



# A gender-sensitive approach to the prevention of Trafficking in Persons

## Handbook on Working with Young Men and Boys

## Handbook Authors:

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## Foreword

Young men and boys are often overlooked when thinking about vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons (TiP). This handbook has been designed as a resource for organizations working along migration routes, to support a gender-sensitive approach to the prevention of TiP among young men and boys. The handbook is intended to function as a living document that organizations can continue to update and expand in line with their experiences. It is developed as a resource for gathering information and ideas for existing staff and as part of a training package for new staff.

Importantly, this handbook is not intended to frame young men and boys as *more* vulnerable, or to direct resources away from support services for women and girls, but rather to help build the capacity of service providers to address the needs and vulnerabilities of young men and boys as a typically under-served vulnerable group.

## Contents

- 1. Risk Profiles ..... 4
- 2. Why Focus on Young Men and Boys? ..... 6
- 3. Addressing barriers due to norms and culture when working with young men and boys..... 8
- 4. Tips and guidance for working with young men and boys ..... 10
- 5. Suggested activities for the prevention of Trafficking in Persons among young men and boys .. 14
- 6. Organizations with potentially transferable knowledge and experience..... 19

## List of acronyms

- LGBTI Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people
- TiP Trafficking in Persons
- UASC Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- MHPSS Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- PaCT Prevention and Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings

## 1. Risk Profiles

While all refugees and other migrants are vulnerable to TiP, specific groups have been identified as particularly vulnerable. Recognizing the kinds of characteristics and situations that can make someone vulnerable to TiP can help service providers to identify people that may need further support.

Although risk profiles and indicators based on visible characteristics – such as observing that a woman is pregnant or someone is elderly – can be helpful, vulnerability can be shaped by many factors, and these may not always be visible. *Best practice is therefore to take an intersectional approach to understanding risk and vulnerability* (OSCE, 2021). It is also important to bear in mind that visible characteristics can be misleading. For example, an unaccompanied minor may look older than they are and therefore may not be immediately identified as an unaccompanied minor (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2019).

**An intersectional approach:** ‘recogni[zes] how power and discrimination intersect and how different groups of people experience them differently. It means understanding that gender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, socio-economic status and others do not exist in isolation from each other but rather are intertwined and influence how we experience the social world and how it perceives us’ (UNHCR, 2021).

### ***Risk factors which may increase vulnerability to TiP include:***

- **Gender** – harmful gender norms may produce vulnerability to TiP in different ways. For example, gender norms may shape societal perceptions that the role of women and girls is to provide sexual and domestic services, which may therefore put women and girls at risk of forced marriage or other forms of sexual exploitation. In contrast, societal expectations that men and boys must provide for their families economically may increase their risk of labor exploitation or trafficking for the purpose of organ removal.
- **Sexual orientation and gender identity** – LGBTI persons, whose sexual orientation or gender identity may not conform to societal expectations, are likely to face discrimination and abuse, and may experience greater challenges in accessing support – both from their peers and family, and from formal service providers.
- **Nationality** – in a migration context, refugees from certain countries of origin may find it more difficult to continue their journeys and to access support than others, based on their ‘perceived deservingness’ (i.e. whether they are perceived as “real” refugees or not). People from certain countries of origin may also have been displaced more than once (e.g. Palestinians living in Syria), thereby increasing their vulnerability (Healy, 2016).
- **Ethnicity** – ethnic minorities may face greater difficulties in accessing services if they speak a less commonly-spoken language and/or their cultural practices are less widely known. They may also be at a greater risk of experiencing violence and discrimination.
- **Disability** – people with disabilities may also face discrimination, may be isolated, and may be dependent on others for care, which may increase their vulnerability to exploitation (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021). People with mental disabilities may also be more easily manipulated.
- **Age** – children and adolescents may also be more dependent on others, and more easily manipulated – for example, if they are less able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate touching or behavior. Children and adolescents may also be at risk of particular

forms of abuse – for example, the exploitation of “dancing boys” (bacha bazi) in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

- **Economic hardship** – refugees and other migrants who do not have sufficient funds to finance their onward journeys and/or daily needs may be particularly vulnerable to exploitative relationships, selling sex for money, or being trafficked by a smuggler who demands more money, etc. (ICMPD, 2015).
- **Restrictions on movement** – border controls and restrictions on movement prevent refugees and other migrants from migrating safely, quickly, and legally, which makes their journeys, longer, more difficult, and dangerous. These challenges can increase desperation and vulnerability and thereby increase the risks of TiP. Other Covid-19 related restrictions on movement, such as quarantines, may also increase vulnerability, for example, by reducing access to necessary services.

