



Gender-Based Violence AoR
Global Protection Cluster

Standard Operating Procedures for Women and Girls' Friendly Spaces
October 2022

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Pakistan is currently enduring the consequences of unprecedented monsoon rains, flash floods and landslides which have affected an estimated 33 million people, claimed more than 1,638 lives and caused more than 12,865 injuries.¹ Due to forced displacement and breakdown of social structures and protection mechanisms, women, girls and other vulnerable populations including persons with disabilities are at increased risk of exposure to gender based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage. A key intervention to promote women's empowerment, mitigate risks and respond to GBV, is the establishment of women and girls' friendly spaces.

1.2. Objective of Standard Operating Procedures

These standard operating procedures (SOPs) were developed for use in the Pakistan flood affected areas for the establishment and operation of women and girls' friendly spaces (WGFS). The SOPs are intended to be complementary to other guidelines produced by the government, including the National Policy Guidelines on Vulnerable Groups in Disasters and the NDMA concept note on establishment of women and child friendly spaces in Pakistan, UNFPA and partners.

1.3. What is a 'women and girls' friendly space'?'²

A women's and girls' friendly space is an intervention that GBV programme actors in humanitarian programming have employed for decades as an entry point for women and girls to report protection concerns, express their needs, receive services, engage in empowerment activities and connect with the community

The five standard objectives of a WGFS

1. Provide a vital entry point for female survivors of GBV to safely access information, specialized services, and referrals to health, protection and other services;
2. Serve as a place where women and girls can access information, resources and support to reduce the risk of violence;
3. Facilitate women's and girls' access to knowledge, skills and services;
4. Support women's and girls' psychosocial well-being, and create social networks to reduce isolation or seclusion, and enhance integration into community life; and
5. Generate conditions for women's and girls' empowerment.

¹ [Pakistan: 2022 Monsoon Floods - Situation OCHA Report No. 04: As of 2 September 2022](#) & [NDMA SitRep #104, 25th Sep 22](#)

² Adapted from '16 Interagency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming', 2019, https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2019-11/19-200%20Minimum%20Standards%20Report%20ENGLISH-Nov%201.FINAL_.pdf.

1.4 Targeted Audience for SOPs

UNFPA implementing partners and other actors working on the response to the floods, in particular those working on GBV risk mitigation and response.

1.5. Guiding Principles for establishing and operating WGFS³

The following guiding principles should be used in establishing and operating the women and girls' friendly spaces. For additional guidance, refer to the Interagency Standing Committee minimum guidelines report (page 64).

- Empowerment
- Solidarity
- Accountability
- Inclusion
- Partnership
- Do no harm

2. Planning

2.1. Assessment

An initial assessment helps to determine the feasibility of establishing a WGFS. Where possible, questions relating to women and girls friendly spaces “should be addressed through coordinated, inter-agency assessments within or across clusters and sectors.”⁴ Examples of questions to be included in the initial assessment can be found in the [UNFPA Guidance Note \(url\)](#). Secondary sources may also be used if relevant questions under the given guidelines are used.

2.2. Targeted Population

The targeted population is women and girls⁵ with emphasis on the following groups⁶:

- Newly displaced women and girls and those living in displacement sites

³ Ibid., for more details on the principles, kindly refer to the above.

⁴ Ibid., and adapted from Child Protection Global sub-Cluster, Principles for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies, 2011, http://www.unicef.org/protection/Child_Friendly_Spaces_Guidelines_for_Field_Testing.pdf

⁵ Note that including girls as a targeted population should only be done if the implementing partner has the capacity to do so. If girls are included, there should be meaningful and targeted activities. Activities for adolescent girls in safe spaces should be segmented by age and consider the specific needs of the population. It is important to engage female and male parents/guardians and the wider community in conversations around safe space protection and empowerment activities specific to adolescent girls' participation.

⁶ Note that spaces should be inclusive of all women and girls and should **not** be exclusively targeted at women and girls who are survivors of GBV as this **may cause harm**.

- Pregnant and lactating women
- Women and girls with disabilities
- Women and girls' refugees residing in affected areas

The recommended number of women and girls' friendly spaces is 1 per 6,000 women⁷ and girls in a disaster affected geographical area, where possible.

2.3. Location of women and girls' friendly spaces

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), semipermanent, permanent, or a mobile structure. Depending on the capacity of the partner implementing the WGFS and the availability of resources, remote and virtual options can be made available.

The different types of set-up respond 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.

Women and girls' friendly spaces may be combined with child friendly spaces, health centres⁸, etc. There are advantages and disadvantages to standalone and integrated approaches. It is therefore recommended that consultations are held with women and girls to determine the most appropriate location and modality. WGFS should be easy to access for women and girls and organized to complement activities for child-friendly spaces, health centers and WASH services (where applicable).⁹ The capacity of the partner implementing the WGFS must also be considered.

