TRANSCENDING NORMS

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES IN WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

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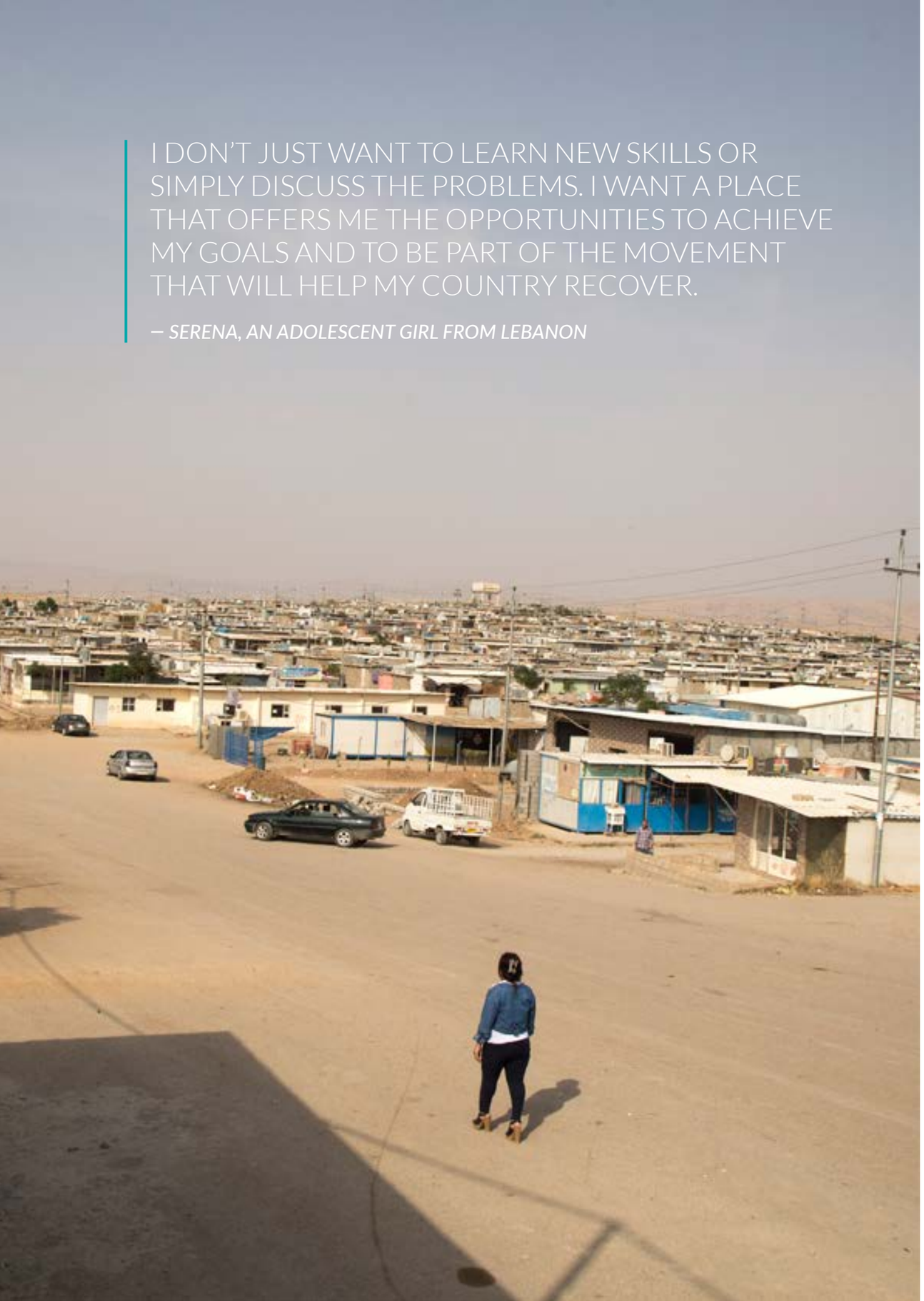
THE KNOWLEDGE SERIES

The UNFPA Knowledge Series products aim to provide all stakeholders in the humanitarian community with simple, effective, and replicable information or approaches that can aid humanitarian responses. These are based on lessons learned from UNFPA operations in the Arab region, informed by both local organisations and by population groups we serve: women, adolescent girls, men, and adolescent boys. The insights and recommendations provided by the Knowledge Series are meant to serve as practical tools to inform responses or enable actors to adapt successful approaches to suit their contexts.



I DON'T JUST WANT TO LEARN NEW SKILLS OR SIMPLY DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS. I WANT A PLACE THAT OFFERS ME THE OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE MY GOALS AND TO BE PART OF THE MOVEMENT THAT WILL HELP MY COUNTRY RECOVER.

— SERENA, AN ADOLESCENT GIRL FROM LEBANON

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FOREWORD

For countless women and girls throughout the Arab Region, women's and girls' Safe Spaces serve as singular lifelines where they can find safety, community, and healing. These spaces offer women and girls unique opportunities to rebuild the social networks they had lost due to humanitarian conflicts or personal trauma, cultivate valuable life skills that create opportunities, and receive professional therapy and support when needed.

Given the challenging nature of restrictive social norms, there still remain gaps when it comes to ensuring that both the Safe Spaces themselves and the activities offered therein are gender transformative — that they provide women and girls with ample opportunities and agency to transcend prevailing norms and achieve real self-actualisation.

Over the past years, UNFPA country offices throughout the region have consistently endeavoured to develop engaging, gender transformative programmes that are first and foremost informed by the women and girls being served. These approaches leverage lessons learned and insights gained through a number of sources, including impact assessments, focus group discussions, interviews, and other sources of data. During the design of such programmes, special consideration is given to the ripple effect created by the mere existence of these women-and-girls-only Safe Spaces in their communities and the impact they continue to have on gender norms and equality throughout the region.

This Knowledge Series publication shares insights and good practices that have emanated from UNFPA's humanitarian response in the Arab Region, and is informed by local organisations as well as the women and adolescent girls who access Safe Spaces. Their insights aim to inform both organisations managing Safe Spaces and the donors who generously fund them on how these Safe Spaces can become more aspirational and transformational for women and girls, and what practically needs to be put in place for such transformation to happen.

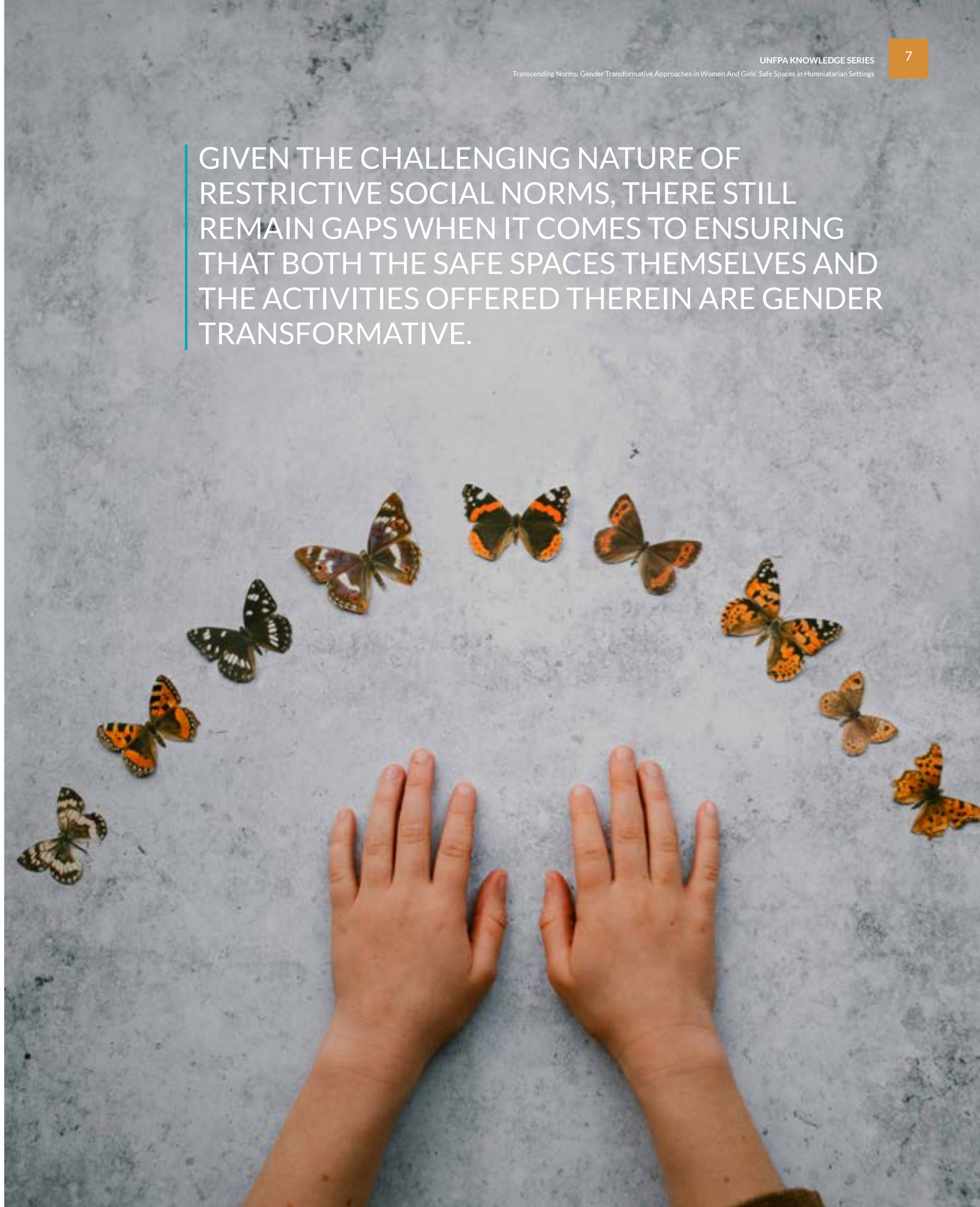
Our hope is that this publication, like other resources in the Knowledge Series, will contribute to the knowledge in humanitarian settings and help deliver better programmes to the people being served.

Sincerely,

Luay Shabaneh

Luay Shabaneh
UNFPA Regional Director, Arab States

GIVEN THE CHALLENGING NATURE OF RESTRICTIVE SOCIAL NORMS, THERE STILL REMAIN GAPS WHEN IT COMES TO ENSURING THAT BOTH THE SAFE SPACES THEMSELVES AND THE ACTIVITIES OFFERED THEREIN ARE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE.



I. INTRODUCTION

Women's and girls' Safe Spaces are spaces dedicated exclusively to women and girls and are an integral intervention in gender-based violence in emergencies programming as outlined in the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards. Evidence suggests that the establishment of women- and/or girls-only spaces helps to reduce risks and prevent further harm during emergency responses and protracted conflicts.

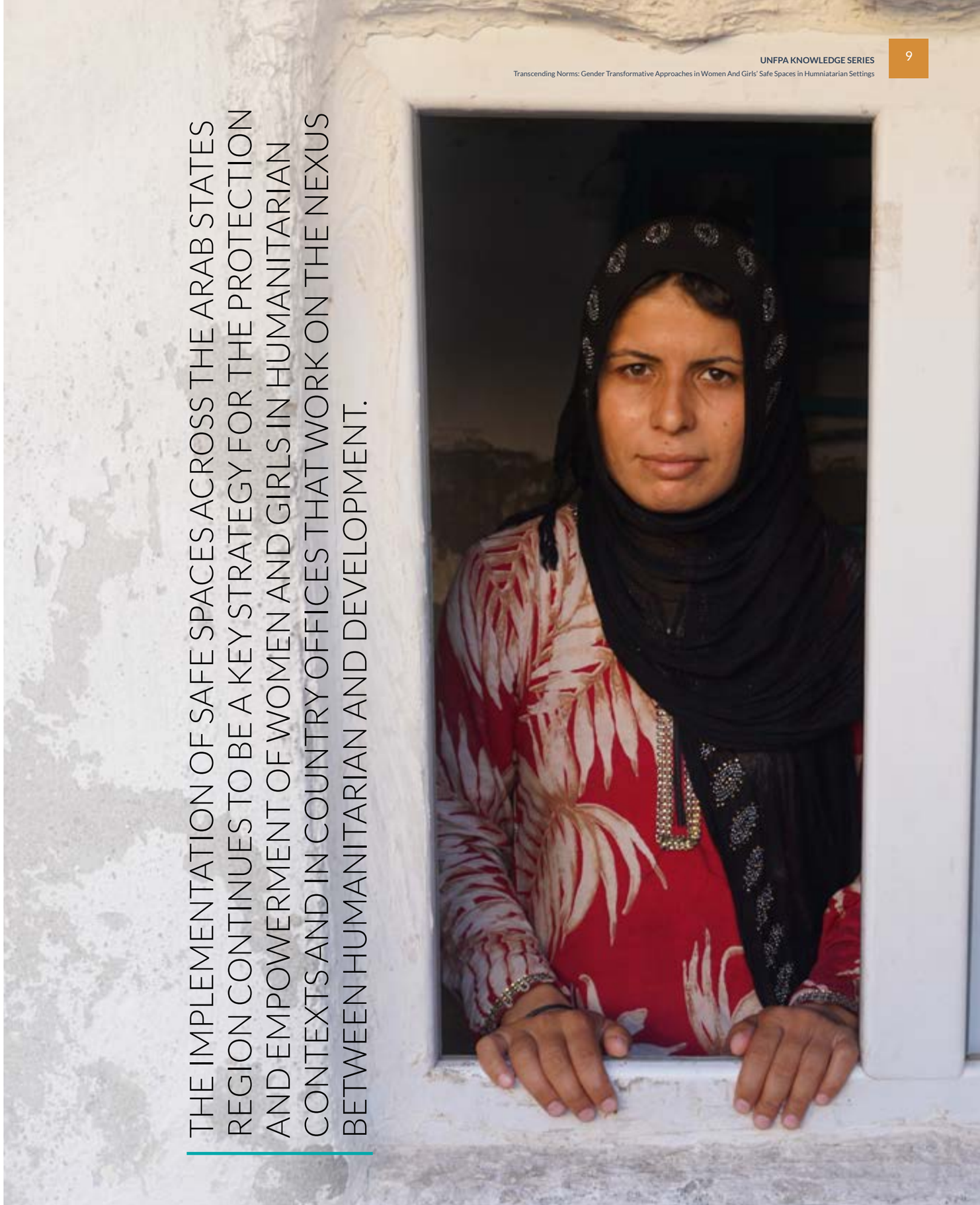
This resource uses the term 'Safe Space" to refer to women-and-girls-only spaces that adhere to the objectives and principles outlined in the 2019 global guidance, Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces: Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings (hereafter referenced as Safe Space Toolkit) and UNFPA's 2015 Guidance Note on Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces. Safe Spaces are called different names (e.g. Safe Space, women's center, women's shelter) across the various countries and implementation locations as appropriate to the community. The terms "women's and girls' Safe Space", "women-friendly space" and "adolescent girls' Safe Spaces' also refer to the same type of spaces.

