

# Women and Girls Safe Spaces

## Greece Response

### Learning Paper 2016



#### 1. Humanitarian Context

Women are commonly excluded from participating in community structures, engaging in community consultations and accessing and influencing decision-makers across the sites in Greece. This is due to factors such as community leadership structures which tend to favour men as the primary representatives, low literacy and language barriers which can affect women's ability to communicate with service providers, and a lack of public or private space in which women can build and establish networks and engage in meaningful dialogue. These challenges are compounded by women's role as primary caregivers with childcare and household responsibilities which reduce their mobility and time and therefore their participation in community consultation processes and structures.

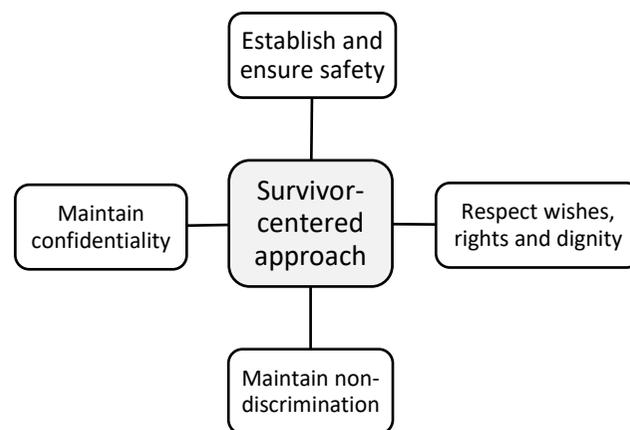
Furthermore, due to care responsibilities - or in cases where sessions are for both genders (and in which women may feel uncomfortable participating) - women are also often unable to participate in information sessions, leaving them without access to information about their rights, legal options and available services. Women often experience reduced access to information shared by word of mouth given their limited presence in public spaces that are predominantly male dominated. Women who participate in public spaces can experience violence (including sexual harassment) or a threat to their reputation. Living in close quarters with other men means that women's movement and behaviour is closely scrutinised and if their reputation is perceived of being at risk it can damage

the family's honour. This has led in some cases to male relatives using coercion and violence to safeguard it, or to women taking precautions by reducing their movement outside of their containers or tents.

Women's responsibility for the young, elderly and the wider family makes it important that they are sufficiently supported with adequate information, empowered to make informed decisions and for their voices to be heard. In addition, it is essential in a humanitarian response for women's differentiated and specific needs to be represented. Therefore, facilitating women's active participating in decision making helps to ensure that both their own and their families' needs and interests are met. A Women and Girls Safe Space (WGSS) enables women to obtain information, participate in meaningful dialogue and engage directly with duty bearers in a safe, confidential and enabling environment.

In addition, although data on incidents of Gender Based Violence (GBV) is not systematically collected, evidence shows that GBV is prevalent and is under-reported for a variety of reasons. In Greece, service providers and women alike report that women and girls experience various forms of GBV in the sites in Greece, including domestic violence (high level of physical violence against girls), harassment, sexual abuse and exploitation, forced prostitution, survival sex, and trafficking. It is therefore important that GBV survivors can be safely identified and access safe, confidential services through referrals. The WGSS adopts a survivor-centred approach\* and enables this identification and referral in a non-stigmatising manner.

\*For more information on the survivor-centred approach:



## 2. Definition

A WGSS is: a communal safe space for women and adolescent girls to access information, networks and services and exercise their choices about what activities to engage in to advance their skills, capacities and resilience.

## 3. Objectives

The objectives of a Women and Girls Safe Space are:

- To provide a safe space for women and girls free from violence
- To strengthen women's collective voice and normalise women's decision making, agency and representation in decision making
- To identify women and girls at risk who need additional support and referral to specialised services
- To increase women's confidence, skills and capacities
- To reduce women's isolation and increase integration into community life
- To facilitate improved social cohesion between and within nationalities
- To enable access to information



Women and Girls Safe Space, Katsikas, Greece



Women and Girls Safe Space, Ritsona, Greece

#### 4. Activities

The WGSS provides a range of activities. These activities are requested, discussed and chosen by the women and girls through consensus.

