



Breaking the silence on gender-based violence against migrant women:

Launch of the ACCESS project aiming to facilitate access to support services for affected women

GAMS Belgium, FORWARD UK and Médicos del Mundo (Spain) are launching the ACCESS awareness campaign on 21 November. The objective is to improve access to prevention, protection and support for migrant women confronted with gender-based violence. A European project co-financed by the European Commission's REC programme, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (PCI) as well as Equal.brussels.

Migrant women face a continuum of gender-based violence (GBV), including female genital mutilation, sexual violence, partner violence, forced marriage, human trafficking... Each person has specific needs.

Support services exist in Europe but are not always easily reachable. Obstacles are many and in practice, it is sometimes impossible to find support.

The objective of the ACCESS project is to improve the prevention, protection and support of migrant women in Europe facing different types of gender violence. "ACCESS" refers to "Appropriate Community-based Care and Empowering Support Services."

The project is based on an awareness campaign, activities by and for affected communities on the issue of GBV, an interactive mapping of support services, an online chat service, and the training of front-line professionals.

Step 1. Launching the awareness campaign. Affected women do not always recognise that they are in a situation of GBV. The objective of the online awareness campaign is therefore to facilitate the identification of such violence. Short videos were created about the emotions generated by GBV. Four emotional states: fear, stress, disgust and pain. These videos were conceived with affected people to ensure a sense of identification. If one does not recognise the violence, they do recognise the emotions associated with it.

Step 2. Raising awareness among affected communities. Peer educators are volunteers who were trained in tackling different types of GBV. They are to raise awareness within their communities. Involving affected communities is crucial to the fight against violence against migrant women. As Idil, ACCESS peer educator, testifies: *"For me, engaging with ACCESS was an intuitive decision. You can't really explain it, there are things you like... And I like helping people. The ACCESS training has been very helpful to me. [...] In addition, we treated different types of violence, only to realise that these all had a common origin. Violence against women takes different forms but is interrelated. Women experience many forms of violence during their lifetime. It's a continuum. The profiles of the peer educators were very diverse, and we now have a reference person in the various migrant communities in Belgium."*

Step 3. Taking action. The website www.we-access.eu, launched on 21 November 2019, includes an online mapping of support services for migrant women facing GBV in Belgium, in the United Kingdom and Spain. The mapping is an evolving tool: it is possible for organisations to register directly on the website to facilitate access to their services. For migrant women, the system is simple: it is visual, easy to use, and precise. So they know exactly where to go according to their situation and needs.

Step 4. Providing guidance to affected women. The project will also offer online chat sessions, in different languages, to allow everyone to access appropriate support. It will be directly accessible through the website. Among the languages available: Arabic, Somali, Fulani, Tigrinya, English, ... The goal being to provide guidance and support to the affected women.

Step 5. Ensuring adequate support. Access to support services is essential, but these services must provide appropriate support. 150 front-line professionals (per country) have therefore been trained in the care of migrant women facing GBV.

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The non-profit organisation **GAMS Belgium** has been fighting since 1996 for the abandonment of female genital mutilation in Belgium and abroad. Its team collaborates with affected communities and carries out prevention, support, professional training and advocacy work. GAMS Belgium is a member of the EndFGM European Network and the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices.