

The enclosed feedback are the collective points drafted by the below mentioned in relation to the Report submitted by Malta pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 1 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (First thematic evaluation round) shadow report.

The following feedback was drafted in 2025 in agreement between the following organisations and individuals:

Dar Hosea

Dar Merħba Bik Foundation

Fondazzjoni Sebħ

Professor Marceline Naudi

St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service)

Victim Support Malta (VSM)

Women's Rights Foundation (WRF)

- IMC-NGO meetings did not continue over the last couple of years. NGO meetings together with the commission on gender based violence and domestic violence (CGBVDV) did however restart in 2024.
- No NGOs or second stage shelter representatives are on MARAM, even after several suggestions for their inclusion. All involved stakeholders are from government entities, leaving out a crucial voice. Whilst some NGOs have the opportunity to give feedback to MARAM, not all NGOs involved in the cases that are reviewed by MARAM would be consulted. Although MARAM effectively creates recommendations for the victim, it does not impose justice on the alleged perpetrator.
- Whilst childcare benefits for those women in full time employment is a great initiative, they do not offer options to survivors of violence who are carrying the full responsibility of parenthood on their own and in part time employment. Free childcare provision for those women who are in part time employment should also be included in the scheme as their lack of support systems may not permit them to access full time employment whilst juggling the full responsibility of parenthood. Additionally, given that free childcare is only given to working parents, those women survivors who require support with child minding until they are mentally fit to work, do not have this as an option. Thus, as a recommendation, women who experienced DV should be provided with an allocated number of hours, for free, to get the necessary support required, to enable them to recover and reintegrate into society.
- Electronic tagging has been planned for a very long time with no implementation as yet. The first time that this was tabled in parliament was in 2021, however as yet there has been no implementation. Updates have been given along the way suggesting that they would start to be used in that year, however this never came to fruition. Additionally, NGOs are not being consulted regarding how electronic tagging is to be safely and effectively implemented.
- Panic buttons - The Victim Support Agency was set to begin distributing these devices in January 2025, however this is still not available. (<https://tvmnews.mt/en/news/panic-buttons-will-be-distributed-from-next-january/>)
 - 2021 – Electronic tagging bill was tabled in parliament (never concluded)
 - 2023 – Electronic tagging to be introduced in 2024 (never materilased)
 - 2024 – yet another promise that electronic tagging tenders are being finalised and to be introduced later in the year
 - 2024 – budget promised to introduce electronic tagging in 2025
- When a woman is seeking safety, her access to housing and other benefits is dependent on her residence status. This still places real limitations on her breaking free of abuse and her residence status is given more regard than her safety (and that of her children). This means that some women and children have limited access to healthcare and housing options.

- Women whose residence status is dependent on that of their husband, and who leave their spouse due to abuse, are ending up becoming dependent on the residence status of their children (when there are children) rather than being granted a status in their own right.
- As NGOs we are shouldering expenses in relation to stateless people, as no established organisation helps with the payment with regard to issues such as hospitalisation and giving birth.
- Cultural interpreters are not always available. NGOs can often get stuck on this with no funds or resources for this. This can delay the procedure for the women and add an extra burden on NGOs. Support is sometimes offered by the Jesuit Refugee Service in this regard, which is another NGO.
- Despite specialised services concerning migrant women, the specialisation does not include catering for DV victims.
- Schools should be further trained on DV and get guidance on how to proceed in certain situations. They should also take an interest and check with DV services if they notice that children are not attending school.
- A gap remains in the system for women who are escaping violence but who are actively using drugs, as most shelters are not equipped to cater for these complexities.
- The maintenance system in Malta means that women and children are being left for months without any financial support and options to feed their children. This same group of NGOs had put the following recommendation in a recent Family Court Reform Public Consultation as a suggested way to rectify this:
 - Procedures for maintenance:
 - It should be deducted automatically from the person's salary, social security benefits or other income.
 - Maintenance should be paid to the Department of Social Security who will pay out the due maintenance to the receiving parent and then the DSS are responsible for reclaiming the money from the paying parent.
 - This will then also flag for DSS when a payment has not been made.
- Changes in the education system mean that families seeking refuge in shelters, are being asked that their children change school during this time, to move to the locality where the shelter is located. Apart from this being more upheaval and possibly traumatic for the children, it might also alert the perpetrator to the locality of the shelter should they need to be informed of the move. This is due to cuts in state transport budgets and was not a problem faced before as specialised transport to take the children from the shelter to their original school was provided in these cases.

