



D3.1. REPORT ON THE PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION OF THE IDENTIFIED PRACTICES USED BY THE CSOs RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER EMPOWERMENT: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH



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RETHINKING INCLUSION AND GENDER

EMPOWERMENT: A PARTICIPATORY

ACTION RESEARCH

SHORT SUMMARY

Objectives

This deliverable aims to evaluate and reflect on the practices used by civil society organisations to promote gender empowerment and inclusion. The specific objectives are:

- To examine the diverse meanings and practices of gender empowerment across CSOs using a bottom-up, participatory methodology
- To evaluate the effectiveness and inclusiveness of CSO practices within a framework of “situated intersectionality”
- To analyse how digital media and public discourse influence and interact with CSO practices
- To foster mutual learning among CSOs across five European countries and support sustainable, context-sensitive practices of inclusion and empowerment.

Main findings

The project found that:

- CSOs operate within highly varied national, political, and funding contexts, affecting their problem framing and scope of action
- “Situated intersectionality” offered a productive framework to analyse how CSOs navigate power dynamics, race, class, and gender in specific locations
- Many CSOs tend to focus on individual support over systemic change due to resource constraints and institutional dependencies
- Participatory evaluations facilitated critical reflection but also surfaced challenges, including power imbalances within organisations, funding competition, and methodological tensions

SHORT SUMMARY

This deliverable reports on participatory evaluations of CSO practices in five countries, using the concept of situated intersectionality. It applies Bacchi’s “Folk Theory of Change” to assess how CSOs define problems, adapt practices, and evaluate impact. Despite challenges, the process revealed key insights into the potential and limitations of CSO work, highlighting the need for reflexivity, context awareness, and collaboration.

The ReIncluGen Project

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Coordinator	UANTWERPEN
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Duration	36 months
Website	www.reinclugen.eu
Consortium	UNIVERSITEIT ANTWERPEN (UANTWERPEN), Belgium UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA (UAB), Spain UNIVERSITA DEGLI STUDI DI TRENTO (UNITN), Italy FMV (FMV), Belgium KUNLABORA (Kunlabora), Belgium SYNYO GmbH (SYNYO), Austria UNIWERSYTET WARSZAWSKI (UNIWARSAW), Poland FUNDACJA FEMINOTEKA (Feminoteka), Poland FUNDACION INTERED (INTERED), Spain La Strada - Der Weg (La Strada), Italy Orient Express (Orient Express), Austria ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM (EUR), The Netherlands

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Deliverable

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Introduction

Across Europe, civil society organisations have been putting a lot of effort into developing practices to facilitate migrant integration, to support gender empowerment, and reduce ethnic/racial, gender and social inequalities in society, as well as the violence people are confronted with. This has led to an enormous set of knowledge, practices and approaches to realise these goals across Europe. However, in times of urgency, for instance to compensate for gender-based violence, or to support people in urgent need to be accommodated in society, civil society organisations (CSOs) do not always find sufficient time and resources to evaluate and reflect upon their own practices, within their organisation but also externally with similar civil society organisations. This is even further complicated by the fact that in many countries, there is some competition among these CSOs that often apply for the same funds and publicity.

In the ReIncluGen project, we have set up a participatory action research, in which both civil society organisations part of the ReIncluGen consortium, as well as organisations working on similar themes, reflect together and with external partners (e.g., academic researchers) on their practices. We have set an additional aim, namely, we wanted to see how these organisations consider the concept “situated intersectionality” within the practices they develop. In doing so, we first want to gain more insights in how practices of the selected civil society organisations were set up, and how these were improved over the course of the project. Second, given the focus on “situated intersectionality”, we also wished to understand the conditions of success of these practices, at the organisational level. Third, we wanted to study the situatedness of practices, which are required to apply similar practices in other organisations working on both similar and different themes, target groups, and are located in different countries. Finally, we aimed to see how the set-up of such a participatory action research could in the future be used elsewhere – both for research and for evaluation purposes for civil society organisations.

In the following sections, we will first set out the theoretical and methodological framework of “situated intersectionality”. Second, we discuss how we implemented our “participatory action research” and the data collection, including the challenges and some ethical reflections. In the results section, we will delve deeper into the comparative analyses of the participatory research action, and, finally, we will discuss our findings. For this deliverable, we bring together several preparatory methodological documents and country reports made by the partners of the ReIncluGen consortium, located in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Poland. But before we do so, we provide a brief overview of the consortium itself.

THE REINCLUGEN PROJECT

The ReIncluGen project received funding from the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research & Innovative Action under Grant Agreement No. 101093987. The consortium consists of 12 partners of which 6 academic partners, 5 civil society organisations and one software solutions partner: University of Antwerp (Belgium), EMPACT vzw (Belgium), Kunlabora (Belgium), Università Degli Studi di Trento (Italy), La Strada/Der Weg (Italy), Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona (Spain), Fundacion Intered (Spain), SYNYO GmbH (Austria), Orient Express (Austria), Uniwersytet Warszawski (Poland), Fundacja Feminoteka (Poland), Erasmus University of Rotterdam (the Netherlands).

The ReIncluGen project aims to study and co-construct creative and innovative ways to help reverse socio-economic and cultural inequalities and help realise gender empowerment and inclusion of migrantised women and girls across societal, cultural and economic contexts in Europe. In order to realise this the project aims to rethink and move beyond gender empowerment as a container term. In doing so, ReIncluGen will consider a more critical and holistic approach of empowerment that aims to rethink and re-imagine gender empowerment as a process, with different manifestations depending on the socio-political context, rather than as a loosely articulated outcome. By researching the various concepts of gender empowerment that are present, as well as the discourses in digital media, we will automatically also touch on issues of structural violence.

Focusing on the target group of migrantised women and girls and the diversity and agency within this group is of particular relevance which leads us to approach gender empowerment as interrelated to issues of gender, class and race. As a consortium, we strongly support the right to movement and migration of every person. Despite the potential for this right to migration to improve women's lives, we are aware of the many disadvantages and risks that women face as compared to men. Moreover, our focus on migrantised women and girls will bring along different meanings and understandings of gender empowerment that will challenge liberal and Western notions of freedom and empowerment on which many policy initiatives and policies are built in a paternalistic way to 'empower' or 'save' migrantised females.

The first objective of the ReIncluGen project is to use a bottom-up and participatory approach to unpack the different meanings of gender 'empowerment' across societal spheres and contexts. A second objective is to evaluate the empowering and inclusive work and impact of CSOs in order to further support them in their needs. A third objective is to examine the discourses and actions of media and digital cultures in strengthening, supporting or contributing to gender empowerment. In doing so, we aim to understand the impact of these media discourses on the used CSO practices and vice versa.

APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF “SITUATED INTERSECTIONALITY”

In this deliverable, we will build further on earlier deliverables from the ReIncluGen project, that discuss the topic of “situated intersectionality”, developed by Yuval-Davis (2015) and concept of “intersectionality” as developed by Crenshaw (1989). This concept builds further on building further on the “feminist standpoint theory” (Harding, 1991) and “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1988). Key in this concept is that it allows us to reflect on how power constructions are captured and take place in a specific location. The situatedness of intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2015; Anthias, 2012) considers geographical, social and temporal power locations of individual or collective social actors. In doing so, this concept takes into account *transtemporality* (e.g., referring to historical moments), *transcality* (e.g., referring to particular social, economic, political and cultural contexts) and *translocality* (i.e., the social divisions) (Yuval-Davis, 2015).

Applied to the ReIncluGen project, and in particular to studying practices developed by civil society organisations to support empowerment processes of migrantised women across European societies, we apply the concepts of translocality, transtemporality and transcality in the following ways.

- To gain more insights in *translocality*, we applied a comparative approach to study gender empowerment, including five distinct country settings, and compare practices both between and within these countries. This translocality is used to understand how geographical and digital boundaries overlap and differ.
- To apply *transcality*, we conducted participatory research using a ‘shared authority’ perspective with civil society organisations working within the socio-cultural and socio-economic spheres. In doing so, we study their relation to state authorities, how their work is embedded at the neighbourhood, local, regional, national and supranational level, and in media and digital spheres.
- And finally, to apply *transtemporality*, we started by using a historical lens to understand how perspectives and policies concerning gender empowerment change over time. We first did this by focusing on policies and datasets to understand patterns and differences across the selected European countries.

To summarise, we took the analytical and methodological framework of situated intersectionality to conduct comparative participatory action research across European countries. Using this framework to examine the notion of culture enriched and validated our understanding of (gender) empowerment and inclusion.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTEXTS IN EUROPE

Before we start setting out the methodological approach and data collection, we first need to sketch the civil society contexts and landscapes in each of the countries involved. This gives an idea about the quantity and specificity of each organisation, their funding schemes and dependencies, and reliance on/competition between each other. We will focus especially on civil society working on topics related to..., such as migrant integration and empowerment. Also, to consider the local civil society, in each of the partner countries, we will focus especially on the civil society in the locations where fieldwork is conducted.

AUSTRIA

The civil society landscape in Austria concerned with gender equality and inclusion is extensive, diverse, and deeply rooted in various social and political movements. Civil society organisations vary widely in terms of structure, size, and focus: from grassroots and volunteer-led initiatives to professional non-governmental organisations with multi-disciplinary teams. Many of these organisations have decades of experience and have become key players in public discourse, service provision, and policy advocacy.

There is a broad spectrum of thematic focus areas, including gender-based violence, health, labour market inclusion, migration, sex work, LGBTQIA+ rights, and intersectional discrimination. Some organisations specialise in supporting specific groups, such as women with a migration background, Roma women, Black women, or sex workers, often offering multilingual services and first-language counselling. Notably, Vienna is home to many such civil society organisations, reflecting the city’s demographic diversity and political prioritisation of gender equality.

Funding for CSOs is mainly provided by multiple levels of the state (federal, provincial, municipal), often in the form of project-based grants. While the total volume of funding has increased in recent years—

particularly since 2020, with emergency Covid-19 support and increased attention to femicide—many organisations criticise the bureaucratic burden and short-term nature of project-based funding. Basic funding mechanisms, such as those provided by the City of Vienna, are praised for allowing more autonomous, needs-based work.

Despite a shared commitment to gender equality, ideological divides exist among civil society organisations, particularly on topics such as sex work, trans inclusion, or the role of religion and culture. While the majority of organisations hold progressive views, some affiliated with right-wing parties or conservative ideologies promote more restrictive or exclusionary interpretations of gender empowerment.

The sector also includes umbrella organisations such as the Österreichische Frauenring (ÖFR) and the Netzwerk Frauen- und Mädchenberatungsstellen, which facilitate cooperation and strengthen political influence. However, due to the heterogeneity of actors and approaches, collaboration among CSOs varies—some work closely through networks and coalitions, while others operate independently or even in tension with one another.

BELGIUM

In Belgium, there are many civil society organizations working on gender empowerment and inclusion and play a significant role in advocating for gender equality, women's rights, and inclusivity across various sectors. These organizations vary in size, focus, and methods of operation, but they share a common goal of promoting gender equity and supporting marginalized communities. Nonetheless, Belgium has a rich and diverse landscape of civil society organisations working on gender empowerment and inclusion, funded through a combination of public and private resources. These organizations often collaborate in advocacy and project implementation, while also facing challenges related to funding and coordination.

In Belgium, civil society organisations focus on advocating for gender equality in areas such as education (IGVM), healthcare (Rebelle vzw), sexual rights (SENSOA), labor rights and gender and ethnicity (Ella vzw), political representation (Vrouwenraad), and social protection (CIRE, Vrouwenraad). Some work specifically on issues related to gender-based violence (GAMS vzw), sexual and reproductive rights, and the rights of LGBTQ+ communities (Merhaba). Although the CSO landscape is limited given the smaller geographical area, there are increasing civil society organisations that specifically emphasize intersectionality, recognizing the overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalization faced by individuals due to factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status, by focusing on specific target groups or topics.

Civil society organisations working on gender empowerment and inclusion typically rely on a mix of funding sources, which include: government grants by the Belgian federal and regional governments (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels-Capital), direct funding (through specific ministries or agencies that focus on gender equality or inclusion) and European Union Funding (programs such as the European Social Fund (ESF)). This often means that policy plans of CSOs are written along the lines and using the terminology of the funding agencies and governments. Although the government may try to impose a strict framework which the CSOs have to comply with, some CSOs try to stay true to their own principles when it comes to execution. In case this would result in questions by the subsidizing government institute,

the CSO may refer to their "critical role", in the sense that they offer critical and independent insight into societal processes. In short, while some CSOs lose their critical role to comply with government demands, some CSOs in Belgium have strategies to widen the narrow framework that a government may try to impose.

Civil society organisations working on gender empowerment and inclusion in Belgium often engage in various forms of collaboration and networking but some competition can also arise, particularly due to the limited funding resources and funding agencies. In these cases, organizations might compete for the same government grants. While many CSOs work in complementary areas, the landscape can sometimes be fragmented, with small organizations working in silos. However, increasing collaboration and coordination are helping to create a more unified voice. Funded by the Flemish government, some efforts have been put into mapping out all these initiatives (e.g., sociale kaart).