The implementation of Safe Spaces across the Arab States region continues to be a key strategy for the protection and empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian contexts and in country offices that work on the nexus between humanitarian and development. Women and girls continue to report that Safe Spaces are often the only places in their environments where they feel safe and where they can access the services and care they need.

UNFPA, its partners, and other GBV actors have implemented Safe Space programming in diverse humanitarian settings across the globe and the Arab States region. In the latter in 2021, UNFPA supports 117 Safe Spaces across eight countries and operations: Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey, Turkey Cross-Border, Syria, and Sudan.

The last regional impact assessment conducted in 2020 identified that gaps remain on how to ensure that Safe Spaces offer a gender transformative approach to the services and activities offered. In particular, the aspects related to the empowerment of women and girls through vocational training, skill building, and livelihood activities often reiterate stereotyped and possibly harmful gender norms. In fact, the most requested improvement across all contexts has been offering more income-generating activities with linkages to capacity strengthening and employment, and particularly to aim these efforts at women and girls who face greater discrimination and barriers to access, such as adolescent girls, women and girls with disabilities, and older women, among others.

This resource is intended to provide practical technical guidance for UNFPA, local organisations, and other gender-based violence (GBV) agencies operating Safe Spaces regionally and globally to enhance the gender transformative potential of Safe Space programming and activities based on contextual knowledge and understanding. It is also intended to provide donors and/or organisation funding Safe Spaces with recommendations on how best to ensure gender transformative approaches in the Safe Spaces that they fund. The findings and recommendations presented are based on research conducted, through desk reviews of secondary data, key informants interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in eight countries and operations: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Turkey Cross-Border (more details on the methodology have been provided in Annex 1). The various locations and populations surveyed across the regional countries include a range of contexts and people: refugee, internally displaced, local, and both in acute and protracted crises, as well as nexus settings.



THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE SPACES ACROSS THE ARAB STATES REGION CONTINUES TO BE A KEY STRATEGY FOR THE PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS AND IN COUNTRY OFFICES THAT WORK ON THE NEXUS BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

This knowledge product highlights the impact of Safe Space programming in the region from a gender transformative lens and outlines recommendations for both sustaining and further enhancing the gender transformative potential of Safe Spaces.

Safe Spaces have been an integral intervention in GBV in emergency programming in the Arab States region generally for over a decade. Safe Spaces are documented as critical to GBV response in emergencies and their role in the region has been life-saving. Despite this clear positive impact on women's and girls' lives, the last UNFPA regional impact assessment conducted in 2020 in the regional Syria countries identified gaps regarding Safe Spaces' capacity to offer a more targeted gender transformative approach to the services and activities offered. In particular, the aspects related to the empowerment of women and girls through vocational training, skill building, and livelihood activities often reiterate stereotyped and possibly harmful gender norms.

Facilitating shifts in unequal power relations requires multi-sectoral interventions and work across the socio-ecological model, from the level of the Individual to the Interpersonal to the Community to the Institutions and Systems level to the Policies and Legislative level. While a change in social norms requires substantial shifts at the Systems/ Institutional (e.g. education, health) and Policies/ Legislative levels, the data for this knowledge product revealed that the most direct impact of Safe Space activities occurred across the first three levels of the socio-ecological model: Individual, Interpersonal, and Community.

FINDING 1: WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES AND SAFE SPACE PROGRAMMING ARE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE.

This finding shows that the impact of Safe Spaces goes well beyond the individual level and positively shifts relationships and dynamics within and among families and in the broader community. First, Safe Spaces inherently are a transformative intervention because women's and girls' access to Safe Spaces in the public realm is a shift toward greater gender equality. Second, Safe Spaces support women and girls to access various services, receive referrals to additional services, and build social networks.

When women and girls have access to information and knowledge, they can make more informed decisions and exercise agency. Participation in Safe Space activities also provides opportunities for women and girls to be exposed to new information and activities that may facilitate broader understanding, curiosity and motivation for change. Although the primary purpose of all Safe Spaces is to enhance members' psychosocial wellbeing, this resource reflects women's and girls' experience that vocational training activities improved women's economic outcomes by supporting them to make extra income from their homes. Many FGD participants perceive vocational trainings to have the greatest gender transformative impact relative to other empowerment activities.

The psychosocial, informational, life skills, recreational, and vocational training activities offered in Safe Spaces have the potential for clear gender transformative impact beyond the individual level and through to the interpersonal and communal levels. However, the gender transformative effects of Safe Space programming is inconsistent both within and among countries and operations. This confirms that investing intentionally in gender transformative approaches in Safe Space programming is necessary to enhance opportunities for individual women and girls, which will directly and positively impact both the interpersonal and communal levels.

Additionally, this also underlines the need for gender transformative interventions to go beyond the Safe Space itself and to extend and link to social norms change interventions targeting the larger community, as explained in Finding 3.

> WOMEN [TEND TO] HAVE A TRADITIONAL MINDSET; THEY REQUEST THE SAME THINGS. GIRLS, HOWEVER, ARE DIFFERENT. THEY WANT TO BE COMPUTER ENGINEERS, DOCTORS, DENTISTS.
>
> *— A FEMALE REPRESENTATIVE OF AN ORGANIZATION IN GAZA, PALESTINE*

FINDING 2: THE IMPACT OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES CAN VARY SIGNIFICANTLY AMONG SAFE SPACES DUE TO VARIOUS INDIVIDUAL, INTERPERSONAL, AND COMMUNAL FACTORS.

This finding highlights the critical fact that while Safe Spaces are gender transformative in and of themselves, their impact is influenced by a multitude of factors, chief among them being the level of agency given to the women and girls being served in the design and implementation of the programmes that target them. Women and girls have some agency to select activities in most of the locations, but their choices are sometimes limited to the options presented before them by organisations. As such, Safe Space activities may not be set up to meet the needs of the women and girls they serve as most requests are for financial or economic empowerment, while the main aim of Safe Space activities, including vocational training, is to improve women's and girls' psychosocial wellbeing.

This is an area that can consistently benefit from improvement, particularly if the goal is to foster aspirational tendencies and encourage gender transformative thinking. **Individual, interpersonal, and communal barriers play a detrimental role in the choices available to and made by women and girls.**

Meanwhile, these choices can also be limited by various societal and logistical factors. Primary among these is women's "hierarchy" of needs, including survival, safety, and belonging. Additional reasons include socialisation processes that make it difficult to think outside the framework of traditional gender roles; limited access to education and other training opportunities, especially due to caring roles and other household responsibilities; patriarchal family structures and thus male dominance on decisions; and gender inequality at the community level.

One of the most prominent factors informing women's selection of traditional activities is the environment or tradition. Across the eight countries and operations, women's and adolescent girls' recreational and vocational training options were controlled by the community directly and indirectly, and to varying degrees. Women's choices are also limited by a lack of a sense of safety and security. The more security a woman has, the more risks she may be willing or able to tolerate. Husbands and other male family members (e.g. uncle, brother, brother-in-law) also limit women's and girls' activity options. Finally, operational challenges create additional barriers to women's and girls' options.

FINDING 3: ENHANCING THE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF SAFE SPACE PROGRAMMING REQUIRES INTENTIONAL, SUSTAINED INVESTMENT IN AND BEYOND THE SAFE SPACES.

This finding focuses on promising practices and recommendations to increase further the gender transformative aspect of Safe Spaces at the individual, interpersonal, and communal levels. Promising practices include establishing and supporting Safe Spaces Committee; strategically promoting the Safe Spaces to family members and community leaders; assessing real and perceived risk to new, different, or non-traditional vocational training; providing small grants and tailored start-up kits; and referrals and partnerships with livelihood / economic empowerment programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are organised into two main sections. The first set of recommendations targets organisations that implement Safe Spaces and the second set is directed toward donors. The recommendations for organisations implementing Safe Spaces range from staff capacity strengthening and attitudes and beliefs to the Safe Space activity selection process. Other recommendations cover women's and girls' participation and empowerment in Safe Space programming, community engagement, and partnerships. The donor recommendations largely focus on investing longer-term and flexible funding to support Safe Space implementation as a core protection, empowerment, and gender transformative intervention as well as to support learning on this integral aspect of GBV programming in emergencies.

III. FUNCTION & IMPACT OF SAFE SPACES IN GLOBAL AND REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN AID RESPONSES.

Creating Safe Spaces for women and girls is a critical part of GBV programming. The essential nature of Safe Spaces is consistently reaffirmed by people served in the Arab Region. For example, in the Syria crisis region, UNFPA's 2020 Impact Assessment found that the most satisfied women and girls across all countries were women and girls who attended Safe Spaces, with 81 percent reporting that accessing services through these spaces was *"absolutely essential to their wellbeing."* This clearly highlights the impact that access to Safe Spaces has on the physical and psychological wellbeing of women and girls and why it should be considered an essential, life-saving service.

A Safe Space is "a structured place where women's and girls' physical and emotional safety is respected and where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment to seek, share, and obtain information, access services, express themselves, enhance psychosocial wellbeing, and more fully realise their rights."

— Safe Space Toolkit, 2019

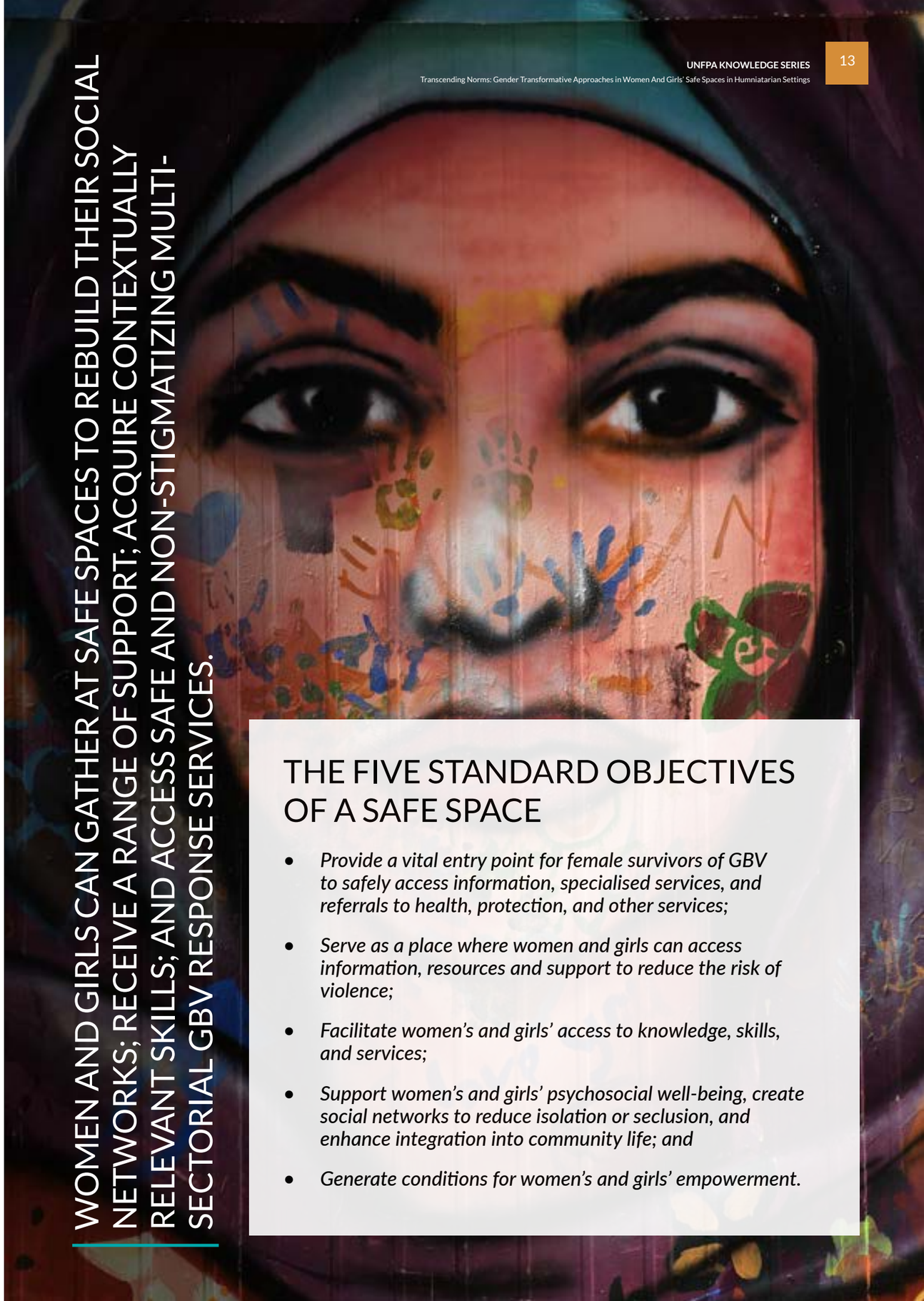
By definition, a "Safe Space" is also a women-and-girls-only space. This is essential as public spaces in most cultures are largely dominated by men. Safe spaces provide a necessary space where women and girls can be free from harm in all its forms, including harassment and other forms of gender-based violence and discrimnation, and where they can access opportunities to exercise their agency and rights, including the right to self-determination. They may also offer livelihood activities, sexual and reproductive health information, and access to legal services.

Women and girls can gather at Safe Spaces to rebuild their social networks; receive a range of support; acquire contextually relevant skills; and access safe and non-stigmatising multi-sectorial GBV response services (psychosocial, legal, medical). This can be done either directly or through referrals. Women and girls also receive information on issues relating to women's rights, reproductive health, where and how to access GBV and other services, and other topics based on their interests and needs.

