



ROMANIA

Country-specific contextual report

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

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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](#) – Asociatia Ecumenica a Bisericii Din Romania (Romania)

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

1. Introduction

This report includes the key findings of the assessment conducted by AIDROM in Romania, 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 Bucharest (Romania).

2. Summary of assessment

AidRom, as a launching partner of the WGSS in Bulgaria has conducted a context and community dynamics assessment following the guidance of the IRC, which provided the relevant tools according to the WGSS Toolkit that was adapted to the local contexts, with the collaboration of the launching partners of the Safe Hut project. The assessment includes the following activities: 1) Key Informant Interviews with key stakeholders in the geographic area where the WGSS will be opened – Sofia in this case; 2) Service Mapping with entities who provide services to women and girls – including but not limited to GBV, sexual and reproductive health and anti-trafficking services; 3) Stakeholder analysis to collect information on key players who are important for effective launch and running of WGSS; 4) Focus Group discussions with women and girls survivors or potential victims of trafficking and safety mapping to collect needs to ensure a tailored women and girls – led design of WGSS; 5) Focus group discussions with members of the communities and community leaders to gather information from stakeholder who can influence women and girls access to the WGSS; and 6) Community mapping to better know the accessibility and safety of services who are addressed to women and girls.

The partner listed the most important stakeholders to be involved in this process, taking in consideration who can support or block an organization from securing a WGSS. The assessment was a first opportunity for the organization to establish trust and credibility for the WGSS, ensuring that women and girls are involved in the very first step to promote the empowerment and leadership process, fundamental objectives in the WGSS programming. Safety considerations were examined before engaging women and girls, to ensure they are not put at risk.





CONTEXT AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

2.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted by AidRom between June and September 2023, with 11 stakeholders operating in the Bucharest area, mainly professionals representatives of local and international NGOs working in Romania including IOM, Save the Children, Terres des Hommes, ADPARE, UNICEF, eLiberare, Ace-do VOICE, and a TV Journalist. Ten out of eleven informants were women and one was a man. It was an important process to collect relevant information on the context and community dynamics, on the most vulnerable groups, and on the relationships between different groups and community leaders. It is also a key starting point to consider which can be a safe and accessible place to establish the WGSS.

Discussions on which are the most **vulnerable groups** of women and girls in the community were held during the Key Informant Interviews. According to the informants, among the most vulnerable groups are the Roma people, people with diverse SOGIESC¹, girls and elderly women, as well as Roma from Ukraine, single and young mothers; ethnic and religious minorities; people with physical and mental disabilities and chronic illnesses, and unaccompanied children.

Some of the organizations interviewed reported that they support refugee women from various countries, placing emphasis on Ukrainian refugees through spaces managed by UNHCR in partnership with ANAIS and Sensiblu Foundation in Bucharest and Brasov. The organizations extend their assistance to victims or potential victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse, emphasizing awareness among Ukrainian refugee women, girls, men, and boys on associated risks. Vulnerability is challenging to measure, but includes factors like low socio-economic background, risk of exploitation, history of abuse, lack of childcare, disabilities, and vulnerability to gender-based violence including domestic violence.

Answers regarding the relationship **dynamics** between different population groups reveal frictions during interactions. For example, when accessing public services or NGO's support, light tensions can be observed between individuals or groups of people with different backgrounds (religious beliefs and/or countries/regions of origins). The communication and interactions within the Ukrainian community are friendly however the importance of strengthening social cohesion through the integration of migrant women with different backgrounds was emphasized and it was also mentioned to consider Romanian women who would benefit from integration activities. This would improve the interconnections at local level since the interaction between migrant communities and the host population is often limited; it would also help change the perception of a person within the host community, since it was underlined how different cultures (religious, cultural or sociocultural habits of various groups) in the communities can have an impact on the daily lives of the people. Participants to the interviews shared that Ukrainian refugees are usually included more easily in the host community because they are closer to the Romanian population in terms of cultural and religious habits.

Some cases of conflicts related to the acceptance of migrant workers in the country were reported as examples of tensions among community members. The presence of abuses by employers of migrant workers, which remain unsanctioned since the trade unions show little interest in their situations, were also declared.

