



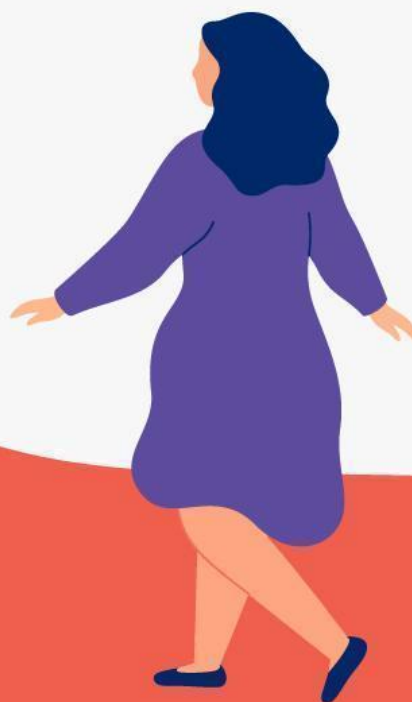
Public evaluation report on the effectiveness and importance of WGSS

Deliverable D1.4

Project Number: 101100732



Co-funded by
the European Union



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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) model within the context of the SAFE HUT project where five WGSS were implemented in Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy. The primary objectives of this evaluation are to assess the effectiveness, relevance, and replicability of the WGSS model by gathering feedback from participants and stakeholders across sites. The report assesses the impact of WGSS on women's empowerment, social relations, and overall well-being, as well as identifying areas of challenge and improvement.

The evaluation identified a highly positive impact of WGSS on the well-being, empowerment, and skills development of participants. The vast majority of women have reported improvements across all significant dimensions and overall functions of WGSS: *Relevance, Quality, Impact, Access, Safety and Fair Treatment, Respectful and Dignified Treatment, Voice and Empowerment*. Participants have described WGSS as a second home, highlighting its central role in constructing integration, individual development, and community cohesion.

While the report does not indicate any major issue, economic instability and language barriers were concerns for some beneficiaries. Staff emphasized the need to reinforce financial independence initiatives and childcare support. These findings validate the need to extend and continue WGSS, integrating economic empowerment programs.

Overview of the SAFE HUT project

The SAFE HUT “*Holding safe spaces for women and girls’ empowerment*” project is co-funded by the European Commission under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) Programme (EU AMIF-2022-AG-CALL-THB).

The project, number 101100732, ran for 24 months (01/04/2023 – 31/03/2025) and involved seven experienced partners from six EU countries (Italy, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria). The main project goal is to support the social and labour integration of third-country national women and girls, including (potential) victims or survivors of trafficking in human beings by establishing Safe Spaces (Women and Girls Safe Space – WGSS) where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment.

The project partners are:

- [CESIE](#) – Centro Studi e Iniziative Europeo – Coordinator (Italy)
- [CENTRO PENC](#) – Antropologia e psicologia geoclinica (Italy)
- [IRC](#) – International Rescue Committee ([Germany](#) and [Italy](#))
- [KMOP](#) – Social Action and Innovation Center (Greece)
- [KOPZI](#) – Center Against Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Lithuania)
- [AIDROM](#) – Asociatia Ecumenica a Bisericilor Din Romania (Romania)
- [Animus](#) - Centre for rehabilitation, counseling and psychotherapy (Bulgaria)

At the core of the project is the launching and implementation of Women’s and Girls’ Safe Spaces in Greece, Romania, Lithuania and Bulgaria, following the model piloted by the IRC in different countries. This model focuses on creating places where women’s and girls’ physical and emotional safety is respected and where they are supported to seek, share and get information, access services, express themselves, enhance psychosocial well-being, to fully realise their rights. Through this approach the project involves third-country national women and girls, including survivors of trafficking in human beings as primary beneficiaries of the WGSS.

The project aims to:

- Provide a place where women and girls are encouraged to voice their needs and collectively raise attention to their rights and specific needs.
- Facilitate the access for women and girl to knowledge, skills and information, as well as to receive psychosocial support, while strengthening their labour inclusion opportunities.

- Ensure long-term assistance and support to women and girl through mutually empowering partnerships serving as a key entry point for specialised services for victims/survivors of trafficking in human beings.
- Establish informal local collaboration networks with different stakeholders and community members who are involved in actions related to protection and support to women and girl victims of trafficking in human beings and violence.

It is worth mentioning that the **main target group consists of third-country nationals women and girls, who may be potential victims or survivors of trafficking.** However, during the project implementation, partners agreed not to limit the Women and Girls Safe Space and its activities only to identified victims of trafficking, to avoid stigma and labeling to the WGSS participants. In this sense, they have extended participation in WGSS activities beyond third country nationals, welcoming participants from other European countries and nationals. Therefore, throughout the report, the term "WGSS beneficiaries" encompasses all these different groups of women, ensuring inclusivity. This reflects the goal of the WGSS and of SAFEHUT Project which is to create in each country an inclusive space where all women and girls can access support services, regardless of their situation or specific circumstance.

The first phase of implementation included the assessment work conducted in the four countries that launched their WGSS (Romania, Greece, Lithuania, Bulgaria) with the technical support from IRC, using the assessment tools provided in the WGSS toolkit. Interviews with key informants such as key staff of organisations working with third-country nationals and community leaders enabled the adaptation of the WGSS model in each country responding to the needs from the findings of the assessment phase. Once concluded, the launching partners worked on the actual start-up of the spaces, through outreach activities with technical support from Centro Penc. The pilot phase was supposed to reach at least 15 women and girls in each new established WGSS, through formal registration. The WGSSs in each country were open at least two afternoons a week. Partners then planned WGSS activities to be offered within the spaces to enhance personal and cognitive empowerment of the beneficiaries as well as their socio-civic and psychological empowerment. Women and girls in each WGSS were free to attend the activities any time they preferred; among the activities organized there were informative sessions with professionals about health and reproductive care, job orientation sessions, workshops to raise awareness on gender-based violence (GBV) and gender roles, yoga and pilates classes, art and crafts workshops.

WGSS Core Concepts and SAFE HUT implementation

Definition of a Women's and Girls' Safe Space(WGSS)

The overarching goal of a Women's and Girls' Safe Space (WGSS) is to be a safe place where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment. Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces have been used for decades by actors addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian programming as an entry point for women and adolescent girls to report protection concerns and voice their needs.

In a recent literature review, Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces were found to improve psychosocial well-being, social support, and attitudes towards rites of passage.¹ Other research posits that Safe Spaces provide protection from harassment, abuse and misogyny, and safety to be expressive and to participate in civic engagement.² Within the humanitarian sector, WGSS implementation is seen as a proven practice that helps reduce risks and prevent further harm during acute emergency responses by providing safe entry points for services and information access while also rebuilding community networks and support.^{3 4} Although WGSS model was conceived for humanitarian contexts, its replication and adaptation in non-humanitarian settings prove to be beneficial in the effort to continue providing support to women and girls mostly coming from contexts of crisis.