Safe Spaces are adaptable to best respond to the needs and safety of women and girls across diverse communities and contexts. The choice of approach in a particular setting should ensure the space's relevance and effectiveness. Although specific Safe Space interventions may include different services and activities, all Safe Spaces should work towards the five standard objectives outlined in the Safe Space Toolkit .

In the Arab States region, Safe Spaces provide a range of services and activities, including but not limited to GBV case management, referrals, counselling, psychosocial support, awareness raising and information sessions, distribution of dignity kits, recreational activities, vocational trainings, targeted adolescent awareness, life skills courses, and dignity kit distribution. A key strategy in the Arab Region and other locations has been the integration of reproductive health services into the Safe Spaces model. There is also a concerted effort to improve accessibility for women and girls with disabilities, demonstrated through the rehabilitation of Safe Space physical structures and the targeted inclusion of these women and girls in specific activities.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted Safe Space programming in the region and severed a critical service delivery and community connection points for women and girls. Woman and girl focus group discussion participants across the region unanimously agreed that other than expansion of case management services to remote delivery in response to the pandemic, loss of access to Safe Space physical locations, services, and activities has been a significant loss.



WOMEN AND GIRLS CAN GATHER AT SAFE SPACES TO REBUILD THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS; RECEIVE A RANGE OF SUPPORT; ACQUIRE CONTEXTUALLY RELEVANT SKILLS; AND ACCESS SAFE AND NON-STIGMATIZING MULTI-SECTORIAL GBV RESPONSE SERVICES.

THE FIVE STANDARD OBJECTIVES OF A SAFE SPACE

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

IV. THE MEANING OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES & PROGRAMMING.

Gender transformative approaches (GTA) are programmes and interventions that create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and address power imbalances among persons of different genders. Gender transformative approaches create an enabling environment for gender transformation by going beyond only including women as participants in programs (i.e. the "individual" level). Gender transformative approaches are part of a continuum of gender integration from the individual to the systemic levels — or the integration of gender issues into all aspects of programme and policy conceptualisation, development, implementation, and evaluation.

Gender transformative interventions are critical for preventing gender-based violence. women's and girls' perceived subordinate status means that they are often prevented from making decisions that affect their own lives, both within and outside of the household, have internalised gender norms and conform or submit to the decisions of men. Women and girls are often forced to comply with their subordinate status to maintain safety, dignity, and belonging; if they appear to "agree" with or perpetuate their own status, it is likely based, at least in part, on their lack of power, safety, and knowledge of their rights.

As outlined in the Inter-agency Minimum Standards on GBV Programing in Emergencies, to transform harmful social norms, GBV programming must: (1) shift social expectations, not just individual attitudes; (2) publicise the changes; and (3) catalyse and reinforce new norms and behaviours. GBV prevention approaches recognise the importance of increasing women's agency, widening women's spaces to act, and engaging with and transforming the systems that maintain inequality.

Although it is important to understand the social and cultural context in a Safe Space implementation setting, culture should also be viewed as dynamic, subject to many influences over time, and therefore subject to change. Moreover, many aspects of culture are highly contested within the culture itself; some segments of society may be keen to change a cultural practice while others, particularly those who benefit from it, may fight hard to maintain it. Therefore, GBV programme actors should not assume cultural consensus but identify allies and opinion leaders who can promote positive shifts to prevent GBV.

For the purposes of this knowledge product, the following definition of "gender transformation" — taken from UNFPA and UNICEF's Technical Note on Gender-Transformative Approaches in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage — was referenced to frame the data collection. Gender transformation:

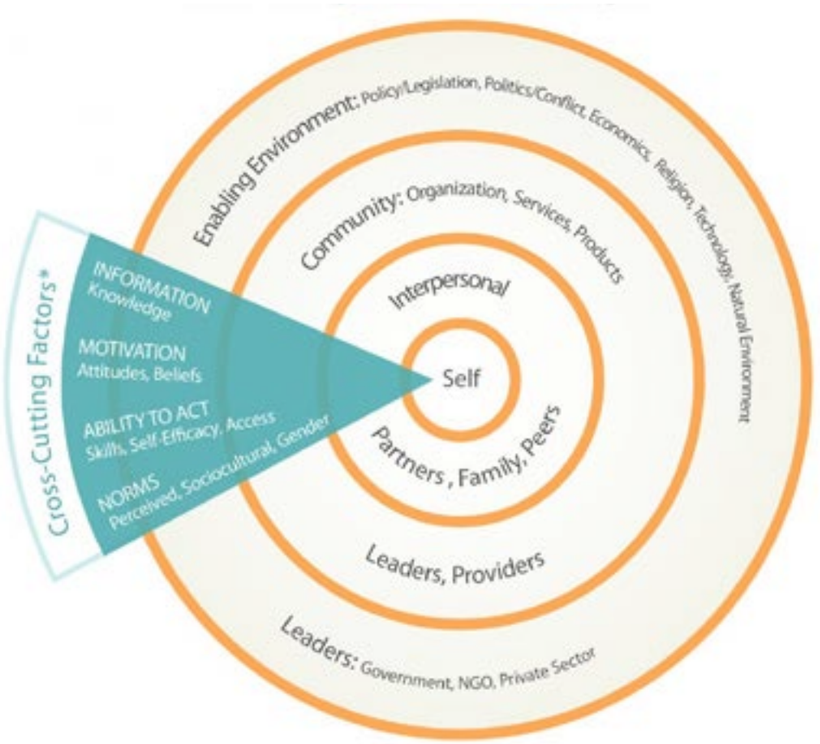
- Actively examines, questions, and challenges rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women.
- Aspires to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and reshape unequal power relations;
- Moves beyond individual self-improvement among girls and women towards redressing the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities.

Moreover, a "gender transformative" approach attempts to promote gender equality by:

- Fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms and dynamics;
- Recognising and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment;
- Promoting the relative position of women, girls, and marginalised groups;
- Transforming the underlying social structures, policies and broadly held social norms that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequalities.

The Technical Note further explains that (1) gender norms change and (2) approaches for preventing violence against women and girls both show a need for multi-sectoral interventions and work across the socio-ecological model for shifts in unequal power relations to occur. In other words, facilitating shifts in unequal power relations requires multi-sectoral interventions and work across the socio-ecological model.

THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR CHANGE



This Knowledge Series product outlines the gender transformative impact and potential of Safe Spaces by focusing on the individual, interpersonal and communal levels of the socio-ecological model.

> GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE INTERVENTIONS ARE CRITICAL FOR PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE. WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' PERCEIVED SUBORDINATE STATUS MEANS THAT THEY ARE OFTEN PREVENTED FROM MAKING DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR OWN LIVES.

FINDING 1

V: BOTH SAFE SPACES & SAFE SPACE PROGRAMMING ***ARE*** GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE.

> EVERYTHING WE DO AT THIS SAFE SPACE IS EMPOWERING FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS.
>
> ***— FEMALE STAFF OF A LOCAL ORGANISATION, CROSS-BORDER TURKEY***

Safe Spaces are transformative simply due to the fact that the women's and girls' access to Safe Spaces in the public realm is a shift toward greater gender equality. Safe Spaces help women and girls access various services, receive referrals to additional services, and build social networks, among other vital activities. However, it is clear that the impact of Safe Spaces goes well beyond the individual level to positively shift social and gender dynamics within families and in the broader community.

The data revealed that the impact of Safe Space activities occurs across the first three levels of the socio-ecological model: individual, interpersonal, and community. As one Syrian woman from Tartous explained during an FGD: *"The education of women and girls affects both the family and society at large. Women can influence their children, who in turn in turn follow in their mothers' footsteps to pursue their education. This will have a wider impact on the community as a whole."*

The concept of empowerment is fundamental to Safe Spaces. It is the overarching objective Safe Spaces seek to achieve with and for women and adolescent girls, in addition to a guiding principle.

Safe Spaces are empowering and this empowerment is (part of) the basis for gender transformation at the individual, interpersonal and community levels. Empowerment activities across Safe Spaces usually include: psychosocial support groups, awareness raising sessions, recreational activities, and life skills and vocational training. Experiences worldwide have shown that when women and girls have access to information and knowledge, they can make more informed decisions and exercise agency. Participation in Safe Space activities also provides opportunities for women and girls to be exposed to new information and activities that may facilitate broader understanding, curiosity and motivation for change. One Syrian adolescent girl living in Diyarbakır, Turkey, noted during an FGD: *"I used to think that I could never change the rigid social norms I learned from my family. After participating in these courses, I realised that this is possible. I improved myself more and started reading books."*

INDIVIDUAL

Women and adolescent girls consistently cited information sessions and life skills and vocational training as favored activities because of the knowledge and skills obtained around mental, emotional, and physical health. This includes fundamental skills such as parenting, communication, negotiation, and practical skills inside and outside the home. Moreover, women's and girls' health improved and women consistently reported significant positive psychosocial shifts. Safe Space members experienced individual empowerment by gaining a sense of value as an individual. As one Syrian woman living in Turkey shared, *"I learned not to act according to the society, not to let society decide and to make my own decisions about the future. I do not have to abandon what I want to do."*

For example, according to a local organisation in Gaza, Palestine, the Safe Space in that community is their first and only opportunity to be outside their homes and attend activities they enjoy. As she explains: *"We transformed this [limitation] and having women attend the Safe Spaces is the first step because now they are able to attend a space that is specifically designed for them."* The same key informant also explained that because the community inside the Safe Spaces is not homogenous, *"having this collection of women gives the opportunity to exchange knowledge, skills, and their outlook on life – and this will surely lead to transformative issues."*

Although the primary purpose of all Safe Spaces is to enhance the psychosocial wellbeing of those being served, across the eight locations where FGDs took place, vocational training activities improved women's economic outcomes by supporting them to make extra income from home. For example, a woman in Sudan explained that by learning sewing, tailoring, and henna, she found an additional stream of income. *"If I do not find an opportunity to work [outside], I can work from home while doing my domestic work and earn an extra income."*

INTERPERSONAL

It is clear among all FGD participants — women, men, and adolescent girls and boys — that women's and girls' participation in Safe Space activities impacted their families and communities by allowing them to share information with their community and by earning greater trust from the community.

Both women and adolescent girls highlighted that participation in awareness raising and life skill activities led to improved relationships between spouses and between parents and children. During an FGD in Diyala, Iraq, one woman explained: *"Of course there will be changes in the house where we would share our thoughts with our parents or spouses about these activities, which contributes to strengthening positive relationships in the house."*

For example, parents ask their adolescent daughters about activities at the Safe Spaces, and this includes inquiries to understand the impact of the Safe Spaces activities on the adolescent girls. According to adolescent girls in Iraq, this has helped increase family members' understanding of the Safe Spaces activities, thereby cultivating comfort towards the activities, which in turn leads to stronger family ties.

MY TRANSFORMATION CREATED AN EQUAL TRANSFORMATION IN MY HUSBAND.

A FEMALE REFUGEE LIVING IN ESKISEHIR, TURKEY

One adolescent girl from rural Damascus explained: *"I started applying what I learned on my mother when I go back home. We started having nice moments . . . Our relationship became stronger."* According to both woman and girl FGD participants, parenting skills classes improved equity of care between female and male children, leading to improved intergenerational connections between parents and children and the transformation of gender norms that value male children more than females.

Shifting internalised gender norms leads to decreased perpetration of harmful social norms.

As a woman living in Diyarbakır, Turkey, noted during an FGD: *"My family always saw me as less than whole because I gave birth to three daughters. But after participating [in the awareness raising sessions], I started to feel valued and important as a woman, and I also valued my daughters even more."* Other FDG participants in Diyarbakır shared that Safe Spaces had led to *"a mentality change in the society"* and that, now, *"boys are raised differently."* Equality begins to enter the mainstream, resulting in a decrease in discriminative approaches, as one man explained: *"My spouse learned things she didn't know about discrimination. She both developed herself and sought to educate our children by first learning how to read and write."*

Women's participation in awareness raising sessions and life skills sessions led to a shift in power dynamics within the family, garnering women greater autonomy.

As one Syrian woman described the change in her household: *"When there is a problem, we sit down and talk as a family and produce solutions."* Another outlined a similar experience: *"Before participating in these sessions, my husband and I were like two strangers living in the same house. After the sessions, we actually became friends. We can talk about many things now. We started to make decisions together regarding the home and the children."* Attending such activities also helps foster a greater understanding within the community of women's rights and gender-based violence which in turn contributes to greater confidence and self-worth on behalf of the women and girls themselves, who may find themselves more able to stand up for their rights. As a woman from Gaza, Palestine, noted during an FGD: *"Life skills teach us how to solve our problems, build our self-confidence, make a decision at home and not be ashamed and be bold in defending our rights and expressing our feelings."*

Meanwhile, mothers participating in Safe Space activities receive health information and are empowered to make better choices for their daughters.

One shared theme among FGD participants has been the reference to generational improvements in gender norms, driven or aided by women's and girls' participation in Safe Space activities. A Syrian woman living in Turkey explained that *"a lot has changed in my family, especially my husband. For example, I got married at the age of 15. According to him, I could have married even earlier. [But] he doesn't think so for his own daughters! He doesn't have fixed thoughts like he used to. For his daughters, he wants them to finish their school first and then marry whomever they want to marry."*

Many FGD participants perceive vocational training to have the greatest gender transformative impact relative to other empowerment activities.

One frequently cited reason is the dire economic situation across all eight locations where FGDs took place. For example, in Khartoum, Sudan, an adolescent girl reported that after being trained in first aid at the Safe Space, her *"family began to depend on"* her and *"now consider [her] an important member of the family."* She added that as a result of daughters learning practical skills, *"the family becomes proud of the daughter and [she] also feels empowered."* Similarly, an adolescent girl in Gaza, Palestine, noted: *"These professional and vocational training courses helped us improve our financial situation and rely on ourselves and not on other family members."*

It is important to note that the value projected onto women and girls in some of these examples is based on their productivity and economic utility to the family and community rather than their inherent value as human beings.

