



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DG Justice

PROJECT: “GEMMA against Violence: Gender based Empowerment of Migrants through a Multiagency Approach”

LOCAL PROTOCOLS FOR VICTIMS OF GBV

BULGARIA

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1. Institutional and contextual framework and the socio - cultural determinations of GBV in Bulgaria

It is widely understood that GBV – be it in the form of isolated acts or systematic patterns of violence - is not caused by any single factor. Rather, it is a combination of several factors that increase the risk of a man committing violence and the risk of a woman experiencing violence.

In Bulgaria, the courts do not take seriously their obligation to punish perpetrators of violence against women at home. Police do not respond appropriately to the problem - they have not found yet the right approach towards the problems of women victims of GBV. On the other hand, women victims of GBV, rarely decide to stand for their rights because of slowness and bureaucracy of the agencies and institutions.

Still, the problem is largely taboo in many sectors, but since the democratic changes, over a decade ago, there has become more of a public awareness about the problem and willingness to talk about it. In addition, there is not appropriate system of specialized services for victims of GBV. There is a lack of support both financially and institutionally. Women still feel discriminated and misunderstood. Many sectors of society still fail to recognize the problem. Some of the socio - cultural determinations include:

- The socio - economic crisis and its consequences - a factor that threatens the physical survival of individuals or families and causes spiritual discouragement;

- Poverty - promotes experiences of inequality, inferiority and social exclusion which affects family and social relationships and could make these relations disruptive to women on the assumption that they are weaker and do not contribute to the financial stability;

- Globalization - a factor that threatens the self - realization of the person - a person realizes his/ her imperfections and more often goes into depression;

- Alienation - a factor that threatens the cohesion of the community as a group and provokes mistrust and uncertainty;

- Social devaluation - a factor endangering the preservation of spiritual identity. The lack of values and value orientation generally affects the human race;

- The norms and standards are rules of conduct for the members of a community, including accepting violence as a normal part of the relationship between man and woman, defining a "lower" role of a woman;

- Public norms related to tolerance to violence;

- Media - the information regarding the issue and the way it is presented influences the attitudes and perceptions of patterns and behavior of intercultural communication;

- Culture - culture and social behavior are closely related. Although it varies from person to person, some people are more intolerant, aggressive and violent than others.

- Because of the naturalization of the gender roles, gender inequalities are accepted and are not questioned. In this scenario, the GBV is sometimes understood as something natural and legitimate. The false superiority of men over women leads to the fake thought that women are property of men; that men have absolute control over the female body and that they have the right to commit violence against them.

2. Networking and liaison of relevant agencies and development of multi sectoral response to support migrant/ ethnic minority women and girls survived to violence

The relevant agencies and institutions should have mutual understanding of the causes and manifestations of GBV and to be familiar with the issue in depths in order to orientate better in the institutional role for its solving. They should also know very well the work of other institutions and professionals in order to be able to properly distribute their duties and responsibilities.

A National coordination mechanism (NCM) should be adopted for countermeasures, including GBV and supporting victims. Currently, a National coordination mechanism is acting in Bulgaria to support children at risk. This mechanism should also become part of the regional and municipal strategies and there should be elaborated a clear action plan for its implementation on local level, including distribution of roles and responsibilities, budget, professional standards and monitoring of its impact and effect.

Representatives of local authorities, NGOs, police, health services, schools, social service providers, communities leaders should undergo upgrading and maintaining trainings. Professionals dealing with the issue at national, regional and local level - social workers, psychologists, police officers, health workers, lawyers and others should continuously upgrade their qualification and receive regular consultations and supervision.

Amendments / corrections should be made to the existing legislation concerning GBV in order to empower institutions and specialists and to facilitate the implementation of the NCM. Also, it would be useful if there exists a formal relationship between the different institutions by signing Memoranda of Understanding at local and national level.

