Report of the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion

Work Package 7

About the project

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has affected our lives in many ways and manifested itself in many undesirable forms, such as the negative impact of coronavirus on individual lives, it has caused many deaths, the negative impact has also been on the global economy and employment, and on the quality of life in society in the form of restrictions on social rights, such as the right to be protected from poverty and social exclusion, the right to housing and education, and restrictions on medical care. COVID-19 also has effects on the democratic debates and the enjoyment of fundamental rights in the different countries of Europe. The impact was even more pronounced from a gender perspective, because as the United Nations (2020) noted, "from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex". Given the mentioned situation, the European Commission has awarded the project partners with the project HEARD, which focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the democratic debate, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and the work and life of women through a gender perspective.

HEARD focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the democratic debate, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and the work and life of women through a gender perspective. The search for an adequate response to overcome the crisis that occurred during the pandemic of COVID-19 should be a result of the participation of the involvement of various social partners, civil society and decision-making bodies of a given state. By involving partners from 9 different European countries in all the phases of the project we aim to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of respect for the rule of law, democratic values, and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, with special attention to the social rights of citizens and residents of the given state.

The project HEARD consists of 11 Work packages. In this document - the Report of the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion - we summarise the following project results/ deliverables of Work package 7 (WP 7):

1. Event Description Sheet for the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion (See Appendix 1),
2. Report of the Results of Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion (See Appendix 2).

About the deliverables of Work package 7

Within the WP 7, the in-situ Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion on the topic how COVID-19 crisis had affected on the democratic debate, titled Co-designing ways to respond effectively and equitably to future epidemics, was conducted by 10 project partners in Novo mesto, Slovenia and attended by 9 partner countries (7 in-situ and 2 online) and with 32 participants (27 in-situ and 5 online) (**See Appendix 1: Event Description Sheet for the First Debate Panel).**
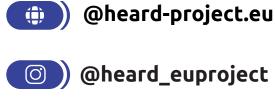
After the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion the feedback of the participants was processed, the report in English language was prepared (**See Appendix 2: Report of the Results of Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion)**. During the implementation of the Work Package 7 we faced some challenges. The Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion was conducted In-situ in Novo mesto, Slovenia, where 7 project partners (from Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, and Slovenia) attended the event in-situ and 2 partners (France and Sweden) attended online, due to unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances and were unable to travel. We informed the EU Officer about the mentioned problem and after a discussion with the EU Officer, it was decided that the event can take place in a hybrid form to also accommodate the partners who were unable to travel.

Even though the participants from two partner countries could not attend the event in-situ, and could only attend online, we still ensured the participant requirements which were set in the project application form. We ensured the minimal number of participants (25-50) and a minimum number of countries, from where the participants are coming from (7-9 countries). At the event we had 27 in-situ participants coming from 7 different countries (Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, and Slovenia), and additionally we had 5 participants online coming from 2 countries (France and Sweden).

The findings of the report will serve as guidelines in the next steps of the project.

Meet the partnership

heard

FOS Fakulteta za
organizacijske študije
Faculty of organisation studies

Associazione InCo

Institute of Entrepreneurship Development
iED

CBE accompagne vos projets

CITTÀ DI VIMERCATE
MEDAGLIA D'ARGENTO
AL MERITO CIVILE

ФПКО
FECE

NORDIC DIASPORA FORUM

Ajuntament de Mislata

MISLATA és EUROPA

CARDET

FAJUB Federação de Associações Juvenis | Distrito de Braga

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Appendix 1: Event Description Sheet for the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

For Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion (Work package 7)

PROJECT	
Participant:	01 - FAKULTETA ZA ORGANIZACIJSKE STUDIJE V NOVEM MESTU (FOS)
	02 - Associazione InCo-Molfetta APS (InCo)
	03 - INSTITOUTO ANAPTIXIS EPICHEIRIMATIKOTITAS ASTIKI ETAIREIA (iED)
	04 - CBE SUD LUBERON (CBE)
	05 - Comune di Vimercate
	06 - FONDATSIA ZA PREDPRIEMACHESTVO, KULTURA I OBRAZOVANIE - Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Culture and Education
	07 - NORDIC DIASPORA FORUM (NDF)
	08 - AYUNTAMIENTO DE MISLATA
	09 - Federação de Associações Juvenis do Distrito de Braga (FAJUB)
	10 - CARDET CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LIMITED (CARDET)
PIC number:	01 – 943692340
	02 – 922855576
	03 – 998069182
	05 – 905191003
	06 – 940414710
	07 – 916641562
	08 – 897272796
	09 – 929027880
	10 – 999738552
Project name and acronym:	The impact of COVID-19 crisis on diverse democratic perspectives through gender perspective - HEARD