This should not, however, detract from the notable increase in agency, choice, and influence experienced by women who generate income. In cases where exacerbated or extreme economic needs result in greater freedom by women to participate in economic activity, it is essential to regard these as circumstantial responses as opposed to sustainable shifts in prevailing gender norms. As outlined in the Recommendations section, transforming gender norms requires a long-term and multi-sectoral / multi-layered approach.

COMMUNITY

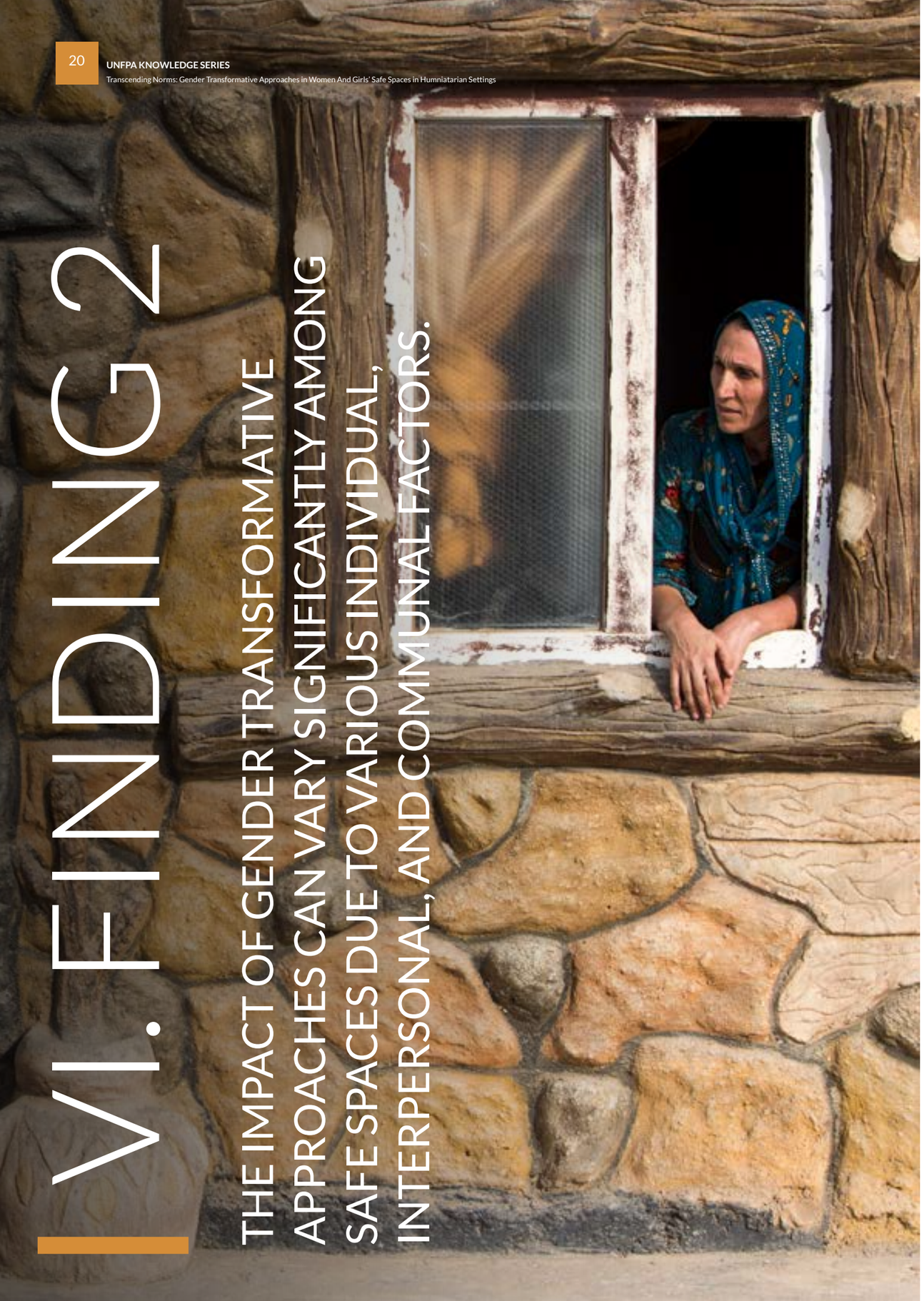
Women disseminate information they gained in Safe Space activities to family and community members. This increases overall impact. The same communal approach that may inhibit women's choices for fear of negative perceptions and potential stigma may also work in women's favor when they are considered productive in society and model "acceptable" behaviour. As one man noted during an FGD in Diyarbakır, Turkey: *"Women and girls are the ones who educate society. That they learn new things means that they transmit this knowledge to children, and this is good for society."*

A change in social norms requires material shifts at the systems / institutional (e.g. education, health) and policies / legislative levels (see UNFPA/UNICEF Socio-ecological Model, above). As one man working at a local organisation in Iraq noted: *"It is very difficult to measure but we can see it"* – and *"it takes time"*. He shared that gender transformative changes *"are long-term objectives"* and *"there are so many obstacles to gender transformation."*

These examples demonstrate that the Safe Spaces and the psychosocial, informational, life skills, recreational, and vocational training activities offered therein have a clear gender transformative impact that extends beyond the individual level and into the interpersonal and communal levels. However, the gender transformative effects of Safe Space programming is inconsistent within and among countries and operations, which confirms that investing intentionally in gender transformative approaches in Safe Space programming is necessary to enhance opportunities for individual women and girls, which will directly and positively impact both the interpersonal and communal levels. Additionally, this also underlines the need for gender transformative interventions to go beyond the Safe Space itself to target the larger community, as explained further below in Finding 3.

IF THEY HAD EXPLAINED TO ME FROM THE BEGINNING WHERE THIS ACTIVITY WILL MAKE ME REACH AT THE END OF IT, I WOULD HAVE CHOSEN IN A BETTER WAY AND KNEW HOW I WANTED TO DEVELOP MYSELF. IF WE HAD TALKED TO THE STAFF MEMBERS BEFORE CHOOSING THE ACTIVITIES, THAT WOULD HAVE HELPED US IN MAKING A BETTER DECISION.

– A WOMAN FROM SYRIA DURING AN FGD



VI. FINDING 2

THE IMPACT OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES CAN VARY SIGNIFICANTLY AMONG SAFE SPACES DUE TO VARIOUS INDIVIDUAL, INTERPERSONAL, AND COMMUNAL FACTORS.

> THESE PROFESSIONAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES HELPED US IMPROVE OUR FINANCIAL SITUATION AND RELY ON OURSELVES.
>
> —*ADOLESCENT GIRL, GAZA, PALESTINE*

While the very presence of a Safe Space in a given setting can have far-reaching gender transformative ramifications, it is important to note that gender transformation is influenced by a multitude of factors, many of which are contextual.

One of the most common findings across all eight countries and operations has been the fact that, when offered a choice of activities at Safe Spaces, women are consistently selecting traditional activities that may perpetuate harmful gender norms (e.g. sewing, cooking, hairdressing, etc.). This is linked, in part, to the fact that their selection options are already inherently defined by several logistical and societal factors, most of which are externally driven.

Primary among these is the simple matter of priorities, particularly given the fact that **many women and families in these communities are struggling to meet their basic needs and may choose to prioritise survival, safety, and belonging.** Another major factor that emerged consistently throughout FGDs was the level of agency given to women and girls during the design and implementation of gender transformative programmes; in many cases, the programmes either failed to meet the unique requirements of the people targeted or to foster sufficient aspiration to encourage gender transformative choices.

Meanwhile, other notable factors emerged, including social processes that inhibit individuals' ability to traverse social norms and think outside the framework of traditional gender roles; limited access to education and other self-development opportunities, especially due to caregiving roles and other household responsibilities; patriarchal family structures that give males unequivocal dominance on decisions; in addition to various other manifestations of gender inequality at the community level.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AGENCY

Safe Space activities may not be set up to meet the needs of women and girls, most of whose primary requests are for financial or economic empowerment, and the main aim of Safe Space activities, including vocational training, is to improve women's and girls' psychosocial wellbeing. **However, in most of the countries and operations researched, the vocational activity options meet women's and girls' needs but largely do not reflect their hopes and dreams or provide aspirational goals.**

In some locations, such as Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan, FGD participants responded that Safe Space activities promote the visioning of future goals and ambitions in addition to providing opportunities for women and girls to acquire new skills (e.g. English language, computer) that support girls' "academic empowerment" and serve as the basis for skills to be further developed when girls become trainers and teachers themselves.

In some cases, such as Hama, Syria, women feel that more and different activities should be available, including more advanced activities; *"once a woman or girl finishes a course, she should be asked if she would like to continue to the advanced level."*

Several FGD participants in different areas in Syria and Turkey explained that they would prefer more advanced and longer courses and access to more than one activity at a time. Another realm of requests focused more specifically on increased access to activities, including permission to enroll in more than one activity at once, extending the activity or training length from four to six months, decreasing the waiting list for activities, and offering more educational courses.

> IN SOME LOCATIONS, WOMEN AND GIRLS REPORT FEELING A COMPLETE LACK OF AGENCY WHEN IT COMES TO THE CHOICE OF ACTIVITIES OFFERED.

Women and girls are only able to make a choice within the sphere of the activities presented by the organisation staff. They do enjoy much greater flexibility to suggest or request topics for awareness raising and PSS sessions than other activities, such as vocational training. This is in large part due to cost of supplies, equipment, expertise, and other requirements of quality vocational training programmes. In most countries, consultation occurs in the following key ways: focus group discussions, post-activity discussions, and suggestion boxes, among others. Women and girls may choose based on the activity options the organisation presents them or suggest different options, if this is possible**. In most places, women and girls enroll in an activity based on the suggestions they receive from the activity facilitator or counselor.** They feel free to express their opinions and suggestions according to what they see would be more beneficial to them.

In other locations, however, women and girls report feeling a complete lack of agency when it comes to the choice of activities offered, as one woman from Hama, Syria, explained: *"we are only presented with a set number of choices made by the manager of the Safe Space. We don't decide what's available."*

> BECAUSE THE CHOICES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE LIMITED DUE TO GENDER NORMS AND, IN SOME CASES, THEIR STATUS AS REFUGEES OR IDPS, HAVING CHOICE IN SAFE SPACE ACTIVITY SELECTION IS CRITICAL AND EMPOWERING IN ITSELF.

There are key places in the chain of activity selection where the scope of choice may become limited. One involves budgetary and other proposal-related limitations, including time, staffing, or funding to conduct FGDs in advance of activity selection; insufficient funding for specific activities; or limited flexibility in funding agreements. **If there are insufficient resources to consult with women and girls prior to activity selection, organisations are forced to revert to stereotypical activities that they know would be accepted in the community and meet women's and girls' basic needs.**

An alternative is to include more flexibility in any partnership agreement to give organisations space to support women and girls, as one female representative of a local organisation in Syria explained, *"to make their opinions wider, give them more options and help their thinking to get out of these stereotypical ideas."* If everything is too defined or specific in the proposal, it cannot change based on required consultations with women and girls.

At the next level in the decision-making chain, **if organisations are not clear on their scope of choice regarding activities to implement, they will present limited options to women and girls.** Organisations' understanding of their scope of choice directly impacts the scope of choice presented to women and girls.

Because the choices of women and girls are limited due to gender norms and, in some cases, their status as refugees or internally displaced people (IDPs), having choice in Safe Space activity selection is critical and empowering in itself. A female representative from a local organisation in Lebanon explained that because women do not have authority, *"it's very important to take the consent from women and girls and to give them options and to choose which activity they need to join,"* adding that, in general, women are not decision makers and *"always return to their husband or brother or someone in the family who is male, to take the decision."*

Even in the same Safe Space, some women and girls will need time to think and/or confer with others about the activity options and others tell staff what they want directly. Moreover, for women and adolescent girls to have the fullest scope of choice, they need to understand the full range of options available to them. Sometimes women do not know or cannot express what they want for two main reasons: either they are focused on basic needs or they are not aware of the options available. As a female staff member of a local organisation in Damascus explains, *"as case managers and other staff who directly engage with the women and girls being served, we need to take this into consideration; you have to remind them that they can request activities that are not on offer and you have to do it every time."*

INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS

The main factors that drive women to select traditional activities at Safe Spaces are economic, particularly in light of the realities across the eight countries and operations. This includes the need for either an immediate and direct source of income, or skills that could yield greater savings (e.g. local first aid skills decrease healthcare costs and increase access to the network of health services, etc.). Moreover, participants may feel more inclined towards these choices in order to have more time to fulfill their caregiving and household responsibilities, while some may prefer to build on existing skills in order to establish additional revenue-generating side projects with greater ease and speed.

For example, a woman who works at Safe Spaces in various locations in Lebanon explained that most women *"first think about [their] difficult financial situation because 80 percent are currently unemployed. They want to learn something they can put to work and earn and support their family to afford their basic needs."* Staff working at a local organisation managing Safe Spaces in Jordan confirmed that women's primary consideration is the desire to start their own small businesses, which may drive them to pursue sewing, hairdressing, and other traditional skills with which they are likely already familiar.

> WE RESORT TO CHOOSING TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES TO AVOID BEING ATTACKED OR SHUNNED BY OUR OWN FAMILY MEMBERS.
>
> *— A WOMAN FROM THE WEST BANK, PALESTINE*

In summary, traditional activities are perceived as the most expedient and sound investment in better standards of living. However, the aforementioned local organisation in Jordan also noted that other subgroups of Safe Spaces participants, such as adolescent girls and older women, are *"also looking for fun activities, like Zumba . . . because it's stress relief and energy giving and [they] can communicate with other girls."*

Women's preference for traditional activities is also limited by their household responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, and caregiving. Women *"need activities that would serve as a source of income and also suit their time and commitments to their families,"* explained one woman during an FGD in Madaba, Jordan. Women prefer activities such as sewing that they could easily perform at home while attending to other responsibilities. During an FGD with male tribal leaders in Baghdad, Iraq, one participant explained that their *"wives and daughters choose these activities because they can practice them at home without the need to leave the house."* Syrian women living in Amman, Jordan, confirmed that socioeconomics are key drivers, and that the *"need for traditional activities is because they provide us with financial income and suits our time while maintaining our role in caring for the family and our commitment to our families."*

According to an adolescent girl from Hama, Syria, women and adolescent girls also 'select" home-based activities *"because we are not allowed to be outside the house for a long period of time."* However, FGD participants in Amman, Jordan, mentioned that *"there is a great need to educate families and society with unconventional activities so that they are gradually accepted in society as the culture of shame is still very apparent where a woman cannot work as a mechanic, for example."*

> WE [GIRLS] CHOOSE TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES BECAUSE WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE OUTSIDE THE HOUSE FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME.
>
> *— AN ADOLESCENT GIRL FROM HAMA, SYRIA*

There are other and often less perceptible dimensions to these socio-economic dynamics. **Women are sometimes unmotivated to learn new skills because of a general lack of opportunities to apply them in real-life scenarios.** As one adolescent girl from Idleb, Syria explains, *"we are not interested in learning computer skills because I do not own a computer to be able to practice the skills I learn, so I would not really benefit from it. We do not have enough money to buy the material needed to practice what we learn, and so we will forget the skills that we learnt in the courses."*

Another extension of this is that **women are choosing activities that can potentially benefit members of the immediate and extended family, which is seen as investing in the home.** Women also choose what is familiar and can be applied in familiar settings: making clothes for family members, cutting family members' hair, cooking, etc.

