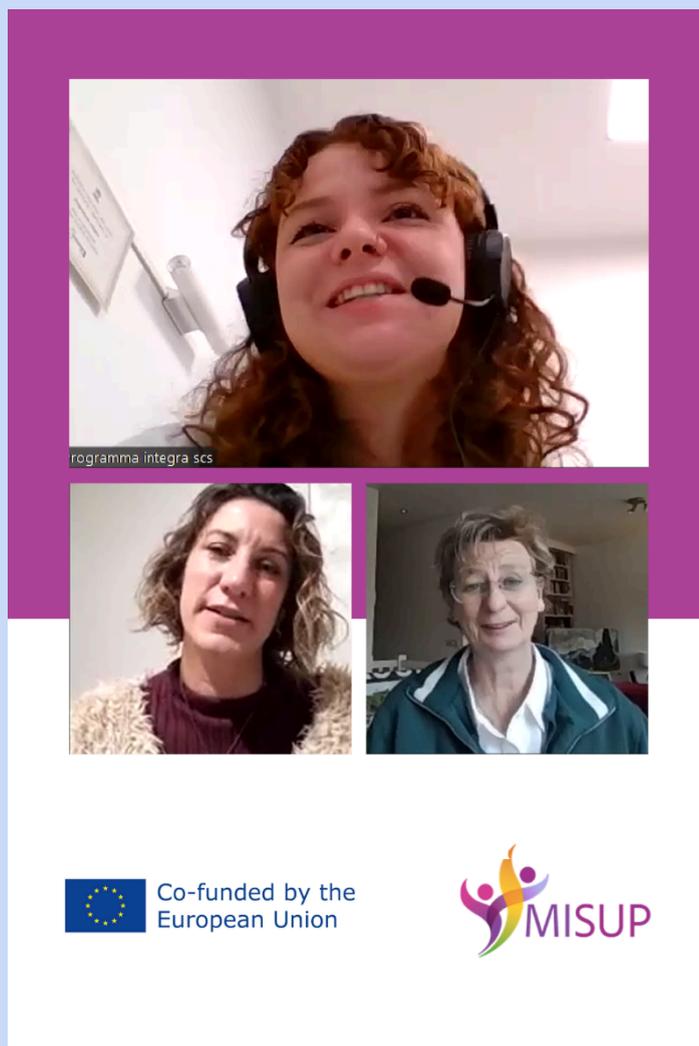




## PILLARS OF POWER IN ACTION: TRAINING THE TRAINERS WITHIN THE MISUP PROJECT



Screenshots taken on a Zoom meeting- 15/01/2026



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



## About the interview

The [MISUP project](#) (Strengthening Migrant Supporting Communities) is an innovative European initiative dedicated to building stronger and more inclusive communities, capable of supporting and empowering migrants across Europe. This interview is part of the project and brings together the perspectives of two professionals active in social work and training: **Arianna Pace and Liekje Welten**.

Arianna Pace is a social worker at [Cooperativa sociale Magliana '80](#), an organisation committed to protecting health and combating social exclusion. Arianna works primarily with migrant women and victims of human trafficking, within reception and protection pathways for people who have survived exploitation.

Liekje Welten is a project manager and trainer at [Netwerkpro](#), a social organisation that supports women's empowerment through training programmes, mentoring and the activation of local networks, fostering the autonomous development of talents and access to the labour market.

The interview reflects their perspectives within the **“Training the Trainers” activity**, which took place in Rome on 12–13 November 2025. This event represented a key moment of the MISUP project, dedicated to the exchange of skills, methodologies and good practices among professionals working with women in vulnerable situations. The training was based on the Pillars of Power methodology, a holistic and flexible approach that strengthens individual and collective empowerment through experiential exercises, reflection and dialogue. This interview brings together both perspectives: that of the **trainer**, represented by Liekje Welten, and that of the **trainee**, Arianna Pace, offering a comprehensive view of the training experience and its impact.



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



## INTERVIEW WITH THE TRAINER: LIEKJE WELTEN

**“Could you briefly tell us what the *Pillars of Power* methodology is and which vision of empowerment inspires it?”**

**Liekje:** “Well, The pillars of Power methodology is a *training-the-trainers* empowerment programme, developed primarily for migrant women. Its main goal is not only to support women directly, but also to equip professionals and practitioners with practical tools to deliver empowerment training to others. During the activity in Italy, the focus was on training participants to apply and pass on this methodology within their own work and everyday contexts.

At the core of Pillars of Power is a holistic approach that brings together *mind, heart and body*, recognising that all three dimensions are equally important. The methodology aims to help participants reconnect with their strengths and abilities, including those that are often unconscious or not easily accessible.

Each pillar is supported by experiential exercises that actively engage the body, emotions and thoughts. Physical awareness and energy play an important role, especially in communication and in building relationships with others. The exercises encourage participants to connect with one another on different levels, combining rational understanding with emotional awareness and embodied experience.

