

María López Belloso /
Sara Clavero / Sofia Strid (eds.)

**Resisting the pandemic.
Better stories and innovation
in times of crisis**



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In an era marked by profound disparities, this book explores the significant ways the pandemic has deepened gender inequalities in the labor, education, and health sectors. Through a rigorous analysis within the RESISTIRÉ EU funded project framework, it highlights innovative scientific and social methodologies that have emerged to challenge these inequalities. Structured into nine chapters, the work synthesizes insights gained from extensive evaluations of public policies and grassroots initiatives across Europe, offering 'better stories' and practices that encapsulate transformative potentials in crisis response.

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María López Beloso, Alain Denis and Sofia Strid

Navigating crisis through innovation: A multifaceted journey

Introduction

When the global pandemic was declared in 2020, the scientific community focused on analysing the origin of the disease and its possible cures from an eminently medical and public health approach. As the pandemic evolved and the political and social consequences of the measures adopted to curb the contagion were prolonged over time, its social, behavioural and cultural impacts became more evident. The starting point for the development of this research project was the call published by the European Commission (EC) on 19 May 2020 ‘call for an Expression of Interest for innovative and rapid health-related approaches to respond to COVID-19 and to deliver quick results for society for a higher level of preparedness of health systems’.¹ One of the topics of the call was addressing the socio-economic impacts of the outbreak response. Below is a citation of the topic descriptions, more specifically part of the description of the scope:

Proposals should focus on lessons learnt: they should (i) address how to mitigate social and economic impacts of the outbreak response related to health systems; (ii) identify non-intended consequences of epidemic-control decisions; and (iii) provide answers to social, including gendered, dynamics of the outbreak and the related public health response.²

In this context, the decision to focus on these impacts from a feminist perspective was indeed a political decision. Aware that ‘the personal is political’ (Hanisch, 1969) and that emotions play a central role in research processes (Barbalet, 2002), a group of feminist researchers decided to point out the relevance of the gender impact of the pandemic. This decision undoubtedly connects with the foundations of feminist epistemology, which emphasises the need for situated and decentralised knowledge (Smith, 1987; Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1987;

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- 1 https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/events/upcoming-events/2nd-special-call-expression-interest-respond-coronavirus-information-session-2020-05-20_en last accessed 19 March 2024
 - 2 https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/H2020_SC1-PHE-CORONAVIRUS-2020-2C/en last accessed 19 March 2024

Silvestre et al., 2020), but it also responded to the responsibility assumed by this driving force to research and document the impact that both the pandemic and the political decisions taken to manage it had on women and gendered groups. This decision reflects the importance of highlighting feminist argumentation in the construction of consent by incorporating visions that incorporate bodies, culture and emotion (Holland, 2007).

Therefore, this chapter, synthesises the contributions, innovations and achievements of the research conducted by a consortium of ten multidisciplinary research, innovation and design partners from nine European countries, as well as a network of thirty-eight national experts covering the selected thirty countries. The aim of the project was threefold: (1) to provide evidence and empower policy-makers and other stakeholders to anticipate potential negative impacts and mitigate current negative impacts on inequalities when taking decisions linked to public health and outbreaks, (2) to understand the impact of the COVID-19 policy responses on behavioural, social and economic inequalities, based on a conceptual gender+ framework to identify, measure and collect evidence on inequalities; and (3) to design/devise and pilot solutions/social innovations which can be applied by policy-makers, stakeholders and actors in the field of different policy domains of the key objectives of the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–25 (EC, 2020a).

The chapter introduces an innovative project characterised by its design and multifaceted methodology. The project's key components are outlined, emphasising the interconnectedness of its various activities:

1. **Comprehensive methodology:** The chapter provides an overview of the project's methodology, which encompassed mapping exercises, qualitative assessments, and quantitative analysis of inequalities.
2. **Stakeholder engagement:** A significant aspect of the project involved active collaboration with stakeholders, fostering co-creation to address challenges collectively.
3. **Solution-oriented approach:** Rather than focusing solely on problem analysis, the project emphasised a solution-oriented perspective. It incorporated prototyping and testing of social innovations as integral elements in each phase.
4. **Advocacy integration:** The project's strategy also included embedding advocacy efforts, ensuring that research findings had a tangible impact on policies and stakeholders throughout the project's lifecycle.

We highlight the four key innovations of the RESISTIRÉ project: The agile approach, which allowed for concurrent activities and shorter cycles (six-eight

months), facilitating rapid results production and therefore efficiency; methodological innovations, where collaborative solutions were co-created in Open Studios, promoting a dynamic and inclusive approach; the leverage of design thinking and techniques to translate research outcomes into practical, operational solutions; and the contribution of the project for a research-activism synergy, bridging, at every stage, the gap between research and activism, aligning advocacy efforts with research findings for a more significant impact.

In sum, the chapter sets the stage for a detailed exploration of the project's innovative features and its potential to drive positive change through an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach.

