



Intervention program in nightlife,
leisure and socialization venues to raise awareness
and prevent GBV behaviours – including LGBTIphobia –
linked to sexual violence and substance use

THE ROAD TO SAFER AND INCLUSIVE NIGHTLIFE ENVIRONMENTS.

Policy Recommendations from the CRISSCROSS Project

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Consortium partners

Asociación Bienestar y Desarrollo - ABD (Barcelona, Spain) – Project coordinator
Kosmicare (Porto, Portugal)
Universidad de Sevilla – US (Sevilla, Spain)
ACRA (Milan, Italy)
COOPERATIVA LOTTA CONTRO L'EMARGINAZIONE ONLUS (Milan, Italy)
4motion - education for social change (Luxembourg, Luxembourg)
Health Service Executive - HSE (Dublin, Ireland)

More information is available on the website:
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Authors of the publication

Isabel María Herrera Sanchez
Virginia Sánchez Jiménez
María Luisa Rodríguez de Arriba
Luisa Fernanda Herrera Solarte

CRISSCROSS Team

Lara Rot Pla, Mireia Munté Martín, Teresa Peset Segador, Marina Fancelli, Elisenda Nieto, Aria López, Konstantina Logkari, Ismael Fernández López, Jordi Navarro López, from ABD
Marirosa Iannelli, Michele Spreafico, Michele Curami, Alida La Paglia, Lucia Maggioni, from ACRA
Cecilia Gaboardi, Rita Gallizzi, Tiziana Bianchini, Davide Bombini, Greta Testa, Ilaria Scavo, Camilla Mozzoni, Martina Vites, Giorgia Sernicola from COOPERATIVA LOTTA CONTRO L'EMARGINAZIONE.
Cristiana Vale Pires, Helena Valente, Bruna Viático, Joana Castro from Kosmicare
Alex Loverre, Carlos Paulos, Adriana Pinho, Lynn Hautus, Fabienne Gorges, Samaneh Pakzad, Feliz Alijaj, Sam Ferreira from 4motion
María Otero Vázquez, Nicola Corrigan, Nicki Killeen, Ruth Armstrong from the HSE

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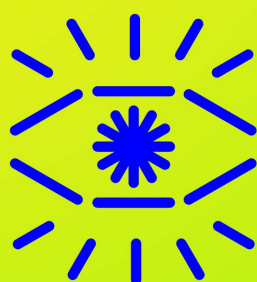
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Correspondent author: iherrera@us.es

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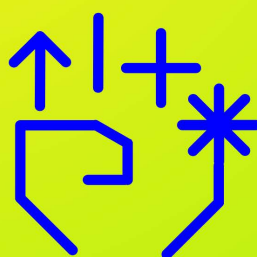
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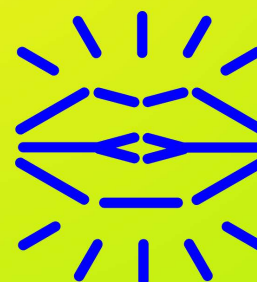
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1) INTRODUCTION

The CRISSCROSS project is a comprehensive, evidence-based initiative that addresses the intersections between gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual harassment, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, and the risks associated with substance use¹ in nightlife and other spaces of socialization and leisure. These environments, conceived as places of social interaction and entertainment, also reflect and reproduce structural inequalities, contributing to the normalisation of violence and risk dynamics, including, those related to gender and sexuality. Transforming them into safer, more inclusive, and respectful spaces, especially for individuals and social groups in vulnerable situations or at greater risk, requires specific and sustainable interventions adapted to local needs.

