



Photo: UN Women/Youngwa Choi

**Technical Brief:**

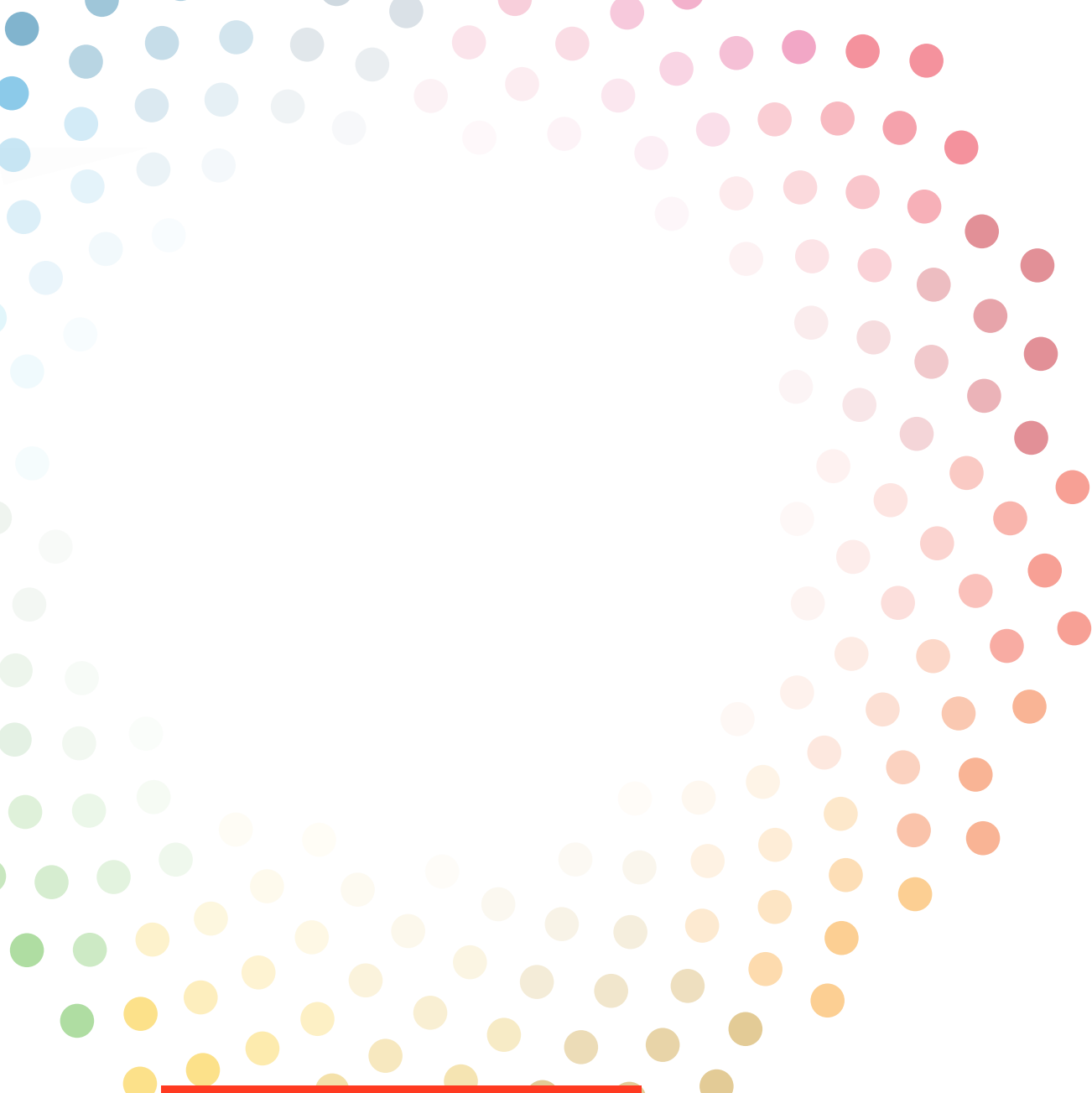
# Remote Service Provision for Women Migrant Workers at Risk or Subject to Violence

2021



**Spotlight  
Initiative**





## Technical Brief: Remote Service Provision for Women Migrant Workers at Risk or Subject to Violence

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## About this Technical Note

This brief provides guidance on the provision of remote services to women migrant workers who are at risk of, or subjected to violence. The brief is based on international principles and standards of [service provision for women survivors of violence](#), together with emerging practice and knowledge on how these can be delivered remotely. The brief complements the [16 Essentials for Quality Multisectoral Service Provision to Women Migrant Workers Subject to Violence](#). It is intended to provide broad-based guidance that is applicable across countries and contexts with the understanding that adaptation will be required in the implementation to meet the diverse needs of women migrant worker populations in the specific contexts that they are living and working in. Recommendations in this brief also depend on the government’s investment in gender-responsive services for women migrant workers to ensure there is adequate staffing and resources to attend to their needs within the host country and upon repatriation.



## Introduction<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

Violence against women (VAW) is a human rights violation whether it occurs in the private or public sphere. Prevalence rates globally are similarly high across countries and contexts, although certain groups of women experience compounded risk as a result of systemic discrimination and insecurity in their daily lives. Women migrant workers often face multidimensional discrimination from host communities based on their ethnicity, the language they speak and because of their status as a “foreigner”. They may also face direct legal discrimination in the destination country, especially if they are irregular or undocumented, which impacts their ability to access protection, basic services, material and financial support and other benefits that are available to nationals. Many women migrant workers work in informal and precarious jobs, such as those categorized as low-skilled, which are often low-paid and with no or few protections (e.g. sick pay and healthcare). In addition, they may face risks within the workplace, such as being confined to their workplace with little access to information about their rights and entitlements, and isolation from their families, friends, networks and other social and cultural comforts.

As of 2019, women constituted roughly 47.9 per cent of the 10.1 million migrants in ASEAN.<sup>5</sup> They are critical economic agents whose contributions extend well beyond their own families to entire economies in both origin and destination countries. These contributions include, among other things, filling labour market gaps; caring for children, disabled and elderly persons; paying taxes and spending money in the host economy; sending remittances to family members back home; and driving up domestic wages.<sup>6</sup> Violence and harassment harms women and their families and creates losses to businesses and economies.

