



GREECE

Country-specific contextual report

Findings from the assessment and recommendations
for establishing a Women and Girls Safe Space in Greece

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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, will run for 24 months (01/04/2023 – 31/03/2025) and involves seven experienced partners from six EU countries (Italy, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria). The main project objective is to support social and labor integration of migrant women and girls (potential) victims/survivors of trafficking and other forms of violence by establishing Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe and are supported through processes of empowerment.

Project partners

[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](#) – Asociația Ecumenică a Bisericilor din România (Romania)

[Animus](#) - Centre for rehabilitation, counseling and psychotherapy (Bulgaria)

1. Introduction

This report includes the key findings of the assessment conducted by KMOP in Greece, as launching partner of a Women and Girls Safe Space (WGSS) in the scope of the Safe Hut project. The assessment was conducted at a stage prior to the establishment of the WGSS, in order to gather important information to tailor and adapt the WGSS to the local context, under the guidance of the IRC as partner of the project. In this phase key stakeholders such as community leaders, local and international NGOs, and local authorities working in the migration and anti-trafficking field were engaged to give their feedback on the major needs of women and girls survivors or potential victims of human trafficking. In the assessment, a key role is played by women and girls who are actively involved in this phase not only as informants or potential beneficiaries of the WGSS, but as decision-makers.



This analysis is key to define critical strategies to develop and plan the programming design of the WGSS that will be launched in Athens (Greece).

2. Summary of assessment

KMOP as a launching partner of the WGSS in Greece has conducted a context and community dynamics assessment following the guidance of the IRC. IRC provided the relevant tools contained in the WGSS Toolkit, which were adapted to the local contexts with the collaboration of the other launching partners of the Safe Hut project: AidRom in Romania, Kopzi in Lithuania and Animus in Bulgaria.

The assessment included the following activities: 1) Key Informant Interviews with key stakeholders in the geographic area where the WGSS would open – Athens in this case; 2) Service Mapping of entities which provide services to women and girls – including but not limited to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and anti-trafficking services 3) Stakeholder analysis to collect information on key players who are important for the effective launch and running of WGSS; 4) Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with women and girls survivors or potential victims of trafficking and safety mapping (as part of the FGD) to collect needs to ensure a tailored women and girls – led design of WGSS; 5) Focus group discussions with members of the migrant communities and community leaders to gather information from stakeholders who can influence women and girls access to the WGSS; 6) Community mapping to better assess the accessibility and safety of services which are addressed to women and girls.

KMOP listed the most important stakeholders to be involved in this process, taking into consideration who can support or hinder an organization from securing a WGSS. The assessment was a first opportunity for the organization to establish the grounds for trust and credibility for the WGSS within the community. At the same time, it allowed women and girls to be involved from the very first steps of the launching process and to promote their empowerment and leadership skills, which are fundamental objectives in the WGSS programming.

Safety considerations were examined before engaging women and girls, to ensure they would not be put at risk. The confidential nature of discussions was reiterated, and participants were permitted to use pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, with no insistence on sharing personally identifiable information. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants understood the purpose, format, and potential risks of the discussions, and explicit details were provided regarding how gathered information would be utilized and shared. Active moderation was in place to monitor discussions for inappropriate behavior, collectively ensuring a secure and risk-free environment for all participants.





2.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted between June and September 2023 in Greek language and involved 9 Key Stakeholders, 8 female and 1 male. They allowed to collect relevant information on the context and community dynamics, on the most vulnerable groups and on the relationship dynamics between different groups and community leaders. The details gathered also provided useful indications on the potential location of the WGSS.



CONTEXT AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS

During the KIIs it was discussed which are the most safe and accessible areas for women and girls in Athens. According to some informants, given the high incidence of criminal activities, Athens and Piraeus are areas not suitable for the establishment of a WGSS. According to others, the feeling of safety does not necessarily depend on the actual level of risk in a certain area, but on how people experience it, and if it is familiar to them. As a result, some specific areas, which may be landmarks for women and girls, should not be excluded due to their high criminality rate. Athens and Piraeus are densely populated areas and migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women alone with no knowledge of the national language, may not feel generally safe, but they may decide to attend a place if it appears safe.

Some of the stakeholders interviewed stated that after the national elections in June 2023, tensions started to surface in certain areas of Athens and Piraeus. There are recorded incidents of racist violence and organized radical groups are re-emerging. It is therefore important to consider places that are not isolated but, at the same time, are not easily identifiable. For this specific reason, as the present report is publicly shared, it will only give general recommendations and insights without specifying the place where the WGSS will be established. Safety risks related to the different locations were discussed between IRC experts and KMOP staff prior to establishing the WGSS. In the discussion with key stakeholders, specific neighborhoods were considered to narrow down the targeting of the potential location for the space.



COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

The assessment took into consideration overlapping or **intersecting social identities** and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination (intersectionality) to stress that the co-occurrence of vulnerabilities is a multiplier effect for women victims or at risks of GBV and trafficking. Among other, race, sexual orientation and gender identity, country of nationalities and origins, elder age, homelessness, unaccompanied and separated situation, addiction, mental health and sexual and reproductive health issues, were identified as particular characteristics putting women and girls from the identified target groups at greater risks of experiencing violence and trafficking as well as having more barriers accessing social services.

It was reported that the groups/identities change depending on the area of the city: the profile of migrant women in Pagrati area is different from the one in Kypseli. Among the main identities of women there are the Roma women, either of Greek or foreign nationality, women with disabilities, women with children who also face mobility difficulties, victims of trafficking with children. Among the intersectional identities, there are sex workers, people with diverse SOGIESC¹, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants mainly from the ex- USSR countries, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, African and Eastern European populations, Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC), homeless women, elderly women, women and girls with addictions, and mental health issues were also mentioned as in need of support and further protection and social services.

¹ SOGIESC: Umbrella term for all people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics. IOM UN Migration 2020, Introducing SOGIESC Information into Pre-Departure Orientation Curriculums

In terms of **ethnicity**, migrant women are mainly from Subsaharian countries as well as of Arabic and Farsi ethnicity. Based on the findings of the KIIs, among specific ethnic groups, some women are particularly at risk, such as Yazidis who are marginalized due to their language even from their own ethnicity and women from some African countries such as Somalia, because many of them have been identified as victims or at risk of trafficking and Female Genital Mutilations (FGM). One of the informants mentioned that Arab women are more at risk of domestic violence within their households.

Among **the most vulnerable groups**, women and girls of migrant communities were mentioned as a general group, since there are very few services available to them, especially those facing multiple vulnerabilities such as mental issues, disabilities, women who are undocumented or with pending criminal proceedings, single mothers, victims of gender-based violence/domestic abuse. “In general, it should be mentioned that multiple vulnerabilities cannot be supported by the system” (KI 1²).

Concerning the **relationship between different ethnic population groups**, it was reported by some Informants that they are not always harmonious, especially due to the different cultural backgrounds and the language, which is often a barrier to a peaceful coexistence. No bridges exist between communities and there may be disputes and competition based on different interests and identities/characteristics, different belief systems and religions. In communities with a common linguistic background (Afghanistan and Iran for example) although there are significant differences, a synergy and a joint participation in different activities have been noticed. However, one informant mentioned that the existence of a common language or religion does not suffice to create social cohesion, especially when they experience GBV. For example, as it was reported, women from Somalia, who may be connected by religion with women from Iraq or Syria, cannot easily coexist or cooperate due to different lived experiences.

² In this document, some quotations stated during the assessment by the stakeholders interviewed are reported. To keep the person anonymous, they are reported as Key Informant 1,2,3.

All the KIIs stated that there are hidden or visible **tensions** among the community members, like the ones between members coming from African countries and members of ex-USSR countries for the reasons linked to the different cultural backgrounds mentioned above. Additionally, members facing mental issues are usually viewed with suspicion.

In case of tensions, attention should be paid to racism against African women, who are likely to be more easily targeted. In addition, there may be a prejudice coming from migrants of Balkan descent against women bearing headscarves, burqas, or non-religious women; also, prejudices are widespread towards women involved or believed to be involved in commercial sex. Similarly, women wearing tattoos, piercings, or non-traditional clothing may be considered “immoral” by some groups. Generally, it is seen that people tend to build more cohesion with people with similar characteristics, thus creating homogeneous communities of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees within the city of Athens.

Tensions between groups are also related to the timing of their arrivals in Greece and their level of integration in the country. According to some Key Informants, second and third generation of migrants (such as Albanians) are more integrated within the Greek society and experience less prejudices than newcomers. Micro-tensions were also reported between cis and trans women of the migrant communities as the former are not fully familiar or find the idea of trans identity acceptable.

Regarding the relations with the host community, some communities are more welcomed and perceived more positively than others. This seems to be partly related to cultural and religious differences. For instance, Ukrainian refugees and migrants are more supported than other foreigners that have settled in Greece since 2015. This different approach highly depends on the image and stereotypes that the host community may have in relation to specific nationalities that are perceived as more distant and therefore are confronted with more suspicion.

Some **mitigation measures** were mentioned during the KIIs to handle potential tensions between groups in the WGSS: open discussions, information, staff training, cooperation, experiential learning, intercultural sensitivity. Financial support and staffing with trained human resources are also necessary. Some of the proposed mitigation measures mentioned during the KIIs are listed below:

- Training in diversity management;
- A code of conduct which includes the values of the WGSS the principle of non-aggressive behavior;
- Cultural mediators support;
- Cooperation and good communication within the space;
- FGDs to learn the characteristics of each group before implementing any action. “There are always links between communities. The goal is for the professional to be able to identify those elements that will connect them.” (KI 2);
- Promotion of the inclusion principle. Through cooperation and discussion, it is possible to remove stereotypes and cultivate intercultural sensitivity and cooperation;
- Promote dialogue and listening to all sides - Focus on what they have in common and not on differences.





COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS

During the interviews, it emerged that there are **relationships between NGOs and community leaders**, which appear to be predominantly positive relationships and more or less systematic, depending on the case. It was stated that migrant communities could have more space opportunities to represent their needs, and some stated a certain willingness of NGOs to engage leaders and women leaders in this regard, in order to improve their cooperation, supporting migrant communities in improving their social conditions. In general, it emerged that there is room for such cooperation to improve and some communities argued that they are underrepresented within NGOs; however, some organizations try to ensure the visibility of the communities.



The main idea among the informants is that **there is no valuable representation of women's voices** in the Greek society. One of them said that as long as there is no female representation, women's issues cannot be fully raised. However, proper groundwork and sensitization of male representatives (i.e., awareness raising campaigns and training sessions on SGBV, child protection and legal issues) can make them allies of women.

"Leaders are men and men cannot represent a woman because they don't understand her and because women don't open up to them. Especially because men themselves violate women's "desires", so how can they express them?" (KII 3).

Women and girls' participation in decision-making processes depends on the community they belong to. For example, the Georgian community or more broadly the Balkan ones have a greater participation of women; the Ukrainian communities have women in leadership positions. On the contrary, for Afghans the balances are delicate, and the Pakistani community is essentially a male affair.

In some African communities (e.g., Ethiopian, Nigerian, Cameroonian), the participation of women has been noticed, especially among older women and mothers. What seems to prevail for these communities, however, is the presence of a religious leader in the decision-making processes of the community.

As for trans women sex workers, they are members of the Transgender Support Association (SYD) but the active participation of migrant women is limited, mainly due to the fear of outing and marginalization from their communities after such a disclosure.

Concerning the **key communication channels** between communities and local NGOs, it was reported that in the refugee accommodation facilities, communication is feasible face-to-face or through coordinators. In the urban centers it can be done via WhatsApp, Telegram,

or by phone, but also through door-to-door invitations for activities. It depends also on the community. For example, the Ukrainian community uses email to communicate with its members and share their respective information. In general, social media also play an important role.

Occasional invitations and bilateral or multi-lateral meetings with communities, or the AC-CMR platform and the UNHCR working groups are also helpful.

Some participants declared that the **involvement of the communities' leaders** should be evaluated ad hoc, depending on the dynamics of the community and the approach the leader may have towards certain types of initiatives. Most of them are powerful men, and if they don't endorse certain initiatives, they might hinder them from the beginning.

As an alternative, some KIIs suggested to focus on the inclusion and inter-community ties to reach the members of the communities, without the mediation of the leadership. For this approach to be successful, a community's leadership mapping, followed by the development of trust and good communication would be required, as the concept of a safe space for women and girls may be perceived differently in each community.

For the leaders' involvement, communication and explanation of the scope, objectives, and services of the WGSS, as well as info sessions with the communities would be useful to explain what kind of services members can receive and to allow the communities to express their views and to participate in a co-creation process. The methods can be various, such as focus group discussions, surveys, and questionnaires.



SERVICE PROVIDERS AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

A discussion was conducted on key stakeholders, in terms of existing associations or NGOs working in this field. Several **women's associations or networks active in the area** were mentioned, such as DIOTIMA, Women in Action, ARSIS, PRAKSI, have projects related to migration and GBV; DAM-ARIS works with single mothers, while NEA ZOI and POSITIVE VOICE also provide services to sex workers; some of the mentioned organizations also have day centers.

Among others, **organizations working with migrant women and girls** include:

- UNHCR, which also has a relevant GBV department;
- A21 and ARSIS which deal with anti-trafficking;
- MELISSA network which is both a women's association and an NGO;
- the Ukrainian and Georgian communities, which are particularly active;
- Christian networks;
- Iran Women's Association;
- Afghan Women's Associations;
- The United African Women Organization with a strong presence;
- The General Secretariat for Public Politics and Gender Equality;
- Feminist activists and political groups developing humanitarian actions based on activism;
- Red Umbrella centers with its interventions at an institutional level, collaborating with other organizations (such as the Racist Violence Recording Network) and the police;
- Sex Workers' Empowerment Network (SWEN), a forum for the support of sex workers;
- Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI);
- Municipal Counseling Hotlines;
- Armutel community centre (reproductive health, SGBV awareness raising campaigns);

As for specific support other organizations were mentioned, such as:

- MSF, Global brigades, and Doctors of the world for medical issues;
- BABEL and MSF for psychosocial support;
- MSF and DIOTIMA for interpretation services;
- Generation 2, Odyssey, Threads of Hope for job training;
- ActionAid for practical issues i.e. declaring taxes;
- SOLIDARITY NOW and DIOTIMA for legal assistance.

As additional organization delivering multiple services were also mentioned: the JRS refugee service Athens (employability services, recreational activities, laundry services, non-formal education activities, food distribution) and Amina Association Hellas (psychosocial support, hygiene kits distribution, referrals, recreational activities).

There are also a few associations – both formal and informal – supporting women of specific backgrounds, nonetheless there are many organizations-members of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) providing services to women as well.

