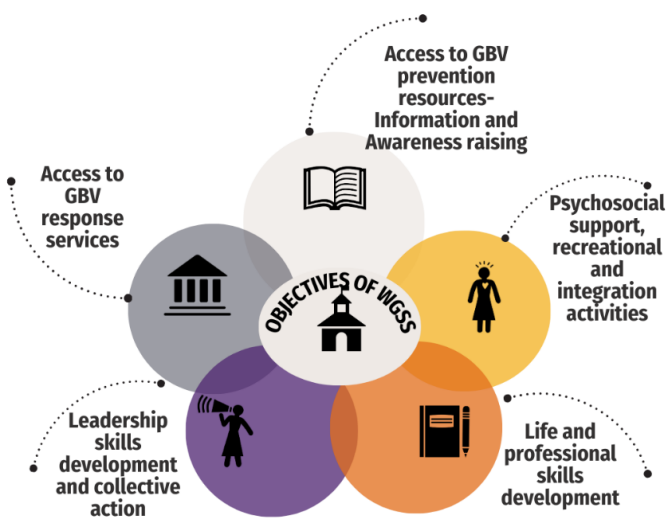# Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS)

Women and Girls' Safe Spaces are a key strategy for the protection and empowerment of diverse women and girls affected by humanitarian crisis.
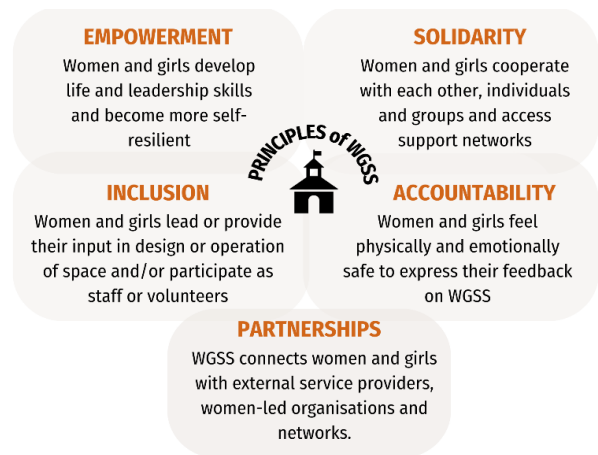
What are Women and Girls' Safe Spaces?

Women and girls' safe spaces (WGSS) are structured places where **women and girls affected by humanitarian crises feel physically and emotionally safe, free of violence, and free of the fear of violence and abuse.** WGSS are women and girls-only space, used by women and girls in all their diversity, exclusively.

WGSS are a **vital entry point** for women and girls to freely express their protection needs and concerns and receive physical and emotional safety. WGSS provide **access** to services, such as psychosocial support and/or referrals to **multi-sectoral external GBV response services**. WGSS also offer opportunities to women and girls to **gain knowledge, life and leadership skills,** and re-build **social networks.**

WGSS are built around *5 main objectives* and *5 core principles:*

EMPOWERMENT
Women and girls develop life and leadership skills and become more self-resilient

SOLIDARITY
Women and girls cooperate with each other, individuals and groups and access support networks

PRINCIPLES of WGSS

INCLUSION
Women and girls lead or provide their input in design or operation of space and/or participate as staff or volunteers

ACCOUNTABILITY
Women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe to express their feedback on WGSS

PARTNERSHIPS
WGSS connects women and girls with external service providers, women-led organisations and networks.

WHY are WGSS important in humanitarian response?

During emergencies, women and girls face increased risks of gender-based violence (GBV), often lacking access to safe places. **WGSS** offer protection, well-being, and empowerment to women and girls. They are a first point of contact, linking women and girls to life-saving services and information, while providing a broader range of support tailored to their specific needs. WGSS are an ideal approach during crises, as they are **logistically feasible, cost-effective, flexible** and can be applied even in the most complex emergencies.

How does WGSS programming support CARE's work to address GBV in emergencies?

WGSS are critical in CARE's work to address gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE) and its three pillars: GBV risk mitigation, GBV prevention, and GBV response.

GBV Response	GBV prevention	GBV Risk Mitigation
WGSS is primarily a **GBV response activity**. It is an **entry point** for reporting protection concerns and accessing response services	WGSS activities can **address social and cultural norms,** such as awareness raising on rights	At WGSS, women and girls safely express concerns and opinions to improve the quality and safety of programming

WGSS align with CARE's gender equality framework by building **AGENCY** and offering individual empowerment and skills to women and girls, by changing **RELATIONS** and promoting non-violent, healthy relationships within the targeted communities, and by transforming **STRUCTURES**, enabling engagement and partnerships with women's movements/groups, and advocacy initiatives.

DEVELOPMENT OF WGSS

Women and Girls' Safe Spaces have been widely *used by humanitarian actors in GBV prevention and response programming* over the decades.

CARE has been implementing WGSS in various humanitarian settings and has accumulated promising practices from Bangladesh, Egypt, Lebanon, Nigeria, South Sudan, Türkiye-Northwest Syria, Uganda, and Yemen.

CARE conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of WGSS in the lives of women and girls in two conflict-affected settings, Northwest Syria and South Sudan.

Most recently, a study was produced, presenting WGSS operation in Yemen

WGSS example from CARE's GBViE programming:

WGSS in Bangladesh are women-led, context-tailored and community informed: They provided women with **leadership skills and made women and girls groups part of decision-making** processes within WGSS and out in the community.

WGSS **considered cultural stigma** around menstruation and set up **dedicated spaces** for women to wash the menstruation materials hygienically. To avoid additional criticism from communities or government on a "women and girls only space", in consultation with women, **WGSS were named as "Women Peace Center" or House of Peace".**

To demonstrate value of WGSS with communities, WGSS used **community outreach activities** with camp management, religious and influential leaders, and men and boys, and linked WGSS to them to address general community issues.

Design and Operation of WGSS

KEY STRATEGIES

Women- and girl-led: Women and girls are consulted and have influence over design or management of WGSS. Regular consultations with women and girls as well as safety audits and GBV needs assessments are conducted, where women and girls express how WGSS should be run safely. Their input is included during the initial assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring of WGSS.

Context-tailored: Designing and running WGSS requires a thorough understanding of community dynamics. Tools such as Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) and a gendered power analysis helps understand local context and design and deliver context-appropriate activities and information.

Community Informed: To be run smoothly and safely, WGSS requires support and engagement from communities. Community and stakeholder mapping is used to understand communities and initiate their engagement process. A **community engagement strategy** is developed and executed. **Outreach activities** to community leaders and local authorities help secure support for the WGSS activities, mitigate societal and authorities' backlash against women-only spaces, and support local ownership after the exit, especially at times of sudden or premature closures.

ACTIVITIES

The core activities that WGSS can offer include **delivery of services,** such as *case management or legal service support,* **established referrals** to external service providers, **psychosocial support, recreational activities** led by women and girls, **life skills development, livelihood/income-generating** activities, and **information and awareness** sessions aimed at GBV prevention.

Additional services and activities may include adolescent girls' life skills program activities, reproductive health information sessions, women's leadership trainings and initiatives, and additional GBV risk mitigation activities.

Community engagement activities, informed and led by women and girls, may include dialogues and skills-building that engage men and boys on gender equality and GBV prevention, or public outreach to communities.

To ensure the effectiveness, sustainability, and local ownership of WGSS activities, depending on context, **partnerships should** be explored. This involves maintaining collaborative relations with **external service providers** and/or partnering with **local civil societies,** especially women-led or women's rights organizations or movements, and **local entities**, including government bodies.

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