



Strengthening Innovative Solutions to Protect Female Migrant and Refugee Rights

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Introduction

This publication provides innovative solutions and lessons learned from a transnational collaboration among national migrant feminist associations and groups across Europe.

This report is structured to feature three main lessons. In each section, we include inspirational and relevant examples of practices we have learned about and we include good practice we have developed in our joint project.

1. There are **many good examples of migrant feminist work** that we can learn from. Learning transnationally gives us a completely new dimension.
2. Building a **transnational, migrant feminist movement in Europe is needed** and possible, and we can tell you how it can be done.
3. We need many more opportunities to exchange our work at European level and **migrant feminists need to be more often included in dialogue with politicians and media.**

This collaboration came about through the joint project: “**Strengthening Innovative Solutions to Protect Female Migrant and Refugee Rights**”, that started at the beginning of 2018 and ended in November 2019. We worked together, coordinated by the European network WIDE+, with partners that included networks of local migrant groups, associations that provide services to migrant, refugee and trafficked women and girls, and associations with a mixed membership of migrant feminist and other internationally focused feminist groups. The national coordinators were: in Spain, Calala Fund, Mujeres con Voz and Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas y del Caribe en Espana (RED); in Serbia, Atina; in Denmark, K.U.L.U. - Women and Development; and in Sweden, GADIP.

The partners came together in this project to counter political narratives that have grown in strength since 2015. These narratives depict migration as a ‘crisis’ due to the number of people coming to Europe, suggesting that they pose all kinds of threats to European societies. The numbers are often much lower than people imagine, and much lower than the number coming to other non-European countries.

In our experience, the crisis is a completely different one. **European politicians are not able to provide decent, rights-based asylum procedures, integration programmes and decriminalized services for those without citizenship status.** The additional

needs and discrimination faced by women and girls (and other marginalized gender identities) in these failing approaches are often ignored. A growing ultra-right political movement is cultivating anti-refugee and migrant sentiment, often ignoring the obligation to help those in need. Within this context, **women refugees and migrants are now subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, as a migrant and as a woman/girl**, often adding other intersecting forms of discrimination.

Who do we mean by ‘migrant women’? There is a common distinction made between migrants and refugees, although the reality is much less clear cut and the terminology tends to obscure the real experiences of trafficked women and girls, those forced to marry, informal domestic workers, and/or undocumented women workers. As feminists we prefer to **use the term migrant women to include all women who are displaced or who have moved from one country to a destination within Europe.**

In our project we aim to: “contribute to a strong European feminist movement for female refugee and migrant rights”. Our strategy has been to build the capacity of and stimulate cross-national learning about women’s rights and innovative practices and strategies among female migrant and refugee associations and other stakeholders. This in turn has helped to empower the feminists in our project to con-

tinue in their political struggles. In total 250 people have been enabled to take part in the project by participating in one of four national workshops and/or two international gatherings. To support our work, we organized online learning and exchange activities. Three webinars were a particularly important addition. Here, you can see the [video in which partners explain how they promote female migrant and refugee rights](#).

Opening our eyes to feminist migrants' work from across Europe

At the beginning of this project, we set out to raise awareness of and learn from 'Innovative Solutions to Protect Female Migrant and Refugee Rights', that were developed by migrant feminists themselves. In response to the political controversy that has arisen

around migration since 2015, "EU member states had been calling for good practices on integration" according to the recent information developed by [EU's Gender Equality Institute EIGE](#) (accessed 6 Feb 2020). There were a few initiatives developed before the start of our project that briefly described good practice in terms of integrating or supporting migrant women across Europe.

What we learned from our project is that there is a great deal of good practice. We were not able to include all the work we could learn from in the available time frame. There **are a huge number of grassroots initiatives, but they often remain ignored by the mainstream media and by policy makers**. While the partners in this project were active in very different countries, we all faced a lack of financial recognition by governments for the work migrant women did to support other migrant women. We found through exchanging our practices that the work of migrant women tends to be neglected, while stories that presented them as victims or included them in a negative context were much more visible.