Women migrant workers’ risks and experiences of abuse occur at multiple junctures in the migration cycle. Women migrate for different reasons, including those linked to poverty, lack of education and decent work, displacement due to conflict, disaster and environmental factors, as well as violence experienced at home (e.g. early and forced marriage, domestic violence, sexual violence). During migration, especially if unaccompanied and through irregular channels, there are risks of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. In the destination country, women migrant workers can be subjected to work-related abuses as well as intimate partner violence. In Asia, 30-40 per cent of women experience violence and harassment at work and statistics from Southeast Asia show that 21% of women experience some form of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, usually from an intimate partner.<sup>7</sup> For a visual representation of the multiple ways in which women migrant workers may face intimate partner violence, see [the Immigrant Power and Control Wheel](#).

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations.2019. [Report of the Commission on the Status of Women \(63<sup>rd</sup> Session, E/2019/27-E/CN.6/2019/19\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations.2019. [Report of the Secretary General: Violence against Migrant Workers \(A/74/235\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> ILO and UN Women.2020. [Mobile Women and Mobile Phones: Women Migrant Workers’ Use of Information and Communication Technologies in ASEAN](#)

<sup>4</sup> ASEAN Confederation of Employers.2021. [A Business Case for Preventing Violence and Harassment at Work: Empowering Women Migrant Workers and Businesses.](#)

<sup>5</sup> United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. [International Migrant Stock](#)

<sup>6</sup> UN Women. 2017. [Will Women Workers Fully Benefit from Increasing Job Opportunities and Mobility in Southeast Asia?](#)

<sup>7</sup> WHO. 2021. [Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Executive Summary.](#)



The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased cases of violence and harassment against women migrant workers perpetrated by employers, partners, law enforcement officials and/or front-line service providers.<sup>8</sup> The effects of the pandemic have exacerbated the known risk factors for violence and victimization, such as, financial distress from loss of employment, income or increased medical bills; increased household tension and stress from greater care responsibilities (including on domestic workers); movement restrictions trapping women with abusers or limiting her access to work and services; harmful consumption of substances used as coping mechanisms; and lack of social protection and health care.<sup>9,10</sup>

Women migrant workers who are experiencing abuse are less likely to access in-person support services in general and especially in this context. As a result of social distancing measures and the closure of in-person shopping and services during COVID, there has been an increased reliance on technology and the use of online methods for purchasing, banking, medical needs (e.g. telehealth), remote working and virtual schooling. Mobile applications, social media and helplines have proven to be a relatively cost-effective, user-friendly, and widely accessible mechanism to meet people's various needs. Women migrant workers tend to have access to phones and internet, although there are a number of caveats to consider when providing services through this method to ensure that privacy and safety can be upheld: some women are sharing their phone with other family members; phones may be confiscated or monitored by employers; costs to obtain or maintain a phone may be out of reach; the technology may be dated or restricted in how it functions and what apps can be downloaded or accessed; and women may have little experience on how to use them (including how to maintain privacy, block harassers, erase records/traces of communications, etc.). For a more in-depth analysis and recommendations on mobile phone use among women migrant workers in ASEAN, see [Mobile Women and Mobile Phones: Women Migrant Workers' Use of Information and Communication Technologies in ASEAN](#).

Using remote technologies to provide services to women migrant workers at risk of or experiencing abuse requires special technical considerations (see the Safe Technology Annex), in addition to adhering to survivor-centred principles.

## Principles

**Non-judgment:** Survivors of violence, irrespective of their migration status, are impacted in many ways from their experience. They may feel ashamed, stigmatized, powerless, isolated and blame themselves for what has happened to them. This can make it challenging to reach out for support. For women migrant workers, this can be compounded by a number of factors:

- Isolation and disconnection from informal support networks (e.g. family and friends)
- Lack of knowledge of available services
- Fear of mandatory reporting to police or other authorities and deportation
- Language barriers or fears of being discriminated against in service provision because of their migrant status and/or ethnicity

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<sup>8</sup> ILO and UN Women. 2020. [Policy Brief: COVID-19 and Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN](#).

<sup>9</sup> UN Women.2020. [Guidance Note: Addressing the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Migrant Workers](#).

<sup>10</sup> UN Women.2020. [Prevention: Violence against Women and Girls and COVID-19](#)



- Fears of losing employment/income for her own family or those she supports back home
- Fears of retaliation by the employer (e.g. filing a case against the woman, who ends up being prosecuted)
- Fears of losing custody of children or being deported and separated from her children
- Fears of being rejected by her home community, re-entering poverty, persecution or other challenging situation if she returns

Establishing trust is the most important element in providing support to survivors. To establish trust, service providers must treat all women with dignity and respect without judging the information she is relaying and without any bias towards the social and cultural ways that she may be expressing herself. Service providers should emphasize that they are there to help improve her safety and provide support based on what she needs; engage in active and compassionate listening; employ effective questioning that encourages survivors to feel comfortable speaking; use healing statements; and demonstrate throughout that she is believed and cared for. For details on these methods, see the [Training Module on Providing Quality Essential Hotline Services for Women Subject to Violence](#).

**Safety** of women (and their children) is a top priority regardless of the mode of services provision. Service providers should aim to enhance personal safety by understanding the woman's context and whether there are opportunities for creating safe zones within her home or workplace. If this is not possible and she chooses to leave, it is critical to have viable options for exiting safely in order to access alternative accommodation. Women fleeing abuse should not be subjected to lockdown and movement restrictions so that they can leave the situation they are in. Safe exit may require arranging for and providing free modes of transportation. It is critical for service providers to have updated information on:

- The types of accommodation that remain open and that are available to receive people, especially considering women migrant workers in countries of destination and those with irregular status.
- Information on embassy or consular services (including safe spaces/shelters that they may have in place) and the support they provide to women migrant workers.
- Whether there is security available at the accommodation to ensure physical safety from perpetrators, including employers.
- The length of stay that is permitted and information on post-shelter accommodation options or processes for voluntary repatriation to countries of origin.
- Whether staff at the shelter/safe accommodation speak multiple languages and/or have interpretation available, in addition to whether there are support groups from countries of origin that women migrant workers can be connected with during their stay.
- Whether the accommodation is women only; whether she can be accompanied by her children (and if there are any restrictions based on age or gender).
- The goods (personal hygiene, food, clothes, cash vouchers or loans, mobile phones, internet, etc.) and services (psychosocial counselling, healthcare, legal aid, repatriation/voluntary return assistance, employment/re-employment assistance,

childcare/educational) that are provided either at the accommodation or through referral.

