

WE SEE





Photo by Maud McClean
femLENS workshops 2021, Online, Ireland



Photo by Denise Garcia Bergt
femLENS workshops 2019, Berlin, Germany

1 IN THE END, WE SEE
by Elena Palaiorouta

2 FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER:
MÉLIE PELLETIER

3 THE NEW FACE OF
INTERNATIONAL CRIME
PROSTITUTION IN DIGITAL
ENVIRONMENTS: AN ARGENTINE
LEADING CASE
by Madres Víctimas de Trata

4 D'ANTILLES ET D'AILLEURS
COMMUNITY SNACK - IYZA'S
JOURNEY
by D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs

5 PHOTOGRAPHY - A TOOL
FOR ALL: WOMEN AND
COMMUNITY LEARNING
by femLENS

6 BETWEEN ALGORITHMS AND
RESISTANCE: OUR EXPERIENCE
IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION
AGAINST GENDER-BASED

7 VIOLENCE
by Beecom

8 LIKE A PLANT THAT STANDS
UPRIGHT
by NoGap

9 HOW A CENTER FOR
SECURITY STUDIES IN GREECE
USES DIGITAL TRAININGS TO
STRENGTHEN DIGITAL SAFETY
FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES
by KEMEA

10 THE ART OF THE TUTOR OF
RESILIENCE
by Élan Interculturel

11 EMPOWERING HER: THE
COMPREHENSIVE EMPOWERMENT
PROGRAMME FOR ADOLESCENT
MOTHERS
by Women Across Differences

12 TESSERE PONTI: A PATHWAY
TO CHANGE LED BY WOMEN
by CESIE

IN THE END, WE SEE



Photo by Beecom
Welens coordination meeting, 2024, Puebla, Mexico

by Elena Palaiorouta

The Welens project began with a simple yet urgent question: how can we transform our anger at gender-based violence into practices of care, attention, and resistance? Out of this question grew a collaboration that transcended geographies, sectors, and disciplines. Organisations from Argentina, Guyana, Martinique, and various parts of the EU combined their perspectives and skills to build a shared language for action — grounded in accessible educational tools, visual storytelling, safer digital practices, and a commitment to collective learning.

At its heart, Welens set out to deepen our collective understanding of the global and intra-interdependencies behind gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. These are not isolated phenomena. They are woven into social, economic, and political structures; shaped by migration, digital technologies, environmental change, and policy decisions; and reinforced by entrenched power dynamics across borders. By approaching them through intersectional, intersectoral, and interglobal lenses, Welens sought to reinterpret gender-based violence as a systemic issue — and to build pathways toward more just and sustainable societies.

To achieve this, the project focused on creating interdisciplinary educational modules and professional tools that support adult educators and organisations in developing more effective strategies to prevent and address gender-based violence. It prioritised capacity-building — strengthening the skills and knowledge of those working directly with women and communities — and fostering cross-border cooperation and networks that could sustain this work far beyond the project's lifetime.

Central to this approach was the transformative power of storytelling. Stories connect us to one another, to our pasts and futures, and to the wider world. They give shape to experiences too often silenced, reveal the hidden interconnections behind violence and exploitation, and create space for empathy, understanding, and change. Through storytelling, women were supported in expressing themselves freely, sharing their knowledge and experiences, and engaging in conversations about gender equality and violence on their own terms.

This magazine became one of the most visible expressions of that work. Across three issues, it has grown into far more than a publication — it is a shared space to think, reflect, and challenge. Within its pages, we have explored the structures that allow violence to persist. We have spoken honestly about burnout, backlash, precarious funding, misinformation, and the emotional labour of activism. We have questioned how violence is represented, who is allowed to speak, and which stories are made visible — and we have done all of this while centring care, inclusion, and collaboration.

Through these collective efforts, We See has reflected the diversity and complexity of the work itself. Adult educators from across regions came together to exchange knowledge and build skills to better support women in challenging circumstances. Women — many of them survivors, migrants, or facing intersecting forms of discrimination — found space to share their stories, challenge stigma, and connect with others. Citizens and stakeholders were invited to question assumptions, broaden perspectives, and engage with the deeper global dynamics behind gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. Together, these layers of work shaped a broader conversation and helped translate learning into lasting change.

In this final issue, we turn our gaze toward what we have achieved together. We celebrate the moments that reminded us why this work matters: a campaign that sparked dialogue and raised awareness; a training that equipped educators with new tools to support their communities better; a storytelling approach that placed women's voices and lived experiences at its centre. These are the wins — sometimes quiet, sometimes hard-won — that sustain movements and inspire future action.

As the Welens project draws to a close, the four special issues of We See magazine remain: as an archive, as a reflection, and as an invitation. These pages hold not just the outcomes of a collective project but the traces of a process — one that was sometimes messy and uncertain, but always rooted in care, collaboration, and intention. They remind us that while projects end, the work continues. The skills, stories, and connections forged here will carry forward — into new contexts, new initiatives, and new struggles.

FEATURED
PHOTOGRAPHER
**AMÉLIE
PELLETIER**

WE SEE MAGAZINE AIMS TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE WOMEN PHOTOGRAPHERS IN PRINT AS WELL AS ONLINE. ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, MALIAN-FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHER AMÉLIE PELLETIER TALKS ABOUT HER PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

A CONVERSATION ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY WITH AMÉLIE PELLETIER

City/Country
St Martin, France

What do you enjoy most about photography?

That I can be a silent observer. I am not much of a talker. I prefer to listen to people and nature, observe, think and take pictures.

I am a person who loves surprises. Photography, especially analogue photography, satisfies this part of my being. For the last three years I have been shooting mainly film and I wait about a year before sending my rolls to the lab. I like to discover the work with the distance of time in between the actual shot and the development. So I get to be surprised and read the images twelve months later. The surprise can be joy or a disappointment but I think that's part of the creative process, same as life.

I really enjoy creating by errors, mistakes, chances and figuring out how to move on with that.

Photography is also a «quick» tool for creation. I draw and paint but these two mediums require more space and time, which I lack a lot as a mother and an employee; photography enables me to satisfy the necessity of creation I feel deep down.

Was there anything that inspired you to start making photos?

Sally Mann's work, *Immediate Family*. I was actually already into my project when I got interested in her work but the exhibition "Mille et un passages" that was held at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2019 really changed the way I worked. It made me realise how much I needed more structure, how I could actually use my passion for literature and other forms of arts like music and try to melt them in my creations.

I love the fact that she uses an 8X10 chamber, the family house in nature close by the river, the timeless feeling of her work, the play with the children, the relationship between humans and nature. All her work really touches me and inspires my own.

On a more personal level, the fact that I am grateful to have so many pictures of my childhood and how it helped me to go through my teen years. I wanted to give that to my children in case they needed to have photographs of them as babies and early teenagers. Now that my eldest is 16 and regularly opens albums and tells me "I am so lucky to have them, I can't explain why but it is precious". At least I have achieved that.

What is your favourite object/subject/topic to photograph?

Humans and nature which could translate into my family and flowers.

