

Women and Girls Safe Spaces

SYRIAN Crisis response in Jordan

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group August 2014

During a mapping exercise coordinated by the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence sub-working group (SGBV SWG), 35 women and girls safe spaces were identified both in urban and camp settings throughout Jordan. These spaces have been created or strengthened as part of the Syrian crisis response. Organizations involved in supporting and managing safe spaces in Jordan include AWO, IFH-NHF, IMC, IRC, JWU, NEF, UN Women, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UPP¹.

The SGBV SWG elaborated a common definition of such spaces, as well as guiding principles and other basic standards that should be considered in setting up and managing women and girls safe spaces². This was done considering both the lack of a global standard with regards to safe spaces for women and girls, and the extensive experience developed by organizations in Jordan. This briefing paper serves as guidance to SGBV SWG members, as well as the rest of the humanitarian community, including the inter-agency task force, the inter-sector working group, donors and other actors.

Definition and Scope

A safe space³ is any kind of space, formal or informal, where groups or individuals can feel physically and emotionally safe. The word “safe” in this context refers to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence) or abuse⁴. A safe space is a place where individuals can build social networks, express, and entertain themselves.

While safe spaces can be established for different groups of people, this position paper focuses on safe spaces for women and girls in the context of the humanitarian response in Jordan. These spaces may take different names, such as “safe spaces”, “women centres”, “women community centres” etc. The primary participants in, and beneficiaries of, such safe spaces are adolescent girls and women. Safe spaces acknowledge cultural gender norms and the cultural dynamics that enable violence to occur. They are culturally appropriate for (a) healing in segregation to occur in same-sex groups and (b) at times, allowing activities to take place for both sexes, when these are part of the healing process. Therefore, while safe spaces for women and girls may sometimes involve and benefit men and boys, this may only be done in specific ways, and always ensuring that this participation does not hinder the involvement of women and girls.

Establishing safe spaces entails managing complex and context-specific risks. Approaches to safe spaces should be organised and developed in consultation with women and girls and their communities. In some situations, formal women’s centres established by organisations may constitute the most easily accessible and appropriate means to provide services. However, this is not a general rule that can be

¹ Further information of the mapping will be shared in September 2014. Arab Women Organization, Institute for Family Health – Nour Al Hussein Foundation, International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, Jordanian Women Union, Near East Foundation, United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, United Nation Population Fund, United Nation High Commission for Refugees, United Nation Children Fund, Un Ponte Per.

² The definition and scope section was adapted from UNFPA’s “Draft Guidance on Establishing Safe Spaces”.

³ The concept originated in the women’s movement, where it “implies a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance [...] it means rather than an end and not only a physical space but also a space created by the coming together of women searching for community.”

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271932/VAWG-humanitarian-emergencies.pdf

⁴ World Health Organization quoted in <http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/AYSRRH/7.pdf>

applied to every situation. Safe spaces can also be less formal, and be held within the community or in educational spaces. Furthermore, they may be linked to women's leaders and/or networks.⁵

Evidence suggests that the establishment of women- and/or girl-only spaces can help to reduce risks of SGBV and prevent further harm during emergency responses. These spaces provide women and girls with a safe and non-stigmatizing entry point for services, information, build resilience and help to ensure their well-being. Safe gathering points also offer women and girls an opportunity to engage with each other, exchange information, and begin rebuilding community networks and support after displacement. In this way, safe spaces are key to building the social assets of women and girls and further develop their confidence and leadership. Safe spaces have also successfully provided women and girls with opportunities to leave their shelters, when otherwise facing restriction in movement.⁶

In Jordan, the use of safe spaces has been one of the most successful strategies in enabling women and girls to disclose SGBV incidents and to access safe and non-stigmatizing response services. In the Jordanian context specifically, in combination with social and life skills activities, many safe spaces for women and girls offer a range of very specialized SGBV response services such as case management, psychosocial support, legal assistance, medical services, and referrals to other services. Such spaces should therefore also take into account the cases of people with specific needs, such as persons with disabilities, LGBTI⁷, minorities, etc., who may be at increased risk of gender-based violence.⁸

There are no internationally agreed upon standards in terms of number of safe spaces that should be established per target population. The standard of a possible reference point of one women and girls safe space per 10,000 to 20,000 individuals is, however, becoming increasingly prevalent.⁹

In summary, the specific objectives of safe spaces for women and girls are to provide opportunities for women and girls to: (1) re-build their social network; (2) receive social support; (3) acquire contextually relevant skills, (4) access multi-sectoral SGBV response services (psychosocial, legal, medical), (5) raise awareness on issues relating to women's rights, health, services, etc.

Differentiating Women and Girls Safe Spaces

Safe spaces versus safe houses shelters

Women and girls safe spaces as defined above fulfil a very different objective than safe houses or shelters. Safe shelters are places providing immediate security, temporary refuge and support to survivors escaping violent or abusive situations. They constitute a formal response service as part of SGBV case management. This service is, through the referral process, made available to women and girls survivors of violence who are in imminent danger. Safe shelters are professionally staffed and accredited. Admission is contingent on specific criteria and strict standard operating procedures of confidentiality. Safe shelters deliver specialized services and provide beneficiaries with personal security.

