

FINAL EVENT REPORT

TRUST



Towards Replicable forms of Support and Tools
for Women's Specialist Services in crisis situations

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I- Data sheet

Project: TRUST – Towards Replicable forms of Support and Tools for Women’s Specialist Services in crisis situations

Name of the event: Violence against women: Tools to Support Women during Crisis

Place: Centro de Cultura Contemporánea de Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain.

Number of participants: 80 assistants

Organizing entity: Fundació SURT and Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies.

Meeting schedule:

9:30 a.m: inscription of the attendance and the start of the event.

10:00 a.m: the introduction of the meeting was carried out by Anna Albareda (who was substituting Sira Vilardell, managing director), from SURT; and Christina Kaili, senior researcher at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS).

10:15 a.m: the monographic: “Towards replicable forms of support and tools in crisis situations” started, and Susana Elisa Pavlou, director of MIGS, started it.

11.15 a.m: after the coffee break, Rubén Sánchez Ruiz, General Assistant Director of Awareness and Prevention from the Equality and Feminism Department of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*; and Stephanie Futter-Orel, executive director of WAVE Network; began with their respective interventions.

12:00 p.m: a round table took place: “The social impact of the innovating practices adopted by the women helping specialized services within the TRUST project”¹.

2:00 p.m: the final stretch began, and a dialog between interested parts was done: “Challenges and next steps – points of influence and recommendations”².

3:00 p.m: the general director for the eradication of gender violence of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, Laia Roisch, concluded the act with a short speech.

II- Participants

1) Project partners

Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies:

- **Susana Pavlou, director.** She is widely recognised as a gender equality expert and has served as a senior researcher on a number of projects and studies commissioned by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the European Parliament, and UN Women among others. She’s served as National Expert for the Network of Experts in Gender Equality, Social

¹ Istituto per la ricerca sociale. União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta. Rel. Azioni Positive. Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation.

² Facilitator: Myria Vassiliadou. Participants: SURT Fundació. Association of sexual and reproductive rights. WAVE Network. Women’s Association of Candia. Association of Austrian Self-Employed Women’s Shelters.

Inclusion, Health and Long-term Care (EGGSI), and as Independent Expert for DG Employment's Mutual Learning Programme (MLP).

- **Christina Kaili, researcher & project coordinator.** As a gender equality expert, she has conducted research, facilitated trainings, and coordinated and implemented many national and European projects in her field. She's particularly interested in the prevention and combating of violence against women and girls, especially through education. She also is an advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights since 2005 and a key actor on both the national and European levels in developing and managing the movement to end female genital mutilation.

União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta:

- **Camila Iglesias.** Plays an important role in defending women's rights in favour of equality and against domestic and gender-based violence in Portugal. The institution supports hundreds of women victims of domestic violence in social responses such as shelter houses, assistance and monitoring centers for women victims of violence, and the departments of research and criminal action's victim support offices from different regions of the country.

Rel. Azioni Positive:

- **Claudia Pividori.** Wants to prevent all forms of violence against women and their children through an integrated, effective and professional approach. The mission includes the promotion of a society free from violence and gender stereotype, and the advancement, self-determination and empowerment of women leaving situations of violence.

Association of Austrian Self-Employed Women's Shelters:

- **Alia Luf.** The association is the umbrella organization of 16 autonomous women's shelters in Austria and an information centre against violence focused on the prevention of violence against women and children and the effective cooperation of all social institutions.

Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation:

- **Elena Triffonova.** Member of an NGO of public utility that promotes social equality and women's human rights in Bulgaria through research, education and advocacy programs. The organization is an established international center of professionals in the field of gender equality, antidiscrimination law, domestic violence and reproductive rights.

Union of Women Association of Heraklion:

- **Nicholas Spetsidis**, Works for an NGO for women's and children's rights that also promotes culture and civilization. The union is active in the fields of protection of women rights and the promotion of gender equality as well as in providing shelter assistance and social service to abused women and children, among others.

SURT Foundation:

- **Anna Albareda**, Head of the Training and Knowledge Management area. Specialises in intercultural and gender issues in intercultural community interventions – supporting women and families.
- **Cova Álvarez**, Head of Personal Empowerment area. Works to make women's economic, social and cultural rights effective and to eradicate all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender.