- The educational syllabus in primary and secondary schools is very academically based and is very heavy and there is no emphasis on soft skills. The inclusion of this would instil the right approaches and consideration of others, which we often see lacking in DV cases.
- Police in the specialised GDVDV unit have received special training, but do not receive individualized compulsory supervision to support them in dealing with limitations in the system and the sensitivity of the subject. The urgent provision of this would help to reduce cynicism and catch any possibly damaging attitudes.
- In 2020, a specialised police unit was established and we now have 2 established hubs. Despite great progress, harmful attitudes still persist, including lack of compassion, understanding from some officers which necessitates ongoing compulsory training.
- Despite suggestions put forward, mandatory ongoing training in GBVDV which is grounded in gender sensitivity and survivor support to professionals, is still lacking. Training is being offered however this is still not mandatory for most professionals, leaving an element of choice. The lack of mandatory training often leads to dismissive handling of cases and secondary victimisation due to lack of trauma-informed approaches.
- Very little to no training is being provided to the judiciary, especially those assigned to domestic violence courts and judges within the family court. Unnecessary comments are often passed by the adjudicators.
- In relation to current training being offered, the organising agency should follow up on concerns relayed from trainers regarding professional's attitudes. When these problems are detected during training, the employing entity should be informed and the person should be given due attention to reframe their reasoning and approach. Currently these behaviours are remaining unaddressed and the person is still in contact with victims of abuse, possibly relaying this negative attitude and approach.
- Secondary victimisation is being caused by the system due to lack of trauma informed training. Whilst it is positive that certain Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been created within the Police Force to maintain standards across a service, and officers are aware of these, monitoring of their implementation and accountability to these appear to be lacking – this needs to be heightened for the desired effects of the SOPs. There are still instances where women who go to report are judged and revictimized by the officer present.
- At times, the police will refuse to accompany women to get their belongings from home unless the client contacts the Police Force Staffing department, which offers the service against payment.
- Whilst training is being offered to police in the specialised unit, it is still very lacking for those based in district police stations who are very often the first point of call for a person seeking support and therefore need increased sensitivity towards GBVDV issues.

- The State Social Work Domestic Violence Unit and Child Protection Services work very separately. With more collaboration in respect to GBVDV cases, the family unit would be considered more in its entirety also giving context and sensitivity to circumstances surrounding DV.
- Court services within Child Protection Services still very often emphasise on parental access for the perpetrator even when this is not in the best interest of the children. The general feeling is that parental rights are often given more importance and weight than those of the children. The voice of children having witnessed or experienced domestic violence, when they are clearly saying that they are afraid or do not want contact, should be given more weight. It is often noted that they include parental alienation. Parental alienation is also included the Child Protection, Mandatory Reporting Guidelines (2020)¹
- Child Protection Services are very understaffed, and very overburdened with the amount of cases and this often means that cases are left pending for a long time, with children in abusive situations remaining at risk. A particular gap in services exists for children who have witnessed GBVDV and are inflicting similar behaviours on their siblings. As this is child to child, limited support is offered in this respect, which is then causing more victims of abuse, and youth without the adequate care to adapt their behaviours before they escalate.
- A very big service gap remains for youth between the ages of 12-21 who would have experienced violence and have started to show aggressive symptoms. There is no residential programme which is specified for working with these children to recover from their trauma, deal with their anger constructively and safeguard other family members in the meantime. This lack of services is almost breeding the next generation of perpetrators.
- For children below the age of 14 (Malta's criminal age of responsibility), who are being aggressive towards their mothers and siblings, the police have at times threatened the mother that they will press charges against her if the behaviour continued, even though she herself was a victim of this abuse.
- One of the main systematic problems remains that services are not consistent for victims of violence and very often it is dependent on who is on shift. These inconsistencies are seen in the police, healthcare, Care for Victims of Sexual Assault department (CVSA), courts etc.
- The crisis worker in cases of rapes and social workers in cases of reports to police are not always allowed to remain present with the victim at all stages of the process even when this is consented to and at the victim's direct request.