As far as the dynamics between local and international organizations are concerned, there is good cooperation between local and international NGOs, mainly due to the long-standing cooperation of the past years. However, issues regarding potential competition for funding should generally be considered.

Certain organizations may be closer to communities and grassroots, while others may have a more “corporate” form, but even then, cooperation is feasible. The anti-trafficking National Referral Mechanism (NRM) works as the coordinating body amongst the member organizations, which refer survivors to the system and report on the status of service provision.

Concerning the service mapping, the following entities were mentioned: EMA's (National Referral Mechanism- NRM), NRM's mapping of services to victims of trafficking, ACCMR's community service mapping platform, and UNHCR's 4W Matrix for services to the refugee population.

Among the main **stakeholders** that could be involved in the assessment that were mentioned, the non-state actors and participants suggested the NRM's list. Regarding state actors, it was mentioned the General Secretariat for Equality and human rights. One of the interviewees pointed out that the target group (i.e., women and girls) should be involved. However, it was mentioned that beneficiaries often move within the boundaries of their community, some of them are not used to attend places in areas of the city that are unknown to them. Thus, the possibility to create safe spaces within the shelters and camps was suggested, along with the organizations with day centers structures, such as NEA ZOI and Action Aid. It was also mentioned to involve the academic community (e.g., the Social Anthropology Department), security forces (human trafficking, domestic violence departments) and public organizations (Solomon, manifold), including police authorities, both so that they can make a referral and because they may need to intervene in response to a complaint, e.g., a violent incident. In general, it was suggested to involve professionals providing services to women, covering different fields, such as psychosocial support, accommodation, and social inclusion.



EXISTING REFERRALS AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Women and girls' access to feedback mechanisms should be improved, especially in the case of migrant women, for whom the language issue is a severe barrier in reporting.

Among the main existing feedback mechanisms which were mentioned are the GBV reporting mechanism, the anti-trafficking National Referral Mechanism, SOS Hotline 15900 (for all women), counselling centers, and the COLOR YOUTH hotline for LGBTQ people, Police, Racist Violence Recording Network, A21 (running the national anti-trafficking hotline), and ARSIS. It was reported that feedback and monitoring procedures by social services on the progress of reported cases should be strengthened, since there is little familiarity with the issue of managing cases of gender-based violence or trafficking towards refugee or migrant populations, as stated during the focus groups discussions. Initiatives such as the "pocket guide and application" of the General Secretariat are important, as is the corresponding pocket guide of the IOM. However, case managers' supervision is also needed.

The Anti-Trafficking NRM, operating under the auspices of EKKA (National Center for Social Solidarity), is responsible for collecting the respective reports and issuing the annual and semester findings. On the NRM's website, there are available guidelines on how to identify indicators of trafficking, how to refer and report survivors, as well as information material that can be provided to presumed victims.

There are specific protocols for emergencies, e.g. abuse or harassment, which set out the process and the parties involved, as well as a Referral Form, for an immediate procedure to be activated.

For other protocol/guidance on WGSS or GBV programming it was suggested to consult the IASC principles³, and the [United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#) and the [UN WOMEN](#) websites; the protocols of the [General Secretariat for Equality 2016](#), the [SURVIVOR program](#)⁴.

³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015. *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action – Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience and Aiding Recovery*. <https://gbvguidelines.org/en/>.

⁴ The Survivor project is funded by the European Union and brings together a consortium of key state institutions (GSGE, KETHI), the leading Greek GBV organisation (CRWI Diotima), and the Greek branch of the global humanitarian actor for GBV (IRC Hellas), <https://diotima.org.gr/en/cases/the-survivor-project-enhancing-services-for-refugee-and-migrant-gbv-survivors-2/>.



DETAILS RELATING TO THE SUPPORT OF THE WGSS

The participants highlighted that the opening of safe spaces for women and girls should be accessible via public transportation, while avoiding dangerous areas and zones. They would be supportive of the establishment of a WGSS, stressing the issue of collaboration among organizations for higher effectiveness.

Some of the participants considered the areas of Athens and Piraeus a priority as target locations, mainly due to the number of potential beneficiaries who live there, and due to the fact that the day centers (such as the one of NEA ZOI) are not able to cover the needs of the entire population. At this moment there are gaps in daycare centers for children, legal aid services, and challenges deriving from homelessness. This would also offer an alternative to the congestion of organizations in the city centre, giving at the same time women and girls the opportunity to be active a further away from where they live, enjoying the freedom of not being too close to their home. Some of the interviewees were positive about the creation of a safe space in an area where no similar centers exist (i.e., Piraeus), as long as all protection measures have been taken, it is easily accessible and there is sufficient lighting in the area.

Constant communication, interconnection, and cooperation with the Municipalities (both Athens and Piraeus) regarding the existence of services and the available space were considered useful, increasing the safe space's security and validity. At the same time, it was pointed out that neither the government nor the host community are always ready to accept such initiatives, therefore information sharing on women rights and obligations is needed. Also, for these reasons, the importance of establishing good management and planning, and managing the expectations of others about the services offered was underlined.