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	07
Event name:	Co-designing ways to respond effectively and equitably to future epidemics: the role of women and the preservation of democratic values and human rights
Type:	Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion
In situ/online:	In-situ (and online)

Location:	Participants of 7 partners conducted and attended the event In-situ in Novo mesto, Slovenia and participants of 2 partners attended the event online. In conclusion the event was conducted in a hybrid form.
	01 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	02 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	03– In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	04 – Online in France, Pertuis
	05 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	06 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	07 – Online in Sweden, Stockholm
	08 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	09 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
	10 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto
Date(s):	25. 10. 2023
Website(s) (if any):	https://heard-project.eu/

Participants			
Female:	In-situ: 22 Online: 4		
Male:	In-situ: 5 Online: 1		
Non-binary:	0		
From country 1 [Slovenia]:	12 – In-situ		
From country 2 [Italy]:	4 – In-situ		
From country 3 [Greece]:	2 – In-situ		
From country 4 [France]:	2 - Online		
From country 5 [Bulgaria]:	2 – In-situ		
From country 6 [Sweden]:	3 - Online		
From country 7 [Spain]:	3 – In-situ		
From country 8 [Portugal]:	2 – In-situ		
From country 9 [Cyprus]:	2 – In-situ		
Total number of participants:	In-situ: 27 Online: 5	From total number of countries:	In-situ: 7 Online: 2

Description
Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

FOS, together with the help of other partners, organised an In-situ Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion between representatives of project partners and professionals from the field of democratic debate, human rights generally and women rights specifically who all attended the WP7 event.

The Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion was organised and conducted within Work package 7 of the HEARD project. The event was conducted In-situ in Novo mesto, Slovenia, where 7 project partners (from Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, and Slovenia) attended the event in-situ and 2 partners (France and Sweden) attended online.

The guidelines/cues for the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion were prepared based on the results of previous Work Packages in project HEARD; the state-of-the-art analysis and the results of the quantitative research (survey), which was conducted in all project partner countries from November 2022 until the March 2023, which are gathered in the report of statistical analysis accordingly to all partner countries jointly and separately (so Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). We identified the similarities and significant differences in all the mentioned partner countries. It was also prepared based on the feedback gathered from all 3 Debate Panels which were conducted prior to the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion, in-situ in all partner countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden, except in France) by all project partners.

The Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion started with the welcome speech of FOS Vice Dean prof. Annmarie Gorenc Zoran, PhD, and head of the project HEARD doc. ddr. Maja Pucelj. The Topic-Based Group Discussion then continued with the presentation of the results of the project activities already performed, like needs analysis, surveys, and panel debate discussion (WP1, WP2, WP3, WP4, WP5 and WP6) in all project partners countries, so the project partners could see the results of other countries and joint results of all countries together. The main part of the Topic-Based Group Discussion followed, which was a topic group discussion about the 3 key themes of the project: democratic debate, human rights perspective and the work and life of women where the professionals also shared their opinion and point of view on the mentioned topics. The participants emphasised the need for further monitoring of the effects of Covid-19 on people on generally and gathering all available data to ensure better response in future pandemic situations.

The topics covered encouraged a lively discussion among the participants, especially the professionals from different project countries who attended the event. They were particularly involved in sharing their experience, opinion, and their point of view. The participants input, feedback and conclusions are gathered in the »Report of the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion«.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	30.11.2023	Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto

Appendix 2: Report of the Results of Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion

Report of the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion

Work Package 7: Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion

Report for the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion (WP 7) in the project HEARD (conducted in Slovenia)

FOS organised an In-situ Topic-Based Group Discussion between representatives of partner countries and professionals from the field of democratic debate, human rights generally and women rights specifically.

In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetable of the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion (WP 7), which was executed on Wednesday, October 25th, 2023, at 9:30 on the Višja ekonomska šola Novo mesto, classroom P1, Ulica talcev 3a, 8000 Novo mesto, Slovenia.

Table 1. Timetable of the Transnational Topic-Based Group Discussion (WP 7)

TIME	TOPIC
09.30 - 09.40	Welcome speech of FOS Vice Dean and head of the project doc. ddr. Maja Pucelj)
09.40 – 10.10	Presentation of the results of the project activities already performed – needs analysis, surveys, and panel debate discussion in all project partners countries
10.10 – 11.10	Topic group discussion about the democratic debate
11.10 – 12.10	Topic group discussion about the human rights perspective
12.10 – 13.40	Lunch break
13.40 – 14.40	Topic group discussion about the work and life of women
14.40 – 15.40	Discussion about the outputs of the project (political recommendations, monography…)
15.40 – 16.10	Conclusion remarks

The Topic-Based Group Discussion started with the welcome speech of FOS Vice Dean prof. Annmarie Gorenc Zoran, PhD, and head of the project doc. ddr. Maja Pucelj. The Topic-Based Group Discussion started with the presentation of the results of the project activities already performed, like needs analysis, surveys, and panel debate discussion in all project partners countries, so the project partners could see the results of other countries and joint results of all countries together.