- Other critical information (e.g. the shelter/safe accommodation will respect her privacy and autonomous decision-making and will not report her to authorities which may jeopardize her employment and get her deported).
- Any additional information that will be necessary for the woman to make an informed decision about her next steps.

**Confidentiality/Privacy** is a core principle related to women's safety. All information exchanged should be kept between the service provider and the woman, unless the woman voluntarily chooses to disclose information to another individual or if her life is in immediate danger. In cases where an interpreter or cultural mediator<sup>11</sup> is needed, that individual should be equally knowledgeable of how to maintain confidentiality and be accountable to any codes of conduct or protocols that exist for service providers. Keeping information confidential begins with ensuring the technologies (e.g. mobile phones, landlines, websites, apps, etc.) being used to communicate with women have safety and privacy features built-in (see [Safe Technology for the Provision of Services to Women Migrant Workers at Risk of or Subject to Violence](#)) that can be easily managed by service providers and those making contact. For service providers working from home, all communications should be undertaken from a place where no other individual can overhear the information or see the screen. All paper records should be kept in a secure place that can only be accessed by the service provider. In cases where information is entered into online databases, access should be password protected, personal information should be encrypted, and names replaced with unique identifiers/numbers. Sharing information with other service providers should only be done in the context of an already established coordinated response and where information sharing protocols are in place. Any new stakeholders that may be partnering around VAW service provision to women migrant workers (e.g. Migrant Resource Centres) should receive all the materials and training on the coordinated response.

**Consent/Informed Decision-Making:** Feeling at risk of or experiencing abuse can be traumatizing and can create feelings of powerlessness, as threats of, or actual violence are a means of asserting power and control over someone. Being in this situation can be traumatizing and affect a person's ability to think clearly and make decisions around their well-being, especially when they are juggling multiple concerns related to their children, employment, basic needs, etc. Service providers are key to providing women with trauma-informed counselling, while supporting her in safety planning, providing information and referrals to additional specialized services that she may need, including those related to labour violations. Service providers are skilled facilitators that help women regain their sense of control and ability to make decisions based on accurate information that they have been given that is tailored to their specific context and stated needs. Service providers must respect the rights of women migrant workers to make their own decisions, conveying they will continue to provide assistance based on those decisions.

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<sup>11</sup> A cultural mediator is a person who understands the cultural differences between the populations of the host and origin countries. This person uses that knowledge to help support the delivery of appropriate services to migrant women at risk of or subject to abuse.



## What should be in place?

VAW services need to be conducted by people that have had adequate training and ongoing supervision with guidance and tools to respond to women who are at risk of violence or who have experienced it. In addition to the fundamentals of providing services, thought and preparation needs to be put into supporting women migrant workers to address the particular challenges they might be facing.

### Resources and Knowledge

It is important for service providers to have certain knowledge and information on hand to be able to reference them easily when answering calls or responding to chats and texts. These resources include:<sup>12</sup>

- A background document that is specific to the local context and that outlines the common experiences of different women migrant workers, such as the common forms of violence and harassment that they may experience and by whom (e.g. intimate partners, brokers/recruiters, employers, etc.).
- A document with frequently asked questions received from women migrant workers and the information and help that they most often request with ready responses. This should be translated into relevant languages and also be provided to the interpreters. It can be updated regularly.
- A template for safety planning that considers the situation women migrant workers are in (e.g. employer's house/domestic work; employer-provided accommodation/ agricultural sector; etc.).
- Health factsheets that include information and guidance related to medical help (including for COVID), emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis and forensic examinations; whether there is any cost involved; whether there is any risk of mandatory reporting to authorities; and how they receive women migrant workers.
- Basic legal statutes and processes relevant to migrant rights and how these interact with legal statutes and processes related to violence against women and family law. If available (through the recruiting agency or government website) become familiar with pre-departure orientation information provided by the country of origin.
- Knowledge and connections to social-emotional support groups for migrant survivors: ethnic community-based networks, virtual support groups that are linguistically, socially and culturally relevant, and (where appropriate) faith-based groups, in addition to friends and families.
- A suicide prevention plan.
- Referral pathways and protocols to engage with other specialized services not provided by the helpline. This directory should include an updated (every 6 months or sooner in a crisis) list of service providers by location. Key details include the name of organization and focal point, phone number, email address, physical address,

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from IRC. [Guidelines for Remote and Mobile Gender-Based Violence Service Delivery Guidelines](#)



services offered, hours of service, languages available and any costs of service, along with any critical notes specific to women migrant workers.

- A list of partners that can deal with other issues that women migrant workers may be experiencing related to wages, working conditions and other labour violations. These entities should be vetted/reviewed for their ability to support women migrant workers (including those not documented). They may include: labour attachés, trade union representatives, consular offices or embassies, migrant resource centres, etc.
- A roster of interpreters and cultural mediators and their contact information.

### Protocols and Standard Operating Procedures

These operational documents are an important part of ensuring that helpline personnel conduct their work with a level of standardization that ensures a survivor-centred approach is followed. These documents are critical as there are likely to be changes and turnover in personnel (whether paid or volunteer), varying degrees of experience and uneven possibilities of training at onboarding. These can include: how to answer a call, how to deal with referrals to other services and administrative procedures, among others. For more specific guidance, see: [COVID-19 Guidance on Remote GBV Services Focusing on Phone-based Case Management and Hotlines](#) (pp. 15-17 and 26-29).

### Consider This!

In countries of origin, there are examples of returned migrant women's groups that have established support centres or networks for those planning to migrate for the first time or who have returned. These groups provide guidance to ensure women's rights based on their first-hand experience, along with updated information on who to contact for different needs while abroad. They also often provide support for re-integration for women who have returned. For example, see: [Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association](#).

This is a model that has also been implemented through [peer networks in Cambodian communities](#), such as Ou Bak Ror Tes commune and will be piloted by UN Women, under the Safe and Fair Programme in Indonesia in 2021

Helplines may consider whether such groups in the country of origin exist and whether there is an opportunity to link with them to improve cultural competence (see below); coordinate for women who may be returning; and explore other avenues of cooperation (e.g., linking virtually for additional support during case management or for group counselling sessions).