I am very much interested in family dynamics, bound between generations, how humans and nature interact and are affected by time, how to translate daily life into poetry, how to represent emotions and deal with them.

Do you feel it is important to share your vision on social media?

I am kind of old fashioned, I think. I am more into books, prints, art spaces.

I'd say one can not really escape social media nowadays so I think it's important but as far as I am concerned I don't really care much about my social media, which is probably a bad thing. I post every now and then and right away I move along in real life.

I do use social media to educate myself following accounts such as femLENS or other people sharing art content, it's great to feel the beat of what is going on out there.

Who do you think is your aimed audience?

Probably mostly female artists, friends and family. Mostly people who know me in real life.

Do you think photography could change someone's life? In what way?

From my point of view photography is Art. I want my photography to be Art. I believe Art can help change



BLACK AND WAX

or at least try to question our perception of the world.

Many things can change someone's life as long as one is ready and willing to be changed.

Photographs have a lot to say, question is: is the viewer ready, willing or in capacity to accept change?

I have always thought that photography/art is a tool to heal, to process emotions, to question the world in a peaceful way.

Tell us a bit about the featured project.

"The Shape of the Wind" first started about my kids and their childhood, the editing part revealed something different and rooted within myself and my multiple aspects as a human being. My path as an artist is difficult, over the years I got to think that our society does not make it easy for women/mothers/artists.

For unknown reasons, the word boule à facettes (editor's note: mirror or disco ball) comes to my

mind, I see it turning in the light with the sound of the wind, all the dots moving around on the floor and the walls or the trees and the dust. What does one really see? Can one ever know all there is behind a smile?

Taking pictures became important to me when my kids were born and the more I took pictures the more it became a necessity. I shot every single day in the beginning. For years. Some days I felt like a crazy puppy, getting myself tired over digital pictures, the process in the computer, the hard drives and the daily life. With my three kids growing up and my job (apart from being an artist) and the new vision I had of my work, I felt a bit more like a grown up and started using analogue cameras again to push my work towards Art and towards slowing down. Analogue photography, to me, requires confidence. Once I reached this point, I started to feel photography differently. I am more into playing and experimenting now.

THE SHAPE OF THE WIND

AMÉLIE PELLETIER, 44, IS A MOTHER OF THREE WITH MALIAN AND FRENCH ROOTS. SHE SPENT HER CHILDHOOD IN WEST AFRICA, BETWEEN NIGER AND BENIN, THOUGH SHE KNOWS LITTLE OF HER MOTHER'S COUNTRY AND DOES NOT SPEAK HER MOTHER'S LANGUAGE. A GRADUATE OF A BUSINESS SCHOOL, AMÉLIE NOW WORKS IN THE BUSINESS SECTOR. ARTISTICALLY, SHE IS LARGELY SELF-TAUGHT, GUIDED BY CURIOSITY, OBSERVATION, AND PERSISTENCE. HER CREATIVE PROCESS IS ONE OF CONTINUOUS EXPERIMENTATION—TRYING, FAILING, FALLING, AND RISING AGAIN. A DREAMER AS MUCH AS A DILIGENT WORKER, AMÉLIE BRINGS BOTH IMAGINATION AND DETERMINATION TO EVERYTHING SHE DOES.

by Amélie Pelletier

My allies in creation are time, patience, nature, my family members, my body and my mistakes which I make very often, everyday. My goal is to represent fragility, loss, transformations, emotions.

How do women not get lost in the state of motherhood, how do they educate balanced and free humans who will grow up as respectful adults, how do they manage to be present in everyday life and still fight for their own dreams?

When daily life gets unbearable, nature is always a shelter to reconnect to one's self and find answers looking at flowers.

«A chicken never gives bad grass to feed its chicks»—African proverb which I inherited from my Malian mother.

Using my own personal story, I try to evoke the archetype of women in our modern occidental societies. Women is to be understood in its various aspects: human being, daughter, friend, lover, employee, partner, mother, dreamer, but above all in my story, artist.







I try to represent the universality of women through the game of the ME/WE - imagine the two words one above the other or the other way around - while parenting. A game in which ME ends up lost or merges itself in WE, in which ME wonders who and where does she stands in the game of transmission between generation? Has there ever been a ME in the story at all? When did the M(e) turned upside down to become W(e) with no limit? Who am I looking at in the mirror? My mother's face, my grand-mother's face, the face of my child? If yes, which one of them am I looking at? Behind societal masks, what shape does my face have?

Sometimes, I look at the unknown face, this half-cast body and I wonder why they both are so masculine and so strong. Women do need strength to carry. The matter is that nobody seems to realise how fragile I am and how close I am to fall down.

Years after years, the wind has started to blow stronger until it became a storm which I can't fight against. The wind sculpts the rocks, the dunes and gives specific direction to trees so maybe I should let go now before I lose it totally because this storm has two opposite effects on me: the aspiration and the elevation of the Me. How could I not be drowned and alienated by the weight on my shoulders? What will help quiet the wind? To let time pass?



The sacrifice of Me for We? We comes before Me?

Like a memory from childhood, scared of the world and too aware of the effects words can have on others' behaviour; at the age of six I concluded that verbal language could be dangerous - but like the Ying and the Yang, they could also be magical - thus I minimised interactions with people of my age and spent a lot of time observing humans around me.

It took me three kids, some years as an independent worker, a published book, a new employment contract - which feels to me like back to the start on the game mat, a third house to restore ourselves, one year masterclass, children turning into teenagers to realise how much unbearable it was to wear the mask I put on my face during childhood. A mask to protect myself against the outside world.

Becoming a forty something, many questions come with the storm: when did the cards I had in my hands dropped? Did I ever really hold cards or was someone playing for ME? The turn is not just for the fun, the story of my life is at stake.

Why do I feel like a failure considering the professional side of my life? Why do I hear quite often, as an echo, this sentence the headmaster of the business school I graduated in 2004 said at the very beginning: "Some of you will become housewives." Why did this man have to introduce our graduation group with this statement in his speech?

*When my second child was born I named my position as a mother *le don de soi* (editor's note: self-sacrifice). There was no ME anymore*







in this game. I chose to become a mother, I chose to be there for them at the beginning of their life when they needed ME, I chose to accept my position to educate them properly and do my best to help them become balanced future adults in our society. I chose to still be there for my own inner child who dreamed of something big for herself too.

What actually drives our instinct as mothers? Something very primitive like when a mother smells her child, when she breastfeeds them, when she knows her hand on the chest of her crying baby in the middle of the night is enough for the baby to fall again into a peaceful sleep?

By becoming a mother, did I die or did I actually start living and fighting a double game to handle both the ME/WE? to accept my position to educate them properly and do my best to help them become balanced future adults in our society. I chose to still be there for my own inner child who dreamed of something big for herself too.

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THE NEW FACE OF INTERNATIONAL CRIME PROSTITUTION IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS: AN ARGENTINE LEADING CASE

by Madres Víctimas de Trata

We live in a world no longer shaped solely by physical proximity. Digital life has become our dominant mode of communication, commerce, and interaction. Within this new cybernetic reality, human beings — and particularly their bodies and identities — have become commodified,

turned into raw material for one of the world's most profitable and violent industries: online sexual exploitation.

