



# LITTLE INVISIBLE SLAVES

**Trafficking Dossier**  
**2022**



**Save the Children**

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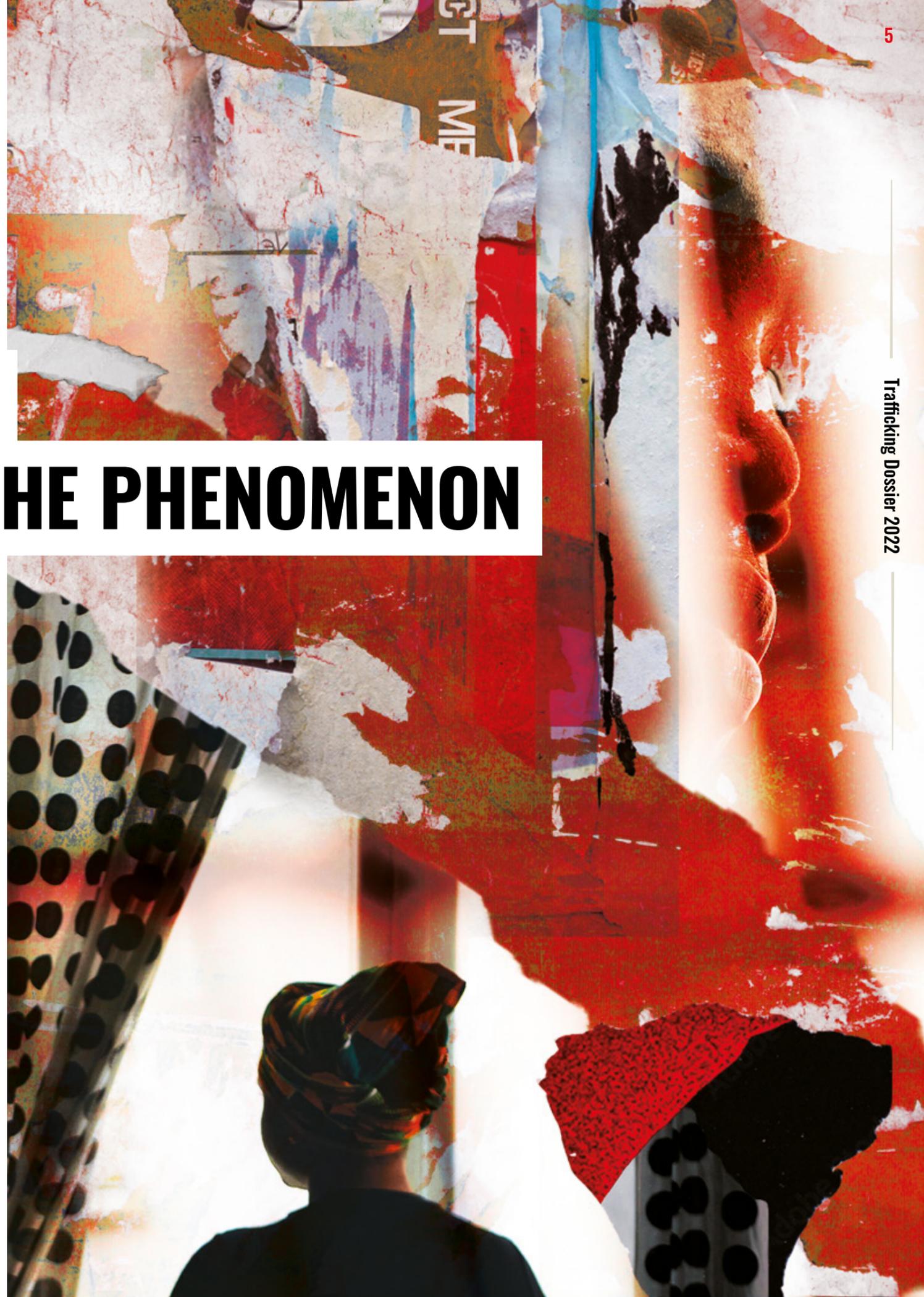
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# 01

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING: FACTS AND DATA ON THE PHENOMENON



## 01.1 THE INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

### WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

At international level, the 2000 Palermo Protocol defined human trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receiving people, by means of the use or threat of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or by the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of other persons or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”.

A **child victim of trafficking** is any individual that has not reached 18 years of age, who has been recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purpose of exploitation, inside or outside of a country, even when there are no elements of coercion, violence, deception, abuse of power or other form of abuse.

### WHAT IS PEOPLE SMUGGLING?

People smuggling consists in illegally bringing a person into a State of which that person is not a citizen or resident, for the purpose of financial or material gain<sup>1</sup>.

### WHAT IS CHILD LABOUR EXPLOITATION?

According to the 1999 ILO Convention prohibiting the worst forms of child labour, child labour exploitation entails:

1. all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale of children, servitude, serfdom and forced marriages;
2. forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
3. the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution;
4. the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities;
5. any other type of work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Human trafficking is still one of the biggest and most profitable illegal markets in the whole world, along with the drug and arms trafficking market. Despite its vastness, it is currently difficult to monitor its development and morphology for different reasons: the issue of having data collection systems which are standardised and consistent across states, the speed of social changes that inevitably also have an impact on the forms criminal organisations take and the broad differences in trafficking across the globe (UNODC, 2020).

Considering the pre-existing difficulty in detecting and observing human trafficking, the COVID-19 pandemic further exhausted data collection and observation systems. Despite the difficulty in finding information and evidence on the field, we can get an understanding of the phenomenon by observing the data collected and presented by the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative - CTDC since 2017 thanks to the collaboration

of different organizations such as IOM (International Organization for Migration), Polaris, Liberty Shared, A21 and OTSH (Observatorio do trafico de seres humanos), all engaged in different ways in countering human trafficking. The global dataset comprises the data of more than 156,000 victims who have escaped human trafficking<sup>2</sup> in 189 countries and territories, where people were identified and helped for the first time.

The *Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative* project is particularly significant since it is the first attempt at a shared global hub which reports data from international organisations that are engaged in countering the phenomenon. The objective of the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative is to facilitate the implementing of anonymous information, overcoming information exchange barriers. The data reported in the following paragraphs refer to the period 2019-2021.

#### 01.1/1 Human trafficking victims

Looking at the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative<sup>3</sup> global data analysis, between 2019 and 2021, out of a total of 34,020

people 27,840 were identified in 2019, 4,120 in 2020 and 2,060 in 2021. The drastic drop in the numbers of people identified could

be connected on the one hand to the period of the pandemic and the restrictions that different countries implemented, on the other hand to the difficulties counter-trafficking organisations had in guaranteeing consistent work in detecting, identifying and monitoring victims. The Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative has access exclusively to data provided by some important organisations<sup>4</sup>: a lot of information could therefore have been excluded from the database.

In 2021, the data demonstrate the global prevalence of a percentage of female victims equal to 56.2% and a remaining male part equal to 43.8%.

Analysing the age of the individuals involved in trafficking (see table 1), for the three-year period 2019-2021 the Counter-Trafficking

Data Collaborative reports this information only for some victims. In 2019, for those whose year of birth is known (n=9,410), 29.8% are below 18 years of age, and 36.4% are young adults (aged 18-29). In 2020, out of the total of individuals with a declared age by the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (n=3,220), the percentage of minors (3.3%) is reduced, but the one of young adults (aged 18-29) (35.9%) still remains quite high.

To conclude, analysing 2021 data, within the subsample with a declared age by Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (n=1,659), 6.8% are aged below 18, while 44.6% are in the aged 18-29 category, confirming an increase in this age group.

**Table 1.** Age range for trafficking victims reported globally. Save the Children processing of CTCD reports. Values reported in %.

AGE	2019%	2020%	2021%
0-8	3,0	1,2	3,8
9-17	26,8	2,1	3,0
18-23	21,6	16,0	14,2
24-29	14,8	19,9	30,4
30-38	19,3	32,8	26,0
39-47	8,2	17,3	15,3
Over 48	6,5	10,6	7,2
TOT%	100	100	100

In line with the data for the previous UNODC report (2020), the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative also shows that over the past three years (2019-2021), the geographic areas where child trafficking and exploitation is concentrated are mainly low-income regions, and, in particular, central-western Africa,

central America, the Caribbean and southern Asia. Adults and young adults are exploited more in geographic areas with medium or low incomes: Europe, northern America or Asia (Russia in particular) seem to be the most affected regions.

## 01.1/2 Forms of exploitation and means of recruitment

The evidence reported in the latest “Trafficking in Persons” report (U.S. Department of State, 2021) regard judicial proceedings, sentences issued and victims identified, also specifying

the values for global labour exploitation (see table 2).

**Table 2.** Global human trafficking proceedings, sentences and victims. Table from latest “Trafficking in Persons” report (U.S. Department of State, 2021)

YEAR	JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS	SENTENCES	VICTIM IDENTIFIED
2014	10,051 (418)	4,443 (216)	44,462 (11,438)
2015	19,127 (857)	6,615 (456)	77,823 (14,262)
2016	14,939 (1,038)	9,072 (717)	68,453 (17,465)
2017	17,471 (869)	7,135 (332)	96,960 (23,906)
2018	11,096 (457)	7,481 (259)	85,613 (11,009)
2019	11,841 (1,024)	9,548 (498)	118,932 (13,875)
2020	9,876 (1,115)	5,271 (337)	109,216 (14,448)

In reference to the data recorded by the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative, in 2019 (out of 23,432 cases reported in the database), 69.8% of victims were involved in sexual exploitation, 30% in labour exploitation and 0.2% of individuals were victims of other forms of exploitation. Again in 2019, sex trafficking is confirmed as being a “female” phenomenon: 94.7%<sup>5</sup> of women, including girls, are involved in this type of exploitation. As far as labour exploitation (of both adults and children) is concerned, 51.4%<sup>6</sup> of the victims are male and 48.6% female.

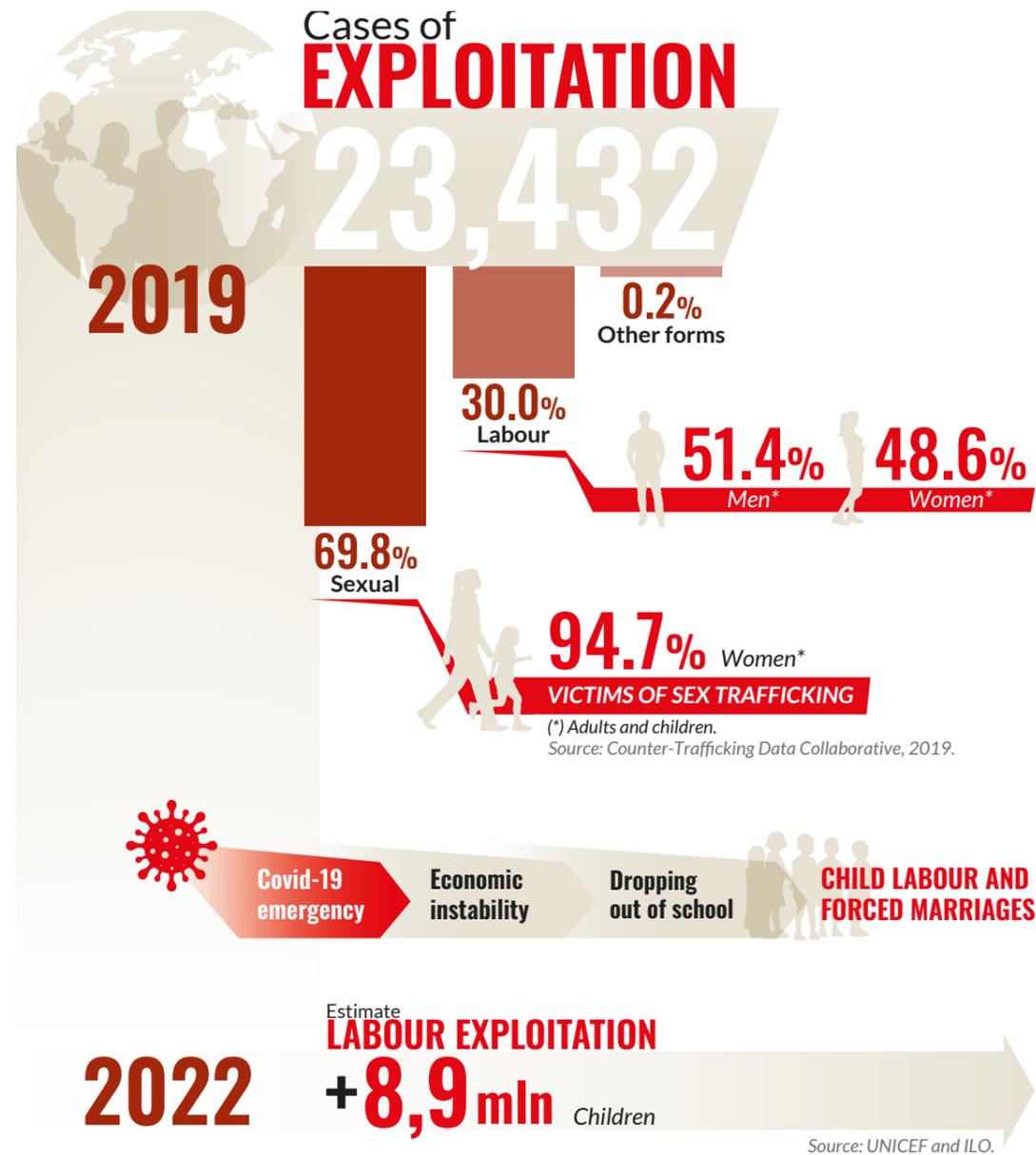
Regarding **child labour**, as shared in the last Save the Children “Young Invisible Slaves” report (2021), last year, ILO and UNICEF (2021) reported that in 2020 around 160 million children (63 million girls and 97 million boys) were involved in forced labour, with a prevalence of labour in rural regions almost 3

times higher than that of urban areas. 70% of children (aged 5-17) were exploited for agricultural labour, 19.7% for service industry labour and 10.3% for industrial labour.