Project inception and pandemic realities

As we have noted, the declaration of a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in March 2020 was the beginning of a crisis that put the scientific community at a crossroads. The measures taken to curb the disease, including containment, social distancing and facility closures, made it extremely difficult for the scientific community to perform its activities. On the other hand, the need to respond to the crisis generated by the pandemic meant that an unprecedented amount of money was spent on scientific research. Indeed, the World Bank's 2019 report, in response to the first signs of the disease, prioritised the need to invest in science and innovation (GPMB, 2019), although funding for medical research had started to pick up between 2016 and 2017 with a 7% increase, and domestic public sector funding in low- and middle-income countries had grown by 17% (GPMB, 2019, p. 28). The US has traditionally led the way in research funding, especially since the early 20th century (CRS, 2022), and as Borahan's (2022) study points out, Europe has failed to match US funding or that of other players such as Korea or China. However, with the outbreak of the pandemic, Europe made an unprecedented effort to increase funding. Thus, the Commission launched several special actions for coronavirus research under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, as part of a €1 billion commitment for coronavirus research (EC, 2020). More specifically, this action took the form of two emergency calls, one on 30 January 2020, and the other on 19 May 2020, channelling €48.2 million to eighteen research projects and €128 million to twenty-four research projects respectively.

Projects funded under the first call covered the improvement of epidemiology and public health, including outbreak preparedness and response. More specifically, projects were funded to improve rapid diagnostic tests, the development of new treatments, and the development of new vaccines (EC, 2020b). The second

call gave researchers just under four weeks to prepare collaborative research projects. The research community mobilised quickly. Research proposals were quickly evaluated by independent experts on the basis of their scientific excellence and high potential impact. A very detailed analysis of the EU funding for COVID-19 was performed by Emanuel Castellarin (2020). According to Castellarin, the European Union prioritised global financing initiatives in the areas of public health and research, aligned with its values and the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, expenditures on public health, humanitarian aid, and research at both internal and external levels were comparable, showcasing the EU's commitment to a cohesive global response. In contrast, the global economic and social response to the crisis showed limited international cooperation, with the G20 playing an informal coordination role. While financial contributions were announced, the G20's emphasis on existing measures and a 'business as usual' approach raised questions about the potential for future developments (Castellarin, 2020). Member States also launched numerous initiatives to promote research. Spain, for example, earmarked €30 million for bio-health research projects under COVID-19. Of this amount, almost 80% (24 million) went to the so-called COVID Fund managed by the Instituto de Salud Carlos III (ISCIII) (Bankinter, 2020), hence, to research with a clear medical orientation. This tendency to focus efforts on health is echoed in most national funds, as reported in the OECD report on measuring governments' response to COVID-19 in R&D funding (2023).

The starting point for the development of the research proposal was the aforementioned second emergency call, which included a topic addressing the socio-economic impacts of the outbreak response¹. According to the European Commission's own data, in the second emergency call, five projects were funded that responded to the same topic: COVINFORM, PERISCOPE, SHARE COVID 19, RESPOND and RESISTIRÉ, allocating a total of 33.2 million euros (EC, no date). The topic emphasised the focus on lessons learnt, especially addressing the mitigation of social and economic impacts of the outbreak response related to health systems; identifying non-intended consequences of epidemic-control decisions; and providing answers to its social implications, 'including gendered dynamics of the outbreak and the related public health response'. This reference to gender dynamics provided a window of opportunity for a group of feminist scholars to develop a proposal that would incorporate the gender dimension and intersectionality into this challenge, incorporating not only sensitivity and emotions but also the responsibility to incorporate the vision and experiences of groups on the margins, while noting that women were at the forefront of the response to the pandemic (OECD, 2020). Even though women did much of the

care work and constituted the majority of the workforce in the sectors considered 'essential' during the pandemic, analyses from a gender perspective were not incorporated in the outbreak of the crisis, neither in medical research nor in research from a sociological perspective³. It was precisely the lobbying and work of groups like the RESISTIRÉ consortium and other activist research groups such as 'Gender & COVID'⁴ that succeeded in incorporating this perspective into research. For this reason, assertiveness and research activism constituted essential elements of the design of the research itself, as we will develop below.

Despite the activism, this challenge was not easy. The first difficulty was time, both for the development of the proposal and for results delivery. Only slightly more than three weeks were allowed for the submission of the proposal. This period, considering the added difficulties related to confinements and mobility restrictions, was very limited to build a competitive proposal. The team overcame this not only by relying on a strong network of researchers and innovators with similar interests and previous experience of working together, but also on a very high level of trust. This trust and sisterhood were, as we will see later, one of the cornerstones of RESISTIRÉ's success. With this short deadline, writing the proposal had to be done in the 'free time' remaining on top of other professional commitments. For those who took up the challenge, this meant working long days and seven days a week. The proposal development will not be covered here, but it was done in four main steps: developing a concept note; approaching partners and getting commitments; collecting reactions on the concept and fine-tuning of the research design; and drafting the proposal. It needs to be noted also that for many women researchers, the lockdown meant also taking over (additional) care duties and home responsibilities, meaning extra burden and significant work life balance challenges.

These decisions in terms of project composition and scope were not without risk: the assurance and advantages provided by the cohesion and reliability of the core-group limited the consortium in terms of geographical composition and areas of expertise. Therefore, a second decision taken was to go for a wide coverage of countries, the twenty-seven EU Member States and a selection of Associated Countries. To be able to have this reach, an existing network of national

3 Journals such as *The Lancet* or European-funded projects such as Going FWD pointed to the need for detailed research into the sex/gender variables of the pandemic (Wenham et al., 2020).