In this digital landscape, human trafficking for sexual exploitation has adapted and expanded. Online platforms provide fertile ground for criminal networks to recruit, coerce, and exploit victims — both minors and adults — with unprecedented ease. The question that now arises is not whether digital spaces can be used to facilitate sexual abuse, but rather: how do they enable it so efficiently, and how can they be held accountable?

Sexual abuse and exploitation in digital contexts do not require physical contact. Platforms play a central role in enabling these crimes. They function not only as facilitators but, increasingly, as active participants, profiting from and structurally supporting criminal behaviours. A landmark ruling issued by the Argentine courts in 2024 — following a case brought forward by the NGO Madres Víctimas de Trata — made this clear. For the first time, a criminal court recognised that digital platforms used to offer and broadcast sexual content can be considered key enablers of human trafficking. Their failure to control content, combined with the economic benefits they derive, directly integrates them into the commission of the crime. This ruling sets a crucial precedent for the Latin American region — and beyond.

The women exploited through these platforms are often referred to as "webcam models" or "content creators." But behind these euphemisms lies a far darker reality. What we are witnessing is the emergence of digital pimping — a reconfiguration of sexual exploitation that is no less violent for being virtual. While the tools have changed, the mechanism remains the same: coercion, profit, dehumanisation, and abuse.

Pimping, regardless of consent, is a criminal offence in international law. It encompasses the promotion, facilitation, or encouragement of another person's prostitution or sexual exploitation for profit. Many of the platforms operating today — even those that brand themselves as spaces of "consensual adult content" — meet the criteria of digital pimping. They provide no meaningful safeguards against exploitation. They fail to verify age or consent. They lack content moderation policies, security protocols, or avenues for victims to report abuse. In some cases, they actively promote violent and non-consensual content, packaging it as "fantasy" to disguise the brutality.

Many of these platforms — including popular pornography sites — host content involving

child sexual abuse, rape, and other forms of violence, disguised as "fantasy." Their technical infrastructure enables mass-scale access for users across borders. Their financial models enable instant profit through virtual currencies. And their near-total lack of regulation ensures they operate with impunity.

Consumers are rarely held accountable. They are taught to believe what they see: that the person on the screen is "enjoying" it, that they're being paid, that they're empowered. "They're just sluts who like sex and make money from it," many consumers say. But consent is rarely examined — and empathy is almost always absent. What matters is the illusion of power and the purchase of pleasure.

THE MONEY THESE WOMEN
MAKE – IF ANY – IS A FRACTION
OF WHAT THE PLATFORMS AND
INTERMEDIARIES TAKE. UP TO
30% GOES TO THE PLATFORM,
ANOTHER 30% TO THE PERSON
FILMING OR PROVIDING
EQUIPMENT. THE MODEL IS
LEFT WITH WHAT'S LEFT – IF
ANYTHING. MISS A SESSION,
AND SHE'S FINED BETWEEN \$20
AND \$50. ONLY ONE DAY OFF
PER MONTH IS ALLOWED – FOR
MENSTRUATION.

Under the basic principles of international criminal law and human rights due diligence, platforms that offer sexual content cannot be treated as passive actors. Their business model clearly fits the legal definition of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Recruitment often begins through ads or algorithms that target vulnerable users with tempting offers: fast money, fame, a better life. The moment someone "agrees" to upload sexual content —

often under pressure, financial duress, or false promises — exploitation begins. Platforms retain at least 20% of all earnings from streamed content. This does not include extra fees for promoting videos or appearing on trending pages. Some platforms operate on cryptocurrency, making payment tracing even harder. In South America, where many of these models work, even accessing the money earned can be difficult. What is more alarming is the total lack of oversight: there is no way to verify who is behind a screen, whether they are being coerced,

SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS DO NOT REQUIRE PHYSICAL CONTACT. PLATFORMS PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN ENABLING THESE CRIMES. THEY FUNCTION NOT ONLY AS FACILITATORS BUT, INCREASINGLY, AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS, PROFITING FROM AND STRUCTURALLY SUPPORTING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOURS.

or whether they are of legal age.

How is it possible to verify the true identity of the content creators? How can a platform ensure that these content creators are not acting under coercion or threat? How do you think that, out of personal motivation, the creator of that sexual content—or web model—can be inserting objects into her body, nonstop, for 12, 15, 20 hours? Do platforms and web sexual content suggest that sexual enjoyment for such a long period of time without interruption is possible?

To the readers of this article, we must say clearly: there are more than 700 pornography platforms operating globally, generating over \$100 billion annually. This is not a marginal industry — it is one of the most profitable in the world. And yet,

where are the comprehensive laws? Where is the enforcement? Where are the policies to combat digital sexual trafficking?

The answers are familiar. It is not economically advantageous to fight these industries. In many cases, a portion of the profits flows back into the States themselves — through taxes, lobbying, advertising, or quiet partnerships. The cost of inaction is borne by the exploited. The profit of inaction is reaped by those in power.

There is a “Porn-Prostitution System” in the digital world, and this occurs because it is one of the most critical global businesses in terms of circulation and the amount of money it generates. And in this sense, the “raw material” proliferates. Almost all “consumers of pornography and prostitution” are men, and the vast majority of sexual content is generated by “women.”

The demand for these sexual services intensified following the pandemic that hit the world in 2020. Social media platforms recruit vulnerable victims affected by a variety of causes, from endemic economic crises to victims of domestic sexual abuse, to victims so young they were coercively pushed into this digital criminal space.

Apps such as OnlyFans, Ismy Girls, ManyVids, Divas Play, and Tinder, which allow users to upload adult content, encourage “models” to create increasingly explicit content permanently, positioning these content creators at different levels. Roblox has become a gaming platform that operates as a recruiter of children, with the same goal: to obtain that much-desired and well-paid “raw material” in the world of sexual exploitation. The acts the “web models” must perform are a perfect system of torture, generating highly lucrative income for the “digital pimps.” First, these victims are exposed to a camera for long hours, in some cases exceeding 15 hours a day. During these sessions, various interactive elements must be introduced, which the consumer controls virtually.

These elements are activated by paying a virtual currency. The activation generates a light and a vibration that can be constant or intermittent inside the web model’s body —in the anal or vaginal opening. The models must simulate “enjoyment” to make the consumer feel good; or, in other cases, they must represent pain with pleasure, because that is what the consumer wants to feel, that is, for the “thing he bought” (the woman’s body) to suffer and enjoy, “thanks to him,” thanks to that money.

“Spread your legs wider, bitch. Tell me how much you like it.” These are the words repeated in Florencia’s (pseudonym) head from her “clients”. That mental torture was what led her to end her life. Despite pleading with her exploiters to stop

offering anal sex, she was forced to do it, as they made her understand that she could only “make money” that way, and if she didn’t, her immediate family would suffer severe consequences. The web platform only asked for more, more explicit content, and to do so, it offered “coaches” who could script these desires of the clients. One of the main pieces of advice from that coaching was that alcohol and drugs would act as small aids to relax and “let go” of the body more—that side of the girls that would turn them “into famous porn stars” one day.