ITALY

Italy has a vast and dynamic civil society landscape, with thousands of civil society organisations operating across a wide range of domains, including social inclusion, migration support, gender-based violence prevention, and education. The sector is shaped by a mix of small, community-based initiatives and large, well-structured organizations with national and international reach. Many civil society organisations receive funding from multiple sources, including public grants (at municipal, regional, and national levels), European funding programs (such as AMIF or ESF+), private donations, and, increasingly, philanthropic foundations. However, competition for resources is high, and financial stability remains a major challenge, particularly for smaller organizations. Civil society organisations often operate within networks—both formal and informal—where collaboration and resource-sharing take place, though fragmentation and competition for funding sometimes limit synergy.

Within this national landscape, the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol (TAA) presents a unique case due to its distinctive political and administrative structure. The region is divided into two autonomous provinces—Trento (Trentino) and Bolzano/Bozen (Alto Adige/South Tyrol)—which enjoy significant self-governance, including independent welfare policies and funding streams. This autonomy deeply impacts how civil society organisations function, as each province manages its own funding allocation and policy frameworks. As a result, civil society organisations in Trentino and Alto Adige often develop in response to distinct regional priorities and funding mechanisms rather than adhering to a uniform national model.

In Trentino, civil society organisations are primarily Italian-speaking and tend to focus on social inclusion, employment, and education for migrant populations, often supported by regional funding schemes and collaborations with local authorities. Civil society organisations here tend to be closely integrated with social welfare institutions and have access to regional development funds. In Alto Adige/South Tyrol, where the population is bilingual (Italian and German), civil society organisations must navigate a more complex sociolinguistic environment. Many organizations cater specifically to German-speaking or Italian-speaking communities, and migration-related civil society organisations face additional challenges due to language barriers and integration models that emphasize linguistic autonomy as a prerequisite for social inclusion. Civil society organisations in Alto Adige/South Tyrol often work within broader networks

that include Austrian and German organizations, benefiting from cross-border collaborations but also experiencing different bureaucratic constraints compared to Trentino.

Across both provinces, civil society organisations targeting migrantised women—like those selected for this study—play a crucial role in addressing gender-based violence, access to education, and labour market inclusion. However, their size and scope vary significantly: some operate at a regional level with broad networks, while others remain more localized and focused on immediate service provision. This diversity reflects broader patterns in the Italian civil society sector, where organizational scale, financial sustainability, and target populations shape operational strategies and effectiveness. Despite these differences, collaboration—whether through formal partnerships or informal exchanges of expertise—remains a key feature of the civil society in TAA, allowing organizations to navigate institutional constraints and better serve migrant communities.

SPAIN

Spain has a broad and diverse civil society landscape, playing a key role in gender empowerment and the inclusion of migrant women and girls. The importance of CSOs in this field is closely linked to the characteristics of the Spanish welfare system, which relies heavily on social actors to provide essential services, especially in the areas of migration, asylum, and gender-based violence. This role is further reinforced by a strong tradition of feminist activism and advocacy across the country.

Civil society organisations in Spain can be grouped into several categories: institutional councils involved in public policymaking (e.g., Consell Català de les Dones or Consell Municipal d'Immigració in Barcelona), international NGOs such as Save the Children or the Red Cross, national NGOs like InteRed—working on transformative education and gender equality—and numerous grassroots initiatives, many of them led by migrant women. These grassroots initiatives are deeply rooted in community organising and offer services such as legal assistance, first-language counselling, mutual aid networks, and economic empowerment initiatives (e.g., catering, handicraft sales), particularly aimed at domestic and care workers.

Among the most prominent organisations founded by migrant women are SEDOAC and Territorio Doméstico in Madrid, as well as SINDILLAR, Mujeres Pa'lante, MUET, and Amb Cura in Barcelona. These groups have become key actors in advocating for labour rights, denouncing gender-based violence, and creating spaces of solidarity, care, and political voice.

Despite their impact, CSOs face significant challenges. Their funding depends largely on public grants from regional or municipal governments, often project-based. After the 2008 financial crisis, many mid-sized organisations disappeared, while larger ones consolidated their presence and smaller ones shifted to cooperative models to survive. Today, competition for limited resources continues to fragment the sector, although recent years have seen efforts to build joint platforms and coalitions, especially in the feminist and migrant rights fields.

Although a large part of the third sector—especially among technical staff—tends to align with progressive values, there are also important ideological divisions. Some organisations are linked to

religious institutions, which can lead to more charitable or assistance-based approaches and introduce red lines on issues such as sexual and reproductive health. Additionally, there are tensions between organisations that adopt a more universalist understanding of women's rights and others that focus more explicitly on cultural difference and respect for diversity. In recent years, there has also been a noticeable increase in organisations led by migrant and racialised activists who question mainstream approaches and representation within the sector, demanding a critical revision of how migrant women's rights are addressed from intersectional and decolonial perspectives.

A distinctive feature of the Spanish context is the strong presence of feminist perspectives within the civil society sector. Some organisations maintain close ties with public institutions and engage in consultative or advocacy work, while others adopt a more activist stance, focused on street mobilisation and campaigns such as CIEs NO or RegularizaciónYa. In recent years, the emergence of racialised and migrant women in leadership positions has challenged dominant feminist agendas and pushed for the inclusion of intersectional and decolonial approaches.

In short, the civil society sector in Spain reflects both the strengths and contradictions of the broader welfare system and political context. On the one hand, CSOs have played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and policy on gender and inclusion. On the other, they often face structural limitations, political hostility (particularly from far-right discourses), and internal tensions around leadership, inclusivity, and representational strategies. Despite these challenges, their ongoing mobilisation and strategic alliance-building remain a key driver of transformation in the field of gender empowerment and the inclusion of migrant women.

POLAND

The landscape of Polish civil society organizations has been shaped by historical legacies, socio-political transformations, and shifting policy frameworks. Following the democratic transition of the early 1990s, the number of civil society organisations in Poland grew significantly, addressing social, cultural, and economic challenges. Over the past three decades, the sector has evolved in response to political shifts, fluctuating public trust, and changes in funding structures. While some organizations have flourished, others have struggled with financial and institutional constraints.

Polish civil society organisations operate across various domains, including education, human rights, gender equality, environmental protection, and labour rights. Some were created to address emerging social needs, others reactivated after being dissolved during the communist era, and still others established as branches of international organizations. However, their development has been uneven, with funding and institutional support often influenced by political alignments. Between 2015 and 2023, government policies favored organizations aligned with the ruling party's agenda, while independent and progressive initiatives faced financial and legal barriers.

Public perception and engagement remain key challenges for civil society organisations in Poland. Despite relatively low participation rates compared to other European countries, public trust in non-governmental organisations reached an all-time high in 2023. Increased personal contact with civil society organisations, financial transparency, and tangible results have contributed to this shift. Grassroots

activism has played a crucial role in shaping civil society, with informal initiatives often transitioning into formal organizations. Poland's history of social movements, such as the Solidarity movement, has fostered a culture of civic engagement (e.g., mass support for the Polish Women's Strike in 2020).

METHODOLOGY

In the methodology section, we will first set out the methodological approach used to evaluate practices, namely the Folk Theory of Change (Bacchi, 2012), to then describe the sampling strategy and sample in the five fieldwork countries, and finally, to reflect on challenges and positionalities during the fieldwork.

Folk theory of change

To set up the participatory evaluation research, we followed Bacchi's (2012) steps of the Folk Theory of Change, or commonly referred to as **"What is the problem represented to be?"**. In our methodology, we followed four different steps to map out practices, their rationale and learning on how they can be applied elsewhere or/improved.

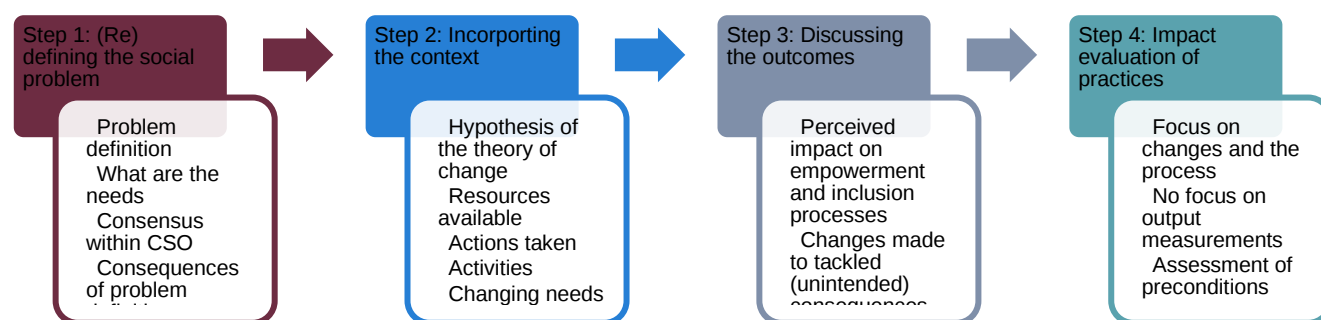
Step 1: (Re)defining of the general societal problem the CSO is working on

Step 2: Incorporating the context and reflect on potential to improve/adjust

Step 3: Selection of 'inspiring practices' and their application

Step 4: Impact evaluation of practices

FIGURE 1: THEORY OF CHANGE



STEP 1: DEFINING THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

In the first step, civil society organisations have to (re)define what is the 'social problem' they are tackling. This could for instance relate to supporting migrantised women in providing access to education and/or training, dealing with gender-based violence, facilitating protection of migrant rights, and so on. In doing so, the aim is not only discuss what the 'social problem' is that is argued to be tackled within the organisation, but also whether there is a consensus within the organization that this is the problem they tackle, and how it corresponds to the needs of the participants that are part of the civil society organisational' activities. As follow-up questions, the idea is that civil society organisations discuss the prevailing assumptions about this problem, how this also is tackled differently within the organisation, what is left unspoken and what the consequences are of how they tackle this problem.

STEP 2: INCORPORATING THE CONTEXT: FOLK THEORY OF CHANGE

In the second step, civil society organisations have to discuss within their organisation and together with members of other organisations and scholars, how they could further realise change and tackle their social problem. They discuss how the practices they implemented are corresponding to the set objectives, and how they tackle the social problem. Hence, they discuss whether their practices are transformative, potential barriers, and reflect on ways these objectives are visible and measured. In particular, for our research project, we discuss whether objectives regarding empowering practices and inclusion are met, how the problem definition changed (and why/how), the consequences of their practices, differential impacts across participants and groups, sustainability over time, and additional problems that arose. During this process, we encourage all participants to further reconceptualise their practices and reflect on potential innovations that resulted in change.

STEP 3: DISCUSSING INSPIRING PRACTICES AND THEIR APPLICATION

During the third step, all civil society organisations describe inspiring practices, to which social problems they correspond, the target group, nature of the activities and practices, location, actors involved, and the resources or preconditions needed, resulting in a large set of practices, set up by CSOs.

STEP 4: IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE PRACTICES

In the final step, we include an impact evaluation which intends to determine potential good practices' capacity to solve social problems. We will not evaluate the 'output' of the practices. Instead, we rather assess how these practices effectively change the lives of the participants, provide a reflection, or support the civil society organisation in their future practices, approaches and alignment between problem definition and activities. Attention has been given to how transferrable these practices are and how the impact of these practices can be increased over time. This approach allows us to move away from policy/intervention evaluations' output, but try to understand why they work (or not). We aim to grasp the change produced by this policy, intervention or activity and how it positively/negatively impacted the target population. This facilitates taking into consideration the impact of other intervening or contextual factors that further impact the actual practice. Or put differently, the impact evaluation aims to map out "*what has happened compared to what would have happened if the intervention had not been implemented*". We are for this inspired by the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria¹, that take into account the purposes of policies/interventions: 1) relevance, 2) effectiveness, 3) efficiency, 4) impact and 5) sustainability. During this participatory evaluation, this process can function as a self-assessment tool that is supported by external facilitators. To realise this goal, the initial aim was to set up the "**critical friend method**" (Booth & Ainscow, 2000). Each civil society organisation will have an external facilitator to help conduct the sessions. The facilitator will bring an external view to the organisation, but from a peer position. The facilitators are ideally persons that are not included in the consortium, but rather be part of another civil society organisation. However, as we will show later on, this critical friend method needed to be adjusted, in response to reactions from the participating civil society organisations.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

TABLE 1 OVERVIEW OF SAMPLE, PER CSO, COUNTRY AND STEPS													
Per CSO	Number of staff members present				Functions within CSO				Number of migrantised or racialized participants per CSO				Other remarks
Steps	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Austria													
CSO1	6	3	3	3	FO; EAM ; BM	CW; BM	PA: M	PA: M	3	2	0	1	Managing board of the CSO is 2 migrantised and 1 white person. Staff is mixed
CSO2		2	3	3		PA; PD	SC W; SLC	SC W; SLC		0	0	0	Supervisor is a migrantised person, staff is mixed
CSO3	6	6	5	5	FO; SC W; PR; SLC	SLC; ME; M	PA; SLC; M	PA; SLC; M	1	1	1	0	White staff and management, one migrantised staff, and external translators
Belgium													
CSO1	2		1		S; SCW		SCW		1		0		White supervisor
CSO2	2		2		PO; SCW		SCW; D		2		2		
CSO3	1		DO		HR		DO		1		DO		Black HR manager but management structure of CSO3 is mainly White, one White leader, approx. 20% White management, 80% are migrantised women.
CSO4	NA		1		NA		D		NA		1		The first session was taken up between facilitator & CSO4 online before step 2.
Italy													
CSO1	3	3	3	3	PO; SC W, SC W	PO; SC W, SC W	PO, SC W, SC W	PO, SC W, SC W	0	0	0	0	
CSO2	3	2	2	2	D, SC W,	SC W. SC W	SC W; SC W	SC W, SC W,	0	0	0	0	

