**Child Protection /
Gender Based Violence
Ethiopia**

Women and Girls Friendly Spaces - Minimum Standards

A women and girls friendly space is a place where women and girls can go to feel safer, access information and support, participate in activities, build their networks and strengthen relationships with peers. It is a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. The term 'safe,' in this context, refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence), or abuse. Friendly and Safe Spaces are often, but not always, integrated spaces offering a range of services, ranging from information sharing and support for social networks and recreational activities to essential and discrete clinical care and support for GBV survivors and sexual and reproductive health services. Women and Girls Friendly Spaces (WGFS) can go by different names, such as Women and Girls Safe Spaces Spaces (WGFS), Wellbeing Centers, or Wellness Centers. In this document they will be referred to as Women and Girls Friendly Spaces (WGFS) while recognizing depending on local contexts different names are used. In conflict contexts it may be best to call them Women and Girls Friendly Spaces given the misinterpretation that may arise from the word 'safe' including perception around physical safety.

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. WGFS can be temporary (tent), semi-permanent, permanent, or a mobile structure. The different types of set-up responds to the different needs of affected women and girls but generally temporary and semi-permanent safe spaces should be set-up in temporary IDP sites and it is advisable to establish permanent WGFS within existing facilities, whenever possible and appropriate for the context. WGFS are often most effective when they are easy to access for women and girls and organized in conjunction with child-friendly spaces and/or health center services.

The objective of a WGFS is "to be a safe place where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment."[1] As such, WGFS are established to empower women, promote and enhance protection, provide necessary information and care, support healing and help reduce vulnerability to harm in the future, as well as to provide opportunities for skills building and collective action in communities. WGFS are co-created with women and adolescent girls entangled in conflict, disasters and displacement, which supports their empowerment and participation in humanitarian settings. The Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies highlights WGFS 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]

> To ensure minimizing the risk of **COVID-19** transmission and ensuring adherence to local government instructions, women and girls safe space activities might need to be adapted to ensure their continuation.
>
> This Women and Girls Safe Spaces: Technical Guidance Note for COVID-19 provides practical guidance on how to adapt programming in the context of COVID-19 and includes recommended key interventions, adaptions, and safety measures.

While a WGFS is an entry point for information-sharing on available services and support, as well as a safe space for survivors of GBV to disclose incidents of violence, the main purpose of friendly spaces is transformational change and empowerment of women and girls. Activities and services provided in the WGFS must be culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of the communities and can include psychosocial support, such as support groups and individual counseling, recreational- and skills building activities, and GBV case-management. In addition, information

---

[1] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings
[2] UNFPA (2015) Minimum Standards for the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies

on critical issues can be shared- such as where/how to access humanitarian services and information on sexual and reproductive health, legal rights, childcare, and GBV prevention and response, safety planning and risk reduction.[3]

When using the term women and girls it includes women and older adolescent girls (aged approx. 15-19) in all of their diversities. This includes for example, older women, women heads of households, women and girls living with disabilities, and women and girls living with HIV/AIDS but this list is by no means exhaustive and can include other groups of women and girls with heightened risk of unequally participating and benefitted from humanitarian services. This focus on inclusion does not require WGFS to provide specialist services or for staff to have specialist skills. It requires WGFS to address barriers which prevent women and girls from diverse backgrounds from equal access to the WGFS, while providing a space that ensures their physical and emotional safety, and supports them through a process of empowerment equally.[4]

This guidance walks you through the full cycle of setting up a WGFS, from inception and assessments, to lay-out and construction, to the implementation of activities and the phase out (or handover). Several useful tools, taken from IRC and IMC's Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings (find the full toolkit in Annex 1), are annexed and referenced.

1. Setting up a WGFS

When planning for the establishment of a new WGFS there are a number of key considerations for the initial assessment and preparations to ensure that the WGFS is community informed, context specific and that the process is led by women and girls from the beginning and all through until the phase-out. These include the below:

1.1 Safety and security

Women and girls should be consulted in order to understand the security risks in the community and the types of community support systems that existed 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 safest in to access and participate as well as on their support systems and protection needs, this also informs the location decision. Ensure you consult with women and girls, men and community leaders separately and use relevant tools to gather the necessary data. Consultations with elderly women and women and girls living with disabilities should additionally be ensured. Inquiries on different needs and preferences, such as for example available childcare or time and type of activities should also be ensured. Find templates for consultation tools in Annex 2, 3, and 4[5] that can be contextualized as per need.

1.2 Location

The location of a WGFS 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 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.