In the last report on child labour exploitation, UNICEF and ILO (2022) confirm the increase of labour exploitation estimating an increase of 8.9 million children involved by the end of 2022 (UNICEF, ILO, 2022)<sup>7</sup>. Among the main reasons reported are most certainly the intermittent school closures occurring during the COVID-19 emergency phase. UNICEF estimates an increase of early school leaving and negative strategies implemented by households to deal with economic instability including child labour for males and early marriages for females.

As regards the **means of recruitment** for child trafficking (aged 0-17), the Counter-Trafficking

GLOBAL DATA



GLOBAL DATA ON THE APPLICATION OF THE LAW

The last "Trafficking in Persons" report (U.S. Department of State, 2021) reveals the global situation regarding the application of the Palermo Protocol (2000) in relation to prevention, elimination and punishment for human trafficking, in particular that of women and children. To this regard, in 2021, different countries in Africa and Asia, such as Bhutan Congo, the Republic of Iran, Korea, the northern Marshall Islands, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Tonga, Uganda, Vanuatu, and Yemen, are not part of the convention. At the same time, between April 2020 and March 2021, Comoros and Nepal became part of the additional Protocol of the United Nations' Convention against organised crime (2000).

In the same report, we can find a classification of different countries across the world, based on how each government has (or has not) carried out actions to prevent and combat human trafficking<sup>9</sup>.

The indicators through which the states were classified are the following: capacity of the government to prohibit serious forms of Trafficking of Human Beings (THB) and punish those responsible for said actions; capacity of the country to impose sanctions on those guilty of Trafficking of Human Beings (THB) in line with those for serious offences; capacity of the country to impose sanctions on the guilty which are sufficiently harsh to discourage similar offences; capacity of the country to implement significant efforts to eliminate human trafficking.

As regards the classification of the countries (see table 3) at level 1 - the most efficient - there are several European countries, including Belgium, Spain, Austria, France, as well as the United States, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, and Namibia. Italy, on the other hand, is located in the level below (level 2) alongside countries like Albania, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Malta, Cyprus and Morocco. In the even lower level, i.e. the "Level 2 - Watch List", we find Azerbaijan, Belize, Cambodia, Burundi, Papua New Guinea and other countries mainly in central Africa or south-east Asia. In the last level (level 3), we find Russia, China, Afghanistan, Iran, Venezuela and other countries in Africa/central America.

Data Collaborative reports how, in 2019<sup>8</sup>, in most cases (about 57%), girls were recruited through a relative (more or less close to the immediate family); a lesser but still significant amount of children are trafficked through an

intimate partner (18%) and in other cases the contact occurs through strangers (17%) or with friends (circa 8%). Boys are recruited mostly through contact with family members (92%) and only a small part through strangers (8%).

## SUBDIVISION OF COUNTRIES ACCORDING TO LEVEL FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION AND COMBATING ACTION

### LEVEL 1

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Guyana, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Namibia, Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, The Bahamas, United Kingdom, USA.

### LEVEL 2

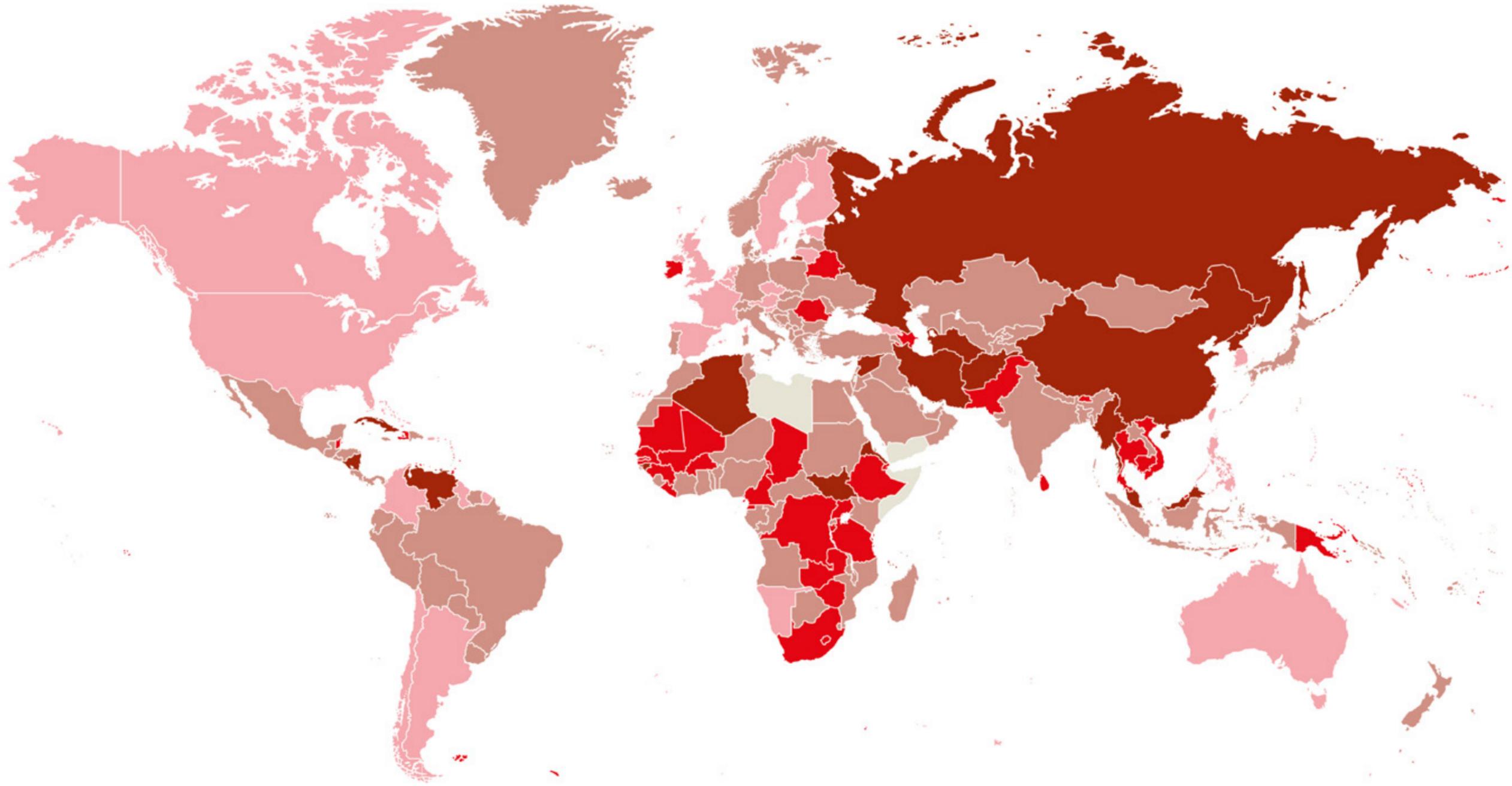
Albania, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Cyprus, Costa Rica, Croatia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eswatini, Fiji, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldavia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu.

### LEVEL 2 - WATCH LIST

Aruba, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belize, Bhutan, Belarus, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Curaçao, Ethiopia, Gambia, Djibouti, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Hong Kong, Ireland, Marshall Islands, Lesotho, Liberia, Macao, Mali, Mauritania, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Romania, Senegal, Sint Maarten, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, East Timor, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

### LEVEL 3

Afghanistan, Algeria, China, Comoros, North Korea, Cuba, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russia, Syria, South Sudan, Turkmenistan, Venezuela.



## 01.2 THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT: THE 2021-2025 EU ANTI-TRAFFICKING STRATEGY PLAN

According to the most recent European Commission statistics (2021), a **quarter of the approximately 14,000 cases identified as human trafficking victims are children**. Considering the transnational structure of criminal networks, in April 2021, the European Commission issued the **new Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025** in order to combat human trafficking to the ends of protecting victims and guaranteeing offenders are punished. The action plan is essentially founded on four cornerstones:

1. Reducing demand that fosters trafficking.
2. Breaking the business model of traffickers online and offline.
3. **Protecting, supporting and empowering the victims with a specific focus on women and children.**
4. Promoting international cooperation.

We should underline that the third cornerstone centres on the victims and, in particular, on women and children.

The significance given to the latter is partly due to the vast presence of child victims (EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, European Commission); and partly since almost three-quarters (72%) of all victims in the EU, and 92% of trafficking victims for the purposes of sexual exploitation, are women and girls. To this regard, we must highlight how gender inequality, scarce accessibility to education systems, national origin and poverty are factors that increase the vulnerability of women and children involved in trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Europe. Labour exploitation, while growing compared to previous years, is still a secondary 18 phenomenon compared to sexual exploitation: only 6% of children are used for this purpose (compared to around 64% that are used in various types of prostitution). According to EUROPOL (2022) this is a widely diversified sector that involves different areas of work: forestry, the agrarian

and productive field, food industry, restaurants and bars, the construction field, car wash facilities, retail, transport, cleaning services, domestic work, domestic care and even the cosmetics industry.

Of course, the statistics available refer to cases that have emerged and been identified: sadly, many exploited children remain under the strict control of their exploiters and thus fail to be considered in official statistics and reports.

In the third cornerstone of the 2021-2025 strategy, young women and children from Roma communities are identified as a group requiring special attention, because they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation due to different elements (including precarious living conditions, social isolation and exclusion, low levels of schooling, exposure to social prejudice and discrimination, and economic and learning poverty). Furthermore, we must draw attention to the other groups considered particularly exposed to the risk of exploitation such as LGBTQ+, those with disabilities and belonging to ethnic minorities. These groups are even more isolated and marginalised and thus more difficult to intercept to the ends of detection and protection.

Finally, most children falling into the hands of criminal networks are European citizens: the target group most vulnerable and exposed to the dangers of trafficking, are undoubtedly children that are migrating (also within Europe) and in particular those arriving in the host country as unaccompanied minors (European Commission, 2021).

According to the last EUROPOL report (2022), while the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably led to the restriction of transnational and intra-national mobility, criminal networks active in human trafficking continued to act, adapting to the challenges of social contexts and

increasingly using alternative channels, such as digital networks. To this regard, in its last report, EUROPOL refers that it received 21,787 reports of *people smuggling*, thus recording 4,889 new cases, and 6,971 reports concerning human trafficking with 1,250 new cases. These data were collected through the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA)<sup>10</sup>. According to the data recorded by the European Commission (2021; 2020), most traffickers in Europe are European Union citizens and around threequarters of offenders are men. There is no doubt that human trafficking entails high profits for criminals but there are also huge social, human and economic costs. To this regard, the European Commission estimates a total cost for human trafficking in the European Union

equal to 2.7 billion Euros a year, while the annual global profit for traffickers is around 29.4 billion annually (European Commission, 2021).

In reference to EUROPOL data (2022), operations to dismantle criminal networks were implemented in different European countries including Italy, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

As regards some of the most important activities recorded in the above states, EUROPOL reports an operation conducted last year (2021) where 187 victims were identified, of which 92 were children destined to forced

## 01.3 THE ITALIAN CONTEXT: THE DATA FROM NUMERO VERDE ANTI-TRATTA (THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING FREEPHONE HELPLINE)

As regards the Italian context, the data made available by Italy's Electronic Trafficking Database (the SIRIT platform) report three types of information compared to the year 2021: the *new evaluations of cases* of potential trafficking victims performed; the number of *new cases handled*<sup>11</sup>; the total number of *victims assisted*<sup>12</sup> and handled within the system. Hereinafter, all types of information recorded are reported, comparing them with each other and with what has been recorded in the previous years. It is important to analyse not only the differences between different years, but also those between the cases actually handled and people assisted: since we know that it takes a long time to detect cases, having available not only victims assisted but also those detected on the territory offers a more comprehensive view of the extent of the phenomenon and how much remains hidden.

According to the official data of the Department of Equal Opportunities at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers,

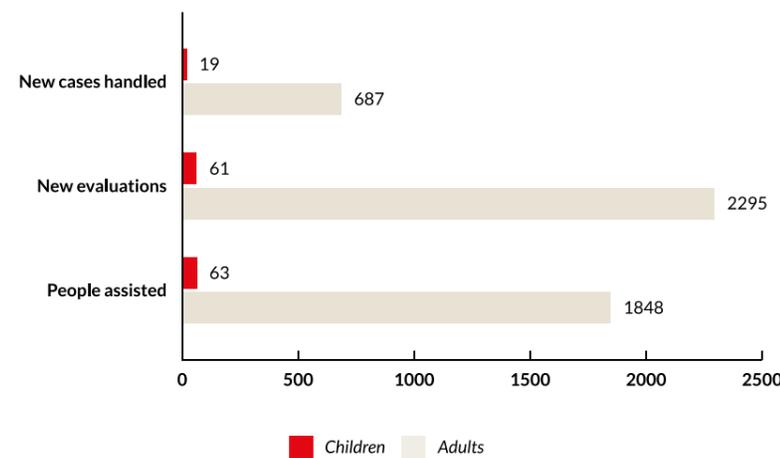
processed by the SIRIT platform, in 2021, the global number of people assisted by the anti-trafficking system amounts to 1,911. Among those assisted, compared to 2021, there were 63 children<sup>13</sup> 3.3% of the total sample. As of 8 June 2022 (figure includes new intakes in 2021 and 2022 as of 8 June 2022), 14 children were being assisted, all of whom were female, with a prevalent age of 17, although there were also 15- and 16-year-olds. As regards their nationalities, they come mainly from Nigeria, but also from the Ivory Coast, Morocco, Romania and from Guinea, Somalia and Mali. All those assisted were intended for sexual exploitation.