Other women choose traditional activities based on skills they already possess or with which they have some familiarity. For example, women refugees who were hairdressers and tailors in their home countries want to continue and sustain their occupations because they already possess a solid foundation. In other words, women do not seem driven by a desire for novelty or skill development; they *"see that traditional activities are easier to handle and learn"*.

Moreover, literacy and educational background may also limit women's options to traditional activities that do not require reading or writing. An elder woman in Idleb, Syria, explained that *"because other types of activities require education and an academic degree, we choose the accessible and easy activities."* A Syrian woman in Madaba, Jordan, reaffirmed this view, noting that an illiterate woman *"cannot keep up with an unconventional activity."*

Women's choices are also limited by a lack of a sense of safety and security. Given that challenging gender norms is considered a form of risk-taking and even rebellion against the established patriarchal order, a greater sense of security can contribute to women feeling more able to take such risks. As a staff member of a local organisation implementing Safe Spaces in Khartoum, Sudan explains, women *"think of the easiest thing they can do that is already part of their life because there is less risk that they will fail at it or dislike it, so they remain in their comfort zones."* This remains the case even when they are aware of the availability of other options. *"They have more freedom to choose if they are more secure, if the area is more safe, if the environment is suitable for them. But refugees and IDPs prefer to stay in their comfort zone."*

The above referenced fear of failure is a recurrent and cross-generational theme. As one adolescent girl from Idleb explains, *"I feel that the accessories course is entertaining whereas the English and computer skills courses are not so much in demand by the girls because they are afraid of failing or that they would face difficulties in those courses."*

A staff member of a local organisation supporting Syrian IDPs hypothesised that Safe Space women and girls have a fear of change and of being stigmatised for doing something different than expected. She proposed that local organisations *"start to normalise the idea of being different"* and thus break the fears and concerns harbored by women and adolescent girls who may otherwise be open to exploring new horizons. .

Beyond community perception and stigma, **women and girls also fear extremists who might retaliate against those who are perceived as encroaching on mens' territory by choosing "unconventional" activities.** Women and adolescent girls may also embrace limited options simply because of their individual heritage. As one adolescent girl from Hama, Syria explains it: *"we are influenced by our mothers' way of thinking and how they raised us to think that certain activities are not allowed or shameful."*

> WOMEN AND GIRLS ALSO FEAR EXTREMISTS WHO MIGHT RETALIATE AGAINST THOSE WHO ARE PERCEIVED AS ENCROACHING ON MENS' TERRITORY BY CHOOSING "UNCONVENTIONAL" ACTIVITIES.

During an FGD in Gaza, Palestine, both women and adolescent girl participants noted that women and girls generally lack practice in self-expression and decision-making; they are used to not having their needs and interests taken into account.

As a male FGD participant in Gaza noted, there is a *"collective persecution of girls' rights and opinions at the community level."* Women are aware that they have internalised gender norms. For example, a Syrian woman in Diyarbakır, Turkey, explains that *"[t]raditional roles of women are taught to us by society and we stick to them without really being aware of it."* Others noted that they were aware of how these norms inform their behaviours and choices, as one woman living in Diyarbakır, Turkey explains: *"sometimes we make traditional choices to meet the expectations of spouses and other family members."*

INTERPERSONAL BARRIERS

According to an adolescent girl in Aleppo, Syria, girls are raised to believe that *"a girl is better off learning hairdressing or sewing"* because *"parents instill those ideas in us."* The parental fear for a girl's reputation, particularly her perceived "piety" within the community, may drive them to insist that their daughters stick to traditional activities that do not involve interacting with men. Similarly, some women actively choose professions that do not require them to interact with men.

> PARENTS INSTILL THOSE IDEAS IN US.
>
> *— AN ADOLESCENT GIRL FROM ALEPPO, SYRIA*

Husbands and other immediate and extended male family members (e.g. uncle, brother, brother-in-law) also limit women's and girls' activity options, even when they are supportive of their participation in Safe Space activities in general: *"My husband would not allow me to enroll in a mobile phone repair course, computer skills, or driving lessons,"* explained one adolescent girl from Hama, Syria. In the West Bank, Palestine, an adolescent girl reported a similar experience, noting that parents' control over teenagers' interests *"sometimes forces us to choose certain activities, and if we refuse to oblige, they will stop supporting our projects and empowerment activities."*

In Diyala, Iraq, another adolescent girl explained that her family takes part in her decision-making, especially with regards *"to activities that contribute to building a strong and empowered personality."* She noted that *"if my family felt that there are certain activities that are not culturally appropriate, they would vehemently refuse my participation or even presence at such activities."*

COMMUNITY BARRIERS

Environment and tradition are key factors that influence the choices of Safe Space activities made by women. Across the eight countries and operations, the vocational training options made available to women and girls were directly and indirectly controlled by the community and to varying degrees. During a FGD in an urban center in Baghdad, Iraq, one man explained that *"most women who attend these social centers are widows and divorcees and prefer choosing activities that they can safely practice at home to avoid stigma by those who are outside of the family circle."* According to other participants, this is a concern harbored by all women but in particular by widows and divorcees, who have to lend special care to their public image and who are more *"concerned about their reputation being ruined."*

Even if women were to explore skills or professions that are typically reserved for men, they are less likely to be hired to do "traditionally male" work. For example,during a FGD in Homs, Syria, one woman explained that *"if a lady learned carpentry and that became her profession, who would hire her? People would trust a man more than they would a woman to do such a thing."* Based on this reasoning, she concluded that *"the choice of a traditional activity ensures a financial income."*

Another woman from the West Bank, Palestine, echoed this statement, adding that in most places, *"non-traditional activities are not allowed for women, especially those activities that are designated for men based on customs and traditions"*. In more conservative areas, such as Hama, Syria, women FGD participants were clear that the community only accepts women in certain professions and *"anything else would simply be rejected."*

> NON-TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES ARE NOT ALLOWED FOR WOMEN, ESPECIALLY THOSE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE DESIGNATED FOR MEN BASED ON CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS.
>
> *— A WOMAN FROM THE WEST BANK, PALESTINE*

Cultural pride plays a relatively minor role. One woman in Diyala, Iraq noted that choosing traditional activities can elicit a *"community's admiration because they are considered part of the popular heritage and a source of communal pride."* In Azraq, Jordan, another woman underscored the cultural perception of traditional activities that might make them alluring to some women, noting that *"families who have women among them who master these skills are considered to be productive families."* For Syrian refugees in Azraq, Jordan, participating in traditional activities such as textile production and handicrafts is seen as an opportunity to preserve their cultural heritage, customs, and traditions as they seek asylum, in addition to providing a source of income.

Although most adolescent girls are mainly engaged in curriculum-based programming and do not participate in vocational training, adolescent girls and younger women in several locations, including in Homs, Syria, have shown interest in non-traditional or "modern" activities (e.g. accounting, graphic design, computer and mobile repair, home maintenance and electricity, etc.), all of which are not available at the center. Other non-traditional activities mentioned include, but are not limited to: plumbing and carpentry, farming, and upholstery. In Gaza, Palestine, one woman noted that *"girls participate in such activities but not as decision-makers and that is why they do not choose non-traditional activities."*

> CHANGES IN THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ALSO SEEM TO PLAY A PART IN GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE DYNAMICS.

In addition to sharing limitations that drive their selection of traditional activities, FGD participants across the countries and operations expressed a clear willingness to make different choices, albeit with fear of the consequences. For example, in the West Bank, Palestine, women FGD participants agreed on the "need to be bold" and to secure funding *"to establish non-traditional projects that might highly succeed because they would be new to the market,"* but agreed on, as one woman described it, *"being afraid of the community rejecting those projects"*, which in turn contributes to a fear of fighting a lost battle that also comes with material and financial consequences.

Changes in the funding landscape following the COVID-19 pandemic also seem to play a part in gender transformative dynamics. One female staff member working at a local organisation in Lebanon noted that the economic ramifications of the pandemic and the decreased support by UN agencies and international NGOs, especially in the form of emergency cash, has led to more women working outside the home to earn enough money to cover their basic needs. She added that even in locales where women are traditionally unable to leave the house at will, *"the harsh economic conditions have rendered this acceptable because everyone is interested in securing an income."* She also acknowledged that *"the awareness sessions by different NGOs on different topics also caused the opinions to change."*

This input, echoed by multiple participants in several locations, highlights that although crises can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and lead to increased risks, they also serve as opportunities for fundamental social transformation, as has been demonstrated in both the available literature and the accounts of humanitarian actors worldwide. Research shows that women, girls, boys, and men have the ability to question traditional gender norms in emergency situations. There may be shifts in conventional roles, attitudes, beliefs, and practices, or new opportunities to discuss subjects that were previously proscribed.

> RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WOMEN, GIRLS, BOYS AND MEN HAVE THE ABILITY TO QUESTION TRADITIONAL GENDER NORMS IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.

Finally, operational challenges create additional barriers to women's and girls' options. A staff of a local organisation in Jordan explained that limits on the budgets allocated for Safe Space programming in Azraq Refugee Camp greatly impact women's and girls' options. She explained: *"We let them know we have a limited activity budget so they cannot be dreamy."*

Specific suggestions for expanding Safe Space vocational training options came more frequently from adolescent girls than from women, and these spanned requests for new and different activities, for regular changes in vocational training courses for variety and for more "modern" activities.

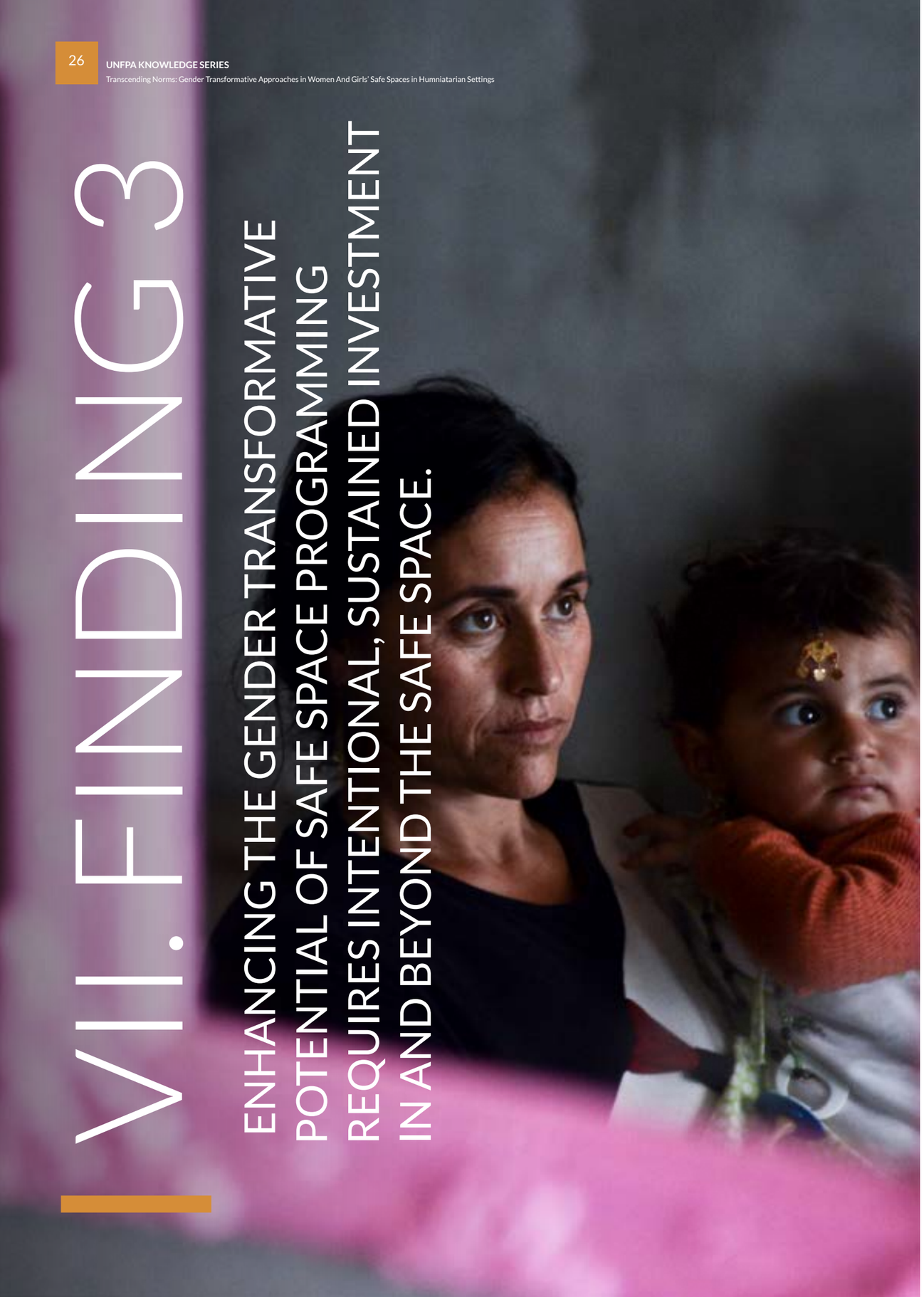
For example, adolescent girls in Homs, Syria, specifically requested activities other than crochet and sewing, while other girls wanted to avoid repeating activities like cooking, make-up, and detergent-making. It is worth noting, however, that in the majority of FGDs the participants did not offer alternative suggestions. This may represent yet another gap related to girls' lack of exposure to a wider range of activities and highlights the importance of ensuring that programmes offer access to sufficient information to guide choices.

