



**CALL FOR SUBMISSION FOR THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

**“Trafficking in persons and protection of refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons
(IDPs)”**

Report submitted by: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)

NGO in Special Consultative Status

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Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the upcoming report to the 53rd session of the Human Rights Council on “trafficking in persons and protection of refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons (IDPs)”. To this end, the present submission provides contributions on challenges and gaps in the identification and protection of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons who are victims of trafficking. The main source of this report is based on APG23's experience in fighting trafficking and supporting victims of sexual exploitation in Italy.

Identification and protection of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons who are victims of trafficking: challenges and gaps.

Concerning the identification and protection of victims of trafficking, APG23 emphasises the need for a strengthened gendered and transcultural approach to overcome stereotypes and discrimination still rooted in Italian society.

In this regard, it is urgent to provide adequate training to social services and workers in reception centres for asylum seekers, in particular with the goal of giving access to victims to safe shelters, which could provide better protection and care. Particularly, learning intercultural and interreligious skills and an intersectional approach are necessary.

Moreover, refugees and migrant women and girls often experience several risks and violence by living in vulnerable conditions; it is imperative to include in the category of high-risk conditions also situations of psychological and economic violence.

For example, workers welcoming asylum seekers too often underestimate the violence that could hide behind what is presented as a stable relationship. For instance, a fellow countryman acting as a partner and/or father of a young girl could instead prove to be responsible for her trafficking.



In fact, the “lover boy method¹” of keeping victims in a state of subjection is increasingly common. In European countries, this emerging modus operandi has been pushing several girls into trafficking nets; the latter are misled by false promises of alleged boyfriends, and then forced into prostitution, suffering sexual abuse and violence. This method can also involve re-trafficking the victim, even when she is already hosted in shelters, or even after a long time has passed from the initial exploitation experience. Communication via social media accelerates contact with old or new chains of criminal networks.

It is also essential to develop standardised guidelines for the identification and reporting of victims of trafficking, also along borders. Indeed, asylum applications are treated differently among different European countries, despite the referral mechanisms of anti-trafficking systems that are now active in most states. For example, women and children from Greece have to face long waiting times to submit asylum applications, and although such applications are intended for trafficking cases, they do not have access to protection in the same way. Linked to this factor, it is necessary to increase the presence of intercultural mediators, which decreased drastically during the pandemic. They should be particularly present in cases involving victims of trafficking with disabilities and psychiatric conditions.

In cases of emergency, there are still institutional places where professionals end up using Google Translate to communicate with migrants and refugees. Therefore, those who are victims of trafficking and need immediate protection are not able to communicate and they do not receive proper information and knowledge, which constitutes a violation of their right to information. Consequently, the early identification of the victims is undermined. This is why mediators and interpreters should have at least minimal skills in identifying the specific needs of vulnerable people, particularly in the case of victims of trafficking with disabilities and psychiatric conditions, and mothers.

Furthermore, to be effective, the process of identification and protection of refugees must employ a multi-agency and intersectional approach, involving health and social services, with a long-term perspective for beneficiaries. It is also necessary to enhance the effectiveness of coordination between the asylum system and the specialised services for victims of human trafficking, through the sharing of information and operational procedures, at all stages of the regularisation and integration process. The lack of coordination puts at risk, in particular, women and children who have suffered multiple violence or who belong to different categories of social identity, in particular those with psychiatric disorders and with emotional dependence and/or alcohol and/or drugs dependence or belonging to minorities.

Among the victims of trafficking, some categories are the most/even more vulnerable, namely, the most vulnerable categories are transgender, minorities and stateless persons. These victims need special attention and they have to be supported at all stages of protection, especially in healthcare and access to education and work services. Bureaucratic barriers, difficulty in obtaining documents together with discriminatory social contexts hamper access to fundamental rights and services such as education, labour market and dignified work and hinder any action of NGOs support.

Finally, concerning housing, we recommend increasing the number of shelters or implementing actions that disincentive and limit asylum seekers from living in informal settlements and slums. These settlements are found in several cities, especially when ethnic communities are established for a longer period of time; often these ethnic communities are also involved with local criminal networks, leading to higher cases of labour and sexual exploitation within the settlement itself. This happens more frequently in cases of ethnic minorities.

¹ Through this method, the trafficker invests time in a relationship with the victim to get close to her and pretends to become her boyfriend. He convinces her to trust him and demands conditional love.



Promising practices

Among the best practices addressed to mothers, victims of trafficking at the national level, we find a project promoted by Save the Children Italy in partnership with APG23, committed to activating protective and empowerment actions for families composed of mothers and children and reducing the risk of re-trafficking for mothers. The pilot project **Rewrite the future - New Paths for women victims of trafficking and their children at the time of Covid-19** was launched in 2021. It is intended to support integrated care with the goal of meeting complex needs, typically arising due to the position of women victims or former victims of exploitation, but also of their children, in relation to the marginalisation and isolation to which the COVID-19 pandemic exposed them. Mothers, the majority from Nigeria but also from Albania, are also supported by a multidisciplinary team.

