

A Toolkit for Enhancing Counselling for Victims of Gender-Based Violence

Empowering Counsellors and
Beneficiaries to Assess the Needs and the Impact of
Counselling with Women in Migration

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A Toolkit for Enhancing Counselling for Victims of Gender-Based Violence

**Empowering Counsellors and Beneficiaries to
Assess the Needs and the Impact of Counselling
with Women in Migration**

The toolkit consists of four parts. Before using this toolkit, read the following introduction, including ethical considerations, and the specific guidance in each tool. Use your professional experience to assess which tools, and/or specific parts of each tool might be useful in any particular counselling setting.

Introduction

THE CONCEPT of this toolkit emerged from the desire of the partner organisations' counsellors to incorporate to the counselling different ways to ensure that women in migration¹ who have experienced gender-based violence are heard.

The toolkit can be used to improve the quality and impact of counselling by assisting:

- a. the beneficiaries² to understand their own strengths, resources and priorities,
- b. the counsellor to make informed decisions about the possible steps in supporting the beneficiaries,
- c. organisations and professionals in collecting data for impact evaluation as well as for advocacy.

THE TOOLS are likely to be more useful in counselling settings where a safe client-counsellor relationship has been established, i.e., after the first sessions. The priority of counselling should be to make sure the beneficiaries concerns are heard. The tools are not meant to be used if the beneficiary is overwhelmed or if the questions might create additional stress. Always use your professional discretion when adapting these tools to your way of counselling.

¹By women in migration we refer to all women who are seeking asylum, have received asylum, other form of international protection, have received a negative decision, are in the deportation process, reside in the EU without an official status (undocumented persons) as well as those women who have come to Europe through e.g. family reunification/marriage or to work or study.

²For practical reasons, we refer to beneficiaries however choosing the right term from e.g., client, survivor, victim of violence etc. depends on the context.

DEPENDING ON the service provider, counselling can include several different approaches and different multidisciplinary services. Due to the different needs of the beneficiaries, the service providers might have to be resourceful and innovative in the delivery of services, as well as to adapt to several different multidisciplinary roles within law, psychology, health care and social work. The support might include psycho-social counselling, information on rights and other ways of supporting every-day needs and wellbeing. Here, we refer to counselling as one or several one-on-one sessions where women are given an opportunity to be heard and offered assistance. For more information about the method of counselling please see the [Handbook on Counselling Asylum Seeking and Refugee Women Victims of Gender-Base Violence](#).

At the heart of the counselling method is working in a victim-centered manner; ensuring that the rights and dignity of each individual are respected when providing services. In practice this means that each beneficiary is treated with dignity, so that they are heard and listened to, and decisions regarding each person are done to ensure the best interest of the beneficiary. A successful counselling also requires certain resources and structures such as a safe space, interpretation and trust.

AS A COUNSELLOR it is important to be able to self-reflect. Self-reflection is an important tool to understand the different roles and responsibilities you might have on and off work. Monitoring one's own expectations, thoughts, feelings, and reactions that might arise when giving counselling is an effective way to promote positive interactions with beneficiaries. Self-reflection is also a useful way of observing one's own coping at work and needs for self-care.

Reflection should also seek to understand the different positions of power and privileges that service providers and beneficiaries possess. Both parties of the counselling are likely to come from different backgrounds and have individual skills and life experiences that shape the way they think or react to certain topics. Ideally the counselling involves an unbiased and un-hierarchical setting. However, power-imbalances and pressure to achieve certain outcomes are likely to have at least some impact onto the interaction.

Realistic understanding of privileges, power-hierarchies and barriers in receiving assistance can help to alleviate some of the pressure with regards to expectations on counselling impact and outcomes. The following tools related to assessing the resources and needs of the beneficiary, reflection during and after counselling and creating opportunities for feedback can alleviate some of the power-imbalances, and improve the quality and impact of the counselling.

Using the toolkit for gathering data for impact evaluation or advocacy

TO ENSURE access to services for victims of gender-based violence, it is important to have systematic data e.g. to understand bottlenecks in access to services, and to hear women's own voices regarding their needs. You can use this toolkit to collect data to highlight the impact you are making as an assistance provider and/or use the data for advocacy purposes. Use the toolkit for data collection only if you have the skills and resources for analyzing and using the data for these purposes.

It is of utmost importance to ensure that data collection is planned and implemented in a manner ensuring privacy, and that ethical issues are considered. Basic guidelines are discussed below. Furthermore, data collection will only succeed, if counselling staff is involved in the planning of the data collection as data collection should not interfere with the counselling process. In any case the counsellors are bound by the rules of professional confidentiality and need a specific consent from beneficiaries for data collection (see below).