#### Key resources for additional information

- Brunovskis, A., & Surtees, R. (2019). [Identifying trafficked migrants and refugees along the Balkan route. Exploring the boundaries of exploitation, vulnerability and risk](#). *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 72(1), 73–86.
- ICMPD. (2015). [Targeting Vulnerabilities: The Impact of the Syrian War and Refugee Situation on Trafficking in Persons—A Study of Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq](#). ICMPD.
- OSCE. (2021). [Applying gender-sensitive approaches in combating trafficking in human beings](#). OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.
- Women’s Refugee Commission. (2021). [Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector](#). Women’s Refugee Commission.

## 2. Why Focus on Young Men and Boys?

Many humanitarian responses incorporate a gender perspective by focusing on women and girls, at times overlooking how to serve men and boys. Even though most unaccompanied youth are boys, they are rarely the focus of policy discussions and often left out of programming. Men and boys may be particularly vulnerable to TiP if they are:

- Travelling alone;
- Under heavy pressure from their families to reach their destinations and start family reunification procedures and/or remit money back to their families – these expectations may pressure young men and boys into risky situations or exploitative work;
- Excluded from services reserved for groups considered more vulnerable (e.g. safe shelter, which is often provided only for women and girls);
- (Formerly) part of armed forces – where they may have already experienced sexual exploitation and other traumatic events;
- Part of any other at-risk groups as outlined above (e.g. LGBTI, ethnic minorities, etc.).

There is growing evidence on the TiP risks faced by men and boys. A study of migrants on the Balkan route found that sexual exploitation was reported by both men and women (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2019). The majority of identified victims of trafficking for organ removal are men (OSCE, 2021).

However, there is a lack of concrete and evidence-based guidance on how to best assist young men and boys in situations of humanitarian crisis. On the sexual exploitation of boys, Freccero et al. wrote:

*Gender-specific research, policy guidance, and evidence of best practices related to interventions preventing the sexual exploitation of boys are extremely limited (2017, p. 1).*

This handbook collates and summarizes the available information to support effective engagement with young men and boys in the context of TiP prevention among refugees in the Western Balkans.

First, it is important to understand why young men and boys may be left out of, or more difficult to include in, current programming which seeks to reduce vulnerability to TiP:

### **1. Gender norms and stereotypes**

Young men and boys may be less readily acknowledged as victims of, or vulnerable to, TiP. The stereotype that victims of TiP are women and girls forced into sex work can make it difficult for service providers – as well as men and boys themselves – to recognize when men and boys are at risk of, or in a situation of, TiP.

As further discussed in Section 3, gender and cultural norms may also mean that men and boys are reluctant to think of themselves as victims, or to be identified by others as victims – for example, due to common beliefs that victimhood undermines masculinity, that men and boys cannot be sexually exploited, and that men and boys who are sexually exploited by other men or boys are themselves homosexual.

#### **A Note on Unconscious Bias:**

Gender attitudes and biases can affect how we as service providers identify risk. For example, the stereotype of sex trafficking victims as young women can lead to overlooking victims who are men and boys (OSCE, 2021). This is an example of unconscious bias which discriminates against men and boys.

To overcome unconscious bias, it is therefore important to be open-minded, aware of stereotypes, and self-reflexive about your own attitudes and behaviors and how these may be influenced by gender stereotypes and biases.

## **2. Barriers to accessing services**

As above, stigma and shame regarding victimhood may prevent young men and boys from seeking support services. Additionally, cultural stigma around mental health problems may also prevent young men and boys from accessing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Furthermore, even if a young man or boy wants to access support, they may face barriers to access. Firstly, as discussed above, service providers may not see them as at-risk or in need of services. Second, there may be a lack of available services for them – most TiP assistance programs, especially shelters, are geared towards women and victims of sex trafficking (OSCE, 2021). Third, where services are available and open to men and boys, they may nonetheless be framed as services for women, which may put off men and boys who need these same services. For example, men and boys may be reluctant to seek help in sexual and reproductive health centers that say ‘women’ in their title.

#### **Key resources for additional information**

- Brun, D. (2017). [Men and Boys in Displacement: Assistance and Protection Challenges for Unaccompanied Boys and Men in Refugee Contexts](#). Care International UK/ Promundo.
- Women’s Refugee Commission. (2021). [Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector](#). Women’s Refugee Commission.



### 3. Addressing barriers due to norms and culture when working with young men and boys

Cultural norms around gender often make it more difficult for young men and boys to openly discuss their expectations and experiences. In addition, identifying potential vulnerabilities to TiP requires an understanding of how cultural norms potentially increase vulnerability.

#### **Gender and culture:**

Gender is inherently linked to culture. ‘The cultural interpretation and negotiation of gender is crucial to the identity (including gender identity) of individuals and their communities. Gender is not universally understood the same way across cultures, and it can have multiple definitions in different communities that go beyond a male-female dichotomy’ (UNESCO, 2014). While gender relations vary across cultures, a common pattern is that women have fewer resources, less influence over decision making processes, and more limited personal autonomy.