					SC W								
CSO3	3	0	0	1	D, SC W; SC W,	0	0	D	1	0	0	0	
Spain													
CSO1	5	5	1	1	PO; SC W	PO; SC W	scw	scw	0	0	0	0	No migrantised staff
CSO2	2	2	0	0	PO; SC W	PO; SC W			1	1	0	0	Coordinator is a migrantised woman, but from aor very different background than participants
CSO3	5	4	0	0	SC W;P A; D	SC W;P A			1	1	0	0	1 migrantised staff
Poland													
CSO1	1 0	8	3	3	D; PA; SC W; C	D; PO; SC W; C	D; PO	PA: M	3	3	0	0	White staff and management
CSO2	4	4	2	2	D; PO	D; PO	D; PO	SC W; SLC	0	0	0	0	White staff and management
CSO3	2	2	2	2	D; M	D; M	D; M	PA; SLC; M	1	1	1	1	White staff and management, all but one staff member is migrantised

Legend: DO: Dropped out; HR: HR manager; PO: Project officer/coordinator; SCW: Socio-cultural worker; S: Supervisor; D: Director; FO: Financial Officer; Board member; EAP: Emergency Apartment Manager; PR: Public Relations; SLC: Social and Legal Counselling; Pedagogical Director; ME: Monitoring and Evaluation; M: Management; PA: Project Assistant; C: Consultants

Reflections on the fieldwork and researcher positionalities

Some reflections need to be made per fieldwork site. First, we will share some ethical concerns and tensions that were also voiced and discussed with the Independent Ethics Advisor. Second, we will discuss challenges related to recruitment and participation. Third, we will reflect on researcher positionalities and power (im)balances.

ETHICAL TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES

We conducted fieldwork with five different research teams, each of them had different researcher positionalities, conditions and civil society organisations. On top, per country, one of the civil society organisations included in this fieldwork is also a part of our consortium. In each country, the CSO that also was part of the consortium, facilitated engagement with the project and evaluation, supported the civil society organisations. This specific set-up - having one CSO part of the project consortium - also created specific challenges or tensions between the research/participant roles they took up in the research process. Furthermore, this complicated their position towards the other civil society organisations included in the fieldwork.

First, all partners voiced concerns or had questions regarding the participatory evaluation process with civil society organisations. A general feeling among our partner civil society organisations is that this fieldwork **feels burdensome for the other civil society organisations participating**. This was especially the case as these other civil society organisations are not remunerated to participate while the partner civil society organisations were. As demonstrated by the fieldwork in Poland and Spain, only the civil society organisation formally participating in the project engaged fully for the entire fieldwork. The other two organizations' fading commitment to participate in the project along the way, which may result from the lack of resources (e.g., time, staff members).

Second, another point of concern is that some partner civil society organisations did not feel comfortable to **take up the role of the “critical friend”** as required in the initially written methodological guide (MS8). These “critical friends” need to provide feedback on the practices of the other civil society organisations. This tension needs to be considered in the context of the competitive field of CSOs in some countries but also the lack of time, skills and resource allocation that can be spent on research projects that do not immediately relate to one's activities. One partner refers to it as follows: *“it is difficult as a civil society organisation to criticize someone else without it being seen as hostile especially given the neoliberal context where civil society organisations are pitted against each other for funding”*. Related to this some countries tried to look for an external entity to take up this role of “critical friend”. Nonetheless, this too was challenging especially due to financial constraints but also as due to lack of specific skills present in the organisation. This was for instance voiced by the partners in Spain who argued: *“evaluating and facilitating a participatory evaluation process requires skills that not all organizations need to have.”*

Third, next to power imbalances between civil society organisations, another concern that was raised had to do with **power imbalances** within civil society organisations or among staff members of the same civil society organisation and how to deal with this in the context of this evaluation approach. Although the methodological guide that was initially set up by our consortium provided a space for the “critical friend” or facilitator of the sessions to take notes and be critical about this aspect, the partners located in Belgium were especially concerned with how it could affect or bias the course of the discussion during the sessions. In Spain, the research team identified that some educators and youth workers seemed to feel evaluated — either by colleagues or by the researchers — as suggested by moments of silence or visible hesitation. To avoid reinforcing power asymmetries, the team adopted a facilitative posture, ensuring balanced speaking turns, not leaving responses unfinished, and avoiding pressure on those who appeared uncomfortable or exposed. Still, the team remained aware that it is difficult for all perspectives

to emerge equally in a group setting. These situations, however, could sometimes be balanced by approaching certain participants' views in different spaces or at other moments.

Finally, in terms of **'feeling' evaluated and evaluating practices** from other civil society organisations, **mixed responses** were obtained. For instance, in Italy, the participating organisations were highly receptive to the evaluation process. They saw it as a valuable opportunity for self-reflection, a structured moment to assess their own methodologies, and a chance to share insights about their work. Many expressed appreciation for the feedback, seeing it as an opportunity to validate their efforts and identify areas for improvement. This contrasts with the expectations of one civil society organisation in Belgium, that made it very clear during a mail conversation, that they had expected more input from us and less efforts from them after which she revealed her initial expectations when agreeing to collaborate in our project: *"we already helped to facilitate the observations and research for the other work package, so we were especially interested in how our organisation would come out in the European comparative analysis of the fieldwork. For this fieldwork, we don't see a true added value for our organisation"*. This quote demonstrates that this director was sceptical about what they could learn through an evaluation approach with other national civil society organisations. In Spain, the three organisations generally welcomed the proposal. Interestingly, the two that did not receive financial compensation were particularly motivated to engage, as the opportunity to connect with each other was seen as valuable in itself. However, logistical challenges arose due to the distance between them, and one of the coordinators also expressed concern about the initiative's impact on an already overstretched team. At one point, additional sensitivities also emerged regarding how to structure joint activities between two of the Spanish organisations. While both were genuinely motivated to collaborate, differing expectations around how to involve participants required careful navigation. To avoid potential misunderstandings, the research team made a particular effort to clarify the main objective of the evaluation process and to support a shared understanding of how the collaboration would unfold, ensuring that participation felt appropriate and comfortable for all involved.

These mixed feelings resulted in different approaches to the fieldwork, where for instance in Austria and Poland, the fieldwork was focused on **internal self-evaluation**, whereas in the other fieldwork sites more exchange of practices between organisations occurred. In Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland and in one of the CSOs in Spain throughout the process and in the three Spanish CSOs during the initial steps, the researchers were appointed as 'a critical friend'. They had already conducted earlier fieldwork and interviews on multiple occasions during other phases of the project and were already familiar with the structure of the organizations, and their main approach and ideas. Teams were not regarded as 'outsiders', who do not know anything of the organisation or the landscape. At the same time, they were still regarded as neutral enough for the discussions to be relaxed and open, and some things were 'explained' to them as unfamiliar with, which helped them to summarize the main points for themselves, a point that might have been skipped as repeating the obvious, if it was only conducted within the teams.

Having researchers as 'critical friends' offered institutional credibility and positioned the researchers as external observers, but steps were taken to minimize power imbalances by adopting a facilitative rather than extractive approach. In this regard, and when applied in this specific way, the "critical friend" methodology proved to be an invaluable asset. The critical friend, who had deep expertise in migration and CSO work, acted as a bridge between researchers and staff of the civil society organisations,

facilitating trust and ensuring discussions remained grounded in practical realities. This role helped mitigate potential hierarchies, allowing representatives of the civil society organisations to feel that the evaluation was conducted *with* them rather than *on* them. The critical friend's presence also reinforced the legitimacy of the research process, as their knowledge of the field reassured CSOs that the study was based on a nuanced understanding of their work.

In the case of Spain, the research team adopted a facilitative role, prioritising the idea that the participatory evaluation process belonged to the organisations themselves. Efforts were made to reinforce that it was the civil society organisations who were evaluating their own practices, with the researchers supporting and accompanying the process rather than acting as external evaluators. The three researchers who acted as facilitators had previously worked as social workers, technical staff, or coordinators in civil society organisations, which allowed them to adopt a particularly close and empathetic position towards the dynamics of the sector. These shared prior experiences likely fostered mutual recognition, helping to create a safe space for reflection and to minimise potential power imbalances. Moreover, having worked on the design of WP3 as academic professionals, the facilitators had an in-depth understanding of the theoretical framework concerning the representation of social problems. This prior knowledge allowed them to 'translate' abstract concepts during the sessions into more tangible examples rooted in the organisations' everyday work. This approach helped participants engage more easily with complex ideas, fostering a richer and more accessible self-evaluation process.

In Poland, it helped that all researchers participating in the discussion were women, feminist scholars with experience in studying women's organizations, which may have impacted the fieldwork in certain ways. For example, it may have encouraged participants to speak more openly about the organizations' struggles to advocate for women's rights within the Polish political context or to speak about their clients' experiences that are gender specific. Given that the researchers have been cooperating with the civil society organisations for an extended period of time and became familiar to the participants, there was no impression of a position-related power imbalance that might have hindered the process of participatory evaluation.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF ORGANISATIONS

The **selection of the organisations** differed across partner countries. While the landscape of civil society organisations was in some countries more differentiated than in others, this was also reflected in the selection of the organisations. For instance, in Poland, there is a longer history of organisations focusing on women's positions in society and gender-based rights. By contrast, there is only a relatively short history of organizations offering assistance strictly to migrantised individuals. Hence, all three of the recruited organizations can be characterized as women's organizations, that is organizations dedicated to advocating for and addressing issues that affect women, including gender equality, political and economic empowerment, reproductive rights, and social justice. For two out of the three selected organizations assisting migrantized women is a secondary area of activity. One can be described as a women's organization dedicated to assisting migrantized women.

Also the **engagement within the organisation** differed, depending on the time spent at the organisation or the (professional) position one took up (e.g., managerial positions, etc.). For instance, in Italy, differences were noted in participation and engagement depending on the level of familiarity with the

organisation. The level of familiarity with the CSOs influenced participants' engagement: regular attendees felt comfortable sharing their experiences, while first-time participants needed more time to adapt to the research setting. Within these organisations, not everyone was represented equally. As shown in the Italian example, migrantised women were harder to include in this fieldwork as they often had to carry out the primary caregiving responsibilities within their families, making it difficult for some to fully engage in the planned activities. In Austria, during the fieldwork, it was especially clear that people occupying managerial positions talked more during the first sessions than others. In the Spanish organisations, differences in engagement were also observed depending on staff profiles. Those primarily involved in fundraising or technical training, who did not come from a social work background, were more reluctant to continue dedicating time to the research process. In addition, in two of the organisations, individuals in managerial positions were more likely to take the lead in discussions or set the tone, which subtly influenced the group dynamic. Regarding the participation of migrantised members of the CSOs, although two of the participating organisations had strong ties with volunteers of migrant background, these individuals did not take part in the participatory evaluation sessions. This likely did not reflect an intention to exclude their voices, but rather a deliberate decision not to overburden them or because of availability. It is worth noting that in one of these organisations, migrant volunteers/staff members had been actively involved in the WP2 focus groups. However, by this later stage of the collaboration, the decision not to involve them may have been guided more by a concern for their workload than by a denial of their status as full members. These ambivalences may also reflect broader internal debates within the organisations about what can or should be expected from volunteers members.

Finally, in all countries, **time constraints** were mentioned, which hindered the timely organisation of meetings. This hindered the participation from organisations with demanding schedules, differing organisational capacities and limited availability for external engagements, and getting them all together in the same space. This made it more challenging to organise joint meetings. In some countries, this also caused organisations to 'drop out' of the research, as was the case in Belgium and Poland where one organisation was replaced half way through the research process by another one. In Austria, this resulted in parallel sessions with civil society organisations, and thus the organisation of two separate self-evaluation processes. As one organisation dropped out, in Austria, instead of reaching out to find a new civil society organisation, the fieldwork continued with two distinct departments, with different goals, staff and practices, to conduct the fieldwork. In addition, in some countries, such as Poland, time constraints were combined with geographical distances between organisations, resulting in changing from face-to-face sessions to online meetings. In Spain, participation in the participatory evaluation was facilitated by the strong relationships established during WP2. However, as in other contexts, time constraints and geographical distance complicated the process. In the case of one of the CSOs, significant difficulties arose in bringing the full staff together (in fact, this was ultimately not possible) due to their intensive engagement in day-to-day social intervention work. Ongoing activities with participants and unforeseen events made it challenging to organise complete or longer sessions. During the sessions, it was evident that staff members were preoccupied with other urgent matters, such as deadlines for grant reporting, paperwork to support users, and other daily management tasks. Although the sessions remained rich and productive, this situation limited the staff's ability to fully engage in the reflective processes encouraged by the self-evaluation.

