

Summary of call on Somalia Safe Shelter

Query: “We are looking for guidelines/ ToRs or criteria of some kind on setting up a safe house – a partner wishes to do so, and we are wondering if there are global standards/guidelines developed that we can share with our partner.”

Introduction

There are numerous points to consider when setting up a safe house or shelter. These include considerations around security, staffing, resourcing, as well as on policies and procedures for managing the service.

This document captures the salient points from a phone call held with UNICEF Somalia to advise on the above query. The phone call and the below document run through some of these considerations.

Annex 1 includes a “shelter checklist”, to ensure that these steps are all covered.

Summary of key points from Rapid Programme Support phone call

Pre-steps before creating a safe house:

- **Formative research:** Before setting up a safe house formative research must be conducted. This should consider incidence and prevalence of SGBV in an area, women’s help-seeking behaviours, and relevant laws and policies.
- **Mapping:** A mapping of safe shelter programs in the area is critical to facilitating coordination and referral. This should include mapping their eligibility criteria, length of permitted stay in the shelter, security features, etc.
- **Coordination and exchange:** Referral and coordination systems are required between shelter and various GBV providers. Coordination systems enable better access to supportive services.
- **Laws and policies:** Ensure that relevant laws and policies provide support for safe shelters. Where they do not, advocacy efforts might be required in this regards.
- **Legal steps for establishing shelter:** Different countries have differing legal steps for establishing and registering shelters as legal entities. Steps may involve: seeking advice regarding the implications and responsibilities associated with legal registration; determining individual(s) able to assume responsibility for compliance with legal requirements; and fulfilling the responsibilities set out for the legal entity.

Formative questions:

These are some questions to consider and discuss, before beginning on the creation of a safe house:

- What is the **philosophy of the shelter**? Is it to empower women? Or is it based more on traditional cultural values, and used as a temporary solution until the woman can go back to her family? Does it prioritise maintaining the family unit over the rights of a woman? Is it survivor-centred?
- **What kind of support are the women given?** Is there a support model? (Who is the case manager, how do referrals work, what information do survivors receive, etc.)
- What is the system in place for **risk assessment of survivors**? Is there a system? Is a safety checklist in place?
- Who makes the decisions in the day to day running of the shelter? Who is staff accountable to?
- Is the **staff well-trained and well-paid**? Do they have solid understanding of VAWG, the cycle of violence in domestic violence cases, and the power dynamics related to VAWG? Do they

understand the psychological impact and their role in supporting survivors to recover? Do they understand the key messages they should be using?

- What are the **services available for children**?¹

Broad types of shelters:

There are a few broad types of shelter options. Shelter accommodation may be categorized as follows.

- **Emergency shelters** (also called 'refuge' or 'first stage emergency housing'), provide short or medium-term secure accommodation and emotional support for women, from a few days up to a few months.
- **Second stage/ transitional housing** facilities offer longer-term accommodation ranging from six months to one year or more. This option also provides support and referral services to assist women and their families in the transition from emergency shelter to permanent housing.
- **Third stage housing** for women who have completed a second stage programme, but still need housing and support. There are various manifestations of this, but broadly, this could result in permanent housing for some survivors or referrals to specialized housing options to address specific needs (e.g. disabilities, substance abuse issues, mental illness).

It is important to consider which of these the project is hoping to provide, and to tailor the project accordingly. Different shelters also cater to different level of risk. Some shelters are high security, requiring women to remain inside; others allow more freedom of movement.