When working with young men and boys in the context of TiP prevention efforts, it may be important to consider the following questions about the likely impacts of cultural and gender norms:

#### ***What role does masculinity play?***

What is considered acceptable and appropriate behavior for young men and boys is fundamentally impacted by culture and norms. Masculinities not only impact their behavior but also how willing young men and boys are to report violations or talk about potential vulnerabilities. Importantly, understandings of masculinity can also influence whether it is acceptable for a man to be seen as a (potential) victim. An expert interviewed for a study on boys and young men trafficked to the UK highlights:

*For boys, it’s harder to admit that they didn’t have a choice. For women it might be more acceptable than for a boy to admit they were forced to do something against their will. It’s a lot more difficult for boys to do, particularly those who have come from more conservative backgrounds (The Children’s Society, 2016).*

Hence, it might be more difficult to involve young men and boys in activities that highlight potential vulnerabilities to TiP. In addition, (sexual) exploitation is hugely stigmatizing for many men which often means that they avoid support centers or services, for fear of being seen as weak (Surtees, 2008; Munro & Pritchard, 2013; UNHCR, 2017).

Even if they do attend activities that are focused on the topic of TiP, gender norms can impact who young men and boys might open up to, or who they might be willing to listen to when discussing potential vulnerabilities.

An additional challenge is a lack of knowledge and the taboos around sexuality. A UNHCR study on Syrian refugees highlights:

*Boys face additional challenges as discussing sexuality generally remains taboo and sexual education is absent. Lack of basic knowledge of sexuality and spaces to discuss sexuality combined with easy access to online pornography and limited avenues of appropriate sexual expression creates confusion about what behaviours and touches are appropriate and silences boys from speaking out (UNHCR, 2017).*

### ***Who is considered an authority figure?***

When trying to identify potential victims of TiP it is essential to identify who is considered an authority figure for young men and boys. This is important for two reasons. For one, it provides an understanding of which actors might be effectively engaged in discussions on raising awareness of TiP risks – these authority figures may be able to disseminate key messages or lend legitimacy to TiP prevention activities within their community. At the same time, an understanding of authority figures and hierarchies also helps to identify which actors might be involved in the trafficking of young men and boys.

#### **Key resources for additional information**

One of the most commonly used sources to understand cultural differences are Hofstede's 6 dimensions of national culture. Two dimensions are especially relevant:

- The Power Distance Index: This index shows how (un)equal power is distributed within a society. Societies with a high level of power distance are characterized by strong hierarchies.
- Masculinity versus Femininity: The Masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success (Hofstede, n.d.)

The comparison tool with detailed country information can be found here: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/>

Several websites provide short overviews of different cultures, for example:

- The Cultural Atlas by SBS, International Education Services (IES)  
<https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/countries>
- The World Culture Encyclopedia <https://www.everyculture.com/>

## 4. Tips and guidance for working with young men and boys

This section offers some guidance and recommendations for working with young men and boys, compiled from the existing literature and from the experience of PaCT partner NGOs.

### *Training and capacity development*

- **Gender-sensitive, adaptive learning:** Conduct participatory, gender-sensitive needs assessment as the basis for programming design. Monitor whether and how young men and boys are accessing services and whether improvements need to be made to facilitate their access and engagement. Ask for feedback from young men and boys (Brun, 2017).
- **Be prepared for personal disclosures and the identification of individuals at immediate risk:**
  - Ensure that staff are trained to manage disclosures from young men and boys. Guidance on how to handle disclosures (of sexual violence) by refugee young men and boys is available from the Women's Refugee Commission/UNICEF handbook [‘Supporting Young Male Refugees and Migrants Who Are Survivors or At Risk of Sexual Violence: A Field Guide for Frontline Workers in Europe’](#) (2021).
  - Ensure that strict confidentiality systems and practices are established and adhered to. Confidentiality means that the individual ‘[has] the right to choose if, when, how, and with whom they share their story, and the information disclosed should only be shared with others after the informed consent of the [the individual] has been secured’ (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021, p. 3).
  - Ensure that a contingency plan is in place to enable you to take swift action in case someone at immediate risk is identified and needs to, for example, be transferred to safer accommodation (Women's Refugee Commission & UNICEF, 2021).
- **Working with interpreters and cultural mediators:** Consider whether the staff that provide translation or other assistance in the context of your communications and activities with young men and boys are sufficiently aware and trained to be respectful and nonjudgmental in their behaviors and practices with all refugees and other migrants, regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, religion, or ethnicity, etc. (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021). Consider whether additional training is needed, and discuss with interpreters or cultural mediators the choice of terminology and phrases they use to translate your speech, in order to make sure that it accurately reflects your meaning and intentions (i.e. to avoid the use of normalized, but derogatory, terms). See page 18 of the Women's Refugee Commission/UNICEF handbook [‘Supporting Young Male Refugees and Migrants Who Are Survivors or At Risk of Sexual Violence: A Field Guide for Frontline Workers in Europe’](#) (2021) for further information and guidance on working with interpreters or cultural mediators, including links to training materials for interpreters or cultural mediators.
- **Staff supervision and monitoring:** Ensure the supervision and monitoring of all staff to ensure that the behavior and practices of all staff, including interpreters or cultural mediators, remains respectful, non-judgmental, and supportive. Encourage self-reflection and provide training on unconscious bias. Address any negative, judgmental or discriminatory attitudes or practices that are identified (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021).
- **Observation and monitoring of at-risk individuals:** As World Vision International has observed, unaccompanied minors and children are particularly vulnerable in transit settings such as large temporary accommodation facilities. It is therefore important to invest resources in observing and monitoring cases of children and, particularly, unaccompanied minors. World Vision further suggests that individual and group discussions about violence, particularly