Among the **mitigation measures** in place, within the Ukrainian community, organizations avoid using the Russian language to avoid creating tensions related to the language use, remembering also that Russian is the primary language for some Ukrainian people. Social cohesion activities, particularly in migration projects, are put in place by some of the organizations involved in the KII. Intervention involves the General Directorate of Social Assistance Bucharest (in case of child abuse), and NGOs like AidRom, Romanian National Council for Refugee, JRS- Jesuit Refugee Service Romania, ICAR Foundation, ANAIS, and eLiberare. The multi-dimensional approach of collaborating with various stakeholders emphasized a collective effort to address social issues and foster cohesion within the community.

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



COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS

In the context of discussions on community representation and leadership dynamics, it was reported that the structure and roles of community leaders are diverse but consistently centered around maintaining a safe and friendly environment for community members. Leaders hold crucial responsibilities and the presence of two distinct leader types—political and religious—is notable in many cases. Democratically chosen, political leaders focus on legislative means for accessing rights, while religious leaders focus on social aspects. Some communities exhibit informal structures, indicating a less formalized hierarchy. Some informants stated that a possible cooperation among the different types of leaders could offer integrated services.

Social instances of community leaders attempting intervention exist, but limitations are evident, because of their capacity. For example, the Ukrainian community faced challenges in addressing aid distribution issues, with authorities remaining unresponsive. It was also reported episodes of discrimination against Romanian citizens of Syrian origin in banking services. These issues were raised by intercultural mediators who are often the link between migrant communities, NGOs and public services, trying to represent migrants' interests to the public authorities.

The dynamic between NGOs and community leaders involves targeted approaches like selecting Romani women from the host community for local facilitation and asking leaders to disseminate program information. In the emergency contexts, like the Ukrainian crisis, it is difficult to have leadership structures which can support in raising awareness on gender-based violence and anti-trafficking, setting up a community mechanism. Efforts are recognized to build structures for at-risk women and create community mechanisms.

Responses to women's representation vary, according to the different perspectives and contexts. According to what emerged during the interviews, it seems that efforts are in place to let women and girls take active participation to the decision-making processes and in the representation of their needs, but it is a slow process, and most of the activities are for their assistance. The Ukrainian community reported that women started to bring their voices and to organize themselves in formal and informal groups, to be more represented in the society.

Collaborative efforts from NGOs, UNICEF, and eLiberare contribute positively with actions to raise awareness on topics like GBV and anti-trafficking, but challenges in balancing diverse community representation endure.

Communication channels between service providers and community leaders showcase a mix of digital and in-person methods. Social networks, traditional meetings, and personal contacts form a comprehensive communication approach, highlighting the importance of one-on-one partnerships and diverse channels.

Engaging community leadership through the WGSS program involves strategic communication, education, and collaboration, emphasizing real benefits, active involvement, and recognizing leaders as voices among the people are key elements. Innovative strategies like cultural events and social media engagement contribute to a multifaceted approach. Overall, the analytical response underscores the thoughtful and comprehensive efforts to engage community leaderships, considering context-specific challenges and opportunities.





SERVICE PROVIDERS AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The communities benefit from the active engagement of women's associations and networks involved in humanitarian responses and the promotion of women's rights. The Coalition for Gender Equality, National Network for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, VOICE, and E-Romnja are among the actively participating organizations. The National Agency for Equality of Chances between Men and Women plays a significant role, operating an emergency hotline and collaborating with NGOs to support potential victims.

Refugees, while not directly involved in NGO structures or community leaders, often have links to women's associations or organizations. Among the most important organizations were listed ANAIS, eLiberare, FILIA Center, ECLER, Sensiblu which respond to current humanitarian needs providing legal and psychological counseling, along with group sessions. Organizations like VIS, A.L.E.G, E-Romnja, and the Gender Equality Association contribute to the promotion of women's and girls' rights. They are also involved in preventing human trafficking, promoting women's voices, and engaging in public policies. The VIF Network and PROTECT have been identified as contributors to humanitarian efforts. A comprehensive list of organizations assisting Ukrainians, including the abovementioned ANAIS and Sensiblu, are available for reference.