¹ <https://fsws.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/MRG-Document-13.04.21.pdf>

- The weight of child responsibilities and even parental access still remains mainly on the woman. The women are still expected to take the children to access (even when there is DV), accommodate timings ruled by court irrelevant of her employment, and adapt to child arrangements. However, the repercussions of the father not attending still remain minimal. This therefore allows for another mechanism for perpetrators to use the system to maintain control over a woman's life.
- It is unclear whether there are structured care plans for perpetrators, especially those leaving prison, but definitely there are no considerations for how this will affect the women and children involved.
- It is essential that we begin to recognize prostitution as a form of violence against women. Policies must be designed to protect those who are most vulnerable and at risk of exploitation. Our discussions and decisions should be guided by the voices of women who have lived through this reality, those who are too often overlooked yet directly impacted.
- Dar Hosea, as the specialised NGO on prostitution and trafficking, was never invited or included in discussions organised by the Migrants Liaison Unit within the Primary Health Care (PHC).
- The importance that police officers at the specialised GBVDV hubs are well informed of the violence endured during prostitution – there were cases when women were not taken seriously considering their history of prostitution and statements like – ‘issa terga’ tmur mieghu’ (translated: ‘now you will go back to him’).
- Victim blaming – victims of violence through prostitution are sometimes being told by the police ‘but this is your work’ and then reports are being minimised and dismissed. This is leading to victims being convinced not to report.
- Police officers at stations often adopt an unsupportive approach, frequently dismissing reports of violence, even in cases where immediate protection from the perpetrator is urgently needed.
- Malta continues to struggle with the timely issuance, enforcement, and monitoring of protection and restraining orders. This results in victims often remaining at risk of further abuse, particularly in cases involving custody disputes or ongoing coercive control. This could be resolved by streamlining the legal processes, digitalising protection orders where appropriate, and ensuring immediate enforcement protocols are in place.
- Access to immediate psychological support, sexual assault response, and long-term housing for survivors remains limited, especially for migrant women and those without financial means. This may mean survivors may be forced to remain in unsafe environments due to systemic and financial barriers.

- Many public policies and awareness campaigns fail to adopt a gendered lens, which weakens the impact of national strategies. Preventative efforts are diluted, and violence against women is often framed as isolated or mutual conflict. All policy frameworks should be centred around the recognition that violence against women is a form of gender-based discrimination.
- Malta has made incremental progress, but significant structural reforms are still needed to meet its obligations under the Istanbul Convention. This includes a system-wide cultural shift towards accountability, trauma-informed care, and survivor-centred justice. Civil society stands ready to support, monitor, and co-create solutions with state institutions—however, clear leadership and political will remain essential.
- There is no adherence to the Istanbul convention article that enables women to stay in the matrimonial home with the children, and the perpetrator evicted. Responsibility falls upon the victim to leave and to safeguard the children from the abuse. The adequate protection for this to happen is not available either.
- There remains a lack of human resources in this sector, as it does not incentivise people to enter this workforce, due to the nature of the work. The pay gap and overall work package (further elaborated on below) further disadvantage NGOs from accessing this very limited pool or having the same opportunity to retain staff and avoid burnout and exhaustion.
- Apart from understanding abuse, the Public Housing Authority should also establish a specific scheme for DV victims, which gives them priority. When women who experienced DV are married to their perpetrator, they do not have the opportunity to apply for social housing, unless a separation contract is finalised, which is costly, and sometimes beyond the financial means of the survivor.
- More implementation of perpetrator programmes to be utilized through sentencing in the Courts.
- The child victims of violence to date have very limited options to attend for free play therapy or other therapy, or it is just limited to some. Where custody is shared, both parents will need to sign to give consent and often times the victim ends up paying for the child's mental wellbeing. Other times the perpetrator uses this as another form of control and refuses to sign, leaving the child without the adequate support needed.
- Whilst training (although not mandatory) has managed to infiltrate a number of sectors, with an increasing understanding in the importance of everyone being trained on GBVDV, access for magistrates to receive training remains absent. Like other fields, it is essential that magistrates (especially those working specifically on GDVDV cases), have mandatory training in the area for increased sensitivity and awareness of emerging trends and behaviours.
- Over the last few years there has been a spike in the use of the term 'parental alienation'. This is often being used by perpetrators of GBVDV as another form of

manipulation, control and abuse, and the system is giving this weight. Under this reasoning, children expressing intense fear to see their abusive parent, are being forced to see them, and the mother who was the victim of abuse is being blamed for the fear. This is minimising and desensitising the system to the effects of GBVDV and increasing trauma for both the children and the mother.