within families, may open up conversations about the presence, forms and frequency of violence that could suggest that someone is at risk of violence, exploitation or trafficking.

### **Visibility and engagement**

- **Gender-sensitive awareness-raising:** Any awareness-raising activities or materials (information sessions, leaflets, videos, etc.) should include examples of male victims in order to combat the perception that trafficking only happens to women and girls, and to encourage young men and boys to also consider the risks that they may be vulnerable to, and to seek help if needed (The Children’s Society, 2018; Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021).
- **Strategic placement of awareness-raising materials:** Place awareness-raising materials (e.g. posters, leaflets, videos) in places where young men and boys are likely to spend time – such as male bathrooms, or barbershops, as well as around any canteens, classrooms, registration or reception areas that young men and boys visit (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021). Also ensure that such materials are placed where young men and boys can read the information and make a note of any contact information without being observed by others.
- **Involve women and girls in prevention efforts:** Make sure that women and girls are also included in communications/activities that aim to raise awareness of the risks that young men and boys are vulnerable to. As the UNHCR (2017) points out, if refugee and other migrant women are also sensitized to the risks that men and boys face, and the support services available, they can also help to identify if their husbands, brothers or sons are at risk or have been victimized, and can encourage them to seek help.
- **Tailor awareness-raising materials to different groups of refugee and other migrant young men and boys:** Try to ensure that awareness-raising materials are also adapted to different language, literacy and age groups, as well as to the kinds of information sources used by young men and boys (e.g. social media platforms). In Athens, the NGO [Faros](#) has created ‘stay safe’ videos for unaccompanied boys which are available in Urdu, Arabic and Farsi (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCd65wjfGQiOxns5dsRWdsuQ/videos>). These materials could perhaps be used, or adapted, for the context in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Approach the topic of TiP via other topics which young men and boys may be more familiar with and interested in:** Grupa 484 has found that the young men and boys they work with typically do not have a good idea of what TiP is, and why it is relevant for them to understand. They are therefore unlikely to engage in a discussion or activity which is framed as a discussion or activity *about* TiP specifically. Instead, Grupa 484 recommend other activities and discussions which allow the facilitator to approach the topic of TiP less directly. In their own work, they have found that activities or discussions focused on gender-related topics, or their own migration experiences (e.g. “My way to Serbia”), are engaging to young men and boys, and can be used to then open up discussions relating to different risks, including TiP risks. These kinds of topics are particularly engaging for young men and boys, who appreciate the opportunity to express their own opinions and share their own experiences. For ideas and guidance on how to run such sessions, see Suggested Activities in section 5.
- **Be sensitive, and flexible, in using male and female staff:** As far as possible, try to ensure that both male and female staff are available to facilitate activities or for more private conversations. Do not assume that young men and boys would always prefer to speak to a man – try to offer them the choice (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021). That said, certain groups may have certain tendencies or preferences – for example Grupa 484 has found that

unaccompanied boys, particularly from Afghanistan, are more open and engaged with male facilitators or cultural mediators.

