



10 insights

into the unique approach of
women's specialist services



WOMEN
AGAINST
VIOLENCE
EUROPE



Women's specialist services (WSS) encompass feminist-run, by and for, women's organisations committed to combating violence against women and girls (VAWG). Their role extends beyond individual support, engaging in primary prevention efforts and offering crucial aid to survivors. Through prioritising women's agency, WSS pursue a political agenda aimed at systemic societal transformation.

Insight



1

Women's specialist services are a victim support service as diverse as survivors of VAWG are

Women's specialist services (WSS) are feminist services that support women and their children experiencing gender-based violence against women. They include (but are not limited to) women's support centers, shelters, helplines, rape crisis or sexual violence referral centers and primary prevention services.



Insight

2



Women's specialist services have a distinct rights-based, intersectional and feminist approach to victim support



Women survivors have unique experiences and needs, due to intersecting layers of identity. Unlike general services, WSS adopt a rights-based, intersectional and gender-sensitive approach, based on feminist principles. WSS provide a secure environment where all women can receive compassionate support and learn prevention strategies without the risk of reprisal or judgement.

Insight

3



Women's specialist services provide long-term support beyond emergency assistance and empower survivors through an intersectional agency-affirming approach

From self-defense and stereotype challenging workshops to legal, psychological, and financial counselling and feminist advocacy for systemic change, WSS offer a tailored support journey based on the needs and agency of each survivor. They affirm and empower the diverse experiences of women and girls, ensuring that their voices guide their path to recovery.



Insight



4

Findings from the WAVE Country Report 2023

Women's specialist services shed light on the prevalence of VAWG through data collection and analysis, thereby advancing women's rights.





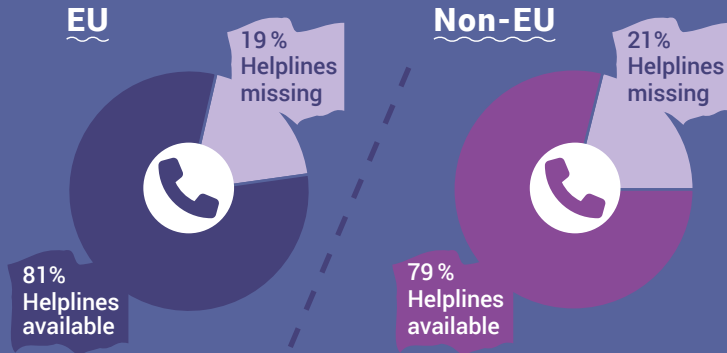
The WAVE Country Report provides a comprehensive review on the availability of WSS and implementation of Istanbul Convention minimum standards across Europe. Compiling data from 46 countries, it benchmarks progress and highlights areas needing enhancement, guiding the advancement of services for women survivors of violence against women.



Insight

5

National women's helplines



...are dedicated phone lines that provide immediate, confidential assistance to women experiencing VAW and DV, including sexualised violence. As a safe and accessible first point of contact, they offer crisis intervention, information, referrals, and empower survivors towards recovery.

Actions to strengthen women's helpline services



Lifelines without borders:

Champion for 24/7, multilingual, toll-free helplines & keep them consistently available, not just in emergencies.

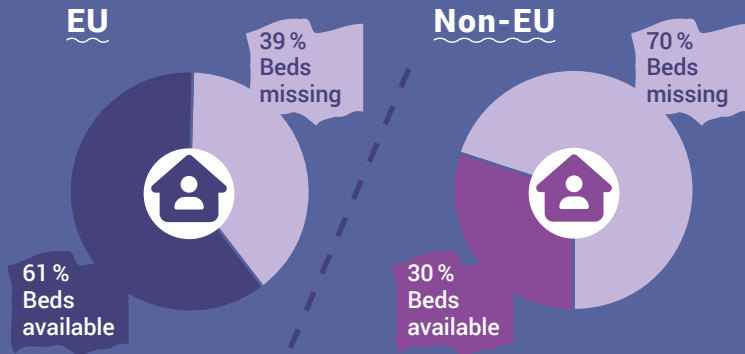


Broadcast the number:

Promote the helpline's number far and wide to ensure it is a well-known resource for safety and support.

Insight 6

Women's shelters



...are indispensable safe spaces offering housing and support for survivors of VAW and their children. These shelters provide a secure, respectful environment that supports both immediate crisis response and long-term recovery. The Istanbul Convention highlights the need for widespread, accessible shelters which meet the needs of survivors through multiagency collaboration.

Actions to strengthen women's shelters



Legislate for inclusive support:

Enact laws to guarantee that all women survivors of violence and their children, regardless of their legal status, have access to shelter and specialist support.



Remove financial barriers:

Adopt measures to ensure free or affordable access, guaranteeing support is available to all survivors regardless of their financial situation.



