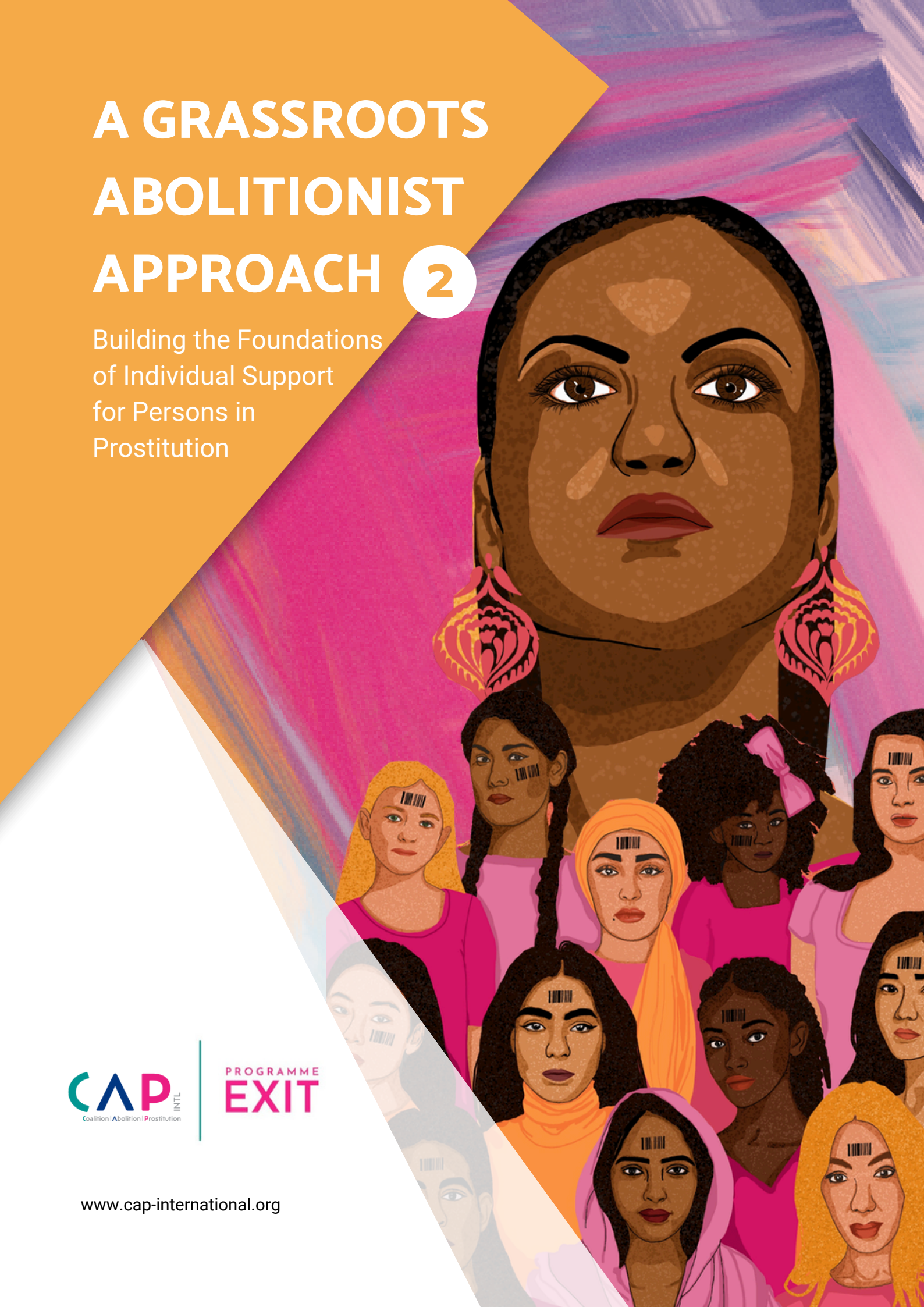
A GRASSROOTS ABOLITIONIST APPROACH 2

Building the Foundations of Individual Support for Persons in Prostitution



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PROGRAMME EXIT

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Publication: December 2024
Authors: Jonathan Machler & Héma Sibi
Graphic design: Alice Rahmoun
www.cap-international.org

CONTENT

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Expressing, in a universal language, the realities of the prostitution system and the responses provided by grassroots and survivors-led organisations in so many countries is not an easy task. The aim is to be as representative and inclusive as possible, bringing together a large number of experts from different countries working in different contexts. It is useful to provide clarification on the use of specific terms in the handbook.

The term ***women is prostitution*** is commonly used rather than the persons in prostitution. The use of this term does not seek to invisibilise the existence of men, boys and trans persons in the prostitution system nor the violence and harms they suffer from it: the Grassroots Abolitionist Approach has the same ambition of protection, justice and emancipation for each person in prostitution. However, it is used to point out to the inherently patriarchal dimension of the prostitution system: the overwhelming majority of those in prostitution are women and girls, exploited by men, to answer the male-demand for the purchase of sexual acts.

