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EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN UNFPA SAFE SPACES

Experiences from
the Humanitarian response
in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Impressum

**EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN UNFPA SAFE SPACES:
Experiences from the humanitarian response
in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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“Migration can be both a cause and a consequence of female empowerment.”
Graeme Hugo, 2000.



The list of abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WGC	Women and girls centre
GBV	Gender-based violence
TRC	Temporary reception centre
NFI	Non-food items
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
PSS	Psychosocial support

1. Introduction

1.1. Empowerment of women and girls in migrant flows

In general, the empowerment of women and girls is recognised worldwide as a justified cause.¹ Considering the level of their deprivation, the empowerment of girls and women in migrant flows (including those internally displaced)² must to be made a top priority (see Box 1). Among others, their primary needs include specialised medical and psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health services, goods and information as well as other relevant gender responsive services such as trauma counselling.³

Empowerment is one of the factors that lead women and girls to leave their place of residence or country in order to find a better place for living.⁴ It includes, but it is not limited to, changing the viewpoint of women and girls and getting them to accept that they can raise their status through education, self-awareness and literacy as well as through the promotion of their sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices and their right to influence social change both for themselves and for others.⁵ In that sense, the process of empowering girls and women on the move is particularly challenging.

In order to respond properly to the mixed migration⁶ that appeared in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNFPA established women and girls centres (WGC) as safe spaces with the aim to provide them with protection and empowerment. To understand the context of mixed migration and the purpose of WGCs in this country it is necessary to read the document 'WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES: A guidance note based on the humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina.'⁷



Box 1.

Important facts

- > **Almost half of all migrants globally are women and girls.**
- > **Female migrants face major risks, including sexual exploitation, trafficking and violence.**
- > **Women migrants face double discrimination, both as women and as migrants.**
- > **Women do not stop getting pregnant when they are on the move.**
- > **Women and girl migrants are more likely to face health problems.**

UNFPA, 2018.

¹ See more in Gupta, Gujrati and Uygun, *Women Empowerment in the World*, Women_Empowerment_in_the_world, 2020. Available at www.researchgate.net/publication/350801745.

² See, for example, Sony S.F, Hossain M.B and Rahman S.M, *Internal Migration and Women Empowerment: A Study on Female Garments Workers in Dhaka City of Bangladesh*, 2020.

³ See more in OHCHR/Global Migration Group, *Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations*, 2018.

⁴ See more in Hugo, 2000.

⁵ See, for example, Bayeh E, *The role of empowering women and achieving gender equality to the sustainable development of Ethiopia*, 2016. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psr.2016.09.013>.

⁶ According to the Mixed Migration Centre, 'mixed migration' (although also referring to 'mixed movements' and 'mixed flows') describes "cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by multiple factors, people engaged in mixed migration have different legal statuses and face a variety of vulnerable situations." Although those travelling along the same migration route and using the same forms of transportation have various migration statuses the status of those in mixed movements is driven by different reasons.

⁷ UNFPA, *WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES: A guidance note based on the humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2022.

Illustration 1.

The purpose of empowerment activities at WGCs

Purpose of the empowerment activities in WGCs

'Now, in the WGC' perspective

- > Create a supportive environment for women and girls in which they feel free to share their thoughts and attitudes, express their concerns (and expect feedback), share experiences (and expect support to overcome negative effects), and discuss plans for the future (and expect advice).
- > Inform and encourage them to participate in relevant protection and assistance activities, with a special focus on GBV and SRH.

'Looking back' perspective

- > Strengthen women and girls survivors of violence (especially GBV) and help them to recover through empowerment activities.
- > Empower women and girls who experienced violence and to and 'give them back' their senses of responsibility for their lives as well as the ability to make choices and decisions.

'Looking forward' perspective

- > Empower women and girls through awareness-raising, learning, and skills development in the areas which could help them in their lives (taking into account their needs and plans).
- > Improve/maintain their mental and physical health through a combination of different types of activities.

1.2. The meaning and purpose of empowerment activities in women and girls centres (WGCs)

'Empowerment activities' refers to different groups of activities based on the specific needs of women and girls on the move. The overall goal is to empower them for their future life, with special focus on GBV and SRH. Competent members of staff take into account three perspectives of the empowerment activities in order to maximise the impact of these interventions. As shown below in Illustration 1, through the perspective 'Now, in the WGC' staff create a safe and supportive environment for women and girls. This allows for a 'dipper dive' into their past ('Looking back' perspective), including their background and life experience. Both of the above-mentioned perspectives feed into the third one or the 'Looking forward' perspective, which targets positive planning for the future of the women and girls.

1.3. How to use this document

The overall objective of this document is to share the experiences gained through more than four years of empowering women and girls through the WGCs established in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with particular focus on the UNFPA mandate.

Box 2.

What the user can learn from this document

- > **Why empowering women and girls is an imperative.**
- > **How to 'hear' and understand women and girls in WGCs.**
- > **How to gain the trust of women and girls within the context of their different cultural backgrounds.**
- > **How to catch the attention of women and girls and keep them involved.**
- > **Get ideas on how to create a supportive environment.**
- > **Understand the type of resources that you need to in order to ensure successful implementation of activities.**
- > **How to handle sensitive topics.**
- > **What you have to do when 'they do nothing'.**
- > **Become aware of certain things that we may have missed and that you should not.**

Box 3.

Methods of assessment

successfully applied in

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. **Collecting essential information during registration: Each woman and girl who enters a WGC is registered and their basic information collected, including age, marital status and education level, number of children, etc.**
2. **Participatory assessments: These are usually focused on GBV risks and other safety factors. They involve interactive group activities as well as focus group discussions and surveys of the women and girls in order to ensure that the diversified population is represented fully in the sample structure.**
3. **Women and girls on the move questionnaire: This was designed to collect data that would provide an in-depth understanding of the different reasons for migration, the challenges that women and girls face along the road, the services they receive or need, their experience in the centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their suggestions for improving the response in this country. The questionnaire also helps identify their GBV experiences, which were recorded and followed in confidence.**
4. **Focus group discussions with the most vulnerable groups: These are conducted with women and girls such as pregnant women, single women, women with disabilities and adolescent girls periodically in order to gain a better understanding of their specific circumstances.**
5. **Regular assessment of those in need of psychosocial support (PSS) is conducted for those women and girls involved in PSS activities at WGCs. They are followed regularly not only in terms of recording their progress but also to suggest which empowerment activities can contribute and how.**
6. **Other assessment techniques and tools: Different techniques and tools are also used, although more occasionally, such as observation methods that include personal impressions by staff members. It was critical, for example, to collect feedback from those women and girls who attended empowerment activities held at WGCs (see Annex 3).**

Through the collected good practice and lessons learned this document has the potential to serve as a guide for future work with the population of women and girls on the move in this country as well as in other countries that share a similar context. It contains a lot of information that can be of use in the development of various initiatives aimed at women's empowerment (see Box 2).

Each of the empowerment activities, including those described below, has its methodology of implementation. Yet bearing in mind the special vulnerability of the target population and the key principles of WGCs, there is no empowerment activities that can be applied without first being adapted to the needs, background and preferences of the women and girls. This requires relevant assessments that are not a one-time action and that are not always formal. The assessment begins with the arrival of the women and girls and continues until they leave the centre. In that sense, they have been applied successfully in Bosnia and Herzegovina through several methods (see Box 3 below). All of them have provided critical data for the adaptation of empowerment activities at WGCs.

To ensure that the empowerment activities have the desired impact, empowerment officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina also consider information collected through established groups of women and girls (see Box 4). Triangulation of all of the collected data provides an excellent overview of 'what works' and 'for whom'. However, the gaps and challenges described below (also see sub-section 3.4) regularly prevent competent and agile members of staff from providing ideal interventions and achieving the maximum impact.





Box 4.
Good practice from Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. **Women and girls committee:** Among its other functions, the committee⁸ aims to ensure the active participation of the women and girls in the planning and implementation of empowerment activities at WGCs. These meetings help gather and discuss feedback (including those collected through the Complaints Box) and this aids the adjustment of activities and plans.
2. **‘Teen Club’ and ‘Young Mothers Club’:**⁹ These clubs gather women and girls with similar interests and allows the relevant professionals to ‘deep dive’ into their specific needs and issues. Although their primary purpose relates to PSS and SRH¹⁰ the findings and conclusions from these meetings influence the design of empowerment activity plans.

⁸ For more detail see UNFPA, *WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES: A guidance note based on the humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2022.

⁹ UNFPA, *Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds Learning Report*, 2021. Available at www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CARE-AMAL-Learning-Report-1-1.pdf.

¹⁰ For more detail see UNFPA, *WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES: A guidance note based on the humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2022.

¹¹ For more detail see UNFPA, *WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES: A guidance note based on the humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2022.

2. Empowerment activities: purpose, methods and impact

2.1. Understanding the interconnection between empowerment activities

Bearing in mind that women and girls centres (WGCs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina operate with a very compact teams, comprised of up to 20 members of staff (usually four or five per centre),¹¹ all of them are involved or at least informed about each activity. It makes the coordination of activities almost perfect, while the women and girls observe the team as harmonised. Yet despite a clear distinction between empowerment activities and protection activities in terms of their purpose and methods of implementation those personnel not engaged in work on empowering women and girls may have difficulty in understanding where empowerment ends and protection begins.

Implementation of empowerment activities is a good way to prevent and to mitigate gender-based violence (GBV) but also to encourage survivors to report it and to be included in the healing and recovery processes. Similarly, empowerment activities contribute towards the prevention of SRH issues and encourage women and girls to accept necessary medical assessment and intervention.

For the purpose of clear interpretation, the empowerment of women and girls in WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be described through the two sub-chapters. The first is the ‘Pure’ empowerment activities (sub-chapter 2.1) and the second is Empowering girls and women through protection activities (sub-chapter 2.2). As shown below in Table 1, there are at least eight groups of activities oriented towards the empowerment of women and girls.

Table 1.
Groups of empowerment activities applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina

‘Pure’ empowerment activities

1. Creative activities
2. Educational activities
3. Recreational and relaxation activities
4. Peer-to-peer empowerment
5. ‘The art of doing nothing’

Empowering through protection activities

6. Empowerment through GBV activities
7. Empowerment through SRH activities
8. Empowerment through PSS activities

Box 5.
An example of projection

A woman from Afghanistan made a drawing of a pigeon flying away from a cage, which she described as her dream. Namely, to fly away and reach members of her family.

2.2. ‘Pure’ empowerment activities

2.2.1. Creative activities

Creative activities play an important role in both intellectual and cognitive development from childhood. They are a critical aspect of developing different skills, such as problem solving, developing imagination, concentration and critical thinking. As women and girls on the move are faced with different difficulties their involvement in creative activities has the potential to help them to overcome some of them with the assistance of WGC staff.

This group of activities is perfect for creating an atmosphere where women and girls can express their feelings and emotions.¹² In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, women and girls often create things that reflect their thoughts, concerns, desires and dreams (see Box 5). This atmosphere creates suitable opportunities for professionals at WGCs to detect indicators of GBV and SRH issues.