At the most basic level, WGSS are physical spaces where women and adolescent girls can be free from harm and harassment. They are also places where women and adolescent girls can gain knowledge and skills; access GBV response services or other available services; and foster opportunities for mutual support and collective action in their community. WGSS is defined as: a structured place where women's and adolescent girls' physical and emotional safety is respected and where women and adolescent girls are supported through processes of empowerment to seek, share, and obtain information, access services, express themselves, enhance psychosocial well-being, and more fully realize their rights.⁵

¹ Stark, L., Robinson, M. V., Seff, I., Gillespie, A., Colarelli, J., & Landis, D. (2022). The Effectiveness of Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Systematic Review of Evidence to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Humanitarian Contexts. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(4), 1249-1261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838021991306>

² Lewis, R., Sharp, E., Remnant, J., & Redpath, R. (2015). 'Safe spaces': experiences of feminist women-only space. *Sociological Research Online*, 20(4), 105-118.

³ DFID, 2013. Violence against Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271932/VAWG-humanitarian-emergencies.pdf

⁴ Violence against Women and Girls in Humanitarian Emergencies. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271932/VAWG-humanitarian-emergencies.pdf

⁵ International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, 'Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings'. <https://gbvresponders.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRC-WGSS-English-2020.pdf>

Objectives of a WGSS

The objectives of a WGSS are:

1. To facilitate access for all women and adolescent girls to knowledge, skills and a range of relevant services.
2. To support women's and adolescent girls' psychosocial well-being and creation of social networks.
3. To serve as a place where women and adolescent girls can organise and access information and resources to reduce risk of violence.
4. To serve as a key entry point for specialized services for GBV survivors.
5. To provide a place where women and adolescent girls are safe and encouraged to use their voice and collectively raise attention to their rights and needs.

WGSS approach

The operationalization of WGSS is highly dependent upon the context in which they are implemented and are always informed by the environment, resources, and women's and adolescent girls' specific needs. Each WGSS is designed in a participatory manner, including consultations with diverse groups of women and girls during the assessment phase, ensuring that diverse perspectives, needs, and identities are included in the design and establishment of Safe Spaces. While the extent and degree will vary, globally in communities where WGSS operate, it is not considered safe for women and adolescent girls to spend time in spaces largely dominated by men and boys. In most contexts, given women's socially imposed subordinate status to men, the presence of any male in the space can significantly alter women's and girls' participation. They may mute themselves to avoid being accused of indecency which could further compromise their safety at home and in the community.⁶ By upholding survivor-centred approaches and ensuring spaces remain female-only, they can help create the necessary environment to support the safety and healing of survivors. It is generally acceptable for boys under the age of 13 years old to access the WGSS alongside their mothers and/or other siblings to allow mothers and female caregivers to participate in WGSS activities.

While the space itself and the services and activities of the WGSS are intended for women and adolescent girls, men and older adolescent boys can play an important support role. Given their privileged position in patriarchal societies, men and older adolescent boys typically have authority over female family members and the power to influence other community members. Therefore, engaging men and boys as key stakeholders through targeted WGSS outreach is pivotal to galvanize their support for the WGSS and to leverage their influence to secure and increase community buy-in for the WGSS. Importantly,

⁶ International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, 'Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings'. <https://gbvresponders.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRC-WGSS-English-2020.pdf>

while WGSS programming usually engages men and older adolescent boys to ensure women and adolescent girls have access to WGSS activities, they might also be engaged through GBV risk mitigation (e.g. one-off participation in community-based risk mitigation sessions that aim to reduce exposure to GBV through activities such as information provision, education, and obtaining community support for safe and inclusive programs for women and girls) or primary prevention interventions (e.g. participation in a series of transformative individual behaviour change curriculum sessions) implemented by broader GBV programming in the same area.

Methodology

Objectives of the evaluation

This evaluation report presents the findings of assessment activities undertaken by the five SAFE HUT project implementing partners, Aidrom, Animus Foundation, KMOP, KOPZI and Centro Penc. The primary aim of this report is to evaluate the quality, effectiveness and relevance of the Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) based on the feedback provided by the beneficiaries and their self-assessment on the impact the spaces had on their lives. Additionally, the document presents an evaluation of the SAFE HUT project itself, offering project partners an opportunity to self-reflect on both the strengths and limitations of the approach and its implementation. The findings will help identify areas for improvement, ensuring that future initiatives respond to the needs of the beneficiaries in the best way, inform advocacy for WGSS and future projects increase their reach of beneficiaries. The evaluation will also include findings from the WGSS activity plan monitoring reports by the WGSS launching countries. The Activity Plan Monitoring reports (D3.2) present detailed activity plans, explaining the deviations from the initial plan according to the WGSS Staff and beneficiaries feedback.

Framework and indicators used for the assessment

The main aim of the feedback sessions was to collect the WGSS beneficiaries' reflections, and opinions, about the effectiveness and quality of the WGSS and to evaluate their engagement, satisfaction, achievements, relevance, self-perceived impact and benefits of the activities, and assess the progress and changes in the experiences of beneficiaries at the Safe Space at the end of the project.

The evaluation of the five WGSS programs established and implemented under the SAFE HUT project was structured around key objectives, with relevant indicators designed to assess various dimensions of impact. These indicators were tailored to capture the core functions of WGSS, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their role and effectiveness:

1. **Relevance:** Whether beneficiaries think that the service is responsive to their priority needs.
2. **Quality:** Whether beneficiaries think that the quality of the service meets their expectations.
3. **Impact:** Whether beneficiaries think that the service will have the impact that they want to see upon their lives.

4. **Access, Safety and Fair Treatment:** Whether beneficiaries think that they can access the service without barriers, whether they feel safe when accessing the service and/or think that the aid is provided fairly (based on need and without discrimination).
5. **Respectful and Dignified Treatment:** Whether beneficiaries think that the service is being delivered by WGSS staff in a respectful and dignified way.
6. **Voice and Empowerment:** Whether beneficiaries think that they have an ability to influence relevant programming decisions made by the WGSS service provider organisation (and / or partners, if applicable) and whether they are being empowered to meet their own needs.⁷

Evaluation design and data collection

Summary of methods used (qualitative and quantitative approaches) and data collection tools

The present evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the effectiveness and quality of the pilot WGSS in Greece, Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria as well as the ongoing implementation of the WGSS in Italy by Centro Penc under the SAFE HUT project. The methodology involved structured surveys with female beneficiaries, group feedback sessions as well as structured surveys with WGSS staff to gather comprehensive insights on the impact of the WGSS.