Consistent with the trend of 2020, again in 2021, women and girls assisted are the majority of the sample (n=1,445; 75.6%) followed by males (men and boys) corresponding to 410 individuals (or rather 21.5%) out of the total of those assisted. Figures for transgender people remain constant at 56, equal to 2.9% of the

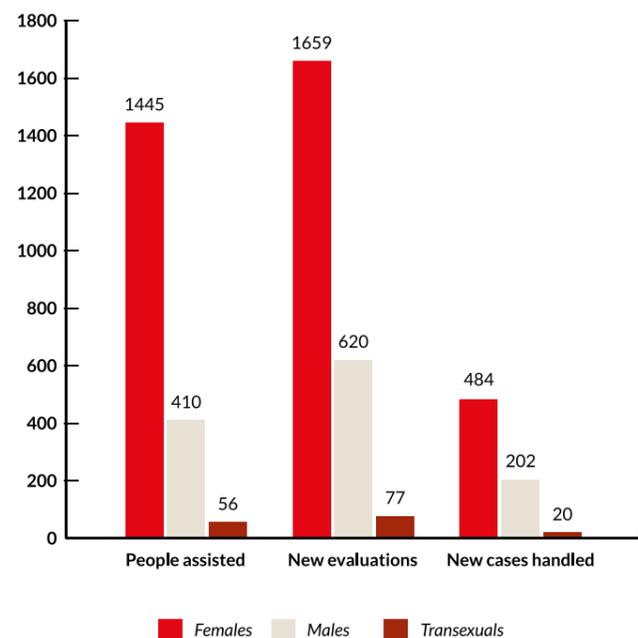
sample. If we consider the data of **new cases handled** in 2021, we have a total of 706 individuals, of whom 484 (68.6% of the sample) are female (women and girls); 202 men (28.6%) and 20 (2.8%) transgender people. Out of the total of the 706 cases handled, 19 (2.7%) are children.

The graphics reported below (see graphic 1; graphic 2) compare the total of individuals assisted, the new cases evaluated and the new cases handled in 2021, according to gender and age.

### COMPARISON BETWEEN CASES ASSISTED, NEW EVALUATIONS, CASES HANDLED IN 2021 ACCORDING TO AGE (ADULT VS. CHILDREN) (V.A.)



### COMPARISON BETWEEN CASES ASSISTED, NEW EVALUATIONS, CASES HANDLED IN 2021 ACCORDING TO GENDER (V.A.)



In terms of the **Country of origin** of victims assisted as a whole, Nigeria still remains the most important country, with 65.6% of the sample (n=1,254); in second and third position are Pakistan (n=86; 4.5%) and Morocco (n=49; 2.6%) followed by Gambia (n=48; 2.5%) and Ivory Coast (n=44; 2.3%). The remaining part of the sample is formed by Senegal (n=39; 2.0%); Mali (n=37; 1.9%); Bangladesh (n=36; 1.9%); Brazil (n=34; 1.8%); Romania (n=29; 1.5%) and other nationalities.

As regards the origin of the people evaluated over the course of 2021, the Nigerian population still occupies first place (57.3%), followed by the following nationalities: Pakistan (6.9%), Ivory Coast (4.4%), Morocco (3%), Tunisia (2.6%), Bangladesh (2.3%), Senegal (2.2%), Brazil (1.9%), Columbia (1.7%), Gambia (1.5%); the remainder is divided between other minority backgrounds. When we compare these data with those of the previous years, and, in particular, in 2019 (pre-pandemic), there has been a sharp drop in people originating from Nigeria (-55%). Likewise, the Anti-trafficking Freephone Helpline reports a decrease in the evaluations of cases handled also for other origins: Ivory Coast (-28%), Bangladesh (-40%), Senegal (-28%), Gambia (-44%), Ghana (-46%), Cameroon (-58%), Guinea (-49%) (Green Number Report, year 2021, 2022). On the hand, there was an increase in people evaluated originating from Pakistan (+300%), Tunisia (+368%), Brazil (+45%) and Morocco (+32%).

As regards the **types of exploitation**, 48.9% (n=935) of the people assisted in 2021 were involved in sexual exploitation. This figure seems to suggest the establishment of the diversification of exploitation, with a lot of other types of human trafficking appearing. Labour exploitation is also widespread, with 359 victims (18.8% of the sample), a slight increase compared to that recorded for 2020. The remaining part of those assisted is formed by the following forms of exploitation: forced begging (n=15; 0.8%); domestic servitude (n=13; 0.7%); forced marriage (n=7; 0.4%); illegal international adoptions (n=1; 0.1%); destined for exploitation (n=470; 24.6%);

victims of violence art.18 bis (n=50; 2.6%); forced criminal economies (n=28; 1.5%); male and female collaborators of justice (n=16; 0.8%). 17 persons (0.9% of the sample) were exploited in their country of origin or during the journey to Italy.

The valid scenario for the assisted victims is clearly in line with the actual cases handled in 2021: in this case, SIRIT reports 278 victims exploited sexually (39.4%); 171 (24.2%) intended for labour exploitation, 30 (4.2%) victims of violence (art.18), 9 (1.3%) people intended for forced criminal economies, 7 (1%) for forced begging, 6 for domestic servitude (0.8%), 4 (0.6%) for forced marriage; 4 collaborators of justice (0.6%) and 7 (1%) people exploited in their country of origin or during their journey towards Italy. The number of persons targeted for exploitation was 190 (26.9% of the sample).

In reference to the people assisted in 2021, the Territorial Commissions (TCs) for the recognition of international protection are still the main activating party with 349 cases handled by the system as a result of their reporting (18.3% of the total of the sample). Clearly the positioning of the Territorial Commissions is such even if we observe the number of **new evaluations of victims in 2021** (in this case 833 were detected by the Territorial Commissions) or new cases handled for 2021: in this latter case, the individuals reported by the Territorial Commissions (n=122) are almost equal to those reported autonomously (n=119). Returning to the total number of victims assisted in 2021, 281 (14.7% of the sample) ask for help autonomously, 246 people (12.9%) were reported by bodies in the private social sector, 143 by contact units (7.5%), 109 (5.7%) by Emergency Reception Centres, 159 (8.3%) from local institutions/ territorial bodies - social welfare services and 76 (4%) by IOM. In line with 2020, we can note a decrease in the number of reports from the public security forces (police squads, Carabinieri NIL, municipal police forces, Railway Police, Finance police) whose figures all record less than 1% with the exception of the Police Mobile Squad (n=70 reports) and the Carabinieri (n=51

reports). Despite the distribution of data suggesting increasingly efficient work is being performed through anti-trafficking projects and the Territorial Commissions, there is a vast number of individuals that are making autonomous reports, and many of the people assisted are able to find help through their own informal networks: in 2021, 141 individuals (7.4% of the sample) were reported through friends or acquaintances; a higher percent compared to that of Emergency Reception Centres, Carabinieri, IOM and Police Mobile Squads. The fact that clients have a very low place in the classification is also significant: only 1 case assisted in 2021 was reported by a client; the commitment of private citizens, reporting 17 people (0.9% of those assisted in 2021), increased slightly in 2021. These data suggest the need to make great efforts in terms of awareness raising and construction of a conscious culture among territorial communities where human trafficking is occurring. The remainder of the reports came

from: Information Desk (n=48; 2.5%); SPRAR/SIPROIMI/SAI (n=28; 1.5%); Prefecture (n=12; 0.6%); Victims' Colleagues (n=12; 0.6%); Lawyers (n=9; 0.5%); Territorial Labour Directorate (n=4; 22 0.2%); Court (n=4; 0.2%); IPM - Criminal Institute for Minors (n=1; 0.1%); Trade Union Association (n=1; 0.1%). The remainder is distributed among minority subjects.

As regards the territorial distribution of the victims assisted and the regions of their surfacing, there are no significant discrepancies compared to 2020: Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy continue to be the regions most involved. In reference to those assisted, 268 (14%) come from Piedmont; 260 (13.6%) from Emilia-Romagna and 242 (12.7%) from Lombardy. Molise, Sardinia, and Umbria are those least involved: as regards the victims assisted, the former counts only 7 (0.4%), the second 16 (0.8%), the third 17 (0.9%) and Valle d'Aosta 0.

## CALLS TO THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING FREEPHONE HELPLINE IN 2021

In the report on the work of the Anti-trafficking Freephone Helpline of 2021 (published in March 2022), a total of 3,116 calls received (around 260 calls a month) are reported, recording a decrease of 43% compared to those arriving in 2020 and somewhat in line with those of 2019. The decrease in telephone contacts in 2021 can be explained by the end of the emergency phase of the pandemic: the previous year, many calls were connected to calls for help connected to people's health care situations. At the same time, we can observe a reduction of irrelevant calls (a drop of 72%) and of nuisance calls (decrease of 32%). Analysing the contacts recorded in 2021, out of a total of 3,116 calls, only 791 were nuisance calls; 818 were irrelevant; 148 eligible; 872 relevant and 487 subsequently relevant. To clarify, we will specify that by the term "eligible" the Freephone Helpline intends all the calls that are not relevant for the Anti-trafficking System, but where requests for consulting from operators who are able to give effective responses are made. As the same Freephone Helpline report (2021) states, compared to 2020 an increase of 10% is noted for relevant calls, returning to the pre-pandemic levels of 2019.

The data relative to the first trimester of 2022 highlight the same number of relevant telephone calls received during the same period of the previous year: irrelevant calls and nuisance calls decrease significantly, (respectively -32% and -46%).

In reference to **activating individuals in 2021** (i.e. people receiving telephone counselling) we find in first place (45%) anti-trafficking projects that use the service to make reports, request the cases to be handled or request technical consultations for the SIRIT platform. In second position, with 19% of the calls, are the potential victims: for the latter there is a 70% increase in calls compared to 2020, a sign that the number - set up to provide a sound help tool - is beginning to be used also by the victims themselves. In third position are calls coming from the International Protection System (10% of the total of the sample). The remaining part of the calls are made by the following individuals: private social sector bodies, private citizens, social-health care services, lawyers, friends/acquaintances of victims, public security forces, clients, other.

In line with the data just presented, among the **reasons** that led the individuals to contact the Freephone Helpline in 2021, we find in first place the service notifications/requests for assistance (34% of the sample) made by anti-trafficking projects to have information.

In second place are the reports of potential trafficking and serious exploitation victims (around 21% of the total), in third place (12% of the total of calls) we find the requests for connection with the project and in fourth place, with 10% of calls, requests for help to escape from exploitation. In this latter case, we are faced with not such a high percentage, however it is increasing compared to the previous years (by 20% compared to 2020 and by 78% compared to 2019). The remaining percent of calls recorded occur for the following reasons: request to join the network (6%), request for information/direction to services (6%), request for information from the Freephone Helpline (4%), request for immediate help (3%), and other (4%).

In reference to the **context of exploitation**, in 2021, as regards the cases reported to the Freephone Helpline, 63% regarded sexual exploitation, 34% labour exploitation, 2% forced begging, and 1% illegal economies. Compared to 2020, consistent with international trends, there was an increase in relative terms of 11% for cases implicated in forms of labour exploitation and a decrease by 10% of sexual exploitation. As regards the latter, the profile of people involved regards young Nigerian women (aged 20 - 30), while unlike past years, there were no cases of reporting or self-reporting related to children. Moving on to the analysis of the outcomes of calls recorded in 2021,

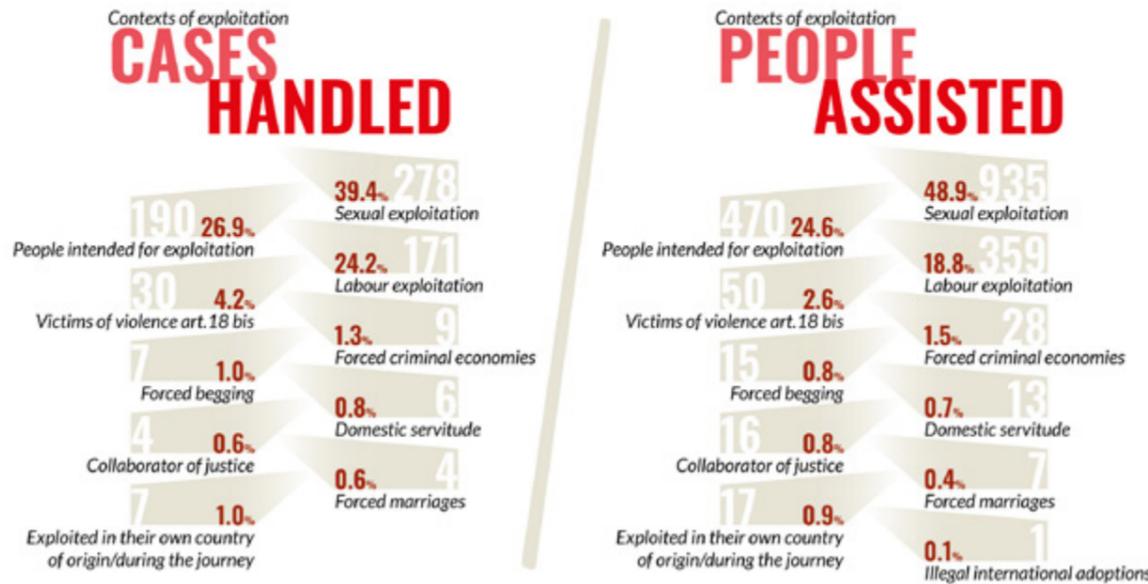
## THE ITALIAN CONTEXT: WHAT EMERGES FROM THE ANALYSES OF THE SAMPLE FROM THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING FREEPHONE NUMBER

### TYPES OF EXPLOITATION

# 2021



Source: SIRIT.



most (47%) were resolved over telephone consulting from the Freephone Helpline operators, a quarter (around 25%) led to the start of an evaluation phase by the anti-trafficking projects, 15% consisted in interviews involving counselling and support. Only a minimum (7%) resulted in the launching of a procedure to join the network, 4% were forwarded to other services and only 2%<sup>14</sup> resulted in the implementation of safety measures related to serious exploitation following a call. As regards 2020, there was a slight decrease in consulting (from 49.6% to 47.3%), but an increase in evaluation interviews (from 16.6% in 2020 to 24.4% in 2021). If we compare the data of the first trimester of 2021 with those of the first trimester of 2022, we can note a slight increase in relative terms for emergency reception (+3%), evaluation interviews (+3%) and forwarding to other services (+2.4%).

