

18 December 2021

International Migrants Day

# POLICY BRIEF

## TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: FEMALE MIGRANT VICTIMS' COMPLEX NEEDS

The complexity of migrant women victims' needs is determined by their immigration status, cultural and linguistic specificity, limited eligibility to general state-funded services, lack of support networks, racism and xenophobia, high threshold for accessing integration services and their lengthy and demanding procedures. The integration assistance to such victims requires a gender-specific approach and methodology, specialist knowledge about male violence against women and intersectional competence.

Among many aspects of assistance, health and psychological care are essential in supporting migrant women victims of trafficking. This care can only be efficient when it is culturally and linguistically appropriate and is done in parallel with the services focused on providing victims' economic, social and legal security, while taking into consideration the needs of women victims who are mothers.

## FAILING THE VICTIMS: GAPS IN SERVICES

"Mind the Gap" is the research carried out in 2021 in six EU states by the COALESCE partners, in consultation with and from the perspectives of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The research demonstrates that there are persistent gaps across three key areas of service provision and rehabilitation of female migrant victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, i.e. economic, legal and psycho-social. These gaps include, among others, the failure to provide appropriate medical as well as psychological health services to the victims. The reports from the six countries also indicate that in most of them, the gaps in services are underscored by the lack of the will of responsible authorities to identify and refer the victims, to recognise victims' health needs as essential, and, and to allocate appropriate funding to service-providers supporting the victims.

## SOLUTIONS THAT VICTIMS NEED

**ESTABLISH** early, centralised identification and referral mechanisms for migrant women victims of trafficking

**ENSURE** access to information on rights, entitlements, protections, services and opportunities for women victims of trafficking

**ENHANCE** access of female victims to women-specific healthcare (e.g. gynaecological focus, Female Genital Mutilation, sex education)

**INVOLVE** healthcare workers in the identification process (create safe spaces and equip nurses with the knowledge and skills to identify and refer potential victims of trafficking)

**PROVIDE** access to affordable or subsidised childcare for women victims of trafficking and help facilitate their active participation in the job market and access to other social integration opportunities

**DEVELOP** long-term funding opportunities supporting social and linguistic integration for women victims of trafficking and integrate childcare into this model

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

*Trafficking in women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation is the most widely spread form of exploitation in Europe. (Europol, 2021)*

*Sex trafficking is a highly gendered crime with severe, long-term consequences and harms to the women. (European Commission, 2018)*

*Trafficking in women for sexual exploitation is not a priority in many EU Member States and many female victims remain unidentified. (European Commission, 2018)*

*Recognising the gender-specificity of the forms of trafficking in women and girls and its consequences, including harms suffered, the Committee acknowledges that trafficking and exploitation of prostitution in women and girls is unequivocally a phenomenon rooted in structural sex-based discrimination, constituting gender-based violence and often exacerbated in the contexts of displacement, migration.. (CEDAW Committee, GR 38, 2020)*



COALESCE is a transnational project, involving six European countries: Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania. It aims to support the female migrant victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in Europe through gender-specific psycho-social, legal and economic support and assistance, and to develop synergies in facilitating needs identification, assistance and support, and improve transnational cooperation among front line professionals.

Taking into consideration all available protection measures in the framework established by the Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU, Coalesce seeks to enhance best knowledge exchange on the integration of trafficked victims, among the partnership which brings together a diverse group of feminist organisations with particular expertise in supporting trafficked migrant women recovering from sexual violence and exploitation.



Funded by the European Union's  
Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund



December 2021

# ITALY

## 'MIND THE GAP' REPORT FINDINGS

At the national level the anti-trafficking system is extremely fragmented: it is made up of 21 projects managed regionally, which guarantee services ranging from identification to reception and social inclusion.

The National Anti-trafficking Plan (2016/2018) highlights, among other things, the right of the applicant for international protection to receive psychological assistance, freely and safely, from competent providers, even during preliminary investigations. However, the research carried out by IROKO revealed the lack, in the Italian anti-trafficking system, of adequate psychological support for women victims of sex trafficking focusing on processing the trauma experienced. In addition, the linguistic-cultural mediators, crucial figures in victim support services, are often not valued enough within the anti-trafficking projects.

The waiting times for residence permit issue or renewal and the identification of women's status as victims of trafficking vary from one territory to another and are affected by bureaucratic difficulties. This generates great uncertainty in the planning of support programmes, both for victims and staff, and exacerbates the trauma already experienced, as well as increasing the risk of re-trafficking, another risk also linked to the issuance of short residence permits.

The financial support provided by support programmes is often insufficient and placements for training do not allow women to achieve genuine economic stability.

Among the positive factors in Italy there is the recognition of certain protections for undocumented foreign nationals: maternity care, child healthcare, vaccinations, preventative healthcare. At the national level there is an Anti-trafficking Helpline to report potential situations of trafficking and understand the type of assistance needed.

In addition, local authorities are required to link the anti-trafficking system to the asylum system, which ensures that women who have escaped situations of trafficking can enter the reception facilities of the asylum system.

### ACCESS THE MIND THE GAP ITALY REPORT:

ENGLISH: <https://bit.ly/30c1PD4>

ITALIAN: <https://bit.ly/3oEITGE>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**In order to address the fragmentation of the anti-trafficking system, national coordination should be strengthened to ensure uniformity of services by the Department of Equal Opportunities; and strengthen the official guidelines of the National Anti-trafficking Plan for staff within the system.**

**The anti-trafficking system also requires official guidelines for figures such as psychologists and mediators, in order to ensure a more uniform and adequate psychological support and mediation service throughout Italy.**

**The duration of support within the anti-trafficking system should be extended in order to ensure that women have adequate time and assistance to rebuild their lives.**

**Services should be strengthened, in particular the economic support offered to ensure greater autonomy for women victims of trafficking, thus avoiding the risk of re-trafficking, and a range of opportunities for employment after training should be facilitated.**

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**The two pillars of the anti-trafficking system are:**

**Article 18 of the Consolidated Law on Immigration, which establishes a 6-month residence permit, renewable for one year.**

**Article 13 of Law 228/2003, which provides for an assistance programme for victims of trafficking and slavery.**

**Another important element is Legislative Decree 24/2014, which transposes EU Directive 2011/36 and provides for a "Right to compensation to victims of trafficking" (art. 6), and defers to local authorities for the connection between asylum and anti-trafficking systems (art.10). The anti-trafficking projects follow the National Anti-trafficking Plan (2016/2018), which defines multi-year intervention strategies for the prevention and suppression of trafficking and serious exploitation, which include services around emergence, assistance, accommodation and social integration of the victim. It should be noted that in Italy, the Merlin law defines the crimes of exploitation and facilitation of prostitution, closely related to the phenomenon of trafficking.**



## ITALY PROJECT PARTNER

### ASSOCIATION IROKO ONLUS

IROKO works to combat inequality by supporting victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation to establish independent and dignified lives and by campaigning for the abolition of the sex industry in order to prevent such exploitation and indignity in the future.

[www.associazioneiroko.org](http://www.associazioneiroko.org)



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