"Our network has extensive experience in Spain but lacks connection with other countries in Europe and we didn't know what they did and if it was similar. This project has connected us to feminist organisations in Europe and because of this we realised the importance of doing advocacy and lobbying at EU level. As a result of this project, we will present our demands in the EU parliament." with picture from the national workshop in Spain.

Silvina Monteros, member of national coordination, Network of Latin American and Caribbean Women, Spain

“An erosion of women’s self-organizing is damaging. For migrant feminists it is more difficult to get access to funds than other women’s rights activists”.

Gea Meijers, project coordinator, WIDE+

We haven’t found a country in Europe in which the work of migrant women received adequate funding.

Although we can share here some innovative solutions developed by migrant women, it is misleading to conclude that this work is invisible because migrant women are not ‘well enough’ integrated into European societies, as some politicians suggest. Tailored programmes to support migrant women are necessary, but at the same time many migrant women are very actively contributing to their communities, workplaces and families; they function as informal solidarity networks where governments are failing. Governments can achieve much more progress in terms of the reception and integration of migrant women, if they simply listen to them and provide more financial support to self-organized migrant women.

The key lesson we learned in this project is that sharing transnationally adds a powerful element to national groups, networks and associations. **“Our eyes were opened to what was happening outside of our own country”**, was said by several partners.

The transnational aspect is particularly powerful because it shows how a national context shapes one’s own activities. It shows what can be different or gives ideas about how to navigate and overcome specific challenges, which can be useful lessons for other organisations and groups. The following examples were cited by project participants as inspiring and replicable in other contexts.

“One easy thing we can all do is to change the way we speak about people. We can refuse to reproduce the oppressive narratives that dehumanize and criminalise. We can remove “illegal” from our lexicon when speaking about people or ways of migrating.”

Alyna Smith, Advocacy Officer at PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants)

How can we learn from innovative practices to protect migrant women’s rights?

Our main recommendation is to create spaces for deep learning, for which face to face meetings are most effective. We suggest organizing more transnational capacity-building exchanges. Other forms of sharing good practice can be supportive of this exchange but will make a significant impact if information is exchanged on a regular basis. One specific suggestion is to establish a transnational roster of experts. This could include not only migrant women activists, but also lawyers, health care providers, translators, psychologists, inter-cultural mediators, volunteers and other relevant national and international consultants.

Innovation: Atina in Serbia and RED in Spain make visible migrant women’s experiences of gender-based violence

Atina addresses gender-based violence in Serbia through different strategies, and it supports some of the most vulnerable women, including women being trafficked and on the move. Atina provides a strong example of an organisation with experience and confidence in promoting the rights of refugee and migrant women who are victims of violence in a permanently hostile political context.

By conducting their own research through interviews, Atina revealed that 74 per cent of the women accommodated in asylum and transition centers, experienced violence in their countries of origin, on the route but also in Serbia, predominantly of a sexual nature, even though the government denies the presence of violence in refugee centers. They interview victims and collect their testimonies. They fight for women to participate in the decision-making process concerning exercising their rights. They call the ombudsman’s office and other independent state organs, such as the Commissioner for Equality, report cases and advocate that police and state prosecutors should take care of all people in Serbia, if they have suffered gender-based violence, regardless of their citizenship status.

That producing ‘data’ is a powerful tool to be used to fight for

the rights of migrant women, is also proven by the work of the Latin American and Caribbean network in Spain (RED). Official statistical data collection on gender-based violence in Spain is structured in a way that includes solely (ex-)partner violence and excludes all the other different kinds of violence experienced by women. The violence suffered by migrated women without Spanish citizenship is particularly invisible. This leads to a huge gap in registering the violence many migrant women face in Spain, since many earn their income by providing domestic services and often living in-house with an informal employer.