The terms “sex work” and “sex workers” are not used in this document as they do not correspond to the realities observed in the field and described by women with lived experiences of prostitution. The term “sex work” is thus a euphemism sanitising the violence and multiple coercions inherent to the prostitution system. It is often used to promote the regulation/legalisation of this system which includes the depenalisation of pimping and the purchase of sexual acts.

The term ***prostitution system*** is used in this report, as it is a system involving several actors: the women in prostitution, the pimp and the sex-buyer. Far from being an individual choice, as often portrayed, it is a part of a continuum of violence against women (before, during and after), coercion and exploitation. This system thrives on the male-demand for the purchase of sexual acts expressed by sex-buyers. It is to answer this demand that pimps and traffickers organise the exploitation of women and profit from it.

The term ***survivors*** is used, as it used by many women who have exited the prostitution system, and who speak out on behalf of those still in prostitution and murdered in this system. Survivors’ voices are invaluable: they can speak freely and without constraint about the realities of the prostitution system and the violence they have suffered from it. They are also at the forefront of the creation and implementation of exit programmes for women in prostitution.

Although the roles and areas of expertise of the staff members of the grassroots and survivors-led organisations are diverse, the generic terms ***social workers*** or ***frontline workers*** are commonly used in the report to facilitate collective understanding. It should be noted that these staff members frequently include survivors working on the implementation of exit programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Many grassroots and survivor-led organisations providing support to women in prostitution worldwide, implement a Grassroots Abolitionist Approach seeking to provide exit pathways, concrete alternatives and tackle the vulnerabilities feeding the prostitution system.

This specific approach is ambitious, as it enshrines a holistic accompaniment providing safe spaces and resources for prostituted women to find safety and the support they need to heal, transform their lives in order to build confidence, agency and to reclaim their power. It further works to build a movement of change with a shared analysis among organisations and a common vision to end violence and exploitation.

By giving a platform to survivors and frontline workers, this handbook highlights the specificities of the grassroots abolitionist approach in terms of building an authentic relationship with persons in prostitution in order to provide individualised support to them.

This second handbook of CAP International from a series of several, develops the various steps of individualised support for persons in prostitution undertaken by grassroots abolitionist NGOs through the sharing of concrete examples from different countries. Grassroots abolitionist organisations use a number of mechanisms to build up individualised support to persons in prostitution: this ranges from meeting people in prostitution where they are, to assessing their needs, creating an equal relationship based on trust, and providing comprehensive access to health care.

While this handbook attempts to highlight the common features that characterise the work of abolitionist organisations, it does not prevent each organisation from having its own specificities, often linked to the context of intervention. Thus, the ambition of this handbook is not to define a single, chronological, rigid approach, but rather to highlight what these actions have in common, what best practices have been observed, in order to help other organisations in their understanding of the realities of prostitution and their efforts to facilitate access to exit pathways out of the prostitution system.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT FOR PERSONS IN PROSTITUTION

CREATING A RELATIONSHIP OF EQUALITY, TRUST AND NON-JUDGMENT

Multiple vulnerabilities surround the lives of women and girls in prostitution. Many of them have suffered psychological and physical violence prior to prostitution, and this is repeated in prostitution at the hands of pimps and sex buyers. Creating a relationship of mutual trust that puts the person being supported at the centre of the decision-making process is a major challenge for abolitionist organisations working in the field.

First and foremost, staff of service-providers set up a safe framework of support, based on a number of rules that are essential to the creation of a caring relationship:

- **Unconditional welcome and support:** Support isn't conditioned to the person's willingness to exit prostitution or not. According to Maria Decker, Executive Director of the organisation **SOLWODI** in Germany "The decision to exit prostitution is a very big one for women in prostitution. One that comes with a lot of fear and anxiety because they are not sure what will expect them and how they will survive." Support should never rely on whether or not the person wishes to exit prostitution. It is based on the concrete needs expressed by the women coming to the services.

- **Non-judgement:** People in prostitution suffer from persistent sexist societal stigmatisation, which adds to the violence they endure in prostitution. The people accompanying persons in prostitution must therefore adopt a benevolent attitude, believe the women when they speak, understand where they are coming from and put aside their own biases in order to fully accept what they have to say. According to Dolzoodma Purevjav, from the NGO **Talita Asia**: "When assessing needs, the conversation must be horizontal, there is no person above the other. We don't ask personal questions; the person has to feel at ease". The organisation **SOLWODI** highlights that women are free to remain anonymous during the first encounters and counselling sessions to protect their privacy. They decide at their own pace when and how much they want to reveal about their identity. It can be noted that because of the shame and stigma associated with prostitution, survivors and those involved have the capacity to have a greater connection and trust for those who have had similar experiences. In Australia, more than half of participants in a research with lived experience of trafficking highlighted that a survivor is the best person to answer a helpline (1). The survivor-led NGO **Eva Center**

highlights that peer education is one of the most effective interventions when it is possible.

