

## **TRIPS Project: Good practice on the identification of victims of trafficking during the procedure for the recognition of international protection in Italy**

*Since 2020, the European project TRIPS examines how to ensure tailored support for trafficked international protection beneficiaries in relation to the integration process, taking into account their specific needs and their vulnerable situation. As part of the research and analysis activities led the partner countries, the Italian identification procedure of victims of human trafficking appears as a promising practice.*

Italy is a country of destination but also of transit of the routes identified by criminal organisations dedicated to trafficking. This phenomenon has taken on particularly relevant measure and is closely connected to migration flows arriving by sea or across land borders. The available data show that for a long time the main country of origin of potential victims of trafficking arriving in Italy was Nigeria (approximately 80% of the total), but more recently there has been an increase in the number of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and, to a lesser extent, domestic exploitation of women from the Ivory Coast, but also an increase in cases of labour exploitation of minors. According to an IOM report in 2019, the percentage of men and women arriving from Ivory Coast was reversed compare to the past (37% men and 46% women). Looking at the data reported by the Department for Equal Opportunities, where the cases actually taken in charge are recorded, it turns out that 78% are of Nigerian origin, followed by Romania with 2.2%, Bangladesh with 2%, Ivory Coast 1.9% and Morocco 1.5%.

In Italy, a procedure for the identification of victims of trafficking is in place and can be carried out in any circumstances. This article will focus on the identification and referral in the framework of the international protection procedure. In the Italian context, it has been noted that "preliminary" or "informal" identification can be carried out before the interview before the Territorial Commission, the determining authorities in charge of assessing the asylum application in the context of the submission of the application for international protection at the Police Headquarters or, again, in the reception centres. In this event, several actors, in particular operators working in the accommodation system, refer to specialised entities in assisting victims of trafficking. However, this practice should be encouraged as it anticipates the referral procedure promoting an early identification of potential victims of trafficking among persons seeking international protection. In other cases, however, it is the Territorial Commission itself that may have to carry out a preliminary identification thanks to the examination of the file and especially during the individual interview. It can detect the first useful indicators to reasonably believe that the asylum seeker may be a victim of trafficking or is at risk of becoming one.

This first identification by the Territorial Commission is functional to the referral of the presumed victims of trafficking to qualified operators of the anti-trafficking system for the adoption of any measures that may be necessary in the short term. Moreover, following the formal identification, it can facilitate the adoption of adequate measures of protection, assistance and social integration provided for victims of trafficking. Furthermore, sufferings and traumas resulting from the experiences of trafficking require adequate interventions that are not necessarily (only) attributable to the activities of anti-trafficking entities. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the Territorial Commissions are able to identify the specific needs that survivors of such experiences may have, in order to refer them, with their consent, to specialised services. These needs are not always disclosed, since the traumatic experience is often a source of shame or even of grave suffering to the extent that it is removed. It is necessary to facilitate the emergence of specific needs for timely access to specialised services for each of them. Therefore, when such needs are identified, the Territorial Commissions inform the applicants about the relevant services available in the territory through dedicated information material.

Following the information, it will be possible for the applicants, subject to their informed consent, to be supported in using the specialised services, which may be different according to the needs of the person: gynaecological clinic and, generally speaking, services for the protection of sexual and reproductive health, anti-violence centres and facilities, mental health services or, where existing, services specifically dedicated to victims of torture. Since these are complex issues, the person may need to be taken care of by different professionals, even after obtaining international protection status. Both at European and national level, the obligations of States and the provisions to be implemented for asylum seekers and persons enjoying international protection are laid down. Member States are obliged to identify and assess the specific needs of the applicant and to take them into account in the provisions on reception conditions.

In Italy, these obligations are enshrined in Legislative Decree 142/2015, implementing the Reception Directive, which in its Article 17 (Reception of persons with special needs) provides that victims of trafficking are vulnerable persons and that their specific situation must be taken into account. It is of utmost importance that a victim of trafficking who has been identified and taken in charge can continue to be supported in the recognition of the international protection and subsequently in the integration process. It is important that services are able to identify and adequately respond to the specific needs of the trafficked person. During the TRIPS project, thanks to the interviews carried out with privileged stakeholders, it emerged very clearly that beneficiaries of international protection who are victims of trafficking need to be able to rely on qualified operators and on specialised intervention.

On the basis of CIR experience, we believe that the guidelines on ["Identification of victims of trafficking on applicants for international protection and referral procedures"](#) published by UNHCR together with the National Commission for the Right of Asylum are an effective tool to facilitate and put in place a procedure not only for the identification in the terms described above, but because they provide support also in the following phase of the recognition of the international protection status. Moreover, it promotes the intervention of the network supporting the person who will later benefit from specialised services. The guidelines represent, in CIR opinion, a good practice implemented in Italy since 2016 and that can be of inspiration in other national contexts.

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