



Gender Inclusive Cities Programme

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Programme administered by:

Women in Cities International

Projects implemented by:

Information Centre of the Independent Women’s Forum (Russia)

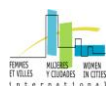
International Centre and Network for Information on Crime (Tanzania)

Jagori (India)

Red Mujer y Habitat de America Latina (Argentina)

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➤ **Overview**

A focus group is a moderated conversation/discussion held to increase understanding of a particular issue and explore ideas about how a problem might be addressed. It involves sharing specific experiences, presenting opinions and exploring ideas. The group needs to be large enough to include different points of view and to generate discussion, but not so large that some participants are unable to participate. Focus groups are more likely to work well when participants have similar backgrounds or experiences, so it is recommended to conduct several focus groups on a particular theme to gather different perspectives. Focus groups usually last 1½ to 2 hours.

➤ **Aim**

The aim of the focus groups within the Gender-Inclusive Cities Project is to increase understanding of what makes women feel safe or unsafe in public spaces in cities, and how their safety could be improved.

➤ **Participants**

- Each group should comprise individuals thought to have similar backgrounds or experiences of safety in public spaces. Groups therefore may be made up of young women, young men, women with disabilities, older women, women from a particular ethnic minority etc.
- It is best to identify individuals who are likely to make a useful input and invite them personally. Provide written details of where and when the group will meet. A reminder shortly before the event might be worthwhile.
- It can be advantageous to recruit participants through a 'notice' but this should only be used to invite anyone interested to get in touch and ask for a place. If the notice gives details of the time and place of the meeting it could result in too many and inappropriate people turning up.
- The ideal number of participants would be between 8 and 12.
- Participants should be informed about the issue and the nature of the discussion.
- Participants should be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred and can be paid a small amount or can be given a small gift as seen as appropriate. Literature, pamphlets etc on VAW or safety can also be distributed.
- Child care could be arranged if needed

➤ **Facilitator/Moderator**

- The facilitator should be knowledgeable on the issue,
- She should encourage each participant to speak and encourage diversity of views. She needs to make sure that one or a two people do not dominate the discussion.
- She should be careful not to impose her views, direct the discussion or express positive or negative reaction to any comments or views expressed.
- She can summarise when necessary
- She must make sure that the discussion stays focused on the issues and not get carried away.

➤ **Venue**

- Find a suitable meeting place that is accessible, comfortable and private.
- Room layout should be informal, inclusive (not classroom style).
- It would be useful to have flip charts, marker pens, paper, and pens.
- There should be opportunity for participants to meet informally and 'break the ice' before the discussion starts.
- A snack and drink can be provided either at the beginning or end.
- There should be a sign-up sheet with emails or other contact information, so you can contact these people for safety audits or other activities. If the focus group comprises people who are not fully literate, someone can note down names and contact info.

➤ **Introduction to Discussion**

- Facilitators and participants should briefly introduce themselves.
- Welcome the group and explain the project. (*We will give a one page summary that can be used as a guide*).
- Explain that the purpose of the focus group is to collect experiences, hear views and exchange ideas. The aim is to hear everyone's opinion not reach a consensus or conclusion.
- Explain how information will be used. If you are either audio or video recording it, please inform the participants. Explain to them clearly what the recording will be used for. It is important to get people's consent for the recording and possible uses.
- Agree on 'ground rules': respect each participant, no right or wrong answers, everyone will be given a chance to speak, privacy of the discussion

➤ **Conducting the Discussion**

- It is a good idea to have a large-scale map of the city for the discussion. The map can be used to add a visual dimension to the discussions. You can use pins, post-its or markers on the maps to illustrate issues of safety.
- For groups that are from the community or area where safety audits are being planned, the questions can relate directly to the area itself. For others, the questions can be more general. For a group of young men, the questions could focus on their experience of safety also.
- The following questions can be used as a guide for conducting the discussion.
 1. *Do you think that public spaces in the city are safe for women and girls of all ages to move about freely? Are there some specific places which you think are particularly unsafe? Why are these places unsafe? What has influenced your views – your own experiences, others experiences, media reports, stories etc. Share some concrete experiences or stories of safety in public spaces.*
 2. *Are there any places in where you feel particularly safe or unsafe? What is it about these places that make you feel so?*
 3. *Do you take any precautions when you go out? For example, do you carry something for protection, or avoid certain areas etc.*
 4. *Have you ever asked for help with an unsafe or dangerous situation? Did you go to the police? Did you approach anyone else for help? Did you feel the response met your needs? Why or why not? [If you haven't actually done this, who are you most likely to ask for help?*
 5. *What do you think are the three most important women's safety issues in the city/this area? Why? (probe if there is any information such as reports or incidents)*
 6. *How could women's safety and feelings of safety in public spaces be improved? This could be by changes of policy, changes in design, changes in services, changes in (men's) behavior, etc. Encourage concrete suggestions.*

➤ **Recording and reporting**

- It is important to record carefully the views and ideas expressed in the discussion for later analysis and reporting.
- Before discussion starts, participants should be asked how they would like any comments attributed in the subsequent report. Comments could be attributed personally (by name), by position (eg “the director of an organisation representing women with disabilities said ”) or totally anonymised (eg “one participant said ...”.)

- Recording can be done by taking notes during the event and/or by making an audio/video recording. Unless notes are taken, an audio/video recording will need to be transcribed, which can be demanding. However, it would ensure an accurate record is available and a video recording could be extremely useful in subsequent presentations about the project (but participants must give permission for it to be made and used in this way).
- A second person should be present at the focus group to do the recording, so that the facilitator can concentrate on the discussion.
- The record of the meeting should be written up soon after the meeting while it is still fresh in the memory.