Several community-based organizations and local NGOs actively work with women and girls, contributing to diverse areas such as human rights, combating gender-based violence, and protecting women's rights, addressing intersectional discrimination, and advocating for the rights of Roma women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

The dynamics between local organizations or networks and local/international organizations vary, with international organizations making efforts to engage national authorities and civil society platforms. Checking the membership of platforms such as [PROTECT](#) and Reteaua-network VIF provides insights into collaborative efforts and a multi-stakeholder approach. In the assessment phase for WGSS, a diverse range of stakeholders, both local and international, actively contribute. Organizations like ANAIS, FILIA Center, Red Cross Romania, and ACCEPT are crucial in providing support and services related to women's rights and gender-based violence. The involvement of global entities like UNHCR, UNICEF, Red Cross, and WHO brings international perspectives and resources to address unique challenges. The collaboration between local authorities, governmental agencies, and NGOs ensures a holistic understanding of the local context and existing resources, paving the way for informed and targeted interventions. The engagement of leaders from state institutions, NGO platforms, and entities like IOM and UNHCR in Romania enhances the effectiveness of the assessment phase, promoting a coordinated response to address the needs of women and girls comprehensively.

The communities exhibit to know the system of feedback mechanisms which ensure that individuals, particularly women and girls, can express their concerns and needs. An inter-agency feedback mechanism, including a specific focus on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), demonstrates a proactive commitment to accountability and



EXISTING REFERRALS AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

responsiveness. These mechanisms contribute to a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the community's well-being and addresses gender-specific concerns.

In parallel, the reporting mechanism for Gender-Based Violence provides individuals with channels to report situations related to domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender-based discrimination. Emergency cases are catered through helplines at the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, as well as through local institutions and the police. Despite the unfamiliarity with the specific GBV reporting mechanism, the multi-pronged approach, including the PSEA mechanism and the eLiberare crisis text line, emphasizes accessibility and varied reporting channels for different gender-based issues.

The integration of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies interventions within Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for preventing and responding to GBV highlights a concerted effort by NGOs and public institutions. The establishment of safe spaces for women, coupled with coordination among these entities, emphasizes the importance of organized structures for effective responses to GBV. While existing laws address violence against women, the recognition of the need for specific guidance within public shelters and services indicates an ongoing commitment to enhancing the support framework for women.

NGOs such as Filia, E-Romnaja, A.L.E.G., Sensiblu, and ANAIS, collaborate with the United Nations to actively deliver services for Ukrainian refugees. The provision of information, self-defense courses, and gender awareness initiatives by ANAIS exemplifies the diverse and holistic approach to support. Integrating elements like sports and cultural mediation further em-

phasizes the need for comprehensive interventions to address the multifaceted aspects of gender-based violence.

In terms of legal frameworks, Decision No 592/2021 approves the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Sexual Violence "SINERGIE" 2021-2030, serving as a guiding document.² However, the acknowledgment of the need for further development suggests an ongoing commitment to refining strategies and protocols for combating sexual violence. For this reason the Law 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence has been amended and supplemented annually from 2015 to 2020, in this document multiple forms of GBV (verbal, physical, psychological, sexual, economic, social, spiritual, cybernetic) are defined and identified.

² Agenția Națională pentru Egalitatea de Șanse între Femei și Bărbați, Strategia națională pentru prevenirea și combaterea violenței sexuale "SINERGIE" 2021-2030, și Planul de acțiuni pentru implementarea ei, aprobate de Guvern, <https://anes.gov.ro/strategia-naționala-pentru-prevenirea-si-combaterea-violentei-sexuale-sinergie-2021-2030-si-plan-ul-de-actiuni-pentru-implementarea-ei-aprobate-de-guvern/>





DIVERSITY

The most at risks groups identified during the KII were Ukrainian refugees, with a specific emphasize on Roma women and girls, and asylum seekers and migrants from the Middle East (Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan). This diversity accentuates the need for nuanced, inclusive support systems, recognizing the specific challenges faced by each group.