2) Generalitat de Catalunya guests

- **Rubén Sánchez Ruiz**, General Assistant Director of Awareness and Prevention from the of Equality and Feminism Department of the Generalitat de Catalunya. He has worked for nineteen years at the Justice Department serving victims of violent crimes, both in adult and juvenile justice. He has worked training professionals in addressing sexist violence and its prevention, anti-sexist and egalitarian masculinities, institutional violence, networking and emotional self-defence. He has collaborated on the Amnesty International report on intervention in cases of sexual violence in Catalonia. He participates, as an activist, in associations related to culture, intellectual functional diversity and the defense of universal human rights and has collaborated in various audiovisual media.
- **Laia Roisch Solé**, general director for the eradication of gender violence of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. She has a degree in Psychology, has a master's degree in Intervention and Research in Domestic Violence, a master's degree in Direction, Management and Intervention in Social Services and a postgraduate degree in NGO Management. He has more than 20 years of experience in the context of sexist violence, combining direct care with training for professionals, especially in the development of protocols, networking and team supervision. She has also been vice dean of the Official College of Psychology of Catalonia.

3) *Facilitators*

- **Flavia Pesce**, Project Manager. She is a sociologist and Director of the Training and Labour Policies Area and an expert in Gender Equal Opportunity Policy and Community Planning. Her main areas of interest are: evaluation of Gender Equal Opportunity Policies and Programs, evaluation of Training and Labour Policies and Programs, evaluation of Community Policies and Programs, analysis of the training demand in the Labour Market, planning monitoring, control and evaluation systems.
- **Myria Vassiliadou**. She's a leader, strategist and senior manager at the national, European and international level in the area of public and social policy. A leading expert in the area of trafficking in human beings, equality between women and men, as well as ethnopolitical conflict and security. Has lengthy experience in the non-profit sector, academia and international organizations, notably as the first EU Anti Trafficking Coordinator with a two-term mandate, the Secretary General of the European Women's Lobby, a founding member and Director of the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, and an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Nicosia.

4) *Civil society associations*

Association for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and the Family Planning Association of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands:

- **Silvia Aldavert**. Develops projects, programs and services in the field of direct community care and in the generation of spaces for professional exchange.

Wave Network:

- **Stephanie Futter-Orel, Executive Director**. She has 14 years leadership experience in feminist women's civil society organisations. She has led the WAVE network since 2017. She focuses primarily on the strategic and resource development of the network, ensuring effective international high-level advocacy about the impact of VAWG and the key role WSS play in preventing and tackling it, strengthening WAVE's capacity to respond to its members needs and leading the WAVE team.

III- General Summary of the day

During the event, the primary focus was on "Violence against women and tools to support them during crisis," set against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. This period brought significant changes, presenting an opportunity to enhance post-pandemic EU services by ensuring women's support services (WSS) and preparing for future crises. This includes addressing the rise of anti-feminist and anti-migration rhetoric and dealing with anticipated funding cuts that may affect access to quality social services.

Crises like economic downturns, political conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics often lead to increased violence against women by exacerbating gender inequalities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a marked increase in violence against women globally, often referred to as the "shadow pandemic": incidents of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking surged due to factors like economic stress, social isolation, disrupted support services and weakened law enforcement.

Key contributors to the increase in violence included lockdowns that trapped women with abusers, economic and psychological stress, and the disruption of WSS. There were more reports of violence, yet underreporting also occurred as victims found it harder to seek help safely.

The pandemic exposed the lack of preparedness in social services due to decades of underinvestment. Feminist mobilization called for more funding, stability in services and advocacy. This situation led to this project which resulted in the creation of a repository of measures and tools by organizations, focusing on five key areas for transnational training and developing a manual of operation. This manual serves as a roadmap for strengthening WSS, guiding both external entities (NGOs, civil societies) and internal bodies (institutions, policy makers).

In summary, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for resilient social support systems and robust mechanisms to protect women during crises. Economic stability and mental health services play crucial roles in preventing domestic violence. Lessons learned should inform better preparedness and response strategies for future crises. Strengthening these systems ensures that support remains accessible, helping to protect women and mitigate the risks of violence in future emergencies. This project aims to aid women in upcoming crises and provide a path for organizations and institutions to follow amidst the almost assured cost of living and energy crises.

