



# Bridging the Gap: Investing in Women-led Organizations as way of Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls

## 16 Days of Activism 2023

1 December 2023

### Introduction

We, the members of the Regional Gender-Based Violence Working Group, the Regional Gender Taskforce and the Regional Anti-Trafficking Task Force, stand united to End the Violence Against Women and Girls, and we are collaboratively mobilizing our efforts during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Our shared commitment is to advocate for the rights and empowerment of all women and girls, including those refugees, or in displacement situations. We recognize that to achieve this goal, it is necessary to amplify the voices of those most affected by gender-based violence and address critical gaps in funding and support.

### The Challenge

Gender-based violence continues to have a greater impact on women and girls. It is rooted in gender inequality, it is pervasive, and it is a life-threatening protection and health issue. The war in Ukraine, with its spillover effect to the region, has exacerbated these challenges, making it more urgent to address the root causes, contributing factors and consequences of violence against women and girls, with additional intersectional layers of its impact on refugee women and girls. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, high rates of family separation, disruption of community, health and protection structures, limited economic opportunities and forced displacement have created or exacerbated the risks of exposure to gender-based violence for refugee women and girls. As we enter the second year of the conflict, women and girls have exhausted their savings or livelihoods, and face increased challenges in accessing quality GBV and sexual and reproductive health services due to decreasing levels of assistance.

### The Role of Women-Led and Women's Rights Organizations

Women-led organizations (WLO) and Women Rights Organizations (WRO) have been at the forefront of the fight against gender-based violence. They possess insights gained from strong community connections and long-standing involvement in advocacy and policy work on the ground, which has helped them to earn the trust of communities and key stakeholders. All of these factors contribute to their invaluable role in combating

gender-based violence despite limited resources. WLOs/WROs bring valuable skills and knowledge, and can often access and provide support to hard-to-reach and marginalized communities. However, they face challenges accessing both volume and quality funding, language barriers, navigating humanitarian coordination systems, and high workloads to meet donor compliance requirements.

### Spotlight on Women-Led Initiatives: Experiences from the Czech Republic, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

Women-led organizations have played a key role in responding to the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. They have provided support to women and girls who had experienced gender-based violence during displacement. These organizations have offered safe spaces, psychosocial support, counseling services and legal assistance to survivors, among other services.

In **Slovakia**, WLOs have been advocating for the recognition of qualifications for refugee women, enabling them to access employment opportunities. And have emphasized the importance of addressing gender-based violence through interventions carried out by community experts.

In **Moldova**, these organizations have played a role in empowering marginalized communities such as individuals with disabilities, older people, LGBTQIA+ individuals and Roma refugees. They have tirelessly worked towards bridging gaps in accessing services, raising awareness about gender-based violence and advocating for policy changes.

In **Poland**, WLOs have provided essential services for GBV survivors and advocated to address the persistent challenges in accessing services and rights related to GBV and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), especially for those groups at higher risk. They have pointed out that the lack of data on GBV-related issues remains an obstacle to greater awareness and targeted interventions.

In the **Czech Republic**, WLOs have played a critical role in providing comprehensive legal, social and psychological

support to GBV survivors and victims of human trafficking. These organizations are also actively engaged in information, dissemination and education initiatives aimed at preventing GBV and human trafficking. Refugee-led organizations headed by women are at the forefront of implementing initiatives for integration, providing language courses and professional development sessions designed to enhance the resilience and empowerment of women and girls in the community.

In **Romania**, WLOs offered trauma-informed psycho-social support as well as raising awareness of the risks of human trafficking and gender-based violence. Women's organizations employed Ukrainian refugee women to deliver peer-to-peer support, including Empowerment Self-Defense classes.

## The Funding Challenge Across the Region

Women-led and women's rights organizations, including those led by refugee women in the region, experience difficulties securing funds despite their substantial contributions to the prevention, risk mitigation and response to GBV. Despite recognizing their expertise and impact, these organizations frequently face a shortage of resources to meet their needs. This lack of funding is an obstacle to expanding services and reaching those who require assistance, hindering long-term change. As a result, GBV survivors and those at risk are left without the support they need.

## Our Plea for Action

### • Increasing Financial Support

We urge donors, governments and international organizations to increase their support to women-led, refugee-led and women's rights organizations engaged in combating gender-based violence. Adequate funding is essential to support these initiatives and long-term change, including empowering survivors through programs that provide multi-sectoral services such as psychological support, counseling, legal assistance, and economic empowerment.

### • Empowering Women-Led Organizations for Coordinated Multi-agency Response

Recognize the importance of localized, multi-sectoral GBV response, in line with the principles of the Istanbul Convention. Empower women-led groups to take the lead in addressing GBV and allocate dedicated resources for survivor-centered assistance and to ensure coordinated, contextually relevant interventions.

### • Raising Awareness

Capitalize on the platform provided by the 16 Days of Activism to highlight the work done by women-led organizations worldwide, and share lessons learned, successes and the challenges they face. Encourage others to join this cause, be an active voice and take steps towards the eradication of gender-based violence.

### • Advocating for Policy Change

Advocate for policy changes aimed at addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and effective protection against all forms of gender-based violence. Adopt strategies that promote gender equality, and enact reforms that support survivors while holding perpetrators accountable.

Together, we have the collective power to create a world where violence against women and girls is no longer tolerated. Let us strive toward a future where women and girls can thrive in an environment of safety and respect. United, we can shape a world free from violence, where everyone enjoys equitable access to resources and opportunities to fulfill their potential.

### Sources

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