



• ireti •

empowering women

toolkit
for social workers
on approaches
and methodologies
to contrast human trafficking



INTRODUCTION

IRETI “Empowering Women and Strengthening Socioeconomic Integration” is an **Erasmus +** funded project that was launched in November 2017. The **partner organizations are BB&R (Spain), Ubele (UK), and AUR (Romania), coordinated by HRYO (Italy).**

The project seeks to highlight and bring together the best practices of working with human trafficking for the common purpose of combating exploitation of women, and to allow victims from human trafficking to have an access to basic services through an **online platform.**

As part of the project, we have also developed a **Booklet of good practices** and the present **Toolkit on approaches and methodologies for social workers’ daily activities,** in order to gain knowledge from the work and the local realities in London, Bucharest, Salamanca and Palermo.

Since the **Toolkit** was not meant to be an extensive research on the topic, but rather a user-friendly tool, it was designed to allow an **easy reading, and possibly inspire social workers in their daily work, promoting a victim-centered approach where their wishes, safety and well-being are considered the priority.** Thus, besides the desk research conducted by the project staff, the content of the Toolkit was greatly enriched by the contributions of the social workers and survivors attending the IRETI international training in Salamanca on September 2019. A group of 26 frontline workers, in fact, had the chance to exchange successful approaches and challenges in their daily work with victims, potential victims and survivors of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

We have identified **four phases in the work with victims of human trafficking,** that is:

1. First contact
2. Establishment of a trusted relationship
3. Awareness raising and formal complaint
4. Empowerment, freedom and own life control.

Per each phase we present some tips and constraints related to four domains, which are **communication** (verbal/nonverbal), **setting** (safe environment), **connection to other services** (e.g. NHS, police, other), and **education, vocational training and activities proposed to the women**. As some suggestions are relevant in more than one phase, they are presented in multiple sections.

Lastly, considered that the aspect of communication emerged as the most sensitive and crucial one, thanks to the collaboration across project partners and with social workers and survivors, we have decided to include in the Toolkit a **Decalogue of good practices for communicators on the topic of victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation**.

Step#1: FIRST CONTACT

Acknowledged the complex and dangerous apparatus behind human trafficking and exploitation, it is essential to be very cautious and wise in the way we first identify and approach potential victims. The content of this chapter is particularly important for the workers engaged in street units activities, as in some cases, the first contact can be asked and mediated by the staff of reception facilities, and in rare cases, it can be the result of spontaneous contacts of the victims themselves with dedicated or general help services (maybe because someone else had previously approached and informed them).

The main tips and challenges remarked by the social workers who participated in the IRETI project activities are hereby presented according to the related category.

COMMUNICATION

- It is better to approach women in their **own languages**, getting the help of a well-**experienced cultural mediator**. It is essential to carefully choose the cultural mediator (try to know more about her engagement and position in the local diaspora community).
- Ask if she needs anything (e.g. water, a blanket). **Material needs** can represent a good way to first approach vulnerable women.
- Use an **informal language** and a calm/relaxed attitude.
- Keep a **non-judgemental approach** and pay great attention to your **body language**, especially involuntary facial expressions, which are easy to recognize (disgust, fear, sense of pity).
- Introduce yourself but avoid the expression “I/we can help you”. Probably tens of people have already told her so, and eventually she was betrayed and exploited.

- The approach risks to be not successful if carried out by non-professionals (although they might be highly motivated volunteers). If someone is interested in helping out, he/she should contact dedicated services.

SETTING (SAFE ENVIRONMENT)

- **Smile.** It contributes to create a comfortable environment and foster a sense of trust. It can also be encouraging for both you (the worker) and the woman.
- During street work, **respect if she doesn't want to talk**, your insistence might put her in danger. Try another day.
- If the social workers have been contacted by the staff of a reception facility or other services, for the first meeting with the woman don't involve them, and if it is possible, take her outside to **eat or drink something in a quiet place**. Do small talking.
- During the meeting be just a few people in order to have a more **intimate environment**.
- If the first contact is not in the street, give her privacy and highlight the dimension of confidentiality.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SERVICES (E.G. NHS, POLICE, OTHER)

The contacts with other services represents a **particularly challenging aspect** for the vast majority of the social workers who have contributed to the development of the present Toolkit.

- Cultivate positive relations with the different services and if possible, offer them **training opportunities to learn more about human trafficking**.
- Consider the possibility to propose thematic roundtables with the various stakeholders involved in order to develop and possibly **implement operational guidelines for mutual support** (MoU).

- If you are the first service approaching a woman, provide her **immediate assistance in any urgent matter** that might require the involvement of other services (especially health-related).
- Understand the impression and experience she had with the services leading her to you. They might have mined the **trust toward institutions and services**. If so, you will need to build a different narrative.

EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE WOMEN

In this phase there is generally no space for education and training, as the **psychological support is the priority**. Nonetheless, one social worker operating in a community center run by migrants reveals that leaflets and brochures on training, job opportunities and specialized services are very helpful as they are disseminated to women who can directly reach victims and potential victims.



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