The money these women make — if any — is a fraction of what the platforms and intermediaries take. Up to 30% goes to the platform, another 30% to the person filming or providing equipment. The model is left with what’s left — if anything. Miss a session, and she’s fined between \$20 and \$50. Only one day off per month is allowed — for menstruation. And even when content is distributed without the model’s consent, there is no recourse. No oversight. No protection.

But how does this system continue? In part, through the glamorisation of sex work on social media. Influencers, celebrities, and public figures promote selling sexual content as fun, lucrative, and empowering. “Buy the newest iPhone.” “Travel to Bali.” “Become a star.” These are the promises. The reality is far more violent.

Behind every sexual content video, there is a person whose dignity is violated in real time. Many are never physically trafficked — they are trapped through technology. This is digital slavery: global, sophisticated, and growing.

The pain of these victims is not a cold statistic. It is an open wound that burns to the bone. This new form of human trafficking for sexual exploitation is lucrative, sophisticated, and, above all, global, and it happens in front of the eyes of governments that choose to look away.

The Argentine court ruling offers hope. It shows that virtual sexual exploitation can be prosecuted. It sets a legal precedent that must spread. Platforms are not neutral. They are responsible actors in a global system of abuse. They must be regulated, investigated, and held criminally accountable.

Bodies, mainly those of children and women, are commodified in real time through virtual currencies. The border does not exist. The digital space turns abuse into a spectacle, and profit into a criminal incentive.

Responsibility can no longer be denied. Human dignity demands firm criminal responses, effective regulation, and urgent international cooperation. Because as long as action is not taken, hell will continue to rage on the other side of a screen. Without clients, there is no trafficking.





D'ANTILLES ET D'AILLEURS COMMUNITY SNACK – LYZA'S JOURNEY

by D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs

Our association fights for a more just and equal society, defending the rights of youngsters and women, especially those in vulnerable situations. In collaboration with the local branch of the association Mouvement du Nid, we have developed opportunities for women survivors of violence to build professional and social skills that support their integration and independence.

After the success of our sewing workshop and training programme, we took another step forward by launching a new community project: a snack bar in a vacant lot next to our offices. The snack, named "Rebelles" in tribute to the courageous women supported by the association, aims to offer them new skills and interpersonal skills through the cooking training and in the long run we hope that it will be completely managed by them. Supported by multiple funders who recognised its potential for both the women and the association, the project overcame numerous administrative challenges and months of construction before finally coming to life.

Alongside this achievement, we were able to deepen our support through a specialised culinary training course with France-Travail. In 2025, five women of migrant background completed a six-month, 20-hour-per-week training led by a chef specialising in vegetarian and Caribbean cuisine. Beyond practical skills and theoretical knowledge about Caribbean and vegetarian cuisine, the programme aimed to build their social skills, confidence and teamwork. Among the training participants was Lyza, a 28-year-old Haitian woman whose life has been marked by both hardship and resilience. Supported by Mouvement du Nid Martinique and D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs for the past two years, she has found in Martinique the guidance and support she needed to rebuild her life. In the following story, Lyza shares her journey—from her arrival on the island to the new beginnings she has found within the association.

Under what circumstances did you arrive in Martinique?

I was born in Haiti, but due to political and personal problems—I was personally attacked—I left my native island to go to Dominica. Unfortunately, I did not find the support or help I needed there. Eventually, I came to Martinique, where I have now been living for almost three years.

How were your first moments in Martinique?

Initially, I was housed by the Red Cross, and then I turned to the associations Mouvement du Nid and D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs, which provided me with significant assistance. I was able to take French classes—I even obtained my B2 level certificate of achievement—and later joined the cooking initiation training offered by D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs.

What did the support from Mouvement du Nid and D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs bring you?

Their support brought me a great deal, but

most importantly, it gave me confidence. I must admit that since my arrival in Martinique, I had almost lost faith in myself. I went through many difficulties, but the help and support of the social workers from Mouvement du Nid helped me get back on my feet, become more confident, and stronger.

What were your expectations from the cooking initiation training?

The training met most of my expectations, and it gave me even more motivation and determination to pursue my project: starting my own food business. When I joined the program, I hoped to gain more skills to bring my project to life. I already had some cooking knowledge and knew how to prepare dishes, but through the trainer's classes, I learned how to cook Martinican dishes and how to combine them with dishes from my country.

Was there a particularly memorable moment?

I was very moved on the last day, during the certificate ceremony. There were five of us in the training program, and we had become very close. I couldn't imagine the end of this training and being separated from them.

What's next for you?

After the training, I feel strong enough to launch my professional project: opening a food truck. I will put into practice everything I have learned and offer both Haitian and Martinican cuisine. For now, my project is still in its early stages. I am being guided and supported by D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs in my administrative procedures. Ultimately, I plan to set up my food truck in Fort-de-France, in a busy area, and make my snack bar a go-to destination where I will serve authentic Haitian and Martinican cuisine.





PHOTOGRAPHY – A TOOL FOR ALL: WOMEN AND COMMUNITY LEARNING

Photo by Halima Al Haj Ali
femLENS workshops 2017, Shatila Refugee camp,
Beirut, Lebanon

by femLENS

Over the years, femLENS has worked with women from vastly different corners of the world — refugee camps, post-industrial border towns, online creative communities, among others — united by a shared desire to learn, express, and transform. The stories of Halima, Svetlana, and Marcilena show how the femLENS approach to learning and collaboration can ripple outward, sparking personal confidence, creative growth, and community change.

The femLENS approach is all about accessibility, collaboration, and self-expression. It brings documentary photography to women often left out of traditional education and media spaces, using simple tools, a mobile phone, to make storytelling possible for everyone. Learning unfolds collectively — through dialogue, experimentation, and reflection — empowering participants to discover their voices, build confidence, and connect with others. It is less about mastering technique and more about creating space for women to see, and be seen, on their own terms.

A photograph as voice

When femLENS held its first series of documentary photography workshops in Lebanon, in the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut in 2017, the aim was simple: to teach women to tell their own stories using whatever camera they had access to, even a mobile phone.

For Halima Al Haj Ali, a Syrian woman raising her children in the camp, photography began as a way to preserve family memories. "Initially, I wanted to capture pictures of my children," she recalls. "But later, I realised that I should also express myself and our life in the camp. Photography is a powerful tool, and there are things that the whole world should see."

The act of documenting became transformative. Shortly after completing the workshop, Halima's photographs won first place in the "Lebanon Changemaker" contest. She describes the moment as "a dream — amazing and surprising. I felt that my voice and my pictures reached the world, and people finally saw what we are really living in the camp."

The recognition gave her confidence, but more importantly, it validated her perspective: "It made me feel more confident in myself. A picture can convey a message more effectively than words. Sometimes, a single photo can show a kind of pain that words can never fully describe."

