

# Setting the Stage: Organizational Framework for Responding to Gender-Based Violence

## INTRODUCTION

The settlement and anti-violence sectors have worked collaboratively on the development of a national strategy to address gender-based violence (GBV) in newcomer, immigrant and refugee communities, along with other project activities through funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

This framework reflects recommendations for settlement organization leaders related to policies and protocols that were identified as part of our initial needs assessment, as well as through ongoing consultations about the importance of considering safety when supporting newcomers, immigrants and refugees experiencing GBV.

## BACKGROUND

In our project needs assessment we found that most organizational policies and protocols focus on micro-level interactions with GBV survivors, including:

- Recognizing the signs of GBV
- Understanding different forms or patterns of GBV
- Assessing risk and planning for safety

However, for frontline staff in the settlement and anti-violence sectors to carry out recommended actions requires support from organization leaders. Existing policies and protocols rarely consider organizational and systemic factors in GBV response. This framework aims to address this gap by offering recommendations for organization leaders for policy development and implementation, as well as strategies for cross-sectoral collaboration.

## PURPOSE

The overarching objective of this framework is to enhance awareness that client safety related to GBV should be considered and included in organizational policies and protocols.

It is also intended to provide settlement agencies and anti-violence organizations with guidelines for developing or enhancing existing policies and protocols using a safety lens to better support newcomer, immigrant and refugee clients experiencing or affected by GBV.

Recognizing the importance of addressing the unique and distinct needs of individuals experiencing GBV, the recommendations included here aim to promote greater consistency across the settlement and anti-violence sectors in recognizing and responding to the needs of newcomers, immigrants and refugees.



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## FOCUS OF THIS FRAMEWORK



This framework focuses on GBV awareness for organization leaders in relation to supporting staff and working with newcomer, immigrant, and refugee clients experiencing or impacted by GBV.

The legal obligation of employers to ensure a workplace free of harassment and violence is another consideration for agencies to address through their Human Resources (HR), Labour Standards and Human Rights laws.

## WHAT ARE POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS ?

**Policies** are principles, guidelines or frameworks that are adopted or designed by an organization.

**Protocols** are solution-oriented. They are a set of decision-making rules, instructions and standards based on best practice.



# Physically and Emotionally Safe Spaces

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS CREATE SAFER SPACES?

- Evaluate, assess and be proactive about how physical spaces in your organization are allocated. Office sharing could be a barrier to disclosure, so set up adequate and welcoming rooms for consultations requiring privacy.
- Arrange your lobby, intake, and consultation areas with client comfort in mind. If possible, it can be helpful to have a play space for children as well as child-minding supports.
- Ensure your agency uses visual cues like multilingual posters and brochures about GBV to communicate that this is a safe place to share difficult experiences. Some posters or images depicting GBV can be triggering. Incorporate empowering images that show diverse client profiles to engage men and boys, 2SLGBTQIA+ clients, etc.
- Create physically accessible spaces for all genders and abilities (i.e. wheelchair accessible entrances, washrooms and inclusive services for those who are transgender and non-binary). Follow [disability and inclusion guidelines](#).
- Consider alternatives when adjustments to physical spaces are not possible or are limited (i.e. going for a walk with the client or meeting somewhere nearby where they feel comfortable).
- Provide tailored spaces and services for specific groups. For example, women's groups that ensure privacy, dignity, and inclusion considerations for religious and cultural needs or programming for newcomers who may not be out within their ethnic community.
- Develop protocols for off-site work to keep staff and clients safe in community centres and other places.
- Provide training for staff in understanding physically and emotionally safe spaces by offering professional development, clinical supervision and workshops/conferences.
- Incorporate training on anti-racism, anti-oppression, anti-violence and 2SLGBTQIA+ information to increase intersectional understanding.

### PREAMBLE

A client experiencing GBV needs to know that your organization is a physically and emotionally safe place for them to communicate, disclose, and seek help. When considering how to create a safer space, it is important to think about how various factors such as gender, culture, age, ability, and religion may shape how an individual understands what constitutes a safe space.