The main part of the Topic-Based Group Discussion was a topic group discussion about the 3 key themes of the project, namely:

- democratic debate
- human rights perspective and
- the work and life of women.

The project partners emphasised the need for further monitoring of the effects of covid-19 on people on generally and gathering all available data to ensure better response in future pandemic situations.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON THE DEMOCRATIC DEBATE

The comments on recommendation for handling pandemics regarding the democratic debate:

Bulgaria's Response and the Role of Experts

In Bulgaria, the reliance on military medical personnel and doctors from medical universities initially garnered public approval. However, this focus on medical expertise led to the overshadowing of contributions from social scientists and other professionals, causing friction in policy coordination.

Evolution of the Crisis and Need for Holistic Teams

The politicization of the crisis in Bulgaria and the rise of misinformation in Slovenia demonstrated the need for a more holistic team of experts, including medical professionals, psychologists, and anthropologists, from the outset for balanced decision-making.

Importance of Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration

Both Bulgaria and Slovenia's experiences highlight the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration in crisis management, with an emphasis on aligning expert views with established institutions like the World Health Organization.

Role of Social Scientists and Human Scientists

The involvement of social scientists and human scientists is crucial in policy formulation and in communicating complex concepts to the public, fostering trust in scientific processes.

Gap in Facilitation and Communication

The absence of facilitators to bridge communication gaps between different social groups, especially in Bulgaria, underscores the need for inclusive policies and measures.

Effective Handling of Health Crises by African States

The successful management of Ebola and Zika virus outbreaks by African states highlights the importance of international knowledge and expertise and the need for policies that ensure effective coordination.

Challenges of Independent National Responses

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that countries often pursue independent actions, posing challenges to cohesive strategy implementation.

Developing Strategies for EU Cooperation

The need for precise strategies within the European Union is emphasized, along with the importance of considering a country's healthcare system status in formulating response strategies.

Unified Yet Adaptable International Response

A unified international response in healthcare is impractical due to varying national capacities. A more flexible approach focusing on international assistance and resource distribution is recommended.

Operational Challenges and International Coordination

The pandemic highlighted operational challenges, such as distributing essential supplies, and the need for clear policy recommendations and coordination mechanisms.

Adjusting the Concept of International Response

The concept of international response may need revaluation to provide assistance tailored to individual countries, considering their specific circumstances and resources.

Mechanism for Early and Proactive International Response

There is a call for a mechanism to strengthen international response from the beginning, focusing on flexibility in country administrations and coordinated responses at the EU level.

These recommendations stress the need for diverse expertise, effective communication, and inclusive approaches in managing public health crises, both at national and international levels. The experiences from Bulgaria and

Slovenia during the pandemic provide valuable insights into the critical role of multidisciplinary collaboration and the challenges in achieving a cohesive international response.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEBATE

Enhanced Digital Literacy

The transition to digital education has spotlighted the necessity of preparing teachers for digital environments. While children often possess basic digital skills, a significant challenge lies in enabling teachers to effectively transition to online teaching. This preparation of teachers is deemed more crucial than the digital competencies of students, who typically have foundational digital skills.

Attention to adult education and lifelong learning has been identified as lacking. Policies should address these areas, emphasizing the importance of certification and awareness-raising in adult education. The focus should extend beyond children's education to include adult learning and lifelong education.

Digital Advancements and Telehealth

The pandemic has seen the rise of conspiracy theories, particularly regarding vaccination and PCR tests, with fears of microchipping. The media's role in spreading these fears has led to distrust in official actions and increased suspicions about interventions and the human body.

EU Vaccination Uniformity and Policy - Harmonized Vaccine Implementation

The importance of offering people a choice in COVID-19 vaccines is underscored. Multiple vaccine options that have passed approval phases are essential for ensuring choice and preventing potential monopolistic practices. A consistent and uniform approach to vaccine delivery is beneficial for patient compliance, but it does not imply reliance on a single vaccine producer.

In Europe, the EU Commission's strategy to sign agreements with various companies ensured a stable vaccine supply and provided a variety of options, proving more efficient and cost-effective than individual negotiations by countries.

Democratic Values and Participation

The pandemic's aftermath has led to increased extremism, radicalization, and the spread of fake news, highlighting the need to reinforce democratic values and educate young people about their democratic rights, including voting. Efforts to make young people aware of the value of democracy are crucial in combating the erosion of democratic engagement.