Concerning isolation, respondents generally believe that there are no isolated girls or women within their awareness, but they acknowledge potential challenges faced by some of them according to specific situations they live. This insight underscores the importance of tailoring support mechanisms to address the unique circumstances faced by Ukrainian women, ensuring that interventions are responsive to their distinct challenges.

Within the community, the presence of women and girls with different identities, particularly women and girls with diverse SOGIESC is recognized. This acknowledgment sheds light on the less visible challenges faced by this group and emphasizes the importance of creating interventions that are sensitive to their unique needs and experiences, together with emphasizing the importance of inclusion, respect and tolerance within ongoing interventions. Acknowledging and addressing these identities is crucial for fostering a truly inclusive community structure that supports the well-being of all its members.

However, in terms of gender identities, the responses suggest a perception that Ukrainian women do not have specificities in terms of needs linked to their identities significantly different from men and boys in the context considered. This could imply a lack of a specific cultural or contextual understanding of gender roles within this community, where the identities of Ukrainian women may be perceived as similar to those of men and boys. Understanding these dynamics is essential for tailoring interventions that respect and accommodate the community's perceptions and beliefs about gender identities.

2.2 Focus Group discussions with women and girls

AidRom conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with women and girls and with community leaders. Specifically, one FGD with girls between 16-17 years old from the Ukrainian community and one FGD with women between 27-45 years old, also from the Ukrainian community.

They conducted 4 FGDs with community leaders: 1) one with 4 women of Syrian and Palestinian nationality between 22-30 years old which took place in July 2023; 2) one with 4 Ukrainian women and a Ukrainian Roma woman (between 24-52 years old) which took place in July 2023; 3) a FGD with 4 Ukrainian men between 24-52 years old which took place in September 2023; 4) a FGD with 4 men from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Syria between 24-52 years old which took place in September 2023.



SAFETY

The interviewed women and girls expressed a feeling of safety almost everywhere in the city. This broad sense of acceptance implies a level of comfort within the community, fostering an environment where women and girls feel unrestricted in their movement and choices.

However, there are reported restrictions on the time-of-day women and girls can move. While the details of these restrictions are not provided, the acknowledgment of limitations on the timing of movement suggests that there may be contextual factors or specific situations where women and girls feel less secure during certain hours (at night for instance).

Concerning restrictions on the types of services women and girls can access, respondents from Ukraine did not mention any restrictions, indicating a perceived openness and accessibility to various services. The perception that women and girls can go everywhere without constraints may suggest a community environment that values equal access and opportunities for individuals regardless of gender. It's worth noting that while there is a general sense of safety and acceptability everywhere, the acknowledgment of restrictions on the time-of-day women and girls can move highlights the importance of considering contextual factors that may impact the lived experiences of individuals within the community. Mall, churches, parks such as Tineretului and Plumbuita, mosques, Coran courses, are identified by women and girls as places where they feel safe to go and meet. Some of the respondents stated that Ukrainian women normally meet in centers like in Tei Boulevard which host refugees and people from the same country, while Roma women normally spend much of their time at home.

Roma, Syrian and Palestinian women reported the necessity for some women of their communities to be accompanied by a male relative while going out or around the city, especially during the nighttime.

The need for the women to be accompanied was also mentioned during FGD with male community leaders, stating the possibility for some men not to allow women of their family to participate to external activities because of the fear of them being publicized through social channels. Some men could also appear hostile to the possibility for their wives or daughters to attend information sessions on GBV awareness. Some of the male community leaders stated their acceptance for women to attend trainings or information sessions on integration, rights, Romanian legal framework, and existing services (police, health), without mentioning directly the topic of gender-based violence.

During the FGD, the respondents did not express any preferences or idea on a suitable location for the WGSS, namely they stated that it does not matter about the location, but it is important the peaceful atmosphere. For the most suitable time to provide services in the WGSS, it was mentioned the daytime until sunset.