### OFF-SITE SAFETY CHECKLIST



When meeting with clients off-site, some recommendations include:

- Establish a start time and approximate end time of meetings with a clear purpose of the visit so the client knows what to expect and has advance notice.
- If you are going alone, ensure a co-worker knows where you are going and when you are expected to return.
- Do not agree to meet anyone in their home or off-site if you sense your own safety or that of the client may be compromised.
- Ensure the client's confidentiality and privacy by meeting in a private space.
- Ask the client if their phone number is safe to call.
- If there are safety concerns, make a safety plan with the client and map out the safest route to and from the meeting.
- Avoid discussing the client's situation in the presence of their partner/family/friend or using this person as an interpreter as they may be, or support, the perpetrator.

Culturally safe approaches are those that recognize and challenge unequal power relations between service providers and survivors by building equitable, two-way relationships characterized by respect, shared responsibility, and cultural exchange. Survivors must have their culture, values and preferences taken into account in the provision of services.

(Government of Canada, 2017. It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender Based Violence.)



# Informed and Aware Staff

## PREAMBLE

All members of your organization, including volunteers, should have a basic understanding of what GBV is and the warning signs to look out for in newcomer, immigrant, and refugee clients. Establishing a common base of knowledge can increase skills, improve competencies, and facilitate the adoption of best practices for responding to GBV.

## ESTABLISH A BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF GBV



There are fundamental tools and knowledge that support GBV awareness, including:

- [Forms of abuse](#), including intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, family violence, and [economic abuse](#)
- [Warning signs of GBV](#)
- Common myths and misconceptions about GBV and sexual violence
- Cycle of violence
- Power and Control Wheel (including one [specific to immigrant women](#))
- Barriers to leaving an abusive relationship
- Understanding the structural forms and root causes of GBV, including white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, prescriptive gender roles, ableism, poverty, food insecurity, lack of affordable housing, lack of transportation, and precarious employment

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS INCREASE GBV AWARENESS?

- Support staff in developing awareness about GBV. This can include providing [training opportunities](#) in collaboration with anti-violence experts on recognizing and responding to GBV and understanding trauma related to resettlement and migration.
  - » Provide cultural humility/awareness/safety training for staff.
  - » Ensure that training on risk assessment/safety planning and GBV is specific to your site, location and services. Look for training developed by subject matter experts and based on existing resources for regional contexts within Canada (i.e. rural, urban, remote).
  - » It is important that this training includes information on forms of trauma that immigrants and refugees may experience on their migration journey (i.e. resettlement and integration challenges, possible trauma such as war and sexualized violence).
- Provide clear and accessible guidelines for staff that include information about:
  - » Clients who experience GBV while having a precarious immigration status/sponsorship agreement and the resources available to them.
  - » Legal information around GBV, immigration categories/status and criminal law.
  - » Proactively addressing misinformation and GBV stigma as a regular workplace practice.
- Direct efforts to securing funding and resources to support GBV-specific programming and staffing.
- Include information on GBV response services and supports in organizational materials and awareness campaigns.
  - » Women and girls and other marginalized populations often have less access to information and services and may receive inaccurate information. This may be deliberate to uphold existing power dynamics, or due to other barriers.
- Minimize the risk of vicarious trauma by putting in place healthy workplace policies that support staff well-being, such as an employee assistance program. Recognize that staff may also experience GBV and be prepared to respond appropriately.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of and up to date on inclusive and appropriate terminology. Periodically review and update any informational material used in your organization.
- Provide specialized training to intake staff and others likely to receive disclosures of GBV. This can include training on safety planning and the dynamics of abuse (especially for violence against women [VAW], intimate partner violence [IPV] and family violence), as well as protocols to ensure staff safety when interacting with clients or perpetrators.



# Client-Centred Interactions

## PREAMBLE

Assumptions about GBV and how it impacts certain groups can lead to stereotypes, stigma and actions that can harm clients. Organizational policies and protocols that support effective client interactions focus on building relationships of trust, using violence- and trauma-informed approaches and supporting staff to have client-centred communication.

## RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES CHECKLIST

- Become aware of rape myths and intimate partner violence (IPV) myths and avoid reinforcing them.
- Avoid interrogating/why questions (i.e. “Why didn’t you just leave?”).
- Enhance self-awareness of implicit and explicit personal biases.
- Believe and validate survivors.
- Use active listening and empathetic response skills (i.e. tell the client it isn’t their fault).
- Follow the client’s lead and rhythm.
- Ask or express concern about the client’s safety.
- Connect the client to resources and help them identify their own supports and options.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS FACILITATE CLIENT-CENTRED INTERACTIONS?