2.4. Minimum Basic Furniture, Essential Items and Equipment¹⁰

The WGFS should be equipped with necessary furniture and materials to ensure women and girls can comfortably and effectively participate in all activities. Wherever possible, the safe space should use universal design principles and include an accessibility audit to prevent and identify barriers to access. Accessibility audits should be conducted with organisations of persons with disabilities when possible.

The following supplies and equipment should be procured:

- Lockable cabinet(s)

⁷ The number of WGFSs should be adapted to the context and space available and ensure that coverage does not exceed the ability to absorb a reasonable GBV case load.

⁸ Where possible, the WGFS may be located close to a health facility or mobile health unit to improve referrals and provision of health related services.

⁹ Sourced from "Women and Girls Friendly Spaces - Minimum Standards", Child Protection / GBV Ethiopia, July 2021.

¹⁰ Ibid. Adapted from "Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance note based on lessons learned from the Syrian Crisis", UNFPA, 2015.

- Chairs and a table each for the private and the activity rooms
- IEC material including posters, charts, and visual aids for any information sessions
- Special items for women and girls with disabilities, whenever possible
- Emergency stand, fire extinguisher or blankets in case of emergency
- Toys and books for children

3. Implementation

3.1. Information and Activities¹¹

All activities and services should be finalized in consultation with women and girls so that they are responsive to their needs, and are context and age appropriate. Ideally, the safe space should be a fun place for women and girls.

The following should be considered in terms of services, provision of information and organization of activities:

Services and referrals to:

- Psychosocial support
- Basic health services such as SRH counselling and family planning (may be provided onsite or via referrals)
- Referrals to other medical care
- Referrals to shelter, safety and security services, and justice and legal aid where possible
- Referrals to other life-saving humanitarian interventions (food, livelihoods, nutrition, etc.)

Activities:

- Outreach activities on prevention and availability of services
- Awareness raising sessions (including on issues including health and hygiene, GBV prevention, mitigation and response)
- Advocacy on women rights
- Distribution of dignity kits
- Distribution of clean delivery kits (where appropriate and in collaboration with health services)
- Recreational activities for women, adolescent girls and accompanying children
- Life skills based education
- Initiation of livelihood activities contributing such as skills development/enhancement, linkages with service providers, etc. (longer term)

3.2. Selection, training and composition of Staff

¹¹ Adapted from “Background to Women and Girls’ Friendly Health Spaces”

Selection¹²

- The selection of staff should be governed by factors like transparency and level of skill.
- The hiring of female staff should be prioritized; however, 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.
- When hiring, it is also important to consider who the community/women trust. Where possible, personnel can be selected from within the affected community.¹³

Orientation and Training¹⁴

At a minimum, staff should be oriented on basics of GBV, skills to deal with survivors, case management, psychosocial support, communication skills, referral pathways and ways to organize group activities. Orientation should be held early in project implementation.

Specialised staff such as case managers and coordination officers will need much more previous experience, in-depth training and constant supervision. Furthermore,

- Weekly follow-up visits should be arranged by experienced workers to observe the situation and activities, help outreach staff and community members to reflect on what is or is not working, and advise on how to strengthen activities and handle challenges;
- It is critical to recognize that some workers may themselves have been affected by the emergency, and will benefit from group discussions;
- Resources such as books and training manuals¹⁵ that enable ongoing learning should be built up; and
- All staff should be trained and should sign a code of conduct including one on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

Staffing

The personnel should cover the following areas:

- Manger (female) - Management oversight or supervision of the WGFS
- Facilitator (female) - Psychosocial support and counselling
- Lady Health Visitor (LHV) (female) - Health awareness, basic MNCH care and medication, referral to health facilities/ hospitals
- Case Management and Coordination Officer - GBV case management, referral and coordination with relevant stakeholders

¹² Ibid, Adapted from 'Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance note based on lessons learned from the Syrian Crisis', UNFPA, 2015.

¹³ 'Keeping Adrift: Documenting Best Practices for Addressing Gender Based Violence from the Platform of Women Friendly Spaces' Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre, 2011

¹⁴ Adapted from "Report - Implementation of SOPs for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies – Establishment of Women Friendly Spaces in Sindh (Thar)", Rehana Parveen Shaikh, Consultant, NDMA

¹⁵ The materials should be in easy to understand language and should be sensitive to the fact that some women will not be formally educated. Education should not be a hindrance to participation.

- Watchperson - Protection and security of WGFS
- Community mobilization workers / adolescent mentors

A detailed orientation on the job description must be provided to the staff during the project inception.

3.3. Community Involvement and Visibility

Community Involvement

The communities should be clearly informed about the function of WGFS and how they can benefit from their services.¹⁶

Experiences from implementation of WGFS in Pakistan led to the following lessons learned:¹⁷

- Engagement of male decision makers of the families and designing individualized strategies and activities (e.g., actively engage religious leaders, the main gatekeepers in rural communities, to increase the acceptance of the project)
- Tailored complementary activities are helpful to promote local buy-in
- Consistent interaction with women and door-to-door campaigns helps gain their trust and encourages them to seek help

Visibility

The existence, objectives and activities should be visible to all stakeholders working on the humanitarian response. The communities should be aware that WGFS are places where help can be sought and referrals can be made to response services.