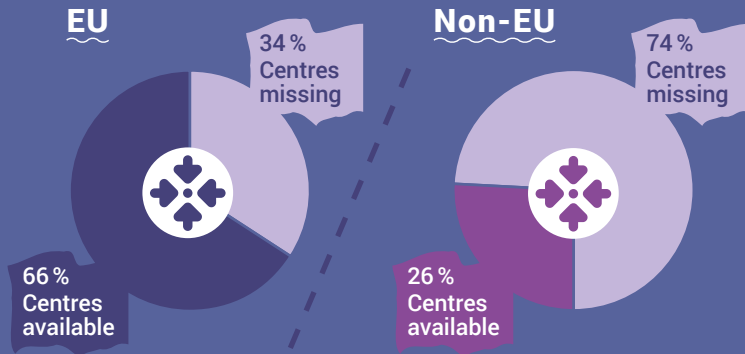
Expand shelter availability:

Increase the number of women's shelters to ensure adequate coverage in both urban and rural areas, enabling access for women nationwide.

Insight

7

Women's centres



Serving as essential support hubs, women's centres offer specialised services to female survivors of VAWG. They prioritise survivors' rights, needs, and empowerment through gender-specific approaches. These centres are instrumental in fostering recovery, promoting community awareness, and preventing violence, enabling survivors to reclaim their autonomy and control.

Actions to strengthen women's centres



Ensure universal access:

Advocate for the availability of women's centres across all regions, prioritising underserved areas for specialised support.



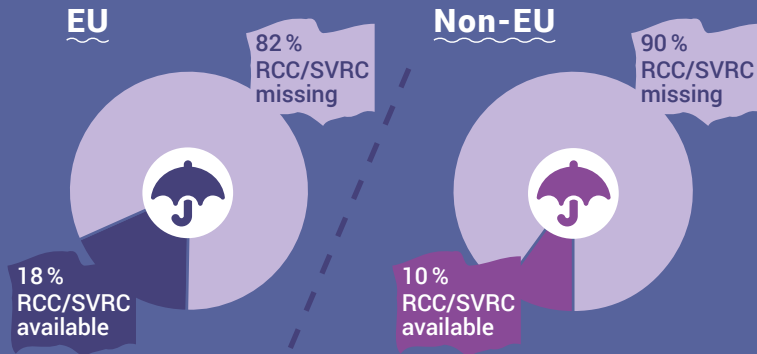
Unified service definition:

Push for a standardised definition of women's centres that embodies feminist principles, to ensure consistency and quality of support.

Insight

8

Specialist support for survivors of sexualised violence



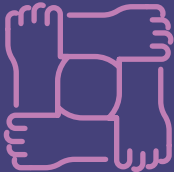
...are essential. They include rape crisis centres and sexual violence referral centres. The demand for these services far exceeds the current availability, highlighting the urgent need for increased support and resources.

Actions to strengthen specialist support for survivors of sexualised violence



Expand SV centres:

Support the expansion of rape crisis and sexual violence referral centers to meet the Istanbul Convention standards, ensuring one service per every 200,000 inhabitants and appropriate geographical accessibility.



Enhance sector cooperation:

Foster collaboration across healthcare, law enforcement, legal services, and NGOs for a unified approach to SV.

Insight

9

Prevention of VAW



Preventing VAWG involves a comprehensive approach targeting the issue before it occurs. It includes primary prevention to alter deep-seated behaviours and attitudes, secondary prevention for early intervention, and tertiary prevention for crisis support and recovery. Investing in primary prevention can significantly reduce violence rates, making it a cost-effective strategy for protecting women's human rights.

Actions to strengthen primary prevention



Boost funding and research:

Increase investment in research to expand knowledge and implementation of effective primary prevention strategies, including the evaluation and scaling of pilot programs.



Balance prevention efforts:

Emphasise a balanced approach to primary, secondary, and tertiary violence prevention, ensuring resources enhance rather than detract from each level to secure survivors' rights and recovery while prioritising the right to a violence-free life.

Insight

10



**Transforming the approach
to femicide in Europe**





Femicide, the gender-based killing of a woman because she is a woman, demands urgent action in Europe. The lack of a standardised definition and consistent data collection hampers efforts to combat this extreme form of violence.

Advocating for uniform methodologies, femicide watches, and policy integration is essential to improve accountability, protection, and prevention of gender-based killings.

Women's specialist services are a crucial pillar of feminist civil society, playing a transformative role by offering life-saving support to women affected by violence. Their work transcends individual assistance, turning service provision into a form of political action that aims to change society at large.

Let's continue to advocate, support, and empower women in their journey towards safety, healing, and justice. Let's keep the conversation going and work towards driving change and advancing women's rights, ensuring a life free from violence!

Scan me to access WAVE's
report and factsheet on WSS



© 2024 WAVE Network | www.wave-network.org
Bacherplatz 10/6, A-1050 Vienna
Illustrations: Boyko.Pictures & Skylines/shutterstock.com



Funded by
the European Union