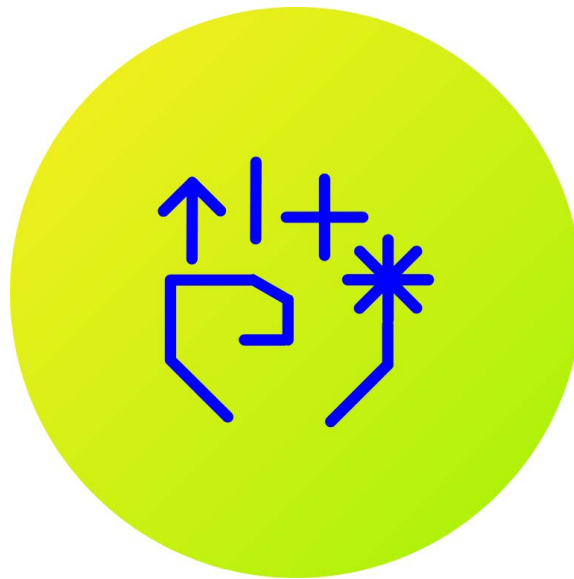
Based on a participatory and inclusive approach, the project employs the Behaviour Change Wheel Model (BCW) (Mitchie et al., 2014) to design interventions tailored to local needs, combining sensitisation, training, and the improvement of leisure spaces. The BCW is a framework designed to facilitate behaviour change by focusing on three elements: capability, opportunity, and motivation. It uses strategies, such as education, persuasion and environmental restructuring to influence these factors through targeted interventions, making it adaptable to diverse local contexts. In addition, the project integrates bystander intervention models (Latané & Darley, 1972; Quigg et al., 2024) to empower young people in nightlife settings to identify and intervene in risk situations, promoting shared responsibility and the proactive prevention of violence. Its transnational and evidence-based nature promotes substantial change in these environments, ensuring the sustainability and scalability of actions at a European level by designing, implementing, and prioritising equality, safety, and collective well-being.

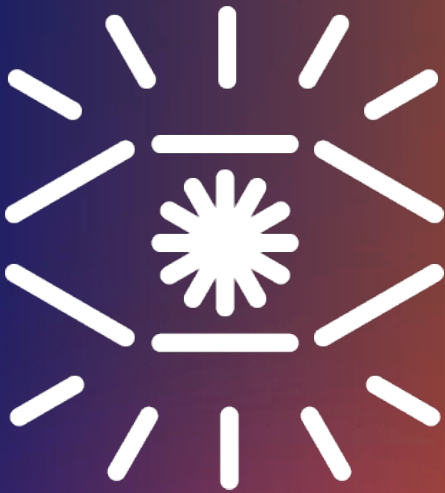
This report aims to provide a strategic framework for the design and implementation of public policies based on the lessons learned and the results obtained from local interventions carried out at festivals, club nights, public spaces in nightlife areas, and other educational settings in cities across five European countries: Sant Cugat (Spain); Lisbon, Viana do Castelo, Porto, Montargil and Crato (Portugal); Milan (Italy), Dublin (Ireland), and Luxembourg (Luxembourg). These interventions have made it possible to identify both the specific needs of the environment, and the best practices for prevention, awareness, and response to violence in nightlife environments.

The development of these policy recommendations is based on an analysis and assessment of the experiences gathered within the framework of the CRISSCROSS project, as well as scientific evidence and proven methodologies for evaluating and implementing social interventions. These methodologies underscore the importance of integrating continuous evaluation processes, fostering the active participation of multiple stakeholders, and the long-term sustainability of the initiatives.

1. Throughout this document, 'substance use' refers to the consumption of alcohol and drugs.

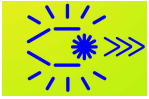
This report is intended to inform policymakers, non-governmental organisations, nightlife professionals, and other key stakeholders. Its purpose is to provide clear, evidence-based guidelines to promote safer and inclusive nightlife environments, contributing to violence prevention and the development of a culture of collective care and co-responsibility. This includes the structural transformation of these environments into spaces that promote respect, equity, and safety, ultimately strengthening collective well-being.





2) Context and foundations

Policy Recommendations
from the CRISSCROSS
project



2.1) CONTEXT

Nightlife venues are environments where social, cultural and consumer dynamics converge. If not adequately addressed, these dynamics can lead to the perpetuation of GBV, including sexual violence, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, and harms related to drinking and drug use.

Following a needs analysis and identification of good practices (Pires et al., 2023), along with scientific review studies (Button et al., 2024; Quigg et al., 2020), the CRISSCROSS project has identified key challenges and priority areas guiding the formulation of public policies and the implementation of preventive strategies in nightlife settings. These findings emphasize the need to address both individual and structural factors that perpetuate GBV, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, and the health and social risks associated with the use of substance.

Normalization of violence and discrimination.

- GBV and anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility are recurring phenomena that often go unnoticed due to their normalisation in nightlife settings. Social norms and expectations in these contexts contribute to legitimising and normalising attitudes and actions that would otherwise be unacceptable. These manifest in various forms, from verbal and physical harassment to social and symbolic exclusion—subtle, indirect or non-explicit forms of marginalisation or exclusion. This reinforces discriminatory patterns and exclusion.
- A culture of silence and the acceptance of harassment as ‘normal’ make it difficult to recognize and report violence in nightlife. Many people, particularly cis men, struggle to identify violent behaviours or acknowledge their role in harassment situations.
- These forms of violence are not isolated phenomena but are deeply rooted in power dynamics, structural inequalities and nightlife culture. While nightlife was once intended to be inclusive, it has increasingly shifted towards exclusion, gender-based stigmatization, and amplified structural inequalities. According to Measham (2002), social expectations and norms around gender influence these dynamics, particularly through drug use in leisure spaces. While often perceived as places of freedom and fun, these spaces reinforce social and gender hierarchies, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups.
- A culture of sexualisation, characterized by objectification, gendered expectations regarding behaviour and appearance, and the normalisation of harassment—exacerbated by symbolic exclusion and a lack of effective preventive policies—reinforces dynamics that legitimise violence and makes it harder to recognise.

Interaction between substance use and violence.

- Binge drinking (heavy episodic drinking) and drug use in nightlife settings can act as enablers or excuses for GBV. Gender stereotypes often depict women, particularly younger women, as sexually available when consuming alcohol or drugs. Similarly, choices regarding clothing and appearance in these environments can be misinterpreted as signals of consent. These harmful perceptions create ambiguity and blur the lines of mutuality and consent. Additionally, reduced inhibitions and increased chemical vulnerability may be exploited as opportunities for violent incidents.
- The combination of substance use and inadequate safety measures increase vulnerability in nightlife settings, particularly in unregulated or poorly managed spaces, such as illegal raves or domestic parties, where safety protocols are often absent. This highlights the need for harm reduction measures, including staff training, early risk detection, and effective response protocols, rather than relying solely on increased control or policing, which can unintentionally encourage unsafe practices.
- Intoxication, coupled with a lack safety measures, can create environments where individuals under the influence may become targets of violence or exploitation rather than simply facing consequences by personal decisions. Impaired awareness increases vulnerability to predatory behaviours.
- The lack of accessible information and harm reduction tools (e.g., safer consumption kits, breathalysers) exacerbates drug-related risks in nightlife spaces. This limits the adoption of safer substance use practices, peer-led care support, and proactive bystanders for early detection of crisis and violent situations. As substances like ketamine become more mainstream among less informed users groups, adapting harm reduction strategies to evolving trends is essential to maintain safety without reinforcing stigma.

Diversity and complexity of local contexts.

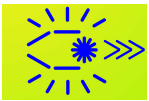
- Nightlife environments vary significantly in terms of customer profiles, socioeconomic factors, cultural dynamics, and consumption patterns. For example, there are differences between those who frequent indoor nightlife venues and those who prefer to socialise in outdoor spaces. Tailored interventions must be designed to meet the specific needs of each setting.
- In some locations, particularly unlicensed or hidden events, venues lack basic infrastructure, such as public toilets, water sources, or designated rest areas. Improving these conditions is



essential to reducing risks and fostering inclusive environments where all people can enjoy themselves safely and equally.

Lack of institutional and community response.

- The normalisation of harassment, including sexual harassment and GBV in nightlife, is exacerbated by insufficient detection tools, inadequate response mechanisms, and limited knowledge on how to prevent such incidents.
- The absence of standardized protocols, insufficient staff training in nightclubs, and lack of leadership and investment hinder efforts to prevent and respond effectively to cases of GBV and anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility. Nightlife has long been a space where health and social issues intersect, yet it historically lacks the resources and support necessary to address these challenges.
- Poor leadership, governance and coordination among public, private, and community stakeholders create a management vacuum, reinforcing the perception of lack of protection and impunity. This disorganization fosters a sense of insecurity and unclear authority to ensure the safety in these spaces.