This type of activity can be used as a form of occupational therapy, especially as a form of treatment for strengthening performance abilities (see Box 6). It contributes to improved self-esteem among the women and girls in a way that shows them that they can create something by themselves. It usually has a positive impact in terms of them being more able to take control of their life in the future.

Creative activities also allow women and girls to apply their imagination, creativity and skills to producing certain things and helps them to discover their potential, which can be further developed through additional sessions aimed at skills building empowerment such as sewing, knitting, and painting. Thus, the link between creative and educational activities is usually emphasised.

As creative activities can be implemented with a group of women and girls of different ages and different backgrounds their effect on socialisation are particularly positive. Although they are usually conceptualised as group activities, women and girls should be encouraged to express their creativity individually.

¹² See also, for example, Sharma A and Singh S.S, *Empowering Women through Art of Weaving: A Case of Karen Tribe Woman*, *Women Empowerment*, EMPYREAL PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2020, pp. 96-102. Available at www.researchgate.net/publication/339324946_WOMEN_EMPOWERMENT.

Creative activities run at WGCs generally achieve an impact in terms of awareness raising, especially when they concern certain topics or events that these women and girls might never have heard about before. They are, for example, ideal for learning about different traditions and cultures and at the same time raise awareness about certain inappropriate behaviour, harmful traditions and such like.



Box 6.
A young women
from Afghanistan

“Painting calms me down. I forget all my problems for the moment.”

Technique of distraction

One more important beneficial aspect of creative activities is that they are a great tool for working with GBV survivors when a distraction is needed from repeated thoughts about the violence that these women and girls survived. In this way, women and girls are given a technique that allows them to relax for a while and focus on another topic. At the same time, they are empowered and supported in their recovery process. This mostly benefits those who repeatedly relive the traumatic experiences but are not yet ready to talk about them.

During the humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the most popular and most impactful creative activities at WGCs related to painting and arts and crafts. Several examples of these activities can be found in the table below.

Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
Creating a ‘Dream-catcher’	A ‘Dreamcatcher’ is a popular ornament in modern times. It is traditionally created by Native Americans, who hang it above the bed to filter out (catch) bad dreams and only let good dreams pass through. Participants create handmade hoops from paper and plastic plates on which a net with a small hole in the centre is woven. It is decorated in different ways, depending on the creativity of the individual and the available materials. This activity enables women and girls to express themselves, their problems and their dreams in a creative way. Discussions on topics such as the answer to the question ‘What should be kept in your network?’ offers an excellent opportunity for staff members to identify potential violence or some other needs of the women and girls.	Instructions given properly: Explain the purpose of creating a ‘Dreamcatcher’ in a ‘catchy’ way. Materials available: Paper/plastic plates, knitwear, plumage, scissors, rope, tassels, fabrics, decorative materials as desired, etc. A safe space for the follow-up discussions secured: Ideally, it will be a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.

Telling stories through puzzles	At the beginning of the activity each participant receives a blank piece of paper in the form of a puzzle (template). Then the women and girls draw/sketch their story or write at their own discretion without the guidance of a facilitator (usually an empowerment officer).	Instructions given properly: The purpose of the activity is explained to the women and girls in a motivational manner. Materials available: Block paper, scissors, crayons and similar.
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Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions	Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
	When everyone has made their own puzzle they are assembled according to the shapes. The goal of this exercise is to combine different stories into a broader one. By telling individual stories and ‘fitting’ them into this larger one it is possible to collect a large amount of potentially important information. Adequate interventions will be created based on them, including relevant protection and assistance activities.	A safe space for telling the stories: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.		to discover both identical photographs during the game. The achievements of these women are discussed when all of the pairs are found. The aim is to encourage and inspire the women and girls. The educational component of this activity is a beneficial side effect.	photographs of important women in society. A safe space for telling the stories: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.
Creating different social games such as Memory Inspirational Cards	Let’s make cards with photos of inspirationally successful women who brought about significant changes in society (such as in the fields of science, art, sport and human rights). The same photograph is placed on two cards and the goal is for the participant	Instructions given properly: The purpose of the activity is explained to the women and girls in a motivational manner. Materials available: Scissors and printed	Fashion and style in different cultures or ‘before and now’ and similar	The women and girls should create fashion models through drawings or similar. The facilitator can potentially suggest that they draw themselves in the past, in their different countries, as well as themselves in the future when they come to the place where they seek to live and then search for the differences in the two drawings. This session is about the history of fashion and makeup. The group discusses fashion, style and makeup in different cultures. What can a certain colour tell us about a person? What can we learn about a person by the way he or she dresses? How is a certain colour connected with our emotions and how can it influence them? The participants watch a video on interesting facts about fashion and the use of makeup. Why do we use it?	Instructions given properly: The purpose of the activity is explained to the women and girls in a motivational manner. Materials available: Block paper, scissors, crayons, etc. A safe space for telling the stories: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.



Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions	Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
	What if we use it to impress someone and not because we like it, what might they think about it? This activity could be done jointly by a psychologist and an empowerment officer, depending on the desired impact.			can be used in the centre, etc. The women and girls paint and draw and make creative decorations to decorate the centre during holidays. They also sew curtains for the centre that in addition to decorating the centre provide increased privacy for the women, which is something for which they expressed a need. These activities have proven to be crucial in making these centres into spaces that empower the women and girls. This is because the freedom and opportunity to participate in making decisions about how the centre should look and then to decorate it themselves is empowering in itself.	
Joint arrangement and decoration of the UNFPA centre	<p>Through the Women and Girls Committee, UNFPA receives information about what the women and girls would like to change at the UNFPA centres and what they would like to work on together with the UNFPA team.</p> <p>One example of this feedback is that they miss their house, their home. They see the women and girls centre as the warmest corner for them during their migration journey and they would like to be able to decorate it as if they were in their own house.</p> <p>For this reason, the products of various creative activities are used to decorate these centres and sometimes decorating the centre becomes an activity in itself.</p> <p>The women and girls participate in painting the centre, cleaning and organising it as their living room, painting and decouping boxes that are later used as a place to store makeup or jewellery, painting cups and trays that</p>	<p>Instructions given properly: The need for these activities was expressed by the women and girls themselves and therefore certain instructions were provided by the women to the entire group.</p> <p>Materials available: Paints, decorations, decoupage boxes, various cotton materials, glue, block paper, scissors, crayons, etc.</p> <p>A safe space for telling the stories: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.</p>			



In addition to the above-mentioned, many other creative activities can be designed such as creative drawing, painting, creative writing, sewing, applying makeup, nail polishing, making necklaces, bracelets, handbags, key chains and making different items from bottles, toilet paper rolls, bottle caps, etc. These activities will require materials and items to be used during the implementation (e.g., white and coloured paper, pens, pencils, scissors, glue, glass/plastic jars and crayons), including materials that are available in the surrounding environment (tree leaves, flowers, rocks, stones, bottles and bottle caps, etc.). Regardless of how and what will be done, the most important thing is to keep the focus on the purpose and desired impact of a particular creative activity.

Preparations for these activities begin with the joint identification of such activities. To enable the women and girls to express their preferences additional explanations are sometimes unexpectedly required regarding what a particular activity means and how it will be conducted. Sometimes, in accordance with different preferences, the situation requires dividing the women and girls into groups in order to implement more than one creative activity at the same time. The overall impact of the creative activities should be measured, such as, for example, the number or proportion of women and girls empowered to think critically, feel more independent and think more positively about their future.

¹³ Plan International, *Because I am a girl: State of the World's Girls*, 2012.

¹⁴ See, for example, Sida, *Gender-based violence and education (Policy brief)*, 2015.

¹⁵ See, for example, Dottridge M, Ninkovic O.L, Sax H and Vujovic S, *The phenomenon of child trafficking in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Council of Europe, 2021.

2.2.2. Educational activities

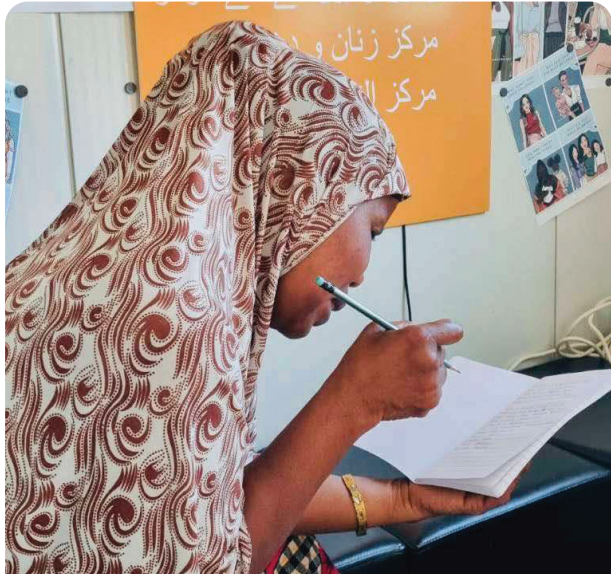
While there is a lot of well-established evidence that education increases the employment opportunities and socioeconomic status of women it has also been found that their level of education has a positive correlation with a decrease in both their future victimisation and the perpetration of physical and sexual violence against them.¹³ To reduce the unequal power relationship between women and men, which has been identified as the root cause of GBV, education is a critical component in the empowerment of women.¹⁴ The previously mentioned ‘Women on the move questionnaire’ that is applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina identified a lack of education as one of the most important factors of vulnerability among women in WGCs.

In the context of the mixed migration humanitarian response in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly because of the short period of stay of women and girls in this country, only programmes of informal education have been designed and applied through the WGCs. These programmes, in accordance with the identified needs, are usually defined as short-term outcomes that should be reached by applying the most efficient learning methods and techniques.

Educational sessions for the population in WGCs should not be general. Instead, they must be designed in accordance with the identified priorities and needs but also the preferences. While, for example, their minimum level of general literacy deepens their vulnerability language barriers prevent them from staying safe and from reaching their goals.¹⁵ Accordingly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina educational activities that address these issues were designed and applied. These and several more examples are shown in the table below.



Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
Literacy classes	Women and girls with a low level of literacy or education in general get an opportunity to learn how to read and write. With the support of the facilitator, they learn to write letters, words, key symbols, etc. The sessions are delivered in a creative way in order to keep their attention and at the same time make the process more efficient. Participant should also be informed about the different benefits of increased literacy. Short-term benefits sometimes sounds ‘catchy’ for them, such as, for example, ‘You will be able to fill all forms out on your trip’. Yet it amounts to more than that, because it will give them the opportunity to express themselves	Motivated learners: The purpose of the activity is explained in a motivational way to encourage the women and girls to participate. Materials available: Paper, pencils, boards and a video projector. A safe space suitable for educational sessions: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.



Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
	through words and to prepare themselves for their future personal development.	
Learning local and foreign languages	Preparing lessons for learning local or foreign languages. Lessons should be delivered in a way that motivates the women and girls to continue to learn. It is sometimes necessary to adapt lessons to the needs of different groups of women and girls in order to, for example, take into account their level of education and previous knowledge. Lessons are usually implemented with the focus on vocabulary and daily conversation. At the end, an informal and optional final examination can be organised.	Motivated learners: The purpose of the activity is explained in a motivational way to encourage the women and girls to participate. Materials available: Paper, pencils, boards and a video projector. A safe space suitable for educational sessions: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.



Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions	Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
Healthcare sessions	These activities are specifically designed in terms of raising awareness about healthcare. For example, personal and space hygiene or body awareness at different ages (specifically for girls in puberty and women in menopause). They also develop awareness about the storage and use of food (e.g., storage of dairy products). They also instigate discussions on healthy lifestyle habits, such as practicing sports and other recreational activities, so that certain educational activities can be connected with recreational activities. These activities should be delivered with examples and appropriate ‘experiments’ (e.g.).	Materials available: weight scale, hygiene products, paper, pencils, boards, a video projector and food (to show examples).		al sessions on menstruation, body changes during the puberty process, adolescence, protection from sexually transmitted diseases and similar have proven to be extremely important for girls. These topics were especially important to girls because practice showed that most of them first discussed this through UNFPA centres.	learn, a projector, paper and chemicals. Tip: In sessions that focus on girls, especially those sensitive to the issue of sexuality, it is recommended to separate these sessions and organise them separately for girls. A safe space suitable for educational sessions: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles. If possible, such sessions should be organised and implemented in health centres together with competent experts.
SRH related healthcare sessions	These activities aim to educate the women and girls on various topics related to their sexual and reproductive health. They provide them with methods and techniques of protection, quick detection of symptoms and adequate reactions. Some examples of these sessions could be learning breast self-examination and recognising early symptoms and education about contraceptives, their use, effects and purpose. Education-	Motivated learners: Participants are motivated in a way that presents the benefits and all of the knowledge and information that they would gain by the end of these sessions as well as all the techniques they could use in their lives. Materials available: Models, posters and various visual displays that can be used to	MHPSS related healthcare sessions	These sessions serves primarily to develop trust with the participants and prepare them for psychoeducation or familiarisation with various mental states (especially those already recognised in women and youth) as well as empowerment, relaxation and learning skilful assertive	Motivated learners: Participants are motivated in a way that presents the benefits and all of the knowledge and information that they would gain by the end of these sessions as well as all the techniques they could use in their lives.

Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions	Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions	Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
	communication. ¹⁶ Some examples of psychoeducational workshops relate to different mental states, symptoms and the ways of dealing with them. Some educational sessions focus on strengthening the skills and capacities of women and girls and are therefore more focused on their learning various techniques and skills. Some examples are self-help, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, breathing techniques, full awareness techniques, problem solving techniques and techniques for accepting inner experiences.	Materials available: Interactive cards, collage paper, pencils, film projectors and other content and use of equipment inside the centre and the like. A safe space suitable for educational sessions: Ideally, it is a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.		associated risks. They also allow them to familiarise themselves with their rights that have been violated through GBV. As a preventive measure, they teach them to recognise early risk factors as well as to promote strategies for the prevention of violence in an emergency context. Lastly, they teach them where and how to seek support as well as self-help mechanisms when the service provider is not available (such as during their migration journey).	should be a WGC that is established in accordance with the relevant principles.		requires the engagement of all participants. The activity symbolises the creation and resolution of conflicts (important factors for conflict resolution), including communication, teamwork, flexibility, cooperation, etc. This is followed by a discussion in which the participants declare their biggest challenges for successful conflict resolution. Some other examples involve activities aimed at encouraging creativity, motivation and strengthening public speaking.	participate and who would encourage others to work, study and acquire skills by their example should be included in the running of the activities.
GBV educational sessions (For more detail see 2.3.2. in Chapter 2)	UNFPA centres offer a plethora of activities focused on supporting women and girls in a safe space. The coping mechanisms of survivors are further enhanced through their inclusion in empowerment activities that encourage them to maintain positive personality traits, competency and self-efficacy. Some of the educational sessions on GBV have the aim to empower people on the move to recognise gender-based violence and the	Motivated learners: The purpose of the activity is explained in a motivational way to encourage the women and girls to participate. Materials available: PowerPoint presentations, photographs, interactive maps and various art tools, etc. A safe space suitable for educational sessions: Crucially it	Soft skills activities	It is a group of activities aimed at building important life skills, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, critical observation, leadership and conflict and problem-solving. These topics are covered through an experiential workshop based on practical exercises. The exercises are designed for each particular topic by considering the needs of the women and girls. An example of a conflict resolution workshop: Participants take hold of hands that are irregularly intertwined. The goal is to free the hands (to return to the free position) and the whole activity	Creative facilitator: A facilitator should design the sessions in a way that is interesting to the participants. Materials available: It depends on the way an activity is implemented (white and coloured paper, pens, pencils, scissors, glue, needles, thread, sewing machine, clothes, first aid items, video materials, etc). Tip: It is recommended that women and/or girls who want to		Many other different activities have been implemented in WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These include learning the basic history and geography of the relevant geographic areas (such as ‘Interesting facts about Europe’), first aid training, increased awareness of human rights and obligations in the EU and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sessions on cultural, religious and sexual diversity, etc. Activities can be organised in the form of workshops, practical exercises, roundtables and focus group discussions, studying in groups and group presentations and debates. Experts in certain fields can be invited from other organisations or institutions to conduct sessions on specific topics.	Every learning activity should be intentional, meaningful and impactful. These activities are supposed to provide the women and girls with the tools that will help them to gain knowledge that can be helpful in their future life. Learning the local language, for example, would help the women and girls to communicate with local residents, in shops, with various authorities, etc., which would make their daily lives much easier and give them a sense of independence and self-care. Learning the local language would also help the women and girls to become familiar with the local cultural context and behavioural habits, which again would benefit the women and girls. Because in most cases they aim to reach EU countries, learning other languages is very relevant to the women and girls as even a basic knowledge of the relevant language would help them to express their needs and establish basic communication.
¹⁶ See more at https://ba.unfpa.org/en/publications/support-provided-women-and-youth-risk-unfpa-humanitarian-response-bosnia-and						¹⁷ See also Schuell T.J, Cognitive conceptions of learning. Review of Educational Research, 1986, 56, pp. 411-436.		

critical in choosing what activity will be conducted, with whom and under which circumstances. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, it was critical to have related activities aimed at raising awareness in healthcare sessions. It was detected that some sessions related to sexual and reproductive health should be implemented separately for adolescent girls and mature women. This was not only because of the different topics they cover but also because adolescent girls may not feel comfortable speaking in front of older women on issues such as ‘My body’ – session for girls (see example 2.1.2.c in Annex 1).

Every learning activity should be intentional, meaningful and impactful. These activities are supposed to provide the women and girls with the tools that will help them to gain knowledge that can be helpful in their future life. Learning the local language, for example, would help the women and girls to communicate with local residents, in shops, with various authorities, etc., which would make their daily lives much easier and give them a sense of independence and self-care. Learning the local language would also help the women and girls to become familiar with the local cultural context and behavioural habits, which again would benefit the women and girls. Because in most cases they aim to reach EU countries, learning other languages is very relevant to the women and girls as even a basic knowledge of the relevant language would help them to express their needs and establish basic communication.





The overall impact of educational activities is reflected in the level of developed skills, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, improved mental and physical health and increased independence of the women and girls. They have better opportunities to stay safe and progress in terms of their social goals. Looking from the perspective of the primary mandate of UNFPA, women and girls involved in educational activities are less likely to face GBV and suffer SRH related issues and if it does happen then their chances of overcoming the negative consequences are greatly increased.

2.2.3. Recreational and relaxation activities

Recreational and relaxation activities have a variety of effects on the mental and physical health and condition of the women and girls. Namely, besides the benefits to the physical health of the women and girls, these activities help them to manage stress and anxiety and to maintain their mental health. Therefore, recreational and relaxation activities are very important within the process of empowering women and girls on the move. The activities that achieved positive effects in the context of WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are shown in the table below.

Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
Indoor sports activities such as yoga and aerobic exercises	Together with the facilitator (empowerment officer at the WGC), practice yoga or aerobics by following the instructions on the video. The facilitator gives relevant instructions and explains the intended impact of the activity.	Instructions given properly: The purpose of the activity is explained to the women and girls in a motivational manner. Materials available: Video presentations and a safe space.
Outdoor sports activities such as volleyball and badminton	Together with the facilitator (empowerment officer in WGC), the women and girls play sports outdoors. These activities are often carried out in cooperation with local NGOs and this allows local women and girls and women and girls from the migrant population to connect. The facilitator must ensure that the rules are followed and that the spirit and values of sport are reached, including socialisation, teamwork, fair play, accepting defeat and learning from it, celebrating wins properly, etc. These factors are discussed later on. These activities provide an opportunity to assess the physical condition of the women and girls, including detection of any injuries or illness.	Instructions given properly: The purpose of the activity is explained to the women and girls in a motivational manner and the facilitation is provided effectively. Materials available: Essential sports equipment and a safe space.

Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
Dance classes	The facilitator plays music, usually from the countries of origin of the women in the WGC, which allows them to present their traditional dances to each other. The purpose of this activity is for the women and girls to relax and generally agree to participate in some recreational activities. Whilst keeping physically active they also learn about different cultures and traditions.	Materials available: Available audio and/or video material.
Film and theatre nights	During 'relaxation nights' the women and girls watch jointly selected films on different cultures and languages or rehearse different theatrical plays in the UNFPA centres. In this way, the women and girls relax and connect and learn about each other.	Materials available: A projector and a projection screen, chairs, available films and costumes. Tip: It is always good to check beforehand what the film is about. The women and girls should not experience any form of re-traumatisation because of the film and it should not stigmatise a certain culture in any way.



As women and girls from very different cultures, traditions, ethnicity and race are accommodated at the temporary reception centres (TRCs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sports activities are an ideal opportunity for learning about and accepting differences and building a culture of diversity. The women and girls also learn about the impact that recreational activities have on their body and their health in general. At the same time, relaxation activities, particularly different social games, contribute towards healthy socialisation between the women and girls.

In general, these activities can be conducted together with women and girls of different ages and backgrounds, depending on their preferences, and yet it is important to take into consideration that some women and girls come from countries where playing certain sports is not culturally acceptable for women and therefore the activities should be discussed in advance. Furthermore, the different interests of women and girls of different ages should be considered when planning sports activities. Judging from the experiences in WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, girls are more interested in outdoor sports that usually require more energy (like games with a ball), while middle-age women prefer indoor sports activities with a lower level of intensity. It was also detected that women with young children have less time for sport. The latter is addressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the 'Young Mothers Club' and solutions found through established services.

One of the obstacles to conducting these activities could be limited space at a WGC or a temporary reception centre (TRC). In such cases the staff in Bosnia

Box 8.
Lesson learned from
Bosnia and Herzegovina

In one of the WGCs the women felt that they should not carry out their activities on the football field because they believed it was reserved for men.

and Herzegovina organises some activities in locations near the WGC or somewhere in the local community, run jointly with local women and girls. One example in WGCs in this country is when women are taken to the nearest sport centre in the town where they can exercise with trainers. Others have the opportunity to visit a gym and exercise using aerobics and pilates. Yet experience has shown that these activities are more demanding for WGC staff than those organised within a TRC, primarily because of the procedures required for their organisation.