In particular:

- **Individual surveys** - A total of 133 structured surveys with women and adolescent girl beneficiaries were conducted in two rounds, involving 111 unique beneficiaries. The survey was developed based on the WGSS Toolkit and standardised and distributed to all partners across all locations. The initial round was conducted following the first six months of the WGSS pilot program, encompassing a sample of 76 women. The subsequent round was conducted during the final two months of the pilot program, marking nine months of implementation, and included 57 women, 22 of whom mentioned throughout the report as '*returning women*', had participated in the initial round. This approach enabled a comparative analysis of returning participants' experiences, satisfaction, and evolving needs over time while also integrating the perspectives of new participants to assess the current state and impact of the safe space. The survey was administered through **three different modalities**, depending on the participants' literacy level, digital skills, and availability: women who were literate and able to complete the survey independently, including those who were not actively attending the WGSS at the time of data collection, were invited to participate through an online self-administered survey; for those with limited digital skills but who regularly attended the safe space, the survey was self-administered in person on paper; finally, for women who faced challenges in completing the survey

⁷ International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, 'Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings'. <https://gbvresponders.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRC-WGSS-English-2020.pdf>

independently, individual in-person interviews were conducted by WGSS staff to ensure their voices were included in the evaluation.

- Group feedback sessions - in addition to individual surveys, group feedback sessions were conducted, engaging 62 WGSS beneficiaries. To ensure inclusivity, these sessions were designed using a combination of artistic methods, chosen by the participants themselves, with drawing emerging as the preferred means across all WGSS. Other methods included word clouds and use of dixit cards to represent their emotions.
- Feedback survey delivered to the WGSS staff. To complement beneficiaries' perspectives, a structured feedback survey was also administered to 21 WGSS staff, including five social workers, three WGSS coordinators, four cultural mediators, one educator, two project experts, and two psychologists (the remaining four staff chose not to disclose their roles). The aim of the survey, delivered through both online modality and in person, was to gather insights on the quality of services provided within the Safe Spaces, as required by the original project indicators.

All these feedback methods were implemented consistently across all five WGSS locations in the project's five implementing countries.

Moreover, findings from the Activity Plan Monitoring Reports (D3.2) from the WGSS launching countries were included throughout the evaluation to confirm results or offer a different perspective on the implementation of the activities in the Spaces. The Activity Plan Monitoring Reports present information and a compilation of feedback about the activities implemented in the WGSS. After the launch of the activities in the WGSS, the first meetings with WGSS beneficiaries have been dedicated to a 6-monthly planning of the activities to be implemented in the WGSS. The activities have been proposed by the women and girls attending the Safe Space and are based on their priorities and specific needs. The planning has been tested for the first 6-months piloting of the WGSS and according to the women's feedback repeated with some revisions for the following 6-month period. Locally the planning has been guided by WGSS staff, (supported by national project experts) and implemented in collaboration with other local partner organisations and support service

Limitations

The WGSS staff endeavoured to ensure that the participants in the evaluation reflected the diversity of the existing group attending the space, considering factors such as age, cultural background, needs, and levels of participation in activities. However, participants selection was primarily influenced by their availability to attend the safe space and to take part in feedback sessions, which may result in findings not fully capturing the diversity of all beneficiaries coming to the Safe Spaces.

Moreover, while the aim was to have at least five women from each organisation involved in the second round of feedback, one country struggled to reconnect with women who had participated in the earlier survey. On the other hand, some partners successfully engaged significantly more beneficiaries than

expected. The Bulgarian partner, especially, reached 29 beneficiaries, surpassing the initial goal of 15 for the first round of interviews. This disparity may affect the analysis, as the views of beneficiaries from the Bulgarian WGSS are overrepresented compared to those from other countries. However, this correlates with the larger number of beneficiaries in Sofia's WGSS.

The evaluation did not include a pre-assessment phase, as this was not originally planned within the project framework. To address this, two rounds of evaluation interviews were conducted - one after the first six months and another after nine months - to assess ongoing changes, involving also some of the women already interviewed in the first feedback round. While this approach allowed for comparative analysis on specific indicators, it did not provide a fully controlled pre- and post-assessment. Instead, self-evaluation surveys were used, enabling women to reflect on their own sense of empowerment and the perceived effectiveness of the safe space.

Data cleaning

In terms of limitations, it is important to note that two responses provided online were excluded from the analysis due to inconsistencies, which made them invalid for inclusion. Likewise, any duplicate answers submitted in the online version were removed to ensure the accuracy of the findings. In order to determine the results presented, the total sample size was adjusted by excluding women who chose not to answer specific questions or where the question was not applicable to their situation..

Key findings from evaluation

Demographics of respondents

The feedback survey for first-time responders from both survey rounds captured responses from **111 women** across five different WGSS in **Sofia (Bulgaria), Bucharest (Romania), Athens (Greece), Kaunas (Lithuania), and Palermo (Italy)**. The majority of the interviewees were third-country nationals from **Ukraine**, making up nearly a half of the entire sample (**49 respondents**), which included women from the Bessarabian Bulgarian minority group coming from Ukraine (14). The other main countries of origin were **Egypt (9), Afghanistan (8)**, and others from African, Middle Eastern, Asian, European, and Latin American countries, including Morocco (4), Nigeria (4), Ghana (4), Syria (3), Algeria (3), and Turkey (3). The **majority of participants (83%) fell within the age group of 25 - 60 years old, particularly including women aged 25, 30, 35, and 41**. Smaller portions of the sample included younger participants (aged 17 to 24) and older adults (up to 78 years old). Focusing on the main differences in the demographic among the different locations of women participating in the survey, we can notice how in **Sofia, the survey saw a fairly balanced mix of nationalities**, with Ukrainian and

Bulgarian participants each making up a significant portion of the sample, while a smaller group was from Afghanistan (4), and the rest from countries such as Iran, Haiti, Syria, Vietnam, Congo and Cote d'Ivoire. Moving to **Bucharest**, the picture changes slightly. Here, **all 20 participants were Ukrainian nationals**. In **Athens**, the diversity of nationality groups became even more apparent. The **largest group was from Egypt (7), followed by four women from Afghanistan**. Smaller numbers came from Algeria, Morocco, and Syria, while single participants came from Somalia, Jordan, and Greece itself. The age distribution in Athens was relatively wide, with participants ranging from 23 to 78 years old. **Kaunas saw a similar mix of nationalities, with participants from 16 different countries**. The largest groups were from **Turkey (3), Ukraine (2), and Egypt (2)**, but the diversity extended further, with single participants coming from South Africa, Nigeria, Mexico and other countries in Latin America and the Middle East. Considering participants' age, Kaunas surveyed **women ranging from 23 to 78 years old**, much like Athens, with a representative demographic of both younger and older respondents. Finally, in **Palermo**, the nationalities were mostly African, with **Nigerians (3) and Ghanaians (3) being the most represented**, followed by smaller numbers from Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, and Latin America countries.

As for returning participants, 22 women who had participated in the first round of the survey were interviewed again in the second round. The majority were from Ukraine (9) and Egypt (4) while the remaining participants came from various other countries, with single respondents from Congo, Ghana, Macedonia, Morocco, and Nigeria, among others.

Results on satisfaction, quality and effectiveness of the WGSS were consistent across all demographics and did not vary significantly based on age or nationality. Other relevant demographic data such as education, income level, parental status, marital status and legal status were not included in the data collection.

