



EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT
COALESCE Project (EC AMIF 958133.)

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The author wants to thank the partner organizations in the AMIF COALESCE project for their genuine commitment to ensuring that women, victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, are provided with holistic support services that centralize their participation, and individual and sex class needs and experiences.

A special thank you to everyone, who kindly took time out of their busy schedules to assist in the completion of the external evaluation.

SUMMARY OF THE AMIF COALESCE PROJECT

Title

COALESCE: Legal, Psycho-social and economic empowerment for the integration of women third country nationals, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and abuse.

EU AMIF funding scheme

The COALESCE project was funded under the EU AMIF 2019-AG-CALL-05 scheme. The objectives of the Call were to facilitate transnational actions for the early identification of third country national victims of trafficking in human beings including in the context of asylum procedures, and to provide concrete measures for assistance, support, integration, and sustainable voluntary return while taking into account their specific needs based on age, sex and specific consequences of the form of exploitation to which they were subjected.

Focus of the scheme included actions to increase the sharing and exchanges of knowledge, experiences, and best practices through transnational cooperation between local and regional authorities and civil society for the identification, integration, as well as voluntary and safe return of third-country nationals, who are victims of trafficking in human beings to find durable solutions.

Applicants were expected to develop practical approaches, tools, and guidelines, by building on results of past projects when relevant and appropriate.

Notably, applicants were obliged to present the foreseen gender-specific and child-sensitive elements of project implementation at all stages from project design in line with the EU legal and policy framework via the different project activities and in the final outcome and impact.¹

Description of the AMIF COALESCE project (2020-2022)

The COALESCE project aimed at providing gender-specific psycho-social, legal, and economic support and assistance to third-country national women victims of sex trafficking, and to develop synergies and complementarities in facilitating needs identification, assistance,

¹ AMIF 2019-AG-Call, link: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/other_eu_prog/home/wp-call/amif-call-fiche-2019-ag-call_en.pdf

and support, and improve transnational cooperation among front line professionals and practitioners.

The COALESCE project placed the voices, experiences, and authentic opinions of women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation and abuse at the centre of implementation.

The partnership developed a Gender Specific Integration Model (GeSIM), which consists of a Psycho-social and Legal Integration Model (PLM), and an Economic Empowerment Model (EEM). The GeSIM sets out general gender-specific integration principles that were applied by all consortium partners during the implementation of the COALESCE project.

GeSIM also identifies best practices for integration that consortium partners developed and followed within their area of expertise, and which were put into practice and evaluated during the implementation of the GeSIM approach by four of the COALESCE partners: SOLWODI (Germany), the Immigrant Council of Ireland, IROKO (Italy), and the Cyprus Refugee Council.

The COALESCE consortium

The partnership consisted of the project coordinator organization and eight partner organizations in six EU Member States.

Lead partner and project coordinator

Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies²

Partner organizations

Caritas Cyprus³

The Cyprus Refugee Council⁴

Associazione Iroko Onlus⁵

The Immigrant Council of Ireland⁶

² <https://medinstgenderstudies.org/what/projects/>

³ <https://caritascyprus.org/projects/>

⁴ <https://www.cyrefugeecouncil.org/our-projects/>

⁵ <https://www.associazioneiroko.org/about-us/what-we-do/coalesce-project/>

⁶ <https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/campaign/ending-human-trafficking/coalesce>

SOLWODI⁷

Association MARTA Centre⁸

Klaipeda Social and Psychological Service Centre⁹

The European Network of Migrant Women¹⁰

Consortium EU member states

The consortium joins partner organizations in the Republic of Cyprus, Germany, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, and EU. Concrete and practical gender-specific victim-centered activities were carried out in four EU member states (The Republic of Cyprus, Germany, Italy, and the Republic of Ireland).

Notably, two of the nine partner organizations did not provide GeSIM victim support services – Marta Centre in Latvia and Klaipeda Social and Psychological Service Centre in Lithuania. Their roles in the project were restricted by eligibility criteria under the 2019 AMIF Call for proposals, which limited access to victim support services to beneficiaries, who were third country nationals. At the time of application, the majority of women, who were victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation to these two EU Member States, were mainly EU citizens or EU residents.

The situation changed during the project period, and the number of victims, who were third country nationals increased, due to world events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion by Russia of Ukraine in February 2022, and the ensuing war. The two partner organization from Latvia and Lithuania were involved in the design and implementation of all other work packages.

COALESCE project period

January 2021-November 2022

⁷ <https://www.solwodi.de/seite/501875/eu-projekt-amif-coalesce.html>

⁸ <https://marta.lv/en/marta-in-action/projects/coalesce/>

⁹ <https://www.ksppc.lt/coalesce?lang=en>

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/coalesce/>

COALESCE target groups

- Direct beneficiaries of the COALESCE project were women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and abuse, who are third country nationals.
- Target groups including professionals working in the field of victim protection and asylum.

COALESCE project website

All documents and activities of the COALESCE project can be access at the following website:

<https://medinstgenderstudies.org/coaslece-to-support-women-affected-by-trafficking-for-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/>

COALESCE theory of social change

The purpose of the theory and methodology of social change that functions as a foundation for the COALESCE project is to conceptualize, implement and evaluate a holistic set of social, economic and policy interventions, which aim to improve and substantially transform women's lives, especially women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, who are third country nationals.

The COALESCE methodology of social change aims to create concrete interventions based on a critical feminist analysis of the problems that hinder progress to find viable solutions, collaborative projects with transnational scope, beneficiary, stakeholder and institutional engagement, and a critical investigation of the social, economic and policy implications of the interventions short- and long term.

COALESCE general objective

The general objective of the COALESCE project involved seeking to provide gender-specific, psycho-social, legal, and economic support and assistance to third-country national women victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and to develop synergies and complementarities in facilitating needs identification, assistance, and support, and improve transnational cooperation among front line professionals and practitioners.

Three specific objectives and outputs

1. Development and implementation of the COALESCE Gender Specific Integration Model (GeSIM)

The project aimed to enhance integration of women, who are third country nationals and victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and abuse through the provision of assistance guided by a Gender Specific Integration Model (GeSIM) for psychosocial and legal assistance, and economic empowerment.

In total 47 women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, who are third country national, in four partner countries accessed and benefited from the GeSIM approach, and received integration assistance under the Economic Empowerment (EEM) and Psychosocial and Legal Support (PSM) models through online or face-to-face activities.

2. Production of a toolkit, a handbook and project reports

Project partners produced six *Mind the Gap* reports, which identify and map the needs in the partner countries informed by available gender-specific measures.¹¹

The partnership also developed a practical guidebook for practitioners working with women victims of human trafficking on gender-specific victim integration. The GeSIM Guidebook provides practitioners with essential information about how to work with and support women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation in a gender- and culturally sensitive way. The Guidebook was informed by input from affected women with specialized knowledge and recommendations for a sustainable gender-specific implementation of EU guidelines and tools, influencing the work of service providers.¹²

The GeSIM Guidebook was adapted and translated into six national contexts and languages (the Republic of Cyprus, Italy, the Republic of Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, and Latvia).