The participants expressed overall their support for the establishment of a safe space and the wish for collaboration, especially for sex workers and beneficiaries with diverse SOGIESC. They also supported that the place should be confidential, with only a phone number being publicly available.

Regarding the **role of men** in such spaces, it was mentioned that they could be allies in this initiative, but risks are always hidden. A comprehensive risk assessment should be carried out. They also suggested a targeted outreach of the male potential allies who serve as community leaders, especially during the phase of the space creation and during the phase of the strategic reviewing and approach.

Considering the involvement of men as staff or community leaders' engagement, the participants explained the necessity of staff assessment before entering the space and the confidentiality of services in case they work with victims of trafficking.

Men's involvement depends on the nature of the services and the orientation of the space (e.g., if the space focuses on GBV and anti-trafficking issues, men may not be an asset). Clear instructions and rules are necessary for the space to operate smoothly with different populations. The engagement of men who work in Municipalities was also considered crucial in tackling GBV, avoiding however their direct involvement with women.



DIVERSITY

According to what emerged during the discussion, the main identity groups of women and girls in the community are: 1. Single-parent families 2. Women and girls, survivors of Female Genital Mutilations (FGM) 3. Women-members of nuclear families (Iran, Iraq) and victims of domestic violence 4. Victims of trafficking, 5. Women with a precarious legal status.

Concerning the possible isolation at home for women and girls, all participants agreed on the fact that in most cases young girls/daughters are isolated in their homes as they undertake household tasks and the upbringing of their siblings, because their mothers work outside the house. As a result, they become accustomed to a condition of confinement and over-commitment, which is why it is much easier to get into such a similar condition in the future as adults. Restrictions on girls are also attributed to the moral values of each culture.

Restrictions on time of the day when women and girls can move around were also discussed. These concern mostly indirect restrictions as a result of the amount of household work, they have to undertake after their husbands and children are back home from work and school respectively.

There are also restrictions on the types of services they can access: safe spaces and services that aim at women's empowerment are forbidden for them by their families (especially by their husbands). It is common for professionals to name the counseling sessions as "appointment to the doctor", "provision of school supplies" for women to be allowed to participate.

One of the participants stated: "It has to do with the perception that the family has, as the dominant cultural view is that of the submissive woman. Therefore, their presence in such a space is identified with liberation. Even in exchange for simple help, it was initially considered very bad. Seeking help was characterized negatively." (FGD, P1⁵).

⁵ Participant 1 of the Focus Group Discussion – in the report some of the quotations of the focus group discussion are reported, keeping the participants anonymous.

Among other suggestions, one of the informants declared the willingness to support the existence of places that "make them [women] feel creative, escape boredom, give them a reason to exist", highlighting the need for such places inside the reception centers. Such places should not require long walks but should be close to public transport; they should not provide services at night and they should be aesthetically pleasant, inspiring warmth. Among the activities proposed: 1) Creative activities: sewing, arts and crafts – painting, jewelry making, 2) Information meetings e.g. on gynecological issues, women's rights, education, internet safety, 3) Off-site visits e.g. work places, worship places, recreation centers, 4) Film screenings – documentaries, 5) Theatre groups for the expression of emotions, 6) Music and singing (lessons and recreation), 7) Discussions with immigrant women who have already been integrated, businesswomen, doctors, 8) legal sessions since most of the issues are of a legal nature.

2.2 Focus Group discussions

KMOP conducted 2 Focus Group Discussions for the assessment activity, one with women and girls and another one with members of the communities.

2.3 FGD with women

The Focus Group took place on the 12th of September 2023 with 8 women representatives of the age group 30 – 50 years old, coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Afghanistan and Syria.

