



FEM-UNITED

united to prevent femicide in europe

FEM-UNITED ACTION PLAN: MALTA

Context & Needs Analysis

As part of the EU-funded project '**FEM-UNITED - United to prevent IPV/DV Femicide in Europe**', the Department of Gender & Sexualities within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta, together with the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF) organised three online meetings with stakeholders held on the 21st June 2021, 12th October 2021 and 28th April 2022 respectively.

The stakeholders who attended all three meetings were from various State Institutions who cover various aspects of violence against women in Malta. These included the Police and the Courts, Social Services and Legal, Primary Healthcare and the Commission of Gender Based Violence & Domestic Violence, the National Statistics Office and the Human Rights Directorate. The individuals who attended were from 15 institutions.

During the discussions of the first meeting, the stakeholders put forward gaps and challenges which are hindering proper prevention and intervention in the area of violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence, domestic violence and femicide. During the second meeting, recommendations were compiled to tackle and improve system-wide responses and during the third and final meeting, guidelines for professionals were extracted from the recommendations.

What are the system-wide gaps in the context of violence against women (VAW) and femicide?

- **Lack of awareness on social services available:** Notwithstanding that Malta has significantly strengthened the support services for domestic violence survivors, most of the victims of femicide over the years were never on the radar of the national domestic violence unit. Hence, help could not be provided. It has been noted that this was possibly due to the lack of awareness of the services available, or their public image. (Art. 18,19,20,22 and 56 of the Istanbul Convention)
- **Media insensitivity:** The media has been known to sometimes tend towards insensitive and sexist language, appearing to place the blame on the victim. Therefore, there has to be a focus on addressing media biases and the discourse used in the media when cases of femicide and domestic violence are reported. (Art. 14 and 17 of the Istanbul Convention)
- **Ineffective training of frontline professionals:** Frontline professionals do not always receive training on violence against women. Thus, it is important to start evaluating the effective implementation of laws and the training provided to professionals in order to strengthen the services. (Art. 15 of the Istanbul Convention)
- **Aid to victims is not always the correct aid:** Victims do not always receive the specific help they need according to their situation. Some end up having to repeat their ordeal from one service to the next, resulting in revictimisation, which may result in incorrect aid being offered. Therefore, the target has to be the issue of quality control and quality assurance across stakeholders which will help with identifying the correct aid to victims. (Art. 15, 18 and 56 of the Istanbul Convention)
- **Victims should not be the only ones to testify:** When cases are being taken up to court, in some cases, victims opt not to testify against their perpetrator. There needs to be more emphasis that the evidence should not be solely dependent upon the testimony of the victim. If the victim had confided in friends and family or sought professional help, then they should be brought forward as witnesses. It should be mandatory for judges and magistrates to ask why a victim is refusing to testify, even in those circumstances where the law allows for the victim not to testify such as the case of spouses or family members, in order to understand the reason for the refusal and ascertain that the victim is not being pressured by the perpetrator and/or others. (Art. 50 and 55 of the Istanbul Convention)



- **Not enough investment in data collection across services:** Data collection across the services is not always a priority and the information is at times not in a format that can be shared. Qualitative data is essential as it gives a better understanding of the circumstances that led to the femicide, which outcomes could be used for preventative measures. (Art. 11 of the Istanbul Convention)

How can we improve system-wide responses to violence against women in order to prevent femicide?

- **Harmonise Data:** When data is harmonised, it should be kept 'live'. This would create an ongoing tool to monitor the reporting of victims to police or any other service, which could be accessed by the multidisciplinary team. With this in place, the victim could be contacted and help could be given without the victim reporting to a service. This tool could prevent future violence and femicide.
- **Focus on having adequate resources:** Strengthen resources, both financial and human, to meet the demand of daily referral cases received at both state support services and NGOs.
- **Better perpetrator programmes:** Invest in strengthening the programmes which target the behaviour of the perpetrator towards their intimate partner.
- **Risk Assessments & Electronic Tagging:** Electronic tagging of the perpetrator should be available for specific cases. Risk assessments which go beyond yes/no answers should be carried out to ensure sufficient depth and accuracy to allow proceeding to tagging.
- **Follow Ups with victims should be a priority:** Focus on doing follow ups with the victim and the victim's family in cases of domestic violence & violence against women.
- **Social workers and/or probation officers should be assigned to perpetrators:** Propose to the magistrate overseeing the case, especially in grave cases, to appoint a social worker and/or a probation officer to keep in touch with the perpetrator in order to monitor and assess behaviour, attendance at perpetrator programmes (where applicable) etc. for the duration of the court case.
- **Dismantle inequality in relationships:** Within society generally there is a lack of awareness on relationships, equality, respect etc. especially in terms of control issues in the relationship. This needs to be tackled in order to dismantle power and control in relationships, specifically romantic relationships.
- **Research on school children's reality:** Research should be undertaken to understand the realities school children face, especially realities at home, in order to then specifically target how to formulate awareness raising around gender stereotyping, relationships etc.
- **Addressing cultural beliefs:** Focus on addressing cultural beliefs around violence against women.
- **The importance of intersectionality:** Focus on the intersectional¹ element of violence in line with the GREVIO recommendations.
- **Campaigns for all of society:** Focus on creating prevention campaigns by targeting schools, places of work etc. around gender equality to counteract the patriarchal society.

