



# BUILDING RESILIENCE AMIDST CRISIS:

Women and Girls Safe Spaces in Egypt



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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>GBVAWG</b>	Gender-based Violence Against Women and Girls
<b>MHM</b>	Menstrual Hygiene Management
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
<b>MOYS</b>	Ministry of Youth and Sports
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NFI</b>	Non-Food Items
<b>RH</b>	Reproductive Health
<b>SEA</b>	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>SWG</b>	Sub-Working Group
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WGSS</b>	Women and Girls Safe Space(s)





## INTRODUCTION

**During emergencies, whether driven by conflict, climate-induced disasters, or disease outbreaks, women and girls are disproportionately affected.**

Pre-existing inequalities deepen, causing women's limited protection space to further shrink. This environment, exacerbated by heightened social tensions and competition over scarce resources leads to an escalation of violence, placing women and girls at significantly higher risk of various forms of violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and abuse and harmful practices.

Beyond women's safety, humanitarian crises disproportionately affect women's mental and physical health. Pregnancies, or menstruation do not stop during crises, yet access to family planning and other reproductive health services, including those related to menstrual health may be hindered and deprioritized. Compounding the trauma of displacement, violence, and lack of resources, women often bear the sole responsibility for their children's care, intensifying their psychological strain in times of crisis.

# UNFPA'S HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME



UNFPA's Humanitarian Programme in Egypt began in 2012 to address the reproductive and maternal health needs as well as ensure services to respond to **Gender-based Violence Against Women and Girls (GBVAWG)** supporting refugee women and girls and host communities affected by the **Syrian crisis**. Since then, the programme has expanded its scope to respond to emerging humanitarian crises in the region.

Following the **2023 Sudan conflict outbreak**, Egypt's refugee and asylum-seeker population has more than tripled, exceeding **one million as of August 2025** according to [UNHCR](#)<sup>1</sup> -- most of whom are women and girls fleeing conflict. Amidst rising protection needs, displaced women and girls in Egypt face structural inequality and unique vulnerabilities.

Rising living costs, overstretched service availability, and their displacement status create a complex environment for them to access essential services like **education, healthcare, and livelihoods**. This situation pushes many into unsafe, informal work, not only undermining their ability of self-reliance but increasing their exposure to exploitation and abuse.

As a result, **many women and girls are forced to neglect their health and safety**, unable to access life-saving support like essential reproductive health care or safe housing to escape their perpetrators of violence.

<sup>1</sup>UNHCR Operational Data Egypt. 31st August, 2025. Extracted from: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/118479>

## CORE PRINCIPLES

UNFPA is committed to serving the most vulnerable communities without discrimination, thereby upholding the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. The programme serves all women and girls who are **survivors of violence, those at high risk, or those in need of protection from refugee and host communities**, regardless of their age or nationality, and in alignment with national policies.

Upholding these principles, UNFPA integrates the "Do No Harm" Approach to guarantee that interventions do not inadvertently cause harm, which is put in practice through a **survivor-centered approach**. This ensures that all aspects of humanitarian and GBVAWG programming preserve the **confidentiality, safety, non-discrimination and respect for the choices, rights and dignity of women and girls**. It creates a supportive environment to promote **survivors' empowerment** ensuring that they are the decision-makers throughout the process.




Equally, UNFPA has a **zero-tolerance policy for all forms of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)** ensuring prevention, response and assistance through staff training, awareness and reporting mechanisms in place across the programme structure.



# WHAT IS THE WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES MODEL?

A Women and Girl Safe Space (WGSS, or Safe Space) is a global model for addressing GBVAG in humanitarian settings and a key intervention in UNFPA's Humanitarian Programme.

## UNFPA is serving women and girls in

-  **10 humanitarian** contexts in the Arab Region through up to
-  **286 Women and Girls** Safe Spaces, and over
-  **1,500** established worldwide.

WGSS are physical spaces where women and girls from diverse backgrounds can feel physically and emotionally safe. They are entry points to express **protection needs**, serving as platforms for women. These spaces serve as platforms for women and girls to access critical **reproductive health information, build and strengthen skills, and receive support through multi-sectorial services that promote healing from violence, and ensure reproductive rights.**<sup>2</sup>

