sensitive communication about health and social services) and follow-up.

Recruitment of interpreters and/or cultural mediators should be mindful of the ethnic and cultural belonging of the men involved– while roping in professionals hailing from the same community may hinder disclosure, matching participants and interpreters/cultural mediators from ethnic groups that are in conflict in the country of origin, should also be avoided. Furthermore, an agreement must be struck between practitioners and interpreters/cultural mediators over the translation of specific terms, particularly vocabulary related to sex, sexual organs and sexualised violence, which may not exist in some languages. It is also worth reiterating the boundaries of the interpreter/cultural mediator role: adding on unnecessary detail, altering the contents of what facilitators or participants are saying or offering unsolicited advice, is unacceptable. Confidentiality and impartiality ought to be respected at all times. Under no circumstance, should children be asked to assist with interpretation or cultural mediation.

2.1.3 Staff competence

Core knowledge, skills and values which apply to secondary and tertiary prevention work with perpetrators of SGBV hold true for work with men with migrant backgrounds[2]. Staff should be knowledgeable about violence, gender and masculinities, as well as GBV among migrant populations[3]. Moreover, they should be trained in relevant national, EU and international legislation. Staff members should be well-versed in referral pathways and systems of care; as previously mentioned, they should be able to communicate information about potentially sensitive services – such as health, psychological and social services – in a culturally-appropriate manner. Practitioners should be knowledgeable about ethical and safety issues, especially vulnerabilities affecting women and children, as well as planning, design, tools and implementation methods. Competences in intercultural sensitivity and anti-racist approaches are important strongholds of work with men with migrant backgrounds. In other words, discriminatory and stigmatizing attitudes that demonize men in light of their cultural or ethnic belonging, should be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, attitudes that derive from toxic masculinity should be constantly challenged.

Wherever feasible, organisations should consider incorporating facilitators with migrant backgrounds in their team. This can not only help minimize communication issues, but also

[2] WWP EN's Guidelines to Develop Standards for Programmes Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (2018) and in the GOOD PRACTICE IN ADDRESSING SEXUALISED VIOLENCE: Guidelines Document (2020).
[3] A useful online resource is the UNHCR training of practitioners, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/gbv-toolkit/learning-and-training/

support bridge-building and credibility. Facilitators with migrant backgrounds may in fact be viewed as role models who hold other members of the migrant community accountable for their harmful behaviours, thereby encouraging desistance. As a general rule, ongoing supervision for all staff, including interpreters and cultural mediators, is highly recommended.

2.1.4 Promoting accountability whilst addressing needs holistically

Professionals working with men with migrant backgrounds should promote accountability and responsibility, whilst concurrently being receptive to their multilayered needs. A holistic approach to needs also calls for sensitivity to a range of hurdles that affect the mental health and wellbeing of men with migrant backgrounds in distinct ways. These may relate to bureaucratic and administrative challenges connected with uncertainties surrounding their migration status. Ambiguity about one's future has been shown to significantly aggravate existing mental health issues, giving rise to severe forms of anxiety and depression, with potential repercussions on physical health (Crepet et al., 2017). Moreover, preoccupations surrounding livelihood (e.g. housing or employment) also act as non-negligible stressors; negative emotions are exacerbated by the pressure to which a large share of migrants who are responsible for sending remittances back home, are routinely exposed. Particularly relevant are experiences of discrimination, that have been proven to play a major role in impacting the physical and psychological wellbeing of migrants living in Europe and beyond (Gkiouleka et al., 2018). Other relevant factors concern feelings of frustration deriving from the sensation of having 'failed' at migration, which can negatively impact self-worth and perceptions of one's masculinity. Addressing the multiplicity of issues which surround migration experiences requires multi-level and multi-sectoral cooperation among institutions and civil society services providing social, health, employment and education-related services and more. Collaboration should also be based on effective information-sharing: whilst upholding privacy and data protection should always be a priority, efforts should go towards avoiding re-traumatisation or additional stress deriving from services working in silos.

3. Collaboration

3.1 Collaboration with organisations working with migrant victims/survivors of violence

Collaborations with services for victims/survivors are fundamental for effective interventions with men with migrant backgrounds, particularly with regard to programs focusing on tertiary prevention. It is essential that women and children who are family members of men enrolled on perpetrator programs are safe at all times. Furthermore, they should be aware of existing services and supported in seeking help. Access to services for migrant women is often problematic due to differing understandings of violence, limited knowledge of the existing legal framework, difficulty navigating the system, shame and language barriers (O'Doherty & Pillinger, 2018). Collaboration with services supporting migrant victims/survivors of violence can help overcome existing hurdles and facilitate the help-seeking process.

3.2 Collaboration with migrant communities, religious or community leaders

Building alliances with migrant communities can help bolster credibility vis-à-vis existing prevention initiatives and perpetrator programs. Community and religious leaders whose values align with those upheld by the program can be roped in to promote access to services and reiterate the importance of promptly addressing harmful behaviours. Moreover, they can help reinforce positive masculinity models that exist within the community of belonging. It is important to offer training on SGBV, gender equality and violence prevention to leaders involved, so that they can be more effective in their awareness-raising efforts. At the same time, their input is extremely valuable - prominent community members can help shed light on internal community dynamics that facilitators may be unaware about. To this end, consultation with migrant communities should ideally be ongoing.

3.3 Interaction with other services and with institutions

Rolling collaboration with other services – e.g. in the form of mutual referrals – is particularly useful to support men with migrant backgrounds. Referrals are of particular utility in cases where there are pressing health or mental health issues requiring further attention, including when alcohol and drug abuse are taking place. International cooperation with reliable services based in foreign countries, can be useful when uncertain legal status, in conjunction with family-related or personal choices, may lead migrants to move abroad. In parallel with collaboration over referrals, interaction with institutions should serve to advocate for improved solutions to prevent and respond to SGBV within the migrant population, and reduce the stressors that oftentimes are conducive to violence among men with migrant backgrounds. Finally, collaboration with academic institutions can help assess the effectiveness of programs for this target group. The evidence gathered can serve to make the case for ongoing funding and program systematization with relevant institutions.

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