2.2) THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CRISSCROSS PROJECT

The theoretical framework of the CRISSCROSS project integrates preventive approaches based on the BCW, education and capacity building, harm reduction and awareness strategies, and risk communication (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction [EMCDDA], 2023). The identification of good practices (Pires et al., 2023) informed the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at transforming the dynamics in nightlife environments through a multi-component, participatory, and sustainable approach.

Education and awareness.

- The project promotes campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes, foster a culture of consent, and encourage care for others. These strategies should be accessible, culturally relevant, and inclusive of diverse identities and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Risk communication strategies should adopt a non-punitive, non-judgmental approach. The most effective strategies combine clear, culturally relevant messaging with practical solutions tailored to target audiences to promote protective behaviours and harm reduction.

- Beyond awareness campaigns, trusted, on-the-ground engagement interventions are essential for building trust and fostering real-time support. This approach helps to mitigate potential negative reactions such as fear, mistrust, or resistance to harm reduction messages.

Capacity building.

- Continuous, specialised training is crucial to enable local communities, nightclub staff and professionals to prevent violence. This training should also empower young people to recognize, prevent, and respond to risk situations and violence.
- Training in active bystander intervention is crucial for various groups, including young people, nightclub staff, event organisers, and local communities. This model highlights how erroneous beliefs about sexual violence contribute to victim blaming and perpetrator exoneration. Research shows that bystander Intervention training is effective in countering these misconceptions and fostering protective attitudes in different settings (Mujal et al., 2021; Quigg et al., 2024). Additionally, this approach redistributes the responsibility for prevention, reducing the burden on potential victims.

Creating Safer Nightlife environments.

- Implementing effective protocols and improving infrastructures are essential to ensuring the safety of nightlife participants. Successful protocols typically involve a multi-stakeholder approach, coordinating the efforts of venue staff, security personnel, medical services, local authorities, and community organisations. The consortium has extensive experience in developing and implementing protocols such as LiLac Care Protocol, and actions within the Safer Nightlife strategies, participating in multi-stakeholder responses at large events to prevent and respond to cases of GBV and anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility (see Pires et al., 2023).
- Provision of basic amenities such as free water, food, seating areas (‘chill out zones’), resources to prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections, and informational materials, along with psychological first aid (e.g. Lilac points, welfare services, psychological care), improves wellbeing and safety at nightlife events. This also enhances responsiveness to substance use-related crisis and other risks (Carvalho et al., 2014).
- Incorporating drug-checking services to analyse chemical compositions and identify high-risk drugs in nightlife spaces provide real-time, accurate information on drug adulteration and associated risks. These services educate users on more informed drug use practices and can reduce medical emergencies by preventing overdose and promoting harm reduction behaviours.

Multi-component action.

The CRISSCROSS project applies a multi-component intervention strategy to address violence prevention and response in nightlife environments. These components are interrelated and build upon previously discussed principles, ensuring a holistic and sustainable approach. The components based on Lilac Protocol include:

- **Prevention:** Sensitisation and education on GBV and risks associated with substance use.
- **Information:** Dissemination of educational materials and local resources to promote awareness.
- **Detection:** Early identification of risk situations to enable timely interventions.
- **Care and support:** Creating safer spaces, providing support services and fostering a culture of mutual care.
- **Referral:** Coordination with specialized services to manage serious cases and ensure adequate follow-up.

Community co-responsibility

- Collaboration between key actors (nightclub staff, local authorities, community organisations, and youth groups) fosters coherent interventions, trust and social co-responsibility.
- These partnerships enhance legitimacy and effectiveness, ensuring community ownership of initiatives and long-term sustainability.