- **Be sensitive to “insider” and “outsider” dynamics:** Do not assume that young men and boys will always find it easier to engage with someone from their own ethnic or cultural background – some may find it easier to speak openly with an “outsider” (i.e. someone who is not from their country of origin or cultural background) (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021).
- **Youth friendly safe spaces:** Create safe spaces for young men and boys, in which they can feel comfortable to relax, discuss personal or sensitive topics, and to disclose personal experiences, if they want to. Walking the Talk offers guidance on how to create safe spaces for youth engagement: <http://www.yetoolkit.ca/content/create-youth-friendly-spaces>.
- **Invest in trust-building:** Create opportunities for, and focus on, building trust between staff members and young men and boys. The Women’s Refugee Commission and UNICEF offer the following guidance on building trust with young men and boys:
  - ‘show a genuine interest in them
  - treat them with respect (this includes respecting the preferred names and pronouns of LGBTI youth and not asking probing questions about sexual orientation and gender identity)
  - show empathy and acceptance of, for example, their sexual orientation and gender identity or choices
  - ensure confidentiality, and keep reassuring male youth that confidentiality will be maintained (many times if necessary)
  - create a sense of safety
  - be reliable, present and available, and
  - be honest about what you can and cannot do to support the adolescent boy or young man’ (Women’s Refugee Commission & UNICEF, 2021, p. 17).

Further guidance on building trust with young people is available in Action for Children’s 2014 Toolkit: [‘Keeping myself safe: Practitioner’s toolkit for developing effective relationships with vulnerable young people’](#); and also the Early Intervention Foundation’s 2018 report: [‘Building trusted relationships for vulnerable children and young people with public services.’](#)

### ***Inter-personal communication***

- **Ensure that you understand the terminology that young men and boys are using:** Talk to interpreters, cultural mediators or others in order to better understand the terms, innuendoes, euphemisms, and metaphors that might be used by refugee and other migrant young men and boys regarding sensitive topics such as sexual relationships, sexual and other types of abuse and exploitation, smuggling and TiP (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021). This will help you to be better prepared for conversations in which a refugee or migrant, or the interpreter/cultural mediator helping to translate, may not directly express their concerns or experiences or may use terms and phrases which are not clear to you. For example, as the Women’s Refugee Commission notes: ‘Depending on the cultural and linguistic contexts, men and boys may not use language such as “rape” to describe their experiences. They may instead speak about torture, abuse, or related terms’ (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021, p. 10).
- **Use the terminology that young men and boys are familiar and comfortable with, if appropriate:** Pay attention to the words and expressions that young men and boys use – it may be helpful to use and reflect this language and terminology in your discussions with them – but only if appropriate (i.e. do not perpetuate the use of sexist, homophobic or otherwise derogatory language) (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021). Using words or terminology that

young men and boys are not comfortable with (i.e. that are considered taboo within their culture) may make them disengage from the conversation (Women's Refugee Commission & UNICEF, 2021).

- **Reinforce key messages to help young men and boys feel comfortable disclosing fears or concerns or asking for help:** If a young man or boy discloses any fears or experiences of victimization, you can help to reduce distress and combat the stigma that may surround male victimization by emphasizing that the young man or boy:
  - Is brave for sharing their concerns or personal experience or seeking help
  - Is not alone (in either their fears or direct experience of victimization)
  - That any experience of abuse or exploitation or trafficking is not the victim's fault
  - That help is available (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021).
- **Never pressure a young man or boy to disclose personal information:** And, more broadly, support young men – and particularly boys – to make well-considered decisions about what information they give to whom. As World Vision International has emphasized, children, in particular, need to be encouraged to set their own boundaries, including in terms of what information they choose to give to strangers.
- **Be aware of your own assumptions or implicit bias:** When engaging with young men and boys, ask yourself whether your conclusions or response would be the same if it were a woman or girl who acted a certain way or said a certain thing (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021). Nonetheless, be aware of the types of behavior that may be more common among young men and boys, and how these should be interpreted. The Women's Refugee Commission (2021) points out that adolescent boys who have been subject to abuse or exploitation may be more likely to externalize their feelings as anger or aggression, which may mean that frontline staff see them as a (potential) perpetrator of violence, rather than as a victim themselves.

## 5. Suggested activities for the prevention of Trafficking in Persons among young men and boys

The following activities have been selected for their potential value in helping to prevent TiP among refugee young men and boys specifically. Some of these activities are directly related to TiP (e.g. awareness-raising) and some of them are not. However, and as mentioned above, activities and discussions about other topics may be useful as a way to build trusting relationships and open up conversations about, for example, gender norms, gender equality and TiP, that can help young men and boys to understand TiP and protect themselves and others from abuse, exploitation or TiP. Some activities may also contribute to prevention goals by helping to give refugee and other migrant young men and boys more confidence and skills to make good decisions and protect themselves, better psychosocial health and resilience, and also create peer support networks. The activities below do not necessarily need to be conducted in male-only groups or spaces. Activities that bring together people of different genders can also contribute to TiP prevention by challenging and transforming harmful gender norms, and by helping to build mutually respectful and supportive relationships between people of different genders. World Vision International suggests that activities in which mixed teams of, for example, boys and girls, work together to achieve a shared goal can be a useful way of fostering mutual understanding and respectful relationships. A review of the evidence on '[Programming with adolescent boys to promote gender-equitable masculinities](#)' (Marcus, 2018) offers some specific recommendations for effective programming, which include: creating safe spaces for critical reflection (which can include a combination of male-only and mixed settings); investing in high-quality facilitation; planning for longer programmes, regular attendance and opportunities for informal socializing between participants and mentors; and the importance of developing rapport before approaching sensitive topics.