3. Stakeholder knowledge exchange

The partnership aimed to promote national and transnational knowledge exchange between relevant actors on the benefits of and commitment to GESIM through collaborative approaches benefitting trafficked women.

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/coalesce/>

¹² *Guidebook for practitioners working with women victims of human trafficking on gender-specific integration* (Available at: <https://usercontent.one/wp/www.migrantwomennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/COALESCE-GeSIM-Model-EN-FINAL.pdf>)

The partners organized three stakeholder roundtables; two online and one in Dublin for 75 professionals working in the field of victim protection and asylum services to present and promote the GeSIM approach. The stakeholder events encouraged constructive discussions about its practical implementation and direct benefits for women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and third country nationals.

Interdisciplinary stakeholder events

A central tenet of the COALESCE project was to nurture collaborative, interdisciplinary dialogues between national and local professionals and frontline workers on the benefits of the GeSIM, with the commitment to provide specialised, gender-specific integration services to women affected by trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and abuse.

Partner organizations arranged six national events, which engaged 271 local professionals and stakeholders: 25 professionals in the Republic of Cyprus, 17 in the Republic of Ireland, 16 in Germany, 30 in Latvia, 55 in Lithuania, and 100 professionals in Italy.

COALESCE final conference

To mark the EU Day against Trafficking in Human Beings, and the wrapping up of the COALESCE project, the partnership, under the lead of the European Network of Migrant Women, organized a European event, entitled *COALESCE: Supporting Migrant Women Victims of Sex Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Europe*.¹³

The event, which took place in Brussels and online, brought together 50 European stakeholder and international experts, along with survivors of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation to share the outcomes and results of the COALESCE project. The COALSCE coordination team presented the GeSIM methodology, experts from the COALESCE partners and international speakers discussed different aspects of the provision of good practice victim support services followed by a productive conversation between experts, invited speakers, and the audience.¹⁴

¹³ See: Agenda for the final COALESCE conference on 18 October 2022: <https://medinstgenderstudies.org/event-coalesce-supporting-migrant-women-victims-of-sex-trafficking-in-europe/>

¹⁴ A recording of the EU COALESCE event is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QV2HxPZ6aWM&t=2s>

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE RELEVANCE, QUALITY, AND IMPACT of the AMIF COALESCE project

Evaluation methodology

The external evaluation was carried out using a qualitative questionnaire with 30 questions distributed in July 2022 to all partners in the COALESCE consortium.¹⁵ In addition, two focus groups were organized with the participation of representatives from all partner organizations – one in Dublin, the Republic of Ireland, in May 2022, and a second one in Brussels, Belgium in October 2022 in connection with consortium meetings.

Site visits and interviews with project beneficiaries during the COALESCE project implementation period were not possible to carry out due to travel and other restrictions in the participating EU member States as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The external evaluator participated in two consortium meetings – in Dublin, the Republic of Ireland in May 2022, and the final partner meeting in Brussels, Belgium in October 2022.

Evaluation criteria

The external evaluation focused on three areas of investigation:

- a. an assessment of the project against the AMIF application criteria of relevance, effectiveness, impact, added value and sustainability.

- b. the quality and functioning of the collaboration of consortium partners, as well as the performance of the coordination team.

- c. the potential impact of current world events on COALESCE – the Covid-19 pandemic, and the invasion by Russia of Ukraine and the ensuing war.

Two additional areas of investigation were directed to the COALESCE coordination organization focusing on the fulfilment of the project *theory of social change* (see above).

¹⁵ Response rate to the evaluation questionnaire: 100%. An additional question concerning theory of social change was posed to the coordination team (see question 30).

EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

a. Relevance

In the proposal, the partnership identified the following needs to be met by the COALESCE project:

- planning for and organizing efficient recovery and re-integration programmes for female victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.
- ensuring that assistance offered to women must be appropriate to their gender, age and the form of exploitation, as well as to their immigration status, cultural specificity, limited eligibility to general state-funded services, lack of support networks, increasing racism and xenophobia; and
- utilizing the latest advancement in the knowledge of the gender-specific integration needs and efficient approaches to supporting the recovery of women, who are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

To what extent has the COALESCE activities addressed the specific needs of women victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, who are third country national and their integration in your country/EU wide?

The COALESCE partner organizations identified several areas where project activities resulted in positive changes in the life conditions for the involved women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, and who participated in interventions under the Gender Specific Integration Model (GeSIM).

The importance and benefits of a feminist-based culturally sensitive approach

Several partner organizations highlighted the importance of providing feminist ethno-psychosocial, legal, and economic empowerment and victim support services for human trafficking victims. This approach involves standing firmly in solidarity with women in distress. Necessarily, all counsellors are women, who carry out their work from a feminist perspective in the fight against violence against women and children, and who support women to leave violent situations by providing tailored tools for their empowerment.

A culture-sensitive approach, information, and exchanges in the mother language of victims, female staff with migration backgrounds, and continuous staff trainings were aspects mentioned that further facilitate the work to ensure comprehensive integration of women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation into the society of the country of destination.

Education about sexual and reproductive rights and care – a positive component of the COALESCE project

Several partner organizations arranged special interventions that focused on much needed sex education; interventions that are often excluded from EU-funded and other human trafficking victim support programs.

Many women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation do not have a clear sense about their own bodies, and have never had the opportunity to make informed decisions about bodily autonomy, sex partners, relationships or pregnancies, and would not discuss these issues with friends or relatives.

Women received information about general health care, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and how to overcome barriers to access such services. They were also given access to pregnancy counselling, and family planning sessions with gynecologists, doctors or midwives. The women, who participated in the sex education sessions, were encouraged to discuss their own sexuality and feelings, and to ask private questions. In addition, women were informed about the consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM), and about FGM reconstruction options, and how these could be accessed.

Gender specific legal services for victims of human trafficking - a necessary tool to ensure integration

One partner organization carried out activities that were solely focused on the delivery of gender-specific and human rights based legal services and support to women victims of human trafficking on migration matters. As a positive result, women's immigration status were changed, and they could access education, social services and the labour market, giving more opportunities for their successful integration.

However, due to limitations of national migration laws policies, and the state's failure to recognize the importance of family reunification to women, who are victims of human trafficking, they were not able to access much needed family reunification.

In another partner country, the majority of women, who were victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, were accorded residence permits, but without receiving the status of refugees.

Practical skills trainings – the way to independence

Several of the partner organizations provided concrete and practical trainings for the COALESCE project beneficiaries about employment rights, job-hunting skills and other labour market issues, vocational trainings, and individual assistance on issues that eventually would ensure their economic empowerment and independence.

Perceived success of the COALESCE project by partner organizations

Partner organizations were asked to rate the success of the COALESCE project on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely well), while taking into consideration the three identified needs (see above). The success of the COALESCE project was rated high by partners; the medium rating was 9.8.

