



TOLERANT

Support Victims of Human Trafficking

TOLERANT: Transnational network for Employment integration of women victims of trafficking

Newsletter No5

May 2021

TOLERANT is a transnational network aiming to support the regular exchange of good practices, experiences and information related to ground work for integrating women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (VoT) in employment and for promoting their economic empowerment.

THIS EDITION OF THE NEWSLETTER IS DEVOTED TO THE DIRECT WORK WITH VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

At the end of March 2021, the TOLERANT project officially came to its end. However, the end of a project does not mean the end of its activities. In our case, partners in Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Romania continue providing integrated services for labour integration to third-country-national victims of trafficking. The TOLERANT project still exists also via the TOLERANT network which gathers more and more members.

Direct work with victims of trafficking is at the basis of all our activities. Thanks to the TOLERANT project we developed a methodology for the provision of an integrated service to support access to employment for third-country-national women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The Manual on integrated services can be downloaded [here](#) (EN, IT, GR, BG, RO, DE)

The integrated services take into account the specific situation of third-country-national women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and the difficulties and challenges they face every day, namely:

- Trauma consequences
- Lack of language knowledge
- Lack of recognition of qualifications
- Difficulties to find skilled jobs
- Cultural and gender barriers
- Children dependent on women VoT
- Discrimination and stigma
- Safety and security

Human-rights and victim-centered approaches are the leading values of our work. They are realized by applying the following work principles:

- Unconditional assistance and protection for the women VoT
- Do no harm
- Safety and security
- Protection against re-victimization
- Data confidentiality and protection
- Protection against discrimination
- Protection of interest of women VoT
- Participation of the women VoT in decision-making regarding their protection/ assistance
- Objective information about their rights
- Emotional support and respect for the individual experience of trauma

PROJECT PARTNERS



Funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union

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► What we achieved

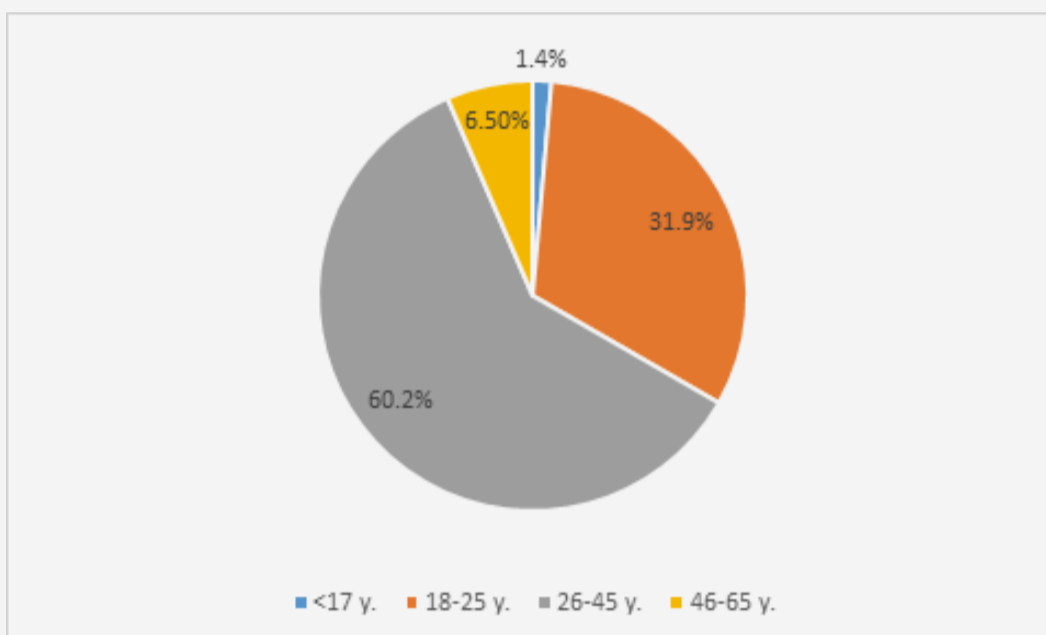
280 women were supported by the TOLERANT project

We are happy that we were able to support many women in a very difficult situation. The Covid-19 restrictions caused serious challenges in implementing the integrated services. Security measures made it difficult to reach the beneficiaries. Face-to-face sessions and training classes moved online. This was a major obstacle to some women who lack technological skills, devices, or reliable internet connection. Building a trusting relationship with them also required further efforts. Covid-19 had a very negative influence on the labour market in Europe and deepened the vulnerabilities of the migrant women even further. In many cases finding a job was mission impossible for the victims.