- **An approach and services based on trauma and the resilience of the people supported:** The services developed by grassroots abolitionist organisations are developed in a trauma-sensitive way. This means that services are developed around the "recognition of the long-term and perverse effects of interpersonal violence and childhood abuse [as well as prostitution in this context], the experiences of survivors as valid and the recognition of the difficulties they face when seeking help" (2). This recognition and the staff's knowledge of the traumas of violence enable people in prostitution to recognise themselves and their experiences. Abolitionist organisations therefore put the emphasis on the resilience and strengths of the women they support.

- **Active listening:** This involves listening to the person without trying to direct the conversation or impose one's own vision or words on those of the other person, and freeing oneself from any desire to interpret what is being said or to draw conclusions. On this point, psychologist Suparna Rudra, from the Indian NGO **South Kolkata Hamari Muskan,** says:

> *We have to believe that each person is capable of solving their own problems. They may be stuck at the moment, but they will get there. When we think in this way, then we can stop giving solutions and start listening. Also, when the person isn't talking, don't try to fill the silence with questions. Don't feel you have to say anything. Just listen and stay with the person. Listen to the silences.*

- **Respecting the temporality of the persons in prostitution:** Social work can be limited by time constraints, but the progress of women in prostitution and vulnerable groups does not follow these deadlines. It is therefore essential for support workers to respect the timeframes of the women they work with. The women express their needs in the time frame they wish, and their rhythms must not be rushed. The support provided is often a lengthy process, it can take up to several years. For women in prostitution, exiting out requires resources provided in a steady manner from crisis interventions to last steps of support.

- **The definition of a framework:** The person being supported is informed that they can refuse to enter into a conversation, to answer a question or to benefit from a proposed service.

Laying down the contours of this reassuring framework also involves allowing women to benefit from a quiet place that respects confidentiality (3). While a relationship of unequal power is inherent in the relationship between the service provider and the person being supported, the staff of the various grassroots abolitionist organisations aim to smooth out this inequality as much as possible and to ensure that exchanges are horizontal. Above all, the aim is to establish a relationship of collaboration and equality, and to give women decision-making power, enabling them to regain control over the decisions that affect them while expressing their limits.

(1) SlaveCheck, Recommendations for Helpline Design and Operation from People with Lived Experience, 2024: file:///C:/Users/hemas/Downloads/Recommendations%20for%20Modern%20Slavery%20Helpline%20Design%20and%20Operation%20(3).pdf

(2) Elliot D., Markoff L., Fallot R., Glover Reed B., Trauma-informed or trauma-denied: Principles and implementation of trauma-informed services for women, Journal of Community Psychology, 2005

(3) Against Violence Against Minors, how do you broach the subject of prostitution with a minor?

INITIATING CONTACT THROUGH OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Women in street, indoor or online prostitution systematically suffer from isolation, poverty and multiple vulnerabilities that constitute obstacles to accessing care, assistance and mainstream services.

The outreach teams of grassroots abolitionist organisations meet women in prostitution where they are. Outreach is the place where first contacts are made and enable the organisations to make themselves known. The outreach method can be defined as follow: "an action, a move that leads to making connections without imposing" (4). The aim is to break the isolation from which women in prostitution suffer and to create links between them and service providers. This exchange is a key factor in creating mutual relationships based on trust, listening and caring between women in prostitution and the people who work with them. Outreach goes beyond the pure logic of administrative work and social work, and is part of a proactive approach, involving physical visits "outside the walls", aimed at creating human, equal contact with people in prostitution situations, and initiating long-term relationships based on trust. According to Cherie Jimenez, founder of the **Eva Center** in the USA, "street outreach can be challenging sometimes, and for many jurisdictions street prostitution has shifted to numerous on-line venues. Therefore, it is important to work with those who are often first responders such as local law enforcement, community programs, hospitals to ensure those in prostitution have access to safety, and easy access to shelter and resources."

The public may vary from country to country. In Europe, for example, 70% of persons in prostitution are estimated to be migrant women (5). In France, according to the Central Office for the Repression of Human Trafficking, 83% of persons in prostitution are of foreign origin. They are subjected to mafia-operated pimping networks that exert pressure, threats, violence and crime on them and their families (6). Displaced and exploited in a foreign country, women and girls victims of trafficking face immense vulnerability. They are isolated by language barriers, unfamiliar with local systems and support services, and often carry a deep mistrust of police and institutions. It is not uncommon for grassroots organisations carrying out outreach work to directly observe pimps controlling and monitoring women in places of prostitution.