4 The project website summarises project's goals: <https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/> last accessed 18 March 2024.

researchers that the consortium partners had worked with in the past decade for a number of gender-related research projects would be involved. This choice helped to increase the geographical coverage, but generated management and coordination difficulties. The team's trust and the prioritisation of generating quality and innovative results took precedence over other interests. A shared leadership in a system of horizontal collaboration was imposed, sharing tasks and responsibilities, which generated unconventional management structures in competitive projects of this size.

The second challenge in terms of time was to ensure the consortium's capacity to deliver results in the short term, as the call itself and the urgency of the situation required. The pandemic was in full swing, and producing evidence and results after its end would have no impact. This meant generating a methodology and a way of working that took the researchers out of their comfort zone, both in terms of speed and focus. A three-cycle methodology was developed in which, through the overlapping of activities, a large volume of data was generated providing significant and relevant information. Yet this also meant a huge effort for the team, which was predominantly used to social science methodologies that allocate much more time to the discussion, reflection and analysis of the results. It could be said that the methodological design of RESISTIRÉ tried to cover all the layers of the 'methodological onion' in a very short time (Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 106–109). In addition, the aforementioned collaboration and horizontality implied shared responsibilities among the team in different tasks, which resulted in combining tasks and responsibilities simultaneously, generated a very heavy workload but also a great solidarity among team members.

Another significant challenge was to justify the target group and focus of the project. As mentioned above, the gender-differentiated impact was evident from the beginning, yet not many other projects addressed the pandemic through a gender lens, and even less so by incorporating intersectionality.

RESISTIRÉ thus became one of the benchmark projects among gender initiatives to analyse the impacts of the pandemic. Other initiatives were launched, such as the COVID-19 Gender and Development Initiative, a project of the Center for Global Development, which aimed to promote gender equality and long-term prosperity in low- and middle-income countries by informing global and national decision makers' policy responses to the current pandemic and future crises (Gender & Covid Initiative). There were also initiatives along these lines at national level, such as DATA COVID GENDER funded by the Catalan Agency for Health Quality Assessment in Spain, or the set of projects funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology in Portugal. The Gender and COVID-19 Project is worth highlighting. This initiative also emerged bottom-up

by small group of academics from public health, international relations, public policy, and development economics who saw the need to better understand and address the gendered effects of COVID-19 and government responses to the outbreak. Their initiative received the funding from the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) to conduct an ad hoc study of the gendered effects of COVID-19 in Canada, the UK, China, and Hong Kong and their research resulted in highly influential paper published in *The Lancet*.

The European Commission set up an Expert Group in 2021 to specifically analyse the impact of COVID 19 on gender equality in research and innovation. The Expert Group analysed institutional responses of COVID-19 and demonstrated that these were rarely taking up gender aspects. Many recommendations to different stakeholders were presented. Its report highlighted that women academics and individuals with care responsibilities, carried most of the additional workload and care responsibilities at home. Consequently, they experienced a decrease in their academic productivity and an unfavourable work-life balance for academic women, at the cost of their mental health and well-being (EC, 2023).

Often, these initiatives remain academic discussions or analyses that hardly permeate political discourse and the general population. For this reason, at the time of drafting the proposal, the RESISTIRÉ team made a clear commitment to analyse the responses to the pandemic coming from political actors and civil society, not only with the aim of making good practices and replicable initiatives visible, but also to be able to contrast the coherence of political responses to the crisis with the mainstreaming of gender in public policies in Europe. While there is no denying that inequalities persist in Europe, policy actors boast of policy and regulatory progress on equality in recent decades. It was important for the project team to understand how different policy responses were having unequal and unequalising effects, but also how different responses could be put into place to understand and address gender and intersectional inequalities in different policy domains (Lombardo & Kantola, 2019). The clearest example is the European Strategy for Gender Equality (2020–2025) (EC, 2020a), which summarises the achievements and objectives of the European Commission in the aforementioned period. As the EC Strategy, RESISTIRÉ pursued a dual approach of gender mainstreaming combined with targeted actions, and intersectionality was a horizontal principle for its implementation.

Unveiling our methodology and collaborative approach

As discussed above, in order to meet the challenges of responding to the expected scope of the call, a number of methodological decisions were made that impacted on the research design. These decisions were underpinned, above all, by feminist epistemology and collaboration, and would not have been possible if all those involved in the design and research had not shared an understanding and commitment to these approaches. As argued by Silvestre and colleagues (2020), the impact of feminist theory has sent ripples through the realm of social sciences with an influence that extends beyond the mere acknowledgement of previously overlooked dimensions (Swingewood, 2000, p. 241). It also serves as a potent catalyst for questioning the implicit male bias entrenched within the theoretical and methodological frameworks upon which these sciences have been built, as highlighted by Molina (2000, p. 255).