There are other ways to make visible the increased violence migrant women face in Spain, which the network RED employs. For example, by analyzing the murder statistics, which show that migrant women have a significantly greater chance of being murdered and that most murders are committed by Spaniards. Such data contradicts biased media reports about the greater threat of violence perpetrated by foreign men. **This kind of analysis makes visible the structural violence migrant women experience, which is not only about the violence itself, but also the response of public authorities.** Statistics on the support and aid victims of gender-based violence receive, show that this is less often allocated to migrant women.



Organizers from GADIP during the national workshop in Sweden

Innovation: Lex Femme in Sweden provide access to information in 60 languages

It is very difficult for migrant women to protect themselves from recurring violence or to ask for justice when they don't speak the language, and don't know where to turn on their arrival in a country. In Sweden, Terrafem operates a helpline, offers training and legal advice to migrant women and girls who have been victims of violence or who want a divorce (as in Sweden the migration status is dependent on the longevity of the marriage). **They offer this support in 60 languages.** They also publish information in several languages. They inform boys and girls separately about sexuality in schools.

Lex Femme in Gothenburg (formerly the Terrafem in Gothenburg) offers emotional support and legal advice in different languages. Refugee and migrant women often need urgent support before they've had the opportunity to learn the local language. Support in one's own language helps women to cope with complex and unfamiliar situations and makes them feel less isolated.

Innovation: LAWRS in the UK and Fisofa in Sweden help migrant women to regain power

The Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) works with Latin American women in the United Kingdom. Their Women's Empowerment and Integration project emphasises a holistic approach that considers a woman's whole story and her needs/desires. It is built on women choosing for themselves and recognising their agency and resilience. The approach addresses barriers like language and lack of confidence in a new work environment and considers other responsibilities, such as child and/or elder care. The approach also addresses the isolation migrant women can experience by organising outings and places to socialise. It promotes a sense of belonging.

What LAWRS' approach teaches us is that the important step in **any programme to integrate or host migrant women is to recognize them as fellow human**



Participants listen during the national workshop in Denmark

beings who have the power to control their own lives. They are not some target group of ‘beneficiaries of an intervention’. It also teaches us to involve women in the whole process of a project: from design to delivery to evaluation. The focus should be on facilitating the conditions that enable migrant women to regain their power and control their own lives.

Fisofa in Sweden has adopted a similar approach. The association that was set up by a migrant woman seeking to pass on skills, has worked with women in precarious economic situations, such as undocumented women, former victims of human trafficking or those facing violence. Fisofa’s “learn by doing” approach helps women by providing them with practical skills like how to write a CV, financial literacy and planning, entrepreneurship skills and information on tax, pensions and insurance in Sweden, as well as areas like self-esteem and self-confidence, leadership and managing stress, over the course of 10 weeks.

Many traditional integration and employment programmes neglect the person and focus exclusively on skills and finding a job. A person-centered approach is more beneficial. It is important not to underestimate the psychological benefits of receiving less tangible forms of support, such as connecting with others and addressing issues such as isolation, self-esteem, self-confidence and stress, when supporting women to go on to find decent employment.

Innovation: proposal from PICUM to put in place a firewall to access services safely

Undocumented women and women with a precarious status are at greater risk of being subjected to violence as they have very limited options to ask for help. Migrant women with spouse-dependent residence status are often not able to leave an abusive partner without risking their status, being detained and ultimately deported. Women without a residence permit are equally unable to safely report violence, as public authorities too often prioritise pursuing people because of their irregular status rather than ensuring their safety.

“Many migrant women had amazing high skilled careers at home and when they came to the Netherlands, forced to leave and through a dangerous journey, their dream now is to get a job, which is such a waste of skill and talent!”

Christina Moreno, founder of SheMatters

This is why PICUM advocates for a **“firewall”**, that is a **mechanism which allows undocumented people, including women, to access public services without the involvement of immigration enforcement**. When firewalls are in place, public authorities can provide safe access to shelters and justice to undocumented women victims of violence and can ensure that the

perpetrators are held accountable. There have been several policy initiatives around the world and in Europe that can serve as an example. In the Netherlands, in 2016, the government rolled out [a national policy](#) to encourage safe reporting, based on a pilot project which was run in Amsterdam. PICUM is working with a broad array of partners at the EU and at a global level to promote this policy, including [Women Against Violence Europe \(WAVE\)](#), the [European Coalition to End Violence](#) against Women and the [Women in Migration Network](#) (WIMN).