(4) https://www.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-de-l-action-2022-2-page-9.htm
(5) Brussels Call, Towards Equality Progresses, Challenges and Next Steps, Her Future is Equal, 2022: https://womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/herfutureisequal_2022_web_artwork_v1_2_very_final.pdf
(6) https://www.ardennes.gouv.fr/index.php/Actions-de-l-Etat/Droits-des-femmes-et-egalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes/Violences-sexistes-et-sexuelles/Prostitution
(7) https://www.ruhama.ie/wp-content/uploads/Ruhama-Annual-Report-2021-LR-9.pdf

> *They told me I was going to work for them for 4 years to pay for my traveling, they had my passport, all my documents, all my identity so you have to work and pay it off. That was not what I was told in my country, I was told I would be working in a shop and I would have a place of my own to live and after a year I could get my girls but when I got here it was a whole different story.* (7) - Person supported by **Ruhama** in Ireland

Outreach activities can be carried out by trained volunteers, professionals or people with lived experience of prostitution. Integrating survivors in designing outreach efforts and evaluating services has proven particularly efficient. Specific training can be provided to outreach teams in order to apply the code of conduct and fundamental values advocated by the organisation with regard to the people it meets and/or supports: exchanges must be benevolent, based on non-judgement and active listening. In addition, the professionals or volunteers must accept and respect any refusal that may be put forward by the people they meet.

The position of grassroots abolitionist organisations in reaching out to women in prostitution varies according to the context, but core similarities remain. The grassroots' NGO **isala** in Belgium summarises the principles of its outreach accordingly:

1. The intervention is feminist. Volunteers or professionals must not express the feelings and emotions of the person they meet on their behalf;
2. The support is unconditional and independent of the person's desire to leave prostitution;
3. It implies being available to listen, taking an interest in the person as such, while respecting their personal space and reactions (8).

> *The contact on the street is a demanding commitment which requires the ability to overcome one's fears and anxieties in the face of the violent world of prostitution. For prostituted persons, this encounter can become a possible opening to the world outside prostitution and lead to the expression of a specific demand to exit. We are not there to plead and advocate, we are there to meet the person and what he or she is, to break the isolation and barriers. What counts is to be true in our approach.* - Julia Crumière, volunteer at **isala**

Abolitionist grassroots organisations carry out a wide range of outreach activities in a variety of contexts: street patrols are common, but they can also take place indoors (in "massage parlours", clubs or even at the gates of legal brothels in countries where prostitution is regulated). As street prostitution has shifted to online platforms in recent years, outreach has to be more creative and grassroots organisations are adapting: some of them set up virtual outreach activities by contacting people on prostitution ad platforms, via social networks, by email or text message. For instance, **Fondation Scelles** in France developed the phone application #SEXPLOITED (9) enabling direct contact with 400 referral services (healthcare facilities, accommodation and shelters, vocational training, helplines) available in ten languages all over France.

(8) Contribution by isala
(9) https://www.sexploited.org

Outreach activities can take several forms: some organisations conduct distributions of food items, hygiene kits, condoms, blankets and clothing. This approach aims to provide for the primary needs of women in prostitution from the very first contact and to mitigate the vulnerabilities they encounter. Other abolitionist organisations, such as the **Mouvement du Nid** in France, do outreach "empty-handed". This means that the volunteers do not carry out any distributions, but simply go out and meet people in prostitution with a view to establishing a dialogue, an exchange that is desired and shared by both parties and that neither involves a “beneficiary” nor a “helper”. This philosophy also aims at prioritising human contacts that do not involve any transaction and are thus distant from the commercial/transactional relationships that surround the lives of persons in prostitution. Particular attention is paid to the fact that no control is exercised over these women, who are not the ones initiating the contact. They are therefore entirely free to refuse or accept the conversation.

In Germany, the organisation **SOLWODI** runs a “café” in several German cities located close to the red-light areas with numerous brothels. Women can stop by this safe place to get a coffee, breakfast and to benefit from information about the support services. The café also proposes various activities that women can join when they wish.

Grassroots abolitionist organisations can share resources with the women they meet, to inform them of their rights and the help available (flyers of drop-in centres, important numbers, etc.). One of the objectives of outreach is to inform women in prostitution that access to the NGO's "safe spaces", whether drop-in centres, shelters, are available to them when they wish. Outreach officers can also refer the persons they meet to other appropriate structures depending on the needs they express (housing, administrative assistance, language courses, etc.). The abolitionist grassroots organisations themselves may be approached by other organisations, through legal proceedings, or by institutions referring people in prostitution in need support to them. According to **Eva Center**, in Boston, USA, it is a matter of “making it a multi system effort. We can make limited resources go further by collaborating with various like-minded organizations as well as reaching out to those who could also become champions on this issue." (10)

Community-based or "peer-to-peer" outreach is also an approach that can be implemented by abolitionist associations in certain countries and contexts. This is the case of **South Kolkata Hamari Muskan** (SKHM) in India. The organisation, which operates in the very heart of the Indian red light areas of Sonaggachi and Bowbazar in Kolkata, empower team members from the community and teenage volunteers born into the area and taking part in the organisation's various programmes, to go out and meet women in prostitution in order to make them aware of the various support services available to them through SKHM. The teams meet women in prostitution in brothels in the red-light areas and its surroundings. Because of the special characteristics of the red-light areas, which combine living quarters and prostitution areas, the teams can also visit the residents directly.

