

2.5 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Introduction

Individual factors are those related to individuals that either increase or decrease their likelihood of experiencing violence, exploitation or abuse before, during or after migrating. This toolkit provides guidance on how to assess the ways in which individual-level factors influence an individual's vulnerability by using the questionnaires provided.

Use of the individual-level questionnaires can only provide a partial understanding of any individual's vulnerability: the information gathered through their use should be complemented by information gathered using the household/family, community and structural level tools. This will allow for a more complete understanding of the individual's vulnerability and how the factors at various levels are interacting and operating to shape their vulnerability. Refer to Parts 3, 4, and 5 for information on conducting assessments of the household/family, community and structural factors.

This toolkit contains: (a) a discussion of different individual-level factors and how they influence vulnerability; (b) a suite of questionnaires to be used to gather the information needed to assess the impact of individual-level factors on an individual's vulnerability; and (c) guidance on how to adapt and use the questionnaires.

Individual factors

The list of factors described in this section are based on existing literature on vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse, as well as research conducted using the IOM determinants of migrant vulnerability framework. Many of these factors are context-specific, meaning that they might be a risk factor in one context but a protective factor in another. The individual-level factors discussed in this section can be assessed through use of the questionnaires provided in this toolkit.

It is expected that over time, more knowledge will be gained on migrant vulnerability, which will necessitate revisions and updates to both the list of factors and the questionnaires.

Country of origin/citizenship

An individual's country of origin and citizenship could act as a protective factor or as a risk factor that would tend to expose him/her to violence, exploitation and abuse, depending on how people from a particular country or holding that citizenship are perceived/treated in that location.

Age

For individuals aged roughly between 20 and 50, age tends to be a protective factor, while younger and older people tend to be relatively more vulnerable and thus age is more of a risk factor. This is because younger and older people are often more dependent, less physically strong/mobile and can be less well informed, including about how best to advocate for themselves as compared to those between 20 and 50 years of age.

Communication abilities

The ability to speak, understand and read the local language(s) in particular locations can act as a protective factor for individuals, since it enables them to be relatively more informed about what is happening, to more easily advocate for themselves, and to be relatively less dependent on others. Conversely, lack of communication abilities in the local language(s) is associated with greater risk.

Migration status

An individual's migration status can be a risk factor – for example, irregular migrants may be vulnerable to manipulation and coercion based on their status – or a protective factor – for example, being a citizen who enjoys the same full legal rights as other citizens in the community.

History of migration

An individual with a history of having migrated previously, or who has friends or family members who have migrated, is more likely to migrate themselves or to migrate again as a result of having a concrete plan of how to undertake migration. This then can be associated with greater risk if the migration that the person undertakes is relatively dangerous or poorly thought through (as detailed in such factors as “clarity of migration plans”), or with greater protection to the extent that the person learns from the experiences of others or his/her own previous migratory experience(s).

Human trafficking

Someone who has been a victim of human trafficking, or who knows someone who has been a victim of human trafficking, may be relatively more conscious of the dangers of being trafficked and may therefore tend to be more careful to avoid traffickers. Individuals without experience or knowledge of human trafficking could be at higher risk.

Reasons for migrating

There are multiple reasons that can cause individuals to choose to migrate. These may include a lack of work opportunities at the point of origin; a desire to escape conflict, insecurity, persecution or a natural disaster; or an attempt to seek out health care. To the extent that individuals are able to improve their situation by migrating, “reasons for moving” constitutes a protective factor; yet when it causes people to undertake unsafe migration, it is associated with greater risk. When individuals are forced to move or deceived into moving, they are relatively more likely to be put into a situation of vulnerability by virtue of their lack of agency and the possibility of bad motives on the part of the person(s) forcing or deceiving them. In this case then, “reasons for moving” will tend to be a risk factor.