Innovation: She Matters in the Netherlands and Atina in Serbia support Empowerment through Employment

There are different formats to **encourage migrant women to find decent employment, matching their skills and interest**. She Matters is a social enterprise recruitment agency with a mission to empower refugee and migrant women to enter the labour market in the Netherlands. It has a gender-specific, 12-week Lotus Flower programme, in which the trainees attend workshops and are placed in companies to learn new skills, network and practise the language, with the aim of providing employment at the end of the programme.

Many companies undertake social initiatives and are willing to support projects that help newcomers integrate and find work, though the support offered by She Matters can help to encourage them to hire migrant women, since She Matters encounters hesitation among companies to hire migrants. Building trust is a key aspect of the work of She Matters.

Atina launched the social enterprise Bagel Bejgl with the aim of enabling trafficking survivors to gain economic independence and to be agents of change. As workers they acquire new knowledge, social contacts and skills. They are earning a decent income by working in the Bagel shop that sustains itself as a profit making but socially just enterprise. All profits from the social enterprise are directed towards support programmes for survivors and their recovery. Starting with an initial grant, Bagel Bejgl is now fully sustainable. Community engagement and support was key to the establishment of the shop and its founder strongly believes in the mutual support and partnership of civil society organisations, the private sector, government institutions and citizens.

Listen to the online webinars

‘Women’s Agency Tackling Violence Against Migrant and Refugee Women’ 21 February 2019. <https://buff.ly/2Xna6gt>

Speakers: Valentina Longo and Silvina Monteros, Network of Latin American and Caribbean Women (Spain); Hida Salmend, Terrafem Gothenburg, now Lex Femme (Sweden); Jelena Hnrjak, Atina (Serbia).

‘Counter Voices of Migrant (Undocumented and Refugee) Women Against Neo-right Populism and Other Threats’ 28 March 2019. <https://buff.ly/2KN37fz>

Speakers: Anna Zobnina, European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW); Sodfa Daaji, AfrikaYM, ENoMW; Alyna Smith, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM); Jennifer Kamay, International Women Space (Germany).

‘A Feminist View on Projects to Integrate Migrant and Refugee Women in European Economies’ 4 April 2019. <https://wp.me/p2KSLS-1az>

Speakers: Christina Moreno, founder of She Matters (Netherlands); Lucila Granada, Director Latino-American Women’s Right Service, (UK); Marijana Savic, Atina and founder of the social enterprise Bagels Bejgl Bakery (Serbia).



Marieme Jamme, a Senegalese businesswoman and one of the BBC’s 100 Women, reflected on her own activism during the national workshop in Serbia.

Innovation: International Women's Space in Germany builds collective resistance to control and marginalization

The International Women's Space (IWS) came from a movement in Berlin in 2012 protesting against the huge restrictions put on refugees in terms of where they were allowed to live, what they could eat and what they could do (for example, not learning the German language). To overcome their isolation, refugees took to the street and occupied Oranienplatz- a central square in the neighborhood of Kreuzberg- and later on, the empty Gerhart Hauptmann Schule also located in Kreuzberg. It was a very male dominated space, which made it very hard for refugee women to speak out. The main aims of this [this refugee movement](#) were: abolishment of the Residenzpflicht; abolishment of the Gutschein-system; demanding permission to work; abolishment/ closing down of the Lager-system; and access to learn the language.

In the school one wing was occupied by the refugee women. This is where IWS was born. It was a self-organized space with a sleeping area that helped to reduce isolation. There were German classes, workshops with lawyers, self-defence classes, etc. Most importantly it became a safe space for women to talk about their issues "in our own words", without being controlled. Even when arriving in the German asylum process it is very difficult for women and girls to tell their story as they want to tell them.