- On the matter of parental alienation, in 2020, the Maltese government established a technical committee to raise awareness about parental alienation. This committee, chaired by lawyer Andy Ellul, includes members from various organizations, such as the Children’s Commissioner, Happy Parenting Malta, and the Commission against Domestic Violence². The NGO Happy Parenting Malta is run by a convicted perpetrator and its members are in the majority perpetrators and/or fathers that through court orders, do not have access to their children.
- Following this technical committee, the Government issued a public consultation on the reform of the Family Court³, where once again, parental alienation was mentioned⁴.
- Legislative amendments - the definition of domestic violence has been amended by means of ACT No. XXIII of 2024⁵. It is now limited to family members and intimate partner violence and does not include persons living in the same household. This was a positive amendment since the previous definition included flatmates and was leading to an increased burden on the domestic violence courts.
- Restraining orders, Protection orders and emergency barring orders – Following yet another femicide, the police have now updated their SOPs so that in cases where there is a breach of protection orders, they would proceed with the arrest of the perpetrator. With the exception of the island of Gozo, Temporary Protection Orders still continue not to be requested by the police in Malta and/or issued by the courts.
- Although the State Domestic Violence Unit social workers’ involvement in court is appreciated, it continues to add to their caseload, leaving limited time for them to intervene with their allocated clients. Moreover, in instances where the perpetrator retaliates to a report with a counter report, they are entitled to the same access to victim services as the actual victim is. Whilst it is understood that all DV reports must be considered, the lack of control of these counter reports is an additional strain on resources and very often an insult to victims. It also means that the same service can be supporting both parties as a victim, although one is clearly a perpetrator. As a recommendation, such service should be offered through court social workers, and when a victim shows a wish to be followed by a DVU SW, a referral will be made.

² <https://tvmnews.mt/en/news/il-gvern-se-jfassal-government-drawing-up-strategy-to-avoid-parental-alienation-biex-jindirizza-kazi-fejn-tfal-jigu-mcahhda-minn-xi-hadd-mill-genituri/>

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https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/131477/public_consultation_on_family_court_reform_launched

⁴ https://justice.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Riforma-Familja-24_-BookletEN-DIGITAL.pdf

⁵ <https://www.parlament.mt/media/129305/att-xxiii-gender-based-violence-amendment-2.pdf>

- Dual reporting continues to persist and we have noted that charges are also issued against the victim reports because she would show them a message where she may have insulted the perpetrator, despite no complaint being filed by the perpetrator.
- There has been an increase in the number of magistrates within the family court, however delays continue to persist and cases can even take up to 2 years and more to be heard and concluded.
- Whilst some DV services have incorporated male team members in their teams, this is still very minimal and the ongoing promotion of this and the positivity it can bring to the field should be promoted more. Whilst we appreciate the sensitivity of our reality, offering exposure to males in DV services can support the idea that males are not only perpetrators, but a positive male role model can offer a different positive connotation with males in the DV sphere.

Lack of Funding for NGOs

An area of particular concern for NGOs remains that of funding, with particular emphasis on the below points. With the below considerations NGOs need further financial support from the government to ensure that they can continue to maintain the standards of services offered, to be on a fair playing field with government entities in respect to recruitment and to continue to create projects that are often given due to fundraising initiatives and over and above the provision of the service:

- Whilst some NGOs have a public social partnership this only covers partial expenses needed for the running of the service, still leaving a very heavy financial burden on the NGOs to deal with recruitment issues and evolving needs of the women and children in our care.
- The agreement with the Ministry provides a fixed rate per bed night, regardless of the number of children, status, physical and mental health, or economic circumstances of the women admitted to the shelter.
- The funding allocated primarily covers staff salaries, which remain below the standards of comparable state-funded services. As a result, the NGO shelters and services face persistent staff turnover and significant challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced personnel. This therefore means that staff employed by the government are offered a much better rate and package than the rate and package negotiated in the NGO agreements. This significant gap creates a substantial disadvantage for NGO recruitment to attract and retain professionals and staff in the field.

