

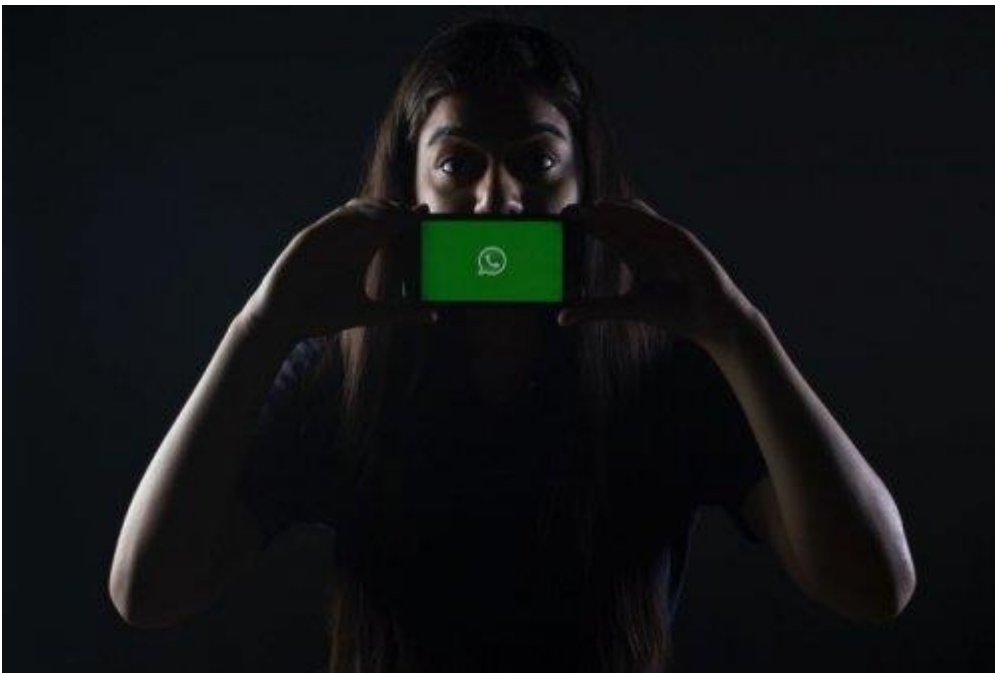


REGIONE DEL VENETO



Contribution on behalf of ELISAN as member of the Social and territorial Transversal Working Group of the Conference of INGOs

Against human trafficking during the crisis provoked by Covid-19 in Veneto region



This contribution is an opportunity to tell what happened within the services dedicated to the protection of victims of trafficking and severe sexual and labour exploitation in Veneto Region, services run by Equality Social Cooperative in NAVE Project - Anti-trafficking network for Veneto Region, the European project INSigHT (Building capacity to deal with human trafficking and transit routes in Nigeria, Italy, Sweden), and in NEXT TO YOU project, Network for the Empowerment, the social and labour inclusion of Trafficked minors and young adults AMIF-2019-AG-CALL, having Veneto Region as lead Applicant and being under evaluation.

NAVE Project - Anti-trafficking for Veneto Region

The NAVE Project - Anti-trafficking Network for Veneto Region, is one of the 21 Italian anti-trafficking projects, in partnership with the Veneto Region, Local Authorities, Healthcare Services, Home Offices, Judicial Authorities, Law Enforcement, Labour Inspector Departments, Universities and NGOs, it consists in an integrated system of identification and assistance for victims of trafficking in human beings and/or severe exploitation, active 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in cooperation with the National Helpline for victims of trafficking 800 290 290.

The project includes actions as **outreaching, identification** aimed at potential victims of trafficking and serious exploitation regardless of their legal status, age, nationality, gender and type of exploitation, as well as the implementation of **assistance and social inclusion programs** for those who choose to escape exploitation networks.

During the Pandemic from Covid 19, social work within the NAVE Project has been necessarily and promptly re-organized. Activities were reformulated in "**stages**" starting from the identification of the needs of women and men victims of trafficking and serious sexual and work exploitation during the lockdown. This has been an occasion to elaborate outstanding **reflections** and imagine new **actions** and interventions.

CRITICAL ASPECTS

- ❖ Previous **economic and social weaknesses** have made these people even more vulnerable once they had to interrupt their work: new material needs have arisen since they couldn't count on their "work" (eg sexual work) and have no right to access to the devices to support income and even to food supplies without having a residence;
- ❖ Some women, in protection programs, or with whom there had been a first contact, experienced the slowdown and suspension of some phases of the protection procedure: Home Office commissions for the recognition of asylum stopped their activities; the renewal of residence permits has been suspended - with the deadline subsequently extended to August 2020; the access to shelters have become extremely complicated due to new requirements, including the result of the Covid-19 buffer. Many women, especially Nigerians, who used to prostitute themselves on the street and who live in apartments shared with their compatriots - often with informal rental agreements - have become even **more invisible**;
- ❖ In general, victims of human trafficking have had serious problems accessing basic health and social services. This has exposed them to the risk of increasing covid-19 infection and increasing situations of extreme poverty.

POSITIVE ASPECTS

- ❖ Mobile outreach units, who had a constant dialogue with women on the street - potential victims or presumed victims - and who monitored their needs, undertook an indoor outreach work and organized the distribution of "food supplies", in some cases also in collaboration with low-threshold entities active in the respective provincial territories. The shift of the outreach from the outside (the street) to the indoor (housing solutions, warehouses, shared apartments, hotel rooms) has marked some important developments. For example, the state of precariousness and uncertainty about the future experienced by women, the need to request income support for rent, bills and food, **has strengthened existing relationships and, in some cases, opened to more solid trust relationships**;
- ❖ After the first weeks of lockdown, the perception of the **lack of alternatives** has enhanced some requests for direct help and escape from exploitation (both from East and Nigerian women).
- ❖ The new situation has highlighted how incorrect, if not misleading, information has circulated both with regard to health protection and legal prescriptions, both through informal networks and social media and through some religious communities. To convey

correct health and legal information is one of our main objectives and in this case it was crucial;

- ❖ The role of cultural and linguistic mediators has proved to be extremely essential, allowing constant contacts, ensuring listening in moments of crisis and loneliness that have pushed people to ask for help;
- ❖ The adaptation to digital tools in some cases was more effective for the assistance of Vots, some video call interviews were more agile and facilitated the narration. In addition, the video calls between social workers, mediators and clients have made people's living spaces more visible, have allowed them to better understand their mood, have revealed "closely" the relationships and domestic dynamics – included the threats of being pushed out of their house that make to us their housing precariousness even more evident.
- ❖ Most of the requests of help involved labour exploitation, mainly affecting men from India, Bangladesh, Morocco and Pakistan. These had been in Italy for many years and work in the informal economy, but only on this occasion asked for help **this confirming the excellent multi-agency work with the labour inspectorate and law enforcement agencies in the reformulation of intervention and protection methodologies for reporting exploitation to Judicial Authority.**
- ❖ The use of digital platforms has made it easier and wider to compare activities and their re-adaptation both at a national level (comparison between anti-trafficking projects and national crowdfunding campaigns) and at a European level within the INSIGHT Project.

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Thank you!