With the slogan: 'We have nothing to lose, but our chains!', women started sharing their own stories through a publication, demonstrations and in other ways, which resulted in the first book "[IN OUR OWN WORDS](#)" published in 2015. While funding for an un-registered group is extremely difficult to obtain, they managed to get funding from Mama Cash, which gave them the chance to publish their stories in a book. This made people take them seriously.

Once established IWS was able to keep working on its original mission. In 2017 several hundred women came together at the conference "When I Came to Germany". They talked about arriving in Germany, working and living here and organising politically as women in this country. These were special, touching and encouraging days (read the [publication and all contributions in German](#)).

In 2019 there was a second publication that included more stories: '[WE EXIST, WE ARE HERE](#)'. Since 2015 IWS formed an international feminist alliance that organizes the 8th March and the 25th November demonstrations in Berlin. The political situation has hardened for refugee women who are being pushed into undocumented existence, with an increasingly hostile reception, including racist attacks. We all have a duty to speak out and form alliances to strongly resist this. One year ago the [Break Isolation Group](#) for refugee women was formed. One of the many activities it does is the Break Isolation Tours, where the team has met many new women who have begun to come to our Friday refugee-only meetings.



Participants discuss during one of the workshops in Spain

(Trans)national collaboration is powerful

While our key lesson in terms of sharing practices across borders led to the “opening of our eyes”, the connections we made working together and through international exchanges provides us with more determination, compassion and motivation. Another key lesson we experienced through the project is that we are not only nourishing our minds, but also our hearts; **we have strengthened solidarity between women across nations, which gives us moral support.**

We had set out to achieve our aim of contributing to a strong European feminist movement on female refugee and migrant rights, following three principles:

- it is based on equal partnerships between other women’s rights and female refugee and migrants’ groups;
- it has an intersectional feminist perspective and employs effective strategies to foster change;
- it is visible to policy makers and a wider public.

“It is important that the kind of partnership promoted in this project exists and that the position of migrant women is strengthened.

Migrant Women are at risk of being legally and administratively invisible, and unable to access their rights.”

Jelena Hrnjak, project coordinator Atina

These principles are very important and have proven to be powerful in sustaining connections. Partnerships and coalitions can be forged in which implicit discrimination against migrant women is reproduced, for example by ‘knowing best’ what a certain approach or political stance should be, without a willingness to question one’s own belief systems as a non-migrant feminist.

The following practical mechanisms can help promote a sustainable and more equal movement:

Maintain the momentum: Maintaining the momentum in sharing, learning and collaboration is essential in order to be truly effective and produce results. Develop a plan to build on what was achieved during the project and create a strong adaptable model for ongoing collaboration.

Be transparent: Adopt a set of procedures to ensure transparency and accountability among members to establish trust, including financial allocations. Strive to ensure all arrangements are fair and benefit members equally. Ensure proper records are kept and that they are open to all.

Collect and use data: Effective advocacy depends on robust evidence-based data. Invest in sound research and data collection to support claims and demands.

Explore joint funding opportunities: Joint funding can expand available resources, influence the amount and quality of allocated funding, and diversify ways of grant-making.

“By creating and enhancing equal partnerships between women’s rights and migrant associations across Europe we find ways to help each other.

Different groups have different information. By collaborating and sharing, we learn from those who have done what we want to do and hear how they faced their challenges.”

Nancy Contreras, GADIP, ABF and Strong Women, Sweden

Understand differences, promote inclusiveness: Keep in mind that migrant women are not a homogeneous group, but made up of diverse social classes, origins, sexual orientations, ages, migratory statuses, motivations, etc. It is important to consider the differences in conditions, journeys and circumstances of migrant women, community-based organi-

sations and specialist groups that have the necessary expertise and knowledge. Any actions should take this diversity into account and alliances should aim to be inclusive.

Establish a regular schedule for communication: Make use of online and face-to-face meetings, webinars, online platforms and other communication channels to collaborate. Consider whether some form of rotating convener is needed.