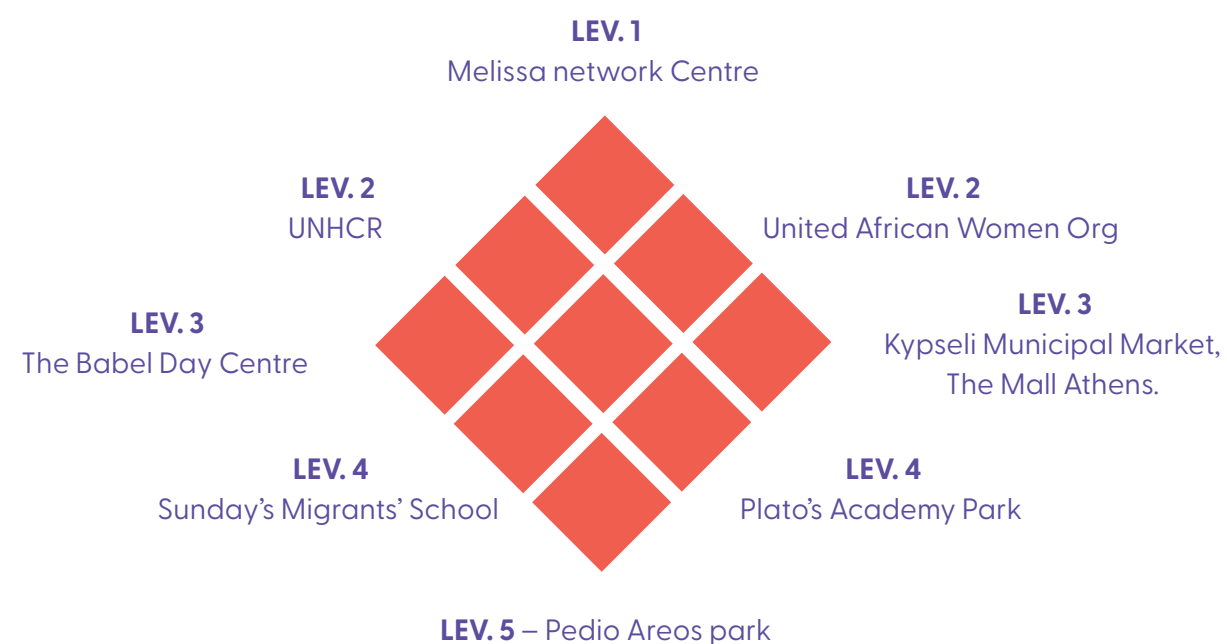


The existence of a WGSS near the migrant communities was a **controversial issue**. Certain participants supported the idea that WGSS should be near places familiar to them. Others mentioned that WGSS inside their communities may pose a risk to their safety as their abuser may also have access to it. The WGSS should be accessible for people with disabilities and with public transportation. Ground floor rooms should be avoided for privacy reasons (“to be away from prying eyes”), fostering their comfort. Ideally, the safe spaces should operate in the morning and early afternoons, “in line with their husbands’ work and their children’s school hours” (FGD, P2).

The **Safety Mapping activity** was conducted during the FGD. It consists of issuing a visual representation after the mapping of the places considered safe by women and girls in a certain area and of other places that represent a high risk to them (Fig. 1). This helps assess their knowledge of the services available.

The safety mapping activity was carried out online. In the figure below, the safest place is on the top (Melissa network center - first level of safety) and the other four levels represent places that are less safe for them, in descending order from level 2 to 5: level two UNHCR and United African Women Organization center, level three the Babel Day center, Kypseli Municipal Market, The Mall Athens; level four, Sunday’s Migrants’ School, Plato’s Academy Park and the latest safe place at the bottom of the pyramid Pedio Areos park.

Fig. 1 – Visual representation of the Safety Mapping activity



During the discussion, women declared that what makes a place safe and accessible is the fact that it can be reached via public transportation, that has adequate lights and is close to the communities. If their husbands don’t work or they need to help their children with their homework, it is unlikely for women to go out and generally they move around the city during daytime. As for the adolescent girls, permission to go out comes from their father or any male authority in the household (e.g., stepfather, brother, uncle, grandfather). It was reported that it is important to engage community leaders, local support services, community centers and women’s organizations to increase the chances that women and girls are allowed to participate to the WGSS activities. No one mentioned the necessity for women and girls to be accompanied to the WGSS.





Regarding the **women's profile**, the overall opinions were in line with the WGSS principles, namely that the space should not be targeted specifically at one group of interest (abused women, victims of trafficking, etc.). It was suggested not to put such criteria as it is easy for them to be stigmatized. The Safe Space should simply be aimed at women, and the criterion for participation in such a space should not be based on the women's vulnerability, but only on their interests.

Concerning **men's access**, it was said that at least in the first phase of implementation it should be a female-only space. In the long term, it can be discussed if the space could be open to everyone. It would be good, in any case, to prioritize women in order to foster their empowerment in every aspect of their personal and social lives. Other participants did not show concern for men's access.

The general daily habits of women and girls were also discussed to tailor the WGSS program to the target population's needs and daily schedule. They were expressed as follows:

- 7pm to 9am – sleep and rest – school activities
- 5am – 9am – school activities – outdoor domestic duties
- 10am to 1 pm – outdoor domestic duties– socialization
- 1pm – 4 pm – outdoor domestic duties– socialization
- 4pm to 7pm – homework – school activities

The types of activities and services that support strength, assets, and control of change around women and girls were also discussed. The following emerged:

- Entertainment activities, such as dance
- A place to hang out and drink coffee
- Childcare and creative activities
- Skills development in line with the job market and job counseling
- Information that supports women decision-making
- Info sessions

During the discussion it was mentioned that the WGSS should be a place where women and girls can be free and escape their rigid daily habits; to decompress, thinking something like “I can go and have a good time. There are places where they can cultivate their skills and I encourage that, but I think a space to escape from any pressure would be ideal” (FGD, P3).

2.4 Focus group discussion with communities

The FGD with communities took place on the 11th of September 2023 with a **mixed gender group** of an age range between 28 and 50 years old. The participants had different roles in the community, such as community leaders, cultural mediators, and community members.

The participants of the FGD brought very different points of views and opinions; this variety can be reconducted to the fact they belong to diverse cultural backgrounds and countries of origin.