### **Discussion or mentorship in small-group settings**

Consider whether informational or discussion-based sessions might be more effective in small group settings. The Women's Refugee Commission describes a successful intervention where awareness-raising in small groups of men and boys helped to encourage survivors of sexual violence to seek help:

*'On the Aquarius search and rescue vessel in the Mediterranean, MSF health providers raised awareness about sexual violence against men and boys and available services through convening private groups of 10 to 15 men and adolescent boys who spoke the same language. One man and one woman health provider met with the groups and gave a short speech acknowledging how difficult their journey had been and that many other men and boys had disclosed suffering sexual violence in Libya, during transit, and in their home country. They clearly defined sexual violence and provided examples of different forms, and explained that sexual violence has medical and psychological consequences that can be treated or managed. They underscored that free, confidential medical care was available on the ship, that refugees had the option of speaking with a man or woman health provider, and that staff could be approached at any time. The providers said that sexual violence can happen to anyone, that it was not survivors' fault, that they did not need to feel ashamed, and that they were not alone. Providers emphasized the medical consequences of sexual violence, which they found helped enable disclosures due to men's and boys' fears of existing or potential sexually transmitted infections. Posters about the availability of post-sexual violence medical care that depicted men/boy survivors were placed in the men's bathrooms. As a result, the proportion of men/boy survivors who came forward for medical care*

*increased from 3 percent in 2017 to 33 percent in 2018’ (Women’s Refugee Commission, 2019, as cited in Women’s Refugee Commission, 2021, p. 13).*

Mentorship to young men and boys may also be effectively delivered in small group settings. For example, in Athens, [Faros](#), which runs a shelter for unaccompanied boys, provides mentoring to groups of three to four boys in so-called “family groups”. Mentoring programmes may not be feasible during periods in which young men and boys are staying in reception centres only briefly, or when resources are very constrained, but further resources and guidance on setting up an effective mentoring programme for vulnerable youths is available in the Early Intervention Foundation’s 2018 report: [‘Building trusted relationships for vulnerable children and young people with public services’](#) and in the International Rescue Committee’s [‘DM&E Tips on Refugee Youth Mentoring’](#).

### ***Virtual communication channels***

Some PaCT NGO partners have set up virtual modes of communication (e.g. for information dissemination and online counselling) to provide guidance and support to refugees. Virtual modes of communication may be particularly valuable where anonymity and confidentiality is a particular concern to at-risk individuals or survivors. Where resources are particularly constrained, an instant messenger-type Hotline could be set up to allow young men and boys to contact frontline organizations for information or advice (or set up an in-person appointment) without needing to come forward in person. Data privacy and security issues would, however, need to be considered – for example, Signal would usually be considered a more confidential platform than, for example, Facebook or WhatsApp.

### ***Vocational or livelihoods activities***

It may be difficult to engage young men and boys in activities that they do not feel are relevant to them or their priorities in transit. However, activities that appeal to young men and boys’ self-concept as (future) breadwinners for their families may attract more interest (also among women and girls, who should not be made to feel excluded from activities geared towards income-generation and self-reliance). Vocational and livelihoods activities designed to support refugees and other migrants’ acquisition of the skills necessary for self-reliance in transit and for achieving their aspirations in their intended destinations may be of interest to young men and boys in transit. As one Handbook on ‘Assistance and Protection Challenges for Unaccompanied Boys and Men in Refugee Contexts’ suggests:

*Livelihoods programming could be used as an entry point for providing counselling and other protection support, so that men and boys can access support without stigma or ‘feeling less manly’ (Brun, 2017, p. 23)*

The Women’s Refugee Commission/ UNICEF 2021 Handbook on ‘Supporting Young Male Refugees and Migrants Who Are Survivors or At Risk of Sexual Violence: A Field Guide for Frontline Workers in Europe’ provides a list of suggested livelihoods and vocational activities (p.21):

- Language courses
- Literacy/numeracy classes
- Financial literacy classes
- Training on CV writing
- Interview training
- Computer skills



- Information sessions on the education system or labour market in key countries of destination
- Workshops on social norms in the current location and in key destination countries

The CARE International Balkans' (2018) '[Manual for Engaging Young Men and Boys in Emergencies](#)' discusses the setting up of carpentry workshops for young men and women in a Serbian asylum centre. These types of livelihoods or vocational activities may help to prevent TiP among young men and boys in three ways:

1. First, by engaging young men and boys in such activities, frontline staff may be better able to get to know participants, build trusting relationships with them, and create opportunities for other discussions.
2. The discussion of topics such as career aspirations and social norms in countries of destination can be used to open up conversations around gender roles, gender equality, and exploitation risks.
3. By supporting refugee boys and young men to develop skills for self-reliance, livelihoods or vocational activities can help to improve their psychosocial health and resilience to TiP risks.