Once a preferred area has been determined, discuss and reach consensus on the location for the WGFS with the Woreda Council, Woreda Women, Children and Youth Office (WOWCYA) and other partners. Ensure the voices of women and girls are always prioritized.

While the physical space of a WGFS can be organized in different ways it is important to consider the range of activities planned in the WGFS to inform the selection of the location. Conduct a rapid service mapping to understand

---

[3] UNFPA and IRC (2017) Safe Spaces for Women and Girls (SSWG) Standardization and Technical Guidance – How to Set Up a SSWG in Practice,

[4] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings, p. 16

[5] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings: **Assessment Tool 4 FGD Guides for Women and Girls p. 77-92; Assessment Tool 5 Safety Mapping p. 93-96; Assesment Tool 6 FGD Discussion Guide with Communities p. 97-113.**

what services exist around the area as it is advised to locate the WGFS near a functioning primary health care facility, ideally less than 1km away in case of referrals for health services. A Service Mapping Tool is found in Annex 5.[6]

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 WGFS and choose a location which has access roads with clear paths leading to and from the WGFS. Always ensure there is good lighting leading to the site. If no lighting exists this is a strong advocacy point to site management and other relevant sectors.

1.3 Construction
Ensure that the public cannot look into the WGFS through open windows, low walls, or wide doors. Ensure the front is concealed and provides privacy – consider putting up high walls and a privacy screen on the other side of the entrance to prevent people tosee into the space. Whenever possible, ensure the space is accessible for women and girls with disabilities, which might include ensuring everything is one level.

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. This would also allow you to have larger windows, letting in more daylight, in the WGFS structure as the public won't be able to look in due to the fence.

The Inside Structure recommendations:

- One to two activity rooms with the capacity to accommodate a minimum of 20 people. These rooms should preferably be able to be closed off and with no insight for which a separation screen can be used;
- One or two private rooms for provision of case management and confidential individual counseling services. Ensure that no one can see or hear from the inside or outside;
- A separate small room to serve as a day care area for children accompanying mothers;
- A small, separate space where staff and volunteers can prepare activities and tea/coffee and be for themselves; Ensure this area has a lockable cabinet so the area can be more broadly used;

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 Suggested indoor lay-out. UNFPA, IRC (2017) Safe Spaces for Women and Girls Standardisation and Technical Guidance

- In-house clinical management of rape/family planning/First Aid services is recommended but not essential, so that women or girls needing this do not need to travel externally. It could be staffed either by a roving medical staff with scheduled presence or staffing the safe space with a midwife. This room must be completely confidential and with a discrete entrance.

It is recognized not each WGFS has the ability to be established in line with all of the recommendations below, especially at the start of the crisis and when establishing temporary spaces. At a minimum strive for a space that is private (sound and sight), whether it is in a tent or a temporary building.

---

[6] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings: **Assessment Tool 2 WGFS Service Mapping Questionnaire p. 65-75**

2. Running a Women and Girls Friendly Space

2.1 Staffing

While the staffing structure depends on need and population size there are certain basic roles that often appear in a WGFS. The selection of staff should be governed by factors like transparency and level of skill. Always ensure that there is at least one facilitator available per 15-30 participants of the activities.

Minimum WGFS staff should cover the following areas, find sample job descriptions in Annex 6:

- Management oversight or supervision of the space (such as WGFS Manager, Supervisor or Coordinator): provide overall oversight to the WGFS, its individual and group activities, and its staff. They are accountable to ensure the safety of the space, and collect information and data on GBV and health gaps and services and share this with key stakeholders.
- Activities taking place in the community (done by a WGFS Community worker): works within the WGFS and in the community to ensure women and girls receive necessary services information and know about and are updated about WGFS activities.
- Activities taking place inside the WGFS (done by a WGFS Facilitator): Facilitated group activities depending on needs and contexts. Activities can include psychosocial support but also recreational activities.
- Other potential necessary roles: Childcare worker, specialist to cover thematic topics such as nurse for maternal health sessions, cleaner, and administrative staff.

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.

To ensure that staff/volunteers/incentive workers are able to safely, effectively, and ethically perform their duties arrangements should be made for necessary training and capacity building.

A basic training package for WSS 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.

2.2 Activities and services[7]

Interviews and focus group discussions can be organized to understand what kind of activities that are appropriate in the setting. It is important to gain knowledge about the types of activities that women and girls used to carry out before their displacement or crisis rather than making assumptions about what they usually may have done or liked. All activities, be they formal support groups or recreational, should be customized according to the specific needs of women and planned in consultation with them.