Satisfaction and engagement

Evidence on satisfaction and engagement of WGSS beneficiaries

WGSS are co-designed spaces, with beneficiaries directly choosing the typology and timing of activities. This contributes to strengthening their '**voice and empowerment**' and their capacity to influence relevant programming decisions as well as to the other WGSS principles of '**access, safety and fair treatment**' and '**respectful and dignified treatment**'.

A significant proportion of the participants in the study, specifically 60%, actively contributed to the development of the WGSS activity plan. This included participating in group discussions led by safe space facilitators and using feedback boxes to express preferences regarding the selection of activities and their timing. The percentage does not reach 100% primarily because not all the individuals interviewed attended the Safe Spaces during the development of the WGSS activity plan. Additionally,

as one survey respondent noted, some did not have the time to engage in the development of the safe space activities.

In any case, even if not all beneficiaries were formally involved in the development of the WGSS activity plan, their remarks on the activities were gathered through a group activity attendance form at the conclusion of each event. This provided an opportunity for all participants to express their opinions and enabled the activities to be tailored and adjusted to women's needs and preferences.

Significantly, **all the beneficiaries (100%) involved in the development of the WGSS activity plan were satisfied with their engagement**, with 63% of them reporting to be very satisfied and 37% satisfied.

Moreover, when asked if they felt their opinions and contributions to the group were taken into consideration and that they directly contributed to the functioning of the Safe Space, all women surveyed agreed, 54% strongly agreeing and 46% agreeing. Eight individuals opted not to respond, reflecting a hesitance to voice their opinions or a shyness that limited their engagement, though they still conveyed overall satisfaction with WGSS activities.

This indicates that their input was actually integrated into the WGSS activities development in the different WGSS.

To facilitate women's participation and maintain their active engagement, ensuring that WGSS sessions and activities are scheduled at convenient times is imperative. When asked about the suitability of the timing and schedule of activities, 89% of respondents expressed agreement, while 7% expressed disagreement, which could be due to a preference expressed by some respondents for the space to be open on Saturdays and Sundays, allowing them to access activities during non-working days. Several participants suggested offering weekend activities specifically for children: *"I am also interested in a space for activities for children (my grandson is three years old) on Saturdays and Sundays."*

Out of 111 women first-time respondents in the first and second round, 18 mentioned that they encountered some difficulties accessing the safe space and the activities/services provided – indeed, the most common barriers were conflicting working hours and also public transportation issues..

Despite these challenges, overall participation levels remained stable or increased over time for most returning women. Among the 22 returning women in the second round, 11 reported that their level of engagement had remained the same, seven that they had participated more regularly in the WGSS activities, and only three that were participating less frequently. Two specifically mentioned distance, personal health issues, and childcare responsibilities as obstacles.

These findings, therefore, underscore the importance of involving women and girls in collaborative decision-making processes during the planning phase, particularly regarding the timing and scheduling of activities to maximise accessibility and participation in WGSS activities. In response to such concerns, all WGSS locations have worked to accommodate feedback from participants by adjusting their schedules and services.

Satisfaction with respect to WGSS staff

Most of the responses collected from feedback interviews were highly positive regarding the WGSS staff. This was particularly evident in questions about feedback channels and sources of support for women, with many participants mentioning WGSS staff specifically. In general, the open-ended responses were filled with kind words and gratitude toward the staff, reflecting the strong, positive relationships women have built with them and the sense of trust and support they feel within the WGSS environment, as demonstrated in some of the examples below:

“The girls [WGSS Staff] always wait for me with joy. Every time they have something different to show us and they always ask us what we would like to do. I feel that we support each other and we are all free to talk.”

“The staff is really nice. They take care of us and respect us, they listen to our problems. We discuss various topics and they lift our mood up. They are really polite.”

“The staff of the place is very kind and calm. The girls always respect us and ask our opinion. They talk with us and are interested in both our problems and needs. The place is very warm and familiar.”

During the group feedback sessions as well, women in Greece mentioned that the **WGSS staff and peers provided a strong sense of security, companionship, and emotional support, helping them navigate life's challenges with calmness and wisdom.** Women in Greece frequently expressed their satisfaction with the care and attention provided, as well as the personal relationships they've built with the staff. It was crucial to maintain this level of personal engagement, ensuring that staff continue to be responsive and approachable. Similarly in Italy, **participants emphasised the quality of relations with the staff, describing them as a fundamental reference point in their journey.** *“Here my son and I are always welcomed with a smile and a cup of tea”* was a phrase that further emphasised the warm atmosphere and the supportive environment characterising the WGSS, similarly to what women in Romania described (*Image 1*). In Bulgaria relationships within the safe space were similarly characterized by **kindness, empathy, and care, demonstrating the positive impact of the environment on fostering trust and meaningful connections among beneficiaries and staff.**

Quality of WGSS

Evidence on quality and relevance of the WGSS

The added value of the WGSS activities and services lie in their capacity to address the priority needs of beneficiaries and maintain a high standard of services that meet their expectations. This is measured by how women perceive both the **'relevance'** of the services provided– whether participants think that their service is responsive to their priority needs – and the **'quality'** – whether participants think that the quality of the service meets their expectations.



Figure 1 - Drawing by a woman in Bucharest WGSS - "You lift us up when we are down"; "Every time you receive us with coffee"; "WGSS is love and understanding"

Feedback from both WGSS staff and beneficiaries indicates a high level of satisfaction with the quality of services provided. Specifically, **all respondents reported being satisfied with the quality of services offered in the safe space** – notably, 55% of beneficiaries were very satisfied and 45% satisfied. **Regarding the relevance of activities offered, when asked whether the activities at the safe space were relevant to their expectations and needs, almost all (99%) surveyed beneficiaries agreed**, with 46% strongly agreeing that activities aligned with their expectations and needs and 53% moderately agreeing.

The activities women liked the most and found the most useful in the WGSS were those that offered both relaxation and personal growth opportunities, especially in the domains of personal and cognitive empowerment activities. **Recreational activities** were the most appreciated activities, mentioned **38 times** by women. This reflects the importance of the Safe Space for having time for leisure and for connection with other women. Of these, painting and drawing were women's most popular choices, emphasising the therapeutic and expressive value of creative activities. Another popular activity was the jewellery making workshops. Cooking classes or food experiences followed closely, with women often remarking that preparing their country of origin's food and sharing it with the community made them feel at home. Physical activities, like Pilates, were another key component of the recreational activities, which strengthen women's mental and physical health.