Recreational activities can be organised in groups using the equipment available. However, the women and girls should be encouraged to apply it individually. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure that activities are chosen based on free will and that the participants are encouraged to express their preferences (see Box 8).

In addition to the impact they have on physical and mental health, resilience to stress and on anxiety as well as friendships, these activities redirect the focus of female refugees and migrants away from thinking about their difficult situation and daily challenges. Ultimately, this has a positive impact on the overall mood of and interaction between beneficiaries at WGCs and TRCs. The women and girls socialise, get to know each other better and interact through these activities, which has a positive effect on their overall interpersonal relationships.

2.2.4. Peer-to-peer empowerment activities

All of the women and girls have some knowledge and experience that can be beneficial to others. Those who share their skill/knowledge feel valuable and those mentored feel supported not only in the learning process but also in their general life.

In WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina women who possess unique or specific skills and knowledge that they practiced before in their home countries and are very good at (e.g., writing skills, dancing, acting, sewing, knitting, hair styling, makeup and dancing skills) are frequently identified. Such potential is explored deeply, usually through face-to-face interviews with the women and girls and such interviews are also used to explore their motivation to share their skills/ experience/knowledge with others. After receiving positive feedback regarding their motivation and readiness to be involved, a peer-to-peer activity can be created and included in the curriculum of the empowerment activities. This process allows the women and girls to become leaders, which also has a positive influence in terms of their self-esteem. They are prepared by the staff of the WGC

in order to maximise the impact of the sessions and they also learn during this process. Professionals provide the materials needed for the implementation of these women led activities (e.g., paper, flipcharts and a video projector). Several examples of peer-to-peer empowerment activities applied in this country are showed in the table below.

Name of activity	Description of activity	Assumption /preconditions
Salsa – dancing classes	Several women from Cuba had outstanding skills in dancing. After undergoing a motivational interview with the empowerment officer at a WGC, who explained the positive impact of sharing their experience with others at the WGC, they were further empowered to prepare and perform salsa dancing classes.	There are woman or girl with dancing skills who are willing to lead such classes and those willing to participate.
IT classes	Girls with developed IT skills who are willing to teach older women basic skills related to modern technology, including the potential risks of their use. The empowerment officer must first obtain permission from the girl’s parent before they receive additional training in how to transfer their knowledge in the most impactful way.	There are woman or girl with IT skills who are willing to lead such classes and there are those willing to participate.

Name of activity	Description of activity
Peer-to-peer mentoring and support	The empowerment officer and the facilitator identify women and girls with specific vulnerabilities who require support of a person who comes from the same country of origin, speaks the same language and understands the specific customs and culture of that country. After identifying potential beneficiaries and conducting a preliminary assessment, the empowerment officer or facilitator either refers such persons to specialised experts or organisations within the centre (when persons need specialised MHPSS support) or identifies and engages a woman (mentor) at the centre from the same country to provide support to the women or girl in need. The support provided by the latter comes mostly in the form of individual listening, moral support, advice and seeking additional support from others if needed. The empowerment officer or facilitator maintains close contact with the woman acting as a mentor and suggests additional individual or group recreational and relaxation activities (games, sport, parties) to contribute to the support of the women or girl in need.

Assumption /preconditions
There are woman or girls who are willing to provide peer-support to women or girls from a similar background who are willing to accept such support.



Peer-to-peer empowerment activities can be led by both women and girls. However, it was interesting to see that older women in WGCs in this country usually have certain skills that were unknown among the adolescent girls (e.g., sewing), while adolescents had skills that many of the women did not have (e.g., IT skills or writing skills).

Peer-to-peer activities are always interconnected with other empowerment activities and contribute towards creative, educational, recreational and relaxation effects. Namely, these activities create a learning environment suitable for developing new skills and expressing creativity wherein whilst socialising the women and girls are occupied by learning and practice.

Hence, the impact of peer-to-peer empowerment activities overlap with the previously described empowerment activities and thus allow for a special contribution that stems directly from the women and girls on the move themselves. Furthermore, these activities create opportunities for the women and girls in WGCs to become leaders and to build their skills and encourages them to present them. This has led to an extremely positive influence on the self-confidence of those women and girls being recorded in this country.

2.2.5. ‘The art of doing nothing’

In the context of the modern world, which values productivity, the idea of spending time relaxing or ‘doing nothing’ should make us feel uncomfortable. This is because spending time without achieving an outcome is assessed either as lost time or as something going wrong. Yet something like this is both necessary and extremely useful in the context of WGCs. While ordinary people have a hard time relaxing and enjoying moments of ‘nothingness’ those involved in migrant flows are usually preoccupied with harsh experiences from the past and an uncertain future.

The ‘art of doing nothing’ could be defined as a period of time when women and girls need to take a rest from everything. Everything that a woman or girl prefers to do for themselves at that moment, such as being in nature, practicing yoga or deep breathing, hanging out with others and such like. This is a time for unplanned but much needed free time and seemingly unnecessary things. Those activities are especially important for GBV survivors when speaking about the trauma they experienced becomes too much to handle or otherwise overwhelming.

There is no specific plan for the realisation of these activities. They can start inside or outside, implemented while sitting or walking and so on. During this time, it is advisable to prepare and celebrate important events and holidays and to

focus on decoration activities according to the season, holiday or essential event (see examples 2.1.1..a and 2.1.1..b in Annex 1)

The greatest stories told and ideas shared from the experiences in Bosnia and Herzegovina came exactly from moments when the women and girls in the WGCs were apparently ‘doing nothing’. It seems that they shared their stories more naturally than when asked for them during official sessions (see Box 9). Important stories were shared during this time. Very often the stories were connected with something that had happened in their country of origin. Women from Cuba, for example, very often talked about their life there, the social problems, politics and everything that happened to them. Actually, they were traumatised by the events that have happened recently in their country. They usually talked about their experiences on their journey, their personal stories, and about their country of origin, plans or their wishes for the future, their ideas and other things they wonder about during such times.

These activities help the women and girls to share their feelings and thoughts, because the atmosphere is relaxing and supportive and there is no pressure from any side. This visibly helped women from African countries, for example, to more easily open up and discuss their unpleasant experiences. It was noted in these activities those women and girls relaxed more and that later it was easier for them to reach decisions on respective PSS activities (For more examples of these activities see example 2.1.5. a, b, and c in Annex 1).



Box 9.
Reflections of a WGC
staff member

“When we started talking about something spontaneously the women and girls just felt a need to come and sit with us and with each other in a relaxing atmosphere telling their stories.”



2.3 Empowering girls and women through protection activities

2.3.1. Empowering girls and women through SRH activities

According to the WHO, “Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) encompasses dimensions of physical, emotional mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.” ¹⁸

During crises the rights of women and girls are often neglected. Existing barriers to women’s and girls’ access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) are exacerbated in humanitarian settings, worsening the already critical situation and making it harder for women and girls to access their basic rights.

Besides their primary purpose, which is to protect women and girls from SRH issues, SRH activities conducted in WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina empower women and girls in a way that allows them to take responsibility for their sexual

¹⁸ www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research/key-areas-of-work/sexual-health/defining-sexual-health.

and reproductive health. They have an opportunity to learn about the potential risks and the importance of regular SRH examinations. They are encouraged to overcome traditional negative assumptions as well as to be ready for various forms of therapy in the event that SRH issues are detected.

In many countries from which refugee and migrant women and girls come to Bosnia and Herzegovina sexual and reproductive education is almost taboo and a shameful topic to talk about and even unacceptable to be taught in educational institutions. Moreover, the sexual violence to which refugee and migrant women and girls are vulnerable confers profound sexual, reproductive and mental health effects that include unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs)/HIV, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Adolescent and underage girls are even more vulnerable in this sense, because they have only limited or no knowledge at all regarding sexual and reproductive health. The lack of SRH knowledge makes them adopt various risk-taking behaviour such as, for example, unhealthy menstrual hygiene practices that cause reproductive tract infections, which affects their mental as well as physical health. Hence, comprehensive SRH and life skills education is necessary in order to empower them in terms of decision-making and adopting a healthy sexual and reproductive lifestyle.

In order to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services for each woman and girl on the move, UNFPA in Bosnia and Herzegovina has included individual consultations with an expert gynaecologist as part of the women’s and girls’ empowerment programme. Consultations are available on a weekly basis at the WGCs, but they can be more frequently if needed. In addition to individual consultations, weekly education is available on the topics of sexually transmitted diseases, the menstrual cycle, family planning, contraception and menopause. Special focus is placed on the education of pregnant women, which includes prenatal care and preparation for childbirth with the focus on conditions during their ongoing movement.

Knowledge about sexual and reproductive health services and access to adequate care has the power to improve the lives of people. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness on sexual and reproductive health and related services and to inform and empower women and girls on this topics. The UNFPA educational programme was created in order to prevent unplanned and unwanted pregnancies, teen pregnancies, entry into early unprotected sexual relations, early diagnosis of uterine cancer, breast cancer, the consequences of sexual and intimate

partner violence, female genital mutilation and sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and HPV.

In order to ensure complete access to this service, the SRH programme also consists of continuously organised gynaecological examinations done in cooperation with local health centres. In this way, preventive gynaecological examinations are available to all women and girls regardless of whether they have the opportunity to participate in education or consultations.

Some women and girls may feel scared prior to the gynaecological examination, especially if it is their first examination. However, after group and individual sessions with a gynaecologist many of them recognise the importance and agree to the examination. The need for adequate support after the examination is also recognised. One example is when girls visited a gynaecologist for the first time and found it useful to talk to the psychologist. They also explained that relaxing activities like mindfulness and meditation are very helpful in terms of their regaining a balanced perspective.

Empowerment sessions should be organised separately for women and girls because mothers and daughters do not feel comfortable taking part in such sessions together and because the topics relating to certain aspects of SRH are relevant solely to women or girls. Sessions on puberty and changes in a girl's body, for example, should be held separately with girls because they might feel ashamed to ask questions or share their thoughts in front of their mother or other women. It should also be kept in mind that the approach towards girls from conservative and traditional countries should be different from that of other girls because they may not be so open or willing to talk about such issues.

The facilitator should have a good understanding of the cultural, religious and traditional sensitivities of the women and girls and organise and implement the sessions in secure, safe and comfortable conditions in order for the beneficiaries to become actively involved and express their needs, questions and feedback. The facilitator should avoid making the women or girls feel ashamed because of the unusual SRH practices that they use or the level of their understanding and knowledge. Whenever required, the facilitator should talk to women and girls individually and allow them to share their experiences in confidence. The terminology used in the sessions should be explained in simple and understandable words.



2.3.2. Empowering women and girls through GBV activities

“Gender-based violence refers to any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.”¹⁹ GBV can appear as sexual, physical, verbal, psychological (emotional) or socioeconomic and it can take many forms ranging from verbal violence and hate speech on the Internet, to rape or murder. The perpetrator can be anyone: a partner, a member of a family, a friend, an unknown person, etc.