## Developing Cultural Competence

Women migrant workers may share some common characteristics and experiences related to leaving a country of origin and living and working in a host country that is different from their own, but they are not a homogenous group. Women migrant workers comprise diverse ethnic, religious, social and cultural backgrounds and, like all women, will have their own unique life experiences (the family they grew up in, schooling, partnership/marriage, childbearing, faith practices, work, social and leisure outlets, reason for migrating, channels of migration, etc.).

“Increasing culturally competent domestic violence services to immigrant survivors and their communities, entails understanding the complexities of survivors’ lives and the barriers survivors overcome when deciding to seek help. The research reviewed here found that several aspects of immigrant survivors’ lives influence their domestic violence experiences. Some of these aspects are specifically linked to experiences and realities of being an immigrant woman.”

- Sheetal Rana

Source: [Addressing Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities: Critical Issues for Culturally Competent Services](#)

Cultural competence is a continual process of learning about women migrant’s experiences, their social and cultural backgrounds and how these interact with the abuse they are experiencing. This process requires reflection and work on both an individual and organizational level. Cultural competency entails<sup>13</sup>:

- Recognizing and being aware of one’s biases and prejudices (i.e., not making assumptions or judging her)
- Listening to and building on the strengths of the survivor (which may be different from female nationals)
- Recognizing the power that advocates and professionals have over the lives of survivors and maintaining a facilitating role rather than being directive
- Accepting that there may be a different set of values, without imposing the values of the service provider
- Gathering information on the survivor’s interpretation of her culture to gain a more complete picture of her context
- Recognizing one’s own history and the interdependence and independence of people, lives, histories and contexts
- Building cooperation and collaboration and reaching out to diverse communities both individually and programmatically

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<sup>13</sup> Extracted (and slightly adapted) from Family Violence Prevention Fund. [Cultural Competency Tips](#).

## Perceptions of Women migrant Workers in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand

Research conducted in 2019 under the TRIANGLE in ASEAN (ILO) and Safe and Fair (ILO and UN Women) Programmes solicited the opinions of nationals in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand regarding migrant workers. The studies found fairly negative perceptions of migrant workers despite the important contributions that they make to the economy and functioning of society. Nationals polled across the four countries erroneously associated migrants with some of the following: higher crime, threats to national heritage and culture, and stealing jobs from nationals. In addition, many did not feel that migrant workers should expect the same pay or benefits as nationals and while there was support for better labour conditions for domestic workers specifically, this was not reflected in good employment conditions and the provision of work entitlements in practice. A couple of findings from those polled showed that:

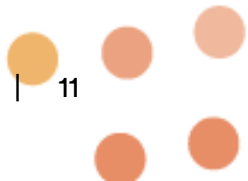
- Sixty per cent of Thais, 44 per cent of Malaysians, 34 per cent of Japanese and 32 per cent of Singaporeans believe that migrant workers have a poor work ethic and cannot be trusted.
- Forty-seven percent of Malaysians, 40 per cent of Thais, 32 per cent of Japanese and 30 per cent of Singaporeans believed that migrant workers were a “drain on the economy”.

The study also uncovered a promising finding that violence and harassment, regardless of migration status, should not be tolerated and that women should receive support. Specifically, support for women migrant workers to have access to shelters ranged from 68 per cent in Japan to 85 per cent in Thailand and support for law enforcement to reduce violence against women migrant workers ranged from 67 per cent in Japan to 83 per cent in Thailand.

Source: ILO. 2019. [Public Attitudes Towards Migrant Workers in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.](#)

For additional resources, see:

- [Culture Handbook \(Family Violence Prevention Fund\)](#)
- [Clinical Tools \(Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre\)](#)



## Attending to women

Helpline<sup>14</sup> attendants are generally responsible for listening, providing trauma-informed basic counselling, safety planning and providing information about referrals to specialists for women to make informed decisions about their next steps. Women should be able to access this support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Ideally, the service should be available in multiple languages, even if it requires coordinating with an interpreter.

### Answering the Call/Chat

whether the communications can proceed without causing her harm or putting her in danger. It is critical to speak in **simple language at a pace that is comfortable for the caller**, checking periodically to make sure she understands what is being communicated. If she agrees, it may also be useful to include a cultural mediator in the call/chat who is familiar with her social and cultural background and who can help facilitate portions of the communication. Using interpreters and cultural mediators can also help maintain privacy and disguise the calls so that perpetrators (especially employers) are not aware that she is speaking to a violence helpline. Call centres may consider using a guide or protocol for how to answer calls/chats, though it is important to maintain an authentic and human interaction to build trust. After the initial greeting, it is critical to respond in a tailored way based on the individual circumstances of the woman.

For resources on how to speak with and engage with survivors, see:

- [COVID-19 Guidance on Remote GBV Services Focusing on Phone-based Case Management and Hotlines](#) (pp. 32-40)
- [Training Module on Providing Quality Essential Hotline Services for Women Subject to Violence](#)
- [Taking a Crisis Call – What to Say and How to Say it \(GBVIMS\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Remote and Mobile Gender-Based Violence Service Delivery Guidelines, pages 63-64 \(IRC\)](#)
- [How to Talk to Survivors About Safe Methods of Contact \(NNEDV\)](#)
- [The GBV Pocket Guide, pages 7-10 \(Inter-Agency Standing Committee\)](#)
- [Quick Tips for Working with an Interpreter \(Women’s Justice Center\)](#)

Women may call the helpline several times (and throughout the day or night) to receive support and before making any other decisions about next steps (e.g., leaving for a shelter/safe accommodation; going to the police; engaging legal counsel; seeking labour union support, etc.). For those providing ongoing support, such as case workers, it is generally important that if a call or chat session drops/ends, the case worker does not call back, as this may be an indication that she cannot communicate safely. At the beginning of the call/chat, determine a **safe word or a code** that can be used to change the subject if they feel unsafe or that they are being listened to. It can be something simple such as

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<sup>14</sup> The term helpline is used in this brief to indicate support lines. Often, helpline and hotline are used interchangeably and may mean the same thing in practice. However, in some contexts, hotline refers solely to a number for reporting abuse or misconduct to authorities.

discussing health/COVID or something related to music, television, cooking, children's education, etc. or an agreed hand signal if it is a video chat format. If the case worker does reach out, there should be no indication that the call is from a violence helpline in case someone other than the client picks up the phone. When the woman is on the phone, first check that it is safe to proceed with the call/chat.

