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# COORDINATING COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN GALICIA (NW SPAIN)

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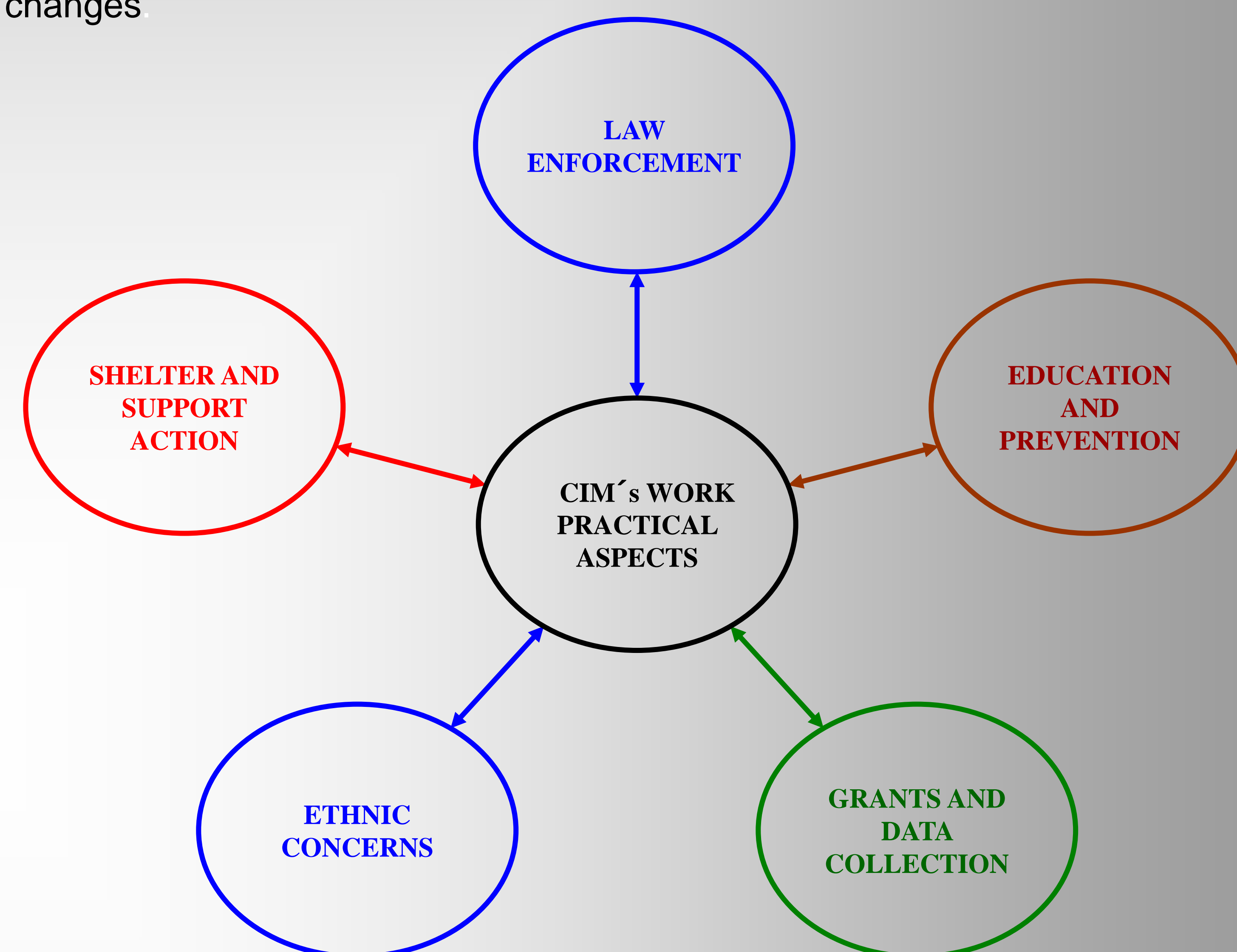
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**Introduction:** Services in the form of shelter, support, education, and legal advocacy may be crucial in the success of other community efforts to address domestic violence. This report provides an overview of different mechanisms for coordinating community responses to domestic violence and examines some of their individual components. As specific policies and practices vary depending upon regional normative and the characteristics of local agencies, the poster focuses on three types of coordination that exist in the Autonomous Community of Galicia (NW Spain): local intervention and support networks, women information centers and protection orders regional coordinating points. The focus here will be on the procedures related to interagency coordination and lead to more uniform responses. Components of a coordinated community response include: follow-up support and advocacy for victims; carrying out and enforce medical and legal interventions; and education and prevention.