In the late eighties, Harding was careful to distinguish between method as ‘techniques for gathering evidence’ and methodology as ‘a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed’ (Harding, 1987a, p. 2f) and this distinction explains the decisions made by the RESISTIRÉ team, both in terms of the tools and techniques to be used for the research, as well as in the design of the research process itself.

As Doucet and Mouthner (2006, p. 40) point out, feminist epistemology stresses the need to do research not only ‘about women’ but also ‘for’ and ‘with’ women and in RESISTIRÉ there was a clear commitment to research that focused on the impact of the pandemic on women, especially analysing intersectionality, and with women, facilitating the participation of different actors (experts, members of civil society organisations, artists and people from the most affected groups, etc.) in the different activities. Secondly, these authors point to the engagement of feminist methodologies with innovation, through challenging conventional or mainstream ways of collecting, analysing, and presenting data. This was also a clear commitment of RESISTIRÉ researchers as explained above.

In addition to these two characteristics already consolidated in the literature, Doucet and Mouthner (2006) add two elements typical of feminist methodologies that have been key in the methodological design of RESISTIRÉ: knowing and representing ‘others’, and reflexivity. Knowing the realities and giving a voice to vulnerable groups is at the heart of the RESISTIRÉ approach. To this end, different approaches were combined: the analysis of public policies, the analysis of quantitative results and the qualitative collection of the different narratives of the pandemic. This approach has had an impact on the reflexivity that characterises feminist and sociological research, as the nature of the call required rapid

responses. However, this does not mean that the reflexive dimension was not present, but that it was done in other ways, such as Open Studios, seminars, or co-creation.

Furthermore, the research carried out by RESISTIRÉ has another very relevant characteristic: the social responsibility to seek and identify innovative solutions. Beyond learning about the realities of the most vulnerable people, giving them a voice and reflecting on the findings, the team took on the challenge of being able to test or pilot innovative solutions that would respond to the negative impacts detected. This was done via the co-creation and launch of pilot actions, for which civil society actors and other stakeholders could apply for funding from RESISTIRÉ to implement. In addition, the research design incorporated an element of activism and advocacy to generate impact on policy and stakeholders during the project.

Bearing in mind that the ‘knowledge’ generated was situated in a context in which the team itself was affected by the pandemic, and experiencing the difficulties of confinement, mobility restrictions, and the overload of work and care tasks, the results obtained are also mediated by this circumstance. The methodology, as well as the links between the different activities, is described in Chapter 2 in this volume.

Breaking ground: The innovative elements of our methodology

In this section we highlight different aspects of the project’s design that contribute to making the project an innovative research project.

The speed of the project’s execution was atypical, and therefore an innovation. As explained above, this was triggered by the context of the pandemic and the ambition of the team to produce results fast to feed policy-makers. Apart from working fast and in short cycles (six to eight months), this was only possible by running different activities in parallel, rather than consecutively, as would be the common practice (e.g., quantitative analysis before qualitative analysis). Another technique used was to involve team members in charge of solution development also in the research and in the analysis of the research results. This allowed for a faster transfer (no need for deliverables to be ready) and overlaps in terms of timing. This is obviously not an ideal situation from a scientific research point of view but was the only way to effectively have a first set of RESISTIRÉ factsheets with policy recommendations ready for advocacy six months after the start of the project.

The solution orientation is also innovative. As with the speed of execution, this was triggered by the ambition to reduce the impacts on inequalities and serve the needs of those being discriminated against. There was a sense of urgency in the team due to the context, but the solution orientation is healthy for all research that has a potential to lead to concrete and implementable innovations as well as to contribute to better policies. The Open Studios (Boyer et al., 2011; Denis & Strid, 2024; Strid & Denis, 2024) played an important role in this respect. The whole Open Studio concept was meant to counterbalance the analytical ‘understanding of the problem’ by switching the minds to the holistic ‘let’s find a solution’ approach. It functioned as an intervention to break the research silos and create synergies between the results of the different research methods and themes. Different techniques were used in this respect, including the ‘better stories’ (Georgis, 2013; Strid et al., 2022c) (see below).

Design thinking, as an approach and a process, was at the origin of the overall project design as well as of the Open Studios (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). The combination of cycles of divergence with cycles of convergence, the so-called ‘double-diamond’ of design, was embedded in the two days of the Open Studios (Design Council, 2024). Techniques used in product and service design were used in the Open Studios, which included not only brainstorming techniques but also personas. The use of personas was considered as an effective way to translate some of the insights from qualitative research (the narratives) into the creative cycle (Denis & Strid, 2024), but they did serve other purposes such as stimulate creativity and ensure an orientation towards the people for which we were trying to find solutions for the vulnerable and those being discriminated against. Using techniques like the personas opened the minds of many of the RESISTIRÉ researchers, as well as for external participants in the Open Studios. This will also open perspectives for the use of such techniques in their future research and activities (see e.g., Kerremans et al., 2023a, 2023b; see Chapter 3).

Typical to a design approach is to bring inspiration into a creative workshop (Foster, 2021). For Open Studios, the original idea was to bring in inspiring examples of policies and civil society initiatives that had been developed in reaction to the policies of the pandemic and their impact on inequalities. These inspiring practices were selected from the mappings of such bottom-up initiatives performed as part of the research activities. When finalising the preparation of the first Open Studio, it was decided to position these inspiring practices as ‘better stories’. This concept, as originally developed by Dina Georgis (2013), fitted perfectly in the solution orientation as it was not only inspirational but could also be looked at as a better story of collaborative and co-creative research

and innovation and participants could work on finding ways to make them even better (Kerremans et al., 2023a; see Chapter 9).

