



Guidance on Women and Girls Friendly Spaces

1.0 Introduction

A women and girls' friendly space is a place where women and girls can go to access information and support, participate in activities, learn new life skills, build, and strengthen relationships with peers through exchange of experiences and stories of life and living. They are informal and formal comfort spaces where women and girls can feel emotionally and physically safe – free from excessive stress or fear of violence or attack. Establishing a WGFS does not necessarily involve building a new structure but rather working with women and girls to identify a space in their community that they perceive as friendly and safe. WGSS can be temporary (tent), semi-permanent, permanent, or a mobile structure. The different types of set-ups respond to the different context and needs of affected women and girls, but generally temporary and semi-permanent safe spaces should be set-up in temporary IDP sites and permanent WGSS within host communities. WGFS are often most effective when they are easy

to access for women and girls. They can also be in existing health facilities to eliminate the possibility of secondary stigmatization and identification of beneficiaries.

The objective of a WGSS is “to be a safe place where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment.”¹ They are established as spaces that enable empowerment and enhanced protection of women and girls through the provision of information and activities that promote safety and resilience building, care, personal empowerment, support healing as well as provide opportunities for skills building. The Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies highlights WGSS as one of the ten core standards of GBV programming and evidence suggests that the establishment of women- and/or girl-only spaces in emergency response helps to reduce and mitigate risks and prevent further harm and promotes psychosocial well-being and protection for affected women and girls.²

¹IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings

²UNFPA (2015) Minimum Standards for the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies

Who are the WGSS for?

All women of reproductive age and beyond. This includes women and older adolescent girls (aged approx. 15-19) older women, women heads of households, women and girls living with disabilities, and women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, widows, women, and girls from minority clans etc.

Can Men/Boys use WGSS?

No – Men and boys are not expected to use this facility as it is for women and girls only.

What do you do to set up a WGSS?

When planning for the establishment of a new WGSS there are several key considerations for the initial assessment and preparations to ensure that the WGSS is community owned, and the process is led by women and girls. These include the below:

1.1. Safety and Security

Women and girls should be consulted to understand the security risks in the community and the types of community support systems that exists for women and girls before the crisis. This part of the assessment will help to determine the need for such a center and/or the type of work and resources it may take to engage the community and ensure buy-in for the initiative. Consult with women and girls on their preferred area or what type of area they feel safe enough as well as their protection needs and support systems available. It is important to include women and girls living with disabilities and minority women. Undertake separate consultations with community leaders separately and use relevant tools to gather the necessary data. Inquiries on different needs and preferences, such as available childcare or time and type of activities are important discussions to undertake.

1.2. Location

The location of a WGSS can range from a health center to a school, community center or even an open space or through the establishment of a new structure. Women and girls should be involved in mapping their community and identifying what places that are safe for them and their preferred locations. The same can be done with men and boys, not only to understand how the perception of safety varies, but also to ensure community buy-in. While the physical space of a WGSS can be organized in different ways it is important to consider the range of activities planned in the WGSS to inform the selection of the location. The activities to be carried out in the WGSS should come from the community and should not be imposed from outside. It is important to consider cultural sensitivities regarding the type of activities that are conducted within the WGSS.



Conduct a rapid service mapping to understand what services exist around the area as it is advised to locate the WGSS near a functioning primary health care facility, ideally less than 1km away in case of referrals for health services. As part of the service mapping and essential service audits, visit the nearest health care facility and find out what services they provide (clinical management of rape, sexual and reproductive health services, child and maternal care) and if they have female staff present, plus opening and working hours. Consider how women and girls will be able to get to and from the WGSS and choose a location which has access roads with clear paths leading to and from the WGSS. Always ensure there is good lighting leading to the site.

1.3. Structure

Ensure the front is concealed and provides privacy – consider putting up high walls to prevent people to see into the space. Whenever possible, ensure the space is accessible for women and girls with disabilities by taking into consideration designs of WGSS that will facilitate access and usage. Where possible, security guards should be posted at the entrance of WGSS to improve safety of women and adolescent girls in the WGGGS.