Similarly, grassroots organisations founded by survivors of prostitution, and made up almost exclusively of survivors in their teams, may practice a *peer-to-peer* approach to outreach. This approach, based on shared experiences between people with lived experience of prostitution,

(10) https://www.evacenter.org/news-resources/outreach

naturally strengthens the bonds of trust and prioritises a relationship of equality between the people they meet and the people who go out to meet them. The survivor-led organisation **Eva Center** in the USA, thus have a team of peer advocates making an initial connection with women in order to let them know that when they are ready for a program, shelter, education and training, these options are available to them (11). For the organisation, outreach also means raising awareness in the community, particularly among law enforcement officers and other first responders, as well as court and medical providers.

Reaching out to women in prostitution remains an ongoing challenge for organisations working in the field: it is not easy to make contact with women who are made vulnerable and marginalised by prostitution. Most of them are in very precarious situations, under psychological or physical duress, and reveal very little about their situation in order to protect themselves. Establishing a relationship of trust takes time and is not always successful. It is thus important for those in prostitution to know that they will be supported throughout the whole process of exiting out. As exiting out often means leaving without nothing, there needs to be reassurance that supports and resources are available along the way.

(11) https://www.evacenter.org/news-resources/outreach

ASSESSING THE NEEDS TO DEFINE AN INDIVIDUALISED ACCOMPANIMENT

Once the initial contacts have been made, a partnership begins between the grassroots abolitionist organisation and those seeking assistance, one in which both participants are valued for the knowledge they bring. In this partnership, women in prostitution remain the experts in their situation and what they need to exit out. Those making contacts make sure that women will have access to safety, financial resources and whatever services they identify. Exiting out is often a long journey that is different for each person. Programs need to be able to meet these needs through collaborations with numerous agencies. These include legal, medical, access to safe housing, along with basic needs for survival outside of prostitution. By decreasing or eliminating the numerous barriers encountered by those in prostitution which often includes the stigma, and victim blaming, individuals then can be afforded the opportunity to heal, have access to safety and financial independence while expanding their choice that includes viable alternatives.

Women in prostitution have a variety of needs, depending on their individual pathways and where they are in them. For a long time, the needs of women and girls in prostitution have been mostly analysed and highlighted from the point of view of health, health risks and sexually transmitted diseases (12), leading to solutions focusing only on strategies to prevent/reduce the risk of transmission and on the behaviours of prostituted persons not the ones of buyers (13). However, the needs of women in prostitution are not limited to this aspect and go far beyond it, these may include the wish to leave prostitution. A research conducted in Australia highlights that needs expressed by survivors of sexual exploitation were mostly related to financial hardship, housing and accommodation, employment and education, mental health, physical health, alcohol and drug use, social and community engagement, safety, legal and visa issues so as domestic and family violence (14).

In Ireland the NGO **Ruhama** underlines that other needs frequently expressed by their service-users are housing, psychological support, support in their legal/migratory status and socio

(12) CLES, connaître les besoins des femmes dans l'industrie du sexe pour mieux baliser les services, 2014: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wIr0eunQj1sYs3SIVHUxtA5no9d7TsWX/view
(13) CLES, connaître les besoins des femmes dans l'industrie du sexe pour mieux baliser les services, 2014: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wIr0eunQj1sYs3SIVHUxtA5no9d7TsWX/view
(14) Australian Institute of Criminology, Sexual exploitation in Australia: Victim-survivor support needs and barriers to support provision, 2023

professional reintegration. The German organisation **SOLWODI** adds that the need for treatment for addictions is also recurrent among the women coming to their services. Many women in prostitution are dependent on substances as a coping mechanism to survive the daily violence they are exposed to.

Needs assessments can be carried out over several appointments. Some organisations, such as **Talita Asia**, offer people a detailed questionnaire to help them identify basic needs, as well as intermediate and long-term needs.

IMPLEMENTING A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

The accounts of survivors of prostitution and various studies highlight the strong impact of prostitution on the health and well-being of prostituted persons. Prostitution is tainted by violence both upstream and downstream: most women in prostitution have suffered violence - often sexual - in childhood (15). This violence is repeated in prostitution at the hands of pimps and sex buyers.