Several FGD participants provided suggestions for enhancing Safe Space activities, with a focus on connecting them to practical applications and strategies for next steps.

Suggestions included training on how to start and manage small projects, comprehensive business development courses, and networking opportunities for the purposes of recruitment and professional development. Women and girls also showed interest in receiving seeding funds for start-up projects, with the prohibitive cost of equipment being cited as a challenge for women seeking to transform their acquired skills into revenue-generating projects.

> ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN HOMS, SYRIA, SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN CROCHET AND SEWING, WHILE OTHER GIRLS WANTED TO AVOID REPEATING ACTIVITIES LIKE COOKING, MAKE-UP, AND DETERGENT-MAKING.

VII. FINDING 3



ENHANCING THE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF SAFE SPACE PROGRAMMING REQUIRES INTENTIONAL, SUSTAINED INVESTMENT IN AND BEYOND THE SAFE SPACE.

> IT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL CHOICES FOR THEM. THEY NEED SAFETY AND ENCOURAGEMENT. IF A CHOICE CARRIES RISK, WE DO NOT PUSH.
>
> ***— STAFF OF A LOCAL ORGANISATION, SYRIA***

As outlined in previous sections, gender transformative approaches require multi-sectoral interventions and work across the socio-ecological model, which mixes interactions of different factors from the individual level out to interpersonal, community, systems and institutions, up to the policy and legislative levels. In terms of increasing the gender transformative potential of Safe Spaces and Safe Space activities, however, it is important for organisations to assess their capacity to positively influence different levels of the ecological model so that resources are directed most effectively and efficiently.

INDIVIDUAL

Although women and girls in focus group discussions consistently recognised the limiting roles of tradition, culture, society, and male family and community members on their decisions and activity options, they also took responsibility for internalising these limitations. As such, women and girls saw their own potential for expanding and shifting the range of activities they pursue by focusing on their own beliefs, confidence, and openness towards new activities. An adolescent girl from Syria in Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan, explained that encouragement to pursue different activities *"should come from within ourselves as girls, in addition to having parents who are willing to support us."* Similarly, a woman from Homs, Syria, explained that *"if women themselves were not accepting of new ideas then it would not matter who supports them because they would not enroll in the new activities."*

To expand the scope of women's and girls' activity choices, women participating in an FGD participants from Gaza, Palestine, suggested offering creative thinking and advocacy training courses for girls and women and leveraging radio and other media to encourage women and girls to think more critically, including sharing stories of successful women entrepreneurs to share their experiences.

Economic needs are also expanding women's options. For example, eight years ago in Lebanon, Safe Space activities focused on make-up and hairdressing. However, a staff member of a local organisation in Lebanon explains that women and adolescent girls are no longer interested in these topics because the market is saturated; they are instead motivated to pursue new activities because *"their opinions have changed a lot."* This was echoed by a UNFPA staff member in Syria, who noted that women accessing the services at the centre often exhibit an openness to trying new activities that surpasses expectations.

> OUR ROLE IS TO SUGGEST NEW PERSPECTIVES THAT THEY MIGHT NOT BE AWARE OF. ULTIMATELY, THEY CHOOSE BASED ON THEIR OWN PREFERENCES, BUT A SIMPLE SUGGESTION CAN DEFINITELY HELP.
>
> ***— STAFF OF A LOCAL ORGANISATION, LEBANON***

INTERPERSONAL

Garnering the support of male family members will help accelerate adoption of gender transformative choices. As one woman suggested during a FGD in Homs, Syria, male family members can be open to supporting such adoption but *"first need to know that these new activities will not be harmful to women."* This entails engaging men and boys in awareness raising and social norms change programming, which however, need to be conducted outside of the Safe Space, to preserve the nature of the Safe Space itself.

Beyond male family members, introducing gender transformative activities at the Safe Spaces will require the acceptance of both the family and the extended community. To that end, women and girls recommend focusing on the need for the continued professional development of women and girls as a point of advocacy, positioning gender transformation as an investment in their potential for income generation. Women and girls consistently note that shifting the focus towards the economic realities and the growing need for additional sources of income within the community will carry greater weight and facilitate faster acceptance. As one woman phrased it, *"we need to stay up-to-date with the new trends out there."* Another noted that *"knowing that a given profession will add a stream of income to the family would encourage acceptance of new ideas."*

Although male members of the immediate family (husbands, fathers, brothers, etc.) in male-headed households play a primary role in determining the scope of women's and girls' engagement in Safe Spaces, mothers were also named in

focus group discussions as key influencers of girls' choices. Classmates and other peers also emerged as influential for girls in particular, with several focus group discussion participants highlighting the importance of peer relationships both in terms of exchanging and sharing information and for moral and emotional support. Teachers were also named as important figures for girls, underscoring the effectiveness of an extended mentorship approach. Women and girls also recommend leveraging marketing and communications to highlight successful women and their stories and to raise awareness on the services offered at Safe Spaces.

> OUR LIFE STARTS TO CHANGE AGAIN WHEN WE START TO LEARN NEW THINGS AND WE CAN DRAW A NEW PATH FOR OURSELVES.
>
> ***– A WOMAN LIVING IN ESKISEHIR, TURKEY***

COMMUNITY

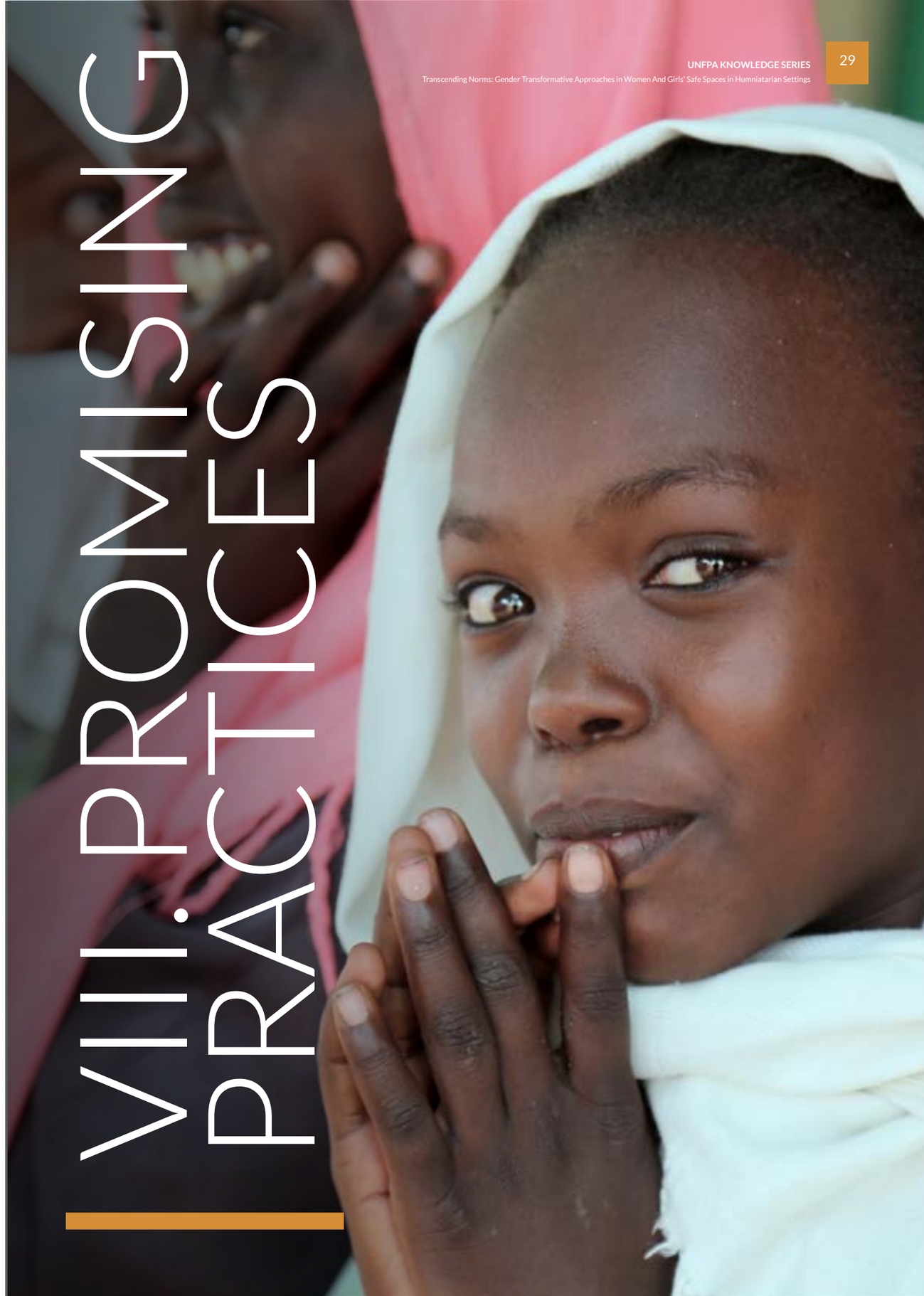
All FGD discussions across the country programmes and operations reflected some support for expanding vocational options for women and adolescent girls and that doing so would have a positive impact on the broader community. As one adolescent boy noted, *"the community would become stronger over time if women and girls were to become educated and had professions."*

As outlined in the Promising Practices section, it is important to assess what activities may be possible and profitable in specific contexts and to engage various community gatekeepers on expanding Safe Space activities. This highlights the importance of more interventions that target the wider community, designed to change social norms.

Local organisations also have a responsibility to expand their ideas of possible vocational training opportunities for women and girls. For example, a local organisation in Ishkeeyer, Turkey, implemented a programme in partnership with a local association to train women refugees from Syria on how to care for horses. After completing the course, the women were eligible for employment by the association. According to UNFPA staff in Turkey, *"vision, capacity, and connections at the local level are very important and influence what they can offer".*

VII. PROMISING PRACTICES

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES REQUIRE MULTI- SECTORAL INTERVENTIONS AND WORK ACROSS THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL, WHICH MIXES INTERACTIONS OF DIFFERENT FACTORS FROM THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OUT TO INTERPERSONAL, COMMUNITY, SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS, UP TO THE POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE LEVELS



Over a decade of strategic Safe Space implementation in the region has yielded essential insights. This section highlights select promising practices that have proven effective at enhancing gender transformative programming, both directly and indirectly.

ENHANCING PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH 'SAFE SPACE COMMITTEES."

In some of the Safe Spaces in the Turkey Cross-Border operations, local organisations created Safe Space "advisory committees" composed of women and adolescent girls, including older women and women and girls with disabilities, with approximately five people from each identity group. The role of these committees is to support activity selection and programme planning, in addition to learning and representing "the desires, interests and concerns" of diverse women and girls in the community. This approach is effective at increasing the engagement of women and girls in Safe Space activities as well as their overall participation in decision-making.

Women and girls reported greater satisfaction based on feeling safer, "closer to" the Safe Spaces, having "their voices heard better than before," and participating in decision making.

Both women and adolescent girls in Gaza, Palestine, agreed that the presence of Safe Space committees would enhance women's and girls' participation and that different subgroups of Safe Spaces attendees, such as women and girls with disabilities and older women, should be represented.

They also noted that participating in Safe Space committees would allow women and girls a greater role in identifying both the needs and the activities themselves, rendering them more representative and effective. This is particularly true in the case of adolescent girls, who are often overlooked during programme design. As one adolescent girl phrased it, *"teenage girls have an important role to play in determining their own needs and should play an active role in committees and the protection network because sometimes women's needs are different from adolescent girls."*

As the Turkey Cross-Border example demonstrates, Safe Space committees are useful for bringing together key representatives of different stakeholder groups to participate in programme decisions. The Safe Space Toolkit explains that these committees may also serve as a useful source of information to validate or explain feedback obtained through other channels. However, this comes with inevitable risks that include limited representation, such as of a specific class or group, or abuse of influence for personal gain.

For example, minority ethnic populations within a specific community may be excluded from Safe Spaces committees. Similarly, even if adolescent girls or women with disabilities are included in Safe Spaces committees, certain power dynamics may thwart their equal participation. Suggestions to address these potential challenges include developing clear terms of reference for the committee and specific guidelines on its sise and composition. Additional information on important considerations for supporting and working with Safe Space committees is outlined in the Safe Space Toolkit.

CREATIVELY PROMOTING SAFE SPACES TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY

FGD participants across all ages and genders recognised the importance of garnering community support for women's and girls' participation through strategic engagement, underscoring a key principle outlined in the Safe Space Toolkit: that Safe Space implementation must be community informed (Safe Spaces Toolkit, p. 395). Although community engagement is a basic tenet of all GBV programming, FGD participants' suggestions regarding cultivating support for gender transformative Safe Space programming carry important considerations.

First, FGD participants across the region emphasised the direct relationship between community acceptance of Safe Spaces and women's and girls' ability to access and use them: as a female representative of a local organisation in Turkey stated, *"once we promote our center and explain activities, men become more trusting and do not stop their wives from coming."*

UNFPA's 2019 women's and girls' Safe Space Guidance Note quotes a woman from Syria who explains that *"ultimately, women and girls spaces should not be isolated units but an extension of broader community life. Men and boys have an important role in ensuring the success of Safe Spaces. Engaging them to ensure they understand the purpose, location, and benefits of the Safe Spaces will enable the participation of a larger number of women and girls."*

> FGD PARTICIPANTS ACROSS THE REGION EMPHASISED THE DIRECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE OF SAFE SPACES AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' ABILITY TO ACCESS AND USE THEM.

Outreach, education, promotion and communication may take various forms, including door-to-door visits, awareness products, and information sessions. (See Safe Space Toolkit, Annex 6.3). FGD participants also suggested the use of social media, awareness banners, and other forms of mass communication. One female representative of a local organisation in Turkey noted that creating a "bulletin" or newsletter for the center where she works helped reach out to more women and girls in the community. The bulletin outlined the roles and responsibilities of each staff member and was available in both Arabic and Turkish to transcend lingual barriers. Similar approaches employ other tactics, such as publishing and sharing success stories of women in the community who had participated in and benefitted from Safe Space activities, which has proven to be another powerful tool for cultivating support for Safe Spaces.