Outdoor area recommendations:

If the space allows, you could erect a tall fence surrounding your friendly space so that women and girls also have some outdoor space within the area that offers them some outside privacy. The Inside

Structure recommendations:

- Two activity rooms with the capacity to accommodate a minimum of 20 people with 3 or 4 windows. One private room for provision of case management and confidential individual counseling services. Ensure it has lockable cabinets. A mattress and pillow or small bed for resting for women and girls who may require this.
- A separate small room to serve as a day care area for children accompanying mothers.
- A room for staff
- A room for CMR/family planning or first aid services



2.0 Running a Women and Girls Safe Spaces

2.1 Staffing

- WGSS Manager/Supervisor: Management oversight or supervision of the space (such as WGSS Manager, Supervisor or Coordinator): provide overall oversight to the WGSS, its individual and group activities, and its staff.
- 1 Case manager
- 2 OR more Case workers
- 3 OR more Community volunteers/mobilizers
- 1 SRH worker – midwife/nurse
- 1 Childcare worker
- 2 Cleaners
- Gatemen/women

Hiring of female staff should be prioritized but the induction of some male staff members as outreach workers can be strategically significant when there is a need to engage with camp leadership structures, police, and men and boys of the wider community. When hiring it is also important to consider who the women and girls trust, and who is trusted by the wider community- consult with women and girls on their preferred facilitators.

A basic training package for WGSS staff and volunteers includes the following topic:

- Basics of GBV: GBV guiding principles and survivor centered support.
- Psychosocial support skills and activities: This covers communication skills, how to organize group activities and provide information on services.
- Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) training, including staff having signed, and been trained on the organization’s Code of Conduct.
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) training and GBV Pocket Guide.
- Referral Pathways.
- Women’s health issues.
- Safety audits.
- Basic Information Management (confidentiality, appropriate data collection and storage of data used and stored in related to WGFS activities)
- Basic First Aid training is recommended.

3.0 Activities

A general overview of activities that can be provided in a WGFS include the following:

i) Support to GBV survivors: The WGFS can serve as an entry point to provide specialized services for GBV survivors. Depending on the specific services available at the WGFS, survivors may be referred to the following services if they choose: Case worker (for case management services); health provider (for medical care and post-rape treatment, if available); an organization offering legal services/information (for legal recourse); and police (for safety); shelter for temporary protective accommodation; One Stop Centre to receive comprehensive services. All WGFS staff should be familiar with the district and zonal referral pathway and their respective roles within it. If no referral pathway exists, contact a GBV or

CP specialist for information on available services in the area.

ii) Psychosocial and recreational activities: Recreational activities can be led by women from the community, with support and resources by the organization and staff. Activities can include sewing, painting, and drawing, craft-making, theater, tie and dye making, weaving, pottery/clay making etc. and livelihood activities may also be included. If activities related to economic empowerment are possible, a prior market assessment would be advisable to choose one that is most financially viable. Age-appropriate support groups can also be established and led by professional psychosocial staff.

iii) Information and awareness raising: It is always useful to arrange information and awareness-raising sessions with women and girls. The WGSS can collaborate with other clusters to provide information on a range of issues such as water and sanitation or nutrition, provided the integrity of the center as a space designed for women and girls is not compromised. Other topics may include information on available services and how to access them; risk identification and reduction strategies; sexual and reproductive health; women's rights; infant and young child feeding practices; positive coping strategies; life skills; and hygiene promotion.

iv) Outreach and prevention: Outreach activities can be arranged, both within and outside the WGSS, which aim to mitigate GBV risks and raise awareness. When arranging such activities, it is important to emphasize working with women and girls and with the community, to promote a safer environment, and to encourage community ownership of GBV prevention and risk reduction. Never go out to try to identify survivors as part of the outreach activities or point out in public that a woman is a survivor but share messages on services available and how to access them.



4.0 Monitoring and Evaluation

The WGSS needs to be monitored on a regular basis and a manager should be assigned for support and follow-up on activities and the quality of services. Consider training several staff on more in-depth monitoring and evaluation and make sure to use client satisfaction surveys (see example in Annex WGSS Member Survey) and anonymous complaint/suggestion boxes and other feedback mechanisms (as preferred and in consultation with women).

5.0 Phase Out

Plan the phase out from the beginning to ensure that the WGSS can be transitioned into community resources. Engage with women and girls in implementing the phase out strategy. It may be important to include a series of support sessions from the onset to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to take over and ensure capacity development of the staff of the WGFS and adaptation of the services accordingly. The phase out process should consider training community-based committees who will manage the WGSS post phase out. It is ideal if the committee are all female however in cases where this is not possible, it may be important to ensure that committee members have more women than men.

(Adapted from July 2021 - CP/GBV WGFS guidelines for Ethiopia)