Connection across distance and time Sometimes impact happens quietly, behind a screen. During the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, when much of the world was isolated, femLENS found new life online thanks to volunteers like Marcilena Cano, a social media writer from the United States. She joined the

photography, even in the simplest form, can become a tool of dignity and empowerment.

Building community through media and memory A bit further north, in the Estonian border city of Narva, the mediaLAB project took the femLENS philosophy a step further — shifting from self-expression to collective creation. Running from 2021 to 2024, the Narva mediaLAB provided a space for residents to learn about visual storytelling, media literacy, and community journalism.

For writer and local historian Svetlana Gorpichenko, it became more than a workshop space; it became a cultural hub. She recalls discovering the project through a local newspaper: "The scale amazed me — workshops, film evenings, safety training for older women, work with family archives — and all of it free."

Through photography walks and projects such as "People of Narva", participants stopped strangers in the street, listened to their stories, and photographed them. "Sometimes we became accidental listeners to moving stories, discovering a world of Narva residents previously unknown to us," Svetlana says. The project culminated in an exhibition that reflected the city back to itself in unprecedented ways.

The mediaLAB also created bridges between generations. Elderly women learned to use smartphones and preserve their family archives; younger participants engaged with community history and memory.

"It was touching to watch older women discover that they could manage digital tools," Svetlana recalls. "For many, it was an introduction to a new world."

For Svetlana, the experience reshaped her creative path. Immersed in the workshops, she completed her book "Angel A" and began new research into Narva's cultural history. "From our own lives and our parents' lives, many participants created stories — performances of our own lives, books, and albums. It was a deeply creative activity," she says. "I was hooked by the multifaceted work at MediaLab — it allowed me to complete my book Angel A and release a draft of a local history study on the V. Gerasimov House of Culture. This was above all thanks to Jekaterina and Lotta. I was shocked and moved when, while in hospital, I was brought the freshly printed book. This gesture from Lotta and her support lifted me out of despair."

Connection across distance and time Sometimes impact happens quietly, behind a screen. During the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, when much of the world was isolated, femLENS found new life online thanks to volunteers like Marcilena Cano, a social media writer from the United States. She joined the



Photo by Ewa Drewa
femLENS workshops 2017, Gdynia, Poland

team at a time when lockdowns had halted workshops and exhibitions, helping to sustain the organisation's digital presence and community spirit.

"I've always loved storytelling," Marcilena says. "And seeing it expressed through documentary photography was captivating."

Working across time zones with a diverse team of women, she helped shape femLENS' reflective and educational voice on social media. Posts invited followers to pause and think — to look at photographs as more than images, as windows into lives and struggles. She remembers one image vividly: an empty wheelchair on a beach, from Ewa Drewa's Travelling Chair series. "The image embodies both beauty and hardship, which creates a sense of peace that becoming one with nature can bring."

Her time with femLENS also reshaped her understanding of representation. "This experience definitely changed how I feel about activism, feminism, and visual storytelling because we

realise how little female voices get broadcast in our world today," she reflects. **"This is an even bigger challenge when you take into account underrepresented women, reminding me of the need to close this gap in the creative industry overall."**

Even without leaving her home, Marcilena helped keep the dialogue alive during one of the world's most isolating moments — proof that connection can thrive even across distance.

A mosaic of achievements

From Beirut to Narva to online spaces across continents, these stories reveal the quiet but lasting power of the femLENS approach.

It is a model that values process over product, collaboration over hierarchy, and empowerment over representation. Through shared learning, creativity, and care, femLENS continues to build a community where women are not only taught to take photos, but to see — and to make themselves seen.

BETWEEN ALGORITHMS AND RESISTANCE: OUR EXPERIENCE IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AGAINST GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE



Photo by Maria Coleman
femLENS workshops 2021, Online, Ireland

by Beecom

**MANAGING THE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR THE “WELENS-
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES THROUGH A GENDER LENS” PROJECT
CONFRONTED US WITH A COMPLEX AND CONTRADICTORY REALITY:
ON ONE HAND, THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE, ON THE OTHER, THE RESISTANCES—ALGORITHMIC AND
CULTURAL—THAT THESE CONVERSATIONS ENCOUNTER IN DIGITAL SPACES**

The Campaign Numbers: Giving Voice to Stories

One of the main pillars of the Welens project took shape in the “From Stories To Emotional Memories” section, a video library that collected 45 video interviews, from which 48 reels were created. The videos gather the stories of victims and survivors of gender-based violence, narrated in some cases by actresses, in others directly by the protagonists themselves. The Library also includes content from experts—psychologists, lawyers, jurists, mediators, and educators—who offer tools for analysing phenomena related to gender-based violence.

The authorised reels were shared from April to December 2025 on the Instagram channel @welensproject and on the profiles of all partner organisations.

The data from the Welens profile alone—referring only to organic reach, without sponsorship—paints a significant picture. On Facebook, the content reached 4,000 views and generated 453 interactions; on Instagram, 20,000 views and 2,659 interactions, with a community composed of 87.7% women (the most represented age group being 35 to 44 years old).

Argentina leads with 39.5% of followers, followed by Italy (15%) and Mexico (12%). The most viewed reel, organically, is the one with Argentine lawyer Marcela Cano speaking about abuse, exploitation, and trafficking in the judicial sphere, reaching about 9,300 views—data suggesting that content offering concrete tools to counter violence, even in its most institutionalised forms, meets significant interest.

The comparison with a sponsored reel (featuring Vera Gheno, Italian sociolinguist) is illuminating: even with a modest budget, it reached 22,580 views on our profiles (Beecom).

This discrepancy highlights how organic visibility is heavily limited by platform algorithms, making sponsorship a necessary tool to amplify the reach of educational content on social issues.

When Expert Knowledge Becomes a Target

Vera Gheno's reel offers an interesting starting point to explore other aspects as well. In the reel, in just over a minute, the scholar discusses “patriarchy,” starting with the dictionary definition and broadening its meaning to the cultural and social dimensions.

Even without specific targeting, the sponsorship generated wide distribution of the content, revealing different dynamics across platforms. On Instagram, where the audience was 79% women with ages evenly distributed, the reel received 215 likes, 7,700 views, and only 2 positive comments.

On Facebook, however, 62% of the audience reached was male (ages 45-65+): the video totaled 22,580 views, 77 reactions, and 25 comments, all from men, none positive, most characterized by derisive or aggressive tones toward Gheno who, despite being a recognized and authoritative figure in the field of linguistics and digital communication, was subjected to mockery and diminishment.

One aspect that particularly struck us is that many male commenters respond to Gheno's message with personal anecdotes, presuming that their individual experience carries the same weight as a specialised scholar's contribution. This phenomenon—the systematic erosion of female authority—

reveals one of the most insidious mechanisms through which patriarchy perpetuates itself.

Polarisation as a Distorting Effect

The experience with Vera Gheno's reel confronted us with a broader mechanism in digital debates on gender issues: social media not only amplifies polarisation but also fuels targeted aggression toward those who address structural problems. Stepping outside the “bubble” of our usual followers, we reached a wider audience—predominantly male—whose response to the topic proved highly divisive.