Being aware of these dynamics, and recognising the organisations' previous contributions to the project, the research team was careful to avoid overburdening actors operating with limited resources. Despite these challenges, two of the CSOs showed a strong interest in the evaluation process and were highly motivated by the opportunity to collaborate with one another. However, their geographical distance made such collaboration logistically difficult. Paradoxically, the shared desire to work together that motivated their participation also became the main obstacle to realising joint sessions. To adapt, Steps 1 and 2 were conducted separately, and Steps 3 and 4 were initially planned as joint activities. Nevertheless, due to scheduling constraints, the Step 3 session could not be carried out.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITIES AND POWER (IM)BALANCES

Overall, **gender** also played a crucial role during the fieldwork, with only female researchers conducting the fieldwork (e.g., in Poland, Belgium, Austria and Spain). Concerning the participants of the civil society organisations, more women participated compared to men in all of the sessions. In some sessions, only women were present, while in other gender-mixed sessions, gender played a role in shaping interactions. Given the focus on women, in these sessions, the discussions often centered on gender-specific barriers and opportunities, further reinforcing an inclusive space. In Spain, in CSO3_SP, one staff member —the only man in the team— who was primarily responsible for grant management and administrative tasks, did not actively participate in the reflective activities. However, this lack of involvement appeared to be more related to his specific role within the organisation, less connected to direct work with the participants, than to gender dynamics. **Age differences** were less prominent in shaping power relations. In Italy or Spain younger participants sometimes deferred to older women in discussions. However, it is difficult to determine whether age was truly the factor shaping these dynamics, or whether it was more related to the leadership roles they occupied. In one of the cases in Spain, internal hierarchies seem to shape participation during the self-evaluation sessions. Facilitators noted that more recently incorporated staff members were more hesitant to express their opinions, while more senior staff were significantly more vocal. When the president of the organisation joined the session, there was a noticeable decrease in the willingness of other staff members to share critical reflections openly. In other fieldwork sites, no age differences were noted.

Within the organisation, power imbalances were noticed related to the positions people took up in the organisation and this intersected with their own positionality in society. In this fieldwork, being part of a **migrantised/minoritised group** in society was a particularly relevant factor that shaped power dynamics in the sessions. Due to the stepwise selection of participants through the organisations they work for, we noticed that there were considered migrantised/minoritized women present in the organisations - especially since we included some organisations that focus mainly on migrant self-organisations, or were fully set up for and by migrantised/minoritized women. Unique in this regard is one organisation in Belgium, which is an umbrella organisation, in which members join voluntarily and are in a sense their own boss. The relationship between the umbrella organisation and the member organisations was therefore more clearly defined - each person/organisation only collaborating on their own terms. These different power relations between all members participating in the sessions was therefore felt. Nonetheless this was not always the case. In another organisation in Belgium, during the first session, the white manager was present together with a staff member. During a discussion the staff member with a Roma background felt offended by her supervisor when mentioning a situation of discrimination in the working field after which the staff member reminded her supervisor on their different positionalities

referring primarily to their ethnic backgrounds. During the Italian fieldwork, similar differences in positionalities were present, with staff members taking up leadership roles were professionals that were part of the majority group, whereas the others participants were racialized and migrantised women. While this dynamic could have led to tensions, it was mitigated by the longstanding relationships of trust between staff and participants.

In Austria, in one of the CSOs, most of the staff, participating in the evaluation sessions, with one exception, were white women. But in the other CSO, in both teams the dynamics between employees with different backgrounds was balanced, which is also specifically expressed in the hierarchical structure of the organization which makes sure that there is no predominance of staff members with Austrian background in the managerial team. This was felt in the discussions as well. In addition, in one of the CSOs in Spain, one of the young staff members had a migrant background, coming from a Moroccan family. Her presence contributed positively to the discussions and was perceived as enriching the understanding of the issue, as she was fully integrated into the team as a professional. Such a presence could have introduced a more personal, experience-based perspective, or alternatively, it might have created an unbalanced relational dynamic within the sessions. However, it remains uncertain how the dynamics might have shifted if a woman previously supported by the organisation had participated. This shows how **the prevailing organisational cultures** played a crucial role in fostering equality. For some organisations, many operated with participatory decision-making structures, in which the hierarchical power imbalances were minimal in the sessions, while this was certainly not the case for all organisations. This was the case in many civil society organisations.

Aside from positionalities of civil society organisations, it is crucial to note that there were differences in the positionalities of the researchers. In Austria, the research was conducted by white, higher educated, non-Muslim women of non-Austrian descent. One researcher was a junior researcher of German origin, and fluent in German, the second researcher was a senior researcher, with Eastern European background, and a German learner. This created a mixed dynamic during the sessions, without outspoken hierarchical imbalance.

In Belgium, the research was conducted by all female researchers. The fieldwork was facilitated by one migrantised researcher that coordinated the research project. The first and second sessions were respectively co-facilitated by the other migrantised researcher and white supervisor of the project. The continuous presence of the migrantised researcher created a sense of trust and accessibility as all three organisations had staff members present with a migration background. Important to mention is that both researchers also have an academic or/and professional background in social work facilitating their access to civil society/ working culture. The main researcher more easily connected with the participants, partially because she also conducted the earlier fieldwork and has long-established relationships with some of the members of the civil society organisations. The white supervisor took on a supportive but listening role. She had also previously worked together with one organisation in a research project and was already more familiar with the organisation that is part of the consortium, and the fourth organisation that was part of the advisory board workshop session.

In Italy, the researchers involved in the study were white, highly educated, non-Muslim women. The role of the critical friend was also taken on by a white, highly educated, non-Muslim woman. It is important to

highlight that both the critical friend and the researcher present during the focus group discussions had professional backgrounds in social work. This shared expertise played a significant role in bridging the gap between academic approaches and the working culture of civil society organizations (CSOs). Similarly, the staff members who participated in the meetings were white, highly educated, and non-Muslim, although the group included individuals of mixed gender—two men were among the participants. All discussions were conducted in Italian, as Italian was the mother tongue of all participants except the researcher.

In Spain, the ethnographic team was composed entirely of white women, one of whom was of migrant origin. None of the researchers were Muslim, and all had higher education backgrounds. However, they also came from working-class families and/or had personal or family experiences of migration. As previously mentioned, all had past professional experience in or in close collaboration with civil society organisations, which facilitated their understanding of the sector's culture and challenges. The previous fieldwork conducted during WP2 had helped to establish strong relationships between the researchers and the staff of the participating organisations, which helped to mitigate potential power imbalances during the participatory evaluation. Each researcher facilitated the sessions with the organisations with whom they had built the strongest rapport. Moreover, most participants in the evaluation sessions were not migrantised individuals, so the experiential distance between researchers and participants was not as pronounced as it might be in other contexts.

In Poland, the research team included white, non-migrantised women academics of different ages. Discussions in all CSOs were facilitated by a non-migrantised member of staff. Given that all the participants of CSOs 1 and 2 were also non-migrantised women, migration-related identity neither facilitated nor inhibited the discussion. Interestingly, what proved an important factor allowing for a smoother and deeper discussion was the researchers' and the participants' feminist identity, which provided common ground for the understanding of different concepts, for example women's rights. In the case of CSO3, there was one migrantised participant, but it did not create a power imbalance during the discussion, though some linguistic difficulties arose. Throughout the research process, measures were also undertaken to prevent a situation of explicit power imbalance, for example: inclusive, non-academic language was used and the discussion was moderated in such a way as to include all the participants. Moreover, the main researcher connected easily with the participants, because she had conducted the earlier fieldwork and had already established a relationship with both CSOs' staff and participants.

Evaluation trajectories

In the following sections, we will discuss how the civil society organisations evaluate their own practices during the course of the trajectory, and get inspired by the practices of other civil society organisations. While some organisations put more effort into developing new practices than others, in the following sections, we will first set out the 'societal problem' and how it is defined and represented across all organisations. Subsequently, we will reflect on the use of the 'Folk theory of change'.

‘SOCIETAL PROBLEM’ REPRESENTATION ACROSS CSOS

What is the problem and where is the solution?

Placing organisations within a historical and societal context reveals how their trajectories are shaped by past decisions, responses to societal transformations, and governmental demands. This perspective is crucial to understanding how organizations define and address societal problems. Insights from the evaluation trajectories highlight how each organization’s framing of issues is influenced by its institutional history and operational environment.

In Poland, CSOs play a significant role in shaping public discourse and influencing policy. They do so by framing gender-based violence as a systemic issue, reproductive rights as fundamental human rights, and the experiences of migrant women as cases of intersectional discrimination. These framings raise public awareness and drive policy advocacy but simultaneously risk reinforcing ideological divisions within Poland's already polarized political landscape. The expansion of activities to assist Ukrainian refugees has led to greater resource allocation for this group, but it has also resulted in unequal treatment of other marginalised migrant groups, highlighting the racial and national hierarchies in aid distribution.

Similarly, in Belgium, the framing of societal problems by CSOs is also shaped by their historical context and institutional dependencies. For example, CSO1_BE, with its roots in popular education, emphasizes local democratic participation but leads to a cautious approach toward naming structural racism, especially given its dependence on public funding. In contrast, CSO2_BE, which emerged from community resistance, takes an intersectional and grassroots approach, balancing institutional legitimacy with strong accountability to its community. CSO3_BE centers on providing resources and role models for young racialized women, yet it does not adequately address systemic exclusion.. CSO4_BE, still in development, critiques the cultural inadequacies of mainstream care systems but has yet to address the root causes of such exclusion in depth.

In Poland, the two selected CSOs address gender inequality and women's rights, with a primary focus on gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and the rights of migrant women. CSO1_PL primarily addresses gender-based violence and discrimination, framing these issues as systemic problems rooted in patriarchal structures that normalize violence against women and hinder gender equality, advocating for education, legal support, and policy changes. CSO2_PL, on the other hand, concentrates on reproductive rights, positioning them as human rights concerns. The organization emphasizes the need for access to abortion, contraception, and comprehensive sex education, while also working on intersectional issues related to migrant and refugee women. Despite their focus on gender and reproductive rights, both organizations underemphasize the intersection of gender with economic and class-based inequalities. Economic precarity, which impacts access to legal support, contraception, or safe housing for survivors of gender-based violence, is not foregrounded in their problem definitions. Furthermore, the role of men in advancing gender equality is not explicitly discussed, which predominantly portrays women as victims of systemic inequality. When examining how organizations represented the ‘societal problem’, it becomes evident that national civil society landscapes, welfare structures and broader societal configurations significantly influence these definitions.. While some organizations may define the problems within its broader societal structures, their power, resources or capacity does not always enable them to tackle the root causes of the problems. This is particularly

evident when comparing staff members' conceptualizations of societal problems with the solutions their organizations implement. By contrasting these, we can note that many see large societal structures, related to gendered power dynamics, but fail to address them as an organization. The levels of activities to go against the stream vary per organization. For example, in Poland, although organizations aim to confront patriarchal norms, their actions often stop short of challenging these norms at a structural level.

Regarding migrant integration, organizations tend to acknowledge systemic barriers faced by migrants but rarely recognize the need for dominant societal structures to adapt. Broader definitions of integration, such as those proposed by Berry et al. (1997), emphasize the importance of mutual adaptation, yet most initiatives focus solely on supporting migrants in adjusting to the host society. These initiatives often are unable to challenge the status quo and rather support individuals and their families as much as possible as to 'fit in' society and find their ways. Again here, less attention has been paid to how the target group (i.e., migrantised women) define their own problem definition, nor does it include critical reflections on how their points of view and ideas concerning 'empowerment' or 'migrant integration' are being considered in the actual activities.

In Spain, civil society organisations approach social problems from diverse trajectories, shaped by their institutional origins, degree of consolidation, and ideological frameworks. In the Spanish/Catalan context, a strong associative fabric and the outsourcing of welfare services have influenced their development, along with their dependence on public funding, which often frames their discourse around empowerment and global justice. The three organisations studied share an educational orientation and focus on migrantised women and/or youth, but their problem framings differ.

CSO1_SP prioritises awareness-raising on equality and structural racism through an educational lens. However, it faces tensions stemming from being part of a larger national organisation whose strategic direction does not always align with the perspectives of technical educational staff.

CSO2_SP adopts a communicative strategy of social denunciation through audiovisual narratives. Although it promotes global justice and inclusion, its gender perspective was underdeveloped until the self-evaluation revealed the low participation of young women, a turning point that prompted internal reflection. In this regard, the coordinator also offered an insightful reflection: she recalled an occasion when a male participant felt particularly exposed in a personal situation, which reminded her of many similar experiences reported by women. She used this moment to help the participant reflect on how women are often treated differently and concluded, "this too is gender perspective." Despite the organisation's current limitations in reaching more young women, a situation that is actually changing, this example shows that meaningful gender work was still being carried out. In contrast to what was observed in some other contexts as pointed in the Polish analysis, where focusing exclusively on women sometimes reinforced the idea that men are not part of the solution, this experience demonstrates how involving male participants in critical reflection can also be included in gender transformation. In general, the organisation frames the problem around the denial of migrant youth's full citizenship and lack of participatory spaces. While aiming to foster emancipatory processes, tensions also emerged during the evaluation around whether to prioritise the formative or expressive dimension of their work. Finally, another ongoing tension concerns the organisation's desire for horizontal participation, which often contrasts with how participants actually relate to the organisation, seeking a space of trust and belonging, rather than one of shared decision-making.