TAILORED WGSS

During the FGDs with women, possible **activities** to be proposed to women and girls within the WGSS were discussed. Various socio-recreational activities were mentioned reflecting a range of interests and preferences among women and girls of the community, such as watching TV, park walking, reading. Activities aiming at gaining practical skills useful to their economic empowerment were also mentioned, such as language courses, specifically Romanian and English, sewing and hairdressing activities. Awareness-raising and support activities such as information sessions, psychological support, and legal advice were also mentioned.

Information that supports women in decision-making is obtained through media channels and internet socialization groups. This underscores the role of information-sharing platforms in empowering women to make informed choices and decisions. Women and girls could be engaged in skill-sharing activities, teaching each other skills such as braiding carpets, braiding hair, and using the internet. This highlights the community's supportive and collaborative nature, where individuals contribute to each other's personal development.

In terms of availability of women and girls and possible **time slots** for scheduling activities in the WGSS, the participants to the FGD indicates that girls are mainly busy with school activities in the morning and with the homework in the afternoon until 7 pm, while women reported to be occupied with domestic duties mainly in the afternoon and outside in the morning. The preferred time expressed by the women in the FGD depends on the season, but after 10am seems to be a good option for the entire year.



2.3 Service Mapping



MAIN SERVICES AVAILABLE TO WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE COMMUNITY

The interviews conducted with key informants from different organizations/agencies provide insights into the services reaching women and adolescent girls in the community. The Bucharest General Directorate of Social Assistance operates two emergency reception centers for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV)/domestic violence (DV), offering adapted services to individual needs. ANAIS Association focuses on social services for women victims of IPV/DV, providing counseling, legal advice, and psychological support. ELiberare, as the president of the [PROTECT Platform](#), coordinates referral pathways for Victims of Trafficking (VoT) and offers specialized services including support for victims of crimes and psychotherapy. ACCEPT, an organization focusing on LGBTQIA+ rights, offers legal advice, psychotherapy, and shelters for people and Ukrainian refugees.

Service delivery locations vary, with static and mobile units in different regions. The services are tailored for women, adolescent girls, GBV survivors, and specific groups like people with diverse SOGIESC. While the services aim for open access, challenges include trust issues (beneficiaries have low trust to staff and translators), limited funds, and women's reluctance to file complaints. Referral processes involve contacting the organizations directly through various channels.

The organizations face challenges such as the duration of service provision, the availability of female staff during operating hours, and few dedicated spaces for women and adolescent girls. Each organization outlined its outreach strategy, encompassing campaigns, community meetings, facilitated sessions, and technology-based solutions to raise awareness and reach the target audience. Overall, these organizations play crucial roles in providing diverse and tailored services to address the unique needs of women and girls in the community.