The digital public space thus ends up being dominated by aggressive tones, often from users who don't represent the majority but occupy centre stage. Women remain the group most affected by online hate speech: a phenomenon that reflects the cultural persistence of misogyny, deeply rooted even in cyberspace.

Does the Algorithm Censor Prevention?

The paradox surfaced, however, when a few days later we tried to sponsor another video content with psychotherapist Caterina Gori on the “cycle of violence”; an educational reel aimed at providing concrete tools to recognise abusive dynamics. Meta blocked it.

The censorship may be related to new rules introduced by Meta following the implementation, on 10 October 2025, of the European TTPA (Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising) regulation, which led the platform to block sponsorships of political, electoral, and social content.

“This is a difficult decision—one we've taken in response to the EU's incoming Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA) regulation, which introduces significant operational challenges and legal uncertainties,” Meta explains. The regulation risks reducing communication by civic organisations, NGOs, and educational initiatives, weakening the Third Sector's capacity to reach and raise public awareness. Algorithms amplify polarisation and misogyny; the new rules risk reducing the possibility of disseminating educational and preventive content that could truly make a difference.

From Digital Activism to Territorial Action

For us, as communicators, Welens was much more than just a communication project: it demonstrated how complex it is to address gender-based violence issues within a digital space where cultural and structural resistances intertwine with algorithms and platform policies.

While this campaign revealed some of the limits of digital space, it also opened our eyes to new awareness. This awareness, along with the training we received along the way and encounters with colleagues, did not lead us to abandon our field but instead encouraged us to experiment practically: applying the skills directly in the field, organising events, and running training courses on gender-based violence.

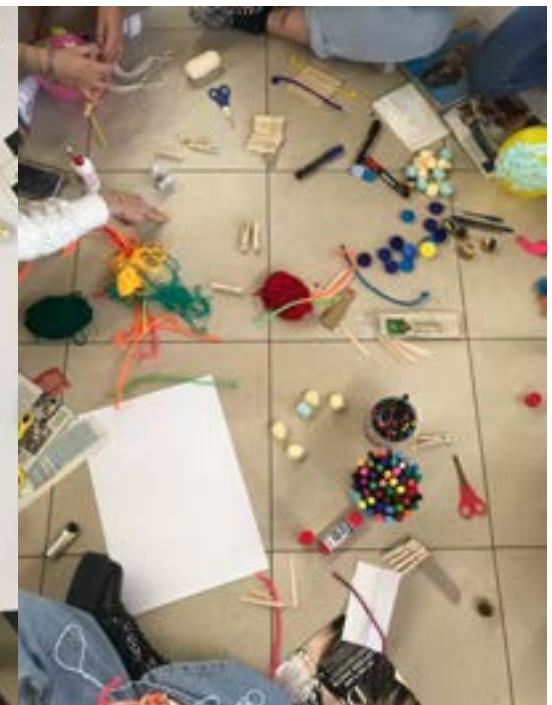
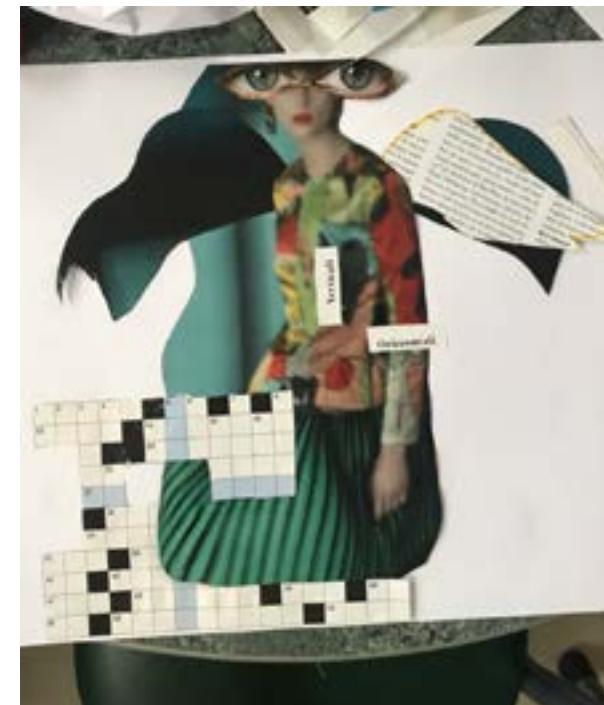
We didn't limit ourselves to supporting other organisations with our communication knowledge but took an active role in creating spaces for learning and awareness, transforming—or at least trying to!—difficulties into opportunities.



LIKE A PLANT *that* STANDS UPRIGHT

by NoGap

Tania spent two years in a residential community, a period she herself defines as “a difficult but necessary passage.” Today, she shares her experience and her connection with NoGap, the organisation that opened a window onto the world for her, through soil, plants, and renewal.



Tania, how did you get to know NoGap?

When I arrived here in the Community and met NoGap, I never imagined that this experience would have such a profound impact on me. The community doesn't just deal with addictions; it also supports people carrying relational wounds, histories of violence, and heavy situations that are difficult to face alone. Initially, I was very closed off, but little by little, I began to discover a new world.

What struck you about NoGap?

What struck me was its ability to see value in the small things. NoGap, for me, is like a window wide open to the world: from the outside, it seems like a small space, but if you look closely, you realise that inside there's a whole universe of ideas, social themes, and people working to protect others emotionally and mentally. I began participating in their projects, and from there, everything changed.

You also took part in the Green Up project, right?

Yes! It was born almost by chance, from the desire to revitalise the community's garden and parking area. At first, it wasn't easy: there was cleaning, organising, choosing the plants... but we did it together. With Fabiana and the other young people, we designed, drew plans, and visited nurseries. It was beautiful to see something we had imagined actually grow. Today, that garden is a symbol of change.

You also became passionate about aromatic herbs, right?

Yes, it became almost a personal therapy. While working in the garden, I discovered the world of herbs: their properties, their scents, and the teas. I started reading, studying, and taking care of the plants — and of myself at the same time. I was surprised by how good it made me feel — it was as if, by caring for the greenery, I was healing myself as well. At one point, I looked in the mirror and thought: “I'm standing back up, like a plant that straightens after the rain.”

What has this experience taught you?

It has taught me to look beyond myself, not to close off. When welcoming new girls to the community, you realise that, in some way, you are growing too. Giving advice, a hand, a smile... It's like planting a seed. You see the other person bloom, and in that blooming, you are part of it too.

And today, how do you feel?

I feel alive, like a plant that has been bent by the wind but has found the strength to straighten again. And I owe this, in part, to NoGap, which taught me that taking care of a garden is a bit like taking care of your own life.

Afterword

Tania's story is one that leaves a mark. In her, fragility and strength, struggle and renewal intertwine. NoGap is not just an organisation: it's a place where people learn to rediscover themselves, like plants that grow again after a long winter season.