Sustainability

- Effective interventions require adaptive designs that align fundamental principles with specific contexts and ensure sustainability through integration into institutional routines. This involves addressing interconnected issues such as drug policy, GBV, and anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility through inclusive and intersectional policies that account for individual, social, and structural dimensions of violence.
- Sustainability also depends on long-term investment and cross-departmental collaboration, involving key sectors such as culture, health, and justice. Coordinated efforts ensure holistic policies that acknowledge nightlife risks extend beyond traditional settings like the homes or schools and require multi-sectorial engagement to deliver effective responses.
- Interventions should be designed with a long-term vision, ensuring their integration into local and national public policies, as well as the implementation of continuous evaluation systems to measure and adapt strategies based on lessons learned.



3) Strategic recommendations for the formulation of policies and action plans

Policy Recommendations
from the CRISSCROSS
project



Based on the lessons learned from the CRISSCROSS project, including experiences from the application of interventions in nightlife spaces, various strategies are proposed to design and implement public policies and action plans. These strategies aim to transform nightlife environments into safer, more inclusive, and respectful spaces, free from violence. The recommendations focus on preventing GBV, sexual violence, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, and substance use-related harms.



3.1) PREVENTION AND AWARENESS

Sensitisation and Educational campaigns

- Design culturally relevant campaigns that promote gender equality, sexual diversity, and safer drinking and drug use patterns. These campaigns should deliver clear, specific messages that encourage consent, sexual mutuality, and challenge rape myths and harmful gender stereotypes associated with substance use in nightlife environments.
- Balance risk warning messages with practical and accessible solutions to foster trust, adherence, and collaboration from target audiences.
- Integrate digital tools with social media, and mobile apps dissemination to maximize reach while collaborating with event planners to embed these messages and materials into their strategies, websites, and other communication channels. Use segmentation strategies to tailor messages to different audiences.

Promoting inclusion and respect

- Develop environments that are responsive to violence and discrimination dynamics based on gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. This can be achieved through prescriptive measures such as adopting inclusive policies, providing staff training on diversity and harassment prevention, and ensuring safer space protocols. Highlighting the importance of values such as respect, diversity, equity and mutual care, encouraging event organisers and venue operators to implement these practices.
- Promote a culture of consent and sexual mutuality among young people through workshops, situation-based learning, and interactive educational materials tailored to diverse audiences. Incorporate these principles into staff policies to guide interactions both among staff members and with attendees.



- Recognize and support venues and event organizers that adopt inclusive measures, safer space policies and protocols by promoting a certification or 'safer space' label. Encourage policymakers to establish a standardized safety and inclusivity system, adaptable to each country's context. This tool would provide clear guidelines and promote consistency across venues, potentially serving as a model for international safety standards.



3.2) TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Training of nightclub staff

- Provide ongoing training to prevent, detect, and respond to incidents related to GBV, sexual violence, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility and drug-related crisis.
- Train staff in effective communication skills, de-escalation strategies, and first aid to support and respond to emergency situations. This training should also cover substance-related scenarios, including responsible serving, handling intoxicated individuals, and managing drug-related crises.
- Provide support to the development of clear guidelines and internal protocols to help nightlife professionals respond effectively to situations involving GBV, drug-related crisis, and overdoses. This support should include training on nightlife culture, dignity and respect, appropriate language use, and gender diversity awareness. These components are particularly crucial for more mainstream venues with limited experience in these issues.

Strengthening skills in harm reduction

- Train key actors, such as peer workers and nightlife monitors, in harm reduction practices to promote informed and safer drinking and drug use patterns. Nightlife venue staff and managers may not provide direct harm reduction services but can support these efforts by implementing harm reduction policies, such as providing information on their websites, offering onsite resources, and collaborating with peer workers.
- Include emotional support competence and attention protocols to respond to GBV and drug-related crisis, targeting both staff and local communities.

Intersectoral training

- Develop joint training programmes involving local authorities, event organisers, community organisations, emergency services, and other key stakeholders to ensure a coherent and coordinated response. These programmes should include scenario-based training, allowing participants to test situations, practice responses, and define roles and responsibilities during events.

Bystander intervention training

- Implement programs that train young people, venue staff, and other key actors to identify and respond to risk situations, empowering them as active agents of change and promoting co-responsibility against GBV and anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility.