The thematic pillars move from more general topics to increasingly personal ones. They begin with subjects such as *hope*, positive thinking and social connections, exploring how peer groups and support networks can foster empowerment. Gradually, the focus shifts towards more individual aspects, such as personal goals, aspirations, talents and values, helping participants clarify what they want to achieve and how they can work towards it.

In this way, the Pillars of Power methodology supports a gradual and inclusive empowerment process, guiding participants from collective reflection to personal awareness and action.”



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



**“Is there one pillar that, in your experience, is particularly relevant or transformative in training pathways like this one?”**

**Liekje:** “In my experience, the relevance of each pillar can be very personal. At the same time, one underlying idea of the methodology is that self-care and self-awareness are the foundation of empowerment. When people take better care of themselves and understand themselves more deeply, they are naturally more able to care for others, to support their communities and to have a positive impact on the wider environment around them.

On a personal level, the pillar related to values is particularly important to me. Reflecting on the values you live by helps you find direction and clarity, and it supports you in understanding what your next steps might be. Knowing your values creates a strong inner compass, both in your personal life and in your professional role.

Within the group in Italy, however, another pillar emerged as especially powerful: being present. Since this was a train-the-trainers activity, participants were invited to stand in front of the group and become aware of how their body feels in that moment. These physical and embodied experiences helped them understand what it truly means to be present — not distracted, not “in their head”, but fully connected to the moment, to themselves and to others.

This state of presence is particularly transformative for trainers. Being grounded, attentive and connected allows trainers to build authentic relationships with participants and to have a real impact. From what I observed, this aspect of presence was one of the most meaningful and transformative experiences for the group during the training in Italy.”

**“What kind of reactions did you observe among participants during the training process?”**

**Liekje:** “During the training, I observed that participants were genuinely challenged and engaged by the process. Given the limited time of one and a



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



half days, it was not possible to explore each pillar in depth, as every subject could easily require an entire day of work. For this reason, the training aimed to strike a balance between introducing the methodology and allowing participants to experience it directly, which is essential in a train-the-trainers context.

One of the most visible reactions was participants' openness to stepping out of their heads and into a more embodied experience. This was particularly important, as many training contexts tend to remain very cognitive and task-oriented. Here, the focus was on lowering stress levels and reconnecting with the body, which is crucial when working with migrant communities, where high levels of stress and trauma are often present.

What stood out to me most was how open the group in Rome was to this experience. Despite coming from different backgrounds and contexts, participants reached a shared understanding of themselves as human beings with bodies, emotions and common needs. This embodied and reflective process fostered a strong sense of connection and trust within the group, strengthening relationships among participants and deepening the overall impact of the training.”

### **“How can the Pillars of Power methodology continue to have an impact over time, even beyond the training itself?”**

**Liekje:** “I believe the Pillars of Power methodology can continue to have an impact over time because it allows people to **experience deep relaxation** while also gaining greater clarity about themselves. Through the process, participants reflect on their values, their goals in life, the support systems they have around them and the concrete actions they can take to move in the direction they want. This helps people understand how they can be meaningful both to themselves and to others, not only during the training but also in their everyday lives.

One of the key strengths of the methodology is that it supports people in identifying what truly matters to them. On a personal level, this had a strong impact on me as well. At a certain point in my life, I realised that one of my core values is **connection with other people**. This awareness led me to leave a job that was mainly administrative and very solitary, focused on writing and paperwork, because it no longer aligned with what I value most. From that



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



moment on, I knew that any role I would apply for had to involve working with and connecting to people in a meaningful way.

The methodology also encourages greater awareness of **stress and emotional triggers**. Understanding what causes stress makes it easier to respond with more calm and presence, both in professional contexts and in personal relationships. Being more relaxed and grounded not only benefits the individual, but also positively affects the people we work and live with.

I hope that participants carry these insights with them beyond the training, using them to make conscious choices, strengthen their relationships and approach their lives and work with greater clarity, balance and purpose.”

**“If you had to summarise in a few words what makes this training important today, what would you say?”**

**Liekje:** “What makes this training especially important today is that it **shifts the focus from telling people what to do to reminding them of who they are**. Too often, empowerment programmes start from the assumption that people need to be instructed or guided step by step, forgetting how much stress, loss and disorientation many migrant people carry with them.

When people arrive in a new country, they are frequently made to feel unwelcome or unwanted, as if they have to diminish themselves in order to be accepted. In these conditions, it is easy to forget one’s own humanity, dignity and value. This training creates space to reconnect with those fundamental aspects.

The Pillars of Power methodology reminds participants that they are already powerful. Migrant women and men have often done things that require immense strength and courage — leaving their country, their families and everything familiar behind, and starting again in a completely new environment. These experiences are not signs of weakness, but of resilience and capability.

For me, this is the core value of the training: helping people remember that they are **worthy, valuable and capable of contributing** — to their families, their communities and the society they now live in. They do not need to be



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



changed or fixed; they simply need to be reminded of the power they already have.”