Combining (internal) project team members with invited (external) participants helped to open the minds and new perspectives which indeed led to numerous ideas for potential solutions. The diversity of the invited participants was a key element to the success of the Open Studios. The systematic inclusion of at least one participant with a creative industries background was also innovative. This helped to think outside of the box. The experience also proved that it is possible to find such creative profiles that do have a strong link and/or affinity with the theme of the Open Studio. Examples were an artist painter who participated in the Open Studio on old persons, who had started a project to destigmatise old age through the painting of portraits of older people (Golden age) during the pandemic, or an artist who was also involved in a community garden, for an Open Studio on green spaces.

One of the outputs of the Open Studios was ideas of social innovations: potential approaches to meet the needs of specific (vulnerable) groups that were not covered either by the public sector or the market (Kerremans et al., 2023). Seven out of the many ideas generated were prototyped and tested as part of the project (see Chapter 4). Prototyping and testing are standard activities of a design process and integrated in RESISTIRÉ to translate research results into potential solutions. This can be considered as innovative for a research project as it creates a direct link between research and practice. The project also acted as a funder of innovation, as the ideas produced were translated into concrete projects; calls for applicants were set up and civil society organisations applied for funding from RESISTIRÉ to concretise and test the idea in real life. Therefore, a part of the grant from the EC was used to fund these pilot projects that tested the prototype of new services targeting specific target groups.

Research projects are expected to disseminate their results. In the case of RESISTIRÉ, the choice was made to also include activities labelled as ‘advocacy’. Research results had to be used to develop recommendations for different target groups, including e.g., policy-makers, research funders and civil society organisations. This showed the intention of the team to be more than researchers but also become activists, to ensure the research results were used for positive change with regards to the discriminated groups that were the subject of the research. This initial intention was strengthened during the project execution due to the nature of the research activities that included many collaborations with external stakeholders. The organisations and people who took care of the needs of the most vulnerable during the pandemic were both subjects of the research as well as partners included in the many expert workshops and Open Studios.

The expertise and experience of these activists was pertinent and invaluable. This symbiosis and the collaborations between researchers and activists created value and confronted the researchers with the limitations of their work, the need for activism, and to translate the results into concrete actions to generate real impact for social, economic, and political chance.

Impactful results

Crisis, in the Merriam Webster dictionary, is defined as ‘a time of intense difficulty or danger’. It is described using three logics: first, calamity and catastrophe; second, crossroads, critical point; and third, turning point, moment of truth. While this rather simplistic dictionary exercise captures the logic and complexity of crisis, it also captures the logic of the results of RESISTIRÉ. Catastrophe/calamity is captured by the research phase, where RESISTIRÉ conducted policy analysis and quantitative and qualitative research to produce insights to set a long-term foundation for solutions and innovations to contribute to an inclusive and creative crisis management and equal recovery for all. An overwhelming amount of data and evidence of calamity and catastrophe were collected and analysed over the course of the project (Axelsson et al., 2021; Cibin et al., 2021, 2022, 2023; Harroche et al., 2023; Sandström et al., 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Stovell et al., 2021, 2022), showing an overall increase in inequalities and new emerging inequalities, quantitative as well as qualitative, across all policy domains (Cibin & Linková, 2023; Horton et al., 2023; Kent et al., 2023). The data – consisting of some 700 policy and civil societal responses, 300 rapid assessment surveys with thousands of respondents, 900 narrative interviews and semi-structured expert interviews, and fourteen pan-European workshops with 212 participants covering twenty-four months of crisis in thirty countries – consistently show how already marginalised and disadvantaged groups have become even more marginalised and disadvantaged; existing inequalities have increased, and new ones have emerged (Horton et al., 2023; Kent et al., 2023). We have called this catastrophe an exponential downward spiralling of inequalities (Axelsson et al., 2021).

The second component of the logic of crisis, the critical points, the crossroads – correspond to RESISTIRÉ’s creative and co-created solutions. These include the results of our insights, creativity, and co-creation in Open Studios (Boyer et al., 2011; Kerremans et al., 2023a), which identify operational recommendations, set out new research agendas and designs pilot actions (Kerremans et al., 2023b). Our evidence also identified such critical points, crossroads in people’s lives, in individuals and community groups, in civil society organisations and activism,

who collectively and in solidarity came together and worked to head for recovery (Sandström et al., 2023a, 2023b).

The third component of the logic of crisis, the turning points, moment of truth, corresponds to the dissemination and implementation – and the activism – of the RESISTIRÉ solutions, in collaboration with stakeholders and target groups. The impact of these set an immediate foundation for recovery and prepares us for the next crisis, so we can make better decisions and manage crisis better, more inclusively and in feminist solidarity next time. This is the core driving force of the project. This takes us to the last stages of RESISTIRÉ, and to the impact of insights, creativity, and solutions, via recommendations, research agendas, and pilot actions. That is then the moment of truth.