#### **Guiding questions for group discussions**

These are some examples of questions (inspired by the PaCT partners' own experiences as well as the Handbooks listed below) that can be used to open up discussions about gender norms and expectations, personal relationships and concerns, and risks of abuse and exploitation:

- What kind of conflicts do you observe or experience in your daily environment here? If a friend had [this kind of problem] what would you advise them to do?
- Have you ever known someone who had a relationship that they considered good, with someone who they trusted, but this relationship was not healthy, and caused them harm? How do you know whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy?
- During your journey, did you ever notice something different about the way men or women or other people behave, or dress, or communicate in any of the countries you've been to? What did it make you think? How do you understand these differences?
- While you are here in [include current country/city] did you see behavior of boys/girls/men/women that surprised you? Why was it surprising for you?
- What is your favorite tv/film/book character? What do you like or admire about this person? Do you try to be like this person in your own life? Can everybody be like this person?
- What does it mean to you to be a boy/girl/woman/man? What do you find important?
- How do you think your life would be different if you were a boy/girl/woman/man?

#### ***Life-skills and resilience training***

Life-skills and resilience training have been developed to empower young people, in particular, to protect themselves and make healthy decisions. In a scientific review of approaches to the prevention of sexual exploitation of unaccompanied migrant and refugee boys in Greece, Freccero et al. (2017) discuss life skills education as a promising prevention approaches (for which evaluative evidence is, however, still lacking). The authors write that:

*Alongside protection, UASCs [Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children] also need the knowledge and skills to support healthy decision making and coping strategies. A recent*

*study involving focus groups with 120 refugee and migrant children in Greece highlighted that stress and uncertainty about their situation were linked to a loss of hope and engagement in negative coping behaviors (Mercy Corps/NRC, 2016). Finding that youth had poor access to education, skill-building opportunities, healthcare, and protective environments, the study authors recommended life skills training to address these challenges (Mercy Corps/NRC, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified 5 life skills to be relevant across cultures: (1) decision-making and problem-solving, (2) creative thinking and critical thinking, (3) communication and interpersonal skills, (4) self-awareness and empathy, and (5) coping with emotions and coping with stress (WHO, 1999). Life skills training curricula have been delivered to refugee and migrant youth in various contexts, including Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Burundi, and Ivory Coast (ANERA, 2015; DRC, 2013; Folkesson, 2009; UNICEF, 2012) (p.4).*

There are various Handbooks on life skills and resilience training in humanitarian and displacement settings available. These offer detailed guidance and session plans to facilitate implementation:

- UNFPA and UNICEF have developed '[Boys on the Move: a Life Skills Programme for Unaccompanied Adolescents Boys and Young Men](#)'. This second edition of the programme was developed specifically with protection risks (including TiP risks) and prevention in mind. The resources include a Handbook for trainers and a Handbook for participants to guide the implementation of modules and workshops on themes including: 'Know and Understand Yourself', 'Know and Understand Others', 'Know and Understand Society', and 'Know and Understand the Big Picture'. Detailed session plans are provided.
- CARE International Balkans has created a '[Manual for Engaging Young Men and Boys in Emergencies](#)' (available in both English and Serbian). Alongside broader guidance on how to engage and work with young men and boy refugees (particularly from Middle Eastern countries), this manual offers detailed guidance on the implementation of 13 educational workshops with a strong gender focus. Topics include: power and relationships; 'what is this thing called gender?'; 'From violence to respect in intimate relationships'; and men as caregivers.
- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has created the '[Life Skills: Skills for Life](#)' Handbook. It provides an introduction to the topic as well as concrete guidance on planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating life skills training. It includes specific sections on gender issues, and on children and youth.
- The IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support and Save the Children Denmark have also developed a '[Children's Resilience Programme: Psychosocial support in and out of schools](#)'. The programme includes introductory materials, a '[Handbook for programme managers](#)', two Handbooks for Facilitators ([Handbook 1](#) and [Handbook 2](#)) as well as accompanying materials for implementation such as [handouts](#) and [worksheets](#). Facilitator Handbooks 1 and 2 provide detailed guidance, session and activities plans. Facilitator Handbook 1 offers introductory workshops on topics such as: 'My life' and 'Children's rights'; and Facilitator Handbook 2 offers more specific workshop tracks, including on 'Protection against abuse and exploitation' which can be used in settings where there are child protection mechanisms in place (but is not recommended for settings where such child protection mechanisms do not exist).
- Save the Children has also prepared a '[Safe You and Safe Me](#)' programme designed for use with younger children (between 7 and 12 years old) to teach them about protection from violence and abuse. The booklet handouts and activities would likely need to be translated into other languages for use with young children.