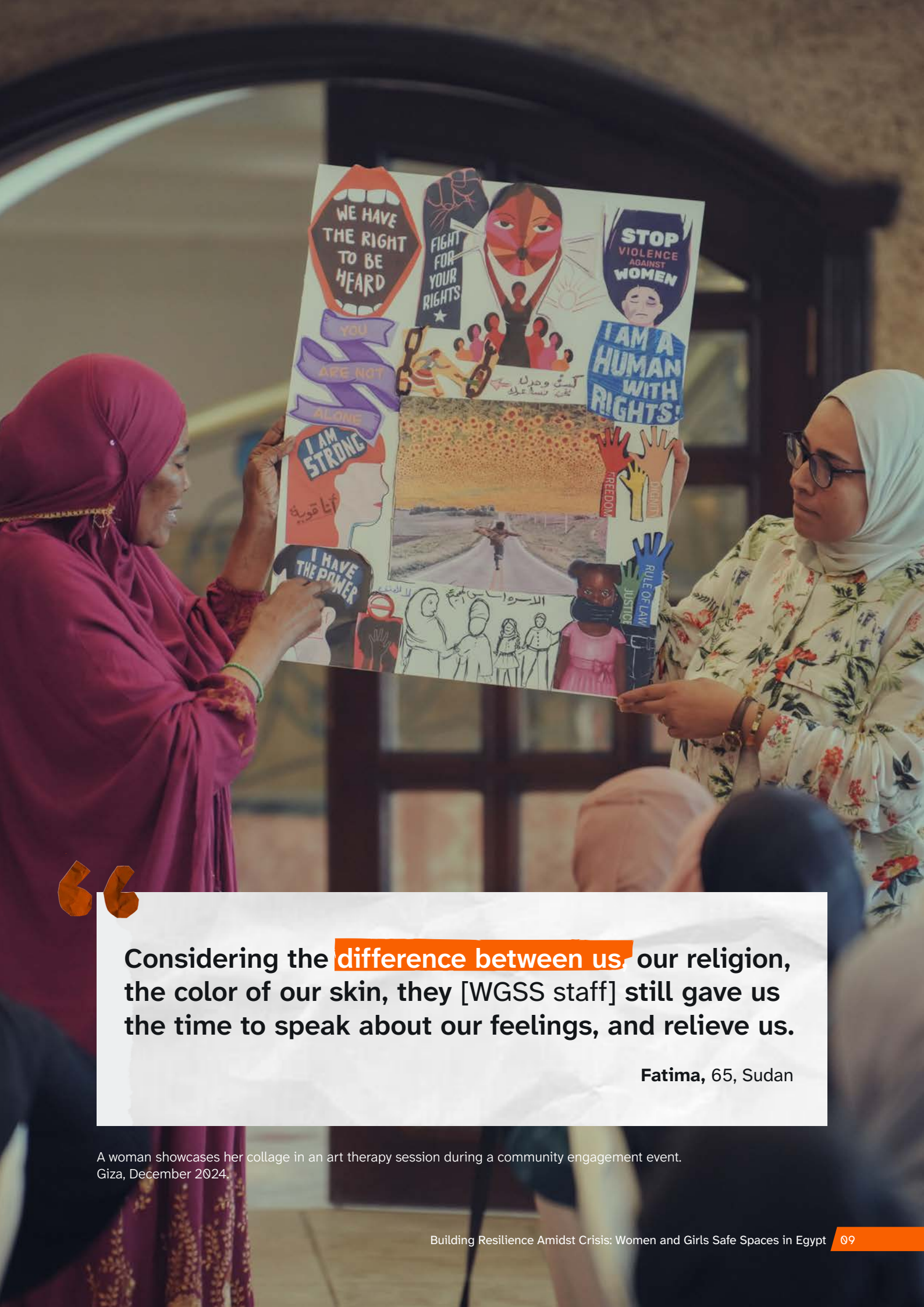
At the WGSS, GBVAG case management is the pillar of this multi-sectorial response, providing a structured approach to inform, and link survivors to key support tailored to their situation. WGSS are ideal for **integrating GBVAG response and reproductive health services** as they provide a private space for women and girls, enabling them to have open discussions on women's health.

Beyond a service provision point, WGSS activities enable survivors to **rebuild social networks after displacement and without fear of judgement.** WGSS have been proven to be a key intervention, with substantial evidence on their role in reducing the risks of violence and preventing further harm.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A toolkit for advancing women and girl's empowerment in humanitarian Settings. IMC-IRC (2019)

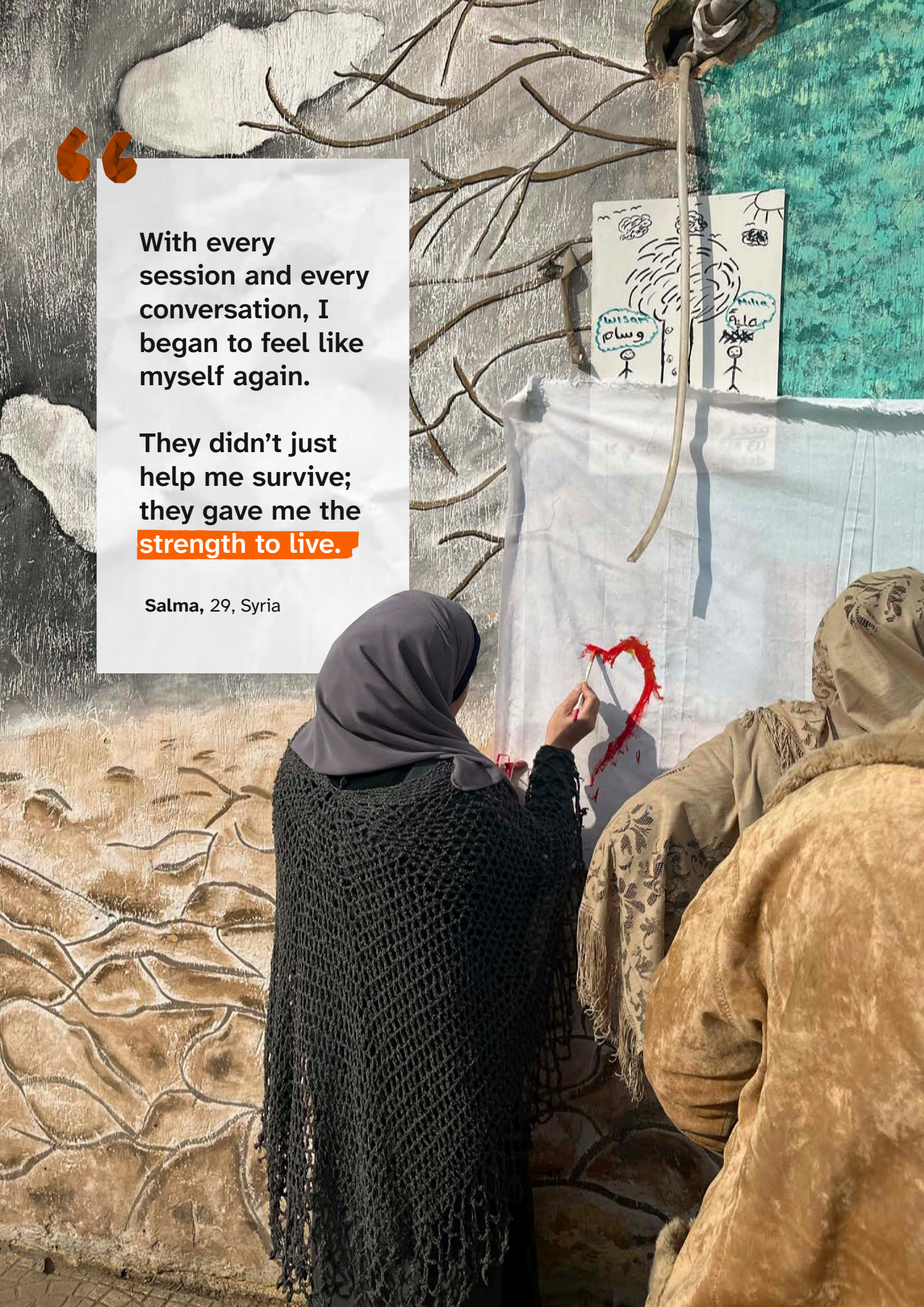
<sup>3</sup>Safe and Empowered: The life-saving function of Women and Girls Safe Spaces in humanitarian settings in the Arab Region. UNFPA. (2022)