The repetition of sexual acts that are undesired but experienced as the result of socio-economic, physical or psychological coercion constitutes violence in itself. Surrounding this main violence are the others: rape, physical and verbal aggression, threats with weapons, culminating in murder (16).

This violence, combined with the consequences of precarious living conditions (malnutrition, poverty, homelessness, lack of access to healthcare), the marginalisation and the *social gaze* (17) of women in prostitution have a real impact on their physical and mental health. Giving women in prostitution access to trauma-informed psychological support and enabling them to achieve a state of well-being and health is therefore a major challenge.

According to Ally Marie Diamond, founder of the organisation **Wahine Toa Rising** operating in New Zealand and Australia "many don't even realise they are being exploited or even recognise the abuse and violence as these behaviours are what they have been exposed to in childhood. They have grown up believing violence, sexual abuse, emotional and mental abuse are normal behaviours from men".

The prostitution system has a number of traumatic consequences for persons in prostitution. According to the psychiatrist and founding president of the association Mémoire traumatique et victimologie, Muriel Salmona, "68 to 80% of women in prostitution suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, similar to the rates observed among soldiers returning from war" (18). The spanish organisation Medicos del Mundo supporting persons in prostitution highlights that "the

(15) Silbert H., Pines M., Sexual Child Abuse as an Antecedent to Prostitution, Child Abuse and Neglect, Vol.5, pp. 407-411, 1981 & McClanahan, S. F., McClelland, G. M., Abram, K. M., & Teplin, L. A., Pathways into prostitution among female jail detainees and their implications for mental health service, Psychiatric Services, 50(12), 1606-1613, 1999: https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.50.12.1606

(16) Sarson Jeanne, MacDonald Linda, 'Herstorical forerunners to present daycybercrimes: non-state torturers, traffickers, pornographers, and buyers', 2019.

(17) https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/article_du_lef_-_prostitution_est_violence_faite_aux_femmes.pdf

(18) Salmona Muriel, Psychotraumatic consequences of prostitution, Munich, 6 December 2014.

mental health consequences of prostitution are similar to those suffered by people subjected to torture" (19).

Repeated violence in prostitution can cause women in prostitution to adopt "dissociative" strategies, leading to an emotional and physical disconnection from the experience of violence they are enduring. This can give rise to a feeling of observing the violence from the outside instead of experiencing as described by persons in prostitution (20).

These "distancing" mechanisms for coping with violence are veritable survival mechanisms put in place by the body in the face of danger (21). The French grassroots organisation **Mouvement du Nid** highlights that:

> *Because of the disjunction affected by the brain, memories of episodes of violence are not integrated by the brain: this is known as traumatic memory. These memories can therefore resurface violently and unpredictably. These recollections are symptoms of post-traumatic stress, which have real physiological effects: the development of phobias, anxiety attacks, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, sleep disorders, flight behaviour, a feeling of "detachment", etc. These are all survival mechanisms put in place by a person's body when they are confronted with traumatic events such as sexual violence. (22)*

> *Many of the women I met in prostitution and I did not know what a big part dissociation played in our lives and what dissociation did to us — our personality and our whole identity. It was invisible to us too. So, on the one hand, dissociation was an important "tool" to survive the daily abuse, on the other hand, it was extremely harmful because it separated us from ourselves unknowingly.* - Sandra Norak, lawyer, survivor-expert (23) (Germany)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop following exposure to unprecedented violence, and the symptoms include hypervigilance, panic, flashbacks to the event, intrusive thoughts, nightmares, etc. In addition to PTSD, depression, anxiety and stress, among others, are psychological consequences of violence in prostitution. In France, the Prostcost study shows that the suicide rate among persons in prostitution is 12 times higher than in the general population, and that the latter are exposed 4.5 times more to drugs such as antidepressants and anxiolytics than the general population (24).

(19) https://www.medicosdelmundo.org/que-hacemos/explotacion-sexual/
(20) https://mouvementdunid.org/prostitution-societe/dossiers/sante-mentale-prostituees-urgence/#:~:text=Judith%20Trinquart%20th%C3%A9orise%20cette%20notion,souvent%20d%C3%A9crit%20par%20les%20personnes
(21) Mouvement du Nid, sortie de prostitution et insertion professionnelle, 2023: https://mouvementdunid.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Brochure-Reinsertion-web-195x26023-1-scaled.jpg
(22) Mouvement du Nid, Sortie de prostitution et insertion professionnelle, Un guide pour outiler les profesionnels.les de l'insertion à accompagner les personnes ayant connu la prostitution, 2023.
(23) Norak, Sandra (2020) "Loss of Self in Dissociation in Prostitution; Recovery of Self in Connection to Horses: A Survivor's Journey," Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence: Vol. 4: Iss. 4, Article 6. https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2019.04.04.06
(24) Prostcost, Estimate of the economic and social cost of prostitution in France, 2015: https://prostitutionresearch.com/prostcost-an-estimate-of-the-social-and-economic-cost-of-prostitution-in-france

Recognising the impact of this violence on the mental health of people in prostitution, abolitionist organisations, some of which were founded by or work with survivors, provide psychological support for the women they work with, to help them overcome the anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome caused by prostitution and the repeated violence that goes with it. This psychological support can take several forms but is based on the individual experience of the people being supported.