Inform: Make sure that a beneficiary understands the reason why information is collected and how the information will be used in your organisation. Information about the data collection should be given as a handout (translated if necessary), and discussed, including with the help of an interpreter when necessary.

The text below is an example of how to inform the beneficiary about the data collection.

Info paper example:

"We are collecting important information on behalf of our own organisation xx looking at issues that affect that affect the wellbeing and safety of the people we meet. We are collecting information to better understand opinions and experiences of individuals in migration. The findings will be used to improve the assistance, services and counselling given to beneficiaries and to help shape policy to improve the their lives. You are free to contact us later on should you want any further information about the data collection or have any other questions at any point."

Explicit consent: The concept of data collection and questions related to consent might cause confusion. Make sure the beneficiary knows that her wellbeing is a key priority and collecting the data is not necessary. Emphasize that all the information is used anonymously, which means that others cannot identify beneficiaries from

the data. Observe and react to any hints or bodily signals that could indicate that the beneficiary is uncomfortable to share information, and respect her wish, if she does not want you to collect data. Ensure that consenting or not consenting does not influence the services provided. Sign the consent form together with the beneficiary, after reading through the content.

Consent form example: The consent form should include the following points, and it can be a part of an organisational consent form, if one exists:

"I have read/the information has been read to me, I understood the info paper, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions related to it. I understand that participation is voluntary, and I have the right to stop the discussion at any given moment. I understand that this discussion and all replies are fully confidential, and the collected data will be presented anonymously."

Using sensitive data: The gathered data must be handled and archived according to privacy and data protection principles common to sensitive materials.

Tool One

Background Information on Beneficiaries and Data on Access to Services

WITH THIS tool you can collect information on the individuals your organisation encounters and on the services provided to them. When using the data gathered for impact evaluation or advocacy, make sure to read and adhere to the data collection guidelines in the previous section.

Many of the questions might include sensitive topics for the beneficiary. Beneficiaries willingness to answer certain questions might vary. Respect beneficiaries willingness to answer. Be prepared to explain why the information is relevant, e.g. migration status is relevant for deciding which services are available and what kind of legal support is needed.

Depending on your organisational focus, you can add or remove questions. You can fill in the questionnaire based on the information you have accrued in the counselling sessions, or you can fill in the questionnaire, or parts of it, together with a beneficiary. Based on the questionnaire presented in this tool, you can create your own online/print/word file.

<input type="checkbox"/> New beneficiary		<input type="checkbox"/> Returning beneficiary	
1	Age of beneficiary		
<input type="checkbox"/> <17		<input type="checkbox"/> 18-25	<input type="checkbox"/> 26-35
		<input type="checkbox"/> 36-45	<input type="checkbox"/> 46-55
		<input type="checkbox"/> 56<	
2	Gender of the beneficiary		
<input type="checkbox"/> Male		<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Other/does not want to answer:
3	Country of origin		
4	Migration status		
<input type="checkbox"/> Asylum seeker		<input type="checkbox"/> Negative decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Undocumented
<input type="checkbox"/> Refugee status		<input type="checkbox"/> In deportation	<input type="checkbox"/> EU-citizen
<input type="checkbox"/> Other protection status		<input type="checkbox"/> Other migration status	<input type="checkbox"/> Permanent resident
		<input type="checkbox"/> Not known	
5	Forms of violence³		
<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic/intimate partner violence		<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual violence (incl. rape)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual harassment
<input type="checkbox"/> Female genital mutilation		<input type="checkbox"/> Forced marriage	<input type="checkbox"/> Honour-based violence
		<input type="checkbox"/> Trafficking in human beings	<input type="checkbox"/> Stalking
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
6	How was the connection with the beneficiary established?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Reception centre staff		<input type="checkbox"/> Lawyer or legal counsel (other than your own organisation)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Deportation centre staff		<input type="checkbox"/> Interpreter	
<input type="checkbox"/> NGO staff (other than your own organisation)		<input type="checkbox"/> Beneficiary's family, friends or acquaintances	
<input type="checkbox"/> Colleagues from your own organisation		<input type="checkbox"/> Shelter	
<input type="checkbox"/> Professionals working in refugee camps		<input type="checkbox"/> Church	
<input type="checkbox"/> Police		<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	
<input type="checkbox"/> Migration authorities		<input type="checkbox"/> Direct request from beneficiary	
<input type="checkbox"/> Municipality social worker		<input type="checkbox"/> Info cafe	
<input type="checkbox"/> Doctor (physical or psychological)		<input type="checkbox"/> Other outreach work done by my organisation (flyers, workshops, visitations)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

³ The list of forms of violence is based on the Istanbul Convention, except for the trafficking in human beings which is from the EU trafficking directive.