Considering the **difference between us**, our religion, the color of our skin, they [WGSS staff] still gave us the time to speak about our feelings, and relieve us.

Fatima, 65, Sudan

A woman showcases her collage in an art therapy session during a community engagement event. Giza, December 2024.



“  
With every session and every conversation, I began to feel like myself again.

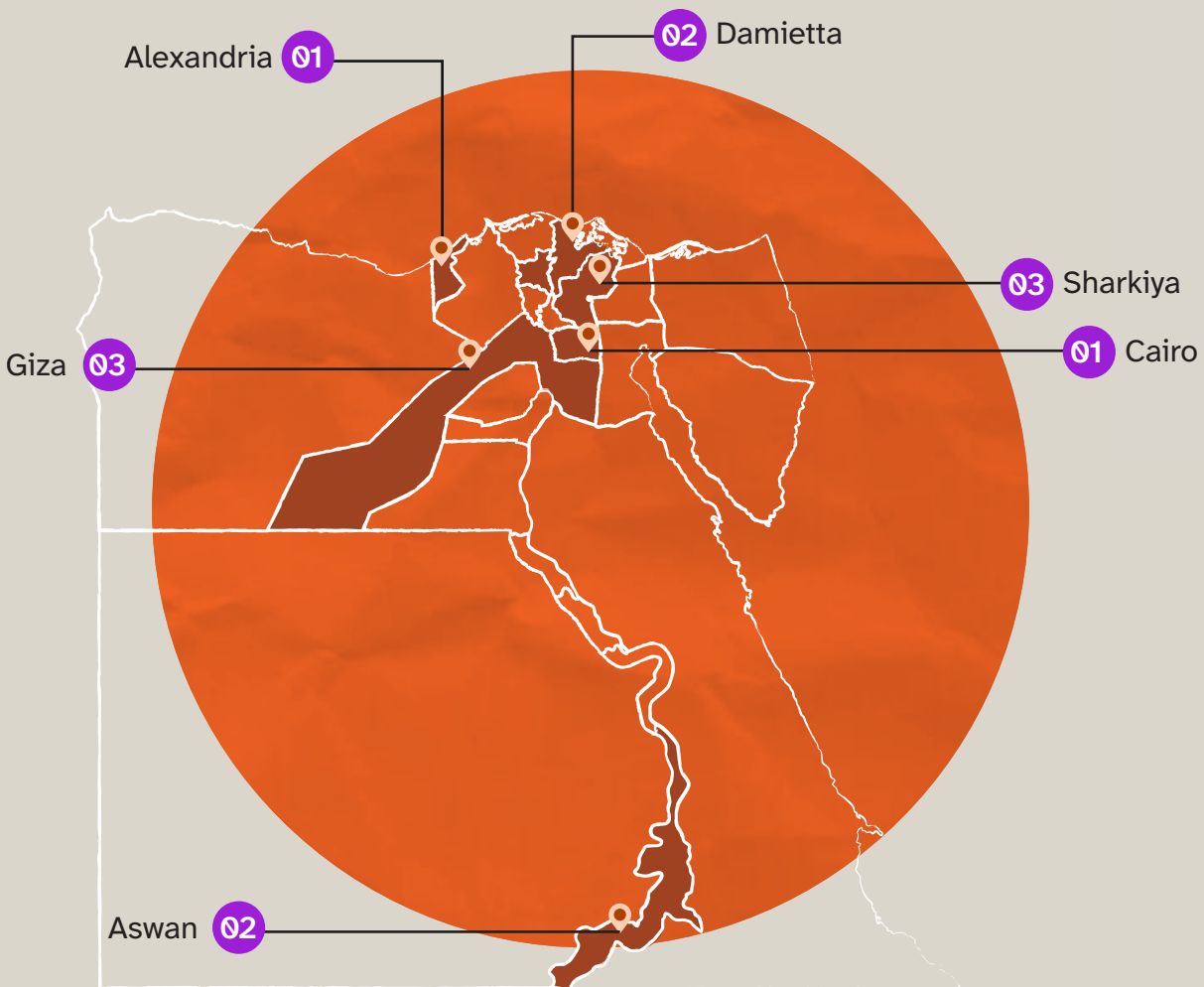
They didn't just help me survive; they gave me the **strength to live.**”

Salma, 29, Syria

# UNFPA'S WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES IN EGYPT

The first five WGSS were established in 2017 in Alexandria, Giza, Sharqiya and Qalyubia governorates.