CSO3_SP, while not as consolidated as CSO1_SP, is more established than CSO2_SP. It defines forced marriage as a form of patriarchal violence and adopts a clear feminist and human rights approach. Sensitive to cultural particularities, it prioritises a universalist stance on women's rights. Its stability allows for continuity in its projects, but its capacity for systemic engagement is limited by the urgency of its work and structural underfunding. The organisation must often prioritise immediate support over deeper strategic development.

Similar to what has been observed in other countries, such as Poland, although all three organisations acknowledge exclusion and discrimination as structural problems, their capacity to challenge those structures is uneven. Their efforts tend to centre on awareness-raising, individual support, or creating safe spaces, rather than directly confronting structural inequalities.

In Austria, we observe that even within the same organization, different branches may address distinct but complementary issues, primarily focused on confronting structural barriers and responding to the specific socio-political context of the country. In our study, one organization operated through two participating branches in the evaluation trajectory. The learning center (CSO1_AUS) primarily frames its work around migrant women's limited access to education, language learning, and integration into the labour market. Their approach emphasizes increasing autonomy through practical support while acknowledging systemic obstacles. They aim to equip migrants with tools to both navigate and challenge these barriers, as well as to foster resilience within the existing system. In contrast, the emergency housing team (CSO2_AUS) focuses on gender-based violence, structural exclusion, and socio-economic vulnerability, often engaging in more immediate and protective forms of care. While their methods differ, both branches are viewed by the organization as contributing to violence prevention and gender equality from different angles. These efforts, however, are largely concentrated on individual and household levels and do not directly seek to transform broader societal structures. This is not due to a lack of importance placed on such change, but rather reflects the scope and focus of their activities. In contrast, the third Austrian organization (CSO3_AUS) adopts a more overtly political and ideologically unified approach, explicitly connecting gender-based violence to systemic patriarchal and racial oppression. Its work is grounded in feminist and antiracist principles, aiming at collective empowerment and the promotion of self-determination. Across all teams, internal consensus on problem definitions is relatively strong, although tensions manifest in different ways depending on the organizational context.

Similar dynamics are observed in other national contexts. For instance, In Belgium, all four CSOs address structural inequalities from different angles: CSO1_BE promotes community education and empowerment; CSO2_BE focuses on anti-racism and migrant mobilization; CSO3_BE supports young migrant women in entrepreneurship; and CSO4_BE addresses culturally sensitive care for migrants with disabilities or neurodiversity. A shared recognition exists that their target groups face exclusion and discrimination, yet the degree to which these structural issues are explicitly acknowledged varies.

In Italy, despite differing approaches within the three CSOs, a shared concern emerges around the need for gender empowerment and inclusion. CSO1_IT emphasizes the structural inequalities affecting marginalized women, aiming for systemic interventions to reduce overall societal inequality. CSO2_IT frames gender-based violence as a product of patriarchy, advocating for survivor-centered responses while highlighting the importance of dismantling patriarchy. CSO3_IT focuses on social inclusion, aligning with national and local policies to foster integration. These organizations represent social problems based on empirical observations and socio-political evaluations. CSO1_IT adopts a cultural and political

analysis, CSO2_IT links violence to societal evolution, and CSO3_IT focuses on social inclusion, aligning its work with national and local policies to foster integration. Their perspective emerged as a response to the increasing presence of vulnerable populations, and they view social integration as a flexible process requiring ongoing policy updates. While there is broad agreement among the CSOs about the need to empower and include marginalized women, they differ in their approaches. Some advocate for systemic change to address the root causes of discrimination and violence, while others prioritize direct support for survivors. A recurring concern across all three organizations is the insufficient attention given to men, particularly in discussions of gender-based violence. However, there was consensus on the importance of educating men to contribute significantly to change and promote gender equality.

REFLECTIONS ON IMPACT AND THEORIES OF CHANGE

Tensions related to the problem definition

Although this is not inherently part of ‘problem definitions’, we noted that in civil society organisations, there is a huge variety in size, hierarchy, and organization, as well as financial independence from governmental institutions. Some are grassroots-based, activist roots, others have become big societal players with the support of governmental funding. Furthermore, there are many variations noted in the problem definition, and internal coherence, based on the amount of contact with people involved (or the target group) and the nature of their jobs. This is also reflected in the tensions noted during the evaluation trajectory between staff members, which complicated also the problem definition.

For example, in Austria, in CSO1, pedagogical or managerial disagreements are often generational or rooted in experiential hierarchies, while in CSO2, questions of racial privilege and internal organisational dynamics remain largely implicit. Across both organisations, evolving client needs, internal power asymmetries, and external pressures (such as funding precarity) shape how problems are framed. Yet, important silences persist – particularly regarding structural complicity and the limitations of individualised interventions – which risk undermining deeper transformative change unless explicitly confronted and integrated into their praxis. In Belgium, internal consensus on the nature of the problem generally exists, though tensions surface in specific cases. CSO2_BE shows strong internal coherence, likely due to its activist roots. In contrast, CSO1_BE revealed internal conflict between field workers and management, pointing to divergent positionalities and power dynamics. CSO3_BE, represented by a single participant, reflected organizational hierarchy and hesitance to engage critically with the organization’s mission. In Spain, internal tensions also shaped how problems were defined. In CSO1_SP, discrepancies emerged between one part of the organization— more focused on maintaining large-scale funding and rooted in an assistance-based tradition—and the other part, more attuned to grassroots movements and closer to participants. Local staff, influenced by feminist and anti-racist perspectives, did not always align with the institutional vision or public representations of the people they work with. These tensions have prompted ongoing internal reflection, particularly among educators committed to shifting the organisation’s discourse towards a more transformative and community-rooted model. In CSO2_SP, the self-evaluation process exposed differences over whether to prioritise the formative or expressive dimensions of their work. Although the team shared a commitment to empowering migrant youth, their varied professional backgrounds shaped distinct perspectives. The coordinator, coming from the field of education and social work, emphasised the need for direct intervention—acknowledging that colleagues with more artistic profiles might perceive this approach as an extra burden with less symbolic or collective impact than

artistic denunciation. Despite mutual respect, these divergences reflect the complexity of combining multiple professional languages within a small and still consolidating team. In Poland, similar issues arise, where the internal dynamics of CSOs are shaped by the varying levels of grassroots involvement and institutional dependency. CSO1_PL, with its systemic focus on gender-based violence, struggles with tensions between activist staff and more institutionalized parts of the organization, especially when it comes to addressing issues such as economic precarity or the role of men in gender equality.

Additionally, differences in experiences of racial/ethnic privileges within the organization further impacted the problem definition of 'societal problems' and tackle structural barriers. In Italy, the absence of racial and ethnic diversity within the organizations limits the range of perspectives, suggesting a need for more inclusive staffing practices. The failure to engage migrant women proactively, assuming they understand societal expectations, risks reinforcing exclusion and alienation. The current framing of these social issues produces unintended effects, such as perpetuating gendered expectations, reinforcing survivor-focused aid while overlooking male perspectives, and fragmenting support structures. These practices mirror broader societal biases, hindering long-term, systemic change. Strengthening inter-organizational networks and creating more intersectional, inclusive solutions could lead to more sustainable, transformative interventions. Ultimately, the debate highlights the complex interplay of structural change and immediate support, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, long-term approach to gender-based violence and social inequality.

Limitations and beyond one's scope

Across civil society organisations, a significant point of divergence arises from the varying emphasis on addressing systemic change versus providing immediate support to survivors. Although there is agreement across countries and CSOs on the importance of involving men in efforts to prevent violence, a consensus was reached that they often overlooked the necessity of engaging men in meaningful ways. This gap sustains a narrow, survivor-centred model that risks overlooking the root drivers of violence.

We can argue that despite critical reflection of the organisations, important 'silences' remain in how organisations confront structural issues. For instance, in Belgium, C0SO1_BE often avoids confronting white privilege and structural discrimination. The empowerment model of CSO3_BE risks reinforcing neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility. CSO4_BE may unintentionally essentialize cultural identities without fully engaging systemic healthcare failures. CSO2_BE is more reflexive but still struggles with internal alignment among its member organisations. These representations produce real effects. The alignment of CSO1_BE with state agendas limits its transformative potential. The activist model of CSO2_BE enables responsiveness but stretches organisational capacity. CSO3_BE provides important role models but fails to challenge broader labour market inequities. The focus on cultural sensitivity of CSO2_BE supports community needs but may not be scalable or systemically transformative. Though CSO2_AUS is more politically vocal, internal tensions around racial privilege and organisational power dynamics also remain largely unspoken, risking internal blind spots that undermine their antiracist stance. This contrasts with the Italian case, where all the civil society organizations in Italy assume that social inequality and discrimination are systemic issues requiring intervention. While CSO1_IT emphasizes the needs of the most disadvantaged, CSO2_IT stresses that gender-based violence is rooted in patriarchal structures, and CSO3_IT views integration as a flexible, evolving process. In Spain, structural advocacy is often constrained by strong institutional dependencies, such as reliance on public funding or

administrative demands. These constraints tend to prioritise direct support and awareness-raising over sustained systemic change. While the three Spanish CSOs analysed share feminist and anti-racist commitments, their ability to challenge structural inequalities remains limited by financial precarity and resource scarcity. Among them, CSO1_SP stands out for its strategic orientation toward broader social impact and internal efforts to foster transformative change. However, its potential is shaped by political polarisation and internal debates about how to pursue holistic, structural interventions. These tensions are compounded by the organisation's need to uphold a neutral public image, often encouraged by its national leadership. In contrast, CSO3_SP focuses predominantly on immediate support, due to the urgency of the cases it addresses and a lack of structural funding. CSO2_SP, while promoting inclusive and transformative narratives, has encountered internal debates about the balance between social impact and direct engagement with participants, and struggles to integrate a sustained intersectional gender approach. As in other contexts, the challenges of small teams, competing priorities, and limited capacity hinder more consistent structural engagement.

In addition, CSOs such as CSO3_BE promote individual empowerment without adequately addressing structural barriers like labour market discrimination or state-imposed exclusions. Similarly, both CSO1_PO and CSO2_PO frame gender inequality as rooted in patriarchy and religion, but they neglect the impact of economic precarity (e.g., low income, unstable jobs, housing insecurity) on survivors' ability to access support. This limits the organisations' ability to fully respond to the complex realities of those they serve. Finally, In contexts like Poland, CSOs face intense political resistance, particularly around issues such as reproductive rights and refugee support. While advocacy is central to their missions, political backlash and funding threats often limit how boldly they can act or speak.

Learning trajectories and trajectories of change

The learning trajectory during the evaluation trajectory was very dependent on the structure of each organization. Several organisations began with narrowly defined mandates and gradually broadened their approach. For example, CSO1_AUS, originally focused on language acquisition, came to view empowerment as a personalised and gradual process that extends beyond formal learning outcomes. Through ongoing contact with participants, the organisation learned to value increases in confidence, autonomy, and civic participation as meaningful indicators of success. Similarly, CSO3_AUS, which provides psychosocial counselling and legal aid for survivors of gender-based violence, expanded its model by integrating emotional continuity and accessibility. In Belgium, learning processes were equally significant. CSO1_BE engaged in internal critique following discussions on its implicit alignment with political narratives around migration and inclusion. This prompted organisational changes such as revising recruitment practices to better reflect lived migration experience within its staff, and a broader re-evaluation of the organisation's position within the socio-political field. Meanwhile, CSO2_BE chose to deepen, rather than restructure, its approach. Already grounded in member-led empowerment, it continued to refine its theatre-based projects as spaces for collective storytelling, mobilisation, and visibility, drawing on internal knowledge and cultural practices without overhauling its framework.

Italian CSOs also evolved through recognition of systemic limitations. Initially focused on employment support and professional skill-building, these organisations gradually incorporated more intersectional and holistic models. For instance, they began to combine job training with legal counselling, language instruction, and psychosocial support to better meet the complex needs of migrant women. This shift was shaped by frontline experiences with structural obstacles like migration policy and economic exclusion,

which rendered narrow employability models insufficient. In Poland, the learning trajectory of CSO2 reflected the tension between large-scale outreach and limited systemic impact. Despite providing reproductive rights information to over 20,000 women and legal support to dozens, the lack of national policy change led the organisation to pivot towards community-level empowerment and deeper one-on-one engagements. Through this, the CSO recalibrated its expectations, focusing more on resilience-building rather than advocacy-led transformation, especially in the face of restricted political opportunities. In Spain, in the case of CSO1_SP, the self-evaluation process prompted a highly valuable critical reflection on how their practices addressed structural racism and gender inequalities as relevant issues, but not always in an integrated manner. The self-evaluation allowed the organisation to identify the need to more consciously and systematically incorporate an intersectional perspective that could address both dimensions simultaneously, with the aim of more effectively influencing the various dynamics of exclusion. In CSO3_SP, the sessions enabled the team to engage in rich discussions around the core focus of their work on forced marriage eradication and to debate the concept of consent. Moreover, the sessions provided space to reflect on the importance of a good practice that had somewhat diminished in recent years: the involvement of role models—former service users who had achieved autonomous lives and were supporting others. These reflections were especially valuable for the organisation, as their daily work often prioritises addressing the immediate basic needs of women survivors of forced marriage, leaving limited time for collective, strategic reflection.