- Create organizational procedures that:
  - » Reduce instances of clients being moved from one counsellor to another and address long waitlists.
  - » Move clients from crisis to longer-term supports as quickly as possible.
  - » Support coordinated responses to disclosure.
  - » Acknowledge that relationship building takes time, and provide staff the room to build rapport and trust.
- Understand that all levels of staff may encounter GBV in the course of their work and therefore it is important to:
  - » Recognize the experience and expertise of, and consult with, frontline staff on how the organization can better support them and clients experiencing GBV.
  - » Use program evaluation to promote safety by using methods that are culturally appropriate and informed by client experience. Outcome measures need to reflect GBV research.
  - » Provide opportunities for staff to review how the organization is responding to GBV and other issues related to client safety.
- Increase or enhance GBV awareness around prevention for diverse newcomers. For example, offer resources about healthy relationships, conflict resolution, parenting support and substance abuse. Encourage virtual support networks for clients as a way to release stress and reduce social isolation that allows GBV to persist.
- Create opportunities to work with men and boys on GBV awareness, positive masculinity, and healthy relationships. Engage in research, planning and development around the roots of GBV (i.e. toxic masculinity, patriarchy, misogyny, rape culture).

Every new person a client must talk to forces them to retell their experience, which may create a lack of safety, predictability and agency for the client. Therefore, it is important to try to reduce the number of people a client has to communicate with.



## WHAT ARE RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING?

**Risk assessment** is the process of determining the level of risk in a situation of GBV.

**Safety planning** is the process of mapping out the steps a person can take to try to be safer (physically, emotionally, and financially) while living in, leaving, or after leaving a situation of GBV.

It is important that organization leaders and staff are aware of **warning signs for high risk**, and that protocols are in place in order to respond to high risk situations.

# Risk Assessment and Safety Planning

## PREAMBLE

Not all organizations will have specialized GBV services, but staff may be recipients of a disclosure or may see signs of GBV and need to know how to respond. Below are ways to incorporate risk assessment and safety planning in your organizational policies and protocols to support client safety.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS PREPARE FOR RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING?

- Maintain and share current lists of crisis lines, information and pamphlets in multiple languages with all staff to be provided to clients when necessary.
- Ensure there is a clear list of protocols, specific to your organization's policies and provincial laws, to be followed if a disclosure is made and there is danger to someone's life (i.e. police, child protective services, shelter).
- Provide practical safety strategies for staff to be aware of when supporting clients (i.e. a second exit to the office in case the client does not want to be seen coming in and out of the building).
- Review and discuss templates and procedures for risk assessment and safety planning with frontline staff for input. Organization leaders are responsible for ensuring forms/processes are explained, available and maintained.

**If you are not a designated GBV support staff member and/ or do not have specific training or organizational policies in place - please consult with anti-violence organizations or experts in your community (i.e. sexual assault centres, transition houses or victim services, crisis lines).**

## SUPPORT FRONTLINE STAFF TO:

- Understand that assessing risk and planning for safety is an ongoing process – it is not just a one-time conversation. Options and resources can be discussed with the client as needed, as their needs and situation may change.
- Recognize that there are specific protocols and procedures that need to be followed for risk assessment and safety planning.
- Establish a set of protocols for how to determine safe methods of communication with clients (i.e. if it is safe to call the client at home, if they have a private device to access online resources). If using online resources, ensure that staff inform clients of possible online safety concerns (i.e. shared accounts, browser history).
- Have accurate knowledge from victim services or other anti-violence experts about the processes and the implications of reporting so clients can make an informed decision on their own (i.e. women may choose not to report, and the police should not be called by staff unless the client asks for accompaniment to do so or a crime is in progress). Focus on providing the client with options.
- Make warm referrals, offering to call chosen resources with the client when possible. To enhance cultural safety, provide clients with information about what to expect and conversely, provide the referral agency with information about client needs (i.e. considerations for food, clothing, prayer and quiet spaces). It is important to use and model anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches.



# Collaboration and Referral

## PREAMBLE

Cross-sectoral collaboration requires an investment from organizations in developing policies and protocols around communication, clarity of roles and logistics that build strong, supportive networks between organizations.

## CONNECTING TO PROGRAMMING

Collaboration and referral are strategic ways to enhance programming, meet emerging needs and build safer communities.

**It is essential that connections are made and in place** to build relationships with local anti-violence organizations and ensure quick and efficient referrals.



## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS ENCOURAGE CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION AND REFERRAL?