Foundational principles for running a safe house:

- **Empowerment:** GBV is characterised by abuse of power and control. Survivors have not been in control of their lives or bodies, and can feel highly disempowered. Help-seeking should not perpetuate this cycle. From the start, a shelter's emphasis must be on giving the survivor control of her life back. This should be done by providing her with information and letting her make decisions for herself.
- Where shelter management make all the decisions without involving survivors, then survivors are disempowered. This can have an impact on their healing process. Therefore, where possible, they should be **involved in decisions about the running of the shelter**.
- **Respect:** Do not judge, do not blame, and respect survivor's choices – even where staff disagree with these.
- **Confidentiality:** Staff should keep all information related to the client confidential. Where survivors need to be referred to other services, consent form should be signed before any information is shared. Within the safe house files should be kept under lock.²

Foundational documents:

- **Protocol for safe shelters:** When creating a safe shelter, there is a need to develop a safe shelter protocol. The protocol should include instructions for setting up and running a shelter. It should also include information about eligibility and exit strategies.
- **Procedures template:** UNICEF GBViE Resource Pack, Section 4, Improving GBV Survivor Safety in Emergencies, p45 – 54, provides a 'Safe Shelter Policy and Procedures Template'. It explains how to create a 'policies and procedures manual' (or protocol) for a safe shelter, and provides a template for doing so. The various considerations listed in this document, can be decided on and slotted into this template.
- **Code of Conduct:** A 'Code of Conduct' and 'Rules for the House' should be developed. Residents must agree to these rules before being admitted to the shelter. These should include rules about movement, visitors and sleeping outside the shelter. Those who violate the rules should be given warnings – verbal and written, and finally evicted if there is no improvement.

Location and infrastructure planning:

- **Location:** It is important to identify a suitable shelter location, to ensure the facility can provide maximum protection for women and their children.

¹ Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

² Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

- **Securing a property for the shelter:** Securing a property may involve using and renovating an existing building, or building a new facility. New construction allows the particular security and shelter specific features to be incorporated into design and layout, which eliminates need for upgrades and repairs. However, this option is not always feasible and may be costlier.
- **Sharing space:** Organizations may share space with other housing providers. For example, the shelter could become part of a multi-use integrated facility that provides a continuum of services for GBV survivors.
- **Considerations to determine whether a particular location is appropriate for a safe shelter:**
 - o Fire safety and evacuation options.
 - o Electrical and structural standards (particularly for older buildings/houses,).
 - o Measures to protect against unwanted access / entry into the shelter (e.g. fencing, locks on windows, etc.).
 - o Facility has reliable access to water, electricity, communication services and heating/ cooling.
 - o Location is convenient and close to services needed by women and girls (e.g. health, police, legal support agencies; schools, marketplaces or commercial areas; accessible public transportation; etc.).
 - o Facility is integrated within the community and nearby opportunities for women to engage in community (for low security shelters).

Layout and design:

Planning for facility infrastructure and layout of a shelter involves three key considerations: 1. size of the shelter; 2. the needs of women and children who will be accessing the space; 3. the services to be provided within the facility.

- **Shelter size:** Size of the shelter should be determined by the estimated number of women and children who will reside at or access the space. Planning the number of rooms for women and children should involve considerations related to family size, including the average number and range of children who might need to stay at the shelter with their mothers.
- **Needs of women using the shelter:** The environment and space should help women to move past their experience of crisis and to overcome trauma. Facilities should have space which allows for individual privacy, as well as collective activities.
- **Facilities:** Ensure women have access to cooking facilities and food supplies, sufficient water/ bathrooms, as well as laundry or washing areas.
- The shelter should provide items such as basic cooking appliances and supplies, dishes, cutlery and utensils for all common cooking areas; furniture; household items (e.g. towels, bedding, personal hygiene and sanitary supplies).
- **Services to be provided:** Depending on the services to be provided by the shelter, various types of rooms and space will be needed for service provision. Separate rooms/spaces may be needed for:
 - o Counselling, crisis intervention, risk assessments, safety planning, etc.
 - o Group meetings, trainings and support groups
 - o Medical/ health assessment and services
 - o Administrative activities
 - o Office to store confidential information (electronic and hard files)
 - o Room for equipment for monitoring building security (e.g. security video monitors or alarms)
 - o Storage of supplies and of facility equipment.