- An increase in poverty and financial dependence of clients, is leading to a huge reliance on the NGO, which incurs additional expenses which would not have been catered for and which cannot be renegotiated with the government agreement until the next term of a 3-year contract is being discussed.

An important reflection on the shadow report is that the work done by NGOs is not featured anywhere. For this reason, the participating NGOs are providing a brief overview of the NGOs and the valuable work done in the field of GBVDV.

Dar Hosea

Services

Dar Hosea was officially launched in 2014 with the mission of providing a safe space and support for women who are involved in prostitution and situations of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Through our work, we've come to understand that these women's circumstances are often the result of systemic failures, frequently starting in childhood, where they face trauma, violence, abuse, and manipulation. To support them, we offer a range of services, many of which form part of individual care plans created in collaboration with their social worker.

As a low-threshold drop-in centre, our goal is not only to meet the immediate needs of the women who seek our support but also to guide them on the challenging journey of rediscovering self-worth, self-love, and respect. Ultimately, we aim to help them break free from the cycles of abuse and exploitation, empowering them to stand on their own and live independently.

Restoring dignity has been the foundation of our work since day one. While our drop-in centre has served as our main point of contact, we've also extended our outreach to women and girls in other settings, such as correctional facilities, hospitals like Mater Dei and Mount Carmel, rehabilitation programmes, and even in their own homes. Regardless of their circumstances, we are committed to being a constant presence in their lives, providing support through their struggles and triumphs.

In addition, we have implemented prevention programmes to help reduce the risk of girls and women falling into exploitative cycles of abuse that are often difficult to escape. Over the last decade, our services have reached more than 370 individuals.

Awareness

Our efforts to amplify the voices of women affected by prostitution have been central to our mission. In 2024, we expanded our awareness sessions to include professionals and key figures who may encounter these women in their daily work, such as parish priests and parish groups, shelter workers, social workers, community workers, youth workers, teachers, and social work students at the University of Malta. These professionals are often in a position to identify and support individuals who may be at risk of exploitation or grooming.

We also conducted awareness campaigns with secondary school students to help prevent young people from becoming victims of exploitation. During the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, we ran an online campaign that shared powerful quotes from our service users, shedding light on the daily horrors of violence and abuse that women in the sex industry endure.

In June 2024, a volunteer and a staff member from Dar Hosea attended the CAP International congress in Montreal, Canada, as part of the CAP International Abolitionist Week. The World Congress, titled "Equality in Action," brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including survivors, researchers, activists, parliamentarians, and other frontline workers. Dar Hosea's participation allowed us to both advocate for equality and showcase the work we are doing in Malta, while also connecting with like-minded organisations around the world.

Advocacy

Dar Hosea is committed to giving a voice to women who are often marginalised and pushed to the periphery of society. Our message has always been clear: prostitution is a form of gender-based violence (GBV) that leaves women vulnerable to further abuse, exploitation, and the loss of self-respect, ultimately contributing to cycles of poverty, substance abuse, and homelessness. These issues often become intergenerational, affecting multiple generations.

In 2024, we intensified our advocacy efforts, meeting with key policy stakeholders to discuss the realities faced by women in prostitution. Leading up to the European Parliament MEP elections, we sent a letter to all Maltese MEPs and arranged individual meetings with four of them. These discussions, which included some of our service users, focused on policies related to prostitution and the broader issues that impact the women we support. We also held meetings with ambassadors to address the situation of prostitution in Malta and participated in consultations led by policymakers. Alongside other NGOs, we were able to present our recommendations on various topics concerning social justice for women experiencing violence.

Networking – Collaborative Approach

In 2024, we continued to build and strengthen our networks, actively participating in a variety of platforms, including the Homelessness Network, FSWS roundtables, the Anti-Poverty Forum, CAP International, and RENATE. We also maintained strong relationships with other social service providers in Malta, collaborating with a range of NGOs, professionals, and organisations who interact with our service users. These include FSWS services, the Court and Probation Services, rehabilitation programmes, MDH, MCH, CSA, Life Network Foundation, Caritas, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, and OASI, among others.