Show and remind the survivor **how to delete communications** from the mobile phone, computer, tablet, etc. so that there is no trace of contact or record of the information that was exchanged. For details on how to do this, see the Safe Technology Brief.

### Safety Planning<sup>15,16,17,18,19</sup>

A safety plan is a personalized, practical plan that includes ways to remain safe at different points in time: while in a relationship (this could be with an intimate partner or employer); when planning to leave; or after leaving. Safety planning does not mean that the woman wants to leave. Generally, a safety plan is meant to help women so that there is no violence and that her needs (basic, social and emotional well-being) are met. Things to consider in safety planning with women migrant workers, include:

- Safe places to stay that are not with the abuser (family, friend, trusted neighbor, shelter, hotel, rescue facility, other)
- Safe spaces within their workplace or home, if they cannot leave immediately
- Discussions around routines, schedules and interactions to determine when abuse is occurring to brainstorm ways to mitigate those risks
- Plans for an emergency escape
- Instructions on how to disable GPS and any other location services on the mobile phone
- Guidance on keeping important contact numbers (helpline, case worker number, labour union rep, consular office, women's NGO line) stored electronically or on paper under code names
- Suggestions to pack a small bag (hidden from sight) with essential items, including copies of important documents or photocopies of documents (IDs, visa/immigration papers, work permits, children's records, medical records, etc.)
- Thought to childcare plans (with information on legal measures related to migration and child custody)
- Guidance on financial safety planning, such as saving money, opening up an independent bank account, changing usernames and pins for accounts, cards or using digital services that cannot be accessed by partners, employers, etc.
- Identify comforts and encourage socializing with friends and family (virtual if social distancing is in place); listening to music; creating spaces for peaceful moments,

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<sup>15</sup> Mauney, R. Providing Quality Essential Hotline Services for Women Subject to Violence

<sup>16</sup> ASISTA. [Enhanced Safety Planning for Immigrant Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)

<sup>17</sup> [National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)

<sup>18</sup> Davies, J. [Victim-defined Safety Planning: A Summary](#)

<sup>19</sup> Madre. [From Global Coordination to Local Strategies: A Practical Approach to Prevent, Address and Document Domestic Violence During COVID-19](#)



getting fresh air (e.g. watering plants, hanging clothes to dry, going for a walk, playing with children) and self-care.

- Reminding individuals to have dangerous objects out of sight and locked away if possible and avoiding the use of personal items (such as scarves) that can be used to harm her.

For resources on safety planning, see:

- [COVID-19 Guidance on Remote GBV Services Focusing on Phone-based Case Management and Hotlines](#) (pp. 45-48)
- [Safety planning for violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic \(available in 9 languages\)](#)
- [Safety Planning with GBV Survivors Over the Phone \(GBVIMS\)](#)
- [The Hotline](#)
- [Sanctuary for Families](#)

## SAFETY PLANNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



A safety plan **DOES NOT** replace urgently calling the police for help, but will help you be prepared. Call the police for urgent help when needed.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER UNDER THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- » **Keep up to date** on transportation availability.
- » During an urgent crisis, **call the police** or the nearest women's organization.

### THINGS TO KNOW IF YOU ARE A WOMAN MIGRANT WORKER

- » You **ALWAYS** have a right to safety and protection no matter your migration status.
- » Call the nearest **women's or workers' organization** or other services you need.
- » Ask for **translation services** when you seek services.
- » Link with peer support networks that can provide information and services.
- » Contact the number of your **embassy and consular services** if you are abroad.



## THINGS TO PACK IN YOUR EMERGENCY BAG

- Identification
- Legal documents
- Extra keys
- Cash and cards
- Extra clothes
- Sanitary products
- A prepaid cell phone
- Phone charger
- Regular medications
- Important contact numbers

### TO GET SUPPORT, CALL THE FOLLOWING NUMBERS

COUNTRY	POLICE	SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS
Cambodia	1288	1280 (Helpline Number)
Indonesia	112	081317617622 (P2TP2A)
Lao PDR	191	1362 (Lao Women's Union)
Malaysia	999	03 7956 3488 (Women's Aid Organisation)
Myanmar	199	067 3 404 222 (Union Government)
Philippines	177	0919 777 7377 (PNP Women and Children's Protection Center)
Singapore	999	1800 777 5555 (AWARE) 6341 5535 (Home*)
Thailand	191	1300 (One Stop Crisis Centre)
Viet Nam	113	1900 96 96 80 (Viet Nam Women's Union)

\* Specialized for women migrant workers in Singapore.

## Counseling/Crisis Management<sup>20,21,22</sup>

There are tremendous psychosocial impacts on women who are at risk of and fear or have experienced violence. For women migrant workers, this may be compounded by additional trauma stemming from experiences related to the process of migration and from being outside of their home country and away from their usual support networks. Survivors may be feeling the symptoms of trauma without recognizing it as trauma. Some of these symptoms are depression, post-traumatic stress and other anxiety disorders, chronic pain, palpitations, stomach problems, sleep difficulties, eating disorders, suicide attempts and unhealthy consumption of substances (e.g., alcohol), difficulty concentrating, remembering, retaining information, organizing thoughts, solving problems, confusion, etc. It can also increase feelings of isolation, distrust, anger, fear, irritability, being withdrawn and hypervigilance.

An attendant's primary responsibility in the area of counselling is to offer non-judgmental listening; provide validation and empathy, minimize self-blame, shame, guilt or any other harmful feelings of self-deprecation; and support the woman to strengthen her coping mechanisms and self-reliance. For longer-term psychosocial support, callers can be referred to psychologists, therapists or other counsellors and/or should be referred to support groups (especially those that are linguistically and culturally relevant). In the context of remote support groups, it is critical that any group sessions, via conferencing platforms or video chat, be done in privacy to protect all participants.

Components of a trauma-informed approach to violence includes: providing survivors with information about the traumatic effects of violence (i.e. that what they are feeling and the way they may be reacting are normal/common); acknowledge that trauma may have come from multiple experiences (but without assuming the specifics of a woman migrant worker's life or asking her to explain her journey); adapting programmes and services to meet survivors' trauma- and mental health-related needs; creating opportunities for survivors to discuss their responses to trauma; offering resources and referrals; and reflecting on caseworker/attendants' own practice and the practice of the helpline overall when receiving women migrant workers.