## CALLS TO THE NUMERO VERDE ANTI-TRATTA (THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING FREEPHONE HELPLINE) IN 2021



## 01.4 GOVERNANCE SYSTEM FOR COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In Italy, as known, the trafficking prevention and combating policy coordination, monitoring and evaluation system, based on Legislative Decree 4 March 2014 n. 24 (implemented by Directive EU n. 36/2011) is headed by the Department of Equal Opportunities at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

the 2020 lockdown, the Ministry of Equal opportunities and the Family called the Steering Committee underlining the commitment to adopting a New National Action Plan by 2020. As of today, the Plan has not yet been published.

This decree provided for: the adoption of a National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan (PNA) following a multilevel governmental approach; the unification of the two previous intervention plans into a Single Emersion Programme, Assistance and Social Integration for the victims of trafficking and the calls for tenders for the projects presented by accredited bodies (second section of the Register of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies); mandatory training for all actors involved; victim indemnity and support mechanism.

To this regard, from the analyses of interviews performed, it emerges that the lack of a plan over these years has caused the different social actors involved in anti-trafficking more difficulties when it comes to acting with clarity and precision in the prevention and handling of victims, since there was no long-term work perspective.

As regards the National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan, it is to be recalled that the previous plan concluded in December 2018<sup>15</sup>. Shortly before

At the same time, from the analysis of the interviews regarding the four cornerstones of the past Action Plan it emerged that it is necessary to work more on “risk prevention” and not just “damage prevention”, above all regarding unaccompanied foreign minors that can easily fall into the trafficking market. As regards the second cornerstone, i.e. “protection”, multiple efforts were undertaken

not only in terms of victim safeguarding, but also in terms of proximity to the beneficiary and guidance over the past post-emergency year. As Cinzia Bragagnolo tells us, the Freephone Anti-trafficking Helpline *“has grown a lot over this period. The data collection system does not actually give credit to all the proximity work carried out. This details the people who are taken into reception services, as well as the demand, the direction of the services, it guides the improvement of the living conditions which are not valued well, while the projects are doing a lot of work and they are doing it well. When we speak of reception services we are not only considering residential services, but also social and educational guidance that is translated into psycho-social and sociohealth care, and socio-legal guidance”*.

In this sense, during COVID-19, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities demonstrated great willingness and flexibility in terms of the implementation of different means compared to these forms of guidance for (potential) victims, significantly promoting the move to online platforms for service provision. As regards the “protection” cornerstone, we can say that significant competences were matured in terms of identifying and detecting victims, while there were more obstacles regarding the reaching of objectives of social inclusion.

Also, as regards the cornerstone of prosecution, considering only the official data of judicial proceedings, we could think further efforts are needed; in any case, it is also necessary to highlight other satellite offences that are identified and processed and that suggest careful work in terms of combating and prosecuting these crimes. However, the number of judicial proceedings remains low in comparison with the extent of the phenomenon.

People do not report<sup>16t</sup> for two main reasons: first and foremost, they are scared of repercussions; secondly, because they do not want to tell their story and risk having to talk about painful details that do not always result in tracking down the criminal organisation. To this regard, the greatest problems occur not so much in identifying the exploiter in Italy, but tracking down the whole criminal organisation.

As Lina Trovato, Deputy Public Prosecutor at the District Antimafia Department of Catania explains, all those that play a significant role, but are not directly involved in trafficking networks, remain unpunished.

In reference to the final cornerstone, i.e. “partnership”, considering the internal network, the geometry is variable and different territories have been capable of activating and maintaining a soundly-consolidated, multiagency network, while in other territorial contexts there are still great vulnerabilities. As Ms Trovato underlines where there is a connection between anti-trafficking bodies, local bodies, and the public prosecutor, the emersion, engagement and fight against trafficking is undoubtedly effective. As a whole, however, there is difficulty in transforming local good practices into institutional multi-agency networks that can be replicated in other territories.

As regards labour exploitation, this year sees the conclusion of **the three-year plan for combating labour exploitation in agriculture (2020-2022)**, adopted in January 2020.

As regards its operations, it emerges that although it has considered issues specific to gender, it fails to provide specific attention to children. Without a doubt, the plan to combat labour exploitation in agriculture has had the great outcome of shedding light on a specific matter, which is of great importance and increasingly more at the heart of problems connected to migratory flows.

At the same time, however, as some experts and other interviewees stated in the context of the drafting of this dossier, the Plan - if not integrated in terms of exploitation in other labour areas - risks undermining the many nuances of the phenomenon and not considering the multitude of dimensions of the situations that victims are involved in. Trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation does not regard only agriculture, but also industry (e.g.: textiles) and the service sector.

While, on one hand, the Action Plans have had the merit of bringing together the efforts of different social actors, on the other they bring

to light the risk of sectorialization of policy and creation of “boundaries” of actions which are not functional in terms of effective emergence and fight against human trafficking in its multiple facets.

## 02

# CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: EVOLVING TRENDS

It is evident that exploitation is evolving, global emergencies have caused changes that often make exploited children “invisible” and traditional methods of identification and emersion not very effective. Criminal networks have been extremely quick at adapting to the world that the global crises have transformed so fast. Online and indoor exploitation, as well as the number of victims with children, are some of the main challenges which trafficking and exploitation combating systems have to face.



## 02.1 CURRENT MAIN VICTIM PROFILES

As reported by the different international reports on human trafficking (UNODC, 2020; GSI, 2020; IOM, 2022), countries with the greatest gender gap when it comes to accessing education, health and economic status have a greater prevalence of modern slavery. Specifically, females (girls and women) make up over half of all victims implicated in exploitation. According to one of the last Walk Free reports (2020)<sup>17</sup>, women and girls represent around 99% of victims intended for sexual exploitation and 84% of people intended for forced marriage. Over the past 10 years (UNODC, 2020; 2018) the differentiation of trafficking based on gender has remained a particularly evident constant. Children, both boys and girls, are the targets that are most easily engaged by criminal networks because they often travel alone and need to pay back the debt which they and their family members owe. In this regard, we recall that due to the conflict which erupted in February 2022 in Ukraine, different international agencies, including UNICEF (2022) and UNODC (2022), underlined the urgent need to pay attention to women and children escaping from Ukraine due to their exposure to the risk of trafficking and exploitation. The dangerous situation and the instability, the huge flow of women and children, the fact of being a country even previously implicated in trafficking (with the main destinations being Russia, Poland and Germany) represent just some of the factors that make an increase of the power of organised crime in sexual and labour exploitation probable (UNODC, 2022). To this regard, the Italian situation does not yet present significant widespread evidence<sup>18</sup>. In two interviews<sup>19</sup> performed for this dossier,

the fear of indoor prostitution of women/ young people or, much more probable, falling into labour exploitation, in particular, domestic labour or in care work, was reported: this would begin with a proposal of illegal work that would easily take on forms of exploitation.

In rare cases, it happened that women with children arrived in Italy relying on unqualified individuals (in some cases identified through ads on social networks) and were forced to pay for accommodation, while the child did not go to school. However, these situations are currently being investigated.

As regards sexual exploitation, in Italy it is possible to note a constant presence of Nigerian girls and an increasing number of young women from the Ivory Coast.

Another significant element is the presence of women in shelters for victims of trafficking also with their children. To this regard, nuclear families assisted as at 08.06.2022 totalled 130, with 161 children. The mothers are mainly aged 21-25 (36.9%), followed by those aged 26-30 (33.1%) and 31-40 (16.9%). There are also nuclear families with mothers aged 18-20 (8.5%); there are few families with women aged 40+ (3.1%) and girls aged below 17 (1.5%). In most cases (80%) the families have only one child; 16.2% have 2 dependent children and only a small amount (3.8%) have 3 children. As regards nationality, 83.8% come from Nigeria and 4.6% from the Ivory Coast while the remaining part is formed of nationals of Cameroon, Albania, Pakistan, Romania, Somalia.

## PROFILES OF FAMILIES ASSISTED BY THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING FREEPHONE NUMBER IN ITALY



### 02.1/1 Children and girls of Nigerian origin

According to the last report of the Anti-trafficking Freephone Helpline on outdoor contacts and insertion in the network in the first trimester of 2022, people from Nigeria (mostly females) continue to be among the main victims of trafficking in Italy.

In any case, analysing the figures of those inserted in the network, we can note a net decrease in the first trimester of 2022

compared to that of the previous year, going from 50% recorded in 2021 to 37.5% in 2022. Clearly the data we are referring to regards only women and girls that have emerged, the tip of the iceberg of a hidden phenomenon (think about indoor or e-trafficking), which is difficult to estimate comprehensively.

Often girls who are victims of trafficking have difficulty to emerge due to different factors

that hinder the creation of relationships based on trust with the operators appointed to support them.

Therefore, among the various reasons that prevent the early emergence of trafficked persons are:

**FEAR** of retaliation: many girls fear that any complaint can have negative effects on the family of origin both following their recruitment, and thus before their departure, and once they arrive at their destination. Nigerian girls, for example, are subject to a ritual called juju that is used to consolidate the bond with the exploiters and to enforce the blackmail of the family.

**MISTRUST**: many children and young adult women victims of trafficking have experienced abuse and violence in their country of origin; for the latter, the journey to Europe is an opportunity of a new life, which is better than what they have had so far. Instead, the journey turns out to be another scam and they feel abandoned once more, they are kidnapped, sold and traded like cattle; they have been subject to torture, deprivation and rape, including group rape; they have been segregated, in the dark, without food, forced to sell their bodies or enslaved for months. This abuse starts during the journey and continues in their destination, where they are perpetuated by those people that should have helped them to escape.

**BAD INFORMATION**: during the journey these girls are provided with deliberately misleading information, with the purpose of facilitating their exploitation, so that they do not trust authorities and organisations appointed to support them. It is also very common for them to declare themselves adults when they are actually younger, or they are forced to provide fake names.

**POVERTY AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES**: the main reason that motivates these girls to migrate is connected to their families' economic instability. Many girls and young women are "chosen" to provide for the family left behind. In this context, poverty and

separation from their families, in addition to the responsibility of supporting family members, make these girls and young women extremely vulnerable and more exposed to traffickers.

***Fear, mistrust, bad information, poverty and family responsibilities are some of the reasons to consider to understand why it is very complicated to escape from trafficking and exploitation rings and thus why the figures about emerging victims are marginal compared to the extent of the phenomenon.***

#### **GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN RECEPTION CENTRES**

Over the past two years, following the pandemic, the presence of new Nigerian girls in reception structures is considerably decreasing. As recalls Tiziana Bianchini, CNCA, Cooperativa Lotta, the young women looked after in centres arriving as unaccompanied minors over the previous years are now receiving after-care support or are almost at the end of their protection period. Among the few arrivals recorded, there are many people whose intended final destination was not Italy, but third countries such as Austria or more often Germany. Only a few cases regard children of Nigerian origin arriving in Italy, having escaped the conflict in Ukraine. In general, the decrease in new arrivals of young Nigerian women in the protection system is not associated with a lack of girls who are victims of trafficking, but rather with the increase in indoor and online exploitation. Paola Giordano, of the Office for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors of the

Municipality of Turin, says that *"this figure should not make us any less concerned, rather it gives us reason to think that there are other indoor situations where girls are exploited behind closed doors. In these cases, identification and engagement is more complex"*.

As reported during the interview with Laura Pensa of Caritas, Udine, along with the stories of these young women it emerges that relationships with their **family of origin** are particularly complex to manage: even where there is an evident bond with the traffickers and the exploiters, the girls (more frequently than adults) tend to choose to maintain and preserve the relationships with their loved ones, often justifying the collusion of their family members with the criminals, once they discover the link between the family and the exploiters in Italy. In these cases, the age of the girl is not irrelevant: the younger the girl, the more they would seem to try to maintain their relationship with their family. In this sense, if the situation allows it, it is a good idea to allow contact with their loved ones, however, with the intermediation of professional figures who are experts in the matter, such as intercultural mediators.