There is well established evidence that women and girls on the move are extremely vulnerable to GBV. According to the results of the ‘Women on the move questionnaire’ that is applied in WGCs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, every sixth woman answered that she had already experienced violence and almost every second women believed that women do not report violence because they are afraid and have no support.

As one of the United Nations leading agencies working to further gender equality and women's empowerment, UNFPA has developed strong protection programmes that offer psychosocial assistance, medical treatment and rape kits to survivors, etc.²⁰ Besides this protective role, which is also ensured in WGCs

¹⁹ The Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Available at www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/what-is-gender-based-violence.

²⁰ See more in UNFPA, *Gender-based violence*, 2020. Available at <https://arabstates.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence-8>.

in Bosnia and Herzegovina, activities related to GBV also have an important empowerment dimension. Namely, these activities contribute to the education of women and girls not only to avoid potential GBV but also to encourage them to report it and find a way to be protected and supported as survivors.

Education has been shown to have a largely positive impact in terms of reducing gender-based violence, but it also has the power to save and improve the lives of women and girls as survivors and to lead to healthier families and stronger communities.²¹

The goal of GBV education is to increase resources and opportunities for women and girls and to improve their access to education and healthcare services and to raise awareness about GBV in general. Such education allows women and girls to obtain the information they need about everything related to GBV: the types of violence, where to ask for help, why they should report it, how to act in case they or someone they know experiences it and who can provide continuous help and support to GBV survivors.

The empowerment officer and psychologist in a WGCs can create activities together aimed at maximising the effect of empowering women and girls through activities related to GBV.

Potential activities

- GBV activities**
- > GBV education about different topics: ‘The scars we can’t see’ (See example 2.2.2. b in Annex 1), psychological violence, sexual violence, addressing GBV, legal aid and ‘What is gender-based violence?’ (see example 2.2.2. c in Annex 1).
 - > Sixteen days of activism (see example 2.2.2. a in Annex 1).
 - > Enumerated activities are listed in chapter 2.2.2.
 - > Group activities focused on compassion (mutual support).
 - > Learning about ways to protecting ourselves.

²¹ Ibid.

²² IASC, *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Humanitarian Emergencies - What Should Protection Programme Managers Know?*, 2010.

> **Desired impact:** To make the women and girls aware of the risks that can expose them to gender-based violence (GBV) and that no form of violence is justified as well as to empower them to know how to seek support and use self-help mechanisms when the service provider is not available (such as during their migration journey). They have to know that many services are available to them, including those that ensure safe accommodation, and that they have the right to be protected and supported in the event that they become a survivor.

2.3.3. Empowering girls and women through MHPSS mental health and psychosocial support activities

The term ‘mental health’ and ‘psychosocial support’ (MHPSS) describe support aimed at protecting or promoting psychosocial well-being and/or preventing or treating mental disorders.²² These types of activities are very important within the context of ‘empowering women and girls’ because the women and girls have, in most cases, left their countries of origin where they experienced serious stress and anxiety as well as the risks associated with political insecurity and socio-economic hardship. Moreover, the women and girls undertake very difficult risky and stressful journeys to reach a safer place in the hope of finding a better future both for themselves and their families.





According to our experiences, the most needed and most impactful MHPSS support activities are 1) psychotherapy sessions and 2) educational sessions.

> **Psychotherapy sessions:** Support the mental health of the women and girls and help them to deal with their problems. The WGC psychologist and psychotherapist organise three types of sessions, namely individual, group sessions and educational sessions.

- **Individual sessions:** These sessions are usually held when the beneficiary (woman or girl) at the centre needs to share a personal story or a problem in private. This is either because it is something that the beneficiary wishes to keep private and something that others should not know about or because the beneficiary considers that such an approach would help and that others would not be able to assist in dealing with that particular problem. Individual sessions are performed similarly for both women and girls at the centre, but the problems women and girls face can differ. The most common problems that women experience are anxiety. This is mostly connected with the future and crossing the border, depression, interpersonal relationships with partners, friends or other beneficiaries at the

centre. Girls usually talk about love relationships, problems with parents, sexual orientation, puberty and similar issues.

It would be useful for the psychologist to have some therapeutic experience, as this would be useful when working with girls. One example is EMDR specifically focused on dealing with trauma or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for children and adolescents, which has different approaches and techniques but the meaning is the same. The techniques used are adequate for the participants' age and include drawing, pictures and materials that are easy to understand. This can provide them with useful techniques when working with girls.

The impact of individual sessions can be determined through the feedback that beneficiaries share with the psychologist after each session or after a few sessions. Each woman and girl that visits the UNFPA centre or that a UNFPA team visits during activities outside the WGC knows that she can talk to a psychologist every time she feels she needs psychological support. Usually, there is agreement on the date and time of the next session. Some women and girls are referred to UNFPA (usually by a partner agency) and in this case the UNFPA team asks them to come and talk, which usually results in most of them agreeing to come and have an individual session. It is possible that some women and girls do not accept that they need psychological support or simply refuse to talk and in this case we do not insist.

- **Group sessions:** Some issues and subjects can be discussed in groups, such as communication skills, problem solving and techniques from different therapeutic treatments. Usually, these types of activities are held in groups of 3 to 10 beneficiaries. Women and girls discuss a specific topic with the psychologist whereby they learn and share personal stories and examples and draw conclusions. Group sessions can be conducted with both women and girls, together or separately, but based on our previous experience in WGCs it is better to have separate groups for women and girls. Both groups have different ways of understanding and expressing themselves. Yet slight modification may be necessary sometimes such as, for example, to have a group session with girls.

Group sessions have a very positive impact on the mental health of the beneficiaries. It is a 'safe space' where they can talk about their problems and discuss subjects that they usually do not talk about with their friends

and family in their everyday life. They can freely open up and ask questions about anything that may be of interest to them and about a particular subject. In this way, we create a supportive social environment where the beneficiaries have the chance to socialise and connect.

In this category, it is important to mention the **focus groups** that are also held from time to time (usually once per month) at the centre. A focus group is a small group of people (from 5 to 12) who have something in common that is of interest to the researcher (Dixon, 2016). The facilitator encourages the participants to talk openly about particular topics that are brought up by the facilitator. They are encouraged to talk as if they were in a normal situation. The topic of conversation could easily go back to its original focus if it goes too far off track. The facilitator can also identify areas of agreement and disagreement as they arise from the group, which facilitates data gathering (Dixon, 2016).

These types of activities are held at WGCs, for both women and girls. The subjects discussed usually relate to the needs of the residents of the centre, certain social issues stemming from their countries of origin, applying for asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cultural differences and other subjects that are relevant to them. These groups are useful for both the facilitator (in this case a psychologist) and the group participants. The facilitator can collect data of interest to himself/herself, while the participants can gain useful information from each other, draw certain conclusions about their cultural differences, learn about other countries and the ways of life there and such like.

- **Educational sessions:** The difference between these types of sessions and group sessions is that they are organised to educate the women and girls about a certain subject from psychology or another area of social sciences with which they are familiar. Usually, the psychologist prepares a short presentation that provides the beneficiaries with certain information on a certain subject, such as emotions, body language, fear and anxiety, empathy and values. The women and girls can ask questions both during and after the presentation, whilst learning about different subjects. One of the benefits of these sessions is that in a short period (when there is no time to organise some other activity) the women and girls can learn something new and gain knowledge that they can use in their future. The sessions are performed similarly for both women and girls, only the subjects are different. Girls topics, for example, are more focused on educating

them about puberty and emotions during that time and similar. All females have the chance to learn something new and ask about anything that is of interest to them regarding a particular subject.

Every PSS activity is linked to empowerment. Therefore, it is very important to create sessions that will include, for example, a creative empowerment activity and PSS. Through the WGCs, for example, the UNFPA team combine painting and drawing with breathing exercises and meditation in such a way that allows the women and girls to draw certain patterns. They may draw a rainbow, colour it

Box 10.
Reflections of a WGC staff member

The difference in the sessions we run with women and with girls regarding PSS lies in the methods that we use. With girls we use more drawings and we explain processes in a different way, using our personal experience and very often we refer to the time when we were their age. With the women the sessions are more verbal so that they can more easily express and better define their feelings. When we do joint activity (empowerment and PSS) we use more pictures with girls and we write more on the board to help them better understand certain terms. With the women, very often we ask them to share their personal experiences and situations from their life because they have more examples that can be linked to the subject that we are discussing.

and then do some breathing exercises with the help of the picture that the drew. In some cases, during classical empowerment sessions the psychologist just watches the women and girls in order to observe the way they express their emotions during a certain activity such as, for example, sports or board games. Actually, every activity can be watched ‘from the other side’ and this allows us to follow movement, facial expression, etc.

One example would be a woman leaving the room before the end of a creative empowerment session because she did not want to finish her drawing. If the session involved colouring a ‘mandala’ drawing, which requires concentration and calmness, we could conclude that she is impatient and unfocused. If she had the tendency to repeat such behaviour then we could conclude that she finds those activities boring or that she has other problems on her mind and instead of being calmer she becomes upset. Later, during the individual session the psychologist may realise that this woman has a problem that made focusing on the session, the material and the drawing very difficult.

The psychologist encourages the women and girls to attend all of the activities and explains all of the benefits of the empowerment sessions to them. At the same time, the psychologist suggests to the empowerment officer that the beneficiaries that came to PSS sessions should be encouraged and included in his/her activities. Very often it only takes one participation in a certain session (PSS or a classical empowerment session) to motivate the participants to come again, which is very important for them. They would be more willing to attend if, for example, a woman who liked to paint but only attended PSS sessions was motivated to come to an empowerment session. In this case the psychologist could inform her that she can paint in empowerment sessions and in this way use her love of painting to overcome her shyness and thereby encourage her to expand her horizon.

> **Teaching materials and stationery:** psychology tests, workbooks, PowerPoint presentations, different drawings, white and coloured paper for group activities, pens, pencils, scissors, glue, video material, etc.

> **Impact:** The overall impact that these activities have on the women and girls is that they help them to maintain good physical and mental health, provide coping and resilience mechanisms during difficult times, help them to connect socially and increases their sense of safety and hope. All of this further empowers the women and girls.



Potential activities

Psychosocial support activities

- > Group sessions focused on learning about a certain topic such as communication, decision making, etc (Anger management - See example 2.2.2. b in Annex 1). Encouraging and strengthening community and family support.
- > Group activities focused on emotions (learning about emotions, examples for each group).
- > PSS + empowerment activities (see example 2.2.2. c in Annex 1).
- > Interventions in crises (e.g., panic attacks). Learning about different techniques such as mindfulness exercises, breathing techniques, etc.
- > Addressing basic needs in a participatory safe and socially appropriate manner.

3. Lessons learned and tips for users

3.1. General facilitation tips

> **Adapt to fast changes with minimal consequences:** In a humanitarian response everything is very unpredictable and can change in a short time. Be prepared to revise your plans and schedules not only during the week but also during the day. Be ready to make compromises. Although at a particular moment you may know that something is the best to apply at that exact moment you may be in a situation where that application method is impossible. Guided by fundamental principles, it is necessary to make a compromise in the best interests of the women and girls.