3.4. Safety considerations

The following should be considered when establishing and operating a WGFS:¹⁸

- In line with the general guiding principles and approaches to preventing and responding to GBV, the following approaches must be taken¹⁹:
 - Survivor-centred approach: A survivor-centred approach creates a supportive environment in which survivors' rights and wishes are respected, their safety is ensured, and they are treated with dignity and respect. A survivor-centred approach

¹⁶ Adapted from "Report - Implementation of SOPs for Prevention and Response to GBV in Emergencies – Establishment of Women Friendly Spaces in Sindh (Thar)", Rehana Parveen Shaikh, Consultant, NDMA

¹⁷ 'Keeping Adrift: Documenting Best Practices for Addressing Gender Based Violence from the Platform of Women Friendly Spaces' Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre, 2011

¹⁸ Adapted from "Women and Girls Friendly Spaces - Minimum Standards", Child Protection / GBV Ethiopia, July 2021

¹⁹ Ibid. Adapted from '16 Interagency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming', 2019

includes ensuring that the safety and security of survivors and their children are the primary considerations.

- “Do no harm” approach: A “do no harm” approach involves taking all measures necessary to avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of the actions of humanitarian actors.
- Women and girls (including women and girl with disabilities) should be consulted to understand safety risks in area, available services and to select location for WGFS²⁰
- Ensure consultation with women and girls, men and community leaders separately, furthermore, specifically focused consultations are held with different groups, such as adolescents, older women, those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities.²¹
- Women and girls should be made to feel emotionally and physically safe in the WGFS. Location, activities, scheduling should consider potential safety risks for those involved. Ground rules should be established to ensure emotional safety.²²
- If case management files are stored on site, they must be properly stored.²³
- Suggestion boxes should be included in the space
- Security guards / watch persons should be included in the staffing composition of WGFS
- As highlighted above, all personnel should be trained and should sign a code of conduct including one on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

4. Monitoring and Evaluation²⁴

The women and girls’ friendly space needs to be monitored on an ongoing basis to track its development, identify gaps, and ensure quality activities and referrals. Monitoring the safety of the space is also an important consideration.

Some important points to consider are:

- Availability of a monitoring and evaluation plan
- Training of selected workers and staff on effective monitoring of programme activities
- Monitoring of the participation of women and girls for each kind of activity and referral made
- Use of feedback mechanism surveys in line with the ‘Accountability to Affected Populations’ principles. This should include ensuring that the feedback mechanism collects and analyzes feedback from involved populations to inform decision making about programming as well as reporting back to people and communities.²⁵

²⁰ Questions can be included in the assessment

²¹ Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings, IMC and IRC.

²² Promoting Positive Environments for Women and Girls: Guidelines for Women and Girls Friendly Spaces in South Sudan, UNICEF, 2016.

²³ Ibid. Adapted from ‘16 Interagency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming’, 2019

²⁴ Ibid. Adapted from ‘Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance note based on lessons learned from the Syrian Crisis’, UNFPA, 2015.

²⁵ Policy: Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, IASC Task Team on AAP and PSEA, 2017.

- Monitoring, via agency staff, the quality of the activities, workers' skill levels and attitudes, and adequacy of supplies and logistics supports
- Use of participatory methods of monitoring and evaluation that engage women and girls and invite views of community members; and
- Arranging for inter-agency collaborative evaluations, when possible, to improve coordination and yield conclusions that apply more widely.

5. Phase-out²⁶

Implementation of WGFS may outlive the emergency response, however, ideally they will become sustainable spaces within the community, without reliance on donor funding. Therefore, a phase-out or transition plan that links with broader recovery planning should be developed in close consultation with the community and other stakeholders. It is important to ensure that the community is aware, from the outset, that a phase-out period and/or handover will take place, and to share information about when the phase-out or transition will occur, the moment it is known.

The following guidelines should be considered during the phase-out:

- Transitioning of the WGFS into community resources such as community centers
- Inclusion of budgetary considerations in planning the phase-out
- Empowerment of women and girls, along with communities, to make key decisions about the transition of the WGFS, whenever possible
- Engagement of women and girls in implementing the strategy
- Planning enough time for the handover between international and national partners; providing opportunities for capacity development of the staff of the safe space and/ or local organization (both institutional and technical training); and
- Adaptation of plans on the basis of the changing context.

²⁶ Sourced from "Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Guidance note based on lessons learned from the Syrian Crisis", UNFPA, 2015 *and* Promoting Positive Environments for Women and Girls: Guidelines for Women and Girls Friendly Spaces in South Sudan, UNICEF, 2016.