The very process of discussing activities enables shared decision-making, and choosing which activities to participate in enables women to exercise their agency.

Creating a culture in which women's voices are heard is resulting in increasing participation of women in the humanitarian response whereby they are raising their concerns and solutions, trusting that they will be listened to and included in programme design and adaptation.

There are four core categories of activities taking place for women and girls in the WGSS:

- **Psychosocial support** that aims to protect and promote psychosocial wellbeing and which recognises the potential psychological suffering experienced by women, whether pre-existing (in the refugee producing country or *en route* to Greece), emergency-induced (due to current living conditions) or humanitarian aid-related.<sup>1</sup>

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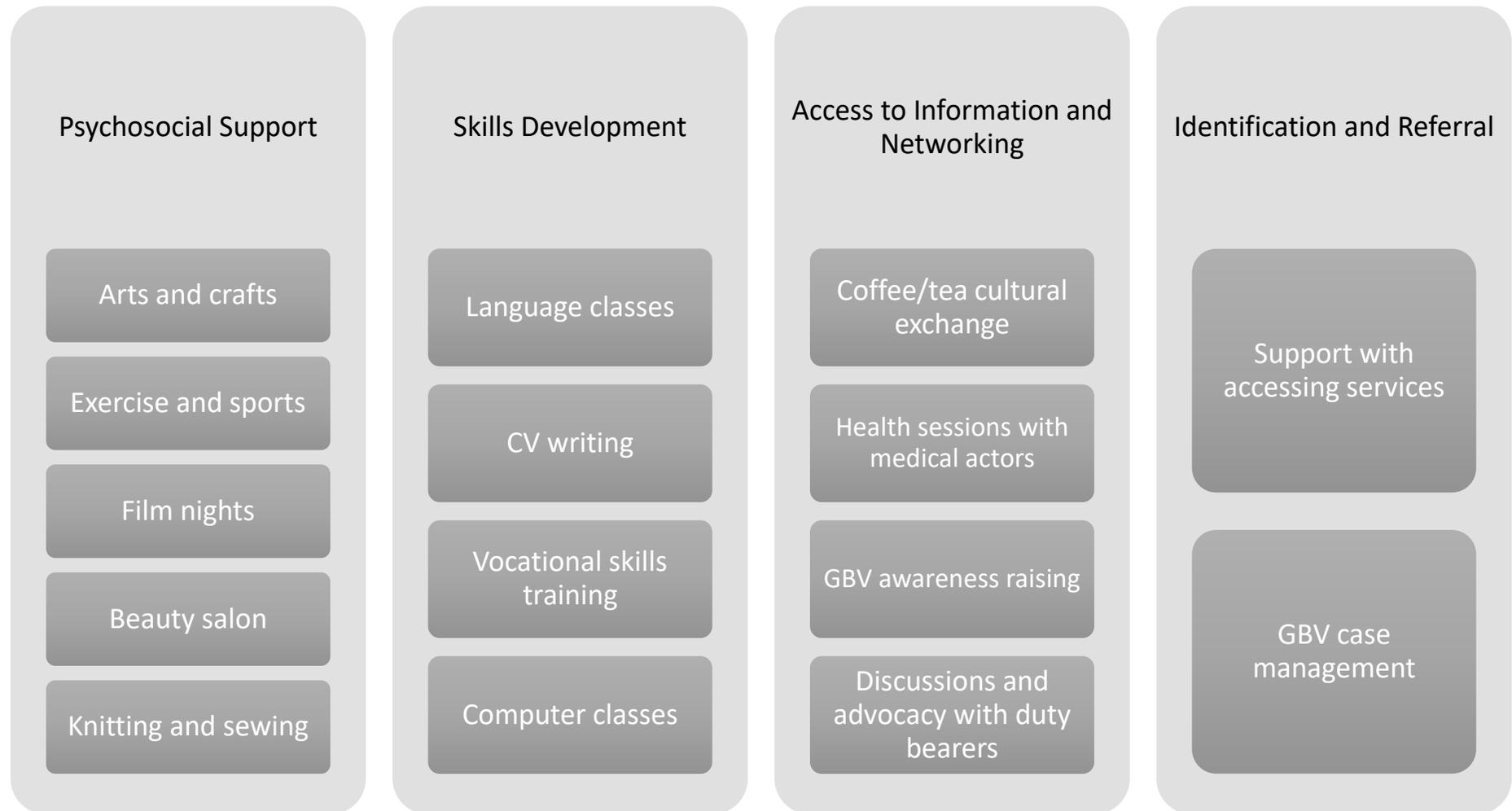
<sup>1</sup> IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings

- **Skills development** to facilitate women's meaningful participation in public life, including job skills training that will enable women to access the job market and increase their resilience.
- **Access to information and networking** which recognises the obstacles women face in accessing information through word of mouth and the isolation some women are experiencing. Furthermore, since men are the primary decision makers in the sites the WGSS creates an alternative space for women to raise issues on behalf of others to duty bearers and engage in meaningful advocacy, providing solutions to some of the challenges they face. This normalises women's engagement in public life for both the duty bearers and the women themselves.
- **Identification and Referral** which enables humanitarian actors to identify possible cases of concern and enables survivors to access information about their rights and options to report risk and access care in an ethical, safe and confidential manner.<sup>2</sup> The WGSS provides discrete access to services specifically for women and girls, including gynaecological and obstetric support.

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<sup>2</sup> IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery

The activities which fall under these four categories include:



### Case Study: Ritsona

Services provided in the WGSS in Ritsona stem from either the gender-based violence programme or the women and young child health programme. As both programmes share the space, there is an exception for infants under 24 months to enter the space if they are accompanied by an age-appropriate female caregiver (i.e. over 12 years old).

Within the WGSS in Ritsona there are several structures including a permanent structure housing the Mummy and Baby Area and a tent for infant feeding and hygiene products. These are part of the infant and young child feeding project that focuses on the first 1000 days of life - from conception to 24 months. We cover maternal nutrition, health and wellbeing as well as infant growth and development through appropriate and timely feeding practices. This includes support and promotion for exclusive and continued breastfeeding.

Other structures inside the space include a tent for psychosocial activities, a wash station for laundry and washing-up, a storage container and several shaded outside areas. All of which have been designed and furnished in consultation with the women and girls who will ultimately be using them. This has meant that they have been revised several times as new women arrive with fresh ideas.

## 5. Guiding Principles

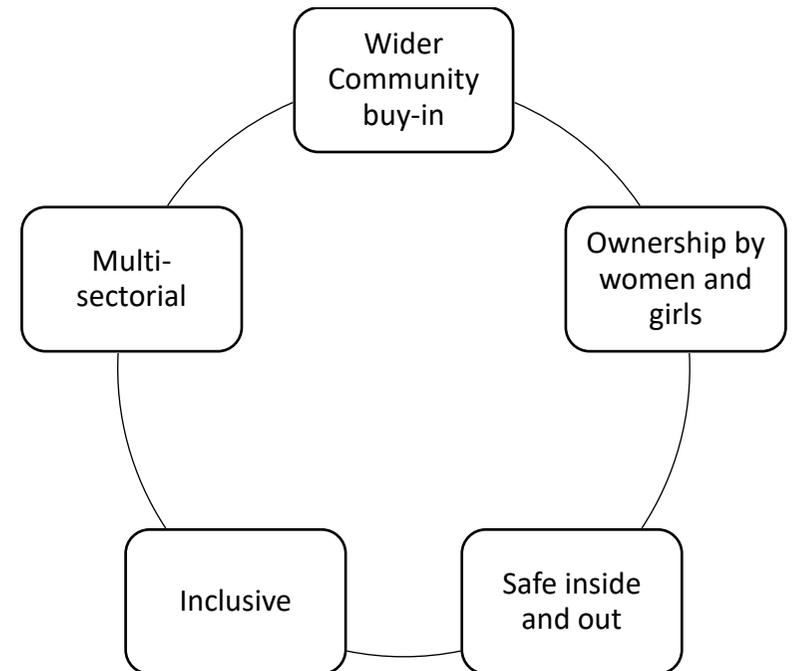
**Inclusive:** the WGSS does not discriminate against any race, religion or nationality.