Partner organizations did not identify any areas of the COALESCE project that needed improvement. One project partner explained the reason as follows:

The [COALESCE] project's activities were designed to specifically meet the needs of women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings (THB). The GeSIM model was based on extensive research activities and best practices identified by the project's partners. Because the Model was tailor-made to the needs of THB victims, it was very comprehensive and addressed multiple areas of support, there were no areas for improvement identified.

Please discuss what are the benefits or drawbacks, if any, of providing single sex/women-only support services for victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.

The general objective of the COALESCE project involved seeking to provide gender-specific, psycho-social, legal, and economic support and assistance to third-country national women, who were victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Single sex services - a core aspect of successful recovery and integration

All four partner organizations that implemented the Gender Specific Integration Model (GeSIM) aimed to provide comprehensive single sex, women-only, and transformative services where beneficiaries could find a sense of community and a safe space for mutual learning about and exchange of experiences with other women, who were victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The benefits of these interventions identified by participating women as well as by staff were many: group sessions helped women to feel productive, and focus on their self-development and physical and mental well-being. The sessions fostered a sense of belonging and community among the women, who participated, created an inclusive, non-judgmental environment, and, importantly, functioned to break women's isolation.

Women-only spaces protect female victims of human trafficking from further traumatization, allow them to disclose abuse and violations, and remove the risks of being re-violated, unlike in mixed-sex victim support services. The GESIM approach to women-only, single sex victim support services for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation during the implementation of the COALESCE project have had secondary benefits nationally, in the local communities where the partner organizations operate by showing other victim support services the positive outcomes.

During the implementation of COALESCE, did your organization identify new areas of concern for or additional needs of women victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation that were not addressed?

Partner organizations did not identify any new areas of concerns or needs of women, who are third country nationals and victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.

They did, however, highlight several critical aspects of the COALESCE project that they consider vital for any institution that aims to provide holistic and sex/gender specific victim support services:

- creation of opportunities for women, who are victims of human trafficking, to engage with each other, and share experiences in a safe and secure, single sex environment to strengthen mental health and counteract isolation.
- provision of free and tailored access to basic levels of education for women, victims of human trafficking, who have little or no schooling, including reading, writing, mathematics, and language classes.
- creation of opportunities for women, victims of human trafficking, and their children that allow for networking and meaningful interaction with the local community to counteract exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination, to facilitate successful integration.
- development of multidisciplinary collaborations/networks with other local organizations and groups that work for or provide support to migrant women, with law enforcement, the legal community, and health care and migration authorities.

Breach of duty of care by state authorities identified in the COALESCE project as barriers to victim integration

Partner organization did, however, identify three areas of ongoing concern that the COALESCE project had not and could not address, which are the responsibility of state authorities:

- The difficulty to guarantee the continuity of the GeSIM and other victim support services for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation long-term due to the absence of available or adequate national funding, as well as the limits under the AMIF funding stream.
- The lack of and access to safe, affordable, adapted and appropriate public housing for women victims, causing women to have to rely on criminal landlords in the private rental sector while risking financial exploitation, illegal evictions and violence.
- EU and national legal barriers for women, who are victims of human trafficking to reunification with children and other family members often leaving family members at risk of violence and human rights abuses, while impairing the capacity of women victims to successfully integrate in countries of destination.

b. Effectiveness

The COALESCE proposal projects two overarching results to be fulfilled by the COALESCE project:

- a. the establishment of enhanced practice of integration and avoidance of re-trafficking of third country national women trafficked for sexual exploitation, through gender-specific and exploitation-informed models of assistance; and
- b. these models are expected to encompass the latest analytical and practical knowledge on gender-specific approaches to identification, support and integration of third country national women trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation (or other forms involving sexual violence).

To what extent has the COALESCE project achieved the expected results?

Five successful outcomes of the COALESCE project

1. According to partner organizations, one of the most important aspects of the COALESCE project is the successful delivery of enhanced practices of integration through gender-specific and exploitation-informed models of assistance in order to bring real impact to the lives of women, who are victims of human trafficking, on the ground.
2. The transnational collaboration between experienced anti-trafficking organizations in the COALESCE project resulted in joint, strong policy advocacy to strengthen measures for the prevention of human trafficking, and for victim assistance approaches that are sex/gender-specific, trauma informed and based on a feminist analysis nationally and at the EU level
3. Some practical outcomes of the COALESCE project were deemed particularly beneficial: the GeSIM approach equips practitioners with in-depth knowledge and instructions on how to work with and support women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, in a gender and culturally sensitive way.
4. Frontline professionals were given the resources (timewise and financial) to provide women, victims of human trafficking with adequate counselling and assistance to support their integration process. Another positive outcome for frontline workers was the opportunity to collectively evaluate, reflect on, and when necessary, improve their methods and approach.
5. The knowledge exchanges for professionals in the field were very positive as they not only allowed for the improvement of capacity of victims support within organizations, but also created room to promote and foster collaborative transnational exchanges between project partners and national stakeholders.

In summary, the reasons for the successful implementation of the COALESCE project include a good, evidence-based project design, carefully planned participation of beneficiaries, the quality of the cooperation between project partners, strong project management and coordination, as well as the experience and expertise of each partner organization combined with the effectiveness of activities based on a strong feminist analysis.

Limited time frame – a barrier to positive outcomes

The one limiting factor mentioned by partner organizations, which affected negatively on the outcomes and results of COALESCE project, was the too-short implementation period, compounded by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

c. Impact

To what extent has COALESCE, and in particular the GeSIM approach, succeeded in making a durable impact/effect changes to the identification of victims and how support and integration services are provided to female victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation at national and European level? Please describe.

Collective knowledge increase has a positive impact on service provision

The consensus of the COALESCE partner organizations is that the GeSIM approach did contribute to the collective knowledge nationally in the project member states, and to the further development of EU policies by providing a practical and concrete example for how to develop and implement a robust integration support services tailored to women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings.

Misconceptions about single-sex, gender specific services hampered impact of the COALESCE project

However, they also underlined that the impact of the COALESCE project could be impaired by the material reality that politicians, national stakeholders, community organizations, and public authorities are not always open to new interventions and actions informed by a feminist analysis to strengthen the support of women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, risking that the funding for and implementation of good practices lag behind.

Please provide information on how the COALESCE project has resulted, if at all, in improved transnational cooperation between local and regional authorities and civil society for the identification, integration and support to female victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.

Transnational cooperation between similarly situated, feminist-based partners strongly benefits victims

All partner organizations underlined in their responses to the evaluation questionnaire that the COALESCE project is a fruitful transnational collaborative effort that has allowed relationships of trust and confidence to develop between diverse partner organisations, and that it has resulted in a gain of a greater understanding of their roles and service provisions.