Resources:

- [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Exercises](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Tools](#) (WHO)
- [Instructions for Developing a Coping Plan](#) p. 65 (IRC)
- [Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations an Organizational Reflection Toolkit](#) (National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health)

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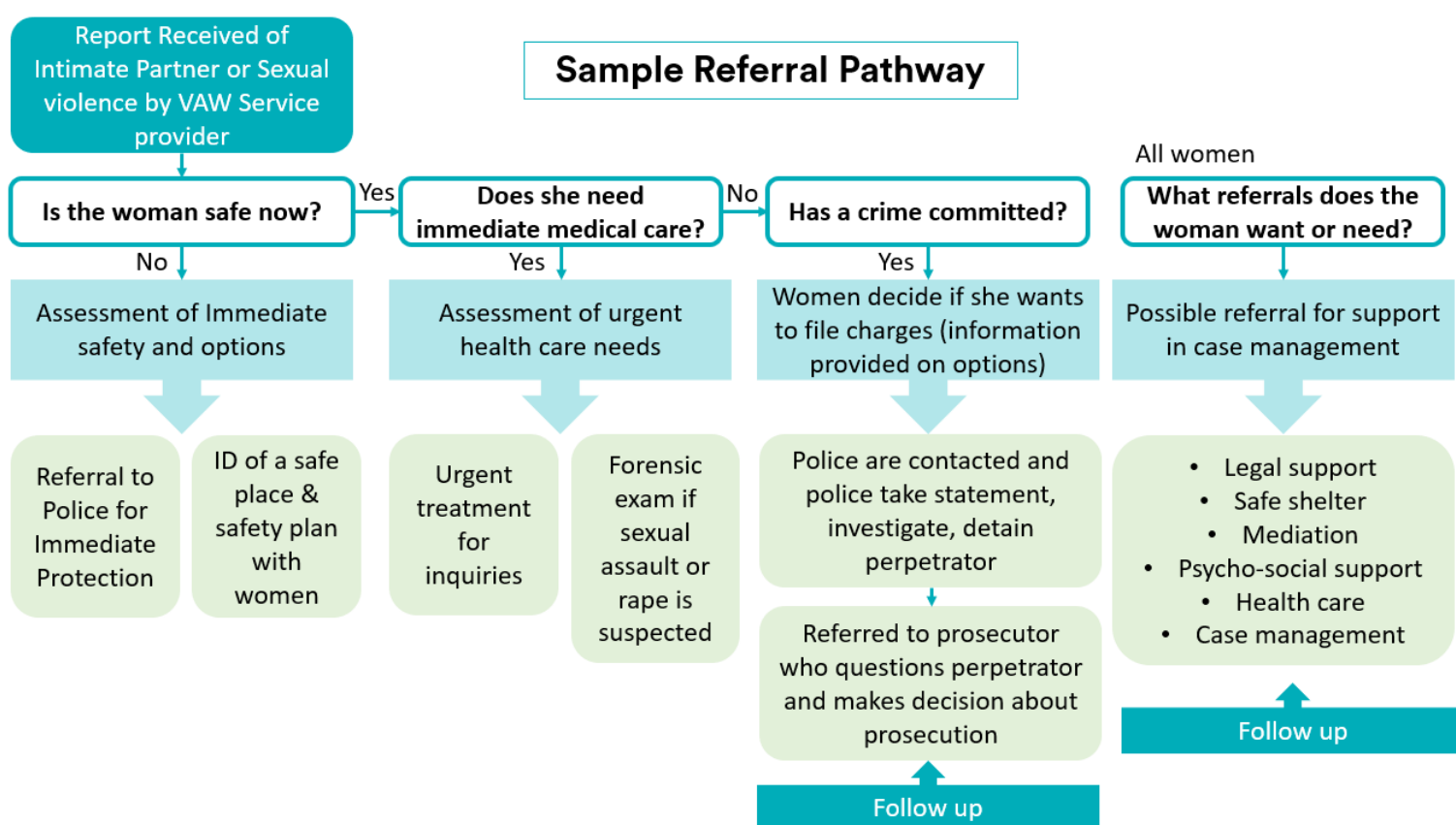
<sup>20</sup> WHO. [Violence against Women](#)

<sup>21</sup> National Center on Trauma, Domestic Violence and Mental Health. [A Trauma-Informed Approach to Domestic Violence Advocacy](#)

<sup>22</sup> Casa Esperanza. Remote Work: [Considerations from A Culturally Specific Organization](#)

## Referral and Coordination<sup>23</sup>

Helplines provide an important first-contact service for survivors. For some, the support received through the helpline may be adequate to meet her needs or may be an important first step to seeking additional, more specialized support. Generally, all women, women migrant workers included, should be able to access quality coordinated multi-sectoral services. These services comprise of: health (medical and psychosocial); police/protection; consular; justice/legal; and social (safe accommodation/housing, economic/financial, other material support to meet the basic needs of the woman and her children). Because a women migrant worker may be facing multiple challenges at home and with employers, she may prioritize certain needs over others. This does not minimize the violence she is experiencing and the harm that it is likely inflicting, but it is critical to follow her lead and meet her where she is. This is particularly important when providing referrals remotely, as it may be difficult to fully gauge her situation over the phone or online, especially in a one-off conversation.



Develop a protocol to respond specifically to the needs of women migrant workers based on their lived experiences in the country and after consulting with specialized service agencies on their policies and practices related to women migrant workers. Ensure that any restrictions to services or legal barriers related to migration status are communicated clearly when providing information. Although there should not be mandatory reporting to authorities by any service provider attending to women who have experienced violence, some countries continue to require it. For women migrant workers, fears of detention,

<sup>23</sup> ILO and UN Women. [16 Essentials for Quality Multisectoral Service Provision to Women Migrant Workers Subject to Violence](#)

deportation or separation from their children are the biggest barriers to accessing services. Providing accurate information is critical, as is providing alternative support if traditional channels pose a problem for women migrant workers' safety and autonomous decision-making.

### Support Services In-house and through Referral

In Myanmar, [Akhaya](#) has established community, township and regional level referral pathways with different government departments, such as police, hospitals and the Department of Social Welfare, as well as with various NGOs that provide legal and other support.