**Multi-sectorial:** the WGSS provides a non-stigmatising environment for women and girls to access services and receive case management support. Effective referrals require coordination with other actors.

**Safe:** the WGSS must be easily accessible and safe inside. The area around it must also be safe with sufficient lighting, far from potential threats and visible by security staff, if deemed appropriate.

**Ownership:** women and girls own the space – managing and organising the space and collectively choosing what goes in the space and what happens inside. It's one of the only spaces where women will have full control and it's important that they exercise it.

**Community buy-in:** recognise that men are often the power holders and can either disable or enable women's access to the WGSS. It is therefore important that they understand its purpose and value.



## **6. Lessons Learned**

### **Lesson 1: Recognise that women have care responsibilities and are the primary caregivers for children.**

This recognition in Epirus resulted in the establishment of accompanying Child Friendly Spaces in the vicinity of the WGSS in which women are able to leave their children in order to meaningfully participate in, and benefit from, the WGSS.

### **Lesson 2: Recognise that men are the primary power holders.**

Men need to be engaged in order to facilitate women's meaningful participation in the WGSS. This can take the form of consultations with men or engaging men in building the WGSS. When the community is actively consulted and involved in the establishment of WGSS, there is an increase in the level of participation and a stronger sense amongst men that the WGSS, and those using it, should be protected.

### **Lesson 3: Ensure access to a private toilet for women and girls.**

The toilet is maintained by women themselves and has sturdy locks on the inside and sufficient lighting inside and outside. In addition, ensure lighting around the site and on the way to public toilets during the night.

### **Lesson 4: Facilitate links between rights holder and duty bearers.**

Whilst outside the WGSS women might be the silent minority, within the WGSS women are able to network with each other to discuss challenges and solutions and are empowered to express their voice. In order to develop increased accountability in the sites, duty bearers are invited into the WGSS depending on the issue which women and girls hope to discuss and raise. These vital interactions between rights holders and duty bearers in a safe space facilitate women and girls equal access to decision-making and to information.

### **Lesson 5: Ensure women's ownership.**

Women develop the rules within the WGSS and their preferences inform the Code of Conduct for all organisations operating within the WGSS, which ensures their ownership of the space. In addition, humanitarian actors must engage women to take over the overall running of the WGSS to ensure its sustainability – an exit strategy should be developed between the humanitarian actor operating the WGSS and the women.

### **Lessons 6: Ensure privacy.**

The WGSS is for girls over the age of 12 and for infants under the age of 2. Other children and men should not be allowed to see into the space or hear what is happening inside the space.

## 7. Monitoring

Recognising the presence of various nationalities in each site, as well as the dynamics of having women of various ages using the WGSS and the potential for negative backlash from men, it is critical that ongoing monitoring is conducted with women, girls, boys and men.

This monitoring involves:

### **Observation and Outreach in Sites:**

Daily outreach outside the WGSS helps gain access to those who do not go to the spaces. This helps to identify the blockages and barriers that they face in equal and meaningful access. Daily outreach creates visibility and an increased likelihood of those who are excluded to become more engaged since they see humanitarian actors proactively seeking their participation and listening to their needs.

Engaging teenage girls as an entry point to their mothers is proving effective. Lighthouse Relief engage with the teenage girls who attend arts and crafts activities and often escort them back to their homes as a way of gaining parents' trust. Over time they have found that parents will invite Lighthouse Relief staff for tea in their homes. This allows staff to discuss the WGSS – and barriers to meaningful access – with parents, in particular mothers who might have reduced time and mobility to come to the WGSS themselves.

### **Attendance Sheets:**

Each activity has an attendance record. This enables actors to identify the times and conditions which affect participation and enables schedules and activities to be adapted to suit the needs of communities.

### **Weekly Community Meetings:**

Weekly women-only community meetings are held between Lighthouse Relief and the women and girls using the WGSS, ensuring interpreters are available for all languages.

### **Feedback Forms:**

Feedback forms are available in the WGSS with open-ended questions, allowing for direct feedback. The completed forms can be completed in the relevant language and are deposited in a locked box. These forms are collected, interpreted and analysed. Lighthouse Relief adapt the programming accordingly.