Figure 2 - Drawing by a woman in Bucharest WGSS

Women also appreciated the diversity of **all activities** in general, with **19 mentions**, indicating a broad recognition of the value in the variety offered. **Cognitive empowerment activities, especially language skills development** was another highly valued activity, with **16 mentions**, highlighting the importance of communication in building autonomy and integration. In the WGSS launched in Bulgaria, based on beneficiaries' feedbacks

and needs, it was decided to dedicate more time to the Bulgarian language course delivered by Caritas furthermore many participants expressed the desire for the Bulgarian language course to continue at higher levels, specifically B1, B2, and C1. In addition to these, **psychosocial activities (10 mentions)** and **individual counselling (9 mentions)** were also deemed particularly helpful, offering women emotional support and personalized guidance. Some participants also enjoyed the more informal aspects of the safe space, such as **coffee or tea, small talk, and recreation (9 mentions)**, which provided an opportunity to relax and create bonds with others. Under this last category, women highlighted how important it has been for them to get the opportunity to interact with other women in order to build a new community. An emblematic statement from one of the women attending the WGSS was: *"I created a network and friendships; women from WGSS are my second family"*. Other activities that received appreciation included **legal orientation and information sessions (8 mentions)**, **self-defence classes (5 mentions)**, and discussions and info sessions about **gender-based violence and anti-trafficking** and **financial education (3 mentions)**. Lastly, more specific activities like **cultural orientation sessions**, and a **resilience-building seminar** were also appreciated, though they were less frequently mentioned compared to the others.

When asked about activities they disliked, most women did not voice specific criticisms, indicating they enjoyed all the offerings across the five WGSS. In particular, one woman highlighted the flexibility and the participant-driven approach of the WGSS, mentioning: *"If I am not interested in a specific activity, I am not forced to attend it, so I can do anything I want in the WGSS."* Women should feel free to participate in activities that align with their interests and needs and which themselves chose in the first place. The only concern expressed in this regard by some women concerned language barriers: they reported difficulties in attending language classes due to the national language's complexity, could not appreciate movie nights, and sometimes struggled to engage in conversations with others due to a lack of a common communication language. For this reason, they all emphasized the importance of keeping learning the host country's language in the Safe Space to improve their communication and integration. Indeed, language acquisition programs were highly valued, particularly for helping women integrate into the host country and its communities. Given the consistent positive feedback on this activity, the language programs remained a central part of the WGSS sessions.

In order to provide their feedback on the quality of activities, partners also established formal feedback channels and mechanisms to continuously collect input from beneficiaries, based on women's and girls' needs and preferences to ensure accountability. When asked whether they knew any feedback channels available to provide feedback, make requests or lodge complaints to the staff of the space and whether they were satisfied with the types of channels available, women **demonstrated awareness of the available channels and satisfaction with their functioning**, with **76 women either affirming this and/or providing a valid example of a feedback channel available**. Among them, **21 women specifically stated they could speak directly to WGSS staff whenever needed**, reflecting a sense of openness and accessibility in the environment. The feeling of trust regarding the WGSS staff is also highlighted by some of the comments left by women attending the WGSS: *"The girls are the best that I have met this year. It is their smile once you enter the space - it gives you the courage to talk and you feel nice, meaning that you are not afraid of talking or you do not restrain yourself. We see them and we feel*

secure immediately". Furthermore, nine highlighted the anonymous complaint box, suggesting that participants appreciate having various, including private, options to voice concerns or share feedback.

With regard to the feedback from the WGSS staff, all personnel (100%) was satisfied with the quality of services delivered in the Safe Space, with 57% strongly agreeing and 43% agreeing with the statement, *"I am satisfied with the quality of services offered in the Safe Space."* Additionally, when evaluating the level of coordination and communication to deliver quality services within the WGSS team, 57% of staff rated it as excellent, while the remaining 43% rated it as good.

Effectiveness of WGSS

The effectiveness of WGSS was evaluated through a series of questions and metrics designed to assess various dimensions of women's empowerment, aiming to measure their '*impact*' - specifically, whether beneficiaries believe that the service will have the effect they wish to see in their lives. Emphasis was placed on well-being and safety, as well as the ability to make independent decisions alongside the development of skills and competencies. All indicators were organised to evaluate the self-perceived impact and benefits of the activities, allowing beneficiaries to determine whether the services provided had the intended effect on their lives and whether they felt empowered to meet their own needs. Also the WGSS Staff expressed their opinion on which services and activities are most effective in meeting beneficiaries' needs and improve their empowerment.

Evidence of changes in WGSS beneficiaries' well-being and safety

One of the main purposes of WGSS is to create a **safe environment where women feel safe and protected from risks such as trafficking in human beings and gender-based violence**. It aims to foster a space where women can openly share their feelings and emotions, without fear of judgment. To evaluate this, women's perception of the WGSS as a source of relevant support was assessed - not only in terms of guidance on where to seek help in case of violence but also for the strengthening of their social connections.

To assess awareness of available support, women were asked if they knew where to seek help if they experienced violence. In response, 85% of the women who chose to respond answered positively and on average, each woman was able to name at least **one place** where she could seek support. Notably, **36 participants mentioned the WGSS itself** as a place where they would seek help in case of violence, underscoring its role not only as a preventive and empowering space but also as a trusted point of reference in times of need. On another aspect, when asked whether they had met women and girls to turn to for support since attending the safe space activity, **92% of women affirmed they have expanded their support network in this regard, thanks to the WGSS**.

Group feedback sessions with women in the five WGSS further reinforced these findings. In **Lithuania**, women emphasized the **joy of having found a place where they feel safe and free to share their**

Figure 3 - Drawing by a woman from WGSS Bucharest - "The Safe Space is relaxation, safety and socialisation"

[illegible]

Figure 5 - Wordcloud created by women from WGSS Sofia during group feedback sessions

All women surveyed reported feeling welcomed and safe at the space, with 67% strongly agreeing and 32% agreeing with the affirmation 'I feel welcomed and safe at the space'. Similarly, **almost all respondents (99%) felt able to discuss their problems and emotions with staff without fear of judgement.**

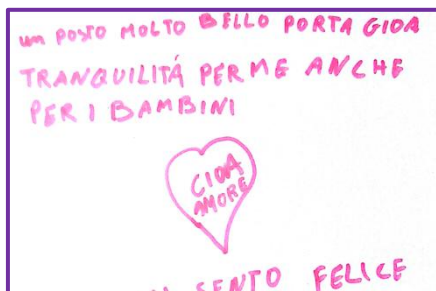


Figure 4 - Drawing by a woman from WGSS Palermo - "The safe space is a beautiful place, which brings joy and calm to myself and my children. I feel happy."

When directly asked if their well-being had improved thanks to the activities and services at the safe space, **95% of respondents confirmed a positive impact**, with nine people who chose not to answer or whose answer was not applicable.

23 women indicated that their well-being improved primarily through engaging in **recreational activities** in which they found relaxation, enjoyment, creative expression, and connections with others in a safe, supportive setting. Among these, **art-based activities** such as painting and drawing were the most commonly cited (6 mentions), followed by **dance sessions**. Other appreciated

activities included **skincare workshops, knitting, jewellery-making, and cooking classes**, all of which combined hands-on engagement with moments of social interaction and mutual learning. Additionally, women also appreciated yoga and movie screenings.