Across contexts, CSOs also adapted in response to feedback loops from participants. For example, CSO1_BE and CSO1_AUS began to adopt more participatory methods, incorporating client feedback into programme design and delivery. This represented a shift from a service delivery model to one of co-creation, where participants' knowledge and experiences were actively integrated into organisational development. In these cases, participants not only shaped activities but, in some instances, took on advisory or volunteer roles, further reinforcing a two-way learning dynamic.

Ultimately, these learning trajectories highlight how CSOs are able to not only act as service providers, but also as reflexive institutions that evolve in dialogue with their environments. Whether through critical self-assessment, experimentation, or shifts in participant relationships, many of these organisations have moved toward more contextually embedded and theoretically nuanced understandings of empowerment.

Challenging internal practices

While learning trajectories often resulted in programmatic or strategic shifts, several CSOs also undertook more inward-looking critiques that challenged their internal structures, representational practices, and organisational cultures. This level of reflection moved beyond operational effectiveness and towards a deeper interrogation of how power, voice, and legitimacy operate within the organisations themselves.

For instance, CSO3_AUS Austria, proactively addressed internal power dynamics in their service delivery by assigning dedicated contact persons and prioritising relational continuity. Though framed as a support strategy for clients, this model also implied a shift in staff roles—from procedural caseworkers to long-term relational anchors—thereby subtly reconfiguring the organisation's internal value system around care and accountability. CSO4_BE, although less explicit in terms of structural reform, reported a growing awareness of the ethical stakes of its discursive practices—particularly in the context of working with young women and girls around sensitive themes such as disability and neurodiversity. While this

awareness did not yet translate into tangible organisational change, it nonetheless marks a shift in the internal ethical discourse and signals a potential for further transformation. Across contexts, the tension between professionalisation and grassroots origins was a recurring theme. In Italy, several CSOs grappled with the challenge of maintaining a horizontal, participant-centred ethos while navigating institutional requirements and funding constraints that favour standardised outputs and formal expertise. This created internal friction: staff were often caught between the need to meet bureaucratic expectations and the desire to preserve relational and context-sensitive ways of working. Some organisations began to question the implicit hierarchies embedded in externally imposed professional norms, especially when those norms clashed with feminist or activist principles.

Taken together, these moments of self-critique show that CSOs are not immune to the very structures they seek to challenge externally. Whether through rethinking recruitment, re-evaluating professional hierarchies, or renegotiating representational ethics, the process of internal change is often slow, uneven, and incomplete but important.

Group dynamics

In line with organizational dynamics, it becomes clear that good functioning teams also find it easier to make adjustments in the practices and challenges their own premises. This often means in practice that all members are engaged and have a voice in the organization. This was for instance visible in one of the civil society organisations in Belgium. CSO1_BE's activities, designed to help participants disentangle personal, interpersonal, and structural barriers, have led to enhanced social networking and self-advocacy, as demonstrated by some participants joining the advisory board or engaging as volunteers. In CSO2_BE, the creation of safe environments fostered expressive and courageous self-articulation among women, although certain dynamics (such as dominant voices) continue to challenge group equity. CSO4_BE reported that young women and girls are more inclined to discuss issues such as disability or neurodiversity, which translates into visible behavioral changes both at home and in school settings. Nonetheless, the extent of impact varies; factors such as length of engagement, type or timing of diagnosis, and differing family contexts mediate these outcomes. These examples show that the tangible impact of organisations on participants is evidenced by improvements in group dynamics and personal agency.

In the Spanish case of CSO3, typical silences during the participatory sessions were observed, often related to participants' timidity or the recent incorporation of some staff members. However, a turning point occurred when the president of the organisation, a highly experienced and well-trained leader, joined the session. Her extensive reflections and critical inputs stimulated a deeper collective reflection on the organisation's mission. Nevertheless, her presence also unintentionally limited broader debate, as other staff members tended to agree rather than challenge or expand on her views. Despite this, the session proved valuable for surfacing fundamental discussions about the core societal problems addressed by the organisation—discussions that are often overshadowed by the day-to-day urgency of addressing basic needs of women survivors of forced marriage.

In Austria, group sessions at CSO1_AUS, the learning centre, were marked by high fluidity. Participants progressed at different paces and often moved between different group formats. This flexibility allowed for personalised pathways but also created variable power balances, as more experienced participants

sometimes took on informal mentoring roles. While this could be empowering, it also raised questions about the distribution of responsibility and support across the group. In Italy, group activities were often oriented toward practical and issue-specific goals, such as acquiring a digital identity (i.e., SPID) or navigating bureaucratic challenges through participatory help desks. These formats were instrumental in uniting participants around shared concerns and improving access to services, especially for migrant women facing administrative barriers. However, while these group settings fostered pragmatic solidarity and mutual assistance, there is limited evidence that they translated into deeper participatory roles within the CSOs themselves. Unlike in other contexts where participants began to join advisory boards or take on facilitative roles, the Italian cases did not report instances of participants shaping internal organisational practices or governance. This suggests that while issue-based collaboration was effective in meeting immediate needs, its potential as a stepping stone toward collective empowerment and co-governance remained largely untapped. These examples demonstrate that the impact of group dynamics depends on the extent to which participants are genuinely included in shaping both activities and organisational direction.

Embeddedness in broader context

The sustainability of these changes within the organisations under study is closely linked to how shifts in individual mindsets are supported within participants' home environments and the broader context. For example, in Belgium, in all organisations, the durability of transformative practices is jeopardised if reinforced by resistant or rigid family and community structures. Moreover, the pursuit of economic and social empowerment sometimes produces unintended consequences. There is, for instance, evidence that changes in women's roles may reinforce intra-community divides or result in a double burden of work and domestic responsibilities, thereby exacerbating stress. These collateral impacts underscore the complexity of balancing personal empowerment with systemic change. Finally, even small innovations – such as the adoption of “symbolic” language in CSO2_BE – highlight the incremental yet significant steps towards transformative communication. Learning to reframe their narratives, participants have found ways to articulate grievances in less stigmatising terms (for example, shifting from personal accusations to describing unsafe environments), thereby enhancing the scope and potential impact of their advocacy.

In addition, in Italy, the evaluation of gender empowerment and inclusion initiatives across the various CSOs presents a mixed picture of progress, challenges, and sustainability. While the projects achieved some success in improving employability, supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and enhancing professional skills, they were limited by systemic barriers such as migration policies, economic instability, and cultural norms. Positive changes included increased self-confidence, stronger support networks, and better engagement with institutions, but challenges such as the lack of long-term support, economic constraints, and cultural restrictions on migrant women's autonomy persisted. The impact of these initiatives varied according to participants' backgrounds, with those in urban areas and those with prior work experience benefiting more from the programs. Additionally, while individual progress was evident, broader structural changes remained limited, and sustainability was hindered by inconsistent funding, high staff turnover, and emerging resistance to gender empowerment from within participants' social contexts. Innovations, such as flexible learning models and holistic support systems, provided valuable lessons for future interventions, underlining the importance of comprehensive, intersectional approaches that balance immediate support with long-term systemic change.

In Spain, the sustainability of empowerment initiatives was also conditioned by funding precarity, which often pushes civil society organisations to prioritise direct support over long-term structural strategies. Although feminist and anti-racist values are strongly present within these organisations — and reflected in participants' reflections on empowerment — internal tensions, partly due to financial insecurity and partly due to the gap between grassroots perspectives and managerial priorities, have at times affected internal coherence and limited their capacity to promote systemic change. Nevertheless, efforts to reframe organisational narratives and promote inclusive practices have shown strong transformative potential, especially when grounded in critical reflection and community-based work.

The way problems are defined — whether more focused on discourse or on participants' rights — also shapes the type of intervention that is developed. While all three organisations aim for structural change, those that accompany participants over longer periods and with more urgent needs are often pushed to prioritise direct support, even though they typically attempt to combine both dimensions. Limitations also arise from how more institutionalised spaces, such as schools collaborating with CSOs, understand, or fail to understand, the needs of participants. This gap between organisational goals and institutional expectations became especially visible during the implementation phase. For instance, CSO1 encountered resistance when trying to address issues of gender, racism and the underparticipation of migrant girls in schools. Although CSOs educators identified an urgent need to work on hate speech, racism intersecting and gendered exclusion, schools often redirected the collaboration towards less controversial topics, such as environmental sustainability. Despite these institutional constraints, the educators succeeded in bringing discussions of racism and inclusion into the classroom, centering the lived experiences of racialised girls. However, the process was marked by resistance and limited support, reflecting a broader lack of awareness and preparedness among educational stakeholders. A clear gap emerged between the transformative goals of the CSO and the institutional environment, which lacked the awareness, willingness, and resources needed to engage with deeper structural issues. This experience also reflects the broader backlash against feminist and anti-racist progress of current times, which was evident not only among institutional actors but also within segments of the student population.

Similarly, in Poland, broader systemic change was limited, despite noting that by focusing on gender equality and women's rights, they had a positive impact on individuals. While they did not define empowerment explicitly in their documents, they worked with women individually to define empowerment and inclusion. CSO2_PL, for example, assisted over 20,000 women with reproductive rights information and provided legal support to 56 women, yet no significant legislative changes were achieved in Poland regarding reproductive rights. Despite a more liberal political shift in 2023, no major policy changes have occurred. Again, as mentioned before, a key challenge for both CSOs is securing sustainable funding. Although there was a temporary surge in funding due to the refugee crisis, long-term financial stability remains uncertain. Participants generally did not report significant changes in empowerment, as most were already familiar with the issues. However, they developed a deeper understanding of empowerment as a personal and individualized process. The impacts varied based on prior experience with women's organizations, with newcomers expressing surprise at the challenges faced by the CSOs. Overall, while individual empowerment was achieved, broader societal changes were slow, and the financial sustainability of the organizations remains a significant concern.

Conclusion

Across the countries, CSOs have made notable strides in fostering individual empowerment - particularly through flexible, participatory, and intersectional approaches. In Austria and Belgium, organisations demonstrated an ability to adapt and deepen their strategies through critical self-reflection and co-creation with participants. In contrast, CSOs in Italy and Poland faced greater systemic constraints, such as restrictive migration or reproductive policies and socio-economic instability, which limited their broader impact. In Spain, organisations display a high level of critical reflection that informs their discourses, but they sometimes encounter limitations in practice due to the tension between their transformative goals and the immediate demands of the institutional and social context. Some of these tensions highlight the need for preparatory work with institutional stakeholders, such as educators or local authorities, to raise awareness and foster shared ownership of the issues addressed. They also underscore the importance of contextual sensitivity, as even well-grounded, needs-based interventions may have limited impact if they are implemented in environments marked by resistance or structural barriers. While individual-level gains (such as increased self-confidence, legal literacy, and social participation) were consistently reported, structural transformation remained limited across all contexts. Sustainability was often undermined by funding insecurity, high staff turnover, and cultural resistance. Importantly, CSOs functioned not only as service providers but also as learning institutions, gradually shifting from operational delivery to more reflexive, community-embedded practices. Overall, the findings highlight that while empowerment at the individual level is achievable, systemic change requires sustained political support, stable resources, and a continued commitment to organisational self-critique and inclusive governance.

INSPIRING PRACTICES' AND THEIR APPLICATION

This section provides an in-depth exploration of good practices developed by civil society organisations (CSOs) across Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Poland. These practices range from essential services (such as language instruction, childcare, and shelter) to more innovative approaches, including participatory theatre, creative expression, and peer-led support systems. While each country operates within its unique context, several recurring themes emerge in the way CSOs approach empowerment and inclusion for migrant and refugee women. These include a strong focus on building practical skills to support autonomy, fostering peer connections and community solidarity, and using creative, participatory methods to encourage healing and engagement. In many cases, these initiatives directly respond to gaps in public services, stepping in where state systems fall short in providing accessible, inclusive, or trauma-informed care. A shared emphasis on intersectionality runs throughout, as CSOs address the overlapping challenges faced by women at the crossroads of migration, gender, socio-economic vulnerability, and systemic exclusion. The following section will give an overview of practices per country, examine how core elements take shape in each of the five countries, highlighting both common strategies and context-specific innovations.