Cultural Studies and Public Spaces

The pandemic has brought forward the challenges faced by cultural organizations and artists, particularly regarding access to culture and the right to culture. It has highlighted the need for improved civic education to enhance understanding of rights, obligations, and social engagement. The precariousness of work in the independent cultural sector and the impact of digital transition on practitioners are noted concerns.

Perception of Misinformation

The challenge of misinformation, exacerbated by conflicting expert opinions and government withholding of information, has led to public distrust. This issue, prevalent in many countries, underscores the necessity of clear and direct communication and the need for research into public perception of misinformation.

Criteria and Terminological Boundaries in the Digital Age

The lack of criteria in handling information, especially in the era of artificial intelligence, is a significant concern. Addressing this issue at the European Union level is suggested to ensure a collective approach to managing information and misinformation.

Democratic Backsliding and Institutional Trust

The pandemic has underscored the issue of democratic backsliding in Europe, with trust in institutions at both EU and national levels being compromised. The need for understanding proportionality and transparency in institutional communication is highlighted. The pandemic has revealed weaknesses in fundamental EU institutions, emphasizing the need for minimum standards for mutual support during crises.

Constitutional Rights and Educational Adjustments

The impact on children's right to education during the pandemic, especially the shift to digital learning, calls for more flexible educational targets in future scenarios. Constitutional rights must be respected even in extraordinary circumstances, as evidenced by rulings from Slovenia's Constitutional Court.

Institutional Trust and Information Dissemination

The pandemic necessitated a strategic approach to information dissemination that upholds democratic values and human rights. Outreach efforts should adapt to changing habits of different demographic groups, particularly the youth.

Long-Term Effects on Younger Generations and AI's Role

Studying the pandemic's long-term effects on younger generations is vital. The research should focus on educational and social challenges, including empathy development. Additionally, the evolving role of artificial intelligence in future crises warrants exploration.

Human Rights Protection for Vulnerable Groups

The pandemic revealed gaps in policy, particularly regarding the protection of human rights for vulnerable groups such as migrants. Policies should avoid actions that deepen societal divides and focus on the common good, especially in situations beyond individual control.

Public Debate on Vaccination and Societal Division

The societal polarization resulting from vaccination campaigns, categorizing people based on vaccination status, needs to be addressed. Public debates should be conducted without creating divisions, and alternative options for the unvaccinated should be genuinely accessible.

Aggressive Vaccination Campaigns and Information Gaps

The aggressive nature of vaccination campaigns, which utilized emotional appeals, is critiqued for not sufficiently addressing vaccine safety and potential side effects. This omission led to public speculation and a lack of confidence in the vaccines.

Scepticism and Division in Society Based on Vaccination Status

The division created by vaccination status reflects broader societal divisions and stigmatization. Policies that create divisions must ensure equitable access to necessary services, considering different perspectives and interests.

Legal and Ethical Concerns in Vaccination and Health Decisions

The political strategy during the pandemic is compared to "divide and rule," focusing primarily on vaccination. The importance of personal choice in health decisions, such as opting for alternative treatments, is emphasized. The societal pressures surrounding child vaccination and legal requirements are

reflected upon, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by families making these decisions.

Compulsory Vaccinations and Rapid Vaccine Development

The contrast between long-established compulsory vaccinations and the rapidly developed COVID vaccines is examined. The expedited development process due to the pandemic's urgency is noted, with a call for more transparent public debates involving healthcare experts.

Impact on Freedom of Movement and Public Perception

Vaccination status significantly affected freedom of movement, leading to societal divisions and restrictions. The need for balanced viewpoints that respect diverse interests and collective well-being is underscored.

Scepticism and Conspiracy Theories

Scepticism about the pandemic, extending to vaccination and other measures, is prevalent, with conspiracy theories gaining traction. The lack of autopsies and selective media coverage has fuelled these theories.

Reflection on Mortality Rates and Public Debate

The reflection on how a higher mortality rate, akin to the Spanish flu, might have altered the nature of public debate and response to health measures is considered, suggesting that the relatively lower mortality rate of COVID-19 influenced the current discourse.

The report emphasizes the need for future pandemic preparedness to be grounded in upholding human rights, addressing misinformation, ensuring equitable access to healthcare, and fostering public trust in institutions and democratic processes.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON WOMEN WORK-LIFE BALANCE DEBATE

Digital Education and Teacher Preparedness

The transition to digital environments in education underscores the need for teacher preparedness. While children may possess basic digital skills, the significant challenge lies in equipping teachers for effective online teaching. Ensuring that teachers are adept at delivering subjects in digital formats is

paramount, perhaps even more crucial than the digital competencies of students, who generally already possess foundational digital skills.