> **Adapt to the characteristics of a group of participants:** Group activities should always be adapted to the age, level of education, marital status, ethnic/cultural backgrounds, etc. We cannot, for example, facilitate session for girls and women in the same way, because we need to use different language and different methods and techniques.

> **Avoid assumptions:** Never assume that the women and girls know or do not know something, regardless of the fact that it is common sense form your perspective. It sometimes requires more clarification and input than expected.

> **Avoid generalisations:** Never conclude that something is so just because the majority of the population has similar characteristics.

> **Be ‘catchy’:** Getting the attention and trust of a vulnerable frightened or injured population is not an easy job. Tell them about a legend and some activity (e.g., the Native American ‘Dreamcatcher’), do something unusual that will help get their attention.

> **Be creative:** There are no guidelines that can answer any and all questions related to the empowerment of women and girls on the move and therefore it is necessary to use our professional skills in a creative way. As a team member at a

WGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina said, “We have started almost from nothing, but we were very curious what works and were searching for solutions everywhere.”

> **Be trustful:** Organise your activity as previously agreed with the women and girls, at a specific time, in a specific way, etc. Promise only what you can do. Communicate all changes in a timely manner.

> **Planning:** Creating a weekly schedule is very important. Although it sometimes can be made for a longer period, it is adapted every day in accordance with the situation and needs.

> **Outdoor versus indoor implementation:** Technically, many of the empowerment activities described above can be implemented either outdoors or indoors. However, the indoor option is usually preferable because it not only increases the understanding of the WGC as a safe space but also allows for better concentration. However, there are always exceptions and this requires certain adaptation. In one WGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, there was a group of women from Africa who very much preferred to stay outside during the spring/summer days.





> **Encourage wide participation:** Facilitators should provide a learning and supportive environment during implementation of empowerment activities. All participants should feel involved, listened to, comfortable and safe. Encourage the participation of all of the women and girls, particularly those who feel intimidated. Sometimes it is necessary to visit women and girls outside or in their rooms, especially those who for some reason attend the WGC infrequently. Explain to them where and when they can find you and in that way motivate them to come and visit a WGC. Give them a good reason to visit a WGC.

> **Make the right balance:** It would be good to encourage all participants to share their thoughts, without judging their ideas, and also to encourage them to explore the significance of an issue in relation to their own life. Sharing examples from your own experience could be relevant, but in these cases you should be careful to maintain appropriate boundaries with the participants. Always be aware of the environment in which you work so that you can avoid putting participants in harm's way.

3.2. What about 'sensitive' topics during activities

Sometimes the issues that need to be discussed during the activities are considered to be 'sensitive' topics, both by the participants and the facilitator. To avoid discomfort and situations that could negatively influence the group dynamic, **we**

should first think about our values and how we feel about certain issues that we are about to discuss with the women and girls. It is also possible that the facilitator does not know everything about a particular topic and so it would be good to always be honest with the participants if unsure about something that we are discussing during a session.

In addition, **we should never underestimate the participants knowledge** because their own experiences are also important and valuable. We should always stick to the facts. Even if we have our personal opinion, it is very important to **stay neutral and open during every discussion**.

It is also very important **not to share personal information** about the women and girls, unless you believe they may be in danger and that the information you have could potentially help.

There is always the possibility that the women and girls could become emotional during a group session. In that case, **the facilitator should respond with sensitivity** so that the participants always feel safe and are not embarrassed. The environment should be safe and supportive for all participants. During a session with a psychologist that took place, for example, after an earthquake that happened a few days earlier most of the women and girls, residents of one TRC at that moment, might become very emotional. In that case, it is very important to **validate**

every feeling that someone is experiencing at that moment. This means that we do not say 'oh, stop crying' or 'it is nothing', 'it will not happen again' (because it can) and similar. This is all wrong, because in that way we tell that person that everything she is thinking and feeling is wrong and that she is not supposed to feel that way (because someone else does not feel that way). In such a situation breathing exercises are recommended. Explain what anxiety is and how it works, find a few examples to support this theory, **respect every person's feelings** at that moment and **teach others to respect them** (we should be an example of how someone should react in this case).

3.3. Differences and similarities in the work with women and girls

It is always important to consider whether there is a need for a different approach when implementing empowerment activities with the women and girls. More or less, there are always pros and cons when it comes to implementing activities jointly for both categories.

Experiences from the women and girls centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina

"During the sessions, first thing we could notice is that women and girls are interested in different types of activities. For example, we did a session about fashion and makeup in different cultures because the girls were interested in those subjects (they often asked us about that and they told us that they would like to draw models, to talk about fashion in general). They were interested in customs in Europe (different countries), love, relationships and subjects similar to that. It is important to know that some subjects needed to be simplified, so they could understand it. What this means? When someone is 15 or 16 years old there is still not enough knowledge and experience to understand everything that we need to explain. So, we should not complicate. We should be aware that girls are curious to know about their subjects of interest, but that does not mean that we should give them too much information at once.

On the other hand, women were interested in subjects like food preparation (many women liked to spend their time in kitchens for beneficiaries in TRCs) and interpersonal relationships. Very often we talked about emotions (in group sessions), about different situations, their problems in general. Important thing is that women always liked to have their 'space' to talk about everything, to socialise. We were always trying to create a 'safe space' where they know that someone will listen to them, where they can talk about anything, where they can create

something on their own (arts, crafts).

Both women and girls liked to paint and that 'creative' part was very common thing. They would come and ask for canvas to paint something (very often they would say that that 'calms them down' and that it helps them to feel better and forget about their problems, at least for a short period of time).

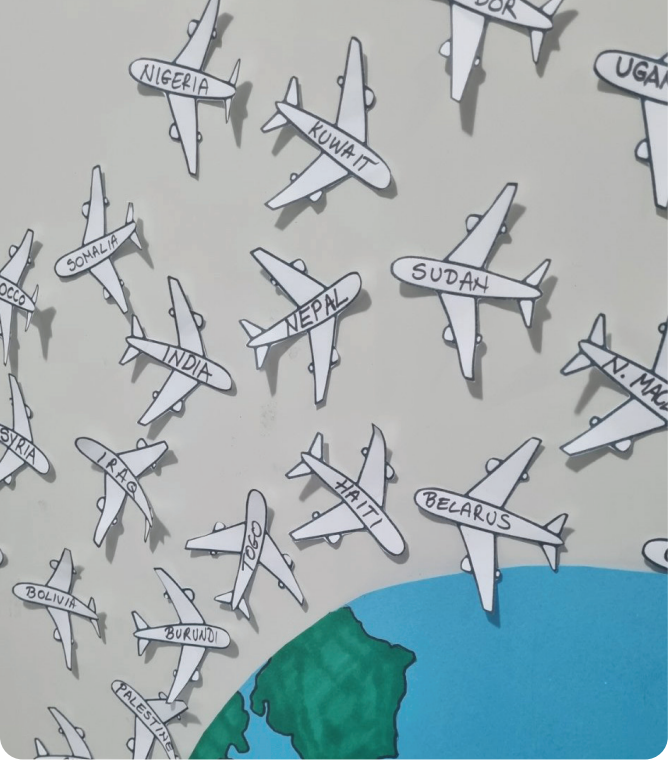
Also it is important to mention different status of women and girls, that sometimes also needed a different approach. For example, married women (especially with children) always had less time to participate in our activities (because they had to take care of children, sometimes prepare food for them, etc.), so they usually had some hours when they are free and they can come to activities (for example, women with small children and babies would ask for support from Mother and Baby Corner, so they could come to activities). On the other hand, single women, girls or women that were divorced had more time to come and very often they would spend a lot of time in our WGCs. Also women that were pregnant came regularly when the gynaecologist is in the TRC, but they would also like to come to group sessions or to talk with the psychologist. For example, one pregnant woman, during her stay in TRC, was separated from her husband (he left and he never came back for her) and she found 'hope' in coming to our WGC every day we were there. She participated in almost all activities (PSS sessions, creative activities), she liked to colour different drawings, as she said that was 'helping her feel better' and calm)."



3.4. Women and girls within the context of their different cultural backgrounds

It is very important to consider the fact that the women and girls come from different cultural backgrounds. It should be considered and used as an advantage and not seen as an obstacle. However, it usually requires major adaptation.

In one WGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, women and girls from Iran were very proactive. They attended activities regularly and they liked most of the activities. In the groups they were dominant, commenting on the sessions, and it was easy to motivate them to work. They liked to work in groups and they were usually in groups with the women and girls from their country (in a way that they were friends with others beneficiaries from their country). In most cases, they were educated, their English was very good and it was easy to communicate with them. On the other hand, the women and girls that came from Afghanistan were quite different. They were, in most cases, shy in groups and only spoke when asked about something. Sometimes they acted like they were intimidated by the presence of other women and girls (mostly women and girls from Iran). Most of the women from Iran and Afghanistan travelled with their children and daily care for their children was a large part of their daily activities. This is important, because sometimes they could not come to the activities because they had to care



for their children or because they wanted to spend more time with them.

The girls from Iran and Afghanistan were very active. They liked activities at the WGC, especially the ones organised only for them.

Women and girls that came from **Africa** found it more challenging to adapt. Language barriers were often a problem in terms of communication. They had different preferences compared to the women and girls from the Middle-east. Namely, they usually preferred outside activities. Dancing was very popular among this group of women, similar to those from Cuba.

Women from **Cuba** mostly travelled without children and were very active in all types of activities. Many of them had a higher level of educational and they were interested in learning in general. They liked to talk a lot about their culture and their experiences. They were very emotional (especially when they talked about their families that had remained in their country), so they always wanted to share their feelings with WGC personnel who were compassionate regarding their stories and experiences. They liked to help to each other and they were really a community.

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5. Annexes

5.1. Annex 1.

Examples of Empowerment Activities (Selected and written by WGC staff members)

Example 2.1.2. c: My body (an activity for girls)

Activity steps

1. We should open the discussion with questions for the girls:
 - Many factors influence how we feel about our bodies. Think about when you were nine years old, how did you feel then?
 - What happens during adolescence, which ranges from 10-19 years of age. Do most adolescents feel carefree and comfortable about their appearance or do they worry about how they look?
 - What kind of messages and images do adolescents receive from films and advertisements about how they should look and what their bodies should be like? Is this pressure more intense for girls or boys?
2. Generate at least eight to ten positive qualities people want others to appreciate and write them on the flipchart. Point out that girls as well as boys want to be appreciated for these qualities. After these questions, the girls are divided into groups. They are instructed to write about the physical changes that happen to our body during puberty and also about the emotional changes and the differences in these changes between girls and boys. When they finish, one member from each group will read what they wrote and we will write that on the flipchart.
3. Ask if the other groups have any changes or additions to add to the list. Help them distinguish between physical and emotional changes. Point out any other changes that were not mentioned. Remind the participants that while puberty is an exciting time of change it can also be challenging. Ask them what things

could help them get through these changes (such as social support from peers, talking to a mother, sister or friend; getting knowledge and information about bodily changes from health providers or books, etc).