This ongoing collaboration has allowed us to take a more comprehensive and integrated approach to supporting women in prostitution, ensuring we are fully engaged in addressing their needs from all angles.

The Good Shepherd Sisters - Dar Merhba Bik Foundation

Overview of the Good Shepherd Sisters' mission:

The Good Shepherd Sisters - Dar Merhba Bik Foundation provides a Safe and Therapeutic Accommodation whilst working with women, along with their children who are in a domestic violence situation, even through gender-based violence, to help them establish a way of life which best meets their needs and allows them to develop their potential.

Objectives;

- To provide adequate, safe and secure facilities to female victims of domestic violence and their children at any given time, with a tailor-made therapeutic program for each service user.
- Our goal is to offer psycho-social services to our residents and promote reintegration into the community, mainly through the re-empowerment of women.
- To help the residents find alternative accommodation and start a new life as and when necessary.
- To promote reconciliation with self, society, and in whatever way possible or desirable with family and God.
- To enhance public awareness about the issue of Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence.
- To actively participate in all Local and International Platforms on the issue of Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence.
- Dar Merhba Bik has been one of the leading pioneers since it opened its doors in 1980, having hosted and helped thousands of women in Malta combat their situation of domestic violence by various means, including but not limited to:
- Offering a safe shelter for adult women and their children going through domestic violence, both when at imminent risk at an emergency stage as well as when they require further support before leading a completely independent life at the secondary stage.
- Supporting the residents and their children wherever possible. This is mostly done through our social work services, 24/7 care workers available for any support needed, linking clients to alternative specialized professionals (legal, medical, therapeutic ect.) whilst offering emotional support.
- Helping clients with their skills, opportunities and with managing everyday tasks.
- Working with various other domestic violence entities as well as other entities beyond, for the betterment of the client.
- Advocacy regarding DV and GBV through various means.
- Where possible, providing members of the community with items they might require.
- Offering information and referring to other services to those reaching out for options yet not seeking shelter.
- Providing talks, information sessions and training to other entities, companies and collaborators of the service, as a means of outreach and education.

- The Good Shepherd sisters - Dar Merħba Bik Foundation have been operating in the field of domestic violence in Malta for almost 45 years. Within the Foundation, there are two domestic violence shelters, certified to operate as such by the Social Care Standards Authority, which are:
- Dar Merħba Bik: The oldest and largest emergency domestic violence shelter in Malta, equipped to safely host 14 families at any given time, who would imminently be leaving their abusers.
- Dar Santa Bakhita: A smaller second-stage domestic violence shelter which was opened in response to the much-needed demand for a shelter of its kind back in 2019. These women and/or families would have completed their programme at any emergency shelter, but would require further assistance until the clients would be able to lead a fully independent life.

Upcoming Awareness Project:

Dar Merħba Bik Foundation applied for the project that forms part of the Together We Empower programme, administered by the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence and supported by the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms and Equality. The project is a community-rooted artistic project. Currently, there is an open call inviting proposals from individual artists, groups, collectives or organisations working in any medium, including but not limited to visual art, sound, performance, installation, text, moving image or interdisciplinary practices. Selected proposals will contribute to a final work shaped through research, development, and exchange within the project context.

Il-Milja – Second Stage Shelter within Fondazzjoni Sebħ

Il-Milja, previously known as Dar Qalb ta' Gesu was the first second stage shelter in Malta. Established 25 years ago, this service aims to offer a dignified, safe and holistic healing space for women and children escaping various forms of violence. Milja is a very serene and therapeutic space where every woman and family have their own flat with their own kitchen, living room, bathroom and bedrooms, so that they can continue to function as a family, within their own private space. Nevertheless, the dedicated team are present for 24 hours a day and offer a holistic service to the families, ensuring that every family member's individualised needs are considered, as well as that of the family as a whole. During their time at Milja, the women and families are supported on every aspect of their journey, supporting them to feel valued and find a life free of abuse. The team of professionals work hand in hand with the families in developing their care plan and goals whereby holistic support is offered. Fundraising initiatives are created to ensure that our families receive timely interventions such as the need for therapy, medical needs which may come at a cost etc, in order to offer the best opportunities for healing and stabilising during the time the family spend at Il-Milja.