Concerns about excessive digitalization, particularly among children, and its impact on mental health are raised. Efforts are being made to prevent the overuse of digital devices among children.

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

There is a notable gap in focus on adult education and lifelong learning. Current educational policies need to address these aspects more thoroughly, emphasizing the importance of certification and awareness in adult education. It's critical to extend educational efforts beyond children's education, recognizing that adult learning and lifelong education are equally essential for the holistic development of a society.

Digital Advancements and Telehealth

Conspiracy theories, particularly those related to vaccination and PCR tests, have seen a rise, fuelled in part by misinformation in the media. These theories, such as the belief in microchipping through PCR testing, have contributed to a deep-seated distrust in official health actions and interventions. This phenomenon has heightened attention and suspicion regarding bodily interventions, underscoring the need for effective communication and public education strategies in the realm of telehealth and digital medical advancements.

EU Vaccination Uniformity and Policy - Harmonized Vaccine Implementation

The discussion around COVID-19 vaccinations highlights the importance of providing choice to individuals. Multiple vaccines from various companies have undergone necessary approval phases. Concerns about potential corruption and the lack of choice in a monopolized vaccine market were noted. Access to multiple vaccine options is essential to ensure both choice and availability for the populace.

A consistent and uniform approach to vaccine delivery is beneficial for ensuring patient compliance. However, uniformity should not equate to exclusivity from a single vaccine producer, as this could lead to disproportionate profits for that company and be detrimental to public interests.

During Europe's vaccine shortage, the EU Commission's strategy to sign agreements with multiple companies to diversify vaccine options was a

prudent move. This approach not only ensured a stable vaccine supply for Europe but also provided a variety of vaccine options, making the vaccination process at the EU level more efficient and cost-effective than individual countries negotiating separately with vaccine manufacturers.

The report underscores the necessity of teacher preparedness in digital education, the importance of adult education and lifelong learning, the challenges posed by misinformation in telehealth, and the strategic approaches to vaccination policy and implementation within the European Union.

Women's Rights and Responsibilities During the Pandemic

The pandemic significantly impacted women in various sectors, especially in balancing job responsibilities and family obligations. An analysis of data before and after the pandemic indicates a substantial increase in support requests from women, estimated at around 30%. It is suggested that governmental policies should prioritize women's ability to work, possibly by keeping schools open and implementing paid parental leave, to aid in managing both professional and family responsibilities.

The stress and anxiety experienced by women due to disrupted access to reproductive healthcare services, such as contraception and safe abortion, are highlighted. Concerns are raised about the limited availability of necessary surgeries in Italy during the pandemic, adversely affecting women.

Labor Market, Work-Life Balance, and Digitalization

Even before the pandemic, Italy faced significant challenges regarding women's roles in the economy, often viewed more as a social inclusion issue rather than a valuable resource. The narrative needs to shift from seeing work-life balance as primarily a women's issue to recognizing the importance of fathers' roles in balancing family and work responsibilities.

The lockdown of schools posed challenges, emphasizing the need for gender-balanced smart working initiatives. The importance of supporting women in starting businesses after job losses during the pandemic is also discussed, noting a trend toward freelance or small social enterprises.

The Prepared Project, funded by the European Commission, focuses on research frameworks during crises, inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic. This project aims to create a code of conduct for researchers during crises, exploring various aspects of crises across different industries. A significant area of focus is the impact of the pandemic on women researchers,

highlighting the additional burdens faced by those with personal caregiving responsibilities, such as mothers with disabled children.

Additionally, a report from Amsterdam sheds light on the unexpected inequalities faced by women researchers working in laboratories during the pandemic. The challenges of frontline healthcare workers, predominantly women, are also noted, particularly in maintaining work-life balance during the pandemic and lockdowns.

Gender Violence and Essential Workers in Spain

During the pandemic, essential workers, including those involved in gender violence issues, continued their jobs primarily through phone and online communication. Women faced distinct challenges, with two main groups identified: those living with aggressors and those living without aggressors but facing job disruptions. A strong associative network in Spain provided support, especially through online activities.

A Co-Response Service was established to assist parents unable to attend to their children under 16 due to work commitments, ensuring continuity in childcare during the pandemic.

Challenges Faced by Immigrant and Refugee Women

Immigrant and refugee women, particularly single mothers in refugee camps, faced heightened difficulties during the pandemic. They often lacked male support, couldn't leave the camps, and were forced into low-wage work within the camps. Access to public health services was limited, placing additional burdens on these women.

Women in Decision-Making and Gender Mainstreaming

The inclusion of women in decision-making positions across various boards and organizations is crucial. Women's perspectives need to be integrated from the beginning of the decision-making process. Mandatory quotas for women in leadership positions within large enterprises have been implemented in Italy to promote gender equity, ensuring women's perspectives in decision-making.