Compared to adult or older women, girls and young Nigerian women report greater difficulty in terms of their capacity to **devise and implement a clear and defined personal life plan**; as Laura Pensa explains: *"compared to an adult woman who has clearer objectives, they face greater disruptions also when their case is being handled"*. Furthermore, while these girls may have excellent cognitive capacities and do well in school (even becoming very successful) they may have serious difficulties when it comes to relationships (or emotional and impulse control) also due to physical, psychological and sexual violence experienced as teenagers. These critical issues, thus, also appearing in work contexts can make their social inclusion and professional socialisation more complicated.

Lastly, we must add that over the past years we have witnessed increasingly more often Nigerian children engaged in **illegal economies**, in particular, transporting within

national borders not only illegal substances (e.g.: cocaine), but also the profits from their sale. This is an emerging aspect since before only males, including boys, were involved in the sale of illegal substances. Of course this phenomenon leads to questions regarding investigations into Nigerian criminal networks, in some cases connected to Italian ones (DIA, 2021): certainly, as stated in the DIA 2021 report, in some zones of Italy, for some time there has been the presence of organisations which are *"above all Nigerian in origin that cause particular alarm since they have become one of the points of reference of international drug trafficking and the management of street prostitution"* (DIA, 2021, p. 178). This scenario makes the reality of these girls even more complex, since they are victims and at the same time they can also be prosecuted according to the law because the subordination to an exploiter and the fact that they owe them a huge debt (to pay for their journey, for the rent of the *joint*<sup>20</sup>, for the accommodation they live in, etc....) clearly leads the victim to have to obey any request the same traffickers make.

#### **THE CHILDREN OF WOMEN OF NIGERIAN ORIGIN IN RECEPTION FACILITIES**

***As regards Nigerian girls, a new element of concern emerges from the increase in the number of the victims' children, often fathered by an offender, as a result of abuse occurring during their journey or in Italy. The children are often used by the exploiters, who may use them as a threat to control their mothers.***

As highlighted by the above-said data and the previous dossier "Little Invisible Slaves" 2021,

among the young victims needing support coming from Nigeria, we must pay attention not only to unaccompanied minors but also to the children of adult women taken in by the reception facilities. As Gianfranco Della Valle of the Anti-trafficking Freephone Helpline explains *“the big news in recent years is that many of the young Nigerian women who arrived in Europe between 2015-2017 have since become mothers”* resulting in complex needs regarding the whole single-parent family.

Of course, this represents a challenging situation for the anti-trafficking reception system that is not structured to take in mothers with children, whose safeguarding must be handled by local bodies. In this sense, as Gianfranco Della Valle underlines *“anti-trafficking projects that have established strong relations with local bodies have tried to push in this direction. In other circumstances, the anti-trafficking bodies are unhappy about being responsible for children that cannot be “accounted for” in numerical terms<sup>21</sup>. In addition, there is the whole question of how to frame this type of phenomenon”*.

As the anti-trafficking operators and experts of Save the Children explain, this sort of parenting is extremely complex due to the mother’s often traumatic experiences. Victims of trafficking often fall pregnant during the journey, having been abused by traffickers or clients. In addition to the potentially traumatic events of the journey, there are different factors that come into play in the structuring and management of the parenting: the severity of the exploitation experienced in Italy (sexual or labour); the distance from the Country of origin that does not allow for points of reference that can help and support them; the capacity of reception facilities and the respective operators to be points of reference that can provide stability for the mother; the type of acculturation of the woman (that is, how much the mother is able to learn the Italian language and communicate with a culture that is different from her own); the capacity of different professionals to communicate with a culture different from their own. The complexity of the management of these

single-parent families and the relative children is also anchored in the different profiles present.

A first type regards all these **women that fall pregnant during their integration, even at a young age**. Although they declare to have arrived alone, they develop sentimental relations with men (not necessarily residents in the same city) who they have children with. In these cases, the reunification of the family is a long and difficult process due to the possibility of finding independent accommodation which can house all members of the family: employment contracts are often short-term (lasting just one month, for example) making it more difficult to find rental accommodation. Additionally, we must consider the prejudices and stereotypes that lead to racial discrimination and thus it is very difficult to find a house to rent even when they have the necessary guarantees.

We also need to underline that often mothers end up taking care of children alone even if the fathers have recognised them, both due to cultural factors (men are less involved in care) and because relationships are often short and the pregnancies occur at the beginning of the relationship before couples can begin to imagine a life together.

The second scenario, as Tiziana Bianchini, CNCA, Cooperativa Lotta, refers, regards the presence of **women coming back from other European countries** (in particular from **Germany**). Without being forced to return to Italy based on the Dublin Regulation, these women return to Italy after 2/3 years - often with one or two dependent children - to avoid being repatriated to Nigeria once they have been denied. In these cases, clearly there are multiple problems: first of all, when they reach Italy, the structures they are accommodated in have to make a great effort to reconstruct the migratory story, including the legal situation. Then, the problems in integrating themselves into the new social context are further complicated by the difficulty of having to relearn a new language and face a social, care and legal system which is different from where they come from. This difficulty is also

experienced by the children. Additionally, there is without a doubt the risk of being recontacted by traffickers to be exploited again in their new place of residence: as soon as they return to Italy they may be sought by exploiters by telephone.

In these cases, we are generally talking about women who have left Nigeria when they were very young (as unaccompanied minors) engaged by traffickers through the known means of recruitment: when disembarking in Italy they managed to avoid being identified and taken into reception facilities (sometimes thanks to the help of men they have met on Facebook or other online channels), running off towards Germany. Germany is idealised and perceived as the state that is most able to provide total, continuous assistance to women with children offering them a home and economic aid. In other circumstances, they may go to Germany or other European countries after having experienced sexual exploitation and falling pregnant. In these cases too, the return to Italy is connected to a possible repatriation once their period of reception concludes.

Of course, **children are taken with them in all these journeys, and risk being exposed to harmful situations where there is little safeguarding**. These children often have behavioural and adaptation problems and scarce regulatory and self-control capacities. Due to these problems, once they have been taken in by reception structures in Italy, it happens that children are referred to child neuropsychiatrists which are not always capable of intervening with a cross-cultural approach.

In addition to the scenarios just outlined, there are also **children of women who have been trafficking victims that have not been intercepted by the services**: in these cases, starting school is the time when family vulnerabilities emerge with the possible case handling by the social services, at this late point. In these cases, in addition to the problem of the living conditions which are often not adequate, there is also the risk of violence witnessed by children, above all in the event of their mother’s

indoor prostitution<sup>22</sup>.

What we witness in different cases is sadly a paradox: on one hand, these women are safeguarded by the services and by protection programmes; on the other, their parenting capacities are under strict observation.

***A short circuit occurs: the woman that is exploited, possibly sexually, is safeguarded as such; at the same time, there is the risk that the evaluation of her parenting skills does not consider the impact that the violence experienced can have had on the mother-child dyad and so she is not considered an adequate mother. It is important in these cases to promote supportive actions on different fronts: prevention of psychological problems, during the initial months following the birth of the child, above all in transcultural terms; the information and indication of specialist services for the children; guidance in inserting the children in school and the training of the same operators of the reception structures on issues regarding parental support.***

## THE STORY

### GOLD, NIGERIA

*Exploited from a young age, even when she was a child in Nigeria, Gold suffered in her short life as a 26-year-old all kinds of severe exploitation, abuse, violence, deception, betrayal and disappointment that a young mother can go through.*

*Victim of sexual and labour exploitation since she was a child, she was forced to have an abortion to end a pregnancy resulting from abuse she was subjected to by her exploiter. The foetus however survived and Gold gave birth, but the exploiter managed to exclude her from the child's life by tricking her: both legally, by assuming paternity, and physically, by removing the child from the young mother when he was just a few months old. Literally thrown onto the street and in shock due to her experience, Gold began to roam Italy, being an easy prey for other violent exploiters that continued to commit offences against her. Gold finally managed to rebel, file a police statement and escape from the exploitation system with the help of two anti-trafficking bodies. Thanks to her courageous testimony, the Italian judicial authorities were able to imprison 13 people.*

*At this point in the story, we wish we could say Gold was able to get her child back and begin the slow, gradual process of getting to know him; many years have gone by since his birth. But we cannot yet tell this part of the story. Despite her collaboration, Gold is still waiting for justice; she is trying to reconstruct a life, but she feels like she is hanging in wait of being able to experience this moment.*

*The anti-trafficking body that is assisting her, and that for security reasons we will not name, has shared her needs with Save the Children that is taking action through the Nuovi Percorsi project, and is providing care and resources: a psycho-motor course to support her as she reconstructs herself and her self-esteem; an apprenticeship, to develop her professional competences; a joint legal action pursued by the lawyer already contacted by the body and the one made available by Save the Children that we hope can soon give Gold the chance to see her child once more through protected meetings while awaiting for the decision of the Juvenile Court regarding his placement.*

## 02.1/2 Girls and young women originating from the Ivory Coast: a new model of exploitation?

***The flow of girls and young women originating from the Ivory Coast is increasing. To them, Italy represents a country of transit: we do not intercept them on our streets, but we have reason to believe that their leaving reception facilities and their short stay in Italy may be organised by traffickers that transform these girls and young women into sources of income.***

A few years ago, the International Organization for Migration (OIM, 2019) underlined how the increase in the percentage of women and children coming from the Ivory Coast on boats had gone from 8% in 2015 to 46% in 2019. Many of these were victims of sexual exploitation before arriving in Italy (in Libya or in Tunisia). In the past years, there has been an increase in women from the Ivory Coast inserted in the anti-trafficking network: in 2017, there were only 35, while in 2019 there were 128.

Analysing the migratory routes of women and girls from the Ivory Coast, we can outline different "profiles". Hereinafter we will try to outline that of **girls aged 14 to 17 that arrive in Italy unaccompanied**.

As reported by the bodies that monitor the reception of children from the Ivory Coast, those arriving in Italy spend on average very little time in reception structures before leaving them without a trace.

Even when some of them accept to be taken into a structure motivated by the desire to study, this is often not sufficient to make them stay for more than a month, at the end of which it seems they are pushed by traffickers to migrate towards France, where they say they have relatives, though they are unable to provide specific names. When they first arrive in the structures, furthermore, they do not try to get in contact with their families who are still in Africa, which they would probably do if they were not so closely controlled by their traffickers/exploiters.

As regards the Italy-France border zone where they are intercepted, the area around Oulx does not seem to be involved in the phenomenon, while there is a large presence in Ventimiglia<sup>23</sup>: this is where **they cross the border aiming to reach France** and more specifically Paris.

As emerges from interviews performed by the Save the Children team with children arriving on boats in Lampedusa, these young people arrive in Italy emotionally exhausted, very scared, discouraged and worried about the future, with low self-esteem, feeling they are not worthy of a carefree future and generally distrusting of others.

The psychological issues expressed could be connected to violence experienced, rape, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, that can seriously compromise their perceptions of themselves, of others and of trusting and loving relationships. It is clear how high the risk is of developing psychological pathologies, shame and distrust in telling their stories and how these women can easily become prey to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, being re-victimised with increasingly serious post-traumatic consequences.

## THE STORY

### MAIMOUNA, AGED 17, IVORY COAST

Maimouna says she arrived with her alleged sister, an adult, who she was separated from on arrival and with whom she departed from the Ivory Coast to reach **Tunisia**. She stayed there for around 6 months, with some people who Maimouna calls “guardians” that took care of them. She said she did not do any work.

**Initially untrusting, the child began to give some details of her personal history, clarifying that she left Ivory Coast to escape a forced marriage.**

The girl said she had a child aged 2 that she left in Ivory Coast with the family of her husband, who is much older than her, and she was forced to marry when she was fifteen years old, by her uncle, since her father had died.

## 02.1 3 Girls and young women originating from Eastern Europe

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the data of the Italian mapping of the Freephone Helpline for the first trimester of 2022 highlight a significant presence of women from eastern Europe coming from Romania, Albania and Bulgaria, reaching in March 2022, respectively the figures of 525, 205 and 91. Empirical data is also confirmed by interviews performed by anti-trafficking experts, partners and anti-trafficking operators of Save the Children that report how these are the main individuals still on the streets while there is a decrease in the presence of children that would seem to be in other more hidden places (indoors). The recruitment of girls, who are often very young, occurs above all putting pressure on their dreams and on their desire to change life by compatriots that pretend to be “lover boys”<sup>24</sup>.

Girls without significant parental, protective figures or orphans that live in institutes are easily recruited through the promise of a paid job or marriage. At times these lover boys monitor orphanages to groom girls who have just turned 18 when they are free to leave the structures that they have been housed in. If the girls have a family, they are not always living in the best conditions and it may be their fathers who facilitate their daughter’s recruitment considering them a good that can

bring some economic advantage.

Also as a consequence of Covid, Romanian girls are increasingly engaged through social networks by traffickers. As reported by the anti-trafficking operators of Save the Children, there are often kidnappings in Romania, even carried out in public places or places that are very familiar for the victims. The girls are recruited by seeking their consent and not through the use of direct violence; for traffickers, a low level of coercion is more convenient and gets the girls to believe they have chosen this path as a necessary sacrifice towards constructing a better life. Of course, this is a more subtle, calculated form of violence and aims first and foremost to persuade and manipulate the victims and then to impose undesired behaviour. The women’s capacity to make decisions is mainly an illusion.