Learning from Crises: How the COVID-19 experience can enhance Sustainability and Resilience in Women's Support System – Rubén Sanchez

Ruben based his speech on the resilience paradigm, or how he called it: "the abacus of resilience". *If every trauma, living experiences and mental consequences is the bridge, the abacus is the resilience.* The base of this thought process is the unconditional acceptance and the respect of the person, which is unquestionably essential.

The framework protocol divides the WSS action between prevention and reparation, both in the individual and structural scope. This implies working against the limiting beliefs and prejudices (racism, fascism and sexism), working counter current against the conformism, lots of bureaucracy and long processes at the entrance and exit of the violence and working with the wisdom of recovered women, emotions and ethics.

"I'm myself again".

“I have already suffered from it; I don’t want other women to go through the same”.

Prevention has a communitarian base, is an integrated work for many areas: legislators, violence experts and WSS. It must bring realistic hope and a local development (institutional and nets), making a facilitating social frame, considering the diverse cultures. It’s important to remember that resilience does not replace in any way social politics.

The responsibility is shared, people must add their efforts to grow up as a society. He used the following metaphor: “Many houses create a neighbourhood, and many neighbourhoods make a town” to state that associations, social movements... are a key social support mechanism.

The main objectives society must reach are:

- To denature the genre mandate and the hegemonic masculinity.
- To contain the communitarian impact that violence against women cause: genre roles, divided works, rape culture, among others.
- To facilitate ways of violence detection and help access.
- To ease the creation of physical, virtual and symbolic places for women.

The structural prevention goes hand in hand with constant, permanent and proactive work, as well as institutional, social and cultural changes. We must not accept the idea of “it has always been like this” and work together, public and private sector.

Impact of gender-neutrality on policy and practices on combatting violence against women – Stephanie Futter-Orel

WAVE Network representant, Stephanie Futter-Orel, started explaining that violence and services as we used to know are not the same as nowadays: the digitalization has also arrived at this scope, affecting both violence (cyber-violence) and services, like helplines, which are not 100% online because not everyone has access; they present privacy and security problems as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed gaps that were already there. The fact that a women can be a subject of violence is not an individual thing, but systemic/structural.

Those gaps she talks about are diverse and we can see them in many areas. For example, children often have to go with violent or ex-convict father due to the judicial problems caused by the pandemic. The custody is splitted fifty-fifty instantly to fasten the processes in eastern EU countries. Another example could be the public procurement processes for victims, since there is housing and financial problems, as well as the existence of one single blueprint for everyone, which does not work properly.

“One euro invested in social action returns between six and seven euros in social benefits” (police salaries, judicial costs...), she states, *“ we need political commitment, funding and investment in the long-term ”.*

Finally, both Rubén and Stephanie answered questions about the role of working in this area. It means empowerment, the possibility of running away from home/the abuser and the no-dependence from it. However, having a work does not mean that you earn a worthy salary nor be independent; in fact, 1/10 workers in Spain are poor.

To conclude with this section, we can state that women's support services are vital for fostering economic growth and stability by increasing workforce participation, enhancing productivity, and reducing poverty. These services not only empower women but also generate positive social and economic ripple effects that benefit entire communities. Investing in gender equality and women's empowerment is essential for achieving sustainable development and long-term economic success.

Round Table – The social impact of innovative practices adopted by WSS in the TRUST project

The round table brought together a diverse group of participants, including program administrators and field workers. This gathering provided a platform for sharing experiences, evaluating the program's impact, and identifying areas for improvement.

Key topics discussed during the round table included the implementation process of the pilot program, the effectiveness of the support provided, and the measurable outcomes achieved. Participants also delved into the challenges encountered and offered valuable insights for future program enhancements.

The program aimed to address the immediate and long-term needs of women facing significant challenges. The result had internal and external outcomes: WSS capacity and intensity post-pandemic, support for women survivors via social awareness, resilience of the structure and women within this structure and innovation and adaptation of services, among others.

The organizations explained their own experience with the pilot program: the Italian group made "Vision Lab", which brought several challenges, both internal and external, as underfunding or the neutral gender policies government and EU are making, as well as the online conciliation with women. Their main focus was to establish women as actors of change for the base of the analysis.

Then, they divided the future goals between immediate and long term, but for the last ones they concluded that it cannot be done without constant funds. Immediate purposes are doing periodic internal meetings with the creation of an integrated working group in the organization. For the long-term expectations, they want to achieve the creation of a research centre, value professional aptitudes, become a political actor and match efficiently the needs of women they represent.