Intersectional Policies and Gender-Based Violence

There's a need for experts from various fields, such as gender-based violence experts, to be involved in discussions and decision-making. Intersectional policies are vital, especially considering the challenges faced by marginalized groups, such as migrants and refugee women. These groups often hold low-paying jobs and are more likely to lose their jobs during crises. Policymakers

should focus on addressing the needs of these marginalized groups to identify and rectify weaknesses in various systems, whether in healthcare or welfare policies.

We finished the meeting with the discussion about the next meeting, online scientific conference, transnational panel discussion with political representatives and about scientific monograph, transnational workshop, and transnational final event in Spain.

Below project partners identified potential political recommendations:

1. Recommendation by the participants

Democratic debate

Interdisciplinary and International Collaboration:
- Foster joint cooperation with a broader group of experts from various fields before and during pandemics (e.g., anthropologists, social scientists, psychologists, health experts)
- Strengthen international response, collaboration, and coordination mechanisms during health crises.

Administration and Policy:
- Enhance flexibility in country administrations to address pandemic situations effectively.
- Formulate clear policies for governments on how to handle future pandemics efficiently.
- Promote a coordinated response at the EU level, adapted to each country's needs.
- The need for unambiguous, slowed-down communication and interpretation of implemented legislation.
- Professionals as the frontmen should be the persons, who can be trusted.
- Use of participative management system, not leading towards military one-way systems.

Healthcare System Improvements:

- Bolster the healthcare infrastructure and operational readiness.
- Diversify supply chains for essential medical and pharmaceutical products to minimize dependence on singular sources.
- Initiate discussions about needed reforms in both Health and Educational systems.
- Advocate for the significance of hygiene, vaccination, and social distancing, aiming for fewer restrictions than during COVID-19.

Combatting Misinformation:
- Launch campaigns against fake news and disinformation.
- Ensure the provision of early, accurate, and trustworthy information for the public.

Public Education and Awareness:
- Elevate public education to prepare for and respond to pandemics.
- Emphasize the significance of internal reflection both as a collective society and as individuals to avoid repeating detrimental behaviors seen during past crises.

Technological Advancements:
- Champion the development and implementation of new technologies to address potential future scenarios akin to pandemics.

Educational Preparedness:
- Ensure the education system (across all levels) is equipped to transition to online learning promptly and efficiently.

Mental Health Support:
- Increase provisions for mental health support during and post-pandemic situations.

Promoting unity:
- Less division between people (vaccinated/unvaccinated).

Additional recommendations for future pandemic situations

Democratic debate

Civic Engagement and Transparency:

- Engage citizens in decision-making processes, utilizing platforms like digital consultations, to increase public trust and cooperation.
- Maintain transparency by regularly updating the public on governmental decisions and their implications.

Economic Safeguarding:
- Establish economic relief packages early to support affected sectors and vulnerable populations.
- Facilitate economic resilience training for businesses, enabling them to adapt to fluctuating market conditions during crises.

Data Collection and Monitoring:
- Invest in advanced surveillance systems to detect and monitor outbreaks early.
- Encourage transparent data-sharing practices internationally for faster and more effective responses.

Cross-sectoral Response Coordination:
- Ensure smooth collaboration between the health sector and other crucial sectors such as transportation, finance, and public services to optimize the pandemic response.
- Enhance supply chain cooperation to ensure continuous flow of essentials, even under restrictions.

Legal Frameworks:
- Review and revise existing laws to ensure they support efficient pandemic responses while upholding citizens' rights.
- Establish legal frameworks to address issues like quarantine enforcement, vaccine distribution, and travel restrictions.

Cultural and Social Adaptability:
- Promote adaptive cultural practices that can fit into new norms while still respecting traditions.
- Advocate for community-driven solutions, leveraging local insights and strengths.

Strengthening Community Networks:
- Encourage the establishment of community response teams trained to handle crises at a local level.
- Foster a culture of mutual aid, where communities are encouraged to support each other, especially the vulnerable members.

Continuity of Governance:

- Ensure that governance structures have built-in redundancies to function smoothly even if key members or institutions are incapacitated.
- Develop robust digital infrastructures to facilitate governance functions remotely, if necessary.

Environmental Consideration:
- Recognize and address the environmental factors contributing to the spread or emergence of diseases.
- Encourage sustainable practices that lower the risk of zoonotic diseases.

Ethical Guidelines:
- Establish clear ethical guidelines for issues arising during pandemics, such as vaccine distribution, patient triaging, and resource allocation.