What we achieved in strengthening collaboration. We realized that our European collaboration was helpful to our own networks, associations and communities and it resulted in a sustained and growing collaboration with new partners joining. We are leveraging the initial collaborations into establishing an ongoing transnational solidarity network. We also realized that there are only a few transnational collaborations established among migrant feminists in Europe.

In terms of national movement building, the project has contributed to the formation of a self-organised migrant group within Atina, in Serbia, that is undertaking advocacy. It has greatly helped to consolidate the national network of the local Latin American and Caribbean women in Spain. It provided the impetus for the development of an informal coalition of different migrant groups in Sweden. And in Denmark the national workshop was part of a larger project that has contributed to providing a platform for exchange among migrant women's groups and strengthened further dialogue with public stakeholders.

Much can be achieved from transnational ties among different types of women's organisations and groups. **Efforts are multiplied by joining forces. Collaboration opens doors and exposes participants to new ideas and approaches.** This can lead to **mutual capacity building, strengthen the impact of advocacy activities and improve visibility and awareness raising.**

In this chapter, we will provide key insights into the four national workshops we held. However, we cannot adequately summarize

all insights (for the full report, one can click on the links). The workshops were designed to enable each partner to strengthen their future national work with others. For some the next steps were around advocacy and lobbying parliamentarians and local government officials. For others it was mostly geared towards raising further awareness, supporting dialogue and sharing information.

Swedish Workshop: 'Women's Voices: Civil society and Migrant Women's Rights'

The first workshop in Gothenburg, Sweden was held on 29 May 2018. It was organized by Gender and Development in Practice (GADIP) in collaboration with Fisofo. The meeting demonstrated the useful and innovative projects and programmes carried out by women's rights associations to support and empower migrant and refugee women. These practices were shared around four themes: violence, economic literacy, labour opportunities vs discriminations and the role of other stakeholders, such as state bodies, in empowering migrant women and girls.



There were many lessons learned, and one key conclusion was that systematic networking should be enhanced between women's rights organizations including female migrant and refugee associations and groups. The presentations from different associations crossed borders, by including not only practices from Sweden, but also from Poland and Serbia on how the collective agency of women, mostly undertaken in their free time as volunteers, contribute greatly to the protection and promotion of rights and the empowerment of migrant women.

The voluntary women's organisations and groups act as glue between their way of working and the authorities' where rules don't properly match the problems faced by migrant and refugee women. Read [the full report](#).

Spanish workshop: 'Citizenship and Participation of Migrant and Refugee Women: Consolidating our political agenda'

The events took place from 19-21 October 2018, in Barcelona, Spain. There were three events; one can read [the full report in English](#) (there is a Spanish report as well). It was organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Network (RED), with the support of Calala Fund and others in Spain.

It started with a meeting on Friday between migrant feminists and other feminists. It included the participation of key women in feminism and migration and renowned migrant women's associations. The first discussion offered reflection on the principles of collaboration among migrant women and other feminists (see box). This was followed by three thematic workshops on violence against migrant women, advocating for decent working conditions for domestic and other migrant care workers, and 'innovative strategies for the political participation of migrant and refugee women'. The fourth and last part of the encounter took place on Sunday morning and was dedicated to the internal meeting of the network RED, to evaluate the meetings and to establish the next objectives and actions.

The workshops attracted the participation of different partners and potential allies, including a surprise visit from the Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, invited by the comrades of Mujeres Pa'Lante. The mayor listen-

ed to some of the debates and invited the migrant women to present the conclusions and political proposals in the city hall at a later date.

The meetings resulted in a political agenda on what needs to be changed for migrant women, including the demand to end living-in housework which is a form of domestic work migrant women do that is not common in Europe.

In Spain the domestic workers is required to live with the family or person they are working for: *"we consider that the acceptance of internal housework is the normalisation of slavery practices, that deny internal house workers the chance to enjoy decent living conditions. This regime does not include a defined working day and supposes the total disposition of the worker to her employees. This situation affects the worker's emotional, physical and mental health"*.

"We should not only be aware of our oppressions but also of our privileges, so we do not reproduce power dynamics upon other comrades.