3.3) ORGANISATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL INTERVENTIONS

Implementation of security and care protocols

- Develop specific response protocols for violence prevention and intervention, adapted to each context, and ensure their widespread knowledge and application in nightlife establishments.
- Ensure that local staff are familiar with and trained to implement these protocols, promoting rapid, consistent and effective responses.
- Conduct ongoing evaluations to adjust protocols on emerging needs and lessons learned.

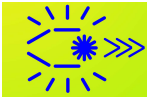
Creation of safer nightlife spaces.

- Improve infrastructure in nightlife environments by including resting areas, hydration points, and safe access zones, ensuring safety and well-being for all guests.
- Create a non-judgmental environment where individuals can disclose substance use emergencies, acknowledging the substance use occurs in those spaces. As part of event planning, develop harm reduction policies that integrate these improvements to infrastructure and safety measures.
- Establish clearly identified assistance points at festivals, raves and large events, staffed by trained personnel to provide immediate support.

- Implement informative points on LGBTIQ+ identities and substance use, along with drug-checking services, to raise awareness of risks and promote safer and more informed practices.

Use of technology for prevention and reporting

- Develop event-specific, multi-component strategies in collaboration with relevant agencies to improve risk detection and response.
- Integrate digital tools, such as mobile applications or event-specific online platforms, to enable anonymous incident reporting, access to preventive resources, and manage emergencies.
- Implement real-time monitoring systems for large events to assess risks and coordinate timely responses, while simpler measures can be adapted for smaller venues like nightclubs.



3.4) MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

Linking with emergency services and early warning systems

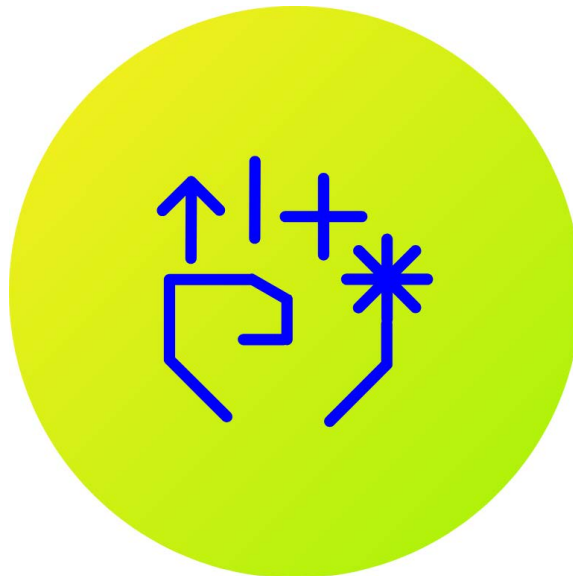
- Strengthen connections between nightlife providers, emergency services, and specialised resources, such as psychological support and legal advice agencies.
- Establish safer and efficient referral strategies for people in vulnerable situations who require immediate assistance. Develop a monitoring system where nightlife providers can report emerging trends and inform public health networks.
- Collaborate with drug-checking services and public health networks to issue early alerts on emerging drug adulteration risks and develop other harm reduction strategies for contexts where drug-checking services are unavailable.

Collaboration with local councils and statutory services

- Promote collaboration agreements between city councils, statutory services, nightlife providers, and event organisers to strengthen preparedness and response strategies for crisis situations related to GBV, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, and substance use. Recommend the establishment of a night-time economy task force to coordinate efforts across stakeholders and encourage the

development of a charter for the city or area that outlines shared goals and responsibilities, promoting safety, harm reduction, and inclusivity in nightlife settings.

- Organize local working groups involving city councils, statutory services, community organizations and private sectors to evaluate and adjust strategies on an ongoing basis.
- Integrate these policies into municipal strategic plans, ensuring stable resources and long-term sustainability of the initiatives.