Participants from Syria and Afghanistan indicated that the profile of their co-national women is one of wives and stay-at-home mothers who do not contribute financially to their household. On the other hand, participants from Morocco, Congo and Tunisia indicated that the women from their communities are mostly single, single-parent families, employees or/and students.

Regarding the topic of women's and girls' isolation in their homes, community members from African countries (i.e., Morocco, Congo, Tunisia) explained that many of their co-national women with a job, work outside their house in Greece, while participants from Syria and Afghanistan stated that their co-national women typically stay at home, taking care of their household. However, this highly depends on their relationship status, meaning that this is the case of married women with children, while the single ones follow a more independent lifestyle. One of the participants stated “The married Afghan woman will continue to maintain the profile of a mother/woman in any host country. In many cases she will start working. Usually, she will limit herself to domestic work. However, underage, or unmarried women may choose to work, or study based on their own strengths and not yet marry” (FGD, P4).

The participant from **Kurdistan** declared that Kurdish women's social status has been upgraded due to their participation in the army back in their country of origin, a status that follows them in Greece. “In recent years we have seen a complete alignment with men. In other words, we are witnessing a liberation both institutional and social. The position of women in Kurdistan has been radically upgraded precisely because of their participation in armed conflicts. In Greece, we see exactly the same upgrading of this role” (FGD, P5). Reports from **Morocco** indicate that Moroccan men tend to sustain and perpetuate conservative and traditional gender roles, while the migrant Moroccan women “are more easily liberated” (FGD, P6). Participants from **Syria** mentioned that Syrian men's identity is around their status as employees, which facilitates their smoother integration in the host community than women's, who stay at home and communicate solely with co-nationals.

As regards places where women meet other women, places like playgrounds, parks, churches/ places of worship, schools and stores run by co-nationals were mentioned. Someone reported: “From my personal experience, I would stress that there used to be a meeting place for Moroccan women, which was organized by the community itself. However, it was closed after intervention by men from the same community as they disagreed with its existence” (FGD, P7).

As places considered unsafe, specific areas of Athens were mentioned like the city center, Omonia, where clashes and robberies occur most often.

According to what emerged during the focus groups with community members, what makes a place safe and accessible for women and girls is the fact of being a public space, with female staff or with limited male presence, and yard/space for their children. Gradually developing trust and freedom were also considered crucial for their participation in safe spaces. Participants pointed out that women should not feel the obligation to participate or engage in the proposed activities or feel that their participation would exclude them from their contact with other organizations. “In my opinion, they would feel more comfortable with women. It creates more safety and more room for developing trust and solidarity than with men.” (FGD, P8)

Restrictions on the time of the day that women and girls go out of their houses are related to their duties and household obligations. Most of them also showed their concerns in men’s participation to the WGSS or in the involvement of male staff. It is important to keep the space as female-only also in terms of professionals working there.

As for the most suitable **location** for the WGSS, participants did not unanimously agree to a suggestion. Certain participants claimed that the city center would be an ideal place, while others supported the idea that communities outside the center should also benefit from such a space. Certain participants declared that the information of the existence of this place should be publicly available, while others expressed their concerns for privacy and safety leaning towards a private place disseminating through the relevant organizations to their beneficiaries.

The most suitable **time** to provide services in WGSS seemed to be the morning and early noon hours when the rest of the family members are at work or school. Flextime was also proposed, including some hours in the morning and afternoon so that it is accessible to all groups, working women and non-working ones.

During the discussion related to the community leaders’ engagement, it was stated that although they are influential within their communities, not all informants were sure of the leaders’ involvement. There are some leaders who are trusted within the community and that may invite women and girls to attend the WGSS since it is a space that can benefit them, but it depends on the person. This could mean that before reaching out and involving a community leader, it is important to know him/her and understand if he/she can have a positive influence on women and girls.

According to some informants, the best way to disseminate the value of such a space and for women and girls to be encouraged to take part in the WGSS activities, would be through word-of-mouth from women who are trusted and who also believe in the benefit of the WGSS. On the contrary, they may not trust women or people who they don’t know if they invite them to some initiatives.

3. Recommendations for establishing the WGSS

The implementation of the WGSS should follow the general guidelines and tips given in the [WGSS Toolkit](#) and the main lessons learnt from the experience of IRC and Centro Penc in implementing WGSS in different settings. However, it cannot be done so without a strong contextualization and adaptation from the design phase to the implementation. The assessment phase allowed KMOP to gather the necessary information to adapt the guiding principles of the WGSS to the context, while maintaining minimum standards. This process was carried out with the support of the IRC, and some initial recommendations for the launch of a WGSS in Athens emerged, outlined in this section of the report.