At the European level, two additional projects have effectively supported victims of trafficking, both males and females. These projects include practices to reduce risk factors and vulnerabilities, especially in the health sector, emerging particularly when people flee to seek safety and arrive in the host country; it does so also by engaging host communities in preventing trafficking in persons.

AMELIE² is a European initiative that aims to strengthen the capacities of health workers and operators and/or front-line services to facilitate victim identification, secure referral and support in a gender and trauma-sensitive perspective, with particular attention to women. The AMELIE project is implemented by APG23 (Italy), led by KMOP - Centre for Social Action and Innovation (Greece), in cooperation with SOLWODI (Germany), Differenza Donna APS (Italy), PAYOKE (Belgium), and is funded by the AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) of the European Union. Specifically, AMELIE plans to increase the competencies of over 200 professionals and health specialists through capacity-building activities. It also plans to support the empowerment of 180 survivors of trafficking and their access to psycho-social support and specialised health care, through practices and services of advice, referrals, prevention, and self-care, on the basis of the victims' needs and preferences.

In particular, training for health workers is a promising practice at the national level to ensure the identification of victims of sexual and labour exploitation who are invisible (because restricted in very closed and hard-to-reach ethnic groups, e.g. from China and Thailand) and their effective access to protection for trafficking in human beings (THB) victims. It is important that professionals know how to recognize a potential victim, especially in those situations where she is accompanied by exploiters or partners who are part of criminal networks. Through the simulations and case studies, and the transcultural approach promoted by APG23, it is possible to improve the gaps in the healthcare system and to know the existing referral mechanisms.

SISA³ is a European initiative that aims to strengthen the identification and integration of survivors of sex trafficking from West Africa, through a peer-to-peer approach and through counselling and assistance on the topic of Dublin transfers. The European project is the result of a collaboration with the German organisations The Justice Project, Solwodi and Gemeinsam gegen Menschenhandel e.v., Berlin, the Surt Foundation in Spain and APG23 in Italy which aims to create a transnational network to help victims of trafficking in these three European countries or when returning from Northern Europe.

This project highlighted the need to strengthen specific measures to ensure the protection of victims of trafficking and their families in the country of origin and of victims themselves in court proceedings. The protection of the children of the victims, present on the national territory that constitute a possible source of blackmail, is also urgent. The fear of possible retaliation by criminal networks constitutes a limit to access to the reception and protection interventions and a cause of self-removal from the protection systems. It is,

² Home - Amelie (project-amelie.eu)

³ SISA Europe | Strengthening the Identification and Integration of Survivors of Sex Trafficking from West Africa (sisa-europe.eu)



therefore, necessary to identify partners specifically involved in the protection of family members in the countries of origin, and also to provide specific guidelines for the procedural phase.

In this sense, from a perspective of international cooperation, the condition of the people under Dublin Regulation must be duly taken into account. Both women victims of trafficking and women asylum seekers, who fall under the Dublin Regulation, are obliged to return to the first European State in which they applied for asylum, or to their country of origin. However, if children with disabilities are involved, mothers will face increased difficulties and danger, especially if the necessary safeguards are lacking.

Moreover, mothers with minors are in danger of not finding adequate assistance and protection, neither in the countries of northern Europe where their so-called "second migration" took place nor in their first recipient country nor if they are repatriated to their countries of origin.



ANNEX

ASSOCIAZIONE COMUNITÀ PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII (APG23)

Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) is an International Catholic Association of the Faithful of Pontifical Right. Since 2006, APG23 has been accredited with Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Founded in Italy in the early '60s by the Italian Catholic priest Fr. Oreste Benzi, the Association is located in 40 countries on five continents⁴. The Association runs 500 hosting structures all over the world, 298 of which are family homes where orphaned children, mentally and physically disabled, and others marginalised persons find a substitutive family. Moreover, it runs emergency shelters, fostering families, houses of fraternity, cooperatives and day-care centres, therapeutic communities for drug users and centres for alcoholics. The Association carries out awareness raising campaigns, micro-credit schemes, services for persons with disabilities, Roma and Sinti, homeless, migrants, elderly, people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, mothers in difficulty and women enslaved into prostitution. Furthermore, the Association has a nonviolent presence in both fronts in war zones to guarantee the respect of human rights and assist populations displaced by the war and carries out activities aimed at combating the trafficking of human beings and assisting its victims.

At UNOG, APG23 currently advocates the following priorities: Rights of the Child (especially, the right to have a family and the right to health); Right to Health and Access to Treatment; International Solidarity and Human Rights; Implementation of the Right to Development; Extreme poverty and Economic, Social, Cultural Rights; Protection of the Family; Right to Peace; Migration and Human Trafficking and also on right to food and right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Furthermore, APG23 monitors the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

APG23, since the early 90s, has been committed to defending the victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation at the front line at several levels, running different recovery and supporting programmes that welcome survivors of sexual exploitation in protected houses and provide legal and psychological assistance and healthcare. In addition, APG23 carries out awareness campaigns and political actions to remove the cause of trafficking and serious forms of exploitation.

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⁴ See https://www.apg23.org/en/where_we_can_be_found/