### ***Recreational activities***

Recreational activities can also be used to engage young men and boys in activities which facilitate trust-building, create opportunities for relevant discussions (e.g. of gender norms, equality, and risks to TiP), and improve mental and psychosocial health. According to the Women’s Refugee Commission and UNICEF Handbook on (2021, p. 21), the following recreational activities can be used to engage young men and boys:

- ‘Workshops on areas of interest to male youth (e.g., creative writing, music, drawing, theatre or dance)
- Sports (such as soccer, frisbee, volleyball or basketball)
- Games (such as bowling, board games, darts or billiards)
- Activities outside services/facilities (such as going to town, to a cinema, for a walk, to a coffee shop, for something to eat or to a swimming pool)’

CARE International Balkans’ (2018) [‘Manual for Engaging Young Men and Boys in Emergencies’](#) (available in both English and Serbian) offers guidance for implementing leisure activities such as sports, movie nights, making a graffiti/mural, and “chalk walks”.

PaCT NGO Partner SRH Serbia uses theatre-based educational workshops as a format in which refugees of different genders can playfully and creatively address topics such as gender together, for example through role-play activities. These workshops are facilitated by an expert who encourages a critical view of gender norms and thereby supports gender-transformational outcomes.

A scientific paper summarises the evidence on ‘Physical activity, mental health and psychosocial support’ (Rosenbaum et al., 2021). It highlights the following key points on incorporating sports in MHPSS activities:

- Physical activity is great for both physical and mental health (reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression).
- Studies show that, in terms of generating mental health benefits, the type of sport activity and the intensity of the workout is less important than the total time spent being active.
- Sports contribute to children’s social and emotional development as they learn to work in a team, grow in confidence, resolve conflicts and more.
- The activity should not be focused on competition which can increase a sense of division and animosity but should rather focus on teambuilding and togetherness.
- The biggest challenges typically include finding space to carry out sports and finding ways to include those with disabilities and women/girls.

The UNHCR, International Olympic Committee and Terre des hommes has created a [‘Sport for Protection toolkit: Programming with Young People in Forced Displacement Settings’](#) (available in multiple languages). This Toolkit provides detailed and practical guidance on how to set up and implement sports for protection activities (as well as for monitoring and evaluating such activities). It also includes information on how to use sports activities to generate social cohesion and reduce inter-ethnic conflict between groups.

## 6. Organizations with potentially transferable knowledge and experience

In the Women's Refugee Commission and UNICEF Handbook (2021), a number of promising practices from NGOs are identified. This includes several NGOs working in the Western Balkans and other key countries of destination and transit who seem to be running activities of interest to the work of PaCT NGO partners. We are therefore including them here as potential points of contact for exchange and learning:

- [INTERSOS](#): In Rome, Italy, INTERSOS operates a mobile unit where they provide help to refugees and migrants. In addition to working through cultural mediators, INTERSOS has a psychologist who provides life-skills education and awareness-raising about sexual violence and who interacts with young men living on the street. In their mobile health clinic they also provide medical check-ups and mental-health counselling.
- [Faros](#): In Athens, Greece, Faros runs a shelter and drop-in centre for unaccompanied youth. In addition to shelter and food, their services and activities include mentorship and life skills training, and recreational activities such as street football.
- [UNFPA](#): In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNFPA runs three Boys and Young Men Centres (alongside three parallel centres for women and girls) where they also deliver informal life skills training.
- [Diotima](#): In Greece, Diotima focusses on promoting gender rights and equality, including within refugee communities. As part of this work, Diotima conducts creative writing workshops on consent and gender stereotypes with young men and boys and helps them to make music about these issues.
- [InfoPark](#): In Belgrade, Serbia, InfoPark holds weekly 'Boys Days' for adolescent refugee boys. On these days, refugee boys can participate in life-skills sessions, alongside accessing food and recreational activities, such as trips to the cinema. 'The goal is to create a safe space to discuss gender equality and violence while engaging with boys in an informal way' (Women's Refugee Commission & UNICEF, 2021, p. 20).
- [CivicoZero Onlus](#): In Rome and other cities in Italy, CivicoZero Onlus runs a drop-in day centre for youth up to 18 years old. At these centres, CivicoZero Onlus uses game-type activities to explore the migration experiences of refugee boys. These sessions provide an opportunity to open up conversations about the refugee boys' experiences and to inform them about their rights, options and available services.

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