Catastrophe

Returning to the first stage of the logic of crisis: catastrophe and its insights. The evidence-base from which we make our knowledge claims and recommendations consists of gender+ (Verloo, 2007, 2013) and intersectional policy analysis, analysis of civil society initiatives, analysis of quantitative data from rapid assessment surveys, Eurostat and EuroFund, interviews with marginalised individuals and experts, workshops with academics, civil servants and civil society experts, and Open Studio workshops with a mix of experts, practitioners, artists, academics, activists, policy designers and others.

Overall, we collectively collected, mapped, and analysed 329 policies, 326 civil society initiatives, 300 rapid assessment surveys with thousands of respondents, 900 narrative interviews and semi-structured expert interviews. We conducted fourteen pan-European expert workshops with 212 participants from public authorities, civil society organisations, and academia, and twelve Open Studio workshops with 255 participants (e.g., teachers, health workers, policy-makers, civil society representatives, public authority representatives, artists), co-creating twenty-one factsheets as operational recommendations with and for policy-makers, employers, research funders and civil society in three workshops with seventy-eight internal and external participants, and co-created, funded and evaluated the impact of nine pilot actions implemented by civil society organisations in different European countries; all in all covering thirty months of crisis in thirty countries.

The results show that inequalities in terms of gender, age, ethnicity/race, disability, social class, and LGBTQ+ increased across all policy domains: in work, employment, care, health, social protection, family, economy, education, violence, human rights, and in politics and decision-making itself (Cibin et al.,

2023; Horton et al., 2023; Kent et al., 2023). The results thus show that policy responses to the crisis did not manage to mitigate inequalities, as clearly and directly experienced by RESISTIRÉ's nearly 1500 interviewees, informants, and workshop participants. Instead, the results show that pandemic policy failed to include both the interests of women, LGBTQ+ persons, migrants, and other marginalised in the content of pandemic policy, and also failed to include the voices and interests of feminist, migrant and LGBTQ+ groups in the policy-making process (Cibin et al., 2021, 2022, 2023). Overall, pandemic policy failed to sufficiently address gender and multiple inequalities as ontologically diverse and intersectional, in line with previous policy in the European policy-making landscape and approaches to inequalities (Verloo, 2006).

Crossroads

The overall results, and the growing pool of research on the pandemic outside of the RESISTIRÉ project, gathered substantial knowledge on the negative effects of the pandemic on inequalities. While the lack of attention to these effects in recovery policies is apparent, the importance of acknowledging these inequalities in building future resilience to crisis has also been highlighted. In addition, the pandemic has been recognised as a potentially disruptive moment in history that may lead to systemic change, but there has been significantly less overall attention on what practices may transform/change inequalities, and very little attention to individual agency. When intersectional inequalities were not been mitigated by policy, and where structures and systems largely failed to protect the most marginalised and vulnerable, the RESISTIRÉ project switched focus and explored what kind of agency is or may be practiced by marginalised groups and front-line workers, stressing what enabled or hindered strategic agency.

The results show that there is agency and capacity to act at the individual and collective levels (Sandström et al., 2023a, 2023b). Significantly less pandemic research and innovation have paid attention to these capacities to act at the critical points, at the crossroads of crisis, but people do act. Women, men, non-binary people, migrants, students, activists, and others found ways to not just get by or get out of difficult situations in crisis, but they also found ways to strategically navigate the crisis by getting back at and getting organised – to draw on Lister's agency framework (2004, 2020). RESISTIRÉ identified the many better stories of individual agency and civil societal responses to the gender+ impacts of crisis – because we dared to look for them (Sandström & Strid, 2022). The decision to look not just for the increasing inequalities and their downward spiralling, was based on the underlying RESISTIRÉ use of the better stories concept (Georgis,

2013) and inspired by Lister's work on strategic agency (2004, 2015, 2020). This was formulated during one of three workshops on the RESISTIRÉ research agendas and was enabled by the innovative three-cycle methodological approach, where the consortium could learn from previous cycles and re-define, or tweak, the research agendas of the subsequent cycles.

The notion of strategic agency refers to the way marginalised individuals cope with their vulnerabilities in ways that envision a better future. People use both individual or personal agency and political agency, and they do so in both 'everyday' and 'strategic' ways. Personal everyday agency includes 'getting by' the best one can with available resources and in one's circumstances, and finding means to 'get out' of a troublesome situation. Political everyday agency includes 'getting back at' the system through micro-level acts of resistance, and political strategic agency refers to collective organisation, 'getting organised', in order to make political claims. A key finding of this analysis was that nearly half of the narratives included components or revolved around getting organised. These narratives are thus counter-stories of agency, collective actions, and inclusive social practices that mitigate inequalities; they tell a counter-story to the dominant narrative of marginalisation, positivity, and exclusion. They capture the turning points and are better stories of the pandemic.

This is a key result and impact of RESISTIRÉ: to have uniquely been able to identify and analyse a range of individual and collective better stories, and forms of agency exercised by individuals and civil servants (Kent et al., 2023). RESISTIRÉ has thereby been able to use its insights on inequalities, capacities to act, and collective organising, as better stories to stake out directions for solutions that lead to impacts via operational recommendations, future research agendas, and pilot actions for how to build inclusive crisis responses and turn crisis around (Altınay et al., 2022, 2023; Kerremans et al., 2023b).