In Sweden, the organisation **1000 Möjligheter** has set up an anonymous chat helpline for persons in prostitution, run by psychologists. The NGO also has another anonymous chat helpline run by volunteers for youth people between the age of 15-20, having experiences with intimate partner violence, both for the ones being exposed to it, for perpetrators and also friends to these target groups. On these platforms, people can anonymously and free of charge receive advice from professionals or confide in volunteers. For people who have not yet decided to take the plunge and seek more in-depth support, or for those who are unable to access care, the centres provide a listening ear and information. Within the organisation, psychologists specialising in trauma management offer free, ongoing support to the women seeking support.

Karin Johansson, Parental support officer & licensed Psychologist, explains that several methods are available for treating post-traumatic stress disorder: Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and "prolonged exposure" (PE). According to the association, PTSD treatment can be a lever to help women escape from prostitution.

As many women in prostitution express feelings of shame and guilt, for **1000 Möjligheter**, part of the therapeutic process also aims at highlighting the responsibility of perpetrators of male violence and placing the individual experience of women in prostitution in a broader context of men's violence against women in society.

The **EVA Center** in the United States is implementing a model based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for women and girls in prostitution that was developed through local organisations working with high-risk youth. This structured, goal-oriented type of talk therapy aims at challenging negative thinking patterns and habits and transform them into healthier, positive ones (25).

> *When I started, I was anxious all the time, I could not see any good thing in my life or any good thing in me. Now I see myself as a human again. Now I am relaxed, I sleep again, and I see opportunities.* – Person supported by **Ruhama** (Ireland) (26)

> *After I joined the group sessions of SKHM I saw some changes. I was no more fearful of leaving the house. Before I felt helpless and powerless. Today I feel like I can say no, like I can protest. I had no sense of self-worth before. My self-esteem has gone up. I've owned respect for the work I'm doing. Today I want to stand before other people, support them, help them leave prostitution."* - Collective discussion between women supported by **SKHM**

(25) https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/21208-cognitive-behavioral-therapy-cbt
(26) https://www.ruhama.ie/wp-content/uploads/Ruhama-Annual-Report-2021-LR-9.pdf

It is common for women in prostitution to develop feelings of shame, guilt and low self-esteem. For the psychologist, it is important for professionals and social workers to set a framework by highlighting the male violence that is the source of prostitution and reaffirming the responsibility of the perpetrators.

CONCLUSION

Building the steps for individualised support for persons in prostitution is at the core of the grassroots abolitionist approach. This support enables organisations to meet persons in prostitution where they are, to understand and assess their needs and to provide them with the necessary resources. Grassroots abolitionist NGOs seek to establish a continuum of services available to the persons in prostitution, to respect their timing and center them as the own expert in their own life. Acknowledging each individual's unique experience, needs and cultural beliefs is a part of creating a safe, equal and trust-based relationship between the organisations and the persons benefiting from support.

Challenges still remain in providing individualised support to persons in prostitution mostly the lack of resources available, the systemic barriers and discriminations surrounding the lives of people in prostitution and the long-term, even life-long action that is implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NGOs wishing to provide individualised support to persons in prostitution should ensure the support focuses on the strengths of survivors and the right to live a life free from violence and exploitation (survivors often express their will not to be seen as in need of "rescue" or as "broken": an approach based on non-judgment should avoid the "saviour" mentality and center persons in prostitution as experts in their own lives);

- NGOs willing to implement the grassroots abolitionist approach should strengthen the integration of survivors in the design and implementation of support services to persons in prostitution;

- NGOs supporting persons in prostitution should abstain from "ideologising support" and conditioning it to the adoption of certain ideological views from the survivors supported;

- States should provide safe emergency housing for persons in prostitution as a critical part of programming and to offer a place for women to heal before being offered educational and/or employment opportunities;

- States should provide residence permits for foreign nationals exploited in the prostitution system and refrain from deporting them to their home-country where the risks of re-victimisation are high;

- States, International institutions, Aid Agencies and Foundations and NGOs should recognise prostitution as part of the continuum of violence against women;

- States, International institutions, Aid Agencies and Foundations should define the provision of Exit Programmes for women and girls in prostitution as one of their funding priorities;

- States in collaboration with NGOs, International institutions and Aid Agencies should support and/or implement training programmes on sexual violence, prostitution, PTSD and support to women in prostitution towards the police, justice professionals, health professionals, in order to create a multi-sectoral culture to better identify and support women in prostitution;

- States, International institutions, Aid Agencies and Foundations should define the provision of Exit Programmes for women and girls in prostitution as one of their funding priorities.