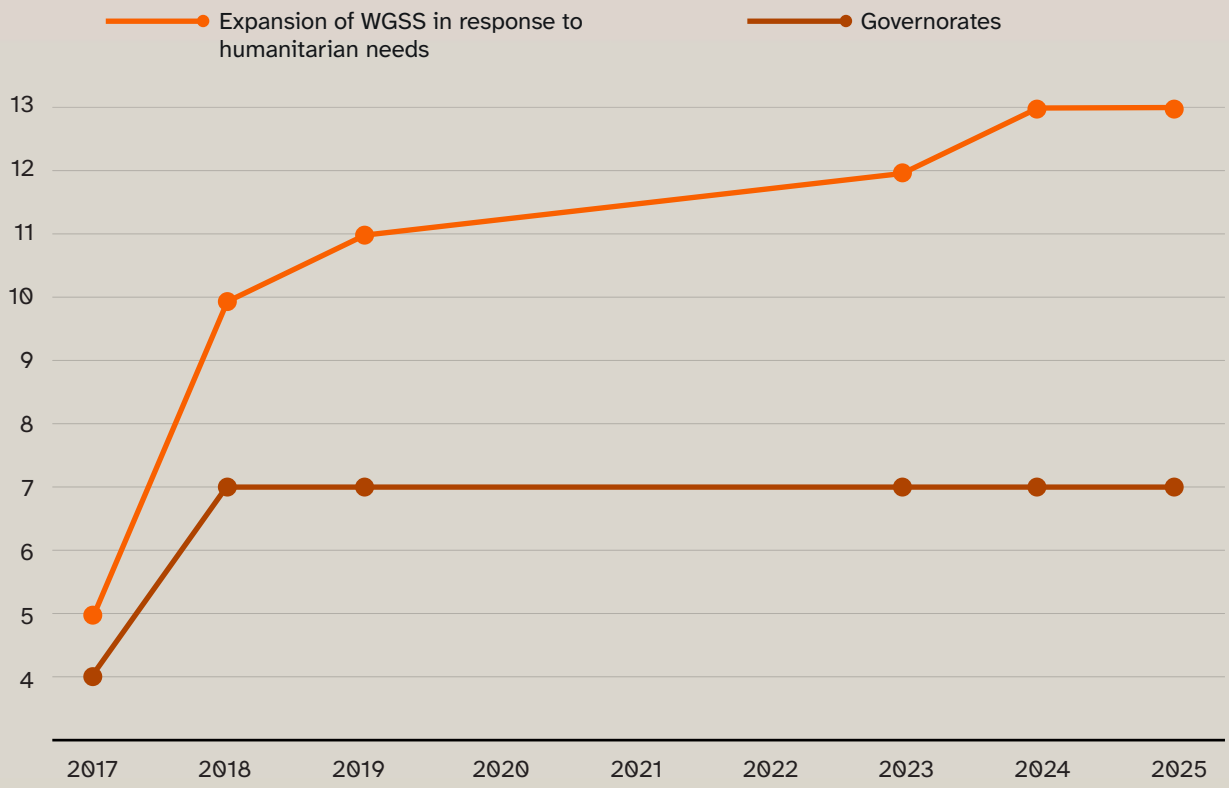
The programme has since adapted to the humanitarian landscape, continuously expanding and adjusting to meet evolving needs.



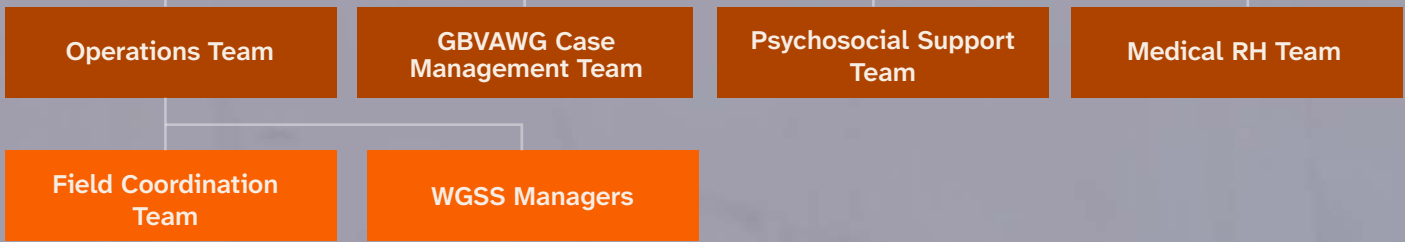
Today, UNFPA operates  
**9 WGSS across  
6 governorates**

These are located in areas where there is a higher presence of refugees and asylum seekers living alongside host communities.

These locations are strategically established to meet **high demand for services and address existing access barriers**. UNFPA used to operate 13 Women and Girls Safe Spaces but it had bring them down to 9 due to recent funding cuts.



## Women and Girls Safe Space Structure



What I love most about my role is ensuring that women and girls have **access to the knowledge and resources** they need to protect themselves.