We have to break with patriarchal organisation logics ... and should provide self-care spaces within our organisations, where we can take care of ourselves [including the women that have responsibilities for others, such as children and elders].

Recommendations from the workshops

Serbian Workshop: 'Women on the Move'

Atina organized the conference "Women on the Move", on 10 December 2018, in Belgrade, Serbia. The conference discussed with a wide group of stakeholders the position of women and girls in the refugee and migrant population in Serbia in the context of a wider European response. What was unique about the conference, was that good practices and experiences were discussed from a feminist perspective, instead of, for example, a humanitarian point of view. It shed light on the political pushback activists face when promoting women's rights and their huge resilience and strength. Read the [full report](#).



Marieme Jamme, a Senegalese businesswoman and one of the BBC's 100 Women, reflected on her own activism and her journey towards the huge amount of work she is now doing from a position of strength. She talked about her childhood, her traumatic experiences of being a victim of exploitation which she survived as a girl and a young woman, and about her experience of being a migrant woman. All that, in fact, gave her courage and strength to struggle, fight, win, and to go beyond – to start supporting other women and girls who are in vulnerable situations.

In this regard, she emphasized that it is very important for these women to have a safe space where they can speak about their experiences, where they can be heard, and that her current work is mainly directed towards providing these women and girls with an opportunity to do Serbian NGOs and groups talked about how migrant women are portrayed by the media. Migration is often reported as propaganda. For example, Women in Black were facing a lot of challenges in communication with the government and with certain media. There was a particular case of

a pro-government tabloid which on the front page stated that Women in Black received over a million euros to 'work against the state', which was a direct attempt to discredit the organization and the activities aimed at making the government accountable.

Though there were improvements in the way the media approached the issue, Bojana Balević mentioned how violence against refugee women became a topic in the media when the refugees stayed for longer periods of time in Serbia (after March 2016). In terms of covering the stories of vulnerable migrant women, she reminded everyone present about two main principles to be applied: do no harm, and confidentiality.

Danish workshop 'What is good integration? Migrant women's voices'

This workshop was held on 19 January 2019, in Copenhagen, Denmark, organized by K.U.L.U. -Women and Development in collaboration with its member

A shared personal story: Sahra Jama

Sahra Jama was born in Somalia and was separated from her family when war broke out; she was five. She arrived in Denmark in 1992 as a refugee and lived in Jutland which was very far away from anything she had known. Everything was a challenge.

After completing primary school, Sahra Jama studied IT and got a job with TDC (Tele Denmark Communications). As one of only four women hired as technicians, colored and a Muslim, she was met with prejudices from customers. She also experienced different types of prejudice, first from some old Danish people who had many prejudices about black people and Muslims, and then from some Somalis questioning her life choices as a Somali woman.

But she hasn't let these prejudices stop her from achieving her dreams: *"with willpower and strength, you can come a long way, and you should never let your abilities or possibilities be defined by others. Many of us (migrant/refugee) women have been through a lot. If you let yourself be limited by the challenges you meet, then you will not get far"*.

organisation Babaylan – Denmark, the Phillipine Women's network (click here, for a [full report](#)).

The Danish workshop brought together migrant women's organisations and groups to share experiences on strengthening migrant women's voices in society while creating new knowledge and strategies. The workshop unfolded through a combination of personal stories (see box) from migrant women and project

experiences, drawing upon different cultures and organisations. The group agreed that it was important to create spaces for dialogue and concluded with the idea of building a national coalition to support, inform and work together to share migrant women's knowledge of their rights in Denmark and in their respective home countries, and in that way to work with the development of women's rights globally.

"There is a need to bring together different organizations. We face different problems; comparing strengths and weaknesses of various approaches in different cultural contexts."

Ulla Björnberg, national project coordinator, GADIP

Use our knowledge to target policymakers and a wider audience

The above two key lessons match what we set as the first two objectives of the project. The third and fourth expected objectives were to target policymakers to promote feminist policy for migrants and to promote feminist policy for migrants and to enable a wider audience to learn how to implement best practices from other locations.