In Singapore, the organization AWARE, provides women with counselling, dedicated care for sexual assault, workplace harassment and discrimination guidance, legal aid and connections to support groups.

In Viet Nam, [CSAGA](#) operates six counselling hotlines in the country. Referral pathways exist at the provincial level with local authorities, the provincial women's union, police and health centres.

Helplines should also strive to be familiar and coordinated with organizations and relevant government entities that are mandated to support the safety and well-being of women migrant workers (both in the country of origin and in the host country), providing they are equipped to and are fulfilling these obligations. These can include any number of partners that can be identified through research, knowledge gained directly from women migrant workers or with the support of the Safe and Fair programme staff from ILO, UN Women and UNODC. Depending on the context, there may be NGOs, migrant resource centres, women's trade or labour unions, consular offices or embassies, among others to connect with. These are important partners for labour grievances and protections.

#### Resources:

- [Essential Services Package for Women Subject to Violence \(UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and UNODC\)](#)
- [Service directory for women migrant workers in the ASEAN region \(ILO and UN Women\)](#)
- [Training Module on Coordinated Quality Services for Frontline Service Providers](#)
- [Combating Violence against Migrants: Criminal Justice Measures to Prevent, Investigate, Prosecute and Punish Violence against Migrants, Migrant Workers and their Families and to Protect Victims \(UNODC and IFCRC\)](#)
- [Migrant Resource Centre Operations Manual \(ILO\)](#)
- [Running an Effective Migrant Resource Centre: A Handbook for Practitioners \(IOM\)](#)

## Target women migrant in advertising the helpline

Raise awareness of the existence of the helplines in the different languages of the migrant populations. Develop specific communications materials for the helpline. Thought should be given to how to brand the helpline and what short phrases or words can be used to relay important information:

- It is non-discriminatory and for all women regardless of their origin or migration status.
- it is confidential and the woman's safety is the top priority.
- attendants are there to help, not make decisions for the caller.

Promote the helpline through channels that women migrant workers are likely to access (including places where they may congregate and in ways that it can be kept secret from the abuser). These may include social media channels, community radio or television stations and physical locations (e.g. places of worship, pharmacies, grocery stores, etc.). Disseminate to all referral pathway partners and to the community and faith-based groups that women migrant workers may be accessing, such as migrant resource centres, consular offices and others who may be in contact with women migrant workers (e.g. labour inspectors, trade union reps, women's labour federations, etc.). All recipients of the helpline contact should be minimally briefed on how to present the helpline with the intent of allaying any fears or mistrust in the service and promoting help-seeking. If any changes occur that will impact callers, it is important to recommunicate with all points of contact, so that they are fully aware of the changes.

### Reaching Women migrant Workers with Information on Helplines

In Malaysia, [Tenaganita](#), distributes wristbands that contain the helpline number on the inside to women migrant workers during their post-arrival training.

The Philippines has established a Facebook page '[OFW Help](#)' specifically for their nationals working overseas and who need emergency help and/or are in distress. Among other things, the OFW facilitates repatriation through Philippine Embassies and in coordination with destination country governments.

## Self-care<sup>24,25</sup>

Providing services to women who are at risk of or experiencing violence is a challenging undertaking that is taxing- physically (long hours with a phone or computer); mentally (undertaking active listening and engaging adeptly with accurate and tailored responses) and emotionally (hearing harrowing personal stories and providing empathy). During emergencies (e.g. COVID), it is likely that the work becomes even harder, due to increased caseloads and increased personal burdens (fears around health, additional domestic responsibilities, less mobility and fewer social outlets, etc.). In addition, text and chat

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> GBVIMS. [Supervision and Staff Care](#)



conversations tend to be longer than verbal exchanges and without carefully planned time boundaries may extend throughout the day or over several days (as opposed to one in-person sitting). It is normal to feel tired, stressed, overwhelmed and possibly angry or sad. The physical and emotional wellbeing of staff is crucial so that they are able to provide the best service possible. Self-care can take many forms, including:

- Keeping a regular daily schedule with breaks (including safely outside), eating well and exercising.
- Keeping a clear separation between work life and home life. This is even more important when working from home.
- Keeping in contact with family and friends.
- Making time for leisure activities that bring joy (reading, listening to music, watching shows, gardening, etc.)
- Accessing emotional support from a counselor.
- Doing stress-relieving exercises (e.g. meditation, yoga, mindfulness breathing)

Organizations/helpline centres can:


- Ensure proper rotation of staff with days off to disconnect from work and plan shifts so that service providers can attend to caring responsibilities.
- Provide staff with space to discuss their feelings, concerns, needs and ideas for addressing them.
- Consider having a psychological expert available to backstop and support staff.
- Creating chat groups or other ways for staff to connect and support each other being mindful of when and how staff want to be contacted.
- Make work supervision routine: debriefs on cases (keeping them anonymous); supporting with particularly challenging cases; checking-in regularly with staff one-on-one or through a peer network; and sharing resources for staff to continue building their skills.

### Self-Care and Support

In Myanmar, [Akhaya](#) employs an empowerment model which provides continuous training and support to its staff and mentoring to its partner organizations and individuals at the community level.

### Remote-Offered Skill-Building Application (ROSA)

ROSA is an app that was designed to serve staff working remotely. It provides key content on gender-based violence knowledge, case management, communication and attitude skills. It offers self or supervisor-administered skills assessments and a community space for users to expand their learning through facilitated remote discussions and distance supervision.

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- [Download the app for IOS](#)
  - [Download the app for Android](#)

Resources:

- [Remote Supervision and Self-Care](#) (GBVIMS)
- [Self and Collective Care](#) (Horn, J. GBV Prevention Network)
- [Doing What Matters in Times of Stress](#) (WHO)

## 1. About survivors of violence

- Survivors may be impacted in many ways from the abuse they have experienced.
- They may be feeling afraid, ashamed, stigmatized, powerless and even blame themselves for what has happened to them.