## INTERVIEW WITH THE TRAINEE: ARIANNA PACE

### “What motivated you to take part in this training?”

**Arianna:** “I was first introduced to the project during the exchange in Valencia, where all the partner organisations and participants met for the first time. What immediately attracted me was the opportunity to meet people from different countries and organisations who all work with migrant women. It started very much as an exchange: sharing experiences, talking about how things work in each country, and learning from one another. That was something completely new for me, as I had never taken part in a European meeting with other social workers before, and I found it extremely interesting.

At the beginning, my motivation was not so much about the specific content of the training, but about the possibility of connecting with others working in the social field across Europe. The days in Valencia turned out to be much more powerful and meaningful than I had expected, and they left a strong impression on me.

The training in Rome felt like a continuation of that experience, even though it was very different in format and focus. I joined it with the desire to experience something new and to gain tools and perspectives that could enrich my work. Doing this in a group, together with people from other countries, working in English and in a different context, felt both challenging and very motivating. That combination of challenge and attraction is what ultimately pushed me to take part in the training.”

### “Was there a moment or an activity that particularly stood out to you?”

**Arianna:** “It is difficult for me to identify just one single moment, because the entire training was very intense. Even though it lasted only a day and a half, it was extremely full and rich. The group had a lot of energy, and the trainers



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



transmitted that energy from the very beginning. From the start, the focus was on the body and on being fully present, which shaped the whole experience.

One moment that stood out for me was an exercise focused on the body, breathing and movement in the space. I do not remember exactly which pillar it belonged to, but it involved walking around the room, becoming aware of breathing, sensing sounds from the outside and then closing one's eyes to reconnect inwardly. It was about noticing how you feel in your body, especially in those parts that feel blocked or difficult, and giving shape, colour and attention to those sensations.

That exercise created a very powerful connection between my inner self and the external environment. Experiencing it made me realise how the body can become a medium and a tool for working with others. Feeling directly how such an exercise works on yourself is incredibly powerful, because it shows that it is not just a simple instruction, but a lived experience. It is something you feel deeply and carry with you afterwards, and that makes it meaningful and effective.”

**“Is there a pillar that you feel is particularly close to your personal or professional experience?”**

**Arianna:** “More than a single pillar, what I felt most connected to was the idea of recognising one's own potential. It is a form of self-awareness and self-consciousness that makes you realise how much there is still to discover, learn and express — both personally and professionally. For me, it was about understanding that I still have many resources inside myself that I can bring into my work.

Everything we do in our professional roles passes through who we are as individuals. This awareness helped me reflect on how I relate to the people I work with and how I position myself in my job. The training created space for these reflections in a very embodied and emotional way, rather than a purely rational one.

What stayed with me was not so much a specific concept, but a feeling — a sense of inner potential that I can continue to explore and express over time, and that I carry with me in my daily work.”

**“ What new insights or awareness do you take away from this training?”**



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



**Arianna:** “The main insight I take away from this training is the recognition of my own potential. It is a form of greater self-awareness, the feeling that there are still many things I can discover, experience, and put into play, even in my everyday work.

The training reminded me that everything passes through us: the way we work, the way we relate to the people we meet and accompany along their paths. This opened up a space for reflection on my professional role and on how I position myself in my work with others.

It was not primarily a rational awareness, but rather an emotional and bodily one: a feeling that stays with you, that accompanies you even after the training has ended, and that you continue to carry with you over time.”

### **“Would you recommend this type of training to others? Why?”**

**Arianna:** “Yes, I would definitely recommend this type of training. All the people who participated seemed to truly enjoy the experience, and there was a strong sense of enthusiasm throughout the group. It was clear that everyone was going through something meaningful, both on a personal level and in relation to their professional role.

I believe this kind of training can be valuable for anyone working in the social field, but not only. At its core, it is about self-empowerment, and that is something everyone can benefit from. The training offers tools and experiences that support personal growth as well as professional reflection.

If I could suggest one improvement, it would be to extend the duration of the training. Having more time would make the experience a little less intense and would allow participants to better integrate not only the emotional aspects, but also the more rational and reflective ones. Even so, the training was deeply impactful, and I think it is something many people could truly appreciate.”

### **“If you had to describe this experience with one sentence or a keyword, what would it be?”**

**Arianna:** “If I had to describe this experience with a single keyword, I would say **powerful** and **meaningful**.



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



It is an experience that is difficult to fully capture in just one sentence, because it touches many different levels, but these two words best reflect what it represented for me.

This article highlights how the MISUP project, through the Training the Trainers activity and the Pillars of Power methodology, creates meaningful spaces for reflection, connection and growth. By bringing together the perspectives of a trainer and a trainee, it shows how empowerment is not a one-directional process, but a shared journey grounded in experience, presence and self-awareness. The voices of Liekje Welten and Arianna Pace demonstrate that strengthening migrant-supporting communities starts with recognising people's inner resources, values and potential. Whether through training delivery or participation, the experience reinforces the idea that empowerment is rooted in humanity, dignity and the ability to reconnect with one's own strengths. In this sense, MISUP continues to build pathways that not only enhance professional practice, but also foster more inclusive, resilient and compassionate communities across Europe.

### Keep Up To Date

Facebook: @MISUP

Instagram: @misup\_eu

web: <https://misup-training.eu/>



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.