The perpetrators of grooming, when they intercept the girls, whether in person or online, describe Italy as the country of well-being and opportunities. The deception carried out by the lover boy makes it very difficult for girls (especially very young girls) to understand that they have been tricked. When they arrive in Italy, often by car or bus, they already have a bond with their abuser and the dependence increases in Italy since the man represents

the only point of reference for them on arrival (when they do not even speak the language).

The girls feel they have established a deep reciprocal loving bond and when the “prostitution proposal” arrives it is presented delicately and deceptively, as a temporary need, the only possible solution to economic problems and to the ends of subsistence, that has the function of improving the economic status of the couple. This confuses the girls who do not immediately perceive the exploitation and control that their abuser is implementing.

The sexual exploitation can occur both indoors and outdoors under continuous, constant control that can occur via telephone and through observation in the places they are forced to perform prostitution. The monitoring of the girl is not performed just by the lover boy but also by other people: sometimes there is also a hierarchy imposed between the girls and older women have to control the younger ones.

Eastern Europe women forced to work as prostitutes are free to manage only a part of the money they earn; the fact that it is not all confiscated gives them the illusion that they are free to make their own choices. Actually, the girls keep only a small part of their earnings: this means they are never autonomous and makes them precipitate even further into slavery.

Eastern European women who are trafficking victims and are exploited through forced prostitution are throughout Italy with a greater concentration on the Adriatic coast and in big cities. Many of them come from very deprived cities and socio-cultural contexts and often experience extreme poverty, violence and alcoholism from a young age.

As Lina Trovato, Deputy Public Prosecutor at the District Antimafia Department of Catania refers, some criminal organisations in **Roma communities of Romanian and Bulgarian origin** have recently been involved in human trafficking.

One of these cases has seen the presence of an association established for the purpose of labour exploitation of girls and boys (as well as adults) (destined for Italy) that are sometimes forced into prostitution. In the case of girls, furthermore, they were delivered to the heads of the organisation or used as “comfort women” to attract other people. In these cases, the criminal network promised new migrants a job, accommodation as well as female company. The idea of sexual exploitation, thus, may not be present immediately in the organisation, but it can be implemented subsequently to monetise the trafficking victim.

In these cases, clearly, criminal organisations try to engage girls from economically and socially deprived contexts with families that are absent or not very present, and can easily be silenced with some money which is useful for their survival. Once they arrive in Italy, the traffickers isolate their victims so as to limit the risk of them leaving the criminal network: even if they are allowed to contact their family by telephone, this can take place only in the presence of someone from the organisation so as to instil fear in the victim and exert psychological and material control. Many of the girls are the second and third “invisible” generation since they were born to undocumented parents who didn’t register their births. All this creates promising premises for criminal organisations both in terms of opportunities for exploitation and in terms of low management risk.

In the case of **Bulgarian young girls**, the family often plays a significant role with criminal networks: one of the two parents agrees on a sum of money with the traffickers/exploiters that take the young to Italy. Once they arrive in the new country, the young girls are put on the sex market and must send a part of the money earned to the family in their home country. In this sense, these means of engagement and exploitation are reminiscent of some stories of young Nigerians arriving in Italy with a background of family collusion with criminal organisations.

As already detailed in the last dossier Little

Invisible Slaves (Save the Children, 2021) over the past years it has emerged that children are exposed to a double form of exploitation - both labour and sexual exploitation - above all in the southern regions of Italy.

Women arriving from Eastern Europe are mainly engaged to working as caregivers or manual labourers in agriculture.

This latter work is chosen above all by mothers that cannot work as 24-hour carers because they would have to live in the regions of the elderly person they work for and could not keep their children with them.

Women work in fields for as much as 12 hours a day with no guarantees, and almost always illegally. They work in all sorts of weather conditions being paid less than 20 Euros a day and under constant control.

In addition to these degrading and extremely tiring working conditions, the women are sexually abused by their bosses who blackmail them, threatening to fire them or even take it out on their children (denying them food and water or refusing to take them to school).

## THE STORY

### NICOLETA

Nicoleta is 18 and has been known by the anti-trafficking body since she was 12. Her family, composed of her father, mother and other smaller children, decided to try to escape the labour exploitation in the fields and try, with the help of the anti-trafficking body, to build a better life. After a lot of work, however, the girl's father decided to return to the fields and to take the family with him. The man was violent to his wife and children and every decision he makes is law: thus the whole family is forced to leave the education, training and empowerment path which they began thanks to the support of the anti-trafficking body, and return to the life of work and deprivation that the rural area represents. Nicoleta was completely against her father's choice and in 2019 tried to leave the family to continue on her own path. She met a boy called Marian and fell in love with him. Her family was against the relationship and tried to prevent it in any way, but this time the girl is determined to oppose her father's prohibitions and, despite the great pain of having to leave her siblings (that she brought up) she decides to move into the home of Marian's family. However here the situation proves to be different from Nicoleta's expectations; the family is extremely patriarchal and the girl is continuously insulted by Marian's mother as well as by Marian himself who proves to be violent. Nicoleta at this point tries to return to her family but she is not accepted back home due to her rebellion against her father. Thus, she is forced to go back to Marian and quickly falls pregnant. After having decided to keep the baby, she continues to working in the fields until just a few weeks before her baby's birth, in conditions of complete exploitation. Having just turned 18, the girl gives birth to her child still hopeful that fatherhood will change Marian and convince him to build a life with her and the little one. Sadly, that is not what happens. As soon as the child is born, Marian, incited by his mother, begins to accuse Nicoleta that the child is not his, humiliating and insulting her. Nicoleta's pregnancy and motherhood have brought her a desire to break free, gain autonomy and to manage on her own and so she asks for help and is taken into reception facilities along with the baby that sees the father only at protected meetings. In addition to taking care of the child, the girl is sure that she must work hard to reach her objectives and is studying to achieve the certificate of completion of middle school. She has also expressed her desire to get her driving licence. Nicoleta's great need is to conciliate looking after her child and studying. The child is already attending the nursery school but just in the morning. The multidisciplinary team of the Nuovi Percorsi project has begun to follow Nicoleta's case and

has evaluated that nursery school in the afternoon would be a care tool that would allow the girl to study and reach the objectives as soon as possible to become autonomous and to free her from a family and a context which are profoundly negative and damaging, from a destiny that seems inevitable but that Nicoleta is changing thanks to her lucidity and desire to break free.

## 02.2 E-TRAFFICKING

*The e-trafficking phenomenon (digital trafficking) has become particularly established over the period of the Covid-19 emergency. It is a complex phenomenon that requires an equally complex response, with a multi-agency intervention not only at a territorial and regional level, but at a transnational level. It also requires experienced operators capable of acting in the digital world.*

E-trafficking comes under the Convention of the European Council of 2001 on cybercrime, the first international treaty on crimes committed via Internet. Given the complexity, there is no unequivocal definition. In general, we can say that the term e-trafficking (or cyber trafficking) refers to all cases of human trafficking perpetrated using computer networks, in all or one of the three elements that define trafficking (behaviour, means and purpose). In e-trafficking, traffickers can use online chat, social media, online placement agencies, counterfeit immigration assistance websites for recruiting potential victims, forums on the dark web. Also the payment of services connected to exploitation can occur through internet use, for example, with cryptocurrencies.

The pervasiveness of technologies in

everyday life and the establishment of the so-called digital trafficking scene (or e-trafficking) is increasingly tangible evidence (Antonopoulos, Baratto, Di Nicola, Diba, Martini, Papanicolaou & Terenghi, 2020) above all following the impact analysis of the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Europol, 2020; WePROTECT Global Alliance, World Childhood Foundation, Unicef, UNDOC, WHO, ITU, End Violence Against Children & UNESCO). To this regard, the first relevant datum is the increase in the presence of research originating from academic and/or institutional contexts that intend to provide empirical evidence on the phenomenon. This is without a doubt an important effort that conveys the awareness of the urgent need to dealing with this phenomenon, understanding its dynamics in greater depth and at the same time the possibility to be able to do so with the first objective data on which to base reflections and consequent operational choices.

In line with this, even the Europol report of 2021 underlines the urgent need to combat the digital business model of traffickers, recalling the EU strategy plan (2021-2025). Furthermore, the capacity of criminal networks to adapt their modus operandi quickly to the characteristics of demand is also underlined. Technology has increased their ability to practice trafficking for different types of exploitation: in addition to sexual exploitation, also labour exploitation, organ removal, forced marriages and illegal child adoption (Europol, 2021). While criminals have been able to quickly seize digital opportunities, the authorities with jurisdiction must still face different challenges in seeking to combat the phenomenon, such as obtaining strategies for

collecting essential digital evidence (Europol, 2021).

As highlighted by the new GRETA report (2022) on technology-facilitated THB<sup>25</sup>, digital technology has a significant role in two particular phases of the trafficking process: *recruitment* (facilitating the identification, placement and contact with victims) and *exploitation*. As regards the latter, as Lina Trovato, Deputy Public Prosecutor at the District Antimafia Department of Catania explains: “one of the latest trends that we have detected in relation to Nigerians is *spatial separation*. Often, we have found the exploiters in Germany while the exploited girls were in Naples. Of course, these types of tools allow for constant, immediate and truly effective control by an exploiter, without any exposure for him/her to the risk of being identified”.

In reference to the identification and recruitment strategies, there are different means which exploiters can act with: usually the favoured channels are the release of specific ads or the implementation of the so-called lover boy technique, above all in the case of girls from Eastern Europe.

In the first case, on trading websites or those set up specifically by traffickers ads for promising jobs are published (UNODC, 2020): the presence of repeated telephone numbers in different apparently unconnected ads, the lack of clear information regarding the type of job proposed, the repetition of the same images on different sites and the presence of grammatical errors with a poor standard of language (Di Nicola et. al, 2017) are all indicators of grooming ads.

The second means of engagement, where children are more easily included, regards the lover boy technique and other forms of online child grooming: in this case, the trafficker contacts their potential victim, acquiring information from their personal social media profile about hobbies, interests, family situation and friendships. Offering support and intimacy, the groomer begins to establish a trusting relationship with the victim achieving strong emotional control on them.

In these contexts, by forcing the person into sexting, they can blackmail them with the materials they possess, confirming the power over the victim. The blackmail and the use of compromising information against those they groom (above all if children) can be used as an instrument for coercion not only in the initial phases of exploitation, but also long term (GRETA, 2022). The emerging trends about sexual exploitation in different European countries (GRETA, 2022) highlight an increase in the use of live webcams and “pay-as-you-go” chat applications with a control system via the victim’s apps. Cryptocurrencies do not seem to be used vastly in human trafficking: they are preferably used to buy live streaming of child sexual abuse and buy CSEM (child sexual exploitation material) (GRETA, 2022).

In the event of labour exploitation, the evidence deriving from GRETA member States reveal that the technologies are used mainly for recruiting victims through job ads on web platforms but also on social media. To this regard, different countries have highlighted the role occupied by sites that aim to promote information exchange between migrant workers as places “favoured” by traffickers for grooming future victims. GRETA (2022) also suggests that criminals have started to use online games to get close to their potential victims.

Children are much more likely to be involved in **Online Child Sexual Exploitation** than labour exploitation through digital tools.

**The US Thorn report (2018) on the monitoring of 260 child sexual exploitation victims included in the research once they have emerged from exploitation (98% females; 2% males; 1% self-defined as “other”), shows that out of the whole sample, 84% referred**

**to have met their trafficker for the first time through face-to-face contact. However, if we look exclusively at children that started to be exploited as of 2015, only 45% declare to have had the first contact with traffickers face-to-face while 55% of children refer to having met their trafficker on the web or through an app. At the same time, within the same sample, 85% of children referred having maintained and developed the relationship with their trafficker in person spending time with him/her. Even in this case, if we look exclusively at children that have begun to be sexually exploited as of 2015, the percentage reduces from 85% to 58%. 42% declares to have used technologies as tools for staying in touch with their trafficker: out of these children, 63% had close communications using online digital environments and apps, while 25% refers having communicated with the exploiters via phone calls.**

The latter data highlight how the Dark Web is not necessarily the only environment where criminals engage with victims, but even the

most common platforms can be used to identify and exploit children (GRETA, 2022; Di Nicola et al., 2017) especially when the “lover boy” technique is used. In 2021, in Italy alone, 5,316 cases of child pornography were dealt with by the Postal Police, with an increase of 47% compared to 2020 (3,243) and 531 child victims of online grooming were reported, with a concentration of cases in the age range 10-13 (n=306) (C.N.C.P.O., 2022)<sup>26</sup>.

The social networks themselves can become an environment where the victims who have escaped criminal networks expose themselves again due to a lack of awareness of digital environment. As Laura Pensa, of Caritas Udine, reports: “even after filing a police complaint, child victims of labour exploitation continue to post their numbers and photos on Facebook, making them available to those they have reported”.

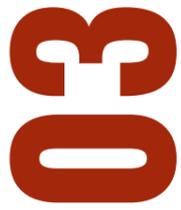
Of course, the use of tools makes identifying the perpetrators complicated because, as Lina Trovato, Deputy Public Prosecutor at the District Antimafia Department of Catania reports: “often the digital conversation takes place via telephones without SIM cards: the kids access the wireless network at some point of the city, for example near a hotel, to make a videocall. This form of communication of course makes investigations really complicated”.