Safe spaces versus women safe spaces in reception areas

Women and girls-only safe spaces in refugee camps reception areas differ from safe spaces. The former

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271932/VAWG-humanitarian-emergencies.pdf

⁶ Refugees with restricted movement, SGBV SWG Jordan, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=107&Id=35

⁷ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex.

⁸ UN women virtual knowledge center, <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/>

⁹ UNFPA, "Draft Guidance on Establishing Safe Spaces"

are a first entry point into the refugee camp. The primary objective of such areas is to minimize the risks for women and girls undergoing the processes of being assigned shelters, receiving initial assistance packages, and entering the camp. These areas can also be used to provide information regarding the services available to women and girls, and ensure connection to other services when specific vulnerabilities are identified.

Safe spaces and child friendly spaces

Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) are widely used in emergency situations as a first response to the needs of girls and boys and as a forum for working with affected communities. CFSs are established as a response to children's immediate rights to protection, psychosocial well-being, and non-formal education. This response is carried out through activities directed at caring for and protecting children, such as the setting up of support groups, peer activities, life skills workshops and more. CFSs typically cater to children, i.e. boys and girls under 18 years of age. In some contexts, however, CFSs may also engage and benefit young people who are over 18 years of age. Safe spaces for women and girls and CFSs do share common elements. At times, they may also cater to similar populations. This is particularly true with regard to adolescent girls. In this respect, it should be appreciated that the purposes of CFSs and those of safe spaces do not overlap, but are seen to be complementary. In the Jordanian context, safe spaces for women and girls typically house very specialized response services for SGBV survivors, while CFSs are less specific and provide referrals to specialized protection services.

Guiding Principles

In Jordan, organizations managing safe spaces in the context of the Syrian response should coordinate through the SGBV sub-working group and should follow the inter-agency Child Protection and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Standard Operating Procedures¹⁰.

In particular, organizations managing safe spaces should adhere to the guiding principles stated below.

SGBV guiding principles for all actions¹¹

- Understand and adhere to the ethical and safety recommendations stated in the WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies (WHO 2007);
- Extend the fullest cooperation and assistance between organizations and institutions in preventing and responding to SGBV. This includes sharing situation analysis and assessment information to avoid duplication and maximize a shared understanding of the situation;
- Establish and maintain carefully coordinated multi-sectoral and inter-organizational interventions for SGBV prevention and response;
- Engage the community fully in understanding and promoting gender equality and power relations that protect and respect the rights of women and girls;
- Ensure equal and active participation by women and men, girls and boys in assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programmes through the systematic use of participatory methods;
- Integrate and mainstream SGBV interventions into all programmes and all sectors;
- Ensure accountability at all levels;
- All staff and volunteers involved in prevention of and response to SGBV, including interpreters and refugee incentive staff, should be trained on, understand, and sign a code of conduct or

¹⁰ http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=107&Id=35

¹¹ Adapted from: SGBV Resource Tool: Establishing SGBV Standard Operating Procedures (SOP Guide). 2008. IASC Sub Working Group on Gender & Humanitarian Action.

similar document setting out the same standards of conduct, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