A Syrian woman living in Turkey explained that creating safer environments for women and girls and greater access to gender transformative activities requires men and women to *"explain these activities to their families, communities, and public gathering spaces like coffee houses"* and that teachers should be *"included in these activities and they can also educate parents and children in schools."*

One female representative of a local organisation in Sudan suggested working with women's committees to promote understanding of, access to, and participation in the Safe Spaces. She explained that women's committees *"know how to talk to their own community because they understand what is happening in the community"* and that *"when you make them aware of what services you have to offer to their community, they are able to reach more people."*

ASSESSING AND MITIGATING RISK

The essential humanitarian principle of Do No Harm requires taking all measures necessary to avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of the actions of humanitarian actors. More specifically, the 2015 IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action highlight the responsibility of all humanitarian sectors to prevent and mitigate risk to GBV. As outlined in Finding 2, women's and girls' safety and security risks are a significant barrier to their skill development, vocational options, and income-generating capacity. At the same time, women and girls earning an income may be seen as a threat to existing power structures, which could lead to violence from family and/or community members.

According to the Inter-Agency GBV Minimum Standards, *"introducing livelihood programmes in humanitarian contexts without taking gender and cultural norms into account can create a backlash and heighten the risk of violence against women and girls. Engaging the community, including male household members, to support women's participation in livelihoods programming is an important step to mitigate risks. Furthermore, if not well planned, livelihood interventions can add to women's and girls' domestic responsibilities and workload, leading to increased stress and pressure."*

> INTRODUCING LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMMES IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS WITHOUT TAKING GENDER AND CULTURAL NORMS INTO ACCOUNT CAN HEIGHTEN THE RISK OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.

To address these risks, a local organisation in Sudan that provides small start-up funding to women to launch businesses explained that a "protection point of view" is a critical factor in determining which business project options to offer women women and girls. The organisation conducts focus group discussions with both women and men through trained Social Workers and community-based protection networks because, as one representative explained, *"they know the culture and how people think; what their ideas and traditions are."*

A local organisation working as part of the Turkey Cross-Border operation explains that **introducing income-generating activities, like small grants, must be accompanied by other efforts, like awareness sessions targeting intimate partners and other members of the community.** Women and girls are aware focusing on economic empowerment may create further risk.

ENCOURAGING NON-TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES WITH TRAINING, MARKET NEEDS ASSESSMENTS, AND START-UP FUNDING

A local organisation in Gaza, Palestine, provides small grants for Safe Space participants with the main objective of supporting women's economic empowerment. This includes encouraging women to explore non-traditional projects (e.g. mobile phone maintenance, air conditioning and other appliance repair, etc.).

The staff at the Safe Spaces nominate a group of GBV survivors who participate in various training sessions. The first session focuses on more general topics related to GBV, gender, and negotiation, communication, and other life skills. The second focuses on the market in Gaza, including market needs and businesses that are more and less likely to succeed, including the benefits of pursuing new ideas. The market needs are determined based on assessments, including information gathered by other local organisations.

PROMISNG PRACTICE: GLOBAL AID HAND, SUDAN

"If we ensure [the business] is secure and suitable and there is a market for it, it will be more sustainable." Local organisation Global Aid Hand (GAH) in Sudan works in 13 states and operates 12 UNFPA-funded WGSS. In addition to vocational trainings, GAH also offers occasional income-generating activities at WGSS, including small amounts of capital to support women to start their own businesses.

First, GAH conducts a five-day training for women on the principles of building and operating a small business. Second, and based on a local assessment, GAH provides participants with 3-5 choices of businesses they can pursue based on their personal skills and the maximum capital GAH can provide.

The assessment considers three issues: (1) a protection perspective that considers women's safety and security; (2) a market lens focused on "whether they can sell and grow their business to make sure it is sustainable by the end of the project"; and (3) the local culture and women's preferences, comfort, and individual risk assessment. The protection assessment is informed by focus group discussions conducted by trained government Social Workers and community-based protection networks.

As delineated in Finding 2, the local organisation recognises that women have a "need and willingness" as well as internal skills to try new things but, at the same time, *"women in Gaza, we are under control of our patriarchal culture."* However, the organisation *"starts to make a match between the [market] needs, and women's willingness and ability."* The group of women selected for the training submit project proposals, including budgets, that are evaluated based on an additional market needs analysis. Eight are selected and provided with grants (approximately $1,000 USD) to start their own businesses. The women and girls are also encouraged to request additional funding from other organisations to supplement the small grant as needed.

A common suggestion from both local orgnisation and FGD participants is to provide start-up kits to complement vocational training so that participating women have a clearer and more realistic path to apply their skills and generate income. Based on a 2020 Impact Assessment of UNFPA's regional Syria crisis response, the UNFPA Syria Country Office is implementing a new approach that provides quality training and related start-up kits covering a limited number of vocations identified through surveys and FGDs. With this approach, instead of providing several training programmes at a basic level, resources will be allocated to fewer programmes but at a higher quality and with greater support and guidance offered to women who complete their training. Each woman who completes the training will receive a start-up kit with the supplies necessary to implement her new vocation and generate income.

COLLABORATING THROUGH REFERRALS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Although GBV-specialised actors are not responsible for direct provision of economic empowerment and livelihood support, they should consider how their programmes complement livelihood programmes and establish linkages to ensure that GBV survivors can access livelihood support as part of a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach. As a response measure, livelihood and economic empowerment programmes can be entry points for GBV survivors to receive information and access services and may also provide an outlet for support and healing activities.

An international organisation in Jordan, for example, has developed a "strong, systemic referral pathway" between its GBV and Safe Space programme and the organisation's economic recovery and development efforts. Under the system, women who meet eligibility criteria are referred for additional guidance and support on how to transform their skills into marketable ventures. Similar linkages are also promoted within the Turkey Cross-Border operation between GBV agencies and cash-for-work organisations.

Before economic and other crises in Lebanon in 2020, the Safe Spaces conducted vocational training and made referrals to UNDP, which leads the Livelihoods sector. Referrals include

support on access to loans and other funding opportunities, which helps address some of the challenges women face after completing capacity building programmes. In Lebanon, a similar project sought to achieve this by integrating financial management into its capacity building programmes in collaboration with a partner organisation. The programme included guidance on how to start small-to-medium-sised businesses and weather the challenges involved. According to UNFPA staff in Lebanon, there is a need for additional funding of livelihoods programming, not only to establish additional capacity building opportunities but also to streamline referrals in a more systemic, sustainable, and reliable manner.

> GBV ACTORS SHOULD CONSIDER HOW THEIR PROGRAMMES COMPLEMENT LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMMES AND ESTABLISH LINKAGES TO ENSURE THAT SURVIVORS CAN ACCESS LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE, MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH.

IX. RECOM-MENDATIONS

THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR ENSURING THAT THE SAFE SPACES MEET GLOBAL MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GBV PROGRAMMING AND PROMOTE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES.

STRENGTHEN CAPACITIES

STRENGTHEN CAPACITIES OF ALL STAFF ON THE GLOBAL STANDARDS

Fostering organisation-wide awareness on global guidance and best practices is essential and helps establish a healthy baseline for organisations to host secure, sustainable, and adaptable Safe Spaces that have a measurable impact on the lives and wellbeing of women and girls. There is a wealth of resources available on the topic, with the following constituting a solid starting point:

- The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming. In particular, review and discuss:
    - Introduction;
    - Standard 8: Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces;
    - Standard 12: Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods; and
    - Standard 13: Transforming Systems and Social Norms.
- Exercises in the Facilitator's Guide: Understanding and Applying The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming (Facilitators Guide), specifically on the following standards:
    - Standard 2: Women's and Girls' Participation and Empowerment;
    - Standard 8: Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces;
    - Standard 12: Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods; and
    - Standard 13: Transforming Systems and Social Norms.
- **Assess local implementation of Safe Spaces using the process and Contextualisation Tool outlined in the *Facilitators Guide* (p. 257).** Note that the Contextualisation Tool aims to support GBV implementing organisations and partners to assess and improve GBV programming components that are currently being implemented in their specific context toward achieving the GBV Minimum Standards. The GBV Minimum Standards contextualisation process may be an intervention in itself as it supports reflection, planning, and collaboration among team members, organisations, and partners. Contextualisation is the process of collectively: (1) assessing the extent to which GBV programming components are being implemented according to a GBV Minimum Standard in a particular context; and (2) identifying which Key Actions for each Minimum Standard, and/ or additional actions, must be prioritised, initiated, adapted, sustained, strengthened or better coordinated to achieve the Minimum Standard in a specific context.
- Make use of the Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces: Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings to promote a new and enhanced perspective on, and relevant tools for, Safe Spaces implementation.

STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF ALL STAFF ON GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES AND THE GOALS OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING

The goals of gender transformative programming are to:

- Examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women;
- Create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms;
- Promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities;
- Tackle the root causes of gender inequality and reshape unequal power relations;
- Redress the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities.

Note that although the scope of Safe Space programming suggests a direct focus on the first three goals listed above — that relate to the first three levels of the socio-ecological model — gender transformative efforts contribute to all goals. This is because the socio-ecological model is dynamic and all levels influence (and are influenced by) the other levels.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

- **Develop a schedule for consistent consultations with women and girls** through different avenues that are accessible to diverse women and girls. Request feedback after activities and training to receive concrete suggestions; consider using social media (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook) to survey women and girls and ask for input.
- **Conduct regular focus group discussions and other formal and informal consultations with women and girls** about their activities, aspiration's and programming interests.
- **Implement post-activity feedback mechanisms** to improve activity implementation and understand women and girls evolving needs and interests.
- **Develop monitoring and evaluation tools** that aim at capturing the gender transformative aspect of Safe Space programming.
- **Support women and girls towards the normalisation of "being different" and overcoming their fears and concerns** when choosing roles that differ from stereotyped gender norms, in addition to raising their awareness of the options available to them while honouring their being women and girls.

ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT & SELECTION

- **Base Safe Space activity options on women's and girls' current and evolving needs.**
- **Staff managing Safe Spaces should encourage and support Safe Space participants to assess options for new or different activities and programming,** in line with the principle of Do No Harm, to increase their exposure to new learning and further develop creative and critical thinking skills.
- **Work with women and adolescent girls to (1) understand the main influences on women's and girls' decision making and their fears and concerns regarding new and different Safe Spaces activities; and (2) discuss and implement mitigation strategies** (e.g. engaging with parents or other guardians, providing transportation options, etc.).
- **Ensure women's and girls' empowerment activities are linked to exploration of diverse vocational training opportunities.** A basic way to improve the Safe Space activities and the activity selection process is to ensure women and girls have the fullest available information to make the most informed choices. Examples include sharing the purpose behind the training or activity with the women and girls *"so that we know if it suits us from the beginning"* (adolescent girl FGD participant, Damascus, Syria) and *"ensuring that the activity or course starting and end dates are clear"* (adolescent girl FGD participant, Khartoum, Sudan).
- **Offer creative thinking and advocacy training courses for girls and women** to "teach them how to think more critically", including sharing the stories of successful female entrepreneurs to inspire different activity selection.
- **Use the Safe Spaces activity selection and other processes to provide women and girls with opportunities** to practice expressing their opinions and making decisions.
- **Consider providing longer (at least six months) and more advanced courses.**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Enhance and expand community engagement and outreach efforts.** See also Promising Practice 2 above and Safe Spaces Toolkit Annex 6.3: Outreach Strategies.
- **Adapt Safe Spaces Toolkit Annex 3.2, Safe Spaces Frequently Asked Questions Sample IEC Tool**, to specific country and regional contexts to support consistent understanding and information sharing among staff, women and girls, and community members regarding the importance of maintaining women-and-girls-only Safe Spaces (See Annex 3).
- **Share information about the purpose and details of Safe Spaces activities with the families of adolescent girls** to promote additional support for girls' participation in Safe Space programming. Advocate with girls' parents to consider supporting their daughters and other female family members to explore different vocational trainings they may be interested in.
- **Work with parents, caregivers, peers, and teachers as key influencing parties** on girls' lives to support girls' safety and exploration of non-traditional activities based on their interests and goals.
- **Use creative methods to cultivate support for Safe Spaces**, such as publishing and sharing success stories of women who have participated in and benefitted from Safe Spaces activities or using Safe Spaces committees to share information within the larger community.

SOCIAL NORMS AND PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

- Enhance commitment to social norms change by complementing Safe Spaces activities with **social norm programmes and strategies to support social norms change** and enhance prevention programming (e.g. SASA!, Engaging Men in Accountable Practice (EMAP), etc.). See also GBV Minimum Standards, Standard 13: Transforming Systems and Social Norms.

STAFF ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

- **Adapt and administer Attitudes and Beliefs survey to all staff to address potential biases and filters related women's and girls' potential and to real or perceived limitations based on the context.** Organisations should be aware of staff bias or existing filters on context-appropriate activities, trainings, and goals for women and adolescent girls. *See Safe Spaces Toolkit, Tool 22: Safe Spaces Staff and Volunteers" Attitude and Beliefs Survey; Safe Spaces Toolkit Section 4.3 on Staff Recruitment and prioritizing staff competencies; and Supervision Tools in the 2017 Inter-agency GBV Case Management Guidelines (see Annex 2).*

PARTNERSHIPS

- **Develop partnerships with livelihoods and economic empowerment actors** and programmess to improve and expand women's and adolescent girls' vocational and income-generation options.
- **Research innovative partnership options,** including with the private sector, to enhance access to gender transformative opportunities.
- **Consider conducting informal and/or formal market analyses or research to explore vocational training options for women and girls that are likely to meet market needs** / generate income and conduct training on how to start and manage small projects, supporting participants to connect to individual professionals and networks to support their professional development and job placement.
- **Explore partnerships that support Safe Spaces vocational training participants to apply their experience and skills practically**, including through opportunities to manage small projects, comprehensive trainings to start businesses, and access to individual professionals and networks to support their professional development and job placement.