4. Ask the participants to summarise what they have learned. Fill in any key points they miss. The key message should be that boys and girls go through many physical and emotional changes during puberty but that all of these changes are normal and represent a healthy body. Explain that boys and girls also experience new and different social pressures and people may relate differently to them.

Example 2.1.1. a: Preparation and celebration of important events and holidays

Activity steps

- > **Aim:** To provide a space and opportunity for the refugee/migrant women and girls to apply in practice their creativity, imagination and initiative (which is something that they possible did not have in their country of origin) in order to develop self-confidence and gain emotional satisfaction, which helps increase their resilience to stress and anxiety. Through such activities the women and girls will also enhance their awareness of specific events and holidays.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugees/migrants women and girls.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer and facilitator prepare in advance a calendar of important upcoming events and holidays that are celebrated nationally or globally. The calendar includes the holidays and events that are celebrated in the country of origin of the refugee/migrant women and girls. Two examples are 'Navruz' (new year) in Iran and Afghanistan and 'Ramadan Eid/ Bajram' (a month of fasting) in Muslim countries. The topics are compiled with the assistance of the refugee/migrant women and girls in order to encourage their active participation in the organisation of the sessions. The preparations should start a few days in advance because for some events the refugee/migrant women and girls will have to get ready for cooking, baking, decorating and other arrangements.

The session starts with awareness raising on the event or holiday, which involves refugee/migrant women and girls who tell others how a holiday is celebrated in their countries, what the background of the event or holiday is and such like. This is in order for the participants to learn from each other and get a better understanding of the reasons behind the celebrations, which is in a way an educational activity. The awareness part is followed by music, dancing and socialisation among the participants. The empowerment officer and the facilitator also raise awareness on certain topics, especially when the event or holiday is unknown to the refugee/migrant women and girls.

- > **Practical team exercise:** Preparations for the celebration involve the women and girls who make contributions through cooking, baking and decorating, etc., using the items provided to them with the full support and participation of the empowerment officer and the facilitator.

Example 2.1.1. b: Decoration activities according to the seasonal period, birth-days and national days

- > **Aim:** The main aim of this session is to promote and support socialisation, interaction, team building and enhance relationships between refugee/migrant women and girls and raise their knowledge about each other's country of origin and their specific national events.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer and the facilitator start the preparations for the seasonal periods in advance in close cooperation with the refugee/migrant women and girls who also inform the empowerment officer and the facilitator about the important national days that they celebrate in their home countries, which are then included in the list of upcoming events. The interested participants are identified a few days prior to the event and the decoration preparations then get started. The decoration depends on the event, if it, for example, takes place during the upcoming spring season the participants decorate the WGC and their rooms accordingly. Decoration of the WGC is done with the participation of the empowerment officer and the facilitator using basic materials available at hand. Decoration for specific national days of refugee/migrant women and girls is also done jointly but the process is led by the women and girls

whose national day is to be celebrated. During the decoration process the participants exchange experiences and stories about how they get ready for such seasons and days in their home countries and through this the participants coming from diverse countries learn new ideas and habits.

- > **Practical team exercise:** The participants jointly agree on the plan of decoration and jointly make the decorative items that are used to decorate the WGC. The participants also make various items such as greeting cards made of colourful paper or souvenirs and present them to each other.

Example 2.1.1. c: Creative drawing, painting, sewing, putting on makeup, nail polishing, etc.

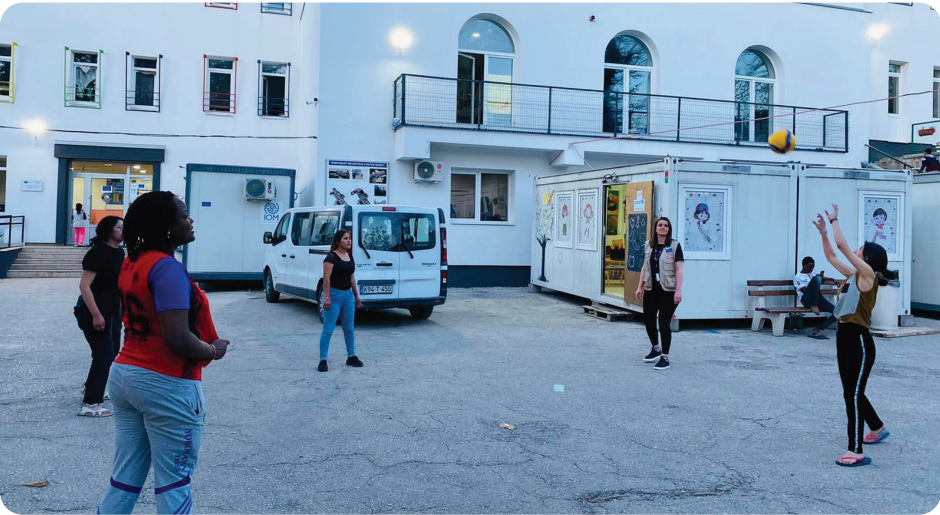
- > **Aim:** These kinds of sessions are held to facilitate and encourage creative ideas on a broad range of topics so that the refugee/migrant women and girls discover their talents and feel free to realise them in practical sessions. Participants: The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls.
- > **Methodology:** Preparations for the session are done after the joint identification of the specific activity in which the participants show interest. Sometimes more than one activity can be held with the participants divided into groups according to preference (such as drawing or applying makeup) or they can work individually. Specific items must be arranged in advance for these activities by the empowerment officer and the facilitator, namely for knitting, putting on makeup, nail polishing etc.
- > **Practical team exercise:** The participants share the roles among themselves according to their skills and wish and contribute to the group work accordingly. The participants present the outcome of their work and share comments and feedback at the end of the activity.

Example 2.1.3. a: Board games and film/cartoon nights

- > **Aim:** To support refugee/migrant women and girls in maintaining good mental health, which ultimately contributes towards relieving their stress and anxiety.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer and the facilitator identify the potential participants for the board games and film/cartoon night activities in consultation with the women and girls. Film/cartoon nights are usually held in the evening hours because after 4 p.m. the centre rules do not allow the women and girls to go out of the centre, which is why it is the best time for them to watch films and cartoons (for girls) and fill their free time in a relaxing way. The choice of film is also made in consultation with the women and girls, taking into account the language and subtitle availability in the film. Moreover, the films serve as an educational opportunity from which the women and girls can learn something new and after the film a brief feedback sharing discussion is held so that they can exchange opinions. Board games and playing cards can be divided into separate groups in order to involve more participants who express interested in this activity. The empowerment officer and the facilitator also take part in the games.
- > **Practical team exercise:** The women and girls are divided into groups according to their interests and play in a competitive manner. Judging from previous experience, the women and girls are very much interested in board games such as Don't be Angry and Monopoly.

Example 2.1.3. b: Sports activities

- > **Aim:** To support refugee/migrant women and girls in maintaining good physical and mental health, which ultimately contributes to relieving their stress and anxiety.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer and the facilitator conduct interviews and conversations with the women and girls about their health condition, barriers to fitness and exercise, the social, physical and cultural effects or obstacles to physical activity and the solutions needed to facilitate access to fitness and exercise opportunities for the women and girls. It is important to know the health condition of the women and girls so that they can consult with a doctor if there is any sickness or condition that could represent a risk to them (in accordance with the principle 'do no harm'). The availability of sports facilities in or outside the centre should be assessed and the necessary sports dresses have to be provided to the participants. Some activities, such as yoga or meditation, can be held outside the centre in nature. External sports facilities can be also considered so that the women and girls can visit them at a certain time and separate



from men, when there are religious or cultural obstacles. The involvement of an external specialised trainer is another possibility if the fitness class or yoga has to be organised in the centre or in nature (a park, etc.). Prior to the activities, the empowerment officer and the facilitator in close coordination with the women and girls divide them into groups according to their interest in a certain activity.

- > **Practical team exercises:** Most of the sports activities are held in groups in a competitive game. Individual physical activity can also be considered. The empowerment officer participates in the activities jointly with the women and girls.

Example 2.1.3. c: Birthday celebrations and dance parties

- > **Aim:** The main aim of this activity is to support the refugee/migrant women and girls and their children in the celebration of important events in their life, which makes them feel better whilst they are far away from their families and relatives. Such activities help the women and girls to relieve their stress, anxiety and loneliness.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and their children and girls.
- > **Methodology:** Through their daily communication with the women and girls the empowerment officer and the facilitator find out about upcoming birthdays of the women and their children and girls. In close coordination with other women and girls at the centre an initiative to organise a surprise birthday party is discussed and agreed. Usually, the initiative comes from the women and girls themselves in order to make their fellows in the centre happy and they propose various ways of organising such an event. The emotional impact that this event has is very strong because it makes them feel like part of a family in the centre without feeling left alone on such a day even though they are far from their actual family and relatives. Contributions towards organising the event come from all sides and this makes it both highly participatory and fun. The event is marked with music and songs in the languages of the women and girls (Afghan, Iranian, Arabic, Spanish, etc.) as well as in English. The participants dance their traditional dances and learn new dancing techniques from each other.
- > **Practical team exercise:** The women and girls share responsibility for cooking, baking and preparing a gift for the person whose birthday is being celebrated.



Example 2.1.4. a: Peer-to-peer mentoring and support

- > **Aim:** The main aim of this activity is to provide support to the refugee/migrant women and girls who are facing stress and anxiety for various reasons, including being far away from their home country. The support is provided by their peers, women and girls in the centre who come from the same country, who speak the same language and share the same customs and traditions.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer and the facilitator identify women and girls with specific vulnerabilities who require the support of a person who comes from the same country of origin, speaks the same language and understands the customs and culture of that country. After identification and a preliminary assessment, the empowerment officer or the facilitator either refer such persons to specialised experts or organisations at the centre (when the person needs specialised MHPSS support) or identifies and engages a woman (mentor) at the centre who comes from the same country to provide support to the women or girl in need. Their support is mostly in the form of individual listening, moral

support, advice and seeking support from others if needed. The empowerment officer or the facilitator maintain close contact with the mentor and suggest additional individual or group recreational and relaxation activities (games, sport, parties) to contribute to the support of the women or girl in such need.

> **Practical team exercise:** Individual and group workshops (if required they should involve MHPSS professionals) and group recreational activities in which women and girls participate and through which they have an opportunity to support each other and distract each other from the daily problems they face and which are otherwise constantly on their mind.



Example 2.1.4. b: Special skills session

> **Aim:** To transfer the skills and knowledge of refugee/migrant women and girls to their peers at the centre.

> **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls.

> **Methodology:** The empowerment officer or the facilitator identifies refugee/migrant women and girls who possess specific skills or knowledge (knitting, hair styling, makeup, dancing skills, etc.) that might be of interest to their peers at the centre. The facilitator in consultation with these women and girls organises a session during which they agree the preliminary number of participants to take part in the learning sessions. The empowerment officer or the facilitator ensures the availability of the necessary items/materials in line with the subject of the sessions.

> **Practical team exercise:** The women and girls learn in group sessions and share their learning experience and practice together.