**Methodology:** The investigation developed through three phases, using a methodology that included qualitative and quantitative aspects. Initially we examined materials related to the coordination mechanisms, in order to identify the key aspects of their practical execution. During the second phase we took contact with the professionals of the related areas and departments. Finally, we evaluated the data and information.

**Local Support Networks (LSN)** are volunteers organizations that focus on promoting citizen participation in the institutional responses to domestic violence within a community. They are distinguished from other coordinating instruments and criminal justice-based reform projects in that they are nonprofit agencies that are external to the criminal justice system and rooted in the battered women's movement. The Rede de mulleres veciñais contra os Malos Tratos (Vigo, 1997) is a well-known LSN that has been a model for other groups in Galicia. This Rede has been successful in developing concrete assistance, information and accompaniment initiatives, as well as promoting interagency meetings to discuss policy and programmatic issues.

The organization in the CIM varies in terms of their membership and structure, but their practical working develops on the same three basis: (1) respect to the victim's points of view; (2) all services are provided free of charge; and (3) confidentiality of all communications and contacts. Their statements of purpose can be distilled into the following three major functions: assessment of the legal justice and social systems involved, improvement of the cooperation and exchange information processes with regard of the situation of the victim and planning. There is also usually a separate work group for front-line workers (e.g., police officers, advocates) to discuss coordination issues and policy changes



## KEY COMPONENTS RELATED TO VICTIM SAFETY

- ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE VICTIM DURING JUDICIAL INTERVENTIONS
- ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE VICTIM DURING POLICE INTERVENTIONS AND HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
- ORGANIZING AUTONOMY AND SELF-HELPING GROUPS

## KEY COMPONENTS RELATED TO THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- ORGANIZING VOLUNTEERS SPECIALIZED FORMATION PROGRAMS
- COORDINATING COMMUNITY RESPONSE FOR VICTIM SAFETY AND OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY
- ADVOCATING FOR BATTERED WOMEN WITHIN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY TO INSURE A SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE
- PROMOTING SOCIAL SENSIBILITY IN FRONT OF ATTITUDES THAT TRIVIALIZE THE PHENOMENON OF GENDERED VIOLENCE

**Women Information Centers:** (also known as CIM) have been formed in many cities and local areas to provide a forum for interagency communication and collaboration. The one of Santiago de Compostela has been a model for the development of others around the Autonomous Community of Galicia. Established in 2005, it has developed psychological and legal assistance protocols and published a resources guide for domestic violence victims.

**Protection Orders Regional Coordination Point:** Innovative programs that focus on integrated case management are often located within the administration. This approach can be exemplified by the Protection Orders Regional Coordinating Point in A Coruña, initiated in 2004. Protection orders are widely used and violations are prosecuted. The point contacts the victim following receipt of the order with the aim to achieve first-hand information about her personal circumstances and needs, to inform her of the existing social protection resources and to verify that the order was correctly fulfilled.

## MECHANISMS FOR COORDINATION

- PROTECTION ORDER IS COMMUNICATED (BY THE COMPETENT JUDGE) TO THE PARTIES, THE VICTIM AND THE COMPETENT ADMINISTRATIONS.
- COURT'S SECRETARY COMMUNICATES THE ORDER TO THE REGIONAL COORDINATION POINT.
- REGIONAL COORDINATION POINT ARTICULATES THE INTEGRATED INTERVENTION OF THE COMPETENT SOCIAL PROTECTION CENTERS, SERVICES AND INSTITUTIONS.

**Discussion:** A number of basic problems that hinder cooperation were identified. First of all, a problem is the lacking knowledge of each other and each other's work, even within the same institution. There can also be problems of language and communication, since different terms used between professionals, as well as communication abilities can have an effect on cooperation. Also, structural problems appear to harden processes, as ways are long and bureaucratic. Therefore, time is always also an issue when looking at the improvement of cooperation, since information sharing and exchange processes can take a vast amount of time.