Finally, we must highlight that, in line with the strategies and good practices highlighted by GRETA (2022), the same technologies can be used by anti-trafficking organisations not only for monitoring and observing the phenomenon, but also to combat it, by inhabiting digital environments in a conscious and capable manner, more and more in synergy with other professional figures such as the Postal Police. To this regard, we recall that technologies have been used in location tracking of adults and children both in the identification and emerging phases; other studies show how popular instant messaging systems (Telegram, Whatsapp, Viber...) can be used with the aim of facilitating the engagement of potential victims through informal remote legal support services or in the orientation of primary (health) care

services (Milivojevic, Moore, & Segrave, 2020). At the same time, the use of technologies can be promoted also in prevention and community awareness-raising actions: for example, the experience of some ethical consumption apps (Buycott, Good On You,

Shop Ethical!) established to combat labour trafficking are useful for analysing the legality of the production chain of consumer goods, including foodstuffs (Limoncelli, 2020).





# RISKS AND CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE COURSE OF THE VICTIMS' LIVES WHEN THEY LEAVE RECEPTION FACILITIES (RE-TRAFFICKING)

The increase of trafficking victims falling back into exploitation networks is worrying. The economic crisis, excessive bureaucracy that characterises the paths of integration and the marginalisation they experience (often ghettos or degraded suburbs) facilitate the victims' falling back into the same or other forms of exploitation, with a devastating impact on personal life plans that brings with it disappointment, failure and mistrust that another life is possible.

While we have precious monitoring data on human trafficking that makes it possible to estimate the extent and the respective characteristics, sadly, in Italy we have no quantitative follow-up evaluation on the effectiveness of protection paths. The interviews that we performed with partner anti-trafficking experts and Save the Children operators allowed us to track some scenarios that regard children and single-parent families

*trafficking. I know cases of girls who have fallen back into it this way".*

In other circumstances, disregarding re-trafficking, as Francesca De Masi, BeFree, explains, some girls: *"after leaving reception facilities, may fall into violent relationships where there is no equality or reciprocity, and the man exercises great control over them. That is why it is necessary to help them find places to process their emotions"*.

Of course, in these cases the challenge for operators is to manage to develop a significant relationship with those staying in the reception facilities so that they can continue to be the point of reference they turn to, above all in situations where there is a strong risk of re-trafficking or violence for girls.

In the case of boy victims of **labour exploitation**, the major critical issues after leaving reception facilities are when they arrive in Italy close to turning 18: in these situations, the time available for launching an effective protection and social inclusion path is minimum and often, when they turn 18, they leave the reception facilities and go back to working in situations where they have little safeguarding.

The risk of being exploited once more in the workplace occurs also for children who, although they haven't arrived in Italy close to their 18th birthday, have not developed a social network on the territory that can support them when they leave reception facilities. Above all when turning 18, the strong psychological pressure that they experience in connection with the need to find a stable job and accommodation, having to contribute to family budget, can be so burdensome as to implement compensating strategies such as substance or alcohol abuse or gambling.

For both boys and girls who are trafficking and/or exploitation victims, another critical issue regards the **social marginalisation and exclusion** which they are exposed to when they leave assistance and reception projects. Even when they manage to become

leaving reception facilities. Of course, where there has been good guidance in terms of work and accommodation, it is more likely that social rootedness is effective. At the same time, leaving reception facilities is a very sensitive moment where new risks can set in.

In the case of **children escaping sexual exploitation**, after-care support is required to the ends of giving continuity<sup>27</sup> to the project launched during their stay in reception facilities, and they can access the adult Reception and Integration System. In these cases, the person may accept but often life in a community context, which encompasses specific rules and procedures, is considered too difficult, so many young people decide to go to live alone abandoning the reception system. This is a risky turning point, since, as Paola Giordano, Office for Foreign Minors, Municipality of Turin explains: *"usually this is the time where a boyfriend turns up, pursuing and manipulating them; if they are a little vulnerable, as is normally the case given their age and experiences, they risk falling back into*

independent economically and in terms of living conditions, the low level of social inclusion still remains to be tackled. This could also be connected to the fact that the protection systems in which they are embedded work a lot in terms of individual empowerment but less on a community participation level. The possibilities of acting

inclusively with all social actors (beneficiaries, citizens, organisations) by engaging the communities themselves could facilitate the activation of informal “bottom-up” projects or networks capable of supporting the girl/ boy also when they have left the reception facilities.



## 04

# SAVE THE CHILDREN'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT THE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

In order to protect children and young victims of trafficking and exploitation, Save the Children has launched over the recent years specific, differentiated pathways to try to meet their needs, guaranteeing their protection and safeguard. Hereinafter are the main projects developed across Italy.

## Nuovi Percorsi

From spring 2021, Save the Children decided to launch the project Nuovi Percorsi (New Pathways) to meet the worsening of the vulnerabilities and marginalisation of mothers who were former victims of trafficking and exploitation, in particular for those who are

each family, based on the activation of CARE TOOLS aimed at facilitating the mother's autonomy and healthy paths of growth for the children.

In the first 12 months since its launch, the project Nuovi Percorsi provided support for **114 families** achieving **403 beneficiaries** including 213 children, 143 mothers and 47 fathers.

The support directed at bodies was methodological, with consulting and orientation while **187 CARE TOOLS** were activated for families regarding one or more of the following actions: **Support for positive parenting; Psychosocial support and consulting for mothers and/or children; Conciliation measures for mothers; Accompaniment to work autonomy; Support and accompaniment in autonomous living for the family; Specific educational support for children; Material support for children.**

alone in managing the care of their children. This project was launched in synergy with the Freephone Anti-trafficking Helpline, set up by the Department of Equal opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and entails the involvement and the collaboration of anti-trafficking bodies across Italy together with other territorial bodies, both of the public and private social sphere.

The project Nuovi Percorsi is based on a **multidisciplinary, culture sensitive** approach, focusing all support on the **well-being of the child and the mother**, also through actions that favour the **mother's self-determination** beginning with her direct, intentional, conscious involvement. The project team supports case handling by the anti-trafficking body in an integrated, holistic manner, outlining a specific path for

The support mechanisms described have fostered positive circular processes and an increase in family's autonomy; the specific educational pathways for children have improved their socialisation and Italian language learning capacities and at the same time have made the mothers free to take on challenges, initiating pathways to employment and also beginning personal growth that has led inevitably to an improvement in the mother/child relationship.

Furthermore, since 2022, the project Nuovi Percorsi attempts to meet the empowerment needs of female child victims of trafficking and exploitation, through its collaboration with the Italian anti-trafficking system.

## Nuovi Percorsi Rome experiment

In the course of 2022, as a consequence to the positive outcome of the national project Nuovi Percorsi, the idea was born to launch a support desk for vulnerable families, who are victims or at risk of trafficking and exploitation in the city of Rome. The project has been active since June 2022 and is directed at meeting the needs of extremely vulnerable women and families, that require “accompaniment to services” which are often difficult to access for foreign women coming from the world of exploitation.

**Nuovi Percorsi Rome**, thus aims to create a network of territorial welfare with all the services intended to support mothers with children in vulnerable situations. The network

is constructed starting with the optimisation of the infant networks already present in the city of Rome, to ensure concrete protection for children, safeguarding and listening for their mothers, favouring access to support services and preventing the risk of trafficking, exploitation and re-trafficking.

The project provides counselling, mediation and accompaniment to services, as well as legal support and psychosocial and educational consulting. The methodology used focuses on the needs and resources of the individual mothers and their children, favouring the empowerment of the family and the enhancement of the mother’s educational and parenting skills.

## Project “Liberi dall’invisibilità”

Since January 2022, Save the Children’s project “Liberi dall’invisibilità” (Free from invisibility) has been running in the province of Ragusa with the aim of contributing to the restoration of the childhood and adolescent rights of exploited minors or children of exploited women and men in the area known as Fascia Trasformata. The objective is to promote a context of growth and protection for children, along with other organizations in the area and partners Cooperativa Proxima, I Tetti Colorati and Caritas Diocesi of Ragusa.

The Fascia Trasformata lies in the province of Ragusa, within an 80km radius including the municipalities of Santa Croce Camerina, Vittoria, Acate, Ispica, Scicli, Pozzallo and Comiso. The territory is mainly inhabited by women, men and many children originating from Romania, Tunisia, Morocco and Albania. The children and their families live in a rural context, lacking in essential services, related to healthcare, education, public transport and poor housing conditions.

The project aims to guarantee a way out of invisibility, to improve the living conditions of children and their families, favour a way out of marginalisation, access to education, training and work and also promote wellbeing and healthy development opportunities. The project intervenes in the municipalities of Vittoria and Marina di Acate through the creation of two Centres, one dedicated to educational and recreational activities and the other dedicated to families and intended to provide guidance on healthcare for mothers and children, legal support and school enrolment for children.

In its first trimester alone, from March to May 2022, 70 beneficiaries were reached (of whom 32 adults and 38 children) with guidance activities in health care and paediatrics, legal advice for the registry and information for the compulsory school enrolment for their children who unfortunately have not started school to date.

## Project Vie d’Uscita

In 2012, Save the Children launched the project **Vie d’Uscita** (Exit Ways), aimed at the identification and emergence of trafficking victims by activating pathways to escape from the trafficking networks for the purpose of sexual and/or labour exploitation and which provide assistance towards achieving economic and social autonomy.

The project is developed along three operational axes:

1. Emergence and exit from trafficking and exploitation.
2. Autonomy: Psycho-social/health care/legal support; Empowerment and activities of economic and social self-determination; Work and housing orientation.
3. Support connected to the consequences caused by COVID-19.

The project is implemented in Lazio, Veneto, Piedmont, Marche and Abruzzo, along with Equality Cooperativa Sociale, PIAM Onlus, Comunità dei Giovani, Società Cooperativa Sociale On the Road and Cooperativa CivicoZero.

Street activities and indoor interception are carried out, followed by personalised interventions for evaluation, counselling (legal, psychological, health care), orientation (for work/education and housing), follow up and activation of interventions through the network, intended to achieve the victim’s economic, social and housing autonomy. Finally, from 2020, the project also focused on supporting children and young people that have been further marginalised and discriminated against due to the pandemic, providing them with material support and information.

In 2021 there were 538 beneficiaries of the project Vie d’Uscita including children and new adults. 94% of them were women and girls, of whom 45% were Nigerian and 43% Romanian, and the remaining 12% from other nationalities (including Moldova, Bulgaria, Albania and Senegal). Transgender kids (from North Africa, Sub Saharan Africa, Bangladesh and Pakistan) and people (from Latin America) totalled around 6% of those supported. Around 2.9% were children.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above evidence reported, Save the Children conveys the following recommendations:

## To the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council:

1. Monitor child trafficking and exploitation, facilitating accessibility and consultation of updated data at European level and at individual state level and guaranteeing transnational, multi-agency cooperation.
2. In the context of the reforms to the Pact on Asylum and Migration:
  - adopt policies directed at ensuring the full protection of unaccompanied minors at external and internal borders of the European Union and on member state territories;
  - provide for a relocation framework which is attentive to the needs of children and goes beyond the current Dublin system also preventing secondary movement between member states that put children at the border at risk;
  - establish an independent rights monitoring system at internal and external borders also in order to prevent and identify trafficking and exploitation at an early stage.

## To the Government and territorial bodies:

1. Close the approval phase and immediately implement the National Anti-trafficking Plan, with particular reference to the measures dedicated to child victims.
2. Guarantee independent monitoring of rights of children at territorial borders and the presence of teams with *child protection* competences in border areas, with a view to early identification of children at risk and the appropriate handling of their cases.
3. Ensure accurate age determination to avoid the risk that children at risk of trafficking and exploitation are wrongly identified as adults based on the declarations they made as ordered by traffickers or incorrect identification procedures, with a consequent increase in risks for them. To this end,

guaranteeing the dissemination to the institutions involved in identification of the July 2020 Multidisciplinary Protocol for Age Determination and providing appropriate staff training for those involved in this work.

4. Strengthen monitoring tools and knowledge of e-trafficking and indoor exploitation, involving national, supranational, and international institutions and independent organisations active in child protection and supporting quanti-qualitative research on these matters and training courses.
5. Define a dedicated intake system for mothers victims and their children, supported by the allocation of adequate resources to ensure effective support for women and their children, involving anti-trafficking bodies, public agencies and independent organisations active in child protection.
6. Increase the number of cultural mediators in the public prosecutor's office, the social services, and other public offices.
7. Promote within schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, actions and training activities on trafficking and serious exploitation of children, also through child-friendly tools.
8. Train social and health workers that meet potential trafficking victims in the transcultural approach to managing the relationships with children in reception facilities and mother-child families.
9. Launch specific assistance courses for mothers (pre- and post-natal) in order to support trafficked mothers and their children during reception.
10. Increase territorial social inclusion and active participation actions for young people in reception systems.



# APPENDIX

**Focus on unaccompanied male foreign minors and the risks of exploitation.**

Children arriving in Italy, in particular if arriving alone, without families or an adult of reference who can safeguard and care for them, risk becoming easy prey to exploiters and traffickers even when they have been taken into the reception system. Looking at the data on foreign unaccompanied minors provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (updated in May 2022), while 64.2% of young people leave reception systems when they turn 18, a significant percentage equal to 25.6% leave structures of their own accord while we have no information for 10.2%. These data are very interesting because they could regard children that fall into the illegal market or illegal work, falling into networks of traffickers or exploiters. As regards those who leave reception structures of their own accord, we know from Save the Children operators that the young people leave the children's homes because they get news from networks of their compatriots that incite them to go to big cities such as Milan or Rome, offering them illegal

work. As Save the Children operators report, this is a situation that regards mainly foreign unaccompanied minors. Of these children, observing the data of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2022), we know that there is a high percentage of young people coming from Egypt (16.6% in April 2022), from Bangladesh (12.3% in April 2022) and also from Tunisia (8.6% in April 2022).