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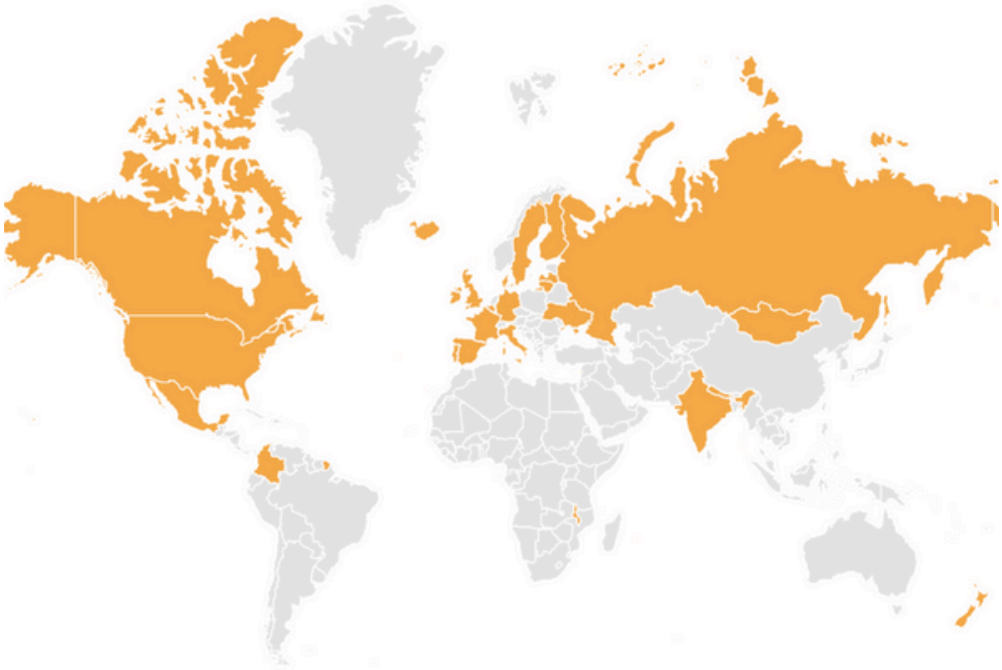
NGOs which contributed to this handbook:

- 1000 Möjligheter
- Eva Center
- Fondation Scelles
- isala
- Maiti Nepal
- Mouvement du Nid
- People Serving Girls at Risks
- Ruhama
- SOLWODI
- South Kolkata Hamari Muskan (SKHM)
- Talita Asia
- Wahine Toa Rising

CAP International is a unique coalition of 35 grassroots and survivor-led organisations united around one common goal: **the abolition of the prostitution system.**

The 35 members of CAP International work with, or are founded by, survivors of prostitution. They provide direct assistance to victims of prostitution and sexual exploitation and/or advocate for the adoption of Abolitionist legislation in their countries.



1000 Möjligheter (Sweden), Acción Contra la Trata (Spain), Apne Aap Women Worldwide (India), Breaking Free (USA), CIMTM Comisión para la Investigación de Malos Tratos a Mujeres (Spain), CLES - Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle (Canada), Comisión Unidos Vs Trata (Mexico), Dar Hosea (Malta), Democracy Development Center (Ukraine), Eva Center (USA), Exit Prostitution (Finland), Fondation Scelles (France), Fundación Empodérame (Colombia), INGI Crisis Center for Women (Russia), IROKO (Italy), Isala asbl (Belgium), Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation (Lebanon), KSPSC (Klaipeda Social and Psychological Support Center) (Lithuania), Maiti Nepal (Nepal), Marta Centre (Latvia), Mouvement du Nid (France), O Ninho (Portugal), People Serving Girls at Risk (Malawi), Reden/KFUKs Sociale Arbejde (Denmark), Ruhama (Ireland), Sawa (Palestine), SISTERS - für den Ausstieg aus der Prostitution! e.V. (Germany), Solwodi (Germany), South Kolkata Hamari Muskan (India), Stígamót (Iceland), Talita (Sweden), Talita Asia (Mongolia), Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter (Canada), Wahine Toa Raising (New Zealand), Women at the Well (United Kingdom)

GLOBAL IMPACT 2023

19,795

Victims of prostitution supported by CAP members

104

Shelters and drop-in centers

698

Employees working for the Abolition of prostitution

78

Publications on the issue of prostitution and sexual exploitation

1,757

Volunteer activists

1,733,476

Followers on social networks

CAP INTL
Coalition | Abolition | Prostitution

PROGRAMME
EXIT