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Expanding Existing GBV Prevention and Response Programming in Santo Domingo to Benefit Adolescent Refugee Girls

December 2015 to July 2016

Case Study: Strengthening GBV Prevention & Response in Urban Contexts

Background

As part of a series of urban gender-based violence (GBV) pilot interventions that the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) undertook throughout 2016,¹ the WRC partnered with Asylum Access Ecuador (AAE) in Santo Domingo to address GBV risks among refugee adolescent girls. In particular, the pilot sought to strengthen prevention and response for risks of GBV faced by adolescent girls within their homes. Basing its approach on findings and recommendations previously set forth *Mean Streets: Preventing and Responding to Urban Refugees Risks of GBV*², AAE's pilot activities had the following components:

- Strengthening safe identification and referral of GBV for adolescent girls by convening stakeholders and holding workshops with school psychologists; and
- Conducting a dance therapy program for adolescents at risk of GBV, bringing together both Ecuadorian and refugee adolescents to build protective peer networks, build adolescents' capacities by improving self-worth, and enable the integration of refugees and Ecuadorians.

(1) Strengthening the GBV Referral Pathway:

Based on collaborations with municipal actors in the GBV referral pathway, in particular, the Public Defender's Office & the Cantonal Council for Rights and Protection, it was decided that workshops within schools were a strategic entry point for improving coordination amongst district level actors, building inclusion of refugees, and boosting case identification capacity for adolescents.

"You managed to present in an easy way effective mechanisms to confront difficulties and cases we witness on a daily basis. Thank you for sharing your experience."

– District 2 school psychologist

The workshops targeted:

- School psychologists, as they manage GBV cases in schools.
- Educational District 1 with 204 institutions and District 2, with 116 institutions.

¹ These interventions were part of a multi-year project focused on strengthening GBV prevention and response in urban humanitarian contexts, undertaken with the support of the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. For more information about underlying research findings and additional case studies, visit WRC's [GBV & Urban Settings](#) homepage.

² See WRC. 2016. [Mean Streets: Preventing and Responding to Urban Refugees' Risks of Gender-Based Violence](#)

The workshops' content included:

- Skills & capacity building for identifying potential GBV cases, as well as how to follow-up and confirm them;
- Discussing barriers to reporting & brainstorming strategies to improve the referral pathway for refugee girls;
- Addressing ways of further integrating refugee girls in existing GBV case identification & referral mechanisms; and
- Sensitizing school psychologists to refugees in general to address prejudice.

Following the workshops, eighty-eight percent of participants from District 1 and 82% from District 2 indicated that workshop activities were useful and beneficial and 90% of all participants expressed "high satisfaction" with the workshops. More notably, according to a representative from the Public Defender's office, referrals for GBV cases from these districts increased after this workshop.³

(2) Tailored Programming for Refugee Adolescent Girls: Dance Therapy

Grounded in previous interventions suggesting that strengthening girls' self-esteem can strengthen risk mitigation strategies and improve their reporting of GBV⁴, AAE's urban pilot project also included the launch of a new dance therapy program for adolescent refugee girls that aimed to emphasize girls' rights to their bodies, increase their peer networks, and provide a safe space for integrated activities with refugees and Ecuadorians. The program was organized in the following way:

- Location: the AAE office, for its central location and the availability of activities and spaces for parents and siblings;
- Duration: Weekly sessions from May to July 2016;
- Participants: 15 refugees (10 girls and 5 boys), and 3 Ecuadorians (2 girls and 1 boy);
- Session Contents:
 - Contemporary dance, mindfulness, meditation focused on improving self-awareness and self-worth; and
 - drawing and journal writing, and sharing these with facilitators
- Core Concept: The idea of personal space.



Final dance event for families choreographed and performed by the adolescent dance therapy participants

The girls' journal entries suggested that respect for personal space and one's own body were critical concepts that resonated with participants. In post-project focus groups, participants further reported having higher self-esteem and more positive feelings towards themselves as a result of the activities, as well as increased ability to share feelings and experiences with peers. In questionnaires, 82% of participants rated the program as a 'good' and 'very good' experience.

³ Anecdotally the representative said 10 additional cases had been reported and this was a notable increase, but was unable to provide reporting records.

⁴ WRC. 2016. *Mean Streets: Preventing and Responding to Urban Refugees' Risks of Gender-Based Violence*.

Conclusion

While the projects met with some challenges including a limited timeline, a lack of consistent attendance, and issues with sustainability due to lack of ongoing funding, there are important takeaways from these pilot activities. The following strategies prove most promising for future programming: (i) a multifaceted approach involving a diversity of actors; (ii) meeting stakeholders & service providers where they are; and (iii) Responding to context-specific challenges.

Creative programming alternatives illustrate what is possible for tailored GBV programming in urban contexts. These programs also underline the potential and promise of leveraging existing mechanisms, networks, and partnerships.

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