2.1. Staff knowledge and skills

- Training programmes aimed at enhancing awareness raising knowledge and skills of professionals are required in regard to:

- Improve the competences concerning the specifics of GBV - reasons, types, manifestations, consequences, which will guide and help the professionals in choosing proper intervention methods;

- Introducing professional standards and criteria;

- Enabling professionals to develop competences in a specific field rather than attempting to orientate and act intuitively;

- Enhancing the cultural competences of professionals and raise awareness of cultural differences and stereotypes;

- Evaluating their own attitudes and perceptions;

- Understanding that the cultural context and historical discriminatory experience can lead to mistrust and misunderstanding;

- Understanding what traditions and customs are and what they are not;

- Acquiring skills to integrate the knowledge of the cultural dynamics in the services offered;

- Referral pathways and coordination among different stakeholders;

- Knowledge on GBV extent and possible barriers in accessing help;

- Knowledge on migrant and ethnic minority population, including main migration trends and flows;

- Knowledge on national/ international standards (i.e. Istanbul Convention and Beijing Action Platform) and their social implementation;

- Make use of common terminology based on international standards;

- Knowledge on how to enhance trust - building and empathy.

2.2 Multi sectoral, person centered and transcultural approaches

- Multi sectoral approach

In terms of multi sectoral approach it is essential to increase the trust between institutions. As a main principle in this approach should be the open sharing of information, data exchange and giving feedback regarding the development of cases. There should exist a mechanism for actualization and evaluation of the level of cooperation and interaction. Regarding GBV, it is necessary to be applied holistic approach and to be realized that tackling the problem is not a commitment only of the police or the social services, but the responsibility must be shared on all levels - educational level, community level, family, formal and non - formal groups and last, but not least - it is a responsibility of each individual. Multi agency approach also includes:

- Capacity to refer if the service is not directly provided;
- Fostering the communication between both policy makers and frontline practitioners;
- Constant communication between professionals;
- Cultivation of a common language and compliance to specific and mutually acceptable principles and joint actions and tools.

- Person centered approach

The bottom line of applying this approach must be the understanding that each person has the resources to address the problem. This means that the work of the professionals should be aimed at detecting women's hidden (unconsciously or forced) resources and strengths to counteract and tackle the problem.

All this should be in compliance with the individual's personal space and pride, the personal information should be kept safe and obtaining informed consent is required. Keeping strict confidentiality is of a particular importance.

The person centered approach should also be applied to those who tend to exercise GBV (the perpetrators) aiming at revealing their resources to overcome violent and humiliating behavior. If you only deal with the victims, and do not deal with the perpetrators, it all makes no sense.

- **Transcultural approach**

The first precondition for the implementation of a transcultural approach by the institutions - governmental and NGOs, as well as different services providers is that they have sufficient information and knowledge on the role of women, gender roles, values, norms and practices in different cultures, as today's societies are characterized by cultural diversity and ethnic differences. That is to say, there is a need for "cultural competence", which means building the capacity to understand, recognize, evaluate, respect and work effectively with individuals of different cultural backgrounds. The effective work amongst different cultures requires competent specialists and organizations in order to find efficient ways to communicate (verbally, in writing, and through other forms of interpersonal communication) and to apply appropriate programmes to / with people from other cultures.

The second precondition, which comes from the first, is that, besides knowledge and information, the institutions and professionals working there should have the willingness to apply a transcultural approach in their work.

The third precondition is - there should be introduced and adopted working standards, which require the implementation of a transcultural approach by the specialists and in case they do not do it, there should exist control and sanction mechanisms.

The transcultural approach also requires:

- Having specialists with relevant bicultural and bilingual skills;

- Promoting the use of interpreting/ cultural mediation services across all sectors and services as well as the provision of written and verbal information to be available in other languages;

- Relying on trustworthy and qualified cultural mediators (interpreters), avoiding to use family members or friends to fill in the language gap.