By showing a strong understanding of the difficult material conditions that women, who are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation live under, and a willingness and engagement to find sustainable solutions to create individual and systemic change, the work of the COALESCE partner organizations over time could ultimately continue to bring strong benefit to beneficiaries, and other women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Concretely, the COALESCE project facilitated transnational cooperation through:

- Virtual roundtables facilitating dialogue among experts in particular areas related to trafficking in human beings focusing on the particular experiences and needs of women.
- A comprehensive analysis of the impact of race, ethnicity, and religion on the provision of support services to victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and access to fact-based information, have been some of the key themes addressed through these virtual discussions.
- The face-to-face transnational knowledge exchange that was organized in Dublin in May 2022 was a key moment in the project where common barriers and opportunities faced by non-governmental service providers in the EU and in the Republic of Ireland were addressed.
- Tools, such as evidence-based research and needs analysis; GeSIM, policy briefs and blog posts by women victims created by the COALESCE consortium were used in advocacy directed to local authorities and local stakeholders, as well as advocacy letters

in response to gaps in socio-economic support and in support of women beneficiaries' needs identified in Mind the Gap reports.

Under the guidance and critical reflections of external evaluator Gunilla Ekberg, the COALESCE consortium developed the approaches and the tools to take stock of what was achieved, but also to identify barriers and new areas of intervention.

What, if any, have been unintended effects of the COALESCE project in your country and EU wide?

Partner organizations were asked to identify and described any unintended effects of the COALESCE project in their country, and in the EU beyond the effects predicted in the project application.

Collective consciousness raising as a beneficial tool for victim recovery

One partner pointed to the creation of safe spaces for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation where they could exchange their experiences with other women and learn from each other as an unintended but important effect of the COALESCE project in their country.

Community awareness raising and cooperation vital to a resilient civil society

Another partner underlined that the implementation of the COALESCE project allowed the organization to draw attention to the specific needs of third-country national women, who are victims of human trafficking in the city of its operations.

A third organization noted that the project led to improved cooperation with local non-governmental organizations that are working with migrants, and in particular, allowed for an exchange of experiences and learning between local civil society organizations on how to better identify the exploitation of third-country nationals.

A high level of community competence and know-how protects against unintended effects

The remaining partner organizations did not identify any unintended or consequences noted at either the national or EU levels.

The discrepancy in responses and experiences between partner organizations could be attributed to the differences in availability of and funding for victim support services for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, in a particular EU member state.

A more solid reason for why some partners did not identify unintended consequences is the existing level of consciousness in these societies of the harm that women suffer as a direct consequence of the sexual exploitation they endure as victims. This understanding, and the accompanying political, social, and legal changes to hold perpetrators accountable would, in turn, not have been possible was it not for the tireless and long-term advocacy by feminist, migrant and other groups paired with a political environment that is increasingly receptive to such demands.

d. Sustainability

To what extent did the project establish links with the relevant local, regional, national public authorities, civil society organizations, in particular with those that are victim-led and other entities to ensure the continuation of the activities in the future?

Sustainability of project outcomes and results is a core valued outcome of projects that receive EU-funding. In particular, emphasis is placed on: the long-term engagement with national authorities and civil society; the sharing of know-how and expertise to ensure that generations of professionals adapt to the latest solid good practices; the raising of the awareness of professionals, public authorities and the general public; as well as ensuring that best-practice methods and actions survive beyond the EU-funded project period.

The majority of the COALESCE partner organizations have, as a result of the project, established stronger relationships with local, regional and national public authorities, community organizations and stakeholders providing direct service to migrants and victims of human trafficking, and/or involved in policy advocacy as a result of the project, connections and mutual exchanges that are expected to last beyond the project implementation period.

The wide dissemination of project outcomes and of the GeSIM Guidebook in translation is deemed to give opportunities for national and other stakeholders to integrate the knowledge, learnings, and results of the GeSIM approach into their own actions.

Have your organization approached national entities or other funding agencies to receive stable long-term funding to ensure that the GeSIM approach and other will continue beyond the project period? If not, please explain the reasons for why not and potential other aspects for the continuation.

Long-term sustainability of support services for victims of trafficking in human beings hampered by lack of EU and national funding – not a new problem

The availability of and access to funding to allow for the continuation of EU funded projects beyond their project periods is a recurring problem for many civil society organizations and others involved.

The COALESCE partner organizations provided several reasons for why funding may not be accessible to them to be able to continue to implement the GeSIM approach beyond the end of the project in November 2022, including the lack of information available about funding opportunities, but also the absence of in-house resources to pursue available funding. Several partner organizations noted that gaining access to long-term state funding is generally not a possibility in their countries, often because of the lack of commitment by state authorities.

In two of the partner countries, the potential for long-term funding for the implementation of the GeSIM approach appears to be somewhat more promising. Two partner organizations already receive state national and regional funding for their services to victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, but note that the funding originates from state agencies in different political areas, which results in a patchwork of often time-limited activities with no guarantees for continuation into the future.

Prejudices against and discrimination of victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in society - a common barrier to successful victim integration in project member states

This problem is further exacerbated due to prejudices against and the marginalization of women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in society. In most partner countries, women, who are victims, especially those that are third country nationals, often do not receive the necessary assistance from immigration and law enforcement authorities, and have difficulty in obtaining justice, with pre-trial investigations being delayed or closed to their detriment.

A strong commitment to seek future funding opportunities could facilitate continuation

All partner organizations intend to actively pursue sustainable state and private funding opportunities nationally to ensure that the long-term implementation of the GeSIM approach through their organizations can continue beyond the project period.

Integration of the GeSIM approach into the work of community organizations – a positive solution for sustainability

Several of the partner organizations also aim to investigate whether the GeSIM approach can be integrated into the work of other migrant and victim support organizations and shelters in their countries to strengthen their abilities to support women, who are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation through single sex assistance.

Education is the road to sustainability – a shortcoming of the COALESCE project

A shortcoming of the COALESCE project is the lack of intention by project partners to establish links with educational institutions. A vital component of ensuring that good practices for holistic, feminist based, victim support services are made sustainable is the integration of principles and actions into the training of future social workers, social care workers, psychologists, lawyers and other professionals. This is best done through the conclusion of formal agreements between victim support organizations and educational institutions, through improvements to curricula, and the establishment and funding of trainee programs.

e. Added value

How did the implementation of COALESCE ensure complementarities and generate synergies with other programmes and stakeholders at local, national and European levels?

Positive transfer of know-how between EU funded projects builds expertise and brings benefits to victims

Notably, the design of the COALESCE project was built upon previous successful EU funded and other projects by partner organizations. The consortium used indicators of success for victim-centered anti-trafficking work identified by the AMIF-funded ASSIST project, which

was developed and led by the Immigrant Council of Ireland.¹⁶ The feedback by the participants in the ASSIST project was indirectly fed into the development of the COALESCE project.

Please provide information of how this requirement that the participation of direct beneficiaries in the design and implementation of the project has been fulfilled (or not, if this is the case) by your organization in designing and implementing the COALESCE project nationally.

The COALESCE project fully engaged victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in project implementation

All partner organizations emphasized that the COALESCE project was carefully designed and implemented to fulfill the requirement that those individuals, who are the direct beneficiaries of EU-funded projects, in this case, women victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, participate in the design and implementation of such projects bringing added value.