¹ Intersectionality: the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>



- **Conduct Femicide reviews:** Carry out fatality reviews on cases of femicide, to identify existing gaps and ways to improve prevention.

Based on the above, the following plan of action is proposed:

List of Stakeholders who are referred to as ALL in the below table:

Aġenzija Appoġġ
 Commission for Children’s Rights
 Commission on Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence
 Court Services Agency
 Department of Education
 Foundation for Social Welfare Services
 Human Rights Directorate
 Human Rights Directorate – LGBTIQ Unit
 Human Rights Directorate – Gender Mainstreaming Unit
 Legal Aid Agency
 Probation and Parole
 Mater Dei Hospital
 Malta Police Force – Homicide Squad
 Malta Police Force – Victim Support Unit
 Malta Police Force – Gender Based Violence & Domestic Violence Unit
 Ministry for Justice
 Ministry for Social Justice and Social Solidarity, the Family and Children’s Rights
 National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
 National Statistics Office Malta
 Office of the Attorney General
 Primary Healthcare
 University of Malta

Research & Data Collection		
	Activity	Stakeholders involved
1.	Research should be conducted in specific professional fields that come into contact with cases of violence against women, in order for data to be collected which will then inform the field on best practices and how to tackle and close any gaps which are hindering the services. This will strengthen policies within the field. The research should be carried out on their activities and service-users.	ALL
Support Systems		
2.	Promotion of self-care amongst frontline professionals to avoid burnout and a decline in work performance.	ALL
3.	Perpetrators are to be channeled into the programmes with a treatment order along with a supervision order. The Probation	The Law Courts Probation & Parole



	Service is to make better use of the programme STOP! (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programme) provided by Aġenzija Appoġġ.	Aġenzija Appoġġ
Legislation		
4.	A proper, tailor-made risk assessment has to be developed and take place.	Malta Police Force Aġenzija Appoġġ NGOs
5.	Electronic tagging should be available legally and professionals should ask for it.	Malta Police Force Aġenzija Appoġġ Probation & Parole Legal Aid
6.	All professionals should be trained in risk assessment and risk management.	ALL
7.	Victims, survivors and their families must be kept informed and updated on their case. This could be done through the automatic allocation of a family/witness liaison officer.	Malta Police Force (Victim Support Unit)
8.	Professionals ought to propose having a social worker or a probation officer assigned to the perpetrator for monitoring for the duration of the court case.	The Law Courts Probation & Parole Malta Police Force Aġenzija Appoġġ
9.	Multi-disciplinary collaboration between frontline professionals.	ALL
10.	Professionals should be aware of existing local and international legislation.	ALL
11.	Professionals should work in line with a victim-based approach aligned with the human rights framework.	ALL
Training & Awareness Raising		
12.	Professionals should receive initial and continuous training within their professional field in order to be kept up to date with	ALL



	current policies and new practices in the area of violence against women.	
13.	Training for professionals should be evidence based and interdisciplinary.	ALL
14.	Training for professionals in the area of violence against women should include the aspect of culture in order to tackle gender stereotyping and gender inequality by addressing the harmful attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes (ABS).	ALL
15.	Training for professionals in the area of violence against women should include the aspect of intersectionality and the various ways different women could experience violence and how this should be addressed and tackled.	ALL
16.	Educational professionals should be trained and informed on how to tackle and address harmful ABS in their classroom amongst their students and flag up issues around gender stereotyping in order to combat gender inequality.	Commission on Gender Based Violence & Domestic Violence Department of Education All Schools
17.	Harmful ABS, gender equality and the societal culture should be tackled at all educational levels including University.	Commission on Gender Based Violence & Domestic Violence Department of Education University of Malta
18.	Professionals should be trained in conducting femicide reviews in line with their field of work.	ALL
19.	Training to identify the various forms of trauma caused by violence and its impact on an individual (refers to both adults and children).	ALL
20.	Professionals should be trained on how to work in accordance with the framework of due diligence.	ALL



21.	Professionals should be trained on the recognition of the signs of abuse and its escalation.	ALL
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