Inclusive Spaces

Milja prides itself at being a shelter that welcomes families of all types. Some women may come seeking safety alone varying from 18-year-old women, to elderly women. Others come whilst pregnant and others with children of all ages. Milja accept adult children who may be accompanying their mother, and we also accept pets of different species and sizes. These two factors are very important for us as we try to lower the barriers as much as possible for a woman to seek safety, and having to choose to leave her adult child behind or her pet could be barriers to leaving violence. Milja is also the only shelter that have male staff on the team. This adds a unique layer to the service, especially for children who are seeing first hand that males can be compassionate and empathic, which often serves as an alternative to male figures they previously had exposure to.

Projects

Within Milja there are a number of ongoing projects like *Sharing of Wealth (SOW)* which support residents with an equity based programme for the receiving of basic needs donations to support their needs and abilities to save; *Project Prosper* which focuses on educational and employment opportunities; *Soul Space* which supports the women on their emotional journey through reflection exercises; and *faMILJA* which is a project which drives family connections and healing.

Our Journey, Our Voice

During this project our current residents and ex-residents came together to give feedback on their journey and to suggest recommendations for policy and service change. Very courageously some of the women presented their collective recommendations to a handpicked group of dignitaries, stakeholders and members of parliament, in a bid to bring about the necessary change and amplify the voice of the women.

Stand with Sebħ

In 2022 Fondazzjoni Sebħ launched a nationwide awareness campaign, Stand with Sebħ whereby our teams take to the communities affixing posters with messages about eliminating violence against women and children. During this campaign the teams visit hundreds of shops and businesses to share the message and for them to stand in solidarity and the team give them all information and contact details about who to contact if a customer or employee seeks help. This campaign aims to create safer spaces in society with more standing in solidarity against violence. Over the three years thousands of companies have participated in Stand with Sebħ and in November 2024 this became an all year-round campaign, with the strong message that '*violence does not stop, so neither will we*'.

Aftercare Services

Fondazzjoni Sebħ also have a dedicated service to Aftercare Services, whereby the team join the team at Milja to support women and families that are transitioning out of Milja and into the community. The aftercare team continue to offer support to those who need or want it in the community to be available to limit vulnerabilities and to have ongoing support. The aftercare services are also in the process of developing transitional housing, which will offer a semi-independent solution to those who need another housing option between Milja and independent living.

Advocacy

As part of this service, we ensure to use every opportunity to advocate for the rights of victims of violence and to challenge barriers in this system. This is done by attending parliamentary meetings, participating in public consultation reviews, having frequent meetings with NGOs and government entities both for healthy ongoing collaboration and also for bringing about change together, participating in media interviews and conferences. Additionally, we deliver training to the police force, multiagency professionals, members of the church, human resources managers and health entities, about GBVDV, the impact of trauma and the importance of sensitivity when working with victims of GDVDV.

SOAR Service at St Jeanne Antide Foundation

At SOAR, the team is made up of women who have personally experienced domestic violence. A deep understanding of the challenges faced is held, as that path has been walked by us. A non-judgmental environment is offered, where empathy, compassion, and unwavering support are at the core of the service. The mission is to assist others in healing and rebuilding their lives, just as it has been done by us. At SOAR, survivors are never alone. They are walked alongside, and empowerment is provided to help them thrive. Here is a brief overview of what SOAR is all about.

One-to-One Peer Mentoring: Personalised support is provided through one-to-one mentoring, where individuals are guided in overcoming the challenges they face. The sessions are held online, face-to-face on the premises, or outdoors.

Volunteer Mentor Matching: Vulnerable survivors are matched with volunteer mentors, who are responsible for providing the necessary support and guidance. The service is made available based on current availability and is subject to capacity. All efforts are made to ensure that individuals receive the assistance they require, although the provision of this service depends on available resources at the time.

Support Groups and Workshops: Group sessions are facilitated, where shared experiences are discussed, emotional support is received, and skills are developed through educational workshops. These sessions are conducted online or face-to-face.

Saturday Social Club: A social gathering is held on Saturdays, designed to create a family environment for thrivers. Fun and therapeutic activities are organised by SOAR, with cooking sessions also being arranged for participants. These activities help interpersonal skills to be developed.

Outreach Work: Survivors in need are reached out to, with support and guidance offered to those who may be isolated or facing difficulties. Some individuals come as a drop-in, are referred by a friend, or reach out via a message on our social media or by phone. Some cases are also referred by other agencies.