Our teams worked with devotion and flexibility and put a lot of additional effort into restructuring the program and minimizing the negative effects of the pandemic. Not all beneficiaries were able to find a job. Nevertheless, they all gained valuable knowledge and tools that will help them integrate into the labor market more easily.

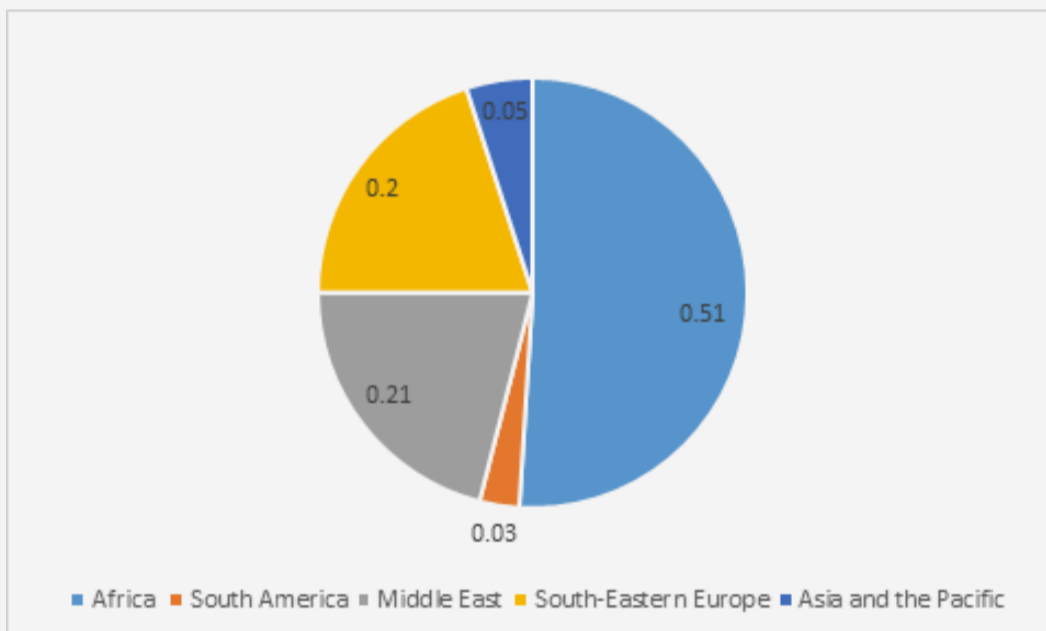
Age

Most of our clients were women in their late adolescence and early youth up to their mid 40s. Respectively, this is the age group most affected by trafficking and exploitation. The majority of the beneficiaries in all countries were between 18-25 and 26-45.



Origin

The majority of the beneficiaries originate from different states in Africa followed by those from the Middle East and South-Eastern Europe.



The highest number of women are from Nigeria (25% of all beneficiaries), followed by Syria in second place (10%), and Ukraine in third place (6%).