Practice toolbox

Table 2. overview of practices per country					
What	Who	When	Where	How/ Resources	Why
Austria					
German language courses for migrantised women	Women with low literacy or illiterate, Arabic/Farsi speakers	3 times a week, 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM	CSO headquarters, Vienna	Professional trainers, educational materials, funding	Empower women with literacy and language skills
Childcare during language lessons	Children of women attending courses (1-5 years old)	3 times a week, 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM	Same building as language lessons	Childcare experts, child-friendly spaces	Enable mothers to attend language courses
Emergency shelter for women and girls victims of gender-based violence	Women/girls, mainly migrants, ages 13-28	Up to 12 weeks	Confidential location	Social workers, support staff, accommodation facilities	Safe space for victims of violence
Admission process for emergency housing	Women/girls seeking shelter	Upon arrival	Emergency apartment	Data protection, risk assessment, individual interviews	Create a safe and trusting environment
Social and legal advice for victims of gender-based violence	Women/girls over 16, victims of gender-based violence	By appointment	CSO headquarters	Social workers, legal advisors, interpreters	Assist with legal, financial, and residence matters
Social guidance for appointments with authorities	Women/girls over 16, victims of gender-based violence	On weekdays	Various locations	Social workers, interpreters, funding	Support women navigating government services
Belgium					
Eating together and sharing food	All participants	During breaks	CSO building	Kitchen materials, budget	Foster connection, discussions, and networking
Offering activities at different times	All participants	Morning and evening	CSO1 and other locations	Staff, budget	Remove timing barriers for participation
Reimbursement of transportation costs	Participants with financial barriers	During activities	Not specified	Budget	Encourage participation despite financial challenges
Use of DIXIT cards for expression	Participants with language barriers	During workshops	CSO premises	DIXIT cards, table	Assist participants in expressing thoughts and feelings
Free childcare during activities	Mothers with preschool children	During activities	CSO building	Volunteers, toys, space	Remove barrier for mothers to participate

"Bring a Friend" initiative	All participants	Closing event	Event location	Space, budget, materials	Lower participation threshold and increase visibility
Theatre group with a bottom-up approach	Women with migration background	Weekly for 2.5 hours	CSO2 building, Antwerp	Space, budget, coaches	Empower women through artistic expression
Sewing class to engage participants	Women with migration background	Weekly	CSO2 building	Sewing machines, materials, teacher	Empowerment through creativity and collaboration
Use of customized language for projects	Women with migration background	During announcements	CSO premises	Language adjustment by organizers	Attract more participants by adjusting project descriptions
Creative activities for youth with disabilities	Youth with disability diagnoses	Varying locations	Indoor and outdoor spaces	Creative materials, budget	Promote self-acceptance and participation
Customized welcome for neurodivergent youth	Neurodivergent youth	From first contact	CSO premises	Organizers, volunteers	Ensure a welcoming environment for neurodivergent youth
Encouraging frequent participants to become volunteers	Frequent participants	During contact moments	CSO premises	Teachers, coaches	Encourage engagement and foster peer support
Italy					
Providing digital signature (SPID) support for women in shelters	Migrant women in vulnerable situations	Ongoing	Residential shelter	Digital tools, internet, facilitators	Empower women with digital and bureaucratic skills
Participatory helpdesk for training support	Migrant women facing vulnerabilities	Ongoing (pre, during, post training)	V.I.T.E. III project locations	Educators, childcare, financial tools	Assist with barriers to training and employment
Peer approach in training programs	Migrant women in V.I.T.E. III project	Ongoing	Training locations	Volunteer (peer mediator), project team	Overcome linguistic/cultural barriers, foster trust
Spain					
Workshops on preventing hate speech through alternative narratives on migration, gender, and environmental justice.	Teenagers aged 15–17 enrolled in the first year of upper secondary education.	October–November 2024. 2 groups – 5 sessions per group	Students' high school	Educators; preliminary meetings with school staff; educational videos, podcasts, and infographics; questionnaires	Promote the participation of migrant-background girls in classroom discussions and activities.
Co-creation of visual narratives.	Migrantised women aged 17 and above, who have suffered	Flexible scheduling based on participants'	At participants' own community spaces	Educators; professional photography and video equipment,	Raise awareness of structural racism by equipping migrantised women

	racist violence and are in vulnerable situations.	availability; usually 6 sessions of 1.5 to 2 hours each.	(community centres...). Alternative venues can be arranged if needed.	and other technical tools.	with tools to create antiracist visual narratives.
Peer mentorship by former migrant participants who are survivors of forced marriage	Women previously supported by the organisation acting as mentors for current participants (survivors of forced marriage)	ongoing	Within the organisation and across different spaces in the women's daily lives (e.g., community settings, informal meetings, workshops).	volunteers; Facilitating links and accompaniment; peer support based on shared experience	Strengthen accompaniment during the support process and foster shared learning and empowerment
Poland					
Mobile exhibition addressing gender-based violence	Ukrainian refugee women	Displayed in 16 locations	Various venues	Neon sign, photos, leaflets, recorded testimonies	Raise awareness of GBV and provide support information
Feminist self-defense and assertiveness training	Women and non-binary individuals	2-day workshop	CSO premises or other venues	Certified trainers, space	Empower participants to prevent violence and harassment
Workshops to enhance migrant women's employability	Migrant and Polish women	Ongoing	CSO1 Warsaw	Workshops, childcare, interpretation	Address barriers to labour market participation

Conclusion

In addressing gender inequality, the different CSOs across the five countries adopt varying approaches. Some, like Poland and Italy, focus primarily on systemic change, while others, such as Austria and Belgium, prioritize immediate support and empowerment. Spain represents a more ambivalent case: while the CSOs show strong feminist and anti-racist commitments and engage in deep critical reflection, their transformative capacity remains uneven, shaped by limited resources and context-specific tensions. Political contexts, particularly conservative governance as seen in Poland, can significantly limit the scope for progress. Additionally, internal tensions within CSOs (whether generational, ideological, or racial) affect how issues are framed and tackled. Despite their efforts, key gaps remain, including insufficient attention to the intersections of gender with economic and racial inequalities, limited engagement with men's roles in gender equality, and widespread funding insecurity that undermines long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, a shared commitment persists: advancing gender equality requires an

intersectional, comprehensive approach that balances immediate needs with structural transformation. While the path forward is constrained by practical challenges, the recognition of the need for more inclusive and transformative solutions offers a hopeful foundation for future progress.

RECURRING ELEMENTS/FOCUS ACROSS PRACTICES

1. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PRACTICAL SKILLS

All countries address practical empowerment, though the depth and structure of such interventions vary. Italy and Poland adopt more formalized training models, while Austria and Belgium embed skill-building in creative or community-based formats:

AUSTRIA: German language courses and basic education, aimed at women with a migration background who do not speak sufficient German and/or are not literate.

BELGIUM: DIXIT Cards (Illustrative Cards) to help women express their thoughts and feelings + CREA activities + Sewing class.

ITALY places strong emphasis on building functional autonomy through structured programs. For instance, the “Digital bureaucracy practice” helps migrant women obtain a SPID identity, thus enabling access to public services. In addition, the “Participative Helpdesk” also guides women in financial literacy and institutional navigation.

SPAIN combined promoting empowerment through the development of critical communication skills and creative narratives to foster structural change and combat racism, with strengthening autonomy and supporting migrant women survivors of forced marriage in overcoming trauma through peer-based support.

POLAND similarly focuses on employability through its “Thematic labour market workshops”, which offer training in language, job applications, and emotional self-regulation. + self-defense and assertiveness training.

2. PEER SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY

Peer and community-led models are a core feature in Italy and Belgium:

BELGIUM also integrates peer methodologies: Eating together and sharing food and “bring a friend”.

ITALY institutionalizes peer support most explicitly. In the “*Peer mediation practice*”, a Kurdish woman acts as a bridge between service providers and other Kurdish-speaking women, thereby reducing both linguistic and cultural barriers.

SPAIN also incorporates peer support, particularly through the integration of former users as community references, providing ongoing support and accompaniment to migrant women survivors of forced marriage. In this context, peer-based solidarity is complemented by strong

institutional support, especially from police and social workers, given that forced marriage is addressed as a crime and victims require coordinated social protection.

3. USE OF CREATIVE, ARTISTIC, AND PARTICIPATORY METHODS

Art and participatory techniques are common tools for awareness-raising, expression, and empowerment across all contexts, though their form and function vary:

AUSTRIA pedagogical care (e.g., games, crafting materials, books) for the residents in the emergency care.

BELGIUM: Creative ownership in theater groups, sewing classes as a gateway to self-expression and connection, CREA activities with neurodivergent youth and Illustration tools like DIXIT cards

ITALY focuses more on functional participation than expressive formats.

SPAIN leverages creative, artistic, and participatory methods to foster critical reflection on migration, gender, and racism, promoting both individual expression and collective awareness.

POLAND employs creative storytelling in the Mobile exhibition, which combines photography, neon signage, and recorded testimonies to address gender-based violence among Ukrainian women.

4. RESPONSE TO INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

All practices aim to fill institutional voids, particularly in relation to support for migrant women, gender-based violence, and access to public services.

AUSTRIA They provide a holistic approach to integration and empowerment, ensuring that women and girls have access to the education, shelter, legal support, and guidance they need to rebuild their lives in a safe and supportive environment.

BELGIUM the practices address institutional gaps by fostering accessibility, inclusivity, and participation among marginalized groups. They focus on creating environments that remove barriers - whether related to language, childcare, financial constraints, or social norms - and ensure that all participants have the opportunity to engage fully in the activities offered.

ITALY addresses the failure of institutions to provide inclusive digital or bureaucratic access by creating mediated helpdesks and autonomy programs.

SPAIN addresses institutional gaps by tackling the failure of governmental institutions to provide holistic support and to empower migrant women as agents of change. The practices promote the development of critical awareness around structural racism, gender inequalities, and the systemic barriers faced by migrant women, strengthening their agency in contexts of exclusion while also seeking to reach a broader audience often overlooked by public institutions. Some

practices specifically overcome institutional shortcomings by strengthening institutional ties, as in the case of support for survivors of forced marriage—a problem often rendered invisible or inadequately addressed by public services.

POLAND responds to the lack of awareness among Ukrainian refugee women regarding available help services by promoting a nationwide mobile campaign.

REFLECTIONS ON INTERSECTIONALITY

Across all countries, practices recognize multiple forms of marginalization, though to varying degrees of depth and explicitness.

AUSTRIA: Women victims of gender-based violence who also face economic insecurity often have limited resources or access to support. Programs that offer emergency shelter, legal support, and financial aid for childcare address this intersection, aiming to support women who may already be facing financial challenges and who require assistance in navigating legal or social systems.

BELGIUM: Many of the practices, such as the language courses, theatre group, childcare provisions, and community-building activities, explicitly target women with a migration background. This intersection highlights the compounded disadvantages faced by women who are migrants, particularly in terms of social exclusion, limited access to language education, economic participation, and family dynamics. Practices such as childcare support and reimbursement for bus or tram tickets directly target women with financial barriers, many of whom may also be socioeconomically disadvantaged due to migration or cultural background.

ITALY takes an intersectional approach by combining gender, migration status, economic precarity, and bureaucratic exclusion. The practices support women who face gender-based violence, digital exclusion, language barriers, and caregiving responsibilities – challenges that reinforce one another. By adapting support to these intersecting needs and involving professionals from various fields as well as peer supporters with similar lived experiences, the practices aim to provide inclusive, context-sensitive, and empowering responses to structural inequalities.

SPAIN: The practices developed by the three CSOs incorporate an intersectional perspective by addressing the specific realities of a population composed of migrant women exposed to hate speech, often facing economic precariousness, exclusion due to migration status, or having experienced gender-based violence. These practices aim to generate an impact by directly supporting these women or promoting structural change in society, by including their narratives, working with their voices, addressing their specific needs and raising broader public awareness of their experiences. In particular, the practice developed by CSO1 sought to address structural racism and gender inequalities jointly, fostering critical reflection among adolescents and aiming to improve practices in formal education spaces after a deep reflection on how to incorporate an intersectional perspective. However, reflecting on the

impact of the intervention, the situated nature of intersectional practices has also emerged as a key issue, especially when considering the resistance encountered from educational stakeholders. Thus, CSO interventions do not only address different axes of inequality simultaneously, such as gender, racism, or migration status, but do so within specific social contexts that may function as strengths or, as in the case of the practice developed by CSO1 in Spain, present significant resistance and barriers. Engaging with context is therefore fundamental to any intersectional approach, as not all proposals find the same conditions for development. It is essential to consider the broader context of integration in which these practices are implemented, especially at a time marked by the rise of hate speech, the denial of gender inequality, and growing backlash against feminist progress.

POLAND: The mobile exhibition addresses the compounded vulnerabilities of Ukrainian refugee women experiencing gender-based violence, while the self-defense training ensures that women and non-binary individuals from various gendered and socio-economic backgrounds have access to crucial empowerment tools. The workshops for employability skills cater to migrant women, addressing the complex barriers of migration status, gender, language, and economic vulnerability.

Impact evaluation of practices on participants

This overview focuses on identifying and evaluating the practices that have significantly improved the effectiveness, participation, and impact of CSO activities. Special attention is given to the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of these practices within their national contexts. Through a comparative evaluation, the report highlights not only successful approaches but also the structural conditions required for their continuity and scaling. These insights offer valuable lessons for policymakers, practitioners, and more inclusive and sustainable approaches to integration and empowerment.