Figure 6 - Drawing by a woman from WGSS Bucharest: "I've received help and support"

Apart from psychosocial group activities, mentioned by six women, contributing to emotional well-being through peer support and shared reflection – as mentioned by one woman attending the WGSS: "Psychosocial activities help me to find the outcome from depression" – also cognitive and socio-civic empowerment activities contributed to women well-being. In particular, **language classes** (10 mentions), **legal orientation sessions** and

informational activities (8 mentions), particularly in navigating daily life in a new context and given the difficulty for some individuals to learn a new language by themselves. The importance of informal moments—such as sharing **coffee, tea, and small talk**—which were also mentioned by eight women as meaningful opportunities for connection and emotional relief. Finally, **individual counselling** was mentioned by seven participants, who found value in the personalized support and the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences, as highlighted by one woman: "Individual counselling is the most useful because I can open up my heart and share my thoughts and disclose my personal issues."

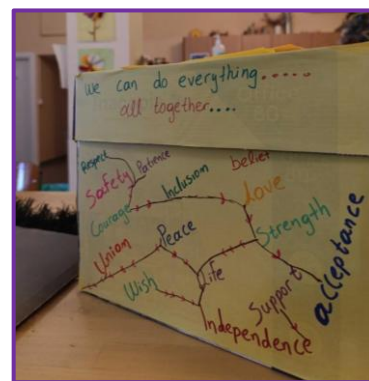


Figure 7 - Feedback box in Athens WGSS

These perspectives align with the WGSS staff feedback who also provided their views on which services and activities were considered most effective in meeting beneficiaries' needs. However, while many women emphasized group activities, staff placed greater importance on individual support services. Indeed, nearly a third of surveyed staff emphasised the effectiveness of **individual support services**. In particular, **psychological individual support** was mentioned by the staff for the significance of providing a secure environment for women to share their personal struggles noting that *"the most important thing is when a woman talks about her personal life and problems and finds someone who listens to her because, psychologically, she needs to feel that there is someone who supports her and shares her feelings"*. **Case management** was also recognised as crucial, as it allows for a deeper comprehension of beneficiaries needs and assists in bridging gaps in accessing services: *"Through this service, we are able to identify and understand most of the needs of our beneficiaries."*; *"All these services were proven the most important ones as there is not a well-known network of services and most women do not know where to seek for support."*

Despite the emphasis on individual support, staff also acknowledged the importance of group activities, **particularly language support, psychosocial and socio-civic activities**, highlighting how much they foster a sense of community and offer a platform for women *"to talk about their personal experiences, share their challenges, and learn new things about the society they live in."* **Recreational activities**, including art therapy and yoga, played a crucial role in enhancing emotional well-being and resilience. Specifically, art therapy was mentioned as a way to process difficult emotions through creative expression, whereas yoga was recognised for its ability to encourage relaxation and overall well-being. These activities were identified as crucial elements in not only providing immediate relief but also supporting long-term recovery, improving resilience and overall well-being of the beneficiaries:

"Women appreciate these opportunities to relax, connect, and briefly return to a sense of normalcy, life they had before. That's why we strive to provide what they need while also integrating activities that help them feel welcome and empowered in this new country."

Some partners reported challenges in conveying the importance of informational sessions and individual counselling to women, as many initially preferred to focus solely on recreational activities. In certain locations, this was all that some participants wanted to engage in. This difference in priorities might explain the slight variation in findings between beneficiaries and staff, as women often sought immediate comfort and distraction before feeling ready to engage in deeper support services. In Romania it was evident that **legal information sessions** were absolutely necessary to help women understand the new regulations and navigate social services, ultimately preventing concerns and potential situations such as eviction.

Additionally, through daily interactions with the beneficiaries, the WGSS Staff recognized that many women in the WGSS were highly skilled in specific hands-on activities: craftsmanship, sewing etc. thus they took the initiative co-create the activities.

It's important to note that some activities were also organized based on the resources available to the organization at the time (both financial and human).

Overall, the staff acknowledged the importance of all the services provided, each contributing to different aspects of beneficiaries' needs and well-being.

During group feedback sessions, some women were asked to visually depict their emotions

before and after joining the safe space. Many women in Lithuania conveyed feelings **prior to their participation** using terms such as 'sadness', 'anger', 'loneliness', 'confusion', 'emptiness', and 'challenges', all depicted in darker hues. In Greece, women described their initial emotional state as one of severe isolation and despair, similar to **living in a "cell"**, articulating a profound sense of loneliness, hopelessness, and a need to connect and escape. Similarly, in **Bulgaria**, women described themselves as **"a suitcase without a handle"**, symbolising a lack of direction or support. After joining the safe space, however, their experiences transformed: they spoke of love, faith in the staff, renewed hope, and support, often referring to the safe space as a **"second home"**. Their current feelings were overwhelmingly positive: happiness, safety, care, calmness, peace, love, creativity, and joy which women in Lithuania represented with lighter colours like yellow, blue and green. Many shared a strengthened and new self-awareness and revitalised sense of self - **"I feel like I exist again"** - even finding comfort in letting go of nostalgia for their home country, embracing their present with optimism and emotional healing. Additionally, in **Bulgaria**, women emphasized the warm, supportive atmosphere, frequently characterizing it as a **"family-oriented environment"** that nurtures trust, mutual understanding, and emotional stability. These insights highlight the **significant emotional and psychological influence of the WGSS, showcasing its vital role in promoting healing, empowerment, and sense of community among women.**

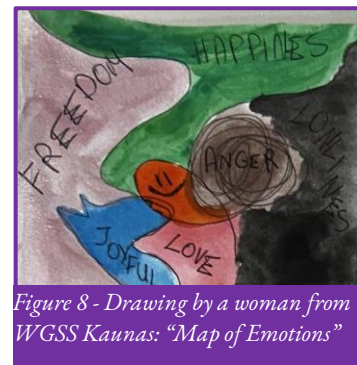


Figure 8 - Drawing by a woman from WGSS Kaunas: "Map of Emotions"

73% of returning women re-interviewed in the second round of feedback reported noticing positive changes in how they felt about the safe space and its activities. Notably no respondents reported a decline in their experience; instead, many expressed feeling happier than ever and feeling more welcomed and engaged: *"I feel like I belong here. I have a place. If I would like to come here I can always come. No matter how long I haven't been here."* Another added, *"Every time that I visit the space I feel like home. The activities are very interesting and we learn new things. I can say my opinion without fear."* Those who reported no change explained that they had felt "comfortable and safe from the first day".

Evidence of changes in WGSS beneficiaries' sense of empowerment

Another key dimension of the WGSS evaluation was assessing how much the WGSS activities and support provided contributed to women's empowerment. In particular, it was important to



Figure 9 – Word cloud created by women in WGSS Athens during the group feedback session

determine how much women increased their ability to seek support, make decisions and raise their voices.

In terms of being capable of asking for support, 93% of women agreed that they felt they could do it as a result of attending the safe space (56% agreed and 37% strongly agreed). This percentage diminished (82%) for those beneficiaries who have been attending the WGSS for two months or less, while rising to 100% for those women who have been attending for more than eight months.