7	Counselling was organised:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face		<input type="checkbox"/> Online
		<input type="checkbox"/> Over the phone
8	Interpretation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Present		<input type="checkbox"/> Phone interpretation
<input type="checkbox"/> Not present, because:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Beneficiary did not want an interpreter		<input type="checkbox"/> Language not available
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of funds		<input type="checkbox"/> Female interpreter not available
		<input type="checkbox"/> Not needed
9	Next steps/referred to?	
<input type="checkbox"/> A new counselling session		<input type="checkbox"/> Assistance related to childcare
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal assistance related to criminal case		<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-natal care
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal assistance related to migration status		<input type="checkbox"/> Language course
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal assistance related to family law		<input type="checkbox"/> Employment services
<input type="checkbox"/> Psychological support		<input type="checkbox"/> Referred to other NGO
<input type="checkbox"/> A safe house		<input type="checkbox"/> Other, what?
<input type="checkbox"/> Assistance with housing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Assistance with sustenance	
<input type="checkbox"/> Medical assistance	
10	What services were not possible to organise/refer to?	
.....		
.....		
.....		
Not possible to organise/refer to, because:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Service not available at all		<input type="checkbox"/> Language limitation
<input type="checkbox"/> Service not available in the area		<input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please, specify:
<input type="checkbox"/> Service not provided by our NGO	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other assistance provider did not have the resources to take a new beneficiary	
<input type="checkbox"/> Service not available for a person without a residence permit	

Tool Two

Discussion Topics for Counselling

THIS TOOL includes questions and discussion topics that are designed to

- a. ensure that the beneficiary and her needs are heard, and assist the beneficiary to understand her own strengths, resources, expectations and priorities;
- b. help the counsellor manage their own expectations and to make informed decisions about the possible steps in supporting the beneficiary.

REMEMBER THAT trust-building is a priority. Choose the parts of the tool which you find useful based on your own way of working and to fit each unique session. Consider the appropriate timing for using them e.g. in the beginning of a session to understand the situation of a beneficiary, at the end of a session to ensure beneficiary's needs are heard or in the end of a sessions to collect feedback. Make sure to ask towards the end of the session has the beneficiary had the opportunity to bring up meaningful topics and asked the questions they had in mind. Furthermore, it is important to end the session with a positive note.

You can print the document, and fill it, or parts of it, during the counselling session together with the beneficiary (incl. the interpreter if needed). For example print out only the first 3 questions, hand it over, and ask to circle the most fitting option, or use the four-square tool in a similar way. You can also just include some of the questions casually to your own counselling routine.

How has this counselling gone so far?



Have we discussed the topics that you wanted to talk about?



Have you asked the questions you had in mind before coming here?



What would you have liked to discuss more about?

**What would you like to talk about in the next session?
Any specific concerns or needs?**

Address the new topics and concerns that may have risen and adjust the planned next steps accordingly.

There might be an existing plan of assistance, however the four-square tool below might be useful in organising concern into an order of urgency and importance. Discuss together which needs are urgent but also reflect upon, e.g. needs posed by any legal processes (such as an urgency to apply for a immigration status/asylum etc.).

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	<p>Top priority</p>	<p>Decide what should be done and when</p>
Not that important	<p>Can someone else provide assistance?</p>	<p>Consider postponing</p>

After or during the discussion related to priorities it might be also useful to list topics that prevent solving priority issues and support the beneficiary.

**Things that suppress/
prevent you**

What are you sensitive or
suspicious about?

**Things that inspire/
support you**

What motivates you or
makes you feel good?

**Things that
discourage you**

What worries you?

**Things that
encourage you**

What feels easy to you?

What was good/positive in this meeting?

Tool Three

Feedback Form for the Counsellor

THIS TOOL can be used to collect feedback from the beneficiary on the support received. It is recommended to translate the form into the beneficiaries' native languages. Make sure that the beneficiary understands that responding is voluntary. Explain that the responses are anonymous, if you are able to ensure anonymity.

Consider using the feedback form also as an opportunity to raise awareness on different options for assistance by attaching a list of useful contacts. These include e.g. violence against women help-lines, safe houses, assistance system for victims of trafficking, crime victim services or the police. Ensure that asking for feedback will not compromise the safety of the beneficiary (e.g. joint email/phone with a perpetrator).

There are two options for using the form:

- a. hand out a printed form and instruct where to return it (ideally in a sealed box at the office);
- b. create an online version and provide a link to the form.

FILLING IN the form is ideally done independently by the beneficiary to ensure privacy and honest feedback. If needed offer the services of an interpreter to assist with filling in the form. If this is not possible, offer to assist yourself. This, however, might interfere with getting honest feedback.