We held some focus groups and semi-structured interviews with anti-trafficking and child protection operators from Save the Children to take a detailed look at their stories. The information dealt with during these meetings were integrated with that emerging from interviews performed with external interlocutors.

## Children of Egyptian origin

As regards children of Egyptian origin arriving in Italy in the first trimester of 2022, arrivals were mainly from the cities of Gharbeya, Asyut, al-Minya and al-Manufiyya. Save the Children operators noted a reduction in the ages of children arriving compared to previous years: in addition to 17-year-olds, there was also a high presence of 14- and 15-year-olds. The latter arrive in Italy reporting having experienced poverty and the need to economically support their family of origin, to the extent that they had been motivated to leave their homeland and attempt to improve their living conditions and those of their loved ones. Once arrived in Italy they try to reach the network of compatriots, relatives, friends and acquaintances, already present on the territory and able to offer them a job, that however turns out not to have any contractual safeguards.

Some Egyptian children involved in child exploitation in Italy, have sadly been victims

of child labour in their homelands, involved in afternoon labour after school, in the countryside or in family businesses or have been employed during the summer. In virtue of this early work, the children arriving in Italy have no awareness of the risks connected to labour and do not know or are badly informed about the safeguarding mechanisms that can protect them.

Egyptian children immediately demonstrate the intention to find a job quickly so as to be able to help their families of origin, feeling the burden and responsibility of their migratory duty. In Italy, they immediately stop being children, invested with an onerous commitment and pressurized by the priority and need to pay back the debt. They live lonely lives, because they are only apparently surrounded by acquaintances and "friends". They however have a strong national network of adults that await them in Italy with well-defined paths: "this aspect, while it does not

safeguard against labour exploitation, remains a factor of protection from falling into illegal economies, in particular, regarding drug dealing” (as emerged from the focus groups held in the research phase). The exploitation network becomes their main point of reference, to the extent that the integration project devised in the reception structures is not considered seriously by the kids who feel they can manage without following an inclusion pathway. Concentrated on their work, they have little mental space and time to be able to take care of themselves, have little time to relax and socialise with their peers and this issue generates problems and distress.

The urgent need to find a job in a very short time clearly exposes them to accepting illegal work or partially illegal jobs with few safeguarding mechanisms. This results in internal conflicts regarding the need to earn immediately and the possibility of accessing the Italian safeguarding system that clearly implies longer times connected with bureaucracy and training courses as well as worker-company matching which is not always immediate. The urgent need to start working prevents them from dedicating time and energy to learning Italian.

Those who do not access reception facilities end up experiencing precarious conditions and live in small overcrowded apartments. These difficult living conditions affect the children’s

emotional state as they feel pressured by duty and frustrated by their powerlessness, and cannot see alternatives to illegal work so they feel trapped in a condition that is hard for them to escape. In some situations where they have no accommodation, they may stay on the streets, but these are a minority of cases.

Often, when the child chooses to be taken in by the reception systems and follow inclusion pathways, the family continues to pressure them so that they continue to send money. All this contributes to the child’s choice to take on a job rather than inclusion courses. Children have difficulty demonstrating to family members that an integration course could be useful for a better future in Italy and indeed they feel crushed by the guilt of having to contribute and pay off the debt that the family has accessed to allow them to travel.

When they then turn 18, they are extremely subordinated to exploiters, creating a real dependency. Most of those who have recently turned 18 live in accommodations owned by their employer so they have no room for a private life, since they are forced to work 7 days a week, for at least 15 hours per day.

They mostly work in general markets or grocer’s shops, in restaurants, car-washes, in the construction field or, once they turn 18, in cleaning companies.

## The journey and the debt

The journey costs between 4000 and 15000 Euros depending on whether the Balkan route - which is more expensive and longer - or the Mediterranean route is taken.

During their stay in Libya, these teenagers are subject to physical violence, maltreated and beaten, controlled by people who are armed that instil fear and exercise intense psychological pressure on them. They stay in Libya for a short period, a maximum of a

month, in extremely difficult conditions, with little access to food and water. Some of them choose to go back and do not pursue the Mediterranean route, preferring the Balkan one, others decide not to leave anymore.

Unlike Sub-Saharan children and young people, Egyptian kids report not having been subject to atrocious violence, because the trafficker that organised the trip seemed to come from the same village as the child and seemed

scared of the repercussions by family members informed of the violence.

An emerging route sees children and young people leave via plane towards Turkey with a tourist visa, where they begin a journey by sea on fishing boats that bring them to Italy, often Calabria. The kids that follow this route arrive in Italy without passports, because the traffickers keep them to earn more money,

to then send them to the country of destination. For this route, the kids pay between 10,000 and 15,000 Euros, in addition to the costs of having their passport sent which costs from 500 to 700 Euros. To pay back this huge debt, as reported by Save the Children operators, children often carry out 2 or 3 jobs at the same time, without any contract and intensely exploited by their employers.

## Children of Bangladeshi origin

As the above data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies updated on 30 April 2022 report, 12.3% of foreign unaccompanied minors come from Bangladesh. These are kids who are not necessarily engaged in their homeland by criminal organisations that manage human trafficking. Within particularly deprived family contexts, where children contribute to the family economy from a young age, the family chooses to send the child to Europe to have an extra income<sup>28</sup>. Usually the family makes huge debt to be able to get the child to Italy and subsequently when they have reached the new country, in order to pay off this debt, children find themselves increasingly forced to work in inhumane conditions. In some cases, young people were registered by Save the Children operators as living near the field where they worked in a natural cave.

The hardship of these children begins well before they arrive in Italy: the journey is long and full of traumatic experiences, they are

exposed to forms of physical and sometimes sexual violence and are subject to labour exploitation also during the route towards Europe.

Laura Pensa, of Caritas Udine, refers the presence of serious exploitation where: “there is intense daily control. The children are transported with the employer’s vehicles and moreover on peripheral, unpaved roads precisely to make it even difficult for them to understand where they are working. And then they are also controlled in their accommodation where they receive or do not receive the necessary food. They live in degrading conditions and obviously do not get any legal information”.

Of course, there are situations with more freedom of movement too: although there is daily labour exploitation, the kids are allowed to go back to their own accommodation alone, especially when they are staying in places they have found by themselves.

## Children of Tunisian origin

There has been a reduction in the age of children arriving compared to previous years: many kids are 14-year-olds but there are also more 12- and 11-year-olds. Children that do not have a strong social network in Italy are much more exposed to the risk of labour exploitation and illegal work. As regards the origin, there is a high flow from Mahdia and Sfax; very few come from the area near the capital Tunis.

Usually children of Tunisian origin come from very poor family contexts, not only in economic but also in cultural terms and from the point of view of educational resources. Sometimes their stories tell of separation from their parents and losing the adult figures who can take care of them in their lives. Many families of these children have been affected by the economic crisis connected to the Covid-19 pandemic: due to the restrictions between States, the tourism sector has experienced serious difficulties and many young people with jobs in their country in tourism found themselves suddenly without a wage. There was thus an intense impoverishment that pushed not only lone minors but also families to leave their land to seek a better future. Save the Children operators happened to meet in Lampedusa single-parent families with many children during the landings. Mothers, even older ones, who said they had lost everything.

Their arrival in Italy is a very delicate moment, especially for the so-called “ghost landings”, which are now more recorded than in past years: children land on unguarded beaches in the Agrigento area and thus they are not intercepted by the police forces; in these cases, those who arrive escape somewhere in the country, reaching different destination.

As reported by Save the Children operators, in some cases children have very serious physical or psychophysical disabilities; they present themselves with cards issued by the Ministry of Health, similar to a certificate of disability, without any specification of the diagnosis.

This certificate - according to reports - was functional in their country to go to the pharmacy and buy medicines.

Once they arrive in Italy there are different scenarios: sometimes these young people remain on the Sicilian territory, where they fall into agricultural labour exploitation, while other times they make their way towards Rome or Milan. In the first case, since there is a big community in the area of Vittoria, Scicli or Cassibile, with greenhouses for cultivation of tomatoes and vegetables, the kids are involved in agricultural labour exploitation that exposes them to isolation, marginalisation, and very hard living and working conditions. Also the area of Campobello di Mazara - where a Tunisian community has been established for some time - is a destination for these kids: in these areas, olives and grapes are harvested, so there is a strong need for labour. As regards the mechanisms of recruitment and falling into agricultural labour exploitation, in different circumstances the recruiters or employers manage to contact the kids through acquaintances or family members. In the second scenario, when the child leaves Sicily and reaches central and north Italy (in particular Rome, Milan, Turin) through “supposed friends” who offer him work with no contract, often in large markets, in catering (pizzerias and kebab shops) or in construction (on scaffolding). Unlike their Egyptian peers who aim to remain in Italy or at most to return to Egypt once they have successfully concluded their migration project, Tunisians frequently aim to go to France, where it is easier for them to integrate due to the French language that they already know. With regard to minors who remain in Italy, in general there is a great diffidence to tell about their living conditions before being taken into reception facilities. Those who do talk about it, say they stayed with compatriots, (presumed) family members or friends; very few kids sleep in the streets. It is worth noting how young people arriving in Rome, unlike their Egyptian peers, have

behind them a less structured and organised pathway by their compatriot networks. This, unfortunately, implies a greater risk for them of slipping into illegal work, such as drug dealing, because they are less exposed to social control by their own network and compatriot community (as emerged in a focus group): “it all happens in peer contact, in the sense that

when the boys start getting to know their compatriots, even through Instagram, Tik Tok... they spend time where their compatriots are and where illegal activities also take place. In these contexts they begin to follow older boys, fascinated by these leaders who are very charismatic”.



# NOTES

1. Art. 3, item a), Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, United Nations, 2000.
2. The database comprises information regarding human trafficking, categorising its purpose as follows: labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, other (e.g.: organ trafficking) and mixed types (that is when different forms of exploitation co-exist).
3. Throughout the dossier, the data referred to CTDC refer to the database updated as of 5 July 2022.
4. IOM (International Organization for Migration), Polaris, Liberty Shared, A21 and OTSH (Observatorio do tráfico de seres humanos).
5. The percentage refers to the data in absolute value which the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative reported divided by gender (n=14,283).
6. The percentage refers to the data in absolute value which the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative reported divided by gender (n=4,738) percentage refers to the data which the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative managed to gather complete information for.
7. UNICEF, ILO (2022) Prospects for children in 2022. A global outlook, available at the link: <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/2471/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2022.pdf>
8. The percentage refers to the data which the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative managed to gather complete information for.
9. For a comprehensive definition of "serious efforts" see the USA report 2021 which lists the 12 criteria for judging human trafficking prevention and combating system actions.
10. This tool allows for rapid communication and information exchange regarding criminal networks between Europol, member states and third countries.
11. As regards the number of people that were assessed as actual trafficking victims.
12. The anti-trafficking system includes victims whose cases are being handled as all those people whose case has been handled for at least one day as part of the 21 anti-trafficking projects active in Italy during 2021. For this reason, the data available can be provisional and subject to change.
13. Specifically, the Freephone Number refers that the data reported for children refer to people aged below 18 when they emerged and began to receive assistance.
14. Said data is owed to the fact that many of the potential victims are directed to evaluation interviews before being taken into protection. Also, the low percentage of emergency assistance is connected to the fact that not all victims taken into protection access through the Freephone Number, but through other channels that are more familiar to them (for example, contact with street units and respective operators).
15. The first National Action Plan covered the two-year period 2016-2018.
16. The problem of filing a police complaint is connected not only to sexual exploitation, but also to persons trafficked for labour exploitation.
17. The report presents the results on women victims of modern slavery (including sex trafficking) based on the figures of the GSI (2018).
18. The interviews and data of the present dossier were obtained in the two-month period May-June 2022.
19. Paola Giordano and Cinzia Bragagnolo.
20. The piece of physical land on which the woman/girl is prostituted.
21. It should be noted that the agreements with anti-trafficking organisations for the care of victims do not provide for the payment of fees for children but only for their mothers.
22. This scenario regards not only Nigerian women but also girls and women from Eastern Europe.
23. Save the Children has been present in Ventimiglia since 2018 to guarantee support, protection and immediate assistance to unaccompanied minors and families in transit in the city. Since December 2020, Save the Children and UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, have joined forces to provide an immediate response to the essential and basic needs of children and adolescents, their families and single women in arrival and in transit. Among the interventions there is also a specific action for the victims of gender-based violence.
24. These lover boys are often their compatriots and are part of a racket that aims at grooming young women to increase their sexual exploitation networks in Italy, mainly managed by Albanian criminal organisations.
25. The summary report and recommendations provide reflections emerging from qualitative and quantitative research performed on 40 states, 12 NGOs and 2 technology companies.
26. For more comprehensive information to this regard, please see the dossier "online child sexual abuse", available at the link: <https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/labuso-sessuale-online-danno-di-minori-il-dossier.pdf>
27. This is a measure provided for by the Juvenile court for young people who have turned 18 to the ends of guaranteeing them the right to continue to be guided in the integration path they are on until they reach 21 years of age.
28. As refers Cinzia Bragagnolo of the project Navigare.



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