Forms of exploitation

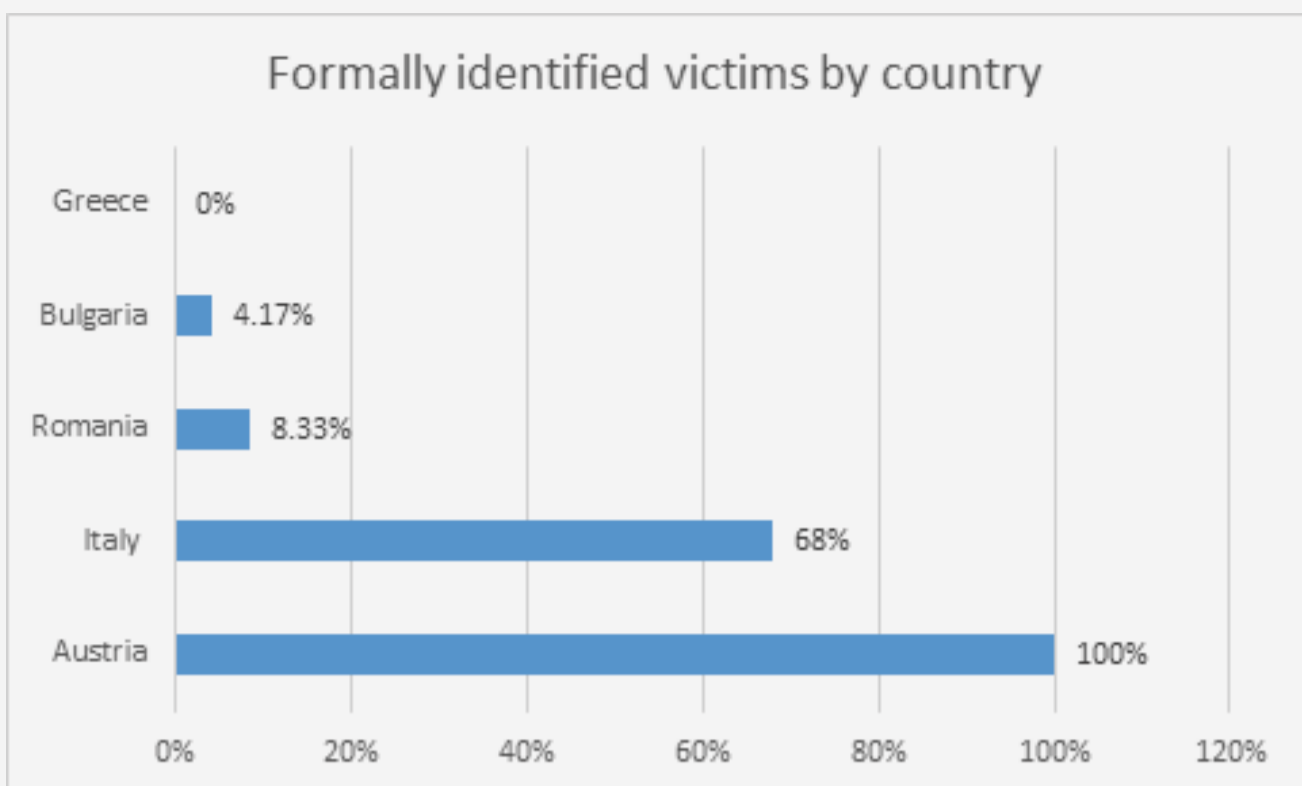
The majority of women supported by the project in all countries were victims of sexual exploitation (over 60%). Many of them shared they had been victims of several forms of exploitation such as sexual, labour, forced marriage, forced begging or repeated rape.

A lot of women we supported were at high risk of trafficking due to unemployment, not knowing the local language, lack of labour experience, complex family situation, isolation, financial dependency and domestic violence, emotional instability, untreated psychological trauma, lack of access to child care, lack of primary education (at least), lack of housing, lack of basic income, lack of social skills, lack of cultural adaptation to the country of stay, etc.

Type of identification

Around 40% of the women beneficiaries were formally identified as victims of trafficking. The type of identification depends upon the country, the local context and procedures, as well as the work of local institutions.

- In Greece, none of the beneficiaries were formally recognised as VoT;
- In Bulgaria, only 2 women from third countries were formally recognised as VoT;
- In Romania, there were five formally identified VoT;
- In Italy, the majority (68%) of the beneficiaries were formally identified;
- In Austria, all services were provided to formally identified women VoT.



There is a clear tendency that victims' identification would fail in the countries that are external borders to the EU (Greece and Bulgaria) or are seen by migrants as transit countries (Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania). The reasons are complex:

- Institutions fail to proactively identify Victims of Trafficking among refugees and migrants; the procedures are short, the time for communication is not enough to build a trusting relationship and this does not allow going deeper into the traumatic experience.
- Victims do not want to be identified out of fear of being detained or deported; they do not want to take part in complex criminal proceedings they have no control over; they do not want to delay their journey to Western Europe; they are concerned to share their traumatic experience in a new and unknown environment; they are ashamed and afraid they will be excluded from their community, etc.

Services provided

Depending upon the individual needs of each victim, the following services, included in the **TOLERANT Guide**, were provided:

1. Counselling and/or informal group sessions to get to know women VoT and to build a supportive environment
2. Individual first orientation session to assess the needs
3. Assessment of employment desires and expectations
4. Setting up the objectives of the individual **integration** plan together with the woman
5. Assessment of job skills
6. Assessment of language skills
7. Assessment of media literacy
8. Assessment of soft skills
9. Assessment of the need for additional qualification and education opportunities
10. Advising on labour market's function
11. Accompanying in the job search process
12. Information on social business start-ups or micro-enterprises
13. Referral to other services and training courses

Tailor-made, immediate, and unconditional support was provided to all women in need. The needs, desires, dreams, and qualifications of each woman were matched with the available opportunities aiming at providing them with the best possible support and help. A big part of the women also benefited from other services provided by project partners - safe accommodation in a shelter, psychological counseling, social support, legal counseling, and legal aid.