2. Recommendation by the participants

Human rights

Unified Health Measures
- To address the ongoing health crisis, the following crucial political recommendations are proposed:

Digital Advancements and Telehealth
- Implement unified EU-wide restrictions, including a one-time 14-day lockdown across all member states.
- Prioritize investments in digital infrastructure to support remote work and education.
- Enhance the promotion and integration of telehealth services.

Public Health Protocols and Decision-making
- Cultivate a widespread culture of adherence to established public health protocols.
- Decision-making should incorporate both the conservative precautionary and proportional principles, tailoring responses to the magnitude of threats, such as quarantine measures.

Institutional Strengthening and Resource Allocation
- Strengthen institutional authority and trust among the populace.

- Allocate resources for the recruitment of medical professionals and the procurement of necessary medical equipment.

Multidisciplinary Approach to Public Health:
- Formulate teams of multidisciplinary experts to holistically evaluate and implement measures, ensuring that public health interventions are effective, efficient, and proportionate.
- Safeguard the fundamental right to peaceful assembly while addressing health needs.

Using Technology for Enhanced Democracy:
- Recognize the challenges and opportunities COVID presents for modern democracy in an era defined by technology and social networks.
- Explore innovative ways to foster democratic participation and debate in the face of pandemics, leveraging digital platforms and novel approaches.

Digital Education Expansion:
- It's vital to expand digital education access to all age groups, even those not directly affiliated with educational institutions. This can ensure continuous learning irrespective of physical barriers.

Proactive Testing with Safety Measures:
- For in-person schooling, implementing regular testing of children combined with appropriate safety measures is crucial. If there's a potential future pandemic or similar situation, testing should take place before students enter school premises.

Physical Activity Encouragement:
- Emphasize the importance of physical exercises like trainings, ensuring sports and other physical activities are allowed. This is essential for the physical well-being of students.

Enhanced Digital Literacy:
- It's essential to equip children with fundamental digital skills by increasing the level of teaching about basic digitalization programs. This prepares them for a rapidly digitizing world.

Adaptive Approach:
- Continuously monitor and adjust these strategies based on evolving scientific knowledge and the specific characteristics of future pandemics to maximize their effectiveness and protect the community.

Holistic Health Approaches:
- Encourage organizations to foster both physical and mental well-being among employees.
- Recognize the importance of mental health in overall healthcare, ensuring its prioritization during disasters and future pandemic planning.

Integrated Public Health Responses:
- Ensure mental health services are well-funded, accessible, and positioned as a fundamental component of the overall healthcare system.
- Provide timely and accurate updates about the pandemic, preventive steps, and mental health resources to alleviate public anxiety and fear.

Digital and Targeted Support Systems:
- Strengthen telehealth platforms, crisis helplines, and online therapy options for immediate assistance and counseling.
- Design tailored mental health initiatives for groups at higher risk, such as frontline workers, the elderly, and those facing economic challenges.

Community Building and Awareness:
- Foster community spirit, promote physical activity, and advocate for healthy coping mechanisms as essential tools to combat mental health challenges during pandemics.
- Encourage open conversations to diminish the stigma related to mental health, ensuring individuals feel comfortable seeking assistance when required.

EU Vaccination Uniformity and Policy - Harmonized Vaccine Implementation:
- Advocate for a uniform vaccine to be adopted across all EU countries.

- Reducing Division and Fostering Choice:
- Minimize distinctions between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.
- Emphasize alternative preventive measures such as mask-wearing and hand disinfection.
- Make vaccination mandatory only during high mortality outbreaks, and emphasize that vaccination should primarily be an individual's choice, unconnected to freedom of movement rights.

Public Awareness and Transparency:
- Enhance public campaigns to inform citizens about potential vaccine side effects and their implications.

Additional recommendations for future pandemic situations

Human rights

Equal Access to Healthcare:
- Ensure that every citizen, regardless of their socio-economic status, has access to adequate healthcare, including vaccination and treatment options.

Privacy and Data Protection:
- As digital contact tracing and health status verification tools proliferate, ensure that they are implemented with strict privacy protocols.
- Establish transparent regulations for the collection, storage, and usage of health data, and ensure that they are compliant with international privacy standards.

Protection of Vulnerable Populations:
- Provide additional resources and protection to marginalized communities, including refugees, migrants, and the homeless, ensuring their human rights are upheld during pandemic responses.
- Prioritize these groups in terms of health services, testing, and vaccination.

Economic Relief for the Affected:
- Create financial assistance programs for individuals who lose their jobs or face economic hardship due to pandemic-related measures.

Right to Information:

- Establish mechanisms to ensure the public receives timely, accurate, and comprehensive information about the pandemic, including government actions, safety protocols, and other related topics.