Referrals and admission decisions

- **Referrals:** Referrals to safe houses can be made by GBV actors, case managers, social workers, or state Ministries of Social Welfare. Those setting up safe shelters should establish clear referral pathways with other GBV service providers, with clear procedures for each agency the survivor is likely to interact with.
- **Admissions decisions:** Admissions criteria for the shelter should be decided on. Decisions about which survivors should be admitted could be made by a staff employed by a safe shelter or by a pre-selected inter-agency panel (where possible, a representative of State Ministries of Social Welfare should also sit on such panels).

- **Accessibility:** There is a need to implement practices that promote accessibility, such as ensuring that the facilities serve women of all ages, including girls, that they are able to shelter women with children, that they can accommodate women with disabilities, undocumented or migrant women, and those with mental health and substance abuse problems.

Exit strategy and follow up:

- **Short term option:** Safe shelters are not supposed to be a long-term solution or a permanent home for a survivor. The problem is that there might be few real exit strategies for survivors in a given setting. As such there might be real challenges in referring them onwards. Thought needs to be given to the duration of survivor's stays in shelters, in order to not promote dependency.
- **Exit strategies:** Exit strategies should be considered and planned for from the start of a women's stay in a shelter.³ Shelter providers should work with residents to identify transition strategies – this will help to foster recovery and independence. The shelter might assist women to access economic opportunities and affordable housing. Programmes should also foster recovery, through training, income generation, and avoid the creation of reliance on the shelter environment.
- **Case management and safety planning:** Some survivors may come to the shelter only for a short period of time, either during a time of crisis (violent episode) or until some sort of mediation is conducted. Many will go back to the abusive relationships. As such, it is important that they access case management process whilst they are seeking help. It is also crucial that safety planning is conducted with survivors before they return back to potentially abusive relationships.⁴
- **Follow up:** Safe houses should ensure follow up after survivors have left. They might work to identify social support structures within survivors' communities to assist with follow-up.⁵

Risks of safe shelters:

- **No guarantee of safety:** Developing a safe house is seen by many as a risky scenario in humanitarian settings, as there is often no way to guarantee the safety of those living in them. Many therefore see this as a last resort option.⁶

Safety measures:

- **Safety measures:** Measures must be put in place for the protection of safe houses, to make them as safe as the context allows.
- **Safety of residents and staff:** Take steps to ensure the safety of both residents and staff. The security needs of both residents and staff must be assessed in advance. To do this, consult with staff and residents to identify their security concerns.
- **Security measures:** Site-appropriate security measures must be developed. These can include things like fences, guards, alarm systems and setting up partnerships with law enforcement agencies.
- **Behavioural measures:** There are also behavioural standards that promote safety, such as restrictions visitors or residents' movement, and rules around confidentiality.
- **Referral to appropriate security-level facility:** Women must be referred to shelters according to their security needs. Inappropriate placement in low security models may endanger both the shelter seeker and those working and living in that space. In contracts, unnecessary placement in a high security programme can hinder a women's community contact and hamper her reintegration.
- **Keep shelter a secret:** Steps should be taken to ensure that safe shelters are kept secret, in order that community members do not realise that these are safe shelters. Steps include building

³ Guidance Note on Safety and Security of Survivors of Gender Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings in South Sudan, June 2015, UNFPA, GBV Sub-cluster, drafter by Orly Stern.

⁴ Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

⁵ Guidance Note on Safety and Security of Survivors of Gender Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings in South Sudan, June 2015, UNFPA, GBV Sub-cluster, drafter by Orly Stern.

⁶ Guidance Note on Safety and Security of Survivors of Gender Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings in South Sudan, June 2015, UNFPA, GBV Sub-cluster, drafter by Orly Stern.

houses in locations not visible to the road, putting alternative signage on the shelter building, and ensuring that only relevant GBV actors are aware of their locations.⁷

Community buy-in:

- **Buy-in:** Steps should be taken to ensure community buy-in and support, particularly from community leaders, including traditional leaders and those active in campaigning for women's issues.
- **Regular dialogue and input:** Engage in regular dialogue with community leaders. Where possible, seek community input into the design and location of safe shelters.
- **Make community aware of shelter's existence, so it is utilised:** Steps should be taken to build community awareness about this service, so that community women utilise the shelters – without revealing the location of the shelter. Public campaigns and targeted engagement with local residents and community leaders can foster community understanding about the purpose and goals of the shelter.