Notably, **four participants emphasized a renewed ability to trust others** - an important element in rebuilding social networks and fostering emotional safety. A client, regarding the improvement of her skills, stated that *"I feel braver. I'm not afraid to express my opinion, and I feel safer because I've made friends."*

Similarly, when asked whether they felt more empowered and valued to make decisions about their future since joining the safe space, 91% answered positively. Once more, this proportion reached 100% among long-term participants (8+ months) and it was lower (82%) among those attending for two months or less.

The ability to advocate for themselves and others within the community was another area of notable change: 82% of women reported feeling able to raise their voice in the community to talk about their and other women rights. This indicator was marginally lower compared to others, likely because more advanced skills are required for speaking up for rights that not all beneficiaries may have yet developed, particularly among those attending for only for two months or less, where the percentage decreases to 73%. Indeed, among women who had been participating for over eight months, the percentage again reached 100%.



Figure 10 - Drawing by a woman from WGSS Palermo - "We are the world"

Evidence of changes in WGSS beneficiaries' skills and competencies

The WGSS offered a variety of activities designed to increase women's skills and competencies. These included legal orientation/info sessions (covering topics such as overviews on legal changes for Ukrainian refugees, accommodation programs, civic empowerment, rights and obligations etc.), recreational activities (such as craft making or crochet workshop), self-defence classes, advocacy trainings, financial education, language skills (e.g. basic communication skills in English).

When asked whether they felt that their skills and competencies have increased thanks to the activities and services of the WGSS, 96% of women surveyed agreed with this affirmation. This

percentage increased to 98% among those who have joined the WGSS for more than five months. Women reported that thanks to the activities of the Safe Spaces they have been experiencing improvements across a range of **personal, interpersonal, and practical skills**. These areas of growth reflect the nature of the activities offered and support provided.

Among the skills most often mentioned as improved were **communication skills**, with 15 women reporting greater confidence in expressing themselves during both group activities within the WGSS and in daily life interactions. To further substantiate the findings above, 12 women reported **improvements in their social skills**, including greater ease in social situations and more positive interpersonal relationships. Notably, three participants highlighted a **renewed ability to trust others**—an important aspect of rebuilding social networks and fostering emotional safety. One client, reflecting on her skill enhancement, stated, *“I feel braver. I’m not afraid to express my opinion, and I feel safer because I’ve made friends.”* Emotional intelligence and emotional regulation were also highlighted by **14 women**, who reported a better capacity to understand and manage their emotions, as well as increased empathy toward others. Similarly, **14 women** pointed to **improved self-confidence and decision making**, describing a stronger sense of security in themselves and their abilities, particularly when facing daily challenges or pursuing personal goals. A further **five women** mentioned **improving their ability to relax and calm down**, whether through specific techniques (mindfulness sessions) or simply by finding a safe and welcoming space to decompress.

Language acquisition was another area of progress, mentioned by **11 participants**, many of whom noted improvements in their ability to understand and speak the language of the hosting country. **Eight women** reported having **developed or strengthened manual and artistic skills** through creative workshops and hands-on activities, which also served as a meaningful outlet for self-expression and relaxation. Other areas of skill development mentioned included the **acquisition of general knowledge**, including on employment and legal issues—reported by **five participants**— and **two women** reported **progress in financial planning**, specifically in managing personal or household budgets.



Figure 11 - Drawing by a woman in Bucharest WGSS

Across different WGSS locations, during group feedback sessions women confirmed the transformative impact of the spaces on their skills and competences. In **Lithuania** women mentioned how creative activities like clay modelling and crochet fostered patience, creativity, curiosity and practical skills, while also encouraging women to trust in their own abilities and be brave to share their ideas, strengthening their sense of community. In **Greece**, the **learning experience within the safe space for acquiring new skills was characterized as empowering, fulfilling, and transformative**. Participants felt a strong sense of pride and accomplishment, especially during creative activities and opportunities for connection, such as art, group discussions, and hands-on workshops. Although challenging topics were discussed throughout the year, they noted that the meetings served as a beacon of hope, helping them address their challenges with resilience with a revitalised sense of purpose. One participant remarked, *“Our meetings were like a light in our lives and problems,”* stressing that the

learning journey at the safe space was a harmonious mix of growth, laughter, and empowerment, making the safe space a consistently positive environment.

In terms of integration, only four women felt the activities at the WGSS were unhelpful (including one who opted not to respond). **The overwhelming majority (96%) stated the WGSS was beneficial for their integration, with 70 women indicating that the WGSS assisted them in two or more integration areas.** Reflecting on their integration experiences, the most frequent area of improvement was the one regarding *'relations with the local population and active participation in society,'* mentioned 74 times. This was followed by *'learning the host country's language,'* referenced by 50 participants, and *'integration into the labour market,'* highlighted by 44. Furthermore, 42 women acknowledged enhancements in their *health*, whereas 15 pointed out progress in obtaining *housing*.

Additionally, regarding access to the labour market, while WGSS were not specifically designed to offer job placement counseling or direct employment support, **it is important to highlight that eight women secured employment with the assistance of the WGSS and 4 women worked as communication officers in the newly launched WGSS.** Furthermore, 48 women received professional guidance for employment inclusion in small groups or at the individual level.

Further reinforcing this impact, follow up interviews revealed that **64% of 'returning' women reported positive changes in their level of empowerment, well-being and skills development compared to their previous feedback session, while the rest maintained the same level of progress.** In particular, those who experienced a change described it as a highly positive one, with improvements in their psychological state mentioned five times - *'I feel stronger and happier'-*, in their confidence and empowerment mentioned by nearly half of the respondents - *'I used to be more reserved and found it hard to talk to others., 'Now, I've become more open and can express my feelings more freely', 'Maybe I'm more connected to society',* and with improvements of their skills, cited four times - *'Through the activities we do in the space I learn new things and we acquire several creative skills'.*

Indeed, **when reflecting on what has improved the most in their experience at the safe space since the last feedback session, women confirmed notable improvements in their psychological well-being and self-confidence** – often linked to the strengthening of their social networks and relational ties and interpersonal skills: *"I feel like a part of something. I'm not feeling alone like I used when I first came to the safe space", "I am happier, I have more friends that i can ask for help if I need it."* Additionally, many highlighted the **development of creative and linguistic skills as well as increased awareness of gender-based violence and legal information.**

Challenges and areas of improvement

Across both rounds of feedback, the majority of participants did not mention any particular challenge. However, a minority of women highlighted difficulties related to integration, financial stability and access to essential resources. During interviews in the first round, some women expressed ongoing concerns about their integration process, particularly difficulties with the local language and navigating society. One participant emphasized the need for additional support, stating,

“To ensure a more comfortable stay in the country, it would be beneficial to organise more Bulgarian language courses, provide deeper insights into legal matters, and offer detailed information about the activities of various self-governing bodies. This would help prevent a lack of knowledge and enable confident interaction in everyday life with institutions such as the migration service, banks, the employment office, notaries, the judicial chamber, and others.” Some beneficiaries also stressed the importance to increase activities such as job counselling sessions to help them integrate into the labor market. In Romania the most pressing concern highlighted by the women is to be informed about the new legislation in terms of migration policies. The political instability are major sources of concern for the women to address these critical issues.

