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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 #3: AWARENESS RAISING AND FORMAL COMPLAINT

COMMUNICATION

- Besides the oral communication, in this phase **information material** on human trafficking and human rights is important.
- Depending on the country, the formal process of pressing charges can deeply differ in terms of how many times, where and with whom women are expected to tell their stories. That might cause a lot of stress, it is therefore essential to **explain all the necessary steps** (writing a checklist can be helpful to visualize and be more aware of the process). Inform them that a formal complaint is written, has legal value and will be used for further investigations.
- Give **info in a mindful way** and work to reinforce or build the **sense of feeling a human being, a woman with rights** to be affirmed and protected. Work on **identity**.

SETTING (SAFE ENVIRONMENT)

- In all phases it is essential to keep a **victim-based approach**, where her needs, fears and expectations are the starting point for the whole process. Openly ask her where and with whom she prefers doing things, and constantly check if she feels **comfortable in the different situations**. If not, identify and work on the reasons of the discomfort.
- Some women might decide to start a new life without pressing charges against their traffickers and exploiters. Eventually, **respect this decision**.
- Women **safety** must be the priority. Don't disclose aloud any sensitive information with your colleagues or other service staff.

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

- Build **alternative narrative** on the existing services that might not work perfectly. They are also part of the system where they live and that is supposed to help them, therefore they will need to interact with it.
- When interacting with other services, define the roles in order to **avoid redundancies and confusion**.
- Give the client some **emergency numbers** and be sure she can easily hide them (e.g. a piece of paper to be placed in a condom box).
- The cooperation with other services is crucial if the woman is an asylum seeker or decides to **seek asylum**. It is important to well assess the legal implications of the different form of gender and sexual based violence in terms of international protection, and a **multisectoral report** can be useful in this sense.

EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE WOMEN

- If they have **language barriers**, an essential starting point is the enrollment in a language course. Remark that language proficiency is important not only for job, but also for a greater awareness and participation in the process.
- Assess literacy, prior education and competencies, giving also some **preliminary information** on available training opportunities.
- Not overwhelm the process of entering this arena, although it is clear that for the **women who are not under a protection program** providing shelter and services, the **economic dimension** becomes a big constraint that is likely to jeopardize the whole process.



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