- Support information sharing and skill building between the settlement and anti-violence sectors to build a common base of knowledge about GBV, migration and settlement and work together to create culturally safe spaces.
- Recognize that organizational intentionality and accountability is essential to fostering collaboration between the anti-violence and settlement sectors.
- Provide leadership in demonstrating how your organization is connected to other organizations. Who does what? What distinguishes them? And how can you work together? Consider planning social mapping exercises that look at:
  - » Shared understanding, terminology and concepts
  - » Creating and affirming values and practices that promote collaboration
  - » Guidelines for warm referral processes
- Refer to the priorities in our [GBV Settlement Sector Strategy](#) and develop strategies to address GBV at a cross-sectoral level. Create spaces and involve staff to champion and help lead the work on these priorities.
- Continue to collaborate and work together with partner and local organizations and community leaders to address the wider issue of GBV in Canada. Seek out local/provincial/territorial GBV coalitions, starting with your settlement or anti-violence umbrella organizations.
- Increase awareness of and collaboration with specific and specialized service providers (i.e. immigration and legal supports).
- Support internal collaboration (i.e. positive staff communication, meetings) for awareness of organizational GBV supports and services as well as for referral and information about external resources.
- Build and model relationships between anti-violence and settlement organizations to support quick and efficient referrals.



# Programming Ideas

## PREAMBLE

Settlement services in your organization may include a broad range of information and orientation sessions, recreational activities, special events, workshops, and language classes.

While ensuring the inclusion of GBV programming is important, remember all programming should be a safe space for discussion and education about GBV.



**Effective  
programming  
can change  
the narrative  
around GBV**

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS PROMOTE THE INCLUSION OF GBV AWARENESS IN PROGRAMMING?

- Plan individual and group sessions or host an event to share information about GBV for clients. Children should generally not be present at GBV sessions, so make other activities available for them.
- Consider diverse ways to share GBV information – online, in person, social media campaigns, etc. Ensure that this information is accessible and available in multiple languages.
- Incorporate arts-based programming. Theatre, art, and music programs can be great ways to engage both youth and adults in conversations about GBV, as well as offer an expressive outlet for those who are experiencing or have experienced GBV.
- Work with children and youth around this topic - partner with schools or after-school clubs to provide dating safety workshops that promote healthy relationships or bystander intervention workshops with older youth.
- Look for entry points to introduce GBV awareness using a positive strengths-based approach, such as parenting or healthy family workshops.
- Use a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) lens to see who is missing/left out/impacted in your programming. Learn about [Gender-Based Analysis Plus](#) and [take the course](#).
- While women are disproportionately affected by GBV, there is also a need for programming that acknowledges the GBV experiences of those in same-sex relationships, non-binary and trans people, as well as male survivors.
- There is a need for specialized programming for perpetrators as GBV can be rooted in trauma.
- Be prepared that in program delivery there could be a disclosure and ensure that staff are able to provide crisis support and referral.
- Create programs and activities that focus on rebuilding after GBV and developing self-esteem and confidence with survivors.
- Consider creative ways to engage men and boys in GBV awareness. Create programming with a focus on education and allyship strategies that address toxic masculinity and are grounded in feminist analysis.
- Look for opportunities to create programs in partnership with other organizations. If you have an idea for programming about a topic you are less familiar with, reach out to experts in that area to collaborate with.



# Systems-Level Policies and Protocols

## PREAMBLE

Settlement and anti-violence organizations do not exist separately from outside events or influences. Their capacity to implement best practices depends in part on systemic factors, such as legislation, government policies, funders, media, and public opinion. Progress towards ending GBV requires that both sectors work together to identify systemic challenges.

By recognizing their organization as one part of a wider, interconnected system, organization leaders can work together to address these challenges. Cross-sectoral collaboration between the settlement and anti-violence sectors has the potential to facilitate systems-level change through increasing cultural competency and establishing a common base of knowledge about GBV.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATION LEADERS FOSTER SYSTEMIC CHANGE WHEN IT COMES TO GBV PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION?

Promote awareness about GBV that recognizes the complexity of Canadian history and current inequities while supporting settlement and integration. Settlement organizations are uniquely placed to raise GBV awareness in this context, with the aim of challenging victim-blaming attitudes and beliefs and looking critically at structural and systemic violence.