Throughout the project, the beneficiaries of the COALESCE project, women, who were victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and third country nationals were given opportunities to voice their concerns, challenges and needs. Their continuing feedback increased the understanding of frontline professionals and directly informed the actions that were designed to address their individual and systemic needs.

The contributions by beneficiaries informed several of the phases of the COALESCE project's implementation. The GeSIM approach was designed based on the findings and analysis of research interviews with women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, about their needs and challenges during the first phase of the project. Participants were asked to express their preferences regarding which subjects were to be covered in the GeSIM interventions, ensuring that they were adapted to victim interests and needs.

¹⁶ ASSIST: Gender Specific Legal Assistance and Integration Support for Third Country National Female Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation (EC AMIF: 821581). Link: <https://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/campaign/ending-human-trafficking/assist>

Beneficiaries, who participated in the GeSIM trainings and empowerment workshops, were requested to provide detailed feedback on their content, and evaluated activities with high satisfaction rates and underlined that they created a sense of community. The dissemination of project results and outcomes gave beneficiaries additional opportunities to tell their stories, which, they noted, created opportunities to empower other women in similar situations.

The engagement of survivors¹⁷ of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in the design of the project may not be fully fulfilled

Only one of the partner organization works with a survivor of human trafficking, who is described as a role model for the staff at the organization, and for other beneficiaries.

It is not clear whether other partner organizations consulted with survivors of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, or their representative organizations to assure that their insights informed the GeSIM approach.

Ensuring victims privacy, data protection and confidentiality versus effective victim support and protection– the COALESCE project reveals a complicated balance

An unintended complication that arose during project implementation, and which could only partly be addressed, involved how to balance the privacy, confidentiality, and safety of women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation against their active and willing participation in project activities and events.

These issues are particularly difficult to navigate for frontline victim support services when a victim lives under threat of violence from the criminal individuals, groups and networks that are responsible for their exploitation, and especially in situations when a victim is not fully aware of the risks posed to her life and well-being.

COALESCE partner organizations concluded that the safeguarding of women, who are victims of human trafficking is a key concern, and that it is necessary to develop new solutions and

¹⁷ For the purpose of this comment, “survivor” is defined as someone, who has been a victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, but has gone through different forms of rehabilitation, and as a consequence has practical, physical and psychological distance from the prostitution industry, the criminal individuals, groups or networks responsible, and from the violence and harm they suffered at their hands in the past.

methodologies to ensure that beneficiaries safely be engaged in project design and development in the future.

f. The Gender Specific Integration Model (GeSIM)

How well have the principles of sex/gender equality been reflected in the design, implementation, and interventions of the GeSIM approach?

Sex/gender equality and interventions based on a feminist analysis - strong components of the COALESCE project

All partner organizations involved in the COALESCE project are feminist or feminism-informed organizations governed by principles of sex/gender equality and non-discrimination that came together to develop an innovative, intervention model that supports a victim-centred and victim-participatory approach that connects feminist theory about violence against women and practice.

The evaluation shows that partner organizations are in full agreement that principles of sex/gender equality, in fact, were at the core of the COALESCE project. The integration of gender quality principles into all stages of the design and implementation of the project were firmly linked to issues of non-discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, and economic empowerment.

The GeSIM approach was designed based on a feminist analysis to address the specific needs and experiences of women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and third country nationals with the ambition to ensure that women not only were able to take back control over their own lives, but also were empowered in a way that will allow them to participate equally and in a meaningful way in society in the future.

For that purpose, all project activities were delivered exclusively by experienced female staff members, female interpreters, and female medico-legal external experts. This priority allowed involved frontline professionals to explore, in depth, the best trauma informed methods and approaches for working with an exploited group of beneficiaries, and to provide appropriate and tailored support services.

Importantly, the COALESCE project management and coordination involved using a feminist, participatory approach with the goal to foster a horizontal, inclusive model of project planning and decision making.

G. Resources – financial and other

The total amount of EU allocated funds for the COALESCE project is €507,190.66, distributed by nine partner organizations. Have these allocated funds been sufficient for the effective implementation of the project activities a. overall, b. for the activities carried out by your partner organization?

For a collaborative project to be successfully implemented, partners need access to adequate financial and other resources such as funding for national and joint activities, trained staff, quality external services, equipment, and access to premises suitable for project activities.

Allocated AMIF funding for the COALESCE project mostly allowed effective implementation

Overall, the majority of partner organizations agreed that the allocated funds for the COALESCE project was sufficient for the effective implementation of project activities in the overall, and for activities carried out nationally.

Funding limitations a barrier to long-term, violence free living conditions for women, who have been victims of human trafficking

However, one partner organization regretted that the budget did not allow for the provision of single sex, safe accommodation, despite the urgent need of beneficiaries, exacerbated by housing vulnerabilities and economic insecurity that most third country nationals, who are victims of human trafficking experience.

Likewise, one of the partner organizations that provide legal support to women, who are victims of human trafficking in immigration matters highlighted the fact that some of the cases undertaken during the COALESCE project risk taking several years to be decided. The partner organization cannot charge their clients for these services, which means that taking on any client is a long-term financial commitment not financed by the AMIF project funding.

Project partners agreed that the COALESCE project and its beneficiaries would have benefitted from a longer implementation period – a year instead of six months - for the psychosocial, legal, and economic empowerment services under the GeSIM approach.

This would have furthered a more robust integration of beneficiaries, and would have allowed partners to measure and analyze the medium to long-term impact of the GeSIM interventions for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. However, an extension of the GeSIM implementation period would have raised staff costs considerably, something that was not projected in the allocated budget.

Another problem area that was highlighted focused on the perceived rigidity of the rules for EU funding, which several partner organizations saw as systemic barriers to the development of comprehensive and holistic support services for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

One particular rule that causes difficulties for many experienced, but nationally underfunded civil society organizations, is the fact that the European Commission only funds 90% of the actual costs of projects, requiring organizations to raise 10% of the costs themselves. Partner organizations underlined that many not-for-profit organizations providing high quality services for the most marginalized women victims of male violence and abuse are automatically excluded from participating in EU transnational projects, especially for those victim support organizations that base their activities on a feminist analysis, because they cannot raise the required funds.

Not only does this rule deprive many victim support services of the opportunity to learn from and work with similarly minded organizations in other EU member states, the rule deprives the ongoing EU legal and policy development in the area of trafficking in human beings and gender equality of important knowledge and insights.

Are there issues concerning resources other than funding that have had a positive or negative impact on the implementation of the project activities by your organization?

Adequate financial and skilled human resources are crucial for the successful provision of holistic support services for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Several of COALESCE partner organizations experienced staff shortages due to staff burnout during the project period, mainly caused the Covid-19 pandemic, but also because some victim support services in one partner country were located in rural areas, not attractive to professionals.

In addition, working with individuals, such as female victims of human trafficking, who have experienced high levels of repeated violence, sexual abuse and discrimination, and who are often severally traumatized by their experiences with complex needs places high demands on staff and their well-being, even when highly experienced.

h. Project coordination and partnership

Please rate your satisfaction with the project coordination on a scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied). Please discuss briefly positive aspects of the project coordination as well as of the partnership. If relevant, please provide suggestions for improvements.