From each activity, publications and articles were published, and for some there was video available. This has enabled us to reach out to others, which is a very important step in order to multiply these experiences. **Our goal is - through working together and sharing good practices - that we contribute to improving government protection of migrant women and girls' rights.**

We strongly believe - and this project confirmed this belief - that the **key to addressing migrant women's situations, needs, abuses and discriminations lies with women and girls themselves.** The knowledge to do this starts there.

One common policy recommendation that came through loudly in our project is that violence against migrant women should be addressed from the perspective of migrant women and girls. **Gender-based violence policies need to be inclusive of different forms of violence, incorporating institutional violence against migrant women, and such policies should be fully implemented.** There is a need for an increased awareness of what violence is: there are many types of violence that do not necessarily imply physical harm, such as psychological, sexual, material, or economic violence (see: [brief report of our European face to face meeting, March 2018](#)).



“Migrant women are one of the most targeted groups by the ultra-right, in addition to institutional racism: what will states do about this?”,

Jennifer Kamau, one of the founders of the International Women's Space in Germany

(in the picture left, during the UNECE CSO Forum, with next to her Jelena Hrnjak from Atina source: NGOCSW).

While we did not set out to directly engage in European advocacy, our transnational collaboration naturally led to this collective work. We found commonalities in the challenges migrant women face. And it was clear to us that there are gaps in the approaches of different governments, so we need to make visible the demands of migrant women towards European politicians.

It is not uncommon for asylum procedures to be blind to gender-based violence, not recognizing women who are fleeing from violence other than as political refugees, or failing to punish those who violently attack women in shelters and camps. Similarly, policies of addressing gender-based violence can be ‘forgetful’ of addressing the violence migrant women face.

Just as migration policies should be gendered, gender policies should be viewed from the intersection with migration and racism. What has been stated previously is the importance of recognizing the civic contributions of migrant feminists. It will be clear by now that we also **advocate public authorities to provide more direct funds to the work done by migrant women and girls in supporting their communities and other migrants.** This will also help address gender stereotyping, given that groups have more capacity to make visible the work they are doing.

Another common challenge is that migrant women face racism — from institutions, from immigration officials or social workers, but also when they work or want to access work. Strict measures and penalties should be taken on racial profiling; **deconstructing and addressing institutional and structural racism is our final recommendation.**

We were able to present recommendations that came out of the many discussions and experiences shared throughout the project, and with others in two ways.

- We shared our recommendations with the European Union in their consultation for formulating their next [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2024](#).

- As a group we co-chaired the preparatory work and the final discussions on promoting female migrant, undocumented and refugee rights for the Women's Civil Society Forum of the UNECE, the UN Europe and Central Asian states, review of the Beijing+25, and Sustainable Development Goals+5. The Civil Society Forum took place on 28 October 2019, in Geneva, Switzerland. It resulted in a [detailed factsheet](#).

On behalf of the CSO Forum, Jennifer Kamau from International Women's Space in Germany spoke on the second day of the State Forum of the UNECE that took place on 29 and 30 October 2019, in Geneva, Switzerland.

Kamau called upon states to urgently address the institutional racism migrant women face. These women include refugees, undocumented women and girls, trafficked women and others on the move or having arrived in Europe and Central Asia. She was part of our project delegation at the Forum and her speech resonated strongly with the audience members, including government representatives.

Concluding thoughts

The project 'Strengthening Innovative Solutions to Protect Female Migrant and Refugee Rights' is the starting point and a concrete example of the potential for impact when migrant and refugee women's groups come together.

By sharing experiences and building a transnational network among different groups, the project participants are collectively fighting against the shadowy corners where refugee and migrant women's rights are trampled.

For many, this was a new level of collaboration that directly affected their vision of what can be achieved through knowledge sharing and alliance building. The project highlighted the willingness and generosity of spirit among participants to achieve and surpass the project's objectives. By using the strong collective voice that has been created through this project, this network and future activists can push for change in migrant and refugee policies at local, national and European level.