



• 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**.

- 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.

Step #2: ESTABLISHMENT OF A TRUSTED RELATIONSHIP

COMMUNICATION

- In this phase you can start **disclosing more info** on your job and the organization you work for. Be honest, reliable and committed, placing yourself on the same level.
- Prefer an **informal discussion and attitude**, but always keep in mind the difference between being friendly and become a friend. In fact, it is important to be emotionally far enough to keep a better perspective.
- **Reaffirm your commitment** and continuity of intents.
- Discuss the **women's need** (material and not). It helps a lot to establish a positive relationship.
- Empathy is essential. Practice **active listening and** encourage **self-reflection** on what it is happening to her. If she uses a word to describe something, use that word as well. It will help to develop a personal connection.
- If you communicate with the support of a **cultural mediator, be sure that the client is at ease with her**. That can compromise the whole relationship and support service.
- Some women might be less approachable and eager to talk. In this case, **informative printed material** on human trafficking can be useful.
- Be honest in saying that building a new life is **a process that requires patience** and no-one is able to offer/achieve an overnight chance.
- Never neglect the importance of the **cultural dimension**. It is possible that there is **not a shared understanding and meaning** of things. If she talks about something you don't believe in or don't know much about, show interest and encourage the woman to explain more, also investigating what she (and you) can do to impact on that.

- If you mention **other women's stories** to encourage the clients, be sure you don't provide much info. She might think you would do the same with her story, compromising the relationship.
- **Share something about yourself** to develop a personal connection.

SETTING (SAFE ENVIRONMENT)

- **Engage a survivor during the meetings.** It can be extremely powerful.
- Always remind women their rights.
- Show **your availability** and tell her that if she needs she can contact you also beyond your working/counseling time.
- **Privacy** is very important during the whole process. Try to meet the women in a colorful, cozy and **inspirational space**.
- Don't ask potentially sensitive questions in open spaces or with other people around.
- In this phase it is likely that a woman is still facing coercion. **Wait for her to call you** and pay special attention to the places you go to.
- Don't think that the **worker's gender** is not relevant or interchangeable. During the meetings don't give for granted or impose your vision around gender roles and stereotypes, and always check if the client is at ease. One social worker engaged in street unit work found very useful the presence of a man in the car. She said: "that would allow women to interact with a man who is not a client, an exploiter or a complete stranger."

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

- **Accompany women to access other services** to encourage a trusted relationship and check the effective and appropriate delivery of the service. In this phase **focus on healthcare**, avoiding contacts with the police. Depending on the legal status of the women (more likely to be irregular), looking at the healthcare services, the situation can deeply vary across countries based on the schemes in place (e.g. in Italy, public healthcare assistance is universal, also for undocumented people, therefore anyone has the right to be treated without risking deportation or any legal consequence).
- Check if she had previously been in touch with other services and how was the experience.

EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE WOMEN

- Talking about **personal interests and experiences** is useful in this phase to establish a positive relationship, and it is also an important **self-reflection** activity to assess the skills and the competences on which building resilience and a new life.
- Prefer **informal and non-formal learning experiences** in this phase.
- Assess, and if needed, start working on the woman's **language** proficiency (better through games or in an informal way).



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