However, the primary common challenge identified was the need for increased funding to sustain and expand these essential services. Addressing this funding issue is crucial for enhancing the program's reach and ensuring long-term support for women in crisis.

The discussions highlighted the critical role of comprehensive support systems in empowering women to overcome crises and regain stability in their lives, and the pilot program has demonstrated its potential to make a meaningful difference in the lives of women in crisis.

Multi-stakeholder dialogue: Challenges and next steps – advocacy points and recommendations

To continue with the main interventions, a dialogue-based question-and-answer session focused on the challenges and future steps in assisting women during times of crisis. This format allowed for a dynamic exchange of ideas, experiences, and insights, providing a well-rounded perspective on the multifaceted issues at hand.

Throughout the dialogue, participants engaged in candid discussions about the various obstacles encountered in delivering effective support to women in crisis. Key topics included the adequacy of emotional counselling, accessibility to vocational training, and the provision of financial aid. A central theme that emerged was the significant challenge of securing sufficient funding to sustain and expand these vital services.

The mediator started the session with a little speech about advocacy points and recommendations. She also gave a data of the suicide rate: suicide rate decreased until 2022, with a raise of 18% of women rate and 0% of men's. This could be due to the isolation, which increased care obligations and the risk of domestic violence.

From there on, the question-and-answer dialog went by with the following questions:

“If the lockdown came again, what should be done differently? Specifically, what is the role of the Government in such scenarios? Additionally, are there policies that, in practice, effectively counteract gender-based violence during these times? Considering recent experiences, how should we proceed based on the pilot project findings? Moreover, what is the added value of these projects, and why is the sector underfunded despite their importance? Finally, in the context of remote services, is online engagement effective, or is it better than traditional methods?”

Finally, the conclusion started. A pandemic of violence against women was happening simultaneously with the medical pandemic, and with no prevention funding, we just have ex-post services available: *“Femicide, killed, then buried, so, now, let's talk about it. Should we change the shift drastically?”*

We also have to teach respect, not just give help afterwards. Young people are confident enough, therefore, the more aware they are, the braver they will be and the less they will let these situations happen. Nowadays, violence is detected much more often than it used to be.

Nevertheless, the world still lacks accountability for judges, states, etc. Despite international human rights frameworks and domestic laws aimed at protecting women, many judicial systems fail to effectively enforce these protections.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. States must strengthen legal frameworks, ensure impartiality and sensitivity in judicial proceedings, improve enforcement mechanisms, and prioritize comprehensive support services for victims. Judicial training programs on gender sensitivity and human rights can also play a pivotal role in fostering accountability and empathy within the legal system.

IV- Conclusion

The recent event focused on women's support services during crises highlighted several critical aspects and actionable insights for improving assistance to women in times of need. It underscored the importance of collaboration between government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups, emphasizing

that a cohesive network enhances resource sharing and improves service delivery, making it easier to reach women in crisis. Speakers emphasized the necessity of holistic support, which includes not only immediate crisis intervention but also long-term assistance such as mental health services, legal aid, and vocational training. This multi-faceted approach ensures that women are empowered to rebuild their lives post-crisis.

Discussions revealed the need for better accessibility to support services, both physically and informationally, with calls for leveraging technology through services like hotlines to bridge gaps. The importance of culturally sensitive support was a recurrent theme, emphasizing that services must be inclusive and respectful of the diverse backgrounds of women, with training for service providers on cultural competency recommended to ensure all women feel understood and respected. Attendees highlighted the role of policy in shaping effective support systems, advocating for stronger protective laws and increased funding for women's support services, with policies designed to be responsive to the evolving nature of crises.

The event stressed the power of community engagement, recognizing that building strong, supportive communities can act as a first line of defence in crisis situations and encouraging community-based initiatives and local leadership as key strategies. Finally, the need for continual assessment and feedback was acknowledged, with a focus on regularly evaluating the effectiveness of support services and incorporating feedback from women who have used these services to help refine and improve the assistance provided.

In conclusion, the event was a vital step in uniting various stakeholders to enhance support services for women in crisis, with a concerted effort towards implementing these insights and recommendations crucial in creating a resilient support system that can adapt to and effectively address the needs of women in times of crisis.

V- Photographs