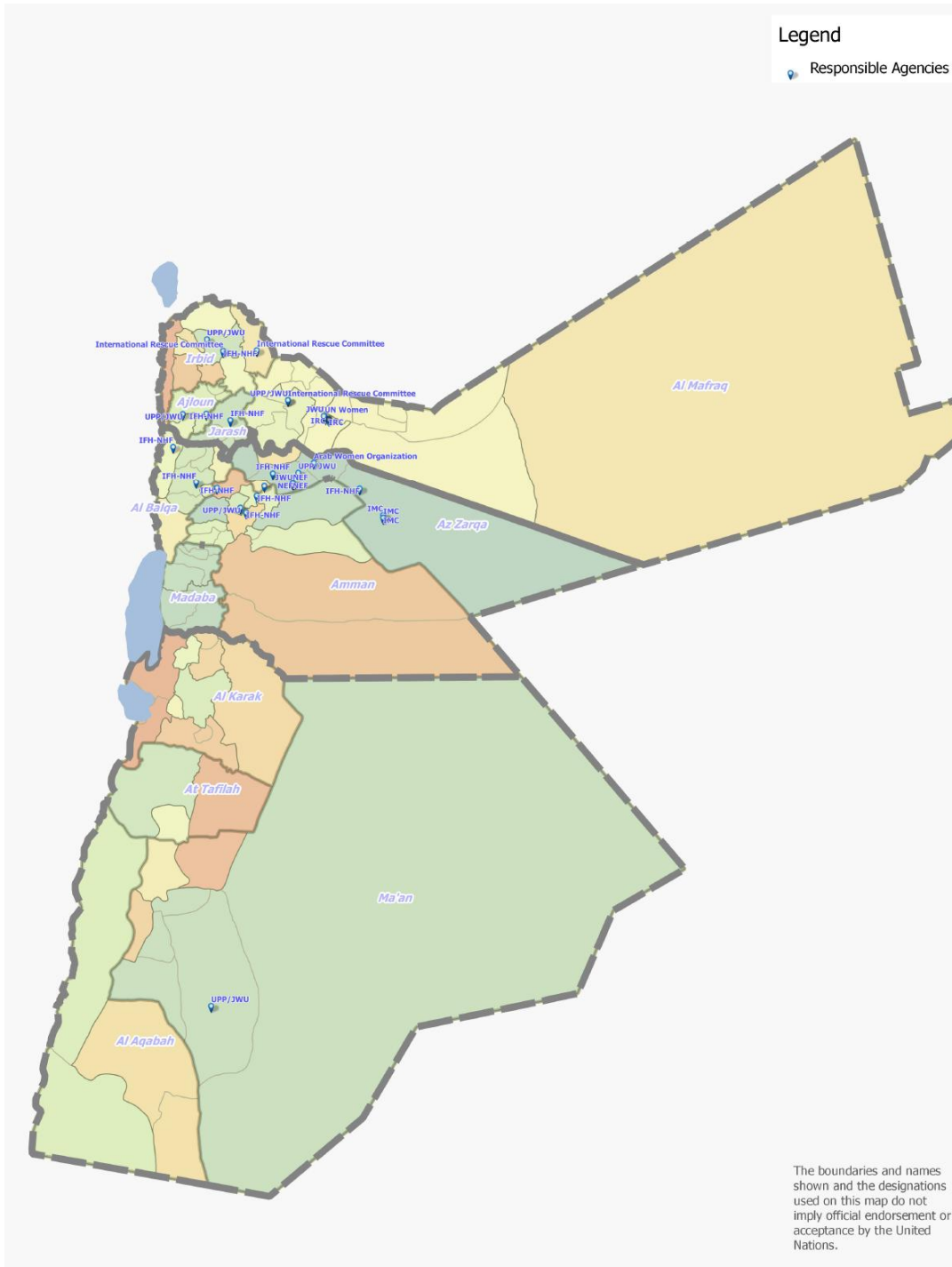
Guiding Principles for Working with Survivors¹²

- Ensure the safety of the survivor(s) and their families at all times.
- Respect the confidentiality of the affected person(s) and their families at all times:
 - If the survivor gives his/her informed and specific consent, share only pertinent and relevant information with others for the purpose of helping the survivor, such as referring for services. This should be guided by the SGBV referral information-sharing agreement for non-identifiable information to access services;
 - All written information about survivors must be kept in secure, locked files.
- Respect the wishes, choices, rights, and dignity of the survivor:
 - Consult the survivor on where he/she wishes to seek help and respect his/her wishes. Do not push, suggest or otherwise guide his/her in any specific direction;
 - Conduct interviews in private settings;
 - Conduct interviews and examinations with staff of the same sex of the survivor or as preferred by the survivor, including translators.
 - Be respectful and maintain a non-judgmental manner. Do not laugh or show any disrespect for the individual, or his/her culture, family, or situation;
 - Be patient; do not press for more information if the survivor is not ready to speak about his/her experience;
 - Ask only relevant questions. (For example, the status of the virginity of the survivor is not relevant and should not be discussed.);
 - Avoid requiring the survivor to repeat the story in multiple interviews.
- Ensure non-discrimination in all interactions with survivors and in all service provision.

While safe spaces acknowledge cultural gender norms and the cultural dynamics that enable violence to occur, and therefore target specific gender and age, ensuring that the spaces are inclusive is of outmost importance. The term “diversity” refers to different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations, gender identities, abilities, health and social status, skills and other specific personal characteristics. While the age and gender dimensions are present in everyone, other characteristics may vary from one person to another¹³. For example, the stigmatization of LGBTI persons is a barrier to accessing services, or tribal disagreements may serve as obstacle for some people. It is also essential to consider that different groups might be at higher risk of SGBV than others. For example, women and girls with disabilities are at a higher risk on a range of protection concerns, including violence, abuse and exploitation, but they often do not benefit from the same access to prevention and response programs as other, able bodied, community members. Therefore it is essential that safe spaces for women and girls be accessible to people with disabilities and that they include them in the services and activities provided.

12 Adapted from: SGBV Resource Tool: Establishing SGBV Standard Operating Procedures (SOP Guide). IASC Sub Working Group on Gender & Humanitarian Action. 2008.

13 UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/4e7757449.html>



The Sexual and Gender Based Violence Sub-Working Group in Jordan (SGBV SWG)

The objective of the SGBV SWG is to strengthen multi-sectoral SGBV prevention and response in the context of the Syrian refugee emergency in Jordan. The group is chaired by UNHCR and UNFPA. Members of the Sub-Working Group include UN agencies, international and national NGOs, ministries of the Government of Jordan and national institutions. **For further information, please contact:**

Ana Belén Anguita Arjona, UNHCR in Amman : anguita@unhcr.org
 Maria Margherita Maglietti, UNFPA: maglietti@unfpa.org



SGBV
 Sub-Working Group