Example 2.1.4. c: Community organisations peer-to-peer support

> **Aim:** The aim of this activity is to involve external governmental and non-governmental organisations that are available in the community and deal with women's and girls' issues in providing support to the refugee/migrant women and girls.

> **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women and girls and representatives from community organisations.

> **Methodology:** The empowerment officer or the facilitator identifies local women's and girls' organisations from diverse networks and contacts those organisations that might have specific activities relevant to the refugee/migrant women and girls. The details of the potential activities, the existing needs of the women and girls at the centre, the capacities of the local women's and girls' organisations and other details are discussed in a separate meeting where agreement on formal or informal cooperation can be secured.

> **Practical team exercise:** The local women's and girls' organisations might offer various types of practical activities that could serve the best interests of the refugee/migrant women and girls as well as contribute to the objective of the local organisations.

Example 2.2.1. a: My Body My Choice

> **Aim:** The empowerment session 'My Body my Choice' aims to promote the human rights of women and girls, including the rights to dignity, equality, respect for their private life and the highest standards of health. The activity is held within global promotional events on gender equality and human rights, such as International Women's Day.

> **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women.

> **Methodology:** The empowerment officer prepares an awareness raising session during which the participants are provided with background information on International Women's Day and how it is celebrated in various countries. Gender equality and human right are highlighted during the session. The informative part



is followed by an interactive discussion on examples of how International Women's Day is celebrated in the countries of origin of the participants of the session and which gender stereotypes or issues women face in those countries. Through interactive discussion the women learn from examples from different countries.

> **Practical team exercise:** The awareness raising session is followed by a team activity during which the participants draw a colourful poster with the message 'My Body My Choice'. The poster is then placed on the wall of the WGC as a promotional message.



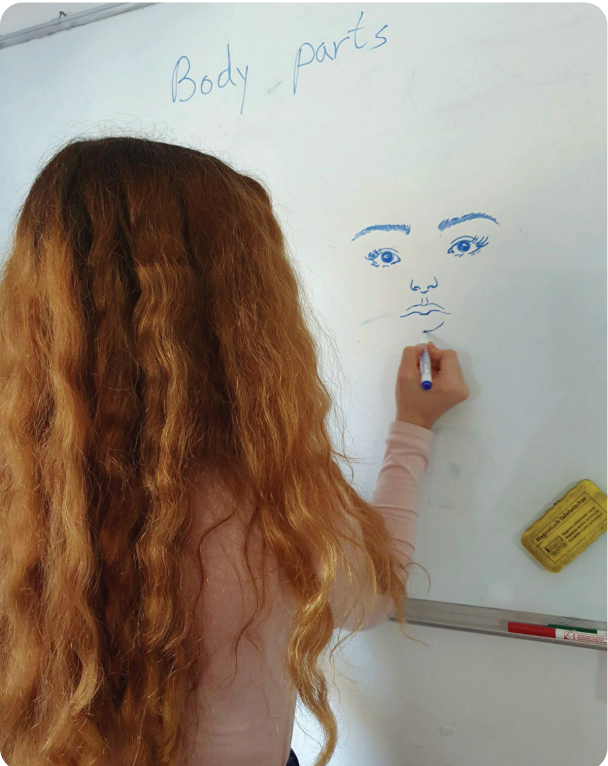
Example 2.2.1. b: Awareness raising on Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October

- > **Aim:** The main aim of the empowerment session on breast cancer awareness is to educate the women and girls about this issue and how to ensure early identification of symptoms that would require a medical check-up.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are refugee/migrant women.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer organises an awareness raising session for the refugee/migrant women. This involves a gynaecologist who conducts an informative session on breast cancer for the participants in order to enhance their knowledge on the topic and how to identify early stage symptoms that require additional mammographic check-ups. The gynaecologist also shows the participants how to identify the signs of the potential breast cancer in a simple way such as when taking a shower and encourages the women to inform her/him (the gynaecologist) if they find any signs so that further necessary check-ups can be done.
- > **Practical team exercise:** The session is followed by making pink ribbons, which is the international symbol of breast cancer awareness. The participants then distribute them to others in the centre and wear the ribbons themselves to promote Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



Example 2.2.1. c: 'My Changing Body' awareness on puberty and changes in the body of adolescent girls

- > **Aim:** To help young refugee/migrant girls become knowledgeable about how their bodies function and to empower them to make appropriate decisions about sexual behaviour in the future.
- > **Participants:** The participants of the session are young refugee/migrant adolescent girls.
- > **Methodology:** The empowerment officer and the facilitator organise an awareness raising session for the girls that involves a gynaecologist. The level of awareness of the empowerment officer, the facilitator and the gynaecologist



concerning the sensitivity of the topic to the refugee/migrant girls should be ensured so that they understand how sensitive the participants may be when it comes to this subject. Moreover, a preparatory private talk with the girls about the topic of the session and their willingness to take part should be also be conducted so that they feel comfortable when listening to and speaking during the session. It is also necessary to inform the parents of the girls about the topic of the session, keeping in mind their possible hesitation caused by cultural and religious taboos. It must be done with their consent, which means that the parents need to be convinced about the benefits and importance of this session for their girls. The session should be conducted in a group but with the possibility for the girls to ask their questions in private.

- > **Practical team exercise:** A group or private discussions/exercises can be organised with the girls using visual medical tools on anatomy as well as guidelines on how to follow a menstrual period calendar.

Example 2.2.2. a: Ending violence against women – 16 days of activism

The 25 November is the 'International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women'. It is marked by 16 days of activism on why is it important to participate and play our role in activities regarding this subject. During this time, we should try to explain the types of violence and share some statistics and facts as well as history regarding violence against women. We can also talk about how we can make a difference and how we should act in the event that we or someone we know or we do not know becomes a victim of violence.

These activities could include:

- a presentation for all beneficiaries at the centre,
- posters that we can make during this time,
- a set of sessions that should include subjects related to violence against women,
- films about violence against women that we can discuss together later.

Judging from our experience, this set of activities is a very good choice. The women and girls are very active during this period. We talk about this and they make various posters and paintings that we use during our final presentation.

Example 2.2.2. b: The scars we can't see

This activity is dedicated to psychological/emotional violence, which unlike physical violence is not visible and is often considered less important. This is the reason it should be talked about constantly.

First, we can explain why we are talking about this form of violence in particular and what other forms of violence exist. We can also ask the women and girls to suggest some examples of violence. We should also mention domestic violence and some statistics linked to that subject. We should then talk about the signs of emotional violence and ask the women and girls for some examples.

Based on our experience, the women and girls are always willing to share examples of the situations that they have been through in life in connection with this subject. We always talk about the importance of mental health in general and the potential risks and reasons why these women are considered more vulnerable in the terms of violence. We also always mention cultural differences and personality traits, which are considered important aspects of the subject in question. The women and girls always seem very interested in this subjects and we always bring them into any discussion involving questions that we consider important in the context of violence against women.

We conclude by repeating everything that we learned during this activity.



Example 2.2.2. c: What is gender-based violence? (An activity for girls)

In this activity we talk about the concepts of gender, GBV, sexuality and rights. We can presume that the girls know less than the women when it comes to these subjects and therefore it is very important to have these sessions as an introduction to the subjects we will address later.

In the introductory part we do one brainstorming session to check the girls' knowledge and what they associate with this subject, whether are they familiar with GBV, do they know what it means, how they define it, etc. We need 10 minutes for this part.

In the second part, the main one, we ask the participants about all of the different types of GBV that they know. We write a list on the flipchart. Types of GBV can include physical violence, rape, forced/early marriage, domestic violence, sex trafficking, child abuse, harmful traditional practices, sexual exploitation and abuse and emotional violence.

We then divide the group of girls into smaller groups. Each group gets one story about one form of violence, which they need to discuss in their groups in order to recognise all signs and conclude what form of violence it constitutes.

We give the groups 20 minutes to discuss and share ideas about the stories they



received. After that, each group then presents the story they were given and the corresponding conclusions they drew.

We then repeat what we have learned and conclude the session.

Example 2.1.5. a: Cultural diversity

From the perspective of Empowerment officers working in WGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Based on our experience, it very often happens that when we talk about nothing in particular the women and girls start to talk about their countries, cultures and diversity (if they are all from different countries). They talk about these subjects and we discuss it and it usually leads to some conclusions. Therefore, it would be good to talk about this aspect, because women and girls like to share their stories, discuss with each other and to meet different cultures. The story usually starts spontaneously and so there is no need for any special preparations.

Example 2.1.5. b: Things I can control

From the perspective of the psychologists working in WGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Usually, when we talk spontaneously about what is happening at the centre we speak about the things we can and cannot control in our life. In those cases, the women and girls start to talk about their personal experiences and their stories from the past, how they felt in a certain situation, what they did, what was under their control and what was not, etc. Usually, they start to discuss their actual problems at the centre. This is because these subjects always motivate them to remember where they had some influence, where they did not and what they can do in each situation they face at the moment.

These subjects always serve to remind them about the things that are under their control and the things we should not worry about because we do not have any influence over them. This usually helps them to calm down and rethink things that are happening to them and around them.



Example 2.1.5. c: My future (an activity with girls)

From the perspective of Empowerment officers working in WGC in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

We can start by talking with the girls about their future, where would they like to go, what destination seems like a good idea to them to go to, to study and what they would like to do in the future.

According to our experience, we can conclude that when the girls come to us they always like to talk about these subjects and to feel that we are interested in hearing about their lives, plans and what they like to do. It always makes them feel accepted and that someone cares about them and that always has a positive impact.

5.2. Annex 2.

Checklist for preparing to Implement an Activity

Before the sessions

- > **Identify the activity through consultation with the women and girls.**
- > **Prepare the necessary materials, facilities and equipment.**
- > **Prepare the rules of the activity, the timeframe and the number of participants required.**
- > **Prepare an evaluation method to get feedback after the session.**
- > **Be ready to manage unexpected situations.**

During the sessions

- > **Clearly and in understandable language explain the process and rules.**
- > **Explain the roles and responsibilities of the participants.**
- > **Ascertain the expectations of the participants in order to formulate the activity.**
- > **Be ready to repeat the tasks, roles and responsibilities and facilitate the process.**
- > **Lead and demonstrate by example if required.**
- > **Ensure a friendly open and relaxed environment for the participants and the facilitator.**

At the end of the session

- > Check if their expectations have been met.
- > Get feedback on the process and collect suggestions for improvements.
- > Give the participants an opportunity to provide feedback individually, if required.
- > Debrief after the session with the facilitator and organisers and agree upon action points for follow-up, if required.



5.3. Annex 3.

Feedback and evaluation forms

These documents are translated into the necessary languages

Example 1.

QUESTIONNAIRE
(Please circle your answer)

Activity name:
Date:

Did you like the activity?



Did you learn something new?



Did you understand the provided information?



Do you think this activity needs improvement?



Will you participate in similar activities?



Example 2.

Activity:
Date:

Please cut out a jar to rate this activity.
Place the cut piece of paper in the box in front of you.
Answers are anonymous.



I'm not satisfied.



I am neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.



I am satisfied.





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