### Avoid Judgement and Build Trust



## 2. About women migrant workers

### Additional challenges and worries of women migrant workers

- Isolation from informal support (e.g. family and friends)
- Lacking knowledge of their rights
- Fear of reporting to police due to possible deportation
- Language barriers
- Fear of being discriminated by service providers
- Fear of losing jobs and incomes
- Fear of being separated from and/or losing custody of children
- Fears of being rejected by her home community if she returns

## 3. Do I have what I need?

A **reference guide** on migrant women workers to help understand her situation

**Health fact sheets** tailored to migrant women (language considerations and no mandatory reporting) that can refer her for medical needs

Knowledge and connections to **social-emotional support groups for migrant women survivors**, such as peer-networks

A list of **partners to deal with common labour violations**, such as labour attachés, trade unions, embassies, or migrant resource centres

A **safety planning** template for migrant women workers: where she can go w/o reporting to authorities; if she is isolated/trapped in a home; etc.

A sheet with details on **laws and regulations** related to migrant women workers who arrived through both formal and irregular channels

**Referral pathways and protocols** that are updated with information friendly to women migrant workers

A roster of **interpreters** and cultural mediators and their contact information



## 4. How do I keep technologies safe?

Employ **multiple options** (phone, SMS, website chat, apps) for survivors to access support using languages spoken by migrant women workers

**Use methods that are used by women migrant workers** that are free or affordable, easy to access and that do not require multiple steps (e.g. app downloads with system requirements; creating an account; signing/logging-in or authentications)

**Do not use automatic translation**, which can be problematic

**Test, monitor and adjust the methods** being used on a regular basis to ensure you are meeting survivor's needs with the highest standards of privacy and security available

Use equipment supplied by the organization/agency and receive training on their use. **Do not use personal devices** and do not download personal items or software on work devices

Ensure you/your agency has control over the technology being used to **maintain the highest standards of security** and privacy to avoid interception. Third parties should not have access to information transmitted (e.g. databases, files, saved chats or images, recordings, etc.)

**Provide information to survivors** on how to erase communications, strengthen privacy settings, improve their safety and security and best methods to document abuse



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## 5. Survivor-centred principles do's and don'ts

### DO's

- ✓ Explain to her how you will maintain privacy and confidentiality
- ✓ Explain to her how to reconnect if the call drops
- ✓ Ensure privacy when interacting with survivors
- ✓ Keep records in a locked cabinet or in an anonymized database with password protection
- ✓ Respect women's individual circumstances and their right to make their own informed decisions
- ✓ Reflect on your own biases and learn from the survivor's cultural and social experiences
- ✓ Take steps to maintain self-care. This is critical for you and in service to other women

### DON'Ts

- ✗ Share any information without the survivor's consent
- ✗ Call her back if the call drops
- ✗ Work in a space where others can see or hear your communication
- ✗ Leave paper records in places that are visible or accessible
- ✗ Tell survivors what to do or coax them into any decisions
- ✗ Assume you know her background and circumstances
- ✗ Neglect your own well-being



Spotlight Initiative



## 6. Active Listening

- **Paraphrase and summarize** what the survivor says, as needed, to show that you are listening and understanding
- **Clarify** when necessary
- **Reflect** content and/or feeling. Help the survivor focus if they drift into another topic
- **Use non-verbal communication techniques** and allow time for silence and thoughts
- **Focus on what the person is saying**, rather than guess, or prepare what you yourself will say next

Let me see if I have this right....

It sounds like you were very scared in the moment when he yelled and raised his fist.

When you say he was threatening, can you tell me more about what he was doing?

You said earlier that you were walking home, and then ... he surprised you on the path...



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## 7. Effective Questioning

Three types of questions:

1. **Open questions:** these motivate the survivor to talk and expand on what she is saying. Use these questions often.
2. **Closed questions (yes/no):** these can inhibit the survivor from talking. Use these questions only when specific information is needed.
3. **Questions starting with 'Why':** These can sound like blame to a survivor. **Avoid** using these questions.

If there is an interpreter, make sure they follow these points as well. Be cautious of sentences such as why didn't you seek support in the destination country? Why didn't you get official documents? These sentences will blame her.

How were you able to get to a safe place?

Tell me more about how that happened.

Would you like to see a doctor?

~~Why did you do that?~~



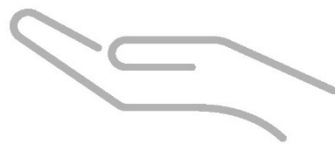
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## 8. Validate Feelings

**Allow the survivor to feel what they are feeling**  
– and let them know that it is okay and that it is normal. This helps the survivor feel safe with you.



It's okay to cry;  
crying is an expression  
of emotion.

Many women in your situation  
would also feel angry.

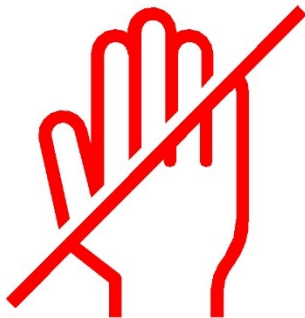
“It is normal for you to  
feel so upset after what  
you have been through;  
many people who  
have had similar  
experiences as you also  
feel upset.”



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## 9. Challenge Self-Blame



- As we have heard, survivors will often feel guilty and blame themselves for the abuse
- **It is never the fault of the survivor**
- If someone is feeling guilty or blaming themselves, state that this is a normal reaction, but assure them that it is never the fault of the survivor
- Always be respectful in challenging self blame and avoid arguing with the survivor

- Make sure that she knows her legal status and migration are not a cause of violence. It is never the fault of survivor no matter her circumstance.
- Acknowledge the challenges related to seeking support in a destination country (new place).



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## 10. Healing Statements

Builds relationship	Thank you for telling me
Validates and empowers	You are very brave for telling me
Builds trust	I believe you
Reassurance and non-blaming	What happened was not your fault
Expresses empathy	I am sorry this happened to you.



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Photo: UN Women/Younghwa Choi

# Remote Service Provision for Women Migrant Workers at Risk or Subject to Violence

The Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN Region Programme, is part of the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls by 2030, a global, multi-year initiative between the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN). Safe and Fair focuses on ASEAN countries and is implemented through a partnership between the ILO and UN Women, in collaboration with UNODC, and is delivered at both local and national levels through governments, trade unions, employer organizations, civil society organizations and women's organizations, and at the regional level through ASEAN institutions.

The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. It is the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls. Launched with a seed funding commitment of €500 million from the European Union, the Spotlight Initiative represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality as a precondition and driver for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. As a demonstration fund for action on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Spotlight Initiative is demonstrating that a significant, concerted and comprehensive investment in gender equality and ending violence can make a transformative difference in the lives of women and girls.

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