HOW A CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES IN GREECE USES DIGITAL TRAININGS TO STRENGTHEN DIGITAL SAFETY FOR VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

by KEMEA

In today's world, digital literacy is not a luxury—it's a lifeline. For women, children, and migrants, the internet can unlock education, services, and community. Yet it can just as easily open doors to exploitation, misinformation, and abuse. That is why at KEMEA, we believe digital empowerment must begin with education.

Through EU-funded projects, we create and deliver training programmes that give NGOs, law enforcement agencies, and frontline organisations the tools they need to protect those most at risk. Our approach is collaborative: we don't work directly with beneficiaries, but we strengthen the organisations that do. By developing high-quality, research-based curricula, we make it possible for NGOs across Europe to offer digital safety training tailored to their communities.

The programmes cover a broad spectrum—from basic digital literacy and everyday cyber “hygiene” to privacy protection, safer social media use, and even digital parenting strategies. Each module is designed to be practical, accessible, and culturally sensitive, ensuring that no one is left behind.

One of our most impactful initiatives equipped NGOs working with migrant women and children with digital safety resources, while also delivering cybersecurity lectures to international organisations. These communities face compounded vulnerabilities, including language barriers, limited access to technology, and a lack of familiarity with digital systems. To address this, our materials

were co-developed with field experts and piloted by partner organisations across multiple EU countries. The outcome was clear: NGOs experienced stronger engagement, participants gained confidence, and the foundation for long-term digital resilience was established.

The ripple effect goes beyond individual skills. Our trainings help NGOs embed digital safety into their everyday programming, normalising conversations about online rights and responsibilities. They spark dialogue, encourage safe practices, and foster a sense of digital citizenship among groups often excluded from these spaces.

KEMEA's role is mainly behind the scenes, but the impact is powerful. Our achievements are not measured in headlines—they are reflected in the confidence of a child who knows how to report cyberbullying, or the relief of a migrant woman who learns how to protect her data. These may seem like small wins, but in reality, they are life-changing.

As the final special issue of We See magazine reflects on stories of progress, we are proud to share ours—one built on partnership, innovation, and the conviction that education can transform lives. For us, digital training is not only about technology. It is about dignity, safety, and the right to thrive in a connected world.

And that, we believe, is a success worth celebrating.



Illustration by Mia Olofsson

THE ART OF THE “TUTOR OF RESILIENCE”

by ÉLAN Interculturel

‘My maternal grandmother, once, when I was crying because I was afraid of a teacher at school—she was very strict—wiped my tears with her apron, looked me straight in the eyes, and said: ‘Your tears are precious. We’ll dry them together, and above all, don’t forget that you are strong, even when you’re afraid.’ I always remember those words, especially when someone mistreats me.’

Aminata was taking part in a workshop for women survivors of gender-based violence, in which, through clay, participants remembered and shaped their tutor of resilience. This expression, coined by French psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik, refers to those supportive people we encounter along our path who help us recover and continue growing. It is an adult who, at some point in our lives, makes us feel that we are valuable and deserving of affection.

Why did we decide to conduct this workshop? Why work on the concept of the “tutor of resilience” with women who have survived gender-based violence? Because it helps nurture self-esteem. Naming a supportive figure reminds each woman that she has worth and is not alone. Reconnecting with a lived source of support also reinforces one’s sense of self-efficacy, the ability to set boundaries and ask for help. Sharing our resilience tutor among women allows each one to tell a personal story that does not reduce her to the violence she endured. It includes support and affection.

Caty presented her artistic creation: “It is my older sister, because she always believed in me. She has always seen me as beautiful and capable.”

Why propose creating a clay figure representing our resilience tutor? Clay is a simple, accessible,

non-intimidating material. Sensory work soothes and recentres. It offers almost endless possibilities without requiring artistic skill. You can shape it and reshape it, which supports the idea of possible growth.

“The invitation to create a form representing the “resilience tutor” allows each woman to choose a key quality, connect with the essence of the person who was so important to her resilience, and honour them.”

Moreover, tactile contact with clay — through touch, pressure, and rhythm — fosters emotional regulation. Bodily grounding takes hold, since busy hands reduce rumination. You regain a sense of control by choosing the form, the pace, and the moment to stop. After this activity, several participants came back to share how the experience had continued to resonate in their lives.



Aminata, for instance, told her 11-year-old daughter about the workshop and about the words her grandmother had told her when she was little. Her daughter replied: “So you’re my tutor of resilience, because you’ve always made me feel that I’m valuable and that I deserve everyone’s respect.” A few days later, her daughter offered her a drawing of a big-hearted superheroine titled “Super Mom.” Aminata was deeply moved.

Caty, for her part, told us that after the workshop, she had sent a photo of her clay sculpture to her sister, explaining that it represented her tutor of resilience. She thanked her for always believing in her and helping her feel beautiful and capable. “It felt so good to tell her that, and especially to thank her... I took the opportunity to tell her how much I love her.”

The midwife from the institution where we conducted the workshop also wanted to participate, intrigued by our approach. A week later, she contacted us again to ask if we could replicate the activity in other shelters for women survivors of violence.

Since then, we have been running it regularly. Each session is moving, constructive, and creative.

The invitation to create a form representing the “resilience tutor” allows each woman to choose a key quality, connect with the essence of the person who was so important to her resilience, and honour them. By valuing this person, she also values their message and, in turn, strengthens her own self-esteem. Artistic creation then enables sharing. Women put words to the resource; guiding phrases and gestures of affection pass from one participant to another.

This workshop showed us how, by naming and shaping their tutor of resilience, women cease to define themselves by the violence they have endured. They transform the wound into a source of support, rediscover self-worth, agency, and shared strength. This reconnection with words of care and affirmation opens the door to sharing, encounter, gratitude, love—and, ultimately, to resilience.

EMPOWERING HER:

The Comprehensive Empowerment Programme for Adolescent Mothers

by Women Across Differences

Adolescent mothers as a group face challenges stemming from both their stage of adolescence and the experience of pregnancy and motherhood. They navigate worlds that hold different and sometimes conflicting expectations. They are required to balance the changes in their lives, often without guidance or support, as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood as mothers.

In 2008, Women Across Differences (WAD) launched the Comprehensive Empowerment Programme for Adolescent Mothers aged 13-19. A crucial aspect of the programme involved providing psychosocial support to the adolescents. Once the layers of their lives were revealed, many women shared their experiences of pain, self-doubt, abuse, fear of the future, and feelings of rejection. They needed care, acceptance, empathy, and love. What proved to be powerful was how others responded when listening to their peers' stories. Many felt that their experiences were unique. The realisation that others had similar experiences and that they were not defined by their past increased the potential for transforming lives.

WAD provides girls a second chance due to

their socio-economic circumstances, which are often affected by sexual abuse, poverty, lack of parental support, and a societal culture which discriminates against adolescent mothers. The organisation is also dedicated to promoting greater gender equality by empowering young mothers to make informed decisions, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, and building income-generating opportunities.

