**Taking a survivor-centred approach: an overview**

This note provides guidance for companies on the key elements of a survivor-centred approach and practical steps that can be taken to implement this approach.

A survivor-centred approach is the preferred approach for responding to reports of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH). People who have experienced GBVH are often referred to as “survivors” – this emphasizes resilience and agency, as opposed to “victims”, which can reinforce a sense of powerlessness amongst those who experience GBVH.

Anchoring decision-making in a survivor-centred approach is not only for the benefit of survivors, but also in the interests of companies and investors. It helps to reduce the potential for further harm to survivors and the likelihood of further financial and reputational risk to companies. This approach should be applied to all survivors of GBVH. In the private sector setting, this includes permanent and fixed-term employees, temporary contractors, agency workers, interns, volunteers and candidates, as well as service users, customers and community members.

| Key elements | How to implement |
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| Safety: Ensure that survivors (and witnesses) are safe from immediate and future harm, and from retaliation. | * Make survivors’ safety the immediate priority as soon as a report is made.
* Work with survivors and witnesses to discuss measures that will protect them from further harm. These may include:
	+ Reconfiguring work teams so that the subject of the complaint is not working with or alongside survivors
	+ Reallocating work or reassigning the subject of the complaint to a role with limited and/or supervised interface with workers, community members or service users
	+ Suspending the subject of complaint while an investigation takes place
	+ Restricting the movements of the subject of the complaint while the investigation is underway
	+ Identifying safe spaces in communities, such as crisis centres, shelters and safe accommodation for survivors
* Continuously monitor the immediate and ongoing safety of survivors and witnesses, and make changes to safety measures over time if needed. Monitoring should be ongoing and should not end following an inquiry or the withdrawal of a complaint.
* Ensure that staff responsible for handling reports of GBVH and commissioning investigations are aware of measures to protect survivors and witnesses from retaliation and how to handle grievances in line with a survivor-centred approach, with sensitivity to the safety needs of survivors. The first person a survivor speaks to after reporting GBVH may significantly affect the course of their recovery.
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| Support: Enable survivors to make informed decisions about what they want, and proactively provide them with information about available support. | * Explore options to partner with local organisations with GBVH expertise that can provide specialist support to survivors and witnesses (e.g. service providers, trade unions, health services, women’s right’s organisations, NGOs and/or government agencies), and ensure that staff responsible for handling GBVH reports are aware of available support services and referral procedures.
* Proactively inform survivors and witnesses of the available support, which they can take up according to their own wishes and needs. Support options can include medical assistance, counselling, legal assistance, as well as job reassignment and other measures (see ‘Offering support to survivors’ below for a full list of potential support options).
* Make sure that support services are available during working hours and do not impose costs on survivors, e.g. long journeys.
* Offer survivors the option to have a friend, colleague or another person accompany them when they use services, and allow survivors to have representatives join them in investigation activities.
* Respect the wishes and choices of survivors in relation to safety and support measures, including if they do not wish to access any support services, or if the services a survivor would like to access are different to the options offered by the company.
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| Confidentiality: Ensure there are robust systems in place to ensure confidentiality for survivors, and do not disclose any identifiable information without the informed consent of the person concerned. | * Ensure that all details of the report – and any subsequent interviews and investigation – are kept strictly confidential at all times, and the identities of any survivors and witnesses are protected to minimise risk of retaliation after a complaint has been made.
* Limit the number of people with whom information is shared from the very beginning and ensure that they aware of what they are/are not allowed to communicate to others.
* Link failure to maintain confidentiality to disciplinary procedures and make this clear to all.
* Give thought to the timing and location of any initial conversations and discussions, investigation activities, including interviews, and support measures so that they are away from worksites and not observed by others.
* File all paper and electronic information in secure locations.
* Ensure that staff responsible for handling reports of GBVH and commissioning investigations are aware of the importance of maintaining confidentiality and confidential data management protocols.
* Obtain informed consent from survivors before sharing any information, including in the context of a referral.
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| Respect: Treat survivors with dignity and respect, taking time to listen to what they have to say rather than rushing to take action. Treat all survivors equally and non-judgmentally, making sure their experience is not unfairly dismissed. | * All actions should be guided by respect for survivors’ choices, wishes, rights and dignity. When a report of GBVH is received, take time to listen to what a survivor has to say rather than rushing to judgment or to take action.
* Ensure that survivors are treated equally, and the severity of an incident or credibility of a report is not diminished based on their age, sexual orientation, gender identity, appearance, sexual history, engagement in sex work, or delay in reporting.
* Ensure that staff training and other awareness-raising activities emphasise positive collective action against GBVH and challenge harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming attitudes.
* Respect the wishes of survivors in relation to the investigation and reporting to the authorities and seek expert advice in complex situations.
* Regularly communicate with survivors to ensure their wishes continue to inform decision-making about the company’s response to the report.
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# Offering support to survivors

Support offered to survivors can include a range of options as practicable and appropriate to the circumstances (see table below). All those who bring forward a GBVH complaint should be given information on available support and safety measures. To facilitate this, companies should maintain a list of local support services who can provide health, legal and psycho-social support to survivors, and provide referrals where necessary.

Overview of potential support options and services

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| **Counselling** | Professional counselling can help survivors to process trauma and provide ongoing support. This may be provided through partnerships with local counselling services, specialist GBVH service providers or, in cases where this is not possible, access to remote counselling services via phone or the internet. Where possible, counselling services should be offered in the same cultural context as the business and in the same languages as workers. In-house counselling is only recommended if the company employs an accredited counsellor on staff. Staff responsible for handling reports of GBVH should also be trained to offer [basic psychosocial first aid](https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GBV_UserGuide_021618.pdf) as an immediate response. |
| **Legal assistance** | Where a report of GBVH involves a criminal offence, survivors may wish to pursue the matter through the justice system, in addition to any internal action taken against the subject of complaint by the company. The company can assist by providing information about organisations that can offer legal advice and support.  |
| **Additional paid leave** | Where the survivor is a worker, the company may consider offering additional paid leave days. Survivors should not be required to take leave while their allegation is being investigated. |
| **Job reassignment** | After the report is made, the company may be able to arrange for the survivor or subject of complaint to move to a new location or role to prevent any further risk of harm, including retaliation. This should only happen voluntarily at the request of survivors. |
| **Employment assistance** | Even in the context of ongoing support, some survivors may feel they are unable to continue to work with the company. The company can support them to access information about alternative employment opportunities. |
| **Financial assistance** | If survivors need to take time off after an incident has occurred or if they need to pay for extended counselling services, the company can consider offering financial support. |
| **Medical assistance** | Where survivors wish to seek medical assistance, the company can provide transportation and/or offer to cover immediate or long-term medical expenses, including for mental health services. |

Additional resources

BII tools on managing GBVH <https://toolkit.bii.co.uk/esg-topics/gender-based-violence-and-harassment/>

BII, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Finance Corporation, [*Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Emerging Good Practice for the Private Sector*](https://www.bii.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Addressing-gender-based-violence-and-harrassment.pdf) (2020)

IASC GBV Guidelines, *How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area* (pocket guide): <https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/GBV_PocketGuide021718.pdf>