Services offered by the shelter:

- Shelters must have access to services to meet the complexity of survivors' needs.
- **Survivor's needs:** Survivor's needs include: psychosocial needs, medical needs, education for accompanying children, need for vocational training, income generation opportunities.
- **Provide or refer:** These needs can be met either directly by the shelter, or by referring to other service providers. Some services that should be provided or facilitated are:
 - o Counselling for survivors and their children.
 - o Support groups: this is fundamental to start breaking the isolation that many survivors have been living through. Women supporting other women can provide an alternative network to survivors, in addition to being a very empowering process.
 - o Access to specialized healthcare: including for cases of sexual violence who may require specific medication and examinations.
 - o Legal information and representation.
 - o Advocacy: with other service providers, with the courts, within mediation processes, within the health care process.⁸

Activities for the women:

- **Activities:** Ensure survivors have access to a variety of activities in the shelter, including vocational-training, education and physical well-being. Survivors should not sit idle all day. They need constructive activities as part of their rehabilitation process.
- **Children's activities:** Activities for the children should also take place – especially access to education.⁹

Women's contributions:

- **Contributions to shelter life:** One way to build empowerment is to ask survivors to contribute in some way to the shelter. In some places, survivors are asked to pay rent. In others they may cook or a cleaning rotation may be set-up.
- **Reasons for this:** Survivors need to understand that this is their home for a while, and it needs taking care of. It is not charity, but they are contributing to their care and upkeep. This can be an empowering process.¹⁰

Rules/regulations:

- **Balance between structure and control:** Emphasise that shelters are not prisons, and that the survivors present are adults. They must be responsible for making their own decisions. There is

⁷ Guidance Note on Safety and Security of Survivors of Gender Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings in South Sudan, June 2015, UNFPA, GBV Sub-cluster, drafter by Orly Stern.

⁸ Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

⁹ Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

¹⁰ Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

a fine line between structure and control. It is important to keep rules to a minimum, so as not to create a 'controlling' space for survivors who are trying to regain control of their lives.

- **Certain strict rules:** Some rules can be strictly enforced. For violations of these, survivor might be asked to leave. These include being violent, abusive, bringing an abuser to the shelter are some examples. Other rules could be considered more as guidelines.
- **Include survivors in designing rules:** Include survivors in designing or adapting the guidelines. They are not children, but adults who have gone through some extremely difficult experiences, and need to be supported, not told what to do.

Managing conflict within the shelter:

- One of the biggest challenges for shelters will be discordance or disagreements between survivors staying there. This is not surprising given the risks and tension survivors have lived with or are living under, in addition to the lack of intimacy/space within most shelters.
- This can be compounded where there are children, as ideas on education, discipline and appropriate behaviour may differ.
- Providing staff and survivors with conflict-management skills is important to address this.

Staffing:

- **Staffing planning:** It is important to plan for the human resources of a shelter. There needs to be a team of staff covering a variety of roles and responsibilities.
- **24 hours a day:** There should be trained staff present 24 hours a day. They should be available at each hour to conduct emergency admissions, crisis interventions, risk assessment and facility security. A duty roster or schedule should be created to ensure that the appropriate skills are available at all times.
- **Training for staff:** It is critical to ensure that all staff well trained, including with a strong knowledge of SGBV and domestic violence.
- **Shelter worker job description:** UNICEF GBViE Resource Pack, Section 4, Improving GBV Survivor Safety in Emergencies p55 provides a sample shelter worker job description.

Support staff needs:

- Ensure that there is adequate support for shelter staff.
- An assessment should be conducted in each site to identify the context specific needs of staff, and funds should be made available to meet these needs.
- Staff might require emotional support services, training in counselling and other skills, resources, as well as additional staffing.