2.3. Service Accessibility

In terms of improving the access to services:

- To be provided sufficient information by carrying out public events, campaigns, media presentations;

- To be developed informational materials in an accessible and clear language, not containing vague and startling professional terms;

- The elaborated mechanisms for cooperation and interaction should have financial parameters;

- To be ensured toll -free phone lines for alerts. Every service provider or institution dealing with the issue should have at least one toll - free phone line;

- To be provided financial means for transportation of women to the place that they can get help;

- Social workers and mediators to hold regular information meetings within communities at risk;

- To be ensured discretion and confidentiality for victims seeking help.

2.4. Reach out strategies

Reach out strategies include:

- Using the help of formal and non - formal community leaders;

- Providing mobile services and consultations for the vulnerable groups;

- Developing a communication strategy and a clear action plan (with timeframe and distributed tasks) and not to act sporadically, from time to time;

- Seeking help of other agencies working with these communities outside the scope of GBV problems and to work in coordination with them;

- Advertising the services through materials translated in different languages, online platforms or other media.

2.5. Ethics and Safety

Ensuring ethics and safety requires:

- Training of specialists on issues related to ethic professional norms;

- Elaboration of “Ethic code”for those working with GBV victims;

- Ensuring that complaints and alerts from clients are submitted and filed without obstacles;

- Developing standard operative procedures for following the stages of reaction and response from institutions and services;

- The services to be provided in an appropriate space where the safety of women is guaranteed;

- Safety storage of information;

- Timely response of services to women's help requests;

- Shelters at a secret address, accessible 24/7, dedicated staff to work with children;

- Acknowledging and respecting women's personal timing and their right to make choices or to withdraw;

- Ensuring that the victim is treated with respect and sensitiveness towards her cultural values, norms and beliefs.

3. Raising awareness and promoting women rights in migrant/ ethnic communities on issues of GBV and empowerment of women and girls within this

3.1. Empowerment

Essential element of the process of empowerment is the involvement of the victims themselves in the decision - making process and in the choice of intervention approaches. It includes a variety of techniques and activities such as taking specific measures, undertaking trainings and programs. All these should follow a preliminary developed, elaborated and very well structured logical framework and sequence.

The training groups should be of an “open” type and the trainings should aim at increasing the capacity of the women, victims of GBV, for adequate self - esteem, identifying and deploying internal resources for coping with the issue, for acquiring appropriate behavioral patterns in order to develop skills for making personal life plans and to integrate socially. Empowerment should also include:

- Promoting self-determination through financial independence, independent living and employment;

- Establishing self–help groups where there is a space for sharing personal stories;

- Initiating and developing behavioral models and encouraging making emotionally mature decisions in problematic situations and conflicts;

- Supporting women initiatives and fostering the implementation of cultural activities;

- Training on hosting country language, legal rights and available services;

- Specific educational programs on GBV for men, providing knowledge on gender equality, violence and their role in the issue.

3.2. Community based approach

The community based approach should consider:

- Participatory approach, which requires inclusion of everyone - the individual, the family or the community that she lives in;

- An approach of respect for dignity and freedom of choice;

- Individual approach;

- Work with and within the community;

- Holistic approach;

- Multidisciplinary approach - i.e. different specialists should work within the community - social workers, psychologists, teachers, health workers, lawyers, police officers etc.;

- Training community members in developing project ideas, problem solving, capacity building;

- Promoting the exchange of good practices with other similar groups;

- Supporting community leaders in taking key positions in the society in order to continue working on behalf of their community;

- Engaging women in activities that they could be interested in.

3.3. Awareness raising

For better awareness raising it is needed:

- Regular information campaigns within the communities at risk;

- Dissemination of appropriate information materials;

- Regular media broadcasts;

- Carrying out public events on topics related to GBV - happenings, celebrating the anti - violence day, the 16 days of activism against GBV, celebrating the international women's day;

- Specialized trainings in schools and engaging children through school activities;

- Involvement of volunteers;

- Involvement of facilitators, key community members and people sharing the same language or mediators;

- Offering programs to support discussion on different expectations regarding gender roles.