3.1 Naming, location, and physical layout – minimizing safety risks

Regarding the location of the WGSS in Athens, the different suggestions that came up during the assessment must be taken into consideration. First, it is recommended that it is easily accessible and reachable by public transportation, as stated several times by key informants and also stated in the WGSS Toolkit guidelines. It is important that the location is in a well-lit street and in a neighborhood perceived as safe. If an organization decides to establish it in the city center, it is recommended the space has a main, visible entrance but also a hidden one, to ensure the privacy of women and girls accessing it. Regarding the name of the WGSS, it is recommended that it should not address precise categories of women and girls, implying safety without making it explicit, in order to avoid stigma. In this regard, for instance, KMOP is considering naming the WGSS a ‘Friendly Space’.

3.2 Target population

During the assessment, it emerged that there can be tensions between different migrant groups based on their countries of origin, religious beliefs, and language spoken. People tend to build more cohesion with other people with similar characteristics, and this should be taken into consideration while establishing a WGSS. This space is not meant to create or encourage divisions, and the WGSS staff should be aware of the fact that tensions may occur, in order to be prepared to handle them as suggested in the section 3.1 of this report on mitigation measures.

WGSS staff can leverage the commonalities of the women and girls who frequent the space (by the identity “woman” - common anxieties, common fears) to create peaceful coexistence and potentially greater unity between women from different groups. In this regard, it can be useful to have an agreement between participants at the beginning of activities, to promote principles of respect and solidarity between women, making them feel that this is a space for them and that they can decide how much they prefer to be involved.

The WGSS staff cultural mediators play a key role in understanding group dynamics, acting in the direction of settling differences, and supporting the rest of the staff in managing diversity. Staff training in cultural mediation techniques, interculturality, conflict management and diversity is highly recommended. It is mandatory for all staff to receive training on GBV and anti-trafficking, as they work in this framework.

According to the assessment, it is considered suitable to have 2 cultural mediators, one from sub-Saharan Africa and one Arabic-speaking, to cover a greater group of women and girls.

3.3 Securing by-in from the community and stakeholders

As discussed during the assessment with key stakeholders, a constant communication, interconnection and cooperation with the local bodies and the other NGOs regarding the existence of services and the available space is considered useful, raising safe space’s security and validity. It is also recommended to disseminate information about what activities and services are available within the safe space, especially in the first phase of programming of the WGSS, but also throughout its time of operation. This helps manage the expectations of other actors and clients about the services offered.

It is strongly recommended to continue engaging with community leaders, both women and men, who have a positive influence on women and girls’ access to the safe space. With this respect, it could be useful to have some information in advance on their role and attitudes regarding the GBV and anti-trafficking topics, since some of the informants stated that the positive influence depends on the person.

Men’s direct participation in the WGSS is not recommended. It is important to keep the WGSS as a female-only space, avoiding the presence of men and boys at least for the first phase of implementation, so that the WGSS can gain trust and make women feel comfortable and safe. Feedback on their involvement could be collected in a second phase of programming, through consolidated feedback channels. The implementing organization can decide whether to conduct outreach activities and awareness-raising activities around GBV and THB targeting men and boys from the community, but those activities should not be carried out in the space itself, in order to guarantee a safe women-only space.



3.4 Selection and design of feedback channels

The feedback channels within the safe space will be established together with the women and girls, e.g. by initially using a box tool to collect their ideas and feedback, and by later finding other tools that make them feel more comfortable. The feedback channels can be gathered through regular consultation meetings with key stakeholders of the community, to keep them involved in the implementation of WGSS activities.

3.5 Provision of services and women-led empowerment activities

With respect to the scheduling of activities within the WGSS, it is highly recommended to consider the information gathered during FGDs with women and community leaders in order to schedule them at times that would best facilitate potential participants. What mainly emerged is the importance to propose the activities within the WGSS during daytime, since after 5/6pm some of the women may have problems in attending the space, because of limited movement possibilities.

Considering that the WGSS staff but have limited capacity to cover all activity needs, it would be desirable to forge a strong network with other associations in the city to integrate their proposals into the WGSS, if they are in line with the goals and principles of the space.

Among the activities that could be proposed, in addition to recreational ones such as tea conversation, reading, and craft making, it is recommended to propose informative sessions on specific topics such as GBV and anti-trafficking, or Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), not only giving women and girls accurate information around protection risks, but also on services available and how to access them. When proposing these activities, it is recommended to present them using generic concepts related to women's well-being and safety, without mentioning words such as violence or trafficking, which could discourage women from participating in group activities. It is recommended that WGSS facilitators assess the level of interest as well as protection risks within the groups of women and girls attending the space, to design information sessions with a more specific outlook.

As suggested by some FGD participants, the safe space should become a place for women to be free and feel safe, while they are encouraged to cultivate their skills and interests in an ongoing process of empowerment.

Finally, it is highly recommended that, organizations define the first activities they wish to develop (together with the women and girls who will attend the space) during the start-up phase of the WGSS. They should ensure clear referral pathways are defined and that their staff is well trained to handle disclosure of violence or trauma and refer incidents in a safely and timely manner to the relevant services. For that matter, it is highly recommended that interested organizations define strong partnerships with other local organizations and public services to provide a survivor-centered comprehensive response to GBV and anti-trafficking.



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