We co-designed and supported nine innovative solutions, pilot actions, to turn crisis around. These are pilot actions where the design, methodologies, tools etc., are available for further uptake; for others to take on (See Figure 1.1). For example, in Türkiye, the pilot Caring Workspaces was implemented with the aim to re-imagine organisational culture and the working environment as inclusive, diverse, safe and caring from a gender+ perspective; an environment where organisational schemes that ensure better work-life balance, as well as the physical and mental health needs of all employees, are taken into account and where everyone's unique contribution and creativity is recognised and rewarded (see Chapter 4).

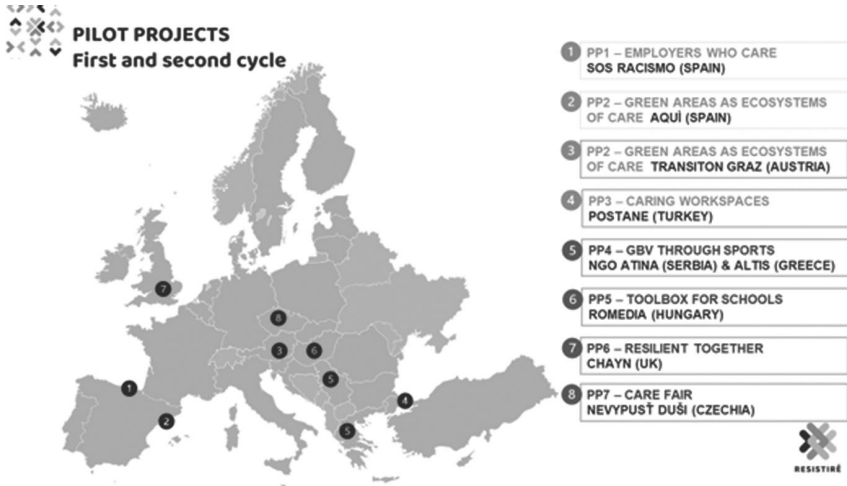


Figure 1.1: The RESISTIRÉ innovations as pilot actions

Moment of truth

Continuing with the logic of crisis. We experienced and analysed the catastrophe. We identified and acted at the critical points, and we created and implemented at the turning points. What remains is the moment of truth, when we learn from crisis and change to do better next time.

What have we learnt? RESISTIRÉ summarised this in a set of twenty-one operational recommendations, produced as RESISTIRÉ factsheets (see Table 1.1), to support policy-makers, advisers, employers, and civil society organisations in understanding the social, economic, political, and environmental effects of COVID-19 policy responses on gender+ equality, and to suggest practical recommendations to mitigate those effects (Kerremans et al., 2023a). These recommendations also serve to safeguard against the societal impacts of future crises by offering operational recommendations to counter negative developments and ameliorate situations that arose as a result of the pandemic. The factsheets cover topics such as gender-based violence, gender mainstreaming, care, institutional crisis preparedness and resilience, as well as a fair and inclusive recovery. The latter is especially pertinent when looking at the project's gender+ analysis of the proposed measures of the policy responses to the pandemic, not least the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (Cibin et al., 2022).

Table 1.1: RESISTIRÉ Factsheets with operational recommendations

Factsheet	Target Group(s)
Pandemic and gender mainstreaming. Decades of work towards intersectional gender mainstreaming wiped out during the crisis!	Policy-makers
Ensuring gender-balanced decision-making and the involvement of civil society	Policy-makers and CSOs
Gender equality plans should be mandatory for hospitals	Employers (hospitals) and policy-makers
Green for everyone. Promoting green spaces and mitigating gentrification	Policy-makers, CSOs and employers
Care and crisis: Fostering a paradigm shift	Employers and policy-makers
Reinforcing EU level action to combat gender-based violence through the Istanbul Convention	Policy-makers
Improving national responses to gender-based violence: Lessons from the pandemic crisis	Policy-makers
Telework as a double-edged sword: Risks and opportunities	Employers and policy-makers
Crisis management for all: Inclusive, multi-actor crisis management	Policy-makers
Gender-based violence during crises: Risk assessment, prevention and effective response	Policy-makers and key stakeholders like the police, social services, and CSOs
Creating safe digital spaces	Policy-makers, tech and social media companies, education stakeholders, employers
Education: Developing resilient education systems	Education stakeholders (i.e., schools, parents, teachers, associations), policy-makers, CSOs

(continue)

Factsheet	Target Group(s)
The missing perspectives of women in the national recovery and resilience plans	Policy-makers
Striving for social justice: Vulnerable groups in the recovery policies	Policy-makers
Mental health support in times of crisis	Policy-makers, employers, education stakeholders, medical practitioners
Access to health services for vulnerable groups	Public health policy-makers, CSOs, activists, equality bodies
Digital transformation for an inclusive post-COVID recovery	Policy-makers (members of the European Commission for 'A Europe Fit for the Digital Age'), CSOs
Promoting sustainable and resilient long-term care	Policy-makers, care service providers, activists
Approaching the crisis as a continuum: Learning from an inclusive feminist crisis response	Policy-makers, CSOs, activists
Transformative funding: A pathway for creative and effective crisis response	Funding organisations
More intersectional data	Policy-makers, European-level statistics bodies
Addressing poverty and social exclusion: A feminist perspective	Policy-makers, street-level bureaucrats, CSOs