Over the years, the programme has focused on helping adolescent mothers to reintegrate into the education system, acquire vocational training, and access health and counselling services. By fostering a supportive environment, the programme empowers these young women to build self-confidence and independence, enabling them to better provide for themselves and their children and to break cycles of poverty. As a result, many beneficiaries have gone on to achieve personal and academic goals, contributing positively to their personal development as well as their communities.

Meet two of our remarkable beneficiaries and journey with them as they share their inspiring transformation from adolescent mothers to accomplished young professional women.

My name is Ashly Harris, and I am a beneficiary of the Women Across Differences Comprehensive Empowerment Programme for Adolescent Mothers 2012

I got pregnant at the tender age of sixteen. The journey as a teen mother was a challenging experience with a lot of discrimination from peers and disappointing looks from my parents and family members. I felt ashamed of myself and thought that at that time, this situation would have been the end of my future aspirations.

I even considered having an abortion; however, I decided to continue my pregnancy. I can recall that being the hardest nine months in my life. However, at the birth of my beautiful baby girl, a

friend recommended that I join Women Across Differences programmes. The guidance and support I have gotten from the members of WAD reignited my future ambitions.

The programme helped build my self-esteem and confidence in so many ways. I participated in crafts and other activities, and I eventually graduated from WAD in 2013. I then went back to school to further my education and wrote the Caribbean Examinations Council, where I successfully passed seven subjects.

It was always my heart's desire to be a nurse, and in 2016, I applied for the Nursing Assistant course. I was accepted that same year, and the course had an 18-month duration. This period



Photo by Miranda Awah
femLENS workshops 2021, Online, Cameroon

My name is Cassey Crawford. I became a member of Women Across Differences in 2017. Before I joined the organisation, I was suffering from depression, low self-esteem and didn't have a sense of belonging. From the age of 11 up until 16, I was sexually abused by a family member.

I sought help through Childcare and Protection Agencies, the Guyana Police Force, and family members, but never got the help that I needed or deserved.

My abuse stopped when I almost murdered my abuser.

I became pregnant the first time I had sex after being abused. I had my daughter at 17. I got invited to the organisation through a cousin of mine. Being a part of Women Across Differences has helped me to understand that I'm not defined by what happened to me, but I am defined by what I become. I became confident, self-aware, I found self-worth, and I learned how to identify my strengths and my weaknesses.

In 2017, I graduated from the Comprehensive Empowerment Program for Adolescent Mothers, which was my first certificate I've ever obtained, and that certificate inspired me to pursue more. I now have 12 certificates, 6 Caribbean Examinations Council subjects, including Maths and English. I'm now a student at the Cyril Potter College of Education, and I'm also presently a teacher at a private secondary school where I teach English and Social Studies.

I'm an entrepreneur of two online businesses where I import wigs and clothing.

So, here's my message to the world: you are not your past; it doesn't define you. Find your purpose in life and pursue it. If you have a dream, don't just envision it, but work towards it and achieve it. The world is as big as you want it to be."



Photo by Najwa Danish
femLENS workshops 2024, Online, Afghanistan

T-ESSERE PONTI:

a pathway to change led by women

by CESIE

How can we support women by placing them at the centre to promote real change and build community-led actions beyond violence? The initiative T-ESSERE PONTI aims to answer this question, offering a valuable opportunity for various diaspora communities of women in Palermo. In Italian, T-ESSERE merges the meanings of 'tiles' (as in pieces of a mosaic), 'to weave' (as in creating connections), and 'being' ('essere'), evoking the idea of being bridges between people and communities of diaspora.

T-ESSERE PONTI is based on the Community Linkage project, which, between 2023 and 2024, successfully transformed the concept of preventing and combating gender-based violence into a living, concrete, and deeply human experience. Created to strengthen local services through social transformation, the project aimed to place migration-background women at the centre as active protagonists, reinforcing their profound impact on local networks and their own diaspora communities.

The heart of the project was the "T-ESSERE PONTI Group", a safe and welcoming space for meetings in Palermo, Sicily, where fifteen women of a migration background embarked on a journey of exchange and dialogue, as well as capacity-building training and awareness-raising on gender-based violence. In this context, they not only acquired knowledge and tools to recognise and analyse different forms of gender-based violence but also strengthened their mutual bonds, creating a solid support and listening network. One of the most significant milestones in this journey took place when the group designed

and implemented a Bridge Actions program, aimed at professionals working in local services — such as doctors, psychologists, and social workers. Through seminars, workshops, and open discussions, the group shared tools and perspectives to address gender-based violence in a more conscious, inclusive, and intersectional way. Their perspective — bearing direct and often invisible experiences of oppression, racialisation, and intersectional discrimination — enriched the dialogue with those who work daily with multiple vulnerability factors. At the same time, the professionals also contributed with their expertise, making the entire journey even more enriching and multidisciplinary. T-ESSERE PONTI thus became more than just a project: it transformed into a collective expe-



rience, a living lab of ongoing participation, where the fight against gender-based violence is tackled through network-building, knowledge sharing, and the activation of new community-based resources. It is a journey that does not end with training but continues to live on in the relationships built, the awareness gained, and the small and large changes the participants are now able to generate around them.

The collective efforts made in the field of gender-based violence — both in combatting it and in recognising and preventing potential risk factors — led to the emergence of new forms of awareness. The recognition, for example, of the central role of concrete and effective autonomy for women — through economic and financial independence, as well as through breaking out of isolation and relational poverty — contributed to the creation of new actions in the territory. This proposal aimed to adapt itself to the specific context of Palermo, with its unique opportunities and, importantly, its limitations — both of which were highlighted by the group itself.

In response to the need to connect gender-based

violence with women's economic, financial, and employment independence, T-ESSERE PONTI Reload was born — a new cycle of actions held in 2025, supported by the WISER project. This new path aimed to expand and strengthen the work already undertaken, with a particular focus on employability, economic independence, and access to local services. The goal was twofold: on one hand, to continue supporting women of a migration background in their path toward independence, and on the other, to actively involve them as peer mentors, enabling them to help other women find concrete answers to everyday needs related to work, safety, and autonomy. The program included 40 hours of initial training focused on developing skills related to the job market and training pathways, with constant reference to local services supporting women and families. It also involved the creation of a women's group engaged in co-building a space of "proximity" in Palermo's Albergheria neighbourhood. This space is dedicated to enhancing each member's personal skills (e.g., in learning Italian as a second language) while also increasing access to direct opportunities with Palermo's local services, fostering a spirit of collective growth and tangible transformation of the city. T-ESSERE PONTI continues to trace new paths, where the fight against gender-based violence intersects with building women's networks, peer solidarity, active participation, and the real possibility of changing one's future. Because social change is built together, starting from the voices and stories of those who cross borders and weave new connections every day.



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WE SEE

The femLENS magazine

Editor

femLENS

info@femlens.com

Publisher

[Blurb.com](https://www.blurb.com)

Contacts:

femlens.com

info@femlens.com

Instagram/Facebook: @femlens

Twitter @femlensphoto



Photo by Shatha Abbasi

femLENS workshops 2022, Jerusalem



Photo by Jekaterina Saveljeva
Welens coordination meeting, 2024, Puebla, Mexico