4) Key factors for implementation and sustainability

Policy Recommendations
from the CRISSCROSS
project

The success of policies and interventions aimed at preventing GBV, anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility, and risks associated with substance use in nightlife settings relies on the integration of adaptive approaches, community participation, and both operational and financial sustainability. Drawing from the experience of the CRISSCROSS project and social and community intervention models (Herrera-Sánchez et al., 2017), the following factors have been identified as essential for ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

Adaptive and Contextual Approach

- **Adaptation to the local context:** Interventions must be designed with consideration of the cultural, social and economic, and policy dynamics of each community. A participatory needs assessment is crucial to identify user profiles, drinking and drug use patterns, power relations, and local governance structures, including decision-making processes and policies. This ensures that strategies are relevant, context-specific, and widely accepted.
- **Flexibility in design and implementation:** The incorporation of feedback systems allows for ongoing evaluation, real-time adjustments, and adapting interventions to emerging needs without compromising effectiveness.
- **Maintaining core components:** Ensuring that core principles such as safety, inclusivity and respect remain intact during contextual adaptations, preserving coherence and a preventative approach.

Community Participation and Co-Responsibility

- **Inclusion of key actors:** Multi-sector collaboration between local authorities, statutory services, community organisations, the private sector, and young people strengthens legitimacy and amplifies the impact of interventions.
- **Participation and agency:** the active participation of young people and other local actors in the design and execution of strategies increases the sense of ownership and sustainability of the initiatives.
- **Creating collaborative networks:** establishing regional and local alliances promotes the exchange of resources and good practices, strengthening response capacity to emerging challenges and promoting the replicability of interventions.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Clear and measurable indicators:** defining specific outcomes and impact measures, such as reduction of incidents, changes in social norms, and perceived safety, facilitates the evaluation of the impact of the interventions and enables adjustments of strategies if necessary.
- **Systematic evaluation:** using mixed evaluation designs, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, ensures a comprehensive analysis of the intervention processes and results, optimizing evidence-based decision-making.

Integration in Public and Operational Policies

- **Strengthening national and public policy integration.** Greater attention should be given at the public and national policy levels to comprehensively address these issues. This includes integrating them into national drug strategies, health policies, and nightlife development strategies.
- **Alignment with legislative frameworks:** Linking preventive strategies with existing public policies facilitates implementation, ensuring regulatory coherence, institutional support, and long-term sustainability.
- **Standardization of safety protocols:** Developing and requiring the adoption of clear safety protocols as a mandatory condition for the operation of nightclubs promotes the institutionalization of good practices.
- **Financial sustainability:** Establishing specific budgetary commitments and fostering ethical public-private partnerships ensures the necessary financing to maintain and expand interventions. Care should be taken to avoid conflicts of interest, particularly by limiting the involvement of industries whose participation could compromise the integrity and objectives of the initiatives.

Diffusion and Scalability

- **Documentation and dissemination of good practices:** Recording lessons learned, evaluation findings, and results encourages the replicability of initiatives in different contexts by sharing them in local and international forums.
- **Strategic Expansion:** designing modular intervention models adaptable to the diversity of nightlife contexts, from large-scale events to smaller, localised, and restricted ones, ensures the relevance and flexibility of strategies.
- **Ongoing sensitisation campaigns:** sustained communication and education efforts help reinforce the values of respect, equality, and inclusion, promoting long-term cultural change.



5) Conclusions

Policy Recommendations
from the CRISSCROSS
project



The CRISSCROSS project highlights that nightlife environments, often perceived as hotspots for risk and violence, can be transformed into safer, more inclusive, and respectful spaces through preventive, multi-component, collaborative and evidence-based interventions. This report synthesises key learnings and presents strategic recommendations to ensure the sustainability and replicability of these initiatives.

Nightlife settings have also been identified as key spaces to reach young people with tailored messages and interventions. Prioritising these actions and ensuring adequate investment is essential to fully leverage their potential for promoting safety and harm reduction.

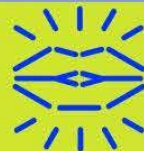
The complexity of violence and risks in nightlife spaces requires comprehensive responses that address individual, organizational, structural, and cultural factors. The most effective strategies integrate prevention, awareness-raising, and immediate response, all supported by multi-sector collaboration.

Ultimately, these strategic actions not only enhance safety and well-being in nightlife spaces but also contribute to fostering a global culture of collective care, inclusion and respect for diversity.

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Intervention program in nightlife,
leisure and socialization venues to raise awareness
and prevent GBV behaviours – including LGBTphobia –
linked to sexual violence and substance use

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