Sources: (Aglietti et al., 2023; Altunay et al., 2022, 2023; Denis, 2022; Ghidoni et al., 2023; Kerremans et al., 2022a, 2022b; Kolasinska et al., 2023; Linková et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d; Lionello et al., 2023; López Belloso et al., 2022; Rossetti et al., 2023; Sandström et al., 2023a, 2023b; Strid et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Tzanakou et al., 2022; Živković & Lionello, 2022; Živković et al., 2022a, 2022b).

What have we learnt from crisis, what do we need to do better? First, there are persistent data gaps: we need comparable and harmonised data at European level on the gender pay gap, gender-based violence, decision making and environmental justice. Second, there are pandemic policy gaps: marginalised groups are excluded in both content and process of policy-making. Third, we need to see the counter narratives that challenge dominant discourses, and underline resourcefulness and collaborative capacities to cope. Fourth, we need progressive,

transformative funding: short term, project based, unpredictable funding is detrimental for civil society. Fifth, we have learnt the importance of understanding and addressing crisis as a continuum. Crisis is not a one-off event, it is a continuum of actions, events, counter events, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. And sixth, we have learnt that we are stronger when we create alliances across inequality grounds, across domains, and in coalitions with public authorities. Creating coalitions formed by CSOs and public organisations has emerged as an essential element for effective crisis management for the most vulnerable. To conclude, what we have learnt from our results is that turning calamity into recovery requires multidisciplinary teams; innovative methodologies that break silos, stimulate creative thinking, and push us out of our comfort zones; and inclusive feminist gender+ responses.

Beyond the horizon: Concluding notes on our journey

As we reflect on the achievements and core principles that underpin the RESISTIRÉ project, it becomes evident that this endeavour has far surpassed its initial expectations. The sheer scale of the project, characterised by the management of a huge database of knowledge, is a testament to the unwavering dedication and collaborative spirit of all those involved. This vast repository of information encapsulates the magnitude of the work undertaken, illustrating the project's commitment to comprehensively understanding the impacts and dynamics of crisis and resilience.

Integral to the project's success has been the meticulous design and implementation of its research methodologies. This approach not only facilitated the collection of data but also fostered a culture of co-creation and critical thinking among participants clearly rooted in feminist methodologies and epistemology. The RESISTIRÉ project stands as an example of how collaboration can yield innovative solutions to complex problems.

At its core, the RESISTIRÉ project champions the principles of democracy as highlighted by Mieke Verloo in her closing speech at the project's final conference in Brussels June 2023, serving as a beacon to guide research in an era marked by unprecedented challenges. In an increasingly complex and polarised world, the recognition of the importance of democratic values in crisis response becomes even more crucial. The project's commitment to democracy takes on added significance when considering the rise of anti-gender movements and the emergence of extreme-right ideologies.

In the face of these challenges, the RESISTIRÉ project stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of democratic principles. It reminds us that, even as

anti-gender movements attempt to erode the progress made in gender equality and the extreme right seeks to undermine fundamental democratic institutions, the principles of transparency, participation, and accountability must remain steadfast.

Anti-gender movements often promote regressive views on gender roles and equality, posing a direct challenge to the principles of inclusivity and equity that underpin democracy. In this context, the RESISTIRÉ project's commitment to understanding and promoting gender equality within the framework of democratic values becomes a potent counterforce.

Similarly, extreme right ideologies can undermine the very foundations of democracy, including freedom of speech, civil liberties, and the rule of law. By highlighting the importance of transparency and inclusiveness in crisis response, encouraging active participation of diverse voices, and holding institutions accountable, the RESISTIRÉ project not only contributes to gender equality but also reinforces the resilience of democratic systems. Therefore, the RESISTIRÉ project's emphasis on democracy is not just a theoretical stance but a practical response to the challenges of our times. It stands as a shield against the erosion of democratic values.

One of the project's notable achievements lies in its focus on promising practices amidst dynamic crisis phenomena. The insights gleaned from this endeavour are more than just data; they represent the examples of resilience in the face of adversity. These stories have the potential to drive knowledge transfer, enabling societies and institutions to learn from one another's experiences and adapt to future challenges more effectively.

Looking ahead, the RESISTIRÉ project opens doors to a myriad of follow-up ideas. Comparative analyses across countries can offer valuable insights into the adaptability of crisis response strategies in diverse contexts. Additionally, the project has highlighted the often-forgotten aspect of collective trauma during crises, inviting further exploration and understanding.

Furthermore, the RESISTIRÉ project has laid the foundation for a robust theoretical framework that deepens our comprehension of the intricate relationship between crisis and democracy. This theoretical foundation paves the way for more in-depth research, shedding light on the mechanisms through which democratic principles and equality can be harnessed to enhance resilience in times of turmoil.

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