Sandy, 26, GBVAWG caseworker at UNFPA's WGSS in Egypt



# SERVICE PROVISION AT THE WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES

UNFPA Egypt operates its WGSS through a multi-sectorial approach to service provision that ensures a **comprehensive package of GBVAWG and Reproductive Health (RH) services.**

Furthermore, WGSS host **community-based activities** centered around prevention of violence against women and girls and elimination of harmful practices. This also serves as an entry point for many women and girls, building trust and encouraging them to seek support at the WGSS.

## A. RESPONDING TO GBVAWG

Whether through a referral, a walk-in visit, or a previous appointment, all individuals are linked to the necessary support and information through the initial step of GBVAWG Case Management. Through its expansion, WGSS in Egypt have strengthened its referral networks, and enhanced its on site service provision to respond comprehensively, **linking from Case Management to essential services including:**



**GBVAWG Prevention & Community-Based Activities**

## GBVAWG Case Management

Case Management is the primary entry point for survivors of violence to receive support in humanitarian settings<sup>4</sup>. While survivors can walk-in the WGSS to receive emergency services, tailored service provision starts with an appointment with a caseworker for GBVAWG Case Management.

This is a structured process to assess each survivor's case, inform them about all the available options to support them, and refer them to services needed. GBVAWG caseworkers are trained to ensure that all problems that a survivor is facing are identified and followed up in a coordinated manner, **maintaining the highest standards of safety, confidentiality and respect for the survivor's choices.**



Staff member registers a participant in a community awareness event in a WGSS in Giza, 2024

<sup>4</sup>Inter-agency GBV Case Management Guidelines (2017). Available <https://www.gbvim.com/gbv-case-management-guidelines/>

## Emergency medical support for women subjected to violence



**UNFPA is the leading agency in Egypt for the provision of emergency medical equipment and services, as part of the global UNFPA procurement catalogue.**

UNFPA ensures procurement, distribution and training on **Post-Rape Kits administration** to NGOs, and national healthcare institutions responding to GBVAWG that includes humanitarian partners, National Forensic Authorities and University Hospitals among others.

Without appointment, survivors of violence can reach dedicated WGSS to receive **emergency support**, as well as psychological first aid after an incident. WGSS staff are trained in **clinical management of rape (as per the UNFPA-WHO global framework) and medical referral pathways**, enabling them to refer survivors to external medical, psychological or social services, partner organizations and national hospitals for adequate care.

## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

MHPSS is an essential intervention to support women and girls who have been subjected to violence, provided at the WGSS through individual counseling and group therapy.

A key strength is its use of arts-based approaches like painting therapy, collage-making, psychodrama, yoga and dance therapy among others, which effectively promote well-being and emotional recovery.

**Survivors of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are also provided with specialized MHPSS to support trauma recovery, and enhance their self esteem.**



When I arrived in Egypt, it felt like I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. The mental health counselling at the WGSS saved my life. I realised that I am not alone doing this and it is **not my fault. This is what kept me going.**

Amina, 35, Sudan





I've spent years escaping my body. Today, for the first time, I felt like it **could be a home**, not just a place of pain.

Female participant of yoga therapy, 36, Damietta



# Humanitarian Program

Women and Girls Safe Spaces for  
refugees, asylum seekers, migrants  
and the host communities



**Colour** was one of the most important things that helped me release even a small part of the **violence I lived through.**

Laila, participant of Art therapy

## Cash Assistance

Many survivors struggle to break the cycle of violence, especially when displacement poses them at higher risk of harmful coping mechanisms. Cash Assistance in GBVAWG interventions is a life-saving tool that empowers survivors, reduces financial dependence on perpetrators, and improves access to vital services like healthcare and safe housing. **It preserves survivors' dignity and autonomy by allowing them to make free choices about their health and families.**



### 2020

Complementing the **UNFPA-UNHCR partnership for Cash Assistance** operating from 2020

### 2024

UNFPA **integrated Cash Assistance into GBVAWG Case Management** in 2024 leveraging on existing processes led by WFP with local financial service providers.

Through this integrated process, **caseworkers conduct a careful case-based assessment to link survivors to cash assistance.** This crucial step allows caseworkers and survivors to jointly design a safety and action plan to take all necessary steps to escape violence.

## Safe Relocation

Many survivors of domestic violence are left without shelter or pushed to rely economically on their abusers, posing a serious threat to their lives. Limited employment and rising living costs also force many refugee women and girls to unsafe housing options, sacrificing privacy and increasing risk of violence. **WGSS can respond to these cases by providing emergency rent assistance as well as housing support** to help survivors and their families escape life-threatening situations and immediate violence.











## Legal counselling

Through established partnerships, WGSS host regular legal awareness sessions and consultations, supporting survivors in understanding their legal rights, as well as the complexities of asylum registration and residency in the host country. **Legal counselling can address FGM cases reported by survivors**, upholding the national prohibition of this practice.


## Vocational Training & Economic Empowerment activities

Recognizing the correlation between economic dependence and risk of violence, UNFPA provides vocational training as part of a comprehensive package of care to respond and prevent GBVAWG.

Under this activity, survivors and women at risk attend basic and advanced workshops that support them in finding both emotional and economic empowerment. Skill-building fosters self-esteem and enhances self-reliance, supporting survivors in escaping and preventing further violence. **This is one of the most demanded activities, as many trainees have reportedly been successful in establishing small businesses to sustain themselves.**

 Sewing	 Macrame
 Candle-making	 Pastry-making
 Jewellery	 Perfumes
 Financial and marketing skills	 Canvas painting



A woman wearing a black hijab is focused on her embroidery work. She is holding a piece of fabric with a pink and white pattern. In the background, there are other pieces of embroidered fabric, including one with a green and white pattern. The setting appears to be a workshop or a safe space for women.