Advocacy Work: Individuals are supported in representing and defending their rights and interests, ensuring that access to services is provided and fair treatment is ensured.

Liaison with National Agencies: Collaboration and communication with national organisations and agencies are conducted to strengthen networks, access broader resources, and advocate for improved services. Shelter meetings and the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) are attended by SOAR as part of this effort.

Triple R Programme: The Triple R Programme (Recognition, Recovery, Resilience) equips survivors with tools to better understand their challenges, recover from trauma, and build resilience for the future.

Meraki Social Enterprise: A social enterprise is run where survivors engage in soap-making. Valuable skills are gained by them to return to the workforce, while the proceeds continue to support others in need.

In-Kind Support: A range of in-kind support is offered to help survivors manage difficult situations, preventing further debt, ill health, anxiety, and mental health issues.

Pet-Assisted Education Training: Animals are incorporated into educational settings to support learning, well-being, and emotional development, helping individuals connect in unique and therapeutic ways.

In-House Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) and Gestalt Therapy (by Trainee): Due to the trauma endured by many of our service users, therapy is often considered essential. From 2024, CAT and Gestalt therapy were offered free of charge to those in need, provided by qualified trainees.

Learning Support: Learning support is provided for children facing learning difficulties by our dedicated volunteers, as it is firmly believed that education is the key to their success. This support is subject to availability.

Art Therapy: is being organised to support service users in expressing themselves. For the art therapy program, the group is taken for a week to a private residence, where a full schedule of workshops focused on their healing journey is provided.

Victim Support Malta (VSM)

Victim Support Malta is an NGO which has been operating since 2006, as a trauma-based service tasked with helping regular people who experience extraordinary events. We offer services to victims of crime, regardless of whether these were reported or not, and whether they were experienced recently or some time ago. VSM offers psychotherapy, counselling, psychiatry, and family therapy, while legal representation is also offered in the cases of those who have experienced sexual assault and wish to pursue litigation. Referrals are received from other organisations (public service, NGOs, etc) however clients can also be self-referred for support.

Victims of domestic violence are supported through the CORE service of Victim Support Malta, which is unfunded, and which relies heavily on the involvement of trainee therapists on placement, with work being overseen and coordinated by a paid member of staff. In 2024, Victim Support Malta received referrals for 85 survivors of domestic violence, the vast majority of whom would have accessed our unfunded CORE services. However, 24 of these clients were funded and referred by the Victim Support Agency, under a PSP agreement held between the two organisations. While these clients entered our services in 2024, a number of other clients would still be accessing these services in an ongoing way, having first been referred in previous years.

Victims of sexual assault are supported through the CVSA (Care for Victims of Sexual Assault) services within Victim Support Malta. In 2024, VSM received 80 new referrals for this service, over and above the clients who were already accessing the service. CVSA is a service that is funded through a PSP with the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights.

In 2024, VSM staff also delivered a number of talks on Elderly Abuse at various Active Ageing Centres in Malta (and later Gozo), an initiative spearheaded and coordinated by the Commission on Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence. Similarly, they deliver presentations on the psychological implications of domestic violence, as part of the multi-agency training which is organised by the Commission throughout the year. VSM staff have also actively delivered talks in schools (secondary and post-secondary level) on sexual consent, and sharing information about our services. We also delivered training to medical students on trauma informed patient care.

In November 2024, as part of 16 days of activism, VSM reached out to DV shelters and organisations supporting DV victims, inviting those who have been moved or affected by gender-based violence in any way, to leave their own mark on this conversation, through any artistic expression of their choice, as a way of challenging and ultimately eliminating gender-based violence. We received submissions and shared these over social media, as a way of empowering survivors to leave their own mark on this conversation.

Women's Rights Foundation (WRF)

Mission statement

Women's Rights Foundation (WRF) is a voluntary organisation committed to informing, educating and empowering women concerning their legal rights. WRF aims to achieve this by:-

1. protecting women's rights through influencing laws, policy and practice,
2. preventing violence against women by raising public awareness and training
3. providing voluntary services to inform women and their children about their legal rights.

Primary focus will be given to domestic violence, sexual exploitation of women, including human trafficking and gender discrimination.