Clarity of migration plans

Individuals should have an informed and/or well-thought through plan for migrating, including the intended destination, the employment prospects there, and an informed conception of how they are likely to be treated during their journey and at destination (including safety as well as openness of the host community to migrants). Those with such a plan will tend to be less vulnerable than individuals who have not thought through or have no reliable information about these various elements of their migration.

Migration logistics

Who a migrant travels with is an important consideration when assessing vulnerability. Travelling with a friend can be associated with greater protection, while travelling with a smuggler or trafficker can be associated with greater risk. Similarly, some payment methods are more associated with protection, such as being able to pay from savings; while others, such as being unable to pay for one’s trip, are more associated with risk. Further, some travel methods, such as walking, are associated with more vulnerable individuals, while taking an airplane tends to be associated with less vulnerable individuals. Finally, having documentation while travelling tends to be associated with greater protection since the person has more liberty, including to leave a dangerous or abusive situation. On the other hand, having one’s documents held by someone else (for example a trafficker) is associated with greater risk and vulnerability. Overall then, “migration logistics” is a factor that highlights how vulnerable particular individuals are by virtue of the choices they are making or being forced into, and thus if they are more or less at risk in their migration journey.

Physical and psychosocial situation

There are a number of risk factors associated with an individual’s physical and psychosocial situation. Individuals who have experienced violence, coercion or abuse may be negatively impacted, both physically and mentally, by their experiences. Someone who has witnessed violence, coercion or abuse done to others may be similarly negatively impacted, as well as be at increased risk of being subjected to violence, exploitation or abuse themselves. Someone who has experienced a major negative life event, such as divorce or separation, death, or major illness or injury, may have diminished access to resources and may experience negative psychosocial impacts. An individual who is sick or injured or who has a disability may be relatively more vulnerable and less resilient.

Networks

Having strong networks of support is an important protective factor since it means that an individual is able to reach out to others, whether for material or other types of support. In turn, being isolated within one's community is a risk factor since the individual is not able to reach out in a similar manner.

Education

Having a higher level of education is a significant protective factor since it means that individuals are more likely to be able to critically engage with their circumstances and to plan. These individuals are better able to understand their rights and to advocate for those rights, including understanding channels within which to do so. They also tend to have more resources to draw upon when faced with challenging circumstances, and to be more likely to have decent work opportunities. By contrast, having a lower level of education is a strong risk factor. Young people who feel unsafe in school are also less likely to continue to attend, which in turn means that they are more likely to become vulnerable as a result of a lower education level.

Financial situation

Having a more stable income at a level that can support one's own needs and one's responsibilities to others is associated with greater resilience to violence, exploitation and abuse. Conversely, having a less stable or insufficient level of income – for example as a result of working in the agricultural sector in a community that tends to experience drought, or because of lacking the skill set to find work in a weak economy – is associated with greater vulnerability and greater risk-taking behaviour to earn income. Having debt is associated with vulnerability due to challenges in repaying money owed while simultaneously meeting one's own immediate financial needs, as well as due to a risk of external pressures such as demands to repay the debt.

Health, education and financial services

Having access to these services tends to be associated with greater resilience. It means that individuals will be more likely to be able to look after their health, get an education, and access financial services with reasonable ease, for example receiving payments and making/receiving money transfers, as well as setting aside money (savings).

Shelter

When individuals have no shelter or have a marginal shelter situation, they are more likely to be exposed to unhealthy, unsafe and exploitative housing circumstances. They are also more likely to make risky decisions, placing them at greater risk.

Race, ethnicity, religion

Members of certain races, ethnicities or religions may be targeted for violence, exploitation and abuse in some contexts, or they may be given preferential treatment in other contexts. This factor therefore focuses on the manner in which an individual's race, ethnicity and/or religion can increase risk or provide protection, depending on the context.

Biological sex, gender identity and sexual orientation

Some biological sexes (such as being female or intersex), gender identities (such as being a woman or non-binary) and sexual orientations other than heterosexual all tend to be associated with greater risk as a result of persecution, abuse and violence. Conversely, being male, a man and a heterosexual tend to be associated with greater protection.