FUNDING

- **Assess the organisation's capacity to positively influence different levels of the socio-ecological model** towards gender transformation and direct resources more effectively and efficiently towards what is feasible / realistic.
- **Include funding in proposals and grant agreements to conduct FGDs with women and girls women and girls to inform the selection of activities and to regularly assess their changing needs.**
- **Include more flexibility in any partnership agreement to give organisations space to support women and girls** *"to make their opinions wider, give them more options and help their thinking to get out of these stereotypical ideas"* (as phrased by a staff member of a local organisation, Turkey Cross-Border operations).
- **Advocate for predictable long-term funding for supporting the continuity of existing and the establishment of new Safe Spaces** to avoid disruption of service and invest in new and creative gender transformative approaches.

FOR DONORS

- **Sustain Safe Spaces as a core protection, empowerment, and gender transformative intervention** with reliable funding that supports long-term strategy.
- **Recognise the critical role of women-led organisations** in implementing Safe Spaces and invest in this approach.
- **Provide flexible funding for Safe Space activities that can respond to women's and girls' evolving needs and interests and changing contexts.** This will allow organisations managing Safe Spaces to fulfill their responsibility to explore, develop and share new and/or different programming and activity options with women and girls to encourage them to make safe, informed, and empowered choices.
- **Allow for flexible activity selection** so that activities may be determined by women and girls after long-term agreements are signed.

- **Fund multi-year strategies to support social norms change and enhance prevention programming** (e.g. SASA!, Engaging Men in Accountable Practice (EMAP), etc.). See also GBV Minimum Standards, Standard 13: Transforming Systems and Social Norms.
- **Support a regional, facilitated learning forum and/or "after-action review"** for organisations implementing Safe Spaces to share learning and promising practices across contexts.
- **Allow for investment in the gender transformative impact of Safe Space programming** through life skills, vocational training and economic empowerment activities, and/or supporting relevant partnerships.
- **Consider funding a regional strategy for income-generation activities within Safe Spaces** which might involve: (a) partnerships with other agencies (i.e. UN Women or UNDP) or regional or national NGOs, technical institutions, or other organisations or private sector (UNFPA 2020 Syria Impact Assessment).

I USED TO THINK THAT AS A WOMAN, I HAD VERY LITTLE VALUE AND THAT I WAS MORE LIKELY TO BE A BURDEN TO OTHERS. THANKS TO THIS SAFE SPACE, I AM NOW ABLE TO HELP MY DAUGHTER FIGHT AGAINST THESE IDEAS.

– RAMA, AN ADOLESCENT GIRL FROM JORDAN

XI. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

This knowledge product is based on research conducted in eight countries and operations: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, and Turkey Cross-Border. The various locations and populations surveyed across the regional countries include a range of contexts and people, including refugee, internally displaced, local, and both in acute and protracted crisis and nexus settings.

The study's methodology consisted of three main approaches: 1) Desk Review, 2) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and 3) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

DESK REVIEW

The desk review included regional, Country Office specific, and global guidance on Safe Space programming with a focus on existing gender transformational work through Safe Space activities, including but not limited to background materials, assessment or monitoring reports, surveys, concept notes, good practices, etc.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Twenty-seven (27) (23F, 4M) key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with UNFPA GBV Specialists in the targeted Country Offices, including additional UNFPA staff with specialised country or technical expertise who oversee, supervise, and/or support Safe Spaces; local organisations (IPs) involved in supporting or managing Safe Space activities; and selected global and regional GBV experts.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Forty-seven (47) focus group discussions (FGDs) were organised in multiple locations across seven countries and operations to consult with women, adolescent girls, men and adolescent boys to receive direct input on the barriers to and possibilities for promoting gender transformational activities in Safe Spaces.

SUMMARY OF TOTAL FGDS CONDUCTED

Women	18
Adolescent girls	14
Men	7
Adolescent boys	8
Total	**47**

FGDs were facilitated by facilitators and notetakers who were of the same sex as the FGD participants and who participated in and/or listened to an ethical and preparatory training. FGDs were conducted in adherence with COVID-19 safety measures based on the specific mandates in each location. The FGDs were conducted using two tools: one for women and girls and the second for men and boys.

The FGDs focused on the following main topics, per category of people:

WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS

- Current experience of WGSS activities, including the most liked and empowering activities as well as impact of activities on women's and girls' lives;
- The process for WGSS activity selection and women's and girls' scope of choice);
- The factors that contribute to women's and adolescent girls' selection of vocational trainings and skills building activities that seem to reinforce traditional gender norms; and
- Participants' ideas and suggestions for improving empowerment activity programming in the WGSS to support shifts in gender norms in the community that improve women's and girls' rights.

MEN AND ADOLESCENT BOYS

- Gauging men's and boy's understanding of WGSS activities and impact;
- Participants' current involvement in and support of women's and girls' participation in WGSS activities;
- Men's and boys' perception of women's and adolescent girls' choices; i.e. their ideas about the factors that contribute to women's and adolescent girls' selection of vocational trainings and skills building activities that seem to reinforce traditional gender norms (WGSS Activity Selection); and
- Participants' ideas and suggestions for improving empowerment activity programming in the WGSS so that the WGSS activities better support shifts in gender norms in the community that improve women's and girls' rights.

The data was analysed through a qualitative data analysis process and comprises this knowledge product. The knowledge product has been extensively reviewed by UNFPA teams at the regional and Country Office levels.

ANNEX 2: TOOLS TO SUPPORT GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE SAFE SPACE STAFF ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

The Safe Space Toolkit (IRC/IMC 2019) Candidate attitude and beliefs: It is recommended to inquire about personal attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles, GBV, women's empowerment, humanitarian, and protection principles when recruiting staff that will work in Safe Spaces.

Using "Tool 16 Safe Spaces Candidate Attitude and Beliefs survey- for Recruitment" will support the creation of a Safe Space team that will challenge restrictive gender norms, promote women's agency and foster gender equality. It is also important to consider whether the team has capacities, opportunities, resources, and time to address negative attitudes or beliefs of new staff members.

TOOL 16: CANDIDATE ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS SURVEY - FOR RECRUITMENT

(VERSION 1 - SELF DELIVERED)

Name: _____
Gender: Male / Female / Nonbinary

Safe Space location/team: _____

Date: _____

Circle whether you Agree or Disagree with each statement:

1. Women often say they have been raped or abused so that they can get attention or money.

Agree / Disagree

2. There are times when a husband is justified in beating his wife.

Agree / Disagree

3. Intimate partner violence is a family matter and should be handled within the family.

Agree / Disagree

4. A survivor should have the right to make a decision about what actions are best for her/him/them.

Agree / Disagree

5. A GBV survivor should always report their case to the police or other justice authorities.

Agree / Disagree

6. Changing the diapers, giving the kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mother's responsibility.

Agree / Disagree

7. A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep the family together.

Agree / Disagree

8. Men and women should share household chores.
Agree / Disagree

9. Women should be allowed to communicate to their sexual partners when they do and do not want to have sex.

Agree / Disagree

10. A woman is not complete until she has children.

Agree / Disagree

11. A woman's most important role is to take care of her family.

Agree / Disagree

12. It is okay for a woman to work outside the home.

Agree / Disagree

13. A woman has the right to go out in public whenever she chooses.

Agree / Disagree

14. Homosexuality is wrong.

Agree / Disagree

15. If a human being is born male but says they are a woman, this person is a woman.

Agree / Disagree

(VERSION 2 - SUPERVISOR-ADMINISTERED VERSION OR SCORING SHEET)

Name: _____
Gender: Male / Female / Non-binary

Safe Space location/team: _____

Date: _____

Circle whether you Agree or Disagree with each statement

1. Women often say they have been raped or abused so that they can get attention or money.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

2. There are times when a husband is justified in beating his wife.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

3. Intimate partner violence is a family matter and should be handled within the family.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

4. A survivor should have the right to make a decision about what actions are best for her/him.
Agree (1) Disagree (0)

5. A GBV survivor should always report their case to the police or other justice authorities.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

6. Changing the diapers, giving the kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mother's responsibility.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

7. A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep the family together.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

8. Men and women should share household chores.
Agree (1) Disagree (0)

9. Women should be allowed to communicate to their sexual partners when they do and do not want to have sex.
Agree (1) Disagree (0)

10. A woman is not complete until she has children.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

11. A woman's most important role is to take care of her family.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

12. It is okay for a woman to work outside the home.
Agree (1) Disagree (0)

13. A woman has the right to go out in public whenever she chooses.
Agree (1) Disagree (0)

14. Homosexuality is wrong.
Agree (0) Disagree (1)

15. If a human being is born male but says they are a woman, this person is a woman.
Agree (1) Disagree (0)

Compare this scoring sheet to the assessment you want to score and circle the correct column for each row. Then add up the totals at the bottom of each column.

Total Agree (total possible score of 6):
Total Disagree (total possible score of 9):
Add the Agree and the Disagree total columns to calculate the total score.
Total score (out of 15):

ANNEX 3: SAFE SPACE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following sample messaging, structured in a question and answer format, responds to frequently asked questions that stakeholders across humanitarian settings have about Safe Spaces. The language and framing below should be adapted to your context before use.

WHAT ARE WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES?

- A Safe Space (add the local term used for Safe Space, if relevant) is a place where all women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe and are supported to believe in themselves and each other.
- It is a space just for women and girls where they can feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without fear or judgement or harm.
- Women and adolescent girls decide how they engage and support each other, through exchanging skills, information, and support networks.
- These spaces provide women and girls with a safe central location to access information about the services that are available and how to access those services safely.
- It is also a space where women and adolescent girls who face increased risks and barriers to inclusion in society, including those who have experienced violence, are welcomed and supported.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE SAFE SPACE?

- This community, including women and girls, has gone through a lot recently. The overall purpose of the Safe Spaces is to support women and girls to make decisions about their safety and well-being.
- It does so by:
    - providing information, activities, and services specifically made for women and girls based on what they told us was needed.
    - empowering women and girls with knowledge and skills to be active members in the community.
    - ensuring the community supports women's and girls' access to the Safe Space.
- Safe Spaces engage women and adolescent girls, community members, and service providers to work together so that women and girls, both as individuals and together, can support the community to reach its potential just like other members of this community.

WHY A SPACE ONLY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS?

- Violence and the current situation affect women, girls, men, and boys differently. The Safe Spaces is a service that focuses specifically on women and girls.
- We cannot truly support women and girls if we don"t address the violence and inequality that prevents them from equally contributing to this community.
- Violence against women and girls is made possible because we live in an unequal world in which women and girls are valued less than men and boys, and in which women and girls have less access to resources and opportunities.
- Violence prevents women and girls from being well and healthy, from going to school, and from being productive members of their community.
- Women and girls also do not have the same access to services, information and programs which prevent and respond to the violence perpetrated against them.
- Additionally, women and girls provide care for others in their families or communities which can expose them to additional violence, as well as contribute to a further reduction in their access to opportunities.
- Women have limited space to meet, as public spaces are predominantly occupied by men and boys, and women and girls do not feel safe and comfortable spending time in these spaces.
- It is, in fact, internationally recognised that women and girls feel safer and more comfortable when they are amongst females only.
- This is what makes the Safe Spaces unique. While many services support women and girls in different ways, the Safe Spaces provides a space where only women and girls can meet with other women and girls.
- While the female-only space supports women and girls in feeling safer, it also reduces their isolation by offering them a collective space to socialise.
- Women and adolescent girls from the community lead the facilitation of many activities in the Safe Spaces, and they also select the activities they wish to take part in and choose the level of social support they receive and provide each other.

DOES THE SAFE SPACES INTERVENTION WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS?

- The Safe Spaces recognises that for violence against women and girls to be addressed, it must be something that communities address together with women and girls.
- We also recognise that men and boys hold the most power and control over resources in the communities where we work and that we must work in partnership with them to change negative attitudes and practices.
- Therefore, the Safe Spaces continually engages men in the assessment, design, and implementation of Safe Spaces. Activities with men and boys are conducted outside of the female-only space, and we work with men and boys to improve the circumstances of women and girls. (Type of activities with men and boys will be described according to the specific programming).

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SAFE SPACES FOR THE COMMUNITY?

- Women's roles are often invisible, but they have a huge impact on community members' lives as most of the actions that women take during their lives do not aim at their own well-being but to the development of a healthy family and community. Safe Spaces supports this, for example through thefollowing:
- Women have a tremendous amount of responsibility in caring for family members, and given the situation, they need special support and a social network to do this well. Through the Safe Spaces, women can share and consult other women about their daily experiences to support their ability to navigate with ease and fully support their family members.
- Through the Safe Spaces, women and girls gain knowledge about practical subjects and acquire skills that can be helpful for themselves, for the family or other community members. In fact, women usually share their knowledge with family members, neighbours or other community members.
- Safe Spaces will raise awareness in the community to promote a supportive society in which men and boys will also take an active role in caring for their households and families. The methodology and the type of support will be discussed with community members to ensure it is in line with customs and traditions. Having a supportive relationship between male and females will contribute to a healthier community.
- Women and girls often work for the well-being of other family or community members. In Safe Spaces they can work on their own skills, capacities, knowledge, social networks and self-esteem. To make this process possible and sustainable, it is critical that they feel their efforts are valued and their achievements recognised.
- Men and boys can be allies of women and girls and become Safe Spaces supporters. That will make access to Safe Spaces safer and easier for women and girls. Being a Safe Spaces supporter may entailpublicly supporting the Safe Spaces during conversations with other family members, friends or at other events, as well as encouraging community stakeholders to become Safe Spaces supporters.

HOW CAN COMMUNITY MEMBERS SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFE SPACES?

- Men and boys play a crucial role and have a big influence in women's and girls' lives. If the male members of the family (and of the community) are supportive and encourage women and girls to attend activities in the Safe Spaces, it will be easier for women to access, feel safe, and be committed.

WHEN WE COME [TO THIS SAFE SPACE], WE GET AWAY FROM THE ISOLATION WE ARE BOUND TO AT HOME. WE MEET NEW PEOPLE WHO TRULY ACCEPT US AND WE LEARN NEW THINGS.

– *FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN IDLEB, SYRIA*

TRANSCENDING NORMS

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES IN WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' SAFE SPACES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

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