**I started to care about myself and my health.**

**At the center, I learned to work on embroidery, and I started earning some money from it.**

**Amal, 56, Syria**

## B. PREVENTION OF GBVAVG



### **Awareness-raising and community engagement to combat GBVAVG, and harmful practices**

The trust that WGSS foster among communities makes them optimal for prevention activities. Communities attend regular activities to learn about GBVAVG and harmful practices, informing them about associated health risks to FGM, their legal rights when facing violence or available support services.

Through the community built around the WGSS, UNFPA also hosts larger-scale community events **engaging men and boys** in conversations to combat violence.



I want to attend more sessions like this [FGM awareness], so I can also learn about child marriage and its negative impacts (...). I am starting to see it around me and **I want to raise awareness.**

Nesma, 19, Sudan



## Adolescents' Empowerment

UNFPA hosts dedicated activities to empower and enable adolescents to access information to fulfill their rights, challenge harmful social norms and take care of their health.

This is integrated with other interventions such as **community events, awareness sessions on FGM or Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) activities.**



The workshop gave me the courage to name things as they are. Why should **I hide or be ashamed** of something so natural?

Girl participating in empowerment sessions on MHM.



## Social Empowerment & GBVAWG prevention through sports

Leveraging on the sports facilities available at the WGSS, facilitators deliver activities following UNFPA's methodology Sports against GBVAWG<sup>5</sup> tailored to use sports as a tool for empowerment and awareness. These activities are diverse and include yoga, dance, football games and self-defense training.

**Dedicated activities engage men from refugee and host communities to learn about GBVAWG promoting prevention messages, particularly during large community events.**

“

I felt like I shook off all the heaviness. Moving my body **made me feel alive again.**

Reem, age 32, Sudan



<sup>5</sup> [Using Sports for the Elimination of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings Toolkit](#). UNFPA Egypt. October, 2020

## C. INTEGRATING GBVAWG RESPONSE SERVICE PROVISION WITH REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES



### Reproductive health counseling

Through the **“Medical Counselling Rooms”** established in the WGSS, medical counselors conduct basic check-ups and provide RH counseling for women. They share information on family planning, and identify pregnant women in need of emergency obstetric care, ensuring their referral to specialized services offered in public hospitals or Primary Health Care Units.

**Medical support extends to FGM survivors and their care-givers, offering them specialized medical consultations and supporting women and girls to abandon the practice.**

## Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Education

Stigma around menstruation in many communities prevents girls from attending school or playing sports impacting their self-esteem and participation in society. **UNFPA invests in integrated approaches, combining distribution of menstrual kits, capacity building of educators and delivery of menstrual health education.**

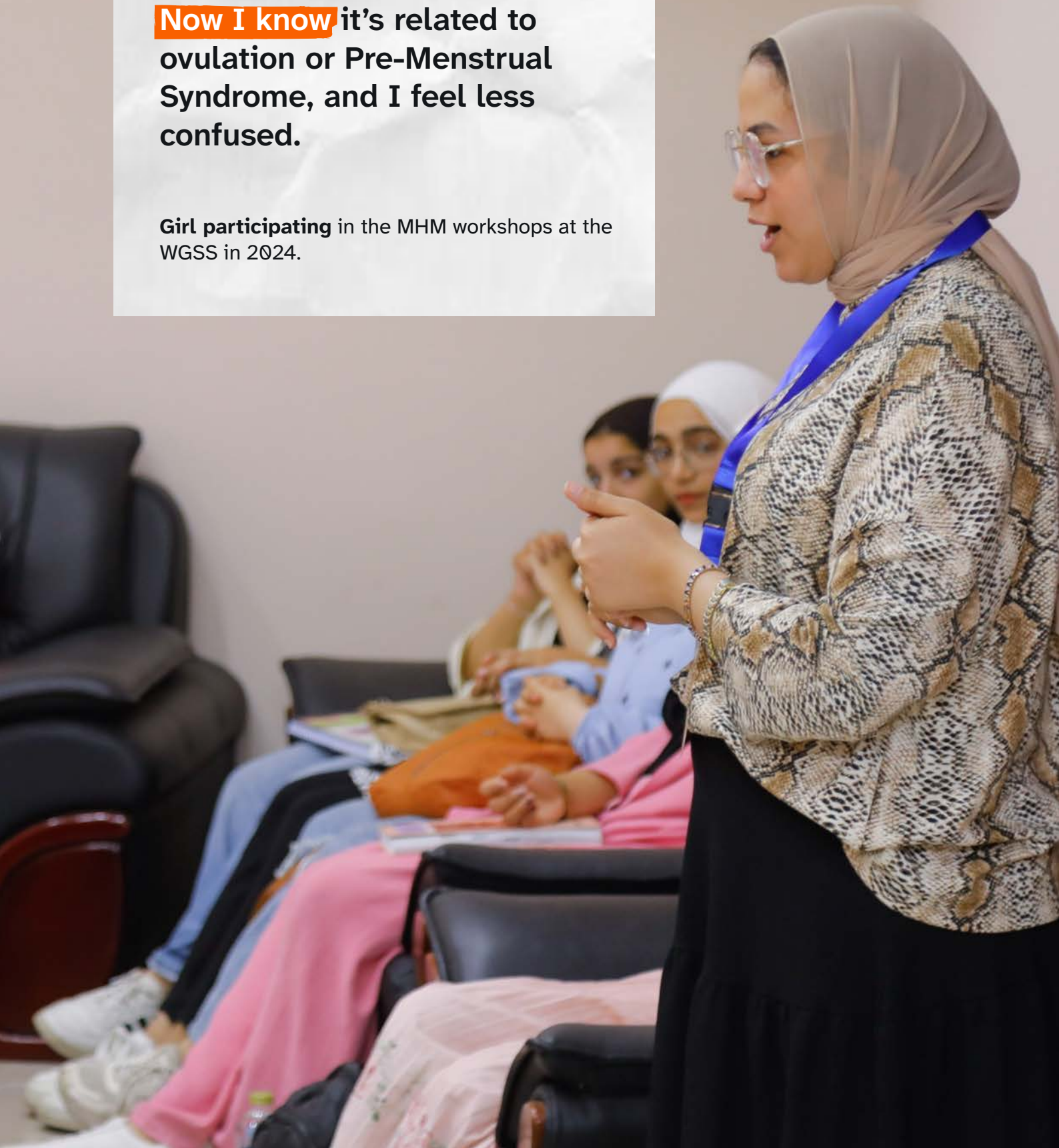
Through a **game-based methodology**, trained facilitators engage adolescent girls and boys in sessions, sharing accurate information on the menstrual cycle, and its linkages to reproductive health, focusing on addressing misconceptions. By engaging boys, this initiative fosters positive dialogues that challenge menstrual stigma, and taboos and advance gender equality.