- Learn about the newcomer, immigrant, and refugee communities in your region, including their histories of migration, colonization, religion, language, and culture. Recognize the challenges they may face in the settlement process as well as their hopes, dreams, and sources of strength and resilience.
- Centre the voices and experiences of marginalized groups in programming, staff training, and human resources. Assess the extent to which your organization consults with diverse immigrant and refugee communities in the design of programming and in your hiring practices.
- Strengthen awareness with staff and newcomer, immigrant, and refugee clients about Canada's colonial history and the ongoing legacies of cultural genocide and systemic discrimination experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. Encourage recognition among newcomers that we are settlers on this land, and work to build solidarity between migrant and Indigenous organizations and groups.
- Ensure that staff and newcomer, immigrant, and refugee clients are aware of anti-Black racism in Canada and its impacts. Offer information about the intersectional consequences of gender and racial inequality for women and girls, and seek to engage newcomers, immigrants, and refugees in addressing anti-Black racism in their families, communities, schools, and workplaces.

# REFERENCES AND USEFUL RESOURCES

This policy guide is a tool from the GBV Settlement Sector Strategy Project and is one resource that is connected back to the larger initiative. The project website hosts the strategy priorities and the results of our needs assessment, as well as a course offered to service providers through this project. Please access the project website at <https://www.ngbv.ca/>

## CREATING SAFE SPACES

**AMSSA** offers a webinar about supporting clients with disabilities, accessibility and inclusion, all within the Canadian context.

**Caring for Kids New to Canada** has created a national directory to help health professionals become familiar with services for immigrant and refugee youth in their province/territory or region.

The **Elmwood Resource Centre** is a community-building organization in Winnipeg that offers toolkits and information on best practices regarding GBV.

OCASI's **Positive Spaces Initiative (PSI)** aims to support the settlement sector to more effectively serve LGBTQ+ newcomers.

**Rainbow Railroad** is a global not-for-profit organization that helps LGBTQBI+ people facing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

## GBV AWARENESS

The **Anti-Violence Project (AVP)** has created a glossary to introduce some of the language that is used to talk about sexualized violence.

The **Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment** has created a national list of resources for women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV), organized by region.

**Immigrant and Refugee Communities - Neighbours, Friends and Families (IRC/NFF)** is a public education campaign that aims to raise awareness about the signs of GBV and promote bystander intervention.

OCASI's **Initiative to End Gender-Based Violence** provides resources, education and leadership to the immigrant- and refugee-serving sector and the broader community on GBV prevention and survivor support.

The **Violence, Evidence, Guidance, Action (VEGA) Project** has created Pan-Canadian, evidence-based guidance and education resources to assist healthcare and social service providers in recognizing and responding safely to family violence (including child maltreatment and intimate partner violence).

## USING A CLIENT-CENTRED APPROACH

The **GBV Settlement Sector Strategy Project** released a series of webinars that contain strategies for GBV awareness during COVID-19, effective allyship, and engaging men and boys.

YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth's **Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project (GBVP)** through the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs focuses on working with newcomer children, youth, and families to raise awareness about GBV and how to access available resources within their communities.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)'s **Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Project** offers online training, tools and resources to settlement, social and health service professionals working with immigrants and refugees.

OCASI's **Mental Health Promotion in Immigrant- and Refugee-Serving Organizations Project** aims to build the capacity of newcomer and refugee services to promote mental health and newcomer well-being and respond to mental health issues within their organizations.

The **Public Health Agency of Canada** provides an introduction to trauma- and violence-informed approaches to policy and practice.

**Resettlement Assistance Programs (RAPs)** in Ontario identify and respond to incidents of intimate partner violence within the context of their service delivery.

## RISK ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING

The **HELP Toolkit** provides practical guidance to legal advisors about identifying and responding to family violence.

**Safety Plan:** [myplanapp.ca](http://myplanapp.ca)

**Shelter Map:** [sheltersafe.ca](http://sheltersafe.ca)

**Sexual Violence Services:** [endingviolencecanada.org](http://endingviolencecanada.org)

## COLLABORATION AND REFERRAL

**A Report to Guide the Implementation of a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence** provides recommendations and a road map for a National Action Plan on violence against women (VAW) and GBV.

The **UN Women Virtual Knowledge Centre** provides a step-by-step guide on how to engage in coordination at the facility- and community-level.

**To access the online version of this framework, other resources, and project acknowledgments, please go to: [ngbv.ca](http://ngbv.ca)**