In the second round, three women expressed a desire to continue learning the host country’s language, feeling their proficiency was still lacking. Others mentioned economic struggles, issues securing housing, and a scarcity of essential items for their children, such as diapers. WGSS staff also reflected on key areas for improvement. In particular, they stressed the importance of supporting women in reaching financial independence from their husbands, encourage economic incentives and improved childcare services, which are often significant obstacles to women entering the workforce. Moreover, staff underscored the necessity of improving outreach efforts, as connecting with all women in need continues to be challenging. In this sense, enhancing collaborations with local municipalities was recognised as a vital measure for expanding access to the safe space and its resources.

Regarding the implementation of the activities, in the WGSS based in Lithuania the initial approach was to follow a 6-month plan, introducing new activities each time to ensure a diverse and heterogeneous program. However, this strategy presented unforeseen challenges: the constant changing of activities did not ensure continuity or in in-depth exploration of the topics addressed during the activities and as a result, the plan became increasingly difficult to be implemented. This perspective was also shared by the beneficiaries, who, sharing their impressions and feedback on the program, highlighted the need to ensure continuity in the implementation of the activities they were most interested in.

After discussing this issue in group discussions, the beneficiaries identified the activities and topics they would have liked to spend more time on, and also suggested new activities to implement.

This shift in perspective led to an adaptation in the approach. Instead of sticking rigidly to the idea of constant novelty, the WGSS staff together with the beneficiaries decided to incorporate continuity by building on the activities that had already engaged the participants. The input from the women helped the WGSS Staff to co-create a plan that balanced the introduction of new ideas with the extension of successful activities. This more collaborative and participant driven approach allowed the WGSS Staff to implement the updated plan without significant further changes and made the project more manageable and relevant to the women interests. In this way, the deviation from the original plan was not a setback but an opportunity to adapt and better serve the needs of the women who comes to safe space.

While WGSS staff have worked to mitigate these challenges, these integration-related difficulties are not criticisms of the Safe Space in itself. Instead, they emphasize a shared belief among the women that the WGSS is an essential support system and that there is an even greater necessity for it to maintain and expand its services.

Indeed, despite the above challenges, when reflecting on the entire time spent at the Safe Space, all women described its impact as profoundly positive, summing it up as a space for self-improvement, empowerment, and both psychological and physical rest. It provided them with opportunities to form new friendships and nets of support - both within their own communities and across different cultures – making it a place of integration, renewal and personal growth. Many referred to it as a “**second home**”, not only for themselves but also for their children, who benefited from the childcare services. Their words capture the depth of this experience:

“In the Space, I feel myself again.”

“I feel like I have a second little family, every time I go it's like going home.”

“The Space is like a second home to me, with beautiful faces. I have met new women and learned things. It makes my life sweeter.”

Evidence

on engagement of
stakeholders for

continuation and replicability across the EU

Based on the experience gained through the implementation of the spaces, a decision was made to evaluate the involvement of external stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of the actions undertaken for the WGSS. 100% of the stakeholders (36) engaged and surveyed during the project's dissemination and sustainability activities provided positive feedback on their commitment to supporting the continuation and replication of the WGSS across the EU, answering "yes" to the question: "Would you be willing to collaborate with the WGSS to ensure its sustainability?".

Conclusions

Summary of key insights

The Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) implemented in Lithuania, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Italy in the scope of the SAFEHUT project have proven to be transformative environments. All women interviewed for this study highlighted the profound positive impact these spaces had on their sense of empowerment, confidence and well-being. Through a holistic combination of psychosocial support, skill-building activities and community engagement, the Safe Spaces have provided women with opportunities for growth, healing and self-expression.

In terms of key insights and lessons learned across the six dimensions of the WGSS:

1. **Relevance:** women consistently reported across all five locations that activities at the WGSS effectively respond to their most pressing needs. This is also due to the fact that whenever possible all women were involved in the development of the WGSS activity plan and expressed satisfaction with their involvement. Women especially emphasised the importance of group activities, particularly recreational activities and creative workshop that offered them moments of peace and connection with peers. Beneficiaries emphasized that talking to someone in order to navigate personal challenges and find emotional relief - being their peer or a specialised person - was transformative. Psychological support and case management were deemed by especially by WGSS Staff as essential services, particularly due to the fact that few beneficiaries have well-articulated supporting systems. With the one-to-one support supplemented by group activities such as language lessons, socio-civic orientation, and creative workshops, women were able to address both practical and emotional needs, while acquiring skills and limiting their social isolation.
2. **Quality:** the vast majority of women reported a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of services received in the Safe Space, a quality testified to by WGSS staff members themselves. Further, the dedication and professionalism of WGSS staff were highly praised, and their respect and kindness were greatly appreciated.
3. **Impact:** the WGSS had a very significant positive impact on women's lives in all the three dimensions explored: psychological well-being, empowerment and skills development. Through their feedback, women reported how they feel stronger, more resilient, more hopeful for the future and better equipped to express themselves and engage with society. Some participants have even credited the WGSS with helping them obtain jobs by boosting their self-confidence and providing employment support.
4. **Access, safety and fair treatment:** the WGSS in all locations were highly praised for their accessibility and sense of safety they provide. All women felt secure, welcomed and free of any judgement from other women or from WGSS staff. The inclusive nature of the WGSS allowed women from diverse backgrounds to connect and support each other.
5. **Respectful and dignified treatment:** the WGSS are often described by beneficiaries from all locations as a "second home" where they feel valued, supported, and respected. This is also clear

in the feedback about the staff being described as compassionate, attentive, and deeply committed to their well-being, thus fostering trust. Additionally, the relationships among women within the WGSS contribute to a strong sense of community.

6. **Voice and empowerment:** one of the main outcomes of the WGSS is increased empowerment of its beneficiaries. The Safe Space led women to feel more independent, more assertive in expressing themselves, more confident and in charge of their own lives. Women have developed a strong and positive sense of self-worth and agency which allowed them to stand up for themselves and the needs of their community, and to make autonomous and informed decisions about their future.

Such changes are not only short-term but also have a long-term perspective: indeed, for their holistic nature, WGSS not only deliver immediate social, emotional and psychological support but also acts as a long-term catalyst for social inclusion, empowerment, and community building and as an engine of social change.

Women's contributions and experiences have illustrated how important the WGSS are to their lives and the life-changing influence that these spaces have exerted, as well as the pressing need for ongoing sustainability and expansion of WGSS across the EU, so that all women, regardless of their background, have a safe, respectful, and empowering space in which they can build a better future.

The words of beneficiaries make it clear: the WGSS are not just temporary solutions, but essential community spaces that transform lives and should be preserved and expanded to ensure that no woman and girl is left without support.

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