Before the workshop, **I didn't understand** why I experienced pain during certain times. **Now I know** it's related to ovulation or Pre-Menstrual Syndrome, and I feel less confused.

**Girl participating** in the MHM workshops at the WGSS in 2024.



## D. DISTRIBUTING ESSENTIAL NON-FOOD ITEMS



### MHM Kits Distribution

Poverty and displacement force many households to deprioritize menstrual products, pushing many women and girls to unsafe hygiene management practices. UNFPA distributes **menstrual kits** integrated into educational sessions **promoting girls' access to sustainable quality products** like reusable pads, period panties, menstrual cycle-tracking tools and waterproof bags.



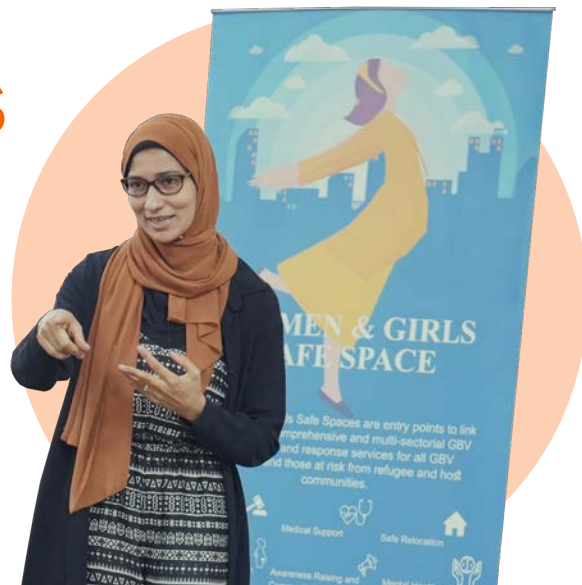
### Dignity Kits Distribution

In response to sudden crises, UNFPA distributes **Dignity Kits** through WGSS with menstrual and personal hygiene items to address the urgent needs of refugee women and girls. Since 2023, UNFPA provides these kits in response to the needs emerging from the **Sudan conflict outbreak**, primarily targeting newly arrived refugee women and girls at high risk of violence.



# UPSCALING WOMEN AND GIRLS SAFE SPACES INTERVENTIONS IN EGYPT

Beyond expansion in locations, UNFPA in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and local partners works to extend the scope to extend the scope and enhance the quality of services provided, directly contributing to strengthening existing systems and infrastructure.



## Expanding service availability

UNFPA has led the **integration of GBVAWG Case Management** services into nine Safe Spaces under the MoYS, and expanded service provision to integrate RH counselling rooms in five WGSS, MHPSS specialized services, and cash assistance.

## Strengthening quality

UNFPA has worked along partners to **expand the pool of trained staff** in GBVAWG Case Management, Clinical Management of Rape, and Trauma-sensitive Care, among other essential protection services.

## Sustainability

By hosting WGSS within local Youth Centers, the MoYS contributes to the long-term sustainability of the programme. This model not only invests in existing infrastructure and staff but expands the program's reach to a **larger segment of the youth**, allowing access to a variety of activities hosted by the centers, such as language courses and programs for children with special needs.

## Coordination

UNFPA plays a leading role in interagency coordination platforms at both national and sub-national levels. **Since 2020, UNFPA has co-chaired the the United Nations GBV Sub-Working Group (SWG) with UNHCR**, strengthening coordinated efforts on GBVAWG prevention and response services. In parallel UNFPA WGSS team actively contributes by providing field-based insights and analysis that inform joint responses with other service providers. In parallel, UNFPA contributes to the Health Working Group ensuring coordination for reproductive health services, and emergency medical response for survivors through UNFPA partners. Additionally, UNFPA co-chairs the GBVAWG SWG and Protection Working Group in the North Coast where the WGSS team contributes to **context-specific and localized protection efforts**.

# Partnerships

To effectively sustain and upscale interventions through the **WGSS**, **UNFPA partners with national entities**, creating a cost-effective and sustainable model for operating the spaces.