The COALESCE project was coordinated by the staff of Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (MIGS).

All partners gave very high ratings (9.86 by seven partners) for their satisfaction with the project coordination team, and provided several thoughtful comments, which focused on the team's availability and effectiveness, their solution-oriented coordination, and their ability to provide timely responses to requests, while giving clear guidance and practical support to partner organizations.

Other aspects that were highlighted included the coordination team's strong capacity to provide clear instructions about the requirements for progress and financial reporting while allowing flexibility with deadlines.

The partnership consists of organizations from six EU Member States. What are the benefits and drawbacks of involving partners from these particular EU Member States? Please focus your comments on the particularities of the partner countries, not on the partner organizations.

All the EU member States of the partner organisations involved in the COALESCE project are destination and/or transition countries for criminal groups and networks that traffic women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. As a result, these EU member states encounter a high prevalence of trafficking cases of third country nationals, as well as victims from other EU member states. Despite a common EU legal framework to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, the legal systems, policies, procedures and measures in the COALESCE partner countries differ considerably, while sharing common challenges.

Diversity of partners enhanced the design and implementation of the COALESCE project

One benefit highlighted by partner organizations of working in a consortium that had members from a wide variety of EU member states was learning about the different legal frameworks regarding prostitution, victims' right to compensation, and accountability and prosecution of the chain of perpetrators including traffickers, pimps, and in some countries, of prostitution users, and of the operation of different asylum/ refugee programs of each member state.

Partner organizations agreed that the combination of similarities and differences between partner countries and between partner organizations was enriching, and strongly facilitated mutual learning. The collaboration allowed for critical thinking about and analysis of possible solutions, increased partner knowledge of cultural diversity, and provided a creative exchange of good practices. These exchanges gave plenty of room for improvements, and, importantly, allowed partner organizations to develop new perspectives and approaches to their support of female victims of human trafficking.

The participation of a partner organization with the whole EU as its area of operations further improved the understanding by partner organizations of the EU-level policymaking and legislation.

The focus on victims of human trafficking, who are third country nationals in the AMIF call for proposals limited the full participation of some COALESCE partners despite victim needs

The AMIF call for proposal under which the COALESCE project was funded focused solely on victims of human trafficking to EU member states, who are third country nationals as beneficiaries. In two of the project target countries, the majority of women, who were victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation are EU citizens/residents.

Consequently, partner organizations in these countries were not able to fully implement the GeSIM approach at the time of the start of the project in January 2020. By mid 2022, and as a direct result of the war in Ukraine, the number of third country nationals, who were victims of human trafficking to these countries saw a catastrophic increase. The COALESCE project, and these victims, would have benefitted from a full implementation of the GeSIM approach from the start in preparation for a potential shift in victim populations.

Please discuss the most important qualities needed to create and sustain a well-functioning and effective project partnership - in general, and for projects that specifically aim to work with female victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation.

This question engaged partner organizations, and most of them provided a long list of qualities for a well-functioning collaboration for the benefit of female victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

COALESCE partner organizations highlighted the following qualities as being of particular significance:

- A common ideological framework based on a shared feminist analysis of male violence against women and girls and its root causes, similar values and ethics including of the need for sex specific interventions, and an understanding of the inextricable link between prostitution and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.
- Expertise in the field, diversity of backgrounds, and competence and experience in working with the direct beneficiaries.
- Women-led partnership working with consensus in decision-making from a feminist standpoint using a participatory approach.
- A good balance between front-line organizations, advocacy and research organizations.
- Experience and expertise in EU project writing and management are needed to create and sustain a well-functioning and effective partnership.

- Similar project goals that benefit all partners in their particular country context.
- Good communication skills and space and time for each partner organization to raise opinions and concerns.
- Regular feedback between partners and by the coordination team to ensure good project progress.
- Transparency, responsibility, commitment, motivation and productivity by all partners.
- Flexibility and room to introduce changes in situations of unpredictability, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please rate your satisfaction with the work and participation of the partnership organizations in the design and implementation of the COALESCE project and your satisfaction with WP leaders from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied).

If relevant, please provide suggestions for improvement.

As expected, the questions that required COALESCE partner organizations to rate their satisfaction with the work and participation of their partner colleagues in the design and implementation of the COALESCE project, and as work package leaders, raised considerable difficulties.

Most partner organizations were very reticent to rate the work of their partners, and preferred to provide general comments about the quality of the collaboration overall, while giving each partner organization high ratings – between 9 and 10 - for their expertise and experience.

All partner organizations agreed that a strong spirit of partnership and work ethics, a shared purpose, mutual respect, and solidarity were present throughout the design and implementation of the COALESCE project infused by a constructive and solution-oriented mindset.

Comments that discussed aspects that could be improved mainly focused, predictably, on the lack of timely delivery of progress and financial reports and other deliverables, challenges due to staff changes during project implementation, but not on the quality of partner participation.

i. Additional evaluation focus areas

a. Effects of legislation that discourage the demand

One aspect of the prevention and combat of trafficking in human beings, which has drawn increasing attention in the current EU legal and policy development is measures to reduce the demand that fosters trafficking in human beings.¹⁸

Please discuss briefly whether legislation or other measures to reduce the demand would have had/had¹⁹ an impact on the design and implementation of COALESCE and the target groups, including female victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. and if so, please provide an explanation.

Discussions about measures to discourage the demand can be a divisive and sensitive issue for COALESCE partners, and in their member states

Several of the partner organizations did not provide responses to the questions that focus on legal and policy measures to discourage the demand and their potential impact on project beneficiaries, mainly because they understood the purpose and aims of the COALESCE project was not to focus on decreasing the demand or changing existing laws.

However, other partner organizations underlined the importance of such measures to reduce human trafficking. Some partner organizations speculated that the enforcement of strong national laws that discourage the demand could lead to a decrease in the number of women, who are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and potentially reduce the sex, racial and ethnic discrimination that victims are subjected to in many EU member states.

Concretely, partner organization in EU member states where the demand for women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is already criminalized highlighted that the fear of legal consequences has resulted in a reduction of the number of men, who purchase sexual services, and in the long-term could reduce prostitution markets, and the decrease of the number of exploited human trafficking victims nationally.

¹⁸ See for example the EU Strategy for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, and the evaluation of the EU 2011 Directive.

¹⁹ For partner organizations in EU Member States where such laws and policies already are in place.

Some partners were particularly critical to law proposals to discourage the demand that required evidence that the perpetrator had knowledge about the victim being trafficked or under the control of a pimp, suggesting that such laws would not reduce the number of men, who purchase sexual services, or increase prosecutions of organized criminal groups and individuals.