References

- UNICEF GBViE Resource Pack, Section 4, Improving GBV Survivor Safety in Emergencies, 2018.
- Shelter for Women and Girls at Risk of or Survivors of Violence, UN Women, Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence Against Women and Girls, Shelter page: <http://endvawnow.org/en/modules/view/15-shelter.html>
- Safe Haven, Sheltering Displaced Persons from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Human Rights Centre, University of California, Berkley, School of Law and UNHCR, 2013.
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- Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

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For any further request or enquiry, contact enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk .

Annex 1: Checklist for shelters¹¹

Here is a short checklist that can be used as a tool to make sure that basic standards for shelter management are respected:

- General points

- Shelter must be accessible to all women regardless of ethnic and religious background, language, age, economic situation, geographical residence, etc.
- A woman may seek shelter as many times as she needs. There should not be any restrictions on the number of times she can access the service.
- How to contact the shelter must be made clear to the community: is there a hotline? Is it through the DFVAW so do they have a functioning hotline?
- Survivors should never be blamed for the cycle of violence in which they find themselves
- Make sure staff is aware of the language they use (see section on empowerment above)

- Safety and security

The main reason for women to seek shelter is to be safe. So it is important to make sure the shelter is safe.

- The location of the shelter is secret and unknown to the public
- Confidentiality of survivors and their case is maintained at all times
- Mediation and services involving others are held in locations away from the shelter
- Develop a security plan and protocol which include emergency contacts with the police are available for on-duty staff
- Ensure there is security personnel at the entrance to avoid any incidents

- Services available both in the shelter and through referrals

- Confidential, respectful and safe case management services¹²
- Safety planning
- Crisis counseling (for survivors and children)
- Group support sessions
- Referral to safe and qualified health practitioner
- Referral to safe and knowledgeable legal adviser
- Survivors are not forced to receive services they do not wish to
- Advocacy and support
- All referrals are confidential and consent forms are used systematically
- Childcare

- In-shelter management

This includes the day to day running of the shelter, including rules and regulations. Make sure these rules are designed to control the environment and not the participants/survivors.

- There is trained and qualified staff on-duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Survivors must come and stay in the shelter voluntarily
- Ensure that non-Kurdish speaking survivors have access to an objective interpreter
- Decision-making processes within the shelter are clear to all (this does not include decisions on the individual cases of survivors!)
- Residents understand their rights (right to be respected, to be heard, to decide, to safety, to live without the threat of violence, to confidentiality, etc)¹³
- Rules in the shelter are clear, including when the shelter may ask a resident to leave (use or threats of violence, breaking confidentiality, bringing abuser to shelter, etc)
- Rules correspond to the philosophy of the shelter- empowerment of women and mothers, promotion of a peaceful environment, staff and participants/survivors are part of the same community, etc¹⁴
- Guidelines and expectations are shared with residents
- Entry and exit procedures to the shelter are clear to participants/survivors and staff (two or more staff as well as the survivor should be involved in decisions when a survivor leaves, safety of children needs to be taken into consideration etc)

¹¹ Short report on Shelters for the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Erbil, March 2010, International Rescue Committee.

¹² There is a separate checklist just for case managers available if requested

¹³ It is a good idea to have these written down to give to survivors (or drawn if there is a high rate of illiteracy)

¹⁴ Make sure the rules do not mirror the control the abuser exercised over the survivor-remember that shelters should seek to empower women.

- Staff is trained and understands thoroughly the dynamics of domestic violence, VAWG and the cycle of violence
- Mechanisms for staff support are in place
- A reporting and accountability system is in place and participants/survivors are informed (clear methods to report any misconduct of staff, etc)
- Ensure all material is accessible to participants/survivors: including different dialects (Kurdish and Arabic for example), levels of literacy, etc.
- Activities for residents
 - Recreational activities are available
 - Vocational-training activities are available
 - Education/activities for the children are available