---

[7] UNFPA (2015) Women & Girls Safe Spaces: A guidance note based on lessons learned from the Syrian crisis.

It is also important to determine, together with women and girls, what time best suits them, and to organize activities that will help customize the WGFS for them. One way of doing so is to map their time use and workload. This will provide an indication of when women and girls have time to come to the center (Activity and Time Mapping Tool, Annex 7).[8]

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); a lawyer or legal association (for legal recourse); and police (for safety). If a One Stop Center is available for referrals survivors can be supported to access the OSC to receive comprehensive services. They can also be referred to UN protection actors with a specific mandate, especially those with a human rights and/or protection monitoring mandate.

Having a clear referral pathway articulating services specific to the needs of both adult and child survivors can prove extremely beneficial. All WGFS staff should be familiar with the woreda and zonal referral pathway and their respective roles within it. If no referral pathway exists, refer to the CP/GBV AoRs for guidance and/or 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, coffee ceremonies etc. and livelihood activities may also be included, but if activities related to economic empowerment are possible, a prior market assessment would be advisable so as to choose one that is most financially viable and these activities should be carefully chosen.[9] 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 WGFS can collaborate with other sectors 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. Different ways can be considered for information-sharing. In fact, it is not always the best strategy to organize formal awareness-raising sessions but often activities too can serve as an entry point for providing information. Topics can 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 WGFS, 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 as a whole, 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.

Mitigation activities can include safety audits to assess security risks for women and girls and to identify opportunities with other sectors to mitigate those risks. Safety audits should be coordinated through the GBV coordination mechanisms. Findings from safety audits should be shared with other relevant sectors, such as Shelter,

---

[8] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings: Activity and Time Mapping Question
[9] UNFPA IRC (2017) Safe Spaces for Women and Girls (SSWG) Standardization and Technical Guidance – How to set up a SSWG in practice

Site Management Support (SMS), and WASH, and with community leaders/committees so that they can ensure that the location and any programmatic approaches being implemented therein, are safe for women and girls. The involvement of women and girls from within the community to conduct safety mapping is strongly recommended. Such an activity can support women and girls in identifying high-risk locations throughout their communities, and working together to minimize those risks (Annex 3).[10]

Outreach activities offer opportunities to access women and girls whose movement may be restricted in some way. Building upon existing women groups and support networks within the communities is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of outreach activities. These initiatives can include home visits and information sessions to inform community members about activities and services. In this context, it is essential for the outreach teams to be fully aware of issues of privacy and confidentiality and of the referral pathways.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

The WGFS 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 a number of staff on more in-depth monitoring and evaluation and make sure to use client satisfaction surveys (see example in Annex 8 WGFS Member Survey) and anonymous complaint/suggestion boxes and other feedback mechanisms (as preferred and in consultation with women).[11] In the Ethiopian context, with rapid changes in the political landscape, inter-communal conflicts and IDP returns, monitoring that the WGFS remains safe and confidential and its location appropriate and accessible is also essential.

4. Phase-out

Plan the phase out from the beginning to ensure that the WGFS can be transitioned into community resources and to be managed by BoWCYA/ZoWCYA. Engage with women and girls in implementing the phase out strategy and ensure their participation, as well as that there is enough time for the handover. You might want 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.

---

[10] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings: Assessment Tool 5 **Safety Mapping**

[11] IRC and IMC (2019) Women and Girl's Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings: **WGFS Member Survey Tools**

Final July 2021

Annexes

All Annexes can be found in [this link](#).

References

IASC. 2007. Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. Geneva: Inter-Agency Standing Committee, http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/ guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf

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

IRC and UNFPA. 2017. Safe Spaces for Women and Girls (SSWG) Standardization and Technical Guidance – How to set up a SSWG in practice. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sswg_technical_toolkit_oct_2017_final_2.pdf

UNFPA and IRC. 2017. Safe Spaces for Women and Girls (SSWG) Standardization and Technical Guidance – How to Set Up a SSWG in Practice, Rohingya Crisis, Cox Bazaar, Bangladesh.

UNFPA. 2012. Managing Gender-Based Violence Programmes in Emergencies: E-Learning Companion Guide. New York: United Nations Population Fund, http://www.unfpa.org/sites/ default/files/pub-pdf/GBV%20E-Learning%20Companion%20Guide_ENGLISH.pdf

UNFPA. 2015. Women & Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance Note Based on Lessons Learned from the Syrian Crisis.

UNFPA. 2015. Minimum Standards for the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/GBVIE.Minimum.Standards.Publication.FINAL_.ENG_.pdf

WHO. 2007. Ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies: https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241595681/en/