SERVICE GAPS AND COMPLEMENTARITY

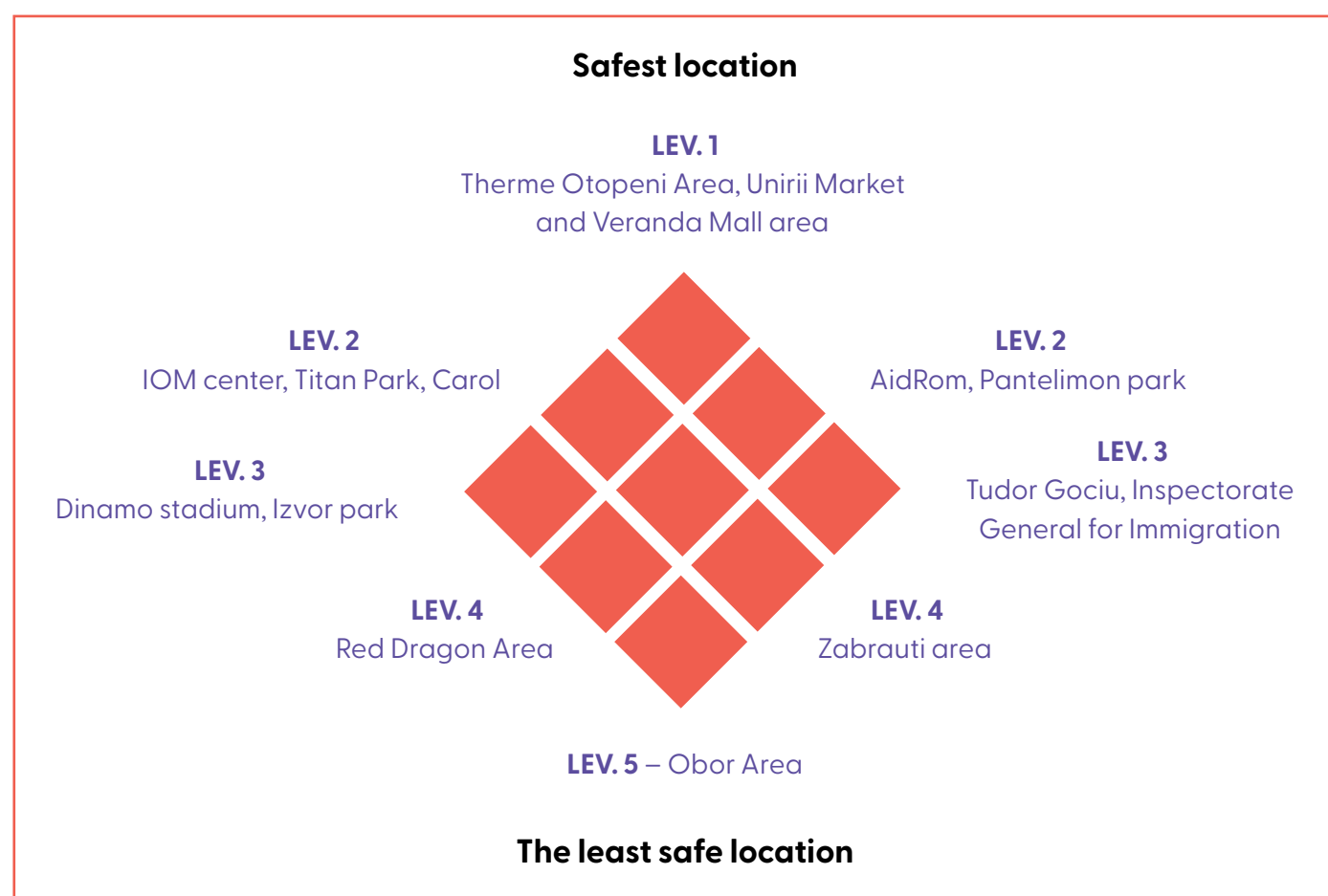
In assessing the landscape for the establishment of the Women and Girls Safe Space (WGSS) in Romania, several critical service gaps have emerged, shedding light on areas that require focused attention. Through mapping activities conducted on various dates, it is evident that specific locations in the community, notably Unirii Market Park and Mall Area, Titan Park, Otopeni and Therme Area, and others, are perceived as safe due to factors such as crowding or the proximity to the public transportations; while other locations such as the Northern Railway station or Obor area are considered less safe for their reputation among the people of the communities, the presence of beggars, and concerns about the alleged presence of micro-criminality.

Time restrictions also play a role, with adolescent girls facing more restricted hours to go out during winter but allowed extended hours during the summer. Accompaniment needs are recurrent, especially during nighttime or in specific areas, varying based on factors like age and community dynamics. Language-related challenges and a lack of familiarity with local languages may contribute to feelings of insecurity and limited access to certain services according to some respondents.

In complementing existing services, the WGSS can strategically engage with the community to address these identified gaps. Collaboration with local authorities, NGOs, and community leaders is crucial for enhancing safety in highlighted locations. Training programs within the WGSS can address language barriers, provide information on local services, and empower women and girls to navigate their surroundings confidently. Targeted support, such as language assistance and accompaniment services during specified hours, can be tailored to meet the specific needs highlighted in the findings. Utilizing the WGSS network to disseminate information about safe places, available services, and emergency contacts ensures accessibility. Recommendations include advocating for awareness programs, collaborative partnerships with local entities, ongoing training initiatives, and a commitment to continuous assessment and adaptation of WGSS services based on evolving community needs and dynamics. This comprehensive approach aims to establish an effective WGSS in Bucharest that addresses service gaps and complements existing structures seamlessly.