Measures that discourage the demand must be accompanied by the repeal of laws, policies or actions that criminalize victims

These partner organizations advised that legal measures to discourage the demand always should be accompanied by measures that decriminalize women, who are exploited in prostitution to be effective. When victims are decriminalized, they are no longer afraid of being arrested and subjected to prosecution, more willing to report offenders, and seek out victim support services.

b. The effects of the Covid-19-pandemic

The COALESCE project has been carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic. Please discuss the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic a. on the design and implementation of the project, including on the interaction between partner organizations.

The COALESCE project was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic and its immediate aftermath.²⁰ This situation had several consequences for project management and coordination, and, in particular, for the implementation of the GeSIM approach in the four partner countries.

The Covid-19 pandemic impeded COALESCE collaborative partner meetings

Two COALESCE partner meetings, which were scheduled to take place face-to-face in the Republic of Cyprus and Italy had to be carried out online due to travel restrictions and lockdowns. Partner organizations noted that online meetings could be difficult to navigate at times, but interactions between partners and working relationships improved over time when partners became comfortable in using video conferencing tools, and eventually became positive and supportive.

²⁰ The project period was from January 2020 to November 2022.

One partner organization noted that the use of digital tools made it possible to meet all staff involved in the COALESCE project, and not only one representative from each partner organisation, as is usually the case. One partner organization reported that the Covid-19 pandemic also impacted negatively on the recruitment and ongoing well-being of staff.

b. on the financial and other resources linked to the specific activities assigned to your organization.

Although the situation could vary between partner countries due to the different schemes for Covid-19 prevention and intervention, certain costs increased as a result of the pandemic. Costs for Covid-19 anti-body testing and vaccinations for victims, which were not available for free in all partner countries, were reimbursed by partner organizations.

On a positive note, as suggested by one partner organization, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in partners having unused financial resources for certain activities. Several partner organizations were able to reallocate funds from travel budgets to accommodate the increased financial needs of and burdens on the beneficiaries, who attended GeSIM activities such as costs for travel, basic subsistence funds and childcare fees, and to facilitate their access to digital tools and technology.

c. on the short and long-term situation of the female victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation that you serve.

The Covid-19 pandemic did not lower the number of women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in COALESCE partner member states

Although the numbers of women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in partner countries generally were lower due to travel restrictions and lockdowns locally and in other countries during the Covid-19 pandemic affecting the movement of persons, the number of victims in-country in need of assistance remained high, and in some countries increased.

Discrimination, isolation and risk for exploitation of victims of human trafficking increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in the COALESCE partner member states

Inequalities, discrimination, and lack of access to information for women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation were further entrenched during the Covid-19

pandemic. Partner organizations noted that women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, experienced a considerable increase in isolation and in institutionalisation as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pressure on different state services, such as social and legal services, was increased, and resulted in a general drop in available services.

Victim access to migration, social and community services, and the labour market was severely delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic

One partner organization noted a decrease in measures for the identification of victims of human trafficking during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the closing of border check points, resulting in fewer opportunities for victims to escape from the perpetrators to seek asylum.

The additional burdens on the asylum and visa system and delays that arose as a result of Covid-19 restrictions had a negative impact on victims of human trafficking, and severely affected their lives and well-being. In particular, delays in the processing of visa applications extended the time of separation between women, victims of human trafficking, and their children.

Several partner organizations also noted that in an already restricted job market for asylum seekers, female victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation struggled to find work during the Covid-19 pandemic, putting them in an even more strained financial position, increasing the risk of re-trafficking, and re-exploitation in the prostitution industry.

In the short-term, women, victims of human trafficking experienced poorer access to medical care and examinations, as well as limited access to reproductive services and to psychological and psychiatric care. Pre-existing issues, whether medical, psychological, social or economic, were exacerbated.

COALESCE victim support activities were delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic

Some GeSIM-related activities had to be redesigned. Initial interviews with women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, had to be conducted via phone or by using digital platforms to lessen health risks. The Covid-19 pandemic negatively affected the outreach to victims, and online training sessions with women, who were victims of human trafficking. Women, who participated in face-to-face GeSIM group sessions were asked to attend the sessions with a valid rapid antibody test, and to wear masks, which made personal interactions more complicated.

c. Effects on the trafficking in human beings in situations of armed conflict/war

What, if any, have been the effects of the overall refugee/migration situation and specifically the situation caused by the war in Ukraine on the implementation of the COALESCE project in your country?

In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Since then, over 5.4 million, mostly women and children, have fled the country to different EU Member States. As a result of this crisis, EU Member States decided, for the first time, to activate the 2001 Temporary Protection Directive²¹ to allow refugees from Ukraine to be granted temporary residence permits in the EU for at least one year, with the possibility of an extension for an additional two years. The Temporary Protection Directive does not apply to individuals fleeing other wars or armed conflict.

The war in Ukraine did not have a tangible impact on human trafficking victim support services in the COALESCE member states during the project period

The majority of the COALESCE partner organizations did not see any direct effects of the invasion of Ukraine on the delivery of their victim support services at the time of implementation, most likely because relatively few Ukrainian women victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation were initially identified in partner countries. As some partners underlined, based on earlier experiences e.g. during the 2015 refugee emergency, the needs of women refugees from Ukraine to access assistance and support are likely to emerge later when their vulnerability as refugees is exploited by local criminals.

An unexpected consequence of the arrival of refugees from Ukraine in some partner countries was that public authorities giving them priority in service delivery over third country nationals from other countries, who were victims of human trafficking resulting in increased fragility of their situations.

A couple of the partner organizations are involved in or lead a civil society response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees to specifically ensure that the particular needs and experiences of women and girl refugees, including when they have been subjected to violence and abuse, are properly addressed by civil society and state actors, including by providing single-sex services.

²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32001L0055&qid=1648223587338>

Please discuss what potential additional measures that your organization has or will put in place to meet the needs today or in the future of women and girls fleeing war/armed conflict, if any.

Migrant women and refugees are members of a highly vulnerable group, who face multiple risks of exploitation throughout the period of displacement. All COALESCE partner organizations have different measures in place to assist and support women, who are refugees from war torn countries and who have fallen victims to human trafficking for different purposes.

Several of the partner organizations carry out regular risk/vulnerability assessments of all women, who are asylum seekers that attend their support services to identify whether they are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and abuse, and to ensure that they receive adequate and tailored support.

All partner organizations have increased their collaboration with local NGO's that work with refugees to ensure that their staff are aware of and meet the specific needs and experiences of women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and abuse, including by providing gender equality-based information and training sessions, and allowing for referrals.

j. Current and future challenges

The legal and policy systems linked to trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation and related crimes differs widely between the EU Member States that are targeted by the COALESCE project. Please discuss any challenges caused by the legal and policy system experienced by your organization in the design and implementation of the COALESCE project in your country.

The aim of a common EU legal framework on trafficking in human beings that is binding upon all EU member states is to ensure that national laws are brought into line with the objectives in the 2011 directive.²² However, it is up to national authorities to decide which form and methods

²² See footnote xx – THB Directive 2011.

they use to ensure compliance and to account for the circumstances in a particular member state.