Feedback options for phone or online counselling are to provide an online link via SMS or email or post the form to the beneficiary with a prepaid envelope and a return address (consider safety of the beneficiary). If it is not possible to collect feedback using the form, consider offering a possibility to give feedback in a spoken form (in the beneficiary's own language) recorded by phone, SMS, or email.

Go through the feedback at regular intervals, learn from it and improve service provision where possible. Archive the feedback according to privacy and ethical guidelines to ensure the safety and anonymity of respondents.

Dear respondent,

We are collecting feedback on the counselling services that we provide. Your experiences on the services are highly valuable. You can give feedback anonymously without revealing your identity, and the feedback will be handled according to the privacy rules of our organisation. You can skip any question if you so wish. Negative feedback is also welcomed and will not affect your services. If you need any assistance in giving the feedback, or have any questions, please ask your counsellor or interpreter for assistance.

1 How was the counselling?

very good



good



don't know



bad



very bad

Would you like to explain your answer in more detail?

2 Did you feel heard and respected?

very good



good



don't know



bad



very bad

3 Did you get to talk about the topics you wanted to talk about?

very good



good



don't know



bad



very bad

4 Did you understand the information you received?

very good



good



don't know



bad



very bad

5 Please, describe any negative impact that the counselling had on you or your family?**6 Please, describe any positive impact that the counselling had on you or your family?****7 In a few words; how was the counselling? What was important to you?**

**Thank you very much
for your feedback.**

Tool Four

Self-Reflection Questions for the Counsellor

THIS TOOL includes guidance and questions that encourages you to systematically practice self-reflection. Self-reflection can help you to better understand your professional role, identify strengths and challenges related to work, and organise your observations. Furthermore, monitoring your own expectations, thoughts, feelings, and reactions is an effective way to further positive interactions with the beneficiaries. Self-reflection is also a useful way of examining your own wellbeing at work and needs for self-care.

This tool is structured in three parts that encourage you to reflect on:

- a. How well was I able communicate with the beneficiary?
- b. What did I experience and feel?
- c. What are my strengths?

IT IS important to keep in mind that self-reflection should not lead to unfounded self-critique or perceiving only problems or flaws. So, in order to maintain a positive balance, the tool encourages to end the self-reflection with positive thoughts on what went well.

Self-reflection may increase workload and, therefore, finding a 'routine' that works for you will help you to commit into using this tool. You can use it regularly after each counselling session or reserve some time for journaling once a week. You can convert the template to a word-document, create an online version e.g. in Google forms or use a specific notebook for writing down your thoughts. If writing down your thoughts feels too time consuming, take a moment to just ponder through some of the questions (internal monologue). However, recording your thoughts in one way or another, will help you to organise them, and to identify repeating patterns or assess the urgency of emerging topics.

How well did I listen, how did we communicate?

How did the counselling go?



More detailed explanation:

Was I able to discuss about the topics that the beneficiary wanted to talk about?



More detailed explanation:

Do you think the beneficiary was able to understand the information/advice given?



More detailed explanation:

What kind of follow-up questions did the beneficiary ask?

These might be useful indicators of topics that cause uncertainty, confusion or otherwise are linked to themes that are difficult to grasp among the beneficiaries.

What did I experience, what did I feel?

Did I notice to make any assumptions about the beneficiary's needs? Did they change during the counselling? Where did these assumptions come from?

Did my feelings, interpretations, expectations about the beneficiary's needs change during the counselling?

Did I or the beneficiary react at some point in a surprising or unexpected manner?

What are my strengths?

What do I want to thank myself about? How can I express gratitude towards myself?

What can I take with me from this?

THE TOOLKIT has been developed as a part of an EU-funded project entitled "**SARAH: Safe, Aware, Resilient, Able and Heard – protecting and supporting migrant women victims of gender-based violence.**" In the project, short-term psycho-social and legal counselling services were provided by the Greek Council for Refugees, SOLWODI Deutschland e.V, the Italian Refugee Council and Setlementti Puijola to refugee and migrant women victims of gender-based violence in Greece, Germany, Italy and Finland.

We would like to thank the project partners for their valuable comments and observations throughout the development of this toolkit.

The toolkit was developed initially for this counselling context. For more information about the method of counselling please see the [Handbook on Counselling Asylum Seeking and Refugee Women Victims of Gender-Based Violence](#) developed in our previous joint EU-funded project *Co-creating a counselling method for refugee women GBV victims (CCM-GBV)*. At the heart of the counselling method, is working in a victim-centered manner; ensuring that the rights and dignity of each individual are respected when providing services.

In practice this means that each beneficiary is treated with dignity, so that they are heard and listened to, and decisions regarding each person are done to ensure the best interest of the beneficiary. For more information about developing victim-centred assistance to victims of gender-based violence see "**Strategy Tool – Developing your organisation into a champion on preventing GBV**".

<https://heuni.fi/-/sarah> →