The figure below (Fig. 1) represents the Safety Mapping elaborated during the exercise conducted with the participants of the FGD. It is a visual representation of the places in the city considered less safe or safer by the women and girls.

Fig. 1 – Visual representation of the Safety Mapping activity



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 AidRom 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 establishment of the WGSS in Bucharest emerged, outlined in this section of the report.

3.1 Naming, location, and physical layout

According to what emerged during the assessment phase and in line with the guiding principles, it would be recommended for the WGSS to be located within an area of the city perceived as safe by the communities, so that women and girls may reach the place autonomously avoiding the need for them to be accompanied. To ensure the accessibility it is important for the space to be in a street not far from the public transportation, to encourage women and girls in attending the activities. If possible, it would be preferable to have a main entrance and a hidden entrance so that women and girls can access it respecting their confidentiality. In line with this last point, the layout of the Safe Space should have at least a second room for the individual interviews with the beneficiaries who need to meet the psychologist or to talk with the staff in a confidential way. If the partner wishes to integrate the WGSS into an already-existing space / building, it is recommended to ensure the standards of privacy and confidentiality are guaranteed, allowing for women and girls to access the space dedicated to them without further justification around the type of services they wish to access. To ensure the continuity of the WGSS programming it would be recommended to use a space that is economically sustainable, trying to start collaboration with other associations to partner with or using spaces which are granted for free. In any case what is strictly recommended is to ensure the safety and the confidentiality of the space.

3.2 Target population

As emerged in the assessment phase, tensions between different migrant groups based on their countries of origins, religious beliefs, language spoken may arise. People tend to build more cohesion with others with similar characteristics and this should be taken into consideration while establishing a WGSS. This is for the WGSS staff to be prepared to handle potential tensions and to be trained in how to prevent and mitigate conflict within a multicultural environment, creating a peaceful atmosphere. As different ethnic groups and communities have been involved in the assessment phase, it would be important to continue engaging them to involve women and girls in the WGSS activities. Since AidRom is already actively involved with groups of Ukrainian, Palestinian, and Syrian women, the WGSS will target them at first, ensuring the continuity of their work. In addition, it is advised that, as the WGSS follows its path and become more and more mature in the coming months, AidRom will consider other at-risks groups to build a diverse group of beneficiaries attending the WGSS.

The cultural mediators play a key role in understanding group dynamics within the WGSS, supporting the rest of the staff in handling potential tensions. Training in cultural mediation techniques, interculturality, conflict management and diversity is mandatory for the WGSS staff. As the WGSS is an intervention within the GBV and anti-trafficking framework, it is mandatory for all staff to receive training in this regard.

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

3.3 Securing buy-in from the community and stakeholders

As discussed during the assessment with key stakeholders, a constant communication, interconnection and cooperation with the local authorities 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. However, the assessment has shed the light on potential constraints men could put for their women relatives to attend GBV-related activities. It is recommended to introduce WGSS in the community in a general way, not emphasizing too much on the GBV aspect of the interventions, but on a space where women and girls can acquire soft and practical skills, get specific useful information and knowledge, while spending time together, strengthening networking. GBV interventions are often better-off being presented as intervention to strengthen family wellbeing to the general public to ensure access, confidentiality and buy-in.

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 the box tool to collect their ideas and feedback on the safe space, and later finding other tools that make them feel more comfortable.

According to AidRom experiences, it would be useful to contact women through phone call and meeting in presence, to keep involving them in the WGSS initiatives.

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 to schedule them at times that would best facilitate potential participants. What mainly emerged is the importance of proposing the activities within the WGSS during daytime, because of limited movement possibilities. Considering the limited capacity of the WGSS staff, 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 socio-recreational ones such as tea conversation and reading, it would be recommended to propose informative sessions on specific topics such as GBV, anti-trafficking, or Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), not only giving women and girls an accurate information around protection risks but especially on service 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 might 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. In addition, women have shown interests in attending information sessions on fundamental rights, legal framework in Romania, and how to navigate public systems (especially health, employment, social benefits).

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 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.



Website:
www.socialhut.eu/



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