Country	Practice	Relevance	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Impact	Sustainability
Austria	<i>German language classes</i>	Meets legal and social integration needs	Improves literacy and autonomy	Limited resources, but results delivered	Better job and social prospects	Funding-dependent, scalable content
Austria	<i>Childcare support</i>	Enables mothers to attend language classes	Greater participation	Limited funding, but crucial	Benefits both children and women	Repeatable if funded
Austria	<i>Emergency shelter</i>	Supports GBV survivors with extended stay	Immediate safety and empowerment	Moderate efficiency (staff limits)	Life-transforming impact	Funding-dependent continuation
Austria	<i>Admission process</i>	Builds trust and safety foundation	Enables stable shelter environment	Time/resource-intensive	Ensures clarity and safe space	Not sustainable without funding
Austria	<i>Social and legal counselling</i>	Essential for GBV victims' independence	Meets client expectations	Insufficient resources	Positive but surface-level impact	Can be adapted, needs funding
Austria	<i>Social support</i>	Guides women through bureaucratic systems	Promotes independent living	Resource limitations	Improves outcomes but limited reach	Adaptable with continued funding
Belgium	<i>Shared meals</i>	Promotes connection and inclusion	Encourages participation, less food waste	Efficient community bonding	Fosters discussions and networking	Easily repeatable and low cost
Belgium	<i>Scheduling (AM/PM groups)</i>	Tailored to women's availability	High participation	Optimized time use	Removes scheduling barriers	Adaptable and scalable

Belgium	<i>Reimbursement transport</i>	Addresses financial access barriers	Maintains attendance	Low-cost, high return	Removes financial barriers	Highly replicable, low effort
Belgium	<i>DIXIT cards</i>	Support emotional expression	Inspires and engages participants	Simple, creative tool	Improves self-expression and comfort	Sustainable, now permanent practice
Belgium	<i>Free childcare</i>	Removes caregiving participation barriers	Increases access for mothers	Resource-efficient, essential for inclusion	High individual and group participation	Replicable, needs support
Belgium	<i>Bring a friend</i>	Promotes network expansion	Drives participation growth	Cost-free outreach	Increased visibility and enrollment	Sustainable via community channels
Belgium	<i>Theater project</i>	Participant-led design and safe space	Builds skills and confidence	Volunteer-led, low cost	Empowerment and self-awareness	Continued interest, long-term effects
Belgium	<i>Sewing as entry point</i>	Encourages engagement via familiar activity	Built group cohesion	Accessible and low-resource	Serves as foundation for deeper work	Sustainable entry method
Belgium	<i>Accessible language use</i>	Inclusive terminology boosts interest	Higher engagement	No added cost	More women joined or showed interest	Scalable with awareness
Belgium	<i>Creative activities for neurodivergent girls</i>	Supports neurodivergent self-expression	Highly engaging	Effective with minimal cost	Empowerment through creativity	Fully booked sessions, ongoing success
Belgium	<i>Tailored welcome</i>	Addresses sensory/social needs	Boosts attendance	Time investment needed	High return, repeat attendance	Sustainable with trained staff

Belgium	<i>Participant to volunteer transition</i>	Promotes long-term engagement	Effective when readiness met	Volunteer-driven model	High impact, self-growth	Sustainable peer model
Italy	<i>Digital signature</i>	Bridges digital divide, empowers migrant women	Improved confidence and digital skills	Low-cost, existing staff used	Increased autonomy, access to services	Easily replicable, low cost
Italy	<i>Peer approach</i>	Culturally relevant support system	Better retention, inclusive environment	Cost-effective, scalable with formal training	Fosters trust, inclusion, self-confidence	Needs structure to scale, currently limited
Italy	<i>Participatory helpdesk</i>	Multidisciplinary support addressing various barriers	Increased retention, tailored support	Resource-intensive but impactful	Boosts employment opportunities	Funding-dependent, scalable within larger systems
Spain	<i>Workshops on preventing hate speech through alternative narratives on migration, gender, and environmental justice.</i>	Addresses low participation of migrant-origin girls, and challenges normalized hate speech among adolescents.	Succeeded in raising awareness despite initial resistance from part of the group.	The materials and educator resources were well targeted, but the effectiveness of the practice depended heavily on the level of commitment from school staff, requiring additional efforts in cases of resistance.	Increased visibility of alternative narratives and empowered migrant-origin students; created space for difficult conversations about stereotypes.	Transferable to other schools/settings; requires motivated facilitators and supportive educational staff to sustain impact.
Poland	<i>Violence awareness exhibition</i>	Responds to refugee context, info exclusion	Improved networking, collaboration	Mobile, reusable materials	Awareness, future joint actions	Long-term reuse and connections

Poland	<i>WenDo workshops</i>	Addresses gender-based violence holistically	Builds confidence, assertiveness	Led by trained staff, owned space	Empowerment, boundary setting	Long-term skills and solidarity
Poland	<i>Employment workshops for migrant women</i>	Addresses market needs via participatory design	Highly adaptive, removes barriers	Needs-driven, participant-led	Skills, confidence, cohesion	Peer-led sustainability, long-term use

COMPARATIVE IMPACT EVALUATION ACROSS COUNTRIES

The relevance of the practices is great, with each initiative responding effectively to specific local needs, whether these concern legal-administrative integration, emotional well-being and social inclusion, urgent humanitarian support or the need to address structural racism and gender inequalities together, areas often overlooked within educational settings, particularly through an interconnected and holistic approach.. The practices are well-aligned with the realities of the target populations, demonstrating sensitivity to intersecting barriers such as language, mobility, childcare, and trauma. In addition, the effectiveness is likewise high across all countries, particularly where programs adopt participatory and community-led approaches. Practices that involve peer mentoring, co-creation of activities, and culturally responsive communication tend to report greater participant engagement and positive outcomes.

In comparative terms, Italy and Poland stand out for their adaptive, community-centered models that maximize impact with relatively modest inputs. These practices demonstrate that decentralization, participatory methods, and flexible use of space and personnel significantly enhance efficiency. Conversely, Austria and Belgium, while offering highly structured and professionally supported services, tend to operate with higher fixed costs and lower adaptive capacity, which can limit efficiency in dynamic or resource-constrained environments. In the case of Spain, the practice analyzed combines creativity, flexibility, and adaptation to the needs of the group, but its efficiency largely depends on the commitment of the teaching staff and the institutional context of each educational center, which may require additional efforts to overcome resistance or structural limitations. In terms of impact, all practices contribute meaningfully to the empowerment of women, both at the individual and community levels. Gains in self-confidence, autonomy, and social connectedness are evident throughout. Notably, Italian and Polish practices display the strongest potential for systemic transformation, as they begin to shift institutional responses to migration, gender, and inclusion through durable partnerships and advocacy.

Finally, the question of sustainability underscores the critical need for structural investment. While several practices have introduced mechanisms for continuity, such as training beneficiaries as future facilitators or embedding initiatives within municipal structures, the overall sustainability of these efforts remains contingent upon stable funding and institutional support. Long-term impact will depend on the ability of these practices to transition from project-based models to integrated components of public and civil society systems.

CONCLUSION

Civil society organizations across Europe have built a rich landscape of practices aimed at fostering migrant inclusion, gender equality, and social justice. However, the urgent nature of their work often leaves little space for structured reflection or mutual learning, especially in a competitive funding environment and when facing considerable time constraints and limited resources. The ReIncluGen project sought to address this gap by facilitating a participatory action research process, enabling CSOs and academic partners to critically engage with their practices. This collaborative approach has offered valuable insights into both the strengths and limitations of current methods, setting the stage for deeper learning and future development.

The participatory evaluation methodology, grounded in Bacchi's (2012) "What is the problem represented to be?" framework, enabled a critical, context-sensitive exploration of how CSOs engage with complex social issues affecting migrant women. Four interlinked steps were used: redefining the social problem, analysing practices within context, identifying inspiring practices, and assessing impact beyond outputs. By doing this, the methodology fostered reflective learning and aimed to uncover the transformative potential of CSO practices. Implemented across the five countries, the approach relied on participatory engagement and the facilitation of "critical friends" to support critical reflection and mitigate power dynamics. Although external facilitators as 'critical friends' would have been ideal, researchers often assumed this role when necessary, leveraging sectoral experience to build trust and foster dialogue. The method required significant adaptability to accommodate diverse organisational cultures, logistical challenges, and ethical complexities, ensuring that participation remained meaningful and grounded in local realities. Power relations shaped participation at multiple levels, influenced by gender, migration status, professional hierarchies, and organisational structures. Differences in recruitment, engagement, and facilitation styles were addressed through flexible adaptations such as session restructuring and hybrid formats. While participation varied, particularly among migrant women with caregiving responsibilities, the methodology encouraged inclusive engagement where feasible. In addition, the fieldwork highlighted tensions between immediate service provision and the pursuit of structural change, with many CSOs acknowledging systemic inequalities but facing constraints such as funding pressures, limited capacity, and internal contradictions.

Despite these barriers, organisations engaged in iterative reflection, expanded their mandates, and began to adopt more intersectional and holistic approaches. Internal questioning of power dynamics and professional norms emerged, albeit unevenly, facilitated by strong team cohesion and shared commitments to feminist and community-driven principles. Although structural transformation remained limited and financial sustainability precarious, the methodology demonstrated that participatory, reflexive evaluation can serve as a catalyst for organisational learning and gradual shifts toward gender equity and systemic justice. By centering lived experience, critical reflection, and relational trust, the approach offered a nuanced pathway for CSOs to navigate complexity while striving for long-term change.

The practices developed by CSOs in Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Poland encompassed both essential service provision (e.g., as language classes, childcare, and emergency support) and innovative approaches (including participatory theatre, artistic expression, and peer-led support). A recurring theme across these practices is empowerment through practical skills. In countries like Austria and Belgium, skill-building is embedded in community-based and creative formats, such as language courses, sewing

classes, and expressive arts. In contrast, Italy and Poland adopt more formalised approaches, such as training in digital literacy, financial skills, and employability. Peer support and community solidarity play a crucial role, particularly in Italy, Belgium, and Spain, where practices integrate peer-led models to enhance trust and bridge cultural or linguistic barriers. For example, Italy's "pPeer mediation practice" provides a Kurdish woman as a mediator between service providers and other Kurdish-speaking women, fostering inclusion and reducing isolation. Creative and participatory methods are central to the practices across all contexts, using arts and storytelling to empower individuals and raise awareness of systemic issues such as migration, gender-based violence, and racism. These methods foster critical reflection and collective action, with examples including Austria's use of pedagogical care and Spain's art-based initiatives to combat structural inequality. All practices respond to institutional gaps, particularly in areas of gender-based violence, migration support, and access to public services. For instance, Italy addresses the failure of institutions to support migrant women through digital helpdesks, while Spain's initiatives aim to combat institutional neglect and promote migrant women as agents of change. Similarly, Poland has responded to the lack of awareness among Ukrainian refugees through nationwide campaigns and self-defense workshops. Finally, an intersectional approach is evident across these practices, acknowledging the interconnectedness of gender, migration status, economic vulnerability, and racial discrimination. Many of the interventions, such as Belgium's community-building activities or Spain's focus on structural racism and gender inequality, target the compounded disadvantages faced by migrant women, providing tailored support that acknowledges these multiple layers of marginalisation. Overall, these practices are highly relevant and effective, addressing local needs such as legal integration, emotional well-being, and structural inequalities. They demonstrate sensitivity to intersecting barriers and emphasize participatory, community-led approaches, with Italy and Poland standing out for their adaptive, community-centered models. While Austria and Belgium offer structured services, their higher costs and lower flexibility can limit efficiency. For example, in Austria, formal language and integration courses often require professional staff, fixed locations, and rigid scheduling, which can make it harder to adapt to the changing needs or availabilities of participants. Similarly, Belgium's structured sewing classes and CREA activities rely on stable funding and trained facilitators, making it challenging to scale up or shift formats quickly. In contrast, Spain's practices, such as creative group sessions with migrant women or youth in schools, are more flexible in format but depend heavily on the personal engagement of educators and institutional openness. If a school or facilitator is less committed or under pressure, the practice may not be sustained or reach its full impact. All practices show positive impacts on women's empowerment, with Italy and Poland leading in potential for systemic transformation. However, sustainability remains a concern, requiring stable funding and integration into broader public systems.

Future research could build on the insights gained from this study by further exploring the long-term impact of participatory evaluation methodologies on the sustainability of CSOs and their practices. Specifically, examining how these reflective practices can be institutionalized within CSOs to foster deeper, more systemic change would provide valuable insights. Additionally, comparative studies across a wider range of countries or regions could help identify context-specific factors that influence the effectiveness of these practices, particularly in diverse socio-political environments.

While doing the research, we faced some challenges that can be considered in future research. One key challenge noted in this study is the variability in participation and engagement, particularly among migrant women with caregiving responsibilities, which may have skewed the diversity of voices involved in the

evaluation. Future studies could more effectively engage these and other marginalized groups by offering targeted support such as on-site childcare, flexible meeting times, transportation reimbursement, and outreach through trusted community networks. These practical adjustments would help reduce logistical barriers and enable broader, more equitable participation in reflective and evaluative processes. Furthermore, while this study highlighted the tensions between service provision and structural change, more research is needed to understand how CSOs can overcome institutional constraints and secure sustainable funding for long-term transformation. Lastly, future research should consider the impact of external factors, such as political shifts and funding cycles, on the continuity and effectiveness of CSO practices, as these factors often significantly affect the sustainability and scalability of community-led initiatives.

In conclusion, the Quwa app (which is developed as part of the ReIncluGen project) offers a valuable tool for enhancing the impact and sustainability of the practices developed by CSOs in this study. Quwa's platform supports CSOs by facilitating knowledge sharing, networking, and strategic profiling, enabling organizations to strengthen their collaborations and improve their outreach. By incorporating automated tools for analyzing activity and measuring engagement, Quwa aligns with the participatory, reflective approach of ReIncluGen, enhancing the ability of organizations to track their progress and identify areas for further development. Thus, based on the findings of this report, Quwa could play a key role in addressing some of the challenges identified, such as improving organizational adaptability, strengthening peer support networks, and enhancing the efficiency of service delivery. It offers an opportunity for CSOs to document and reflect on their activities, ensuring that the valuable insights from participatory evaluation are integrated into ongoing practices. As such, Quwa has the potential to complement the methodologies explored in ReIncluGen, supporting long-term learning and systemic change across the civil society sector.

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