Justice and Accountability:

- Set up independent bodies to review and investigate potential human rights violations that may occur during the imposition of pandemic measures.
- Ensure swift justice for any infringements on individual rights and liberties.

Participation and Inclusivity:

- Engage communities in the decision-making process when formulating and implementing pandemic response measures.
- Prioritize inclusivity, ensuring voices from all segments of society are heard and considered.

Freedom of Expression and Press:

- Safeguard the rights of journalists and the media, ensuring they can report on the pandemic without facing censorship or threats.

Protection for Healthcare Workers:

- Implement measures to protect healthcare workers from both the disease and potential societal backlash or stigma, given their frontline roles.

Ethical Considerations:

- Establish ethical guidelines around resource allocation during health crises, ensuring fairness and equity.

International Cooperation and Solidarity:

- Strengthen international collaborations to uphold human rights, especially in countries with weaker health infrastructures.
- Facilitate the sharing of best practices, resources, and expertise among nations.

Protection Against Discrimination:

- Guard against any forms of discrimination or bias that may arise during pandemic responses, be it based on health status, race, gender, or any other factor.

Ensuring Continuity of Essential Services:
- Guarantee that essential services such as food distribution, water supply, and electricity remain uninterrupted, even during stringent lockdowns.

3. Recommendation by the participants

Work and life of women

Childcare & Education:
- Prioritize children's care during crises by halting societal functions or providing accessible, high-quality childcare.
- Adjust educational benchmarks impacted during pandemics and increase investments in care and education segments.

State Social Support & Healthcare:
- Streamline and simplify state social support, ensuring it's accessible, user-friendly, and equitable.
- Emphasize on mental health services, support for domestic violence victims, and utilize innovative technological solutions.
- Improve public access to healthcare, especially during epidemics, emphasizing inclusivity and efficient delivery during crises.

Women's Empowerment & Support:
- Acknowledge the pivotal role of women in society, especially during challenging times.
- Provide enhanced resources for female victims of violence and guarantee their employability.
- Employ a more holistic approach to tackling domestic violence, which should involve creating a better medical culture and addressing the issue of harassment.
- Address challenges faced by women, particularly mothers, through equitable support like flexible work arrangements, extended parental leave, and accessible childcare services. Recognize the role of fathers as well.

Work, Gender Equality & Policymaking:

- Advocate for adaptable work setups and comprehensive caregiving support.
- Promote gender equality in workplaces, tackle existing disparities, and ensure women receive necessary support during crises. Implement policies that address root causes of gender inequality, including affordable childcare and women's leadership promotion.
- Policymakers should recognize and address the unique challenges women face, especially during crises. Implement strategies targeting women, particularly mothers, to sustain their employment.

Additional recommendations for future pandemic situations

Work and life of women

Remote Work Flexibility:
- Encourage businesses to offer remote work options wherever feasible, ensuring women can balance household and professional responsibilities more efficiently.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting:
- Ensure that economic stimulus packages and crisis response budgets address the specific needs of women, recognizing their disproportionate economic vulnerabilities.

Equal Pay Initiatives:
- Strengthen efforts to close the gender pay gap, which can be exacerbated during times of crisis, by promoting transparency and holding organizations accountable.

Skill Development and Training:
- Launch specialized programs focusing on reskilling and upskilling women, preparing them for sectors that may see growth post-pandemic.

Entrepreneurship and Financial Support:
- Foster women's entrepreneurship by offering financial incentives, training, and resources, given the potential for job losses in traditional sectors during crises.

Leadership and Representation:

- Ensure women are adequately represented in decision-making roles, especially in task forces or committees handling pandemic responses.

Support for Informal Workers:
- Recognize the significant number of women in the informal sector and provide them with safety nets, like health insurance and emergency funds.

Public Awareness and Advocacy:
- Launch public campaigns highlighting the challenges women face during crises, aiming to shift societal perceptions and stigmas.

Safe Transportation:
- Ensure safe and accessible transportation options for women, especially those in essential services, during lockdowns or restricted movement phases.

Digital Inclusion:
- Increase efforts to bridge the digital divide for women, given the shift towards digital modes of work, communication, and access to services.

Mentorship and Networking:
- Establish platforms where women can seek mentorship and networking opportunities, helping them navigate challenges and progress in their careers.

Research and Data Collection:
- Conduct gender-specific research to understand the varied impacts of pandemics on women. Such data can guide effective policy interventions.

Safety Protocols in Workspaces:
- Ensure that workplaces adhering to pandemic-related safety measures also incorporate protocols to prevent sexual harassment and ensure women's safety.

Support for Single Mothers:
- Recognize the unique challenges faced by single mothers during crises and develop specialized support mechanisms for them.

Meet the partnership