## Key partners are:

### Ministry of Youth and Sports

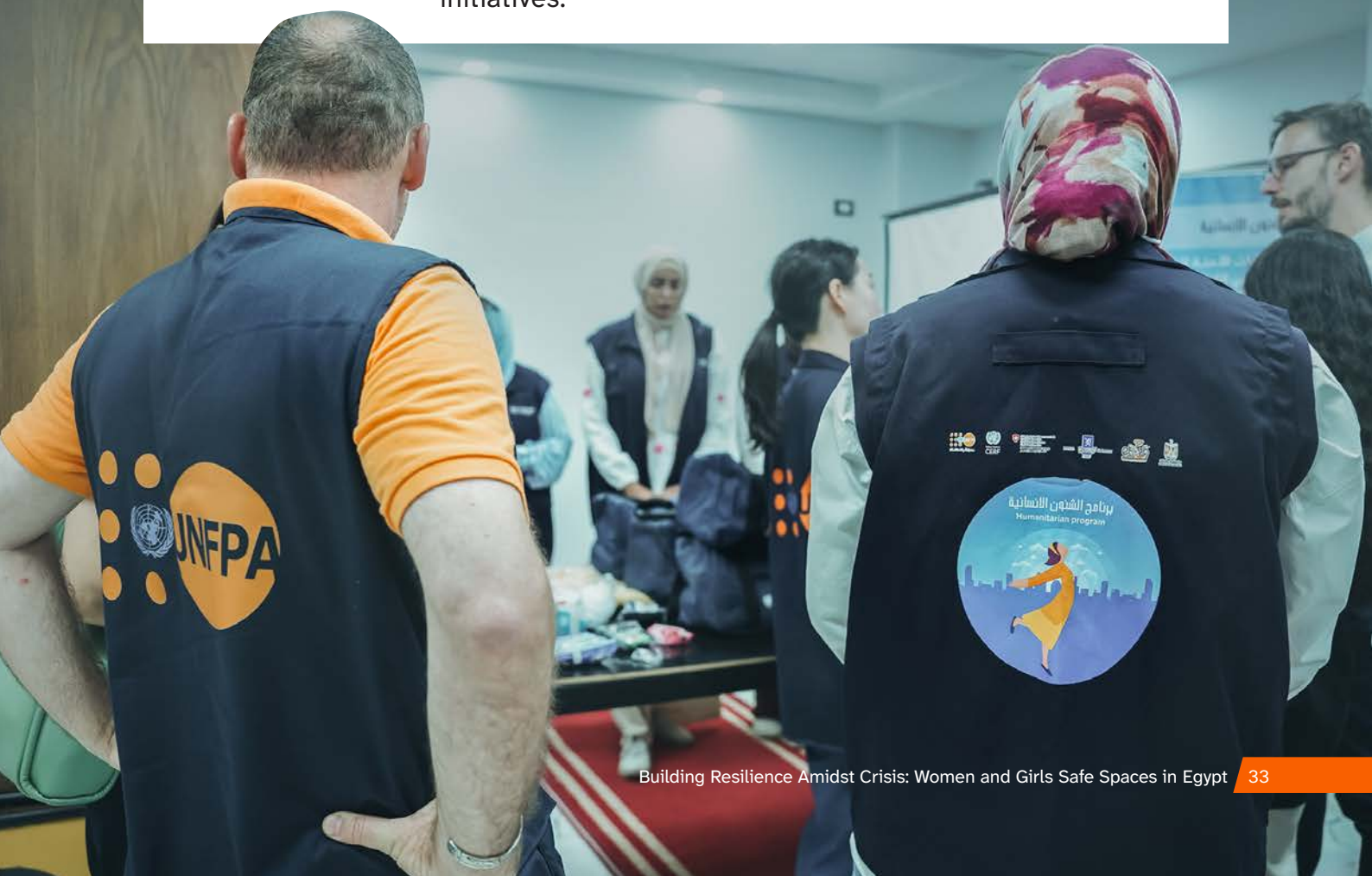


- Since 2017, UNFPA has been partnering with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to operate **11 WGSS across 7 governorates**.
- Youth centres act as a hub for social services hosting a wide range of activities and services from other NGOs and national partners, thereby **enhancing access, sustainability and outreach to communities**.

### Etijah, Youth & Development Consultancy Institute



- Etijah has been a key NGO partner of UNFPA since 2017, managing the operations of **two UNFPA-supported WGSS in Giza and Damietta** (informally referred to as Sanad or 'support' in Arabic)
- Etijah contributes with their **wealth of experience** in arts-based interventions, youth engagement and empowerment initiatives.




# ACHIEVEMENTS

With the long-standing support of international donors and partners, UNFPA has reached between 2017 and 2024 over

**185,000** women, girls, men and boys with RH and GBVAWG programming across the history of the programme, enabling them to access information and receive survivor-centred support through UNFPA's WGSS.

These include:

 Economic Empowerment

**16,693**

women and girls with vocational training workshops

 Cash Assistance

**5,067**

survivors and women at risk with life-saving cash assistance

 GBVAWG Case Management

Over

**42,830**

survivors with GBVAWG case management

 MHPSS

**53,990**

survivors with individual counselling and group-based MHPSS activities

 RH Counselling

**5,913**

women and girls with SRH consultations through the WGSS medical counselling rooms

 Menstrual Health support

 **3,015** GIRLS

and

 **1,000** BOYS

reached with menstrual health education sessions, and menstrual supplies for girls

 GBVAWG Awareness Sessions

**62,536**

community members with awareness raising sessions on GBVAWG and harmful practices

 RH Awareness sessions

**26,639**

women and girls with information and awareness sessions on RH topics

Since 2017, UNFPA's WGSS operation has been made possible through the generous contributions of international donors to whom UNFPA extends its gratitude.



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