A varied interpretation of the EU legal framework on trafficking in human beings has a direct and negative impact on women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in the COALESCE partner member states

The results of the COALESCE project demonstrate well how differing interpretations of the 2011 Directive, which ultimately are played out in national laws and policies in regard to trafficking in human beings and migration can have lasting dilatory effects on the rights and conditions of women, who are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation – and especially on those women, who are third country nationals.

Partner organizations tell of government-run identification processes that suffer from inconsistencies and are, at times, discriminatory, leaving many victims of human trafficking unacknowledged without recourses, or access to victim support and assistance. Victims of trafficking in human beings that are not officiality recognized as such are accorded few rights leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation by criminal networks, groups, or individuals.

It also means that the prevalence of trafficking in human beings for different purposes to and from a particular EU member state is underplayed, which can have long-term consequences for anti-trafficking legal and policy development, and for the allocation of state funds to adequate measures for the prevention, prosecution and victim support and protection.

All COALESCE partner countries have ratified the UN Palermo Protocol,²³ and are, as noted above, bound by the provisions in the 2011 EU anti-trafficking directive. This means that they are obliged to adhere to the provisions in both international agreements that require member states to pass legislation that discourages the demand. However, the lack of legislation that criminalizes the purchase of sexual services or inefficiently enforced legislation in partner countries is likely to benefit the operations and profits of organized criminal networks and

²³ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000). Link: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>

individuals that traffic women, and increase the number of women, who are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Anti-migrant policies in some COALESCE member states had negative effects on the integration of women, victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation

Increasing populist anti-migrant policies and sentiments, racism and xenophobia in many EU member states further complicates the situation and living conditions of women, who are third country nationals and victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, and limit their access e.g. to state-funded services, safe and accommodation, secure employment, and livable earnings.

The principle of subsidiarity causes difficulties for the provision of holistic victim support services in COALESCE member states

The COALESCE project results indicate that the principle of subsidiarity in EU law creates additional challenges for civil society organizations that provide support and assistance to women, who are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and, in particular, to those women that are third country nationals.²⁴

The subsidiarity principle means that the EU does not intervene in issues that can be dealt with effectively and satisfactorily by member states at national, regional or local levels. Prostitution is such an issue that is considered better handled by individual EU member States.

COALESCE partner organizations in countries where certain prostitution activities are regulated, where “sex work” is seen as voluntary and a viable option for women to make a living²⁵ suggest that such legislation complicates the identification of victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, and leads to very few victims gaining access to protection and support measures, or permission to reside in the country. Victim protection is only granted

²⁴ See: Article 5(3) of the *Treaty on European Union*: “Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level.”

²⁵ See for example the German *Prostitution Act* (Prostitutionsgesetz) from 2002, and the *Prostitution Protection Act* (Prostituiertenschutzgesetz) from 2017. See also: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *The new Prostitute Protection Act (Das neue Prostituiertenschutzgesetz)* pp. 3-5. Link: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/117624/ac88738f36935f510d3df8ac5ddcd6f9/prostschg-textbausteine-en-data.pdf>

if victims file criminal charges against the perpetrators, and there is a conviction, which is a rare occurrence.

Please discuss whether there are any future challenges that your organization has identified that could affect the development of policies and the provision of services to female victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation in your country and the EU-at-large?

Partner organizations identified several challenges that impacted on the provision of services to women, who were victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

A major challenge in all partner countries involved the erratic attendance of women, who are victims of human trafficking, in GeSIM activities. One of the main reasons for non-participation involved the Covid-19 pandemic and the fear of women to catch the infection. Another important reason women pointed to was their ongoing struggle with feelings of depression and other mental health issues as core consequences of the violence and harm that they had been subjected to by perpetrators. Other women had work-related obligations, language difficulties, safety issues, or their own or their children's illnesses.

Other challenges involve stricter laws on migration and limited access to asylum and residence permits, further erosion of laws protecting women's rights, and the intentional dismantling by state authorities of the autonomous, non-profit support system for women, victims of human trafficking. The expansion of organized criminal networks and groups responsible for trafficking in human beings in many EU member states, and their increasing political influence through corruption and bribery, is an ongoing challenge that has an indirect impact on the living conditions of women, who are victims of human trafficking.

Systemic legal and policy challenges negatively affected the implementation of the COALESCE project and its beneficiaries

a. Discrimination in access to reproductive rights and care

One partner organization highlighted the effects of a legal framework that result in limited access to abortion for women and girls, and a society where women's sexual and reproductive rights are negatively affected by prejudice, stigma and discrimination. The refusal or discouragement by medical staff and doctors to carry out abortion or refer women

to abortion services compound the challenge, and has particular consequences for already vulnerable and marginalized women.

b. Legislation and measures linked to prostitution activities

The lack of willingness by politicians to pass appropriate legislation for the elimination of the demand for prostitution, the legalization of diverse prostitution activities in some EU member states, and a lack of understanding of the importance single sex, gender-specific programs for women and girls further compound the difficulties that feminist victim support organization experience.

c. A climate of increasing hostility against gender-specific and single sex victim support services

Finally, and a common challenge that most partner organizations experience on an ongoing basis, and which has serious effects on their operations (e.g. on fund raising), is a climate of hostility (cultural, economic and political) in society against organizations with strong feminist politics that provide women-only services.

k. Recommendations for future EU funded projects on trafficking in human beings

- a. The European Commission, for example through the AMIF funding stream, could publish an annual compilation of all mapping reports, toolkits, and service delivery guides developed during EU funded projects linked to trafficking in human beings to ensure that best practice standards are sustained across the EU, and against which future (AMIF) project can be measured.
- b. Importantly, successful projects²⁶ should be given the opportunity to apply for additional and sustainable EU funding beyond the regular two years to ensure longer implementation periods, especially when their principal beneficiaries are of particular need.
- c. Although not a novel insight, the COALESCE partner organizations underlined the value of international collaboration for fruitful, best practice exchanges, and

²⁶ "Success" to be defined by positive feedback from beneficiaries and project target groups, and favourable obligatory, comprehensive external evaluations.

development of methodologies while promoting mutual learning for the ultimate benefit of victims of trafficking in human beings. Such cooperation can potentially lead to positive and necessary legal and policy changes in the EU and nationally in EU member states.

- d. The EU legal and policy framework on trafficking in human beings “recognizes the gender-specific phenomenon of trafficking and that women and men are trafficked for different purposes. For this reason, assistance and support measures should also be gender specific...”. Likewise, a sex/gender equality perspective should be adopted and integrated into all measures to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, and the provision of support to victims.²⁷ In addition, it should be recognized that trafficking for sexual exploitation – which is the most prevalent form of exploitation – is a form of gender-based violence, rooted in gender inequalities.²⁸
- e. The European Commission should acknowledge the benefits of and fully support – politically and financially – EU-based specialist women’s victim support organization that provide gender-specific, single sex, victim-centered support and integration services for women, who are victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

²⁷ EU Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2002/629/JHA). Link: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32011L0036&from=en>

²⁸ EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025). Link: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0171&from=EN>