► In Greece:

The team of KMOP supported 50 women.

The services we provided were building a CV, writing cover letters, creating email accounts, referrals to other organizations if needed, job seeking, communication with potentially employers, engaging with social network and psychoeducation in effective communication through role playing and scenarios. Language barriers, the pandemic and the multiple vulnerabilities of the beneficiaries (including the inability to meet the basic needs) were among the main challenges our team faced.

Therefore, basic needs should be covered prior to the women's participation in relevant projects and programmes, while solutions could be offered to some of the common challenges, such as the lack of available child care services that would permit women to participate in the service provision. Finally, there is a need for bigger and more long-term funding from the EU/State to support such interventions in order to create the necessary conditions for larger impact in the community.

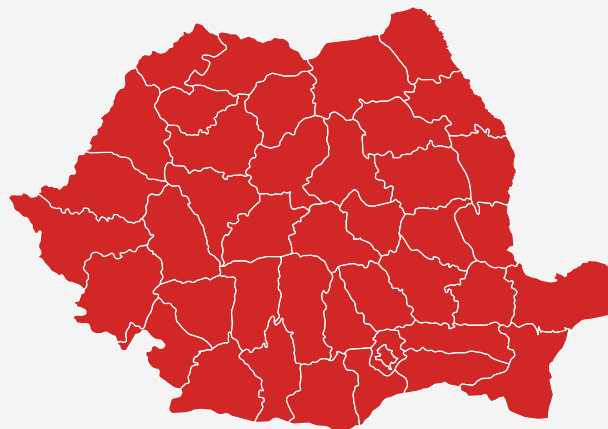


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► In Romania:

The team of AIDRom supported **60** women

Although the Romanian legislation generously provides access to assistance and protection services, in practice the number of beneficiaries was low compared to the number of victims identified every year. The reasons for this are generally the lack of proper collaboration between institutions, poor information of victims on their rights and the procedures to follow according to the law.



Within the project TOLERANT, specialized protection and assistance services were provided at the counselling centre AIDROM, in the protected apartment of another NGO, (ADPARE) in the shelter for asylum seekers (AIDROM) and/or in the community,

The protection and assistance interventions were addressed in a flexible way, customized to the needs of victims. Specifically, this way of working is advocating deinstitutionalization, actively involving the victim in decision making on her/his own path of social reintegration

Within the TOLERANT project the services consisted of vocational counselling, education on labour rights, job searching support, mediation of relations with professional coaching service providers, emotional support in finding and maintaining a job, Information on the local labour market, support for social business start-up/micro enterprises;

During the project development a lot of women managed to get a job. Unfortunately, due the pandemic with COVID 19, a large number of beneficiaries already existing in the program have faced material and psychological problems, and have requested additional help from AIDROM and partners (extra food, protection materials, individual psychological counselling and in some cases individual psychotherapy.

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► In Italy:

The teams of DD and CESIE supported 72 women (respectively 50 in Rome and 22 in Palermo).



All the activities carried out by DD and CESIE during the project were implemented in accordance with women's needs, desires and vulnerabilities. Trafficked women received personalised support in order to facilitate their access to the Italian labour market through counselling and orientation activities as well as interview simulations and specific sessions aimed at enhancing their IT/digital competences and soft skills. Women were encouraged and empowered to pursue education and qualifications that provide them with access to labour sectors that go beyond low skilled jobs in the care and domestic industry which risk perpetuating vulnerabilities and victimisation.

In addition to the devastating impact of the Covid-19, our teams had to deal with structural and systemic barriers as residency issues, demonstration and recognition of previous work experience and qualifications, hindering women's and girl's empowerment and social integration. Besides this, the lack of decent job and training opportunities together with the poor knowledge of the Italian language and, in some cases, the difficulties faced during the lockdown (due to women's inability to get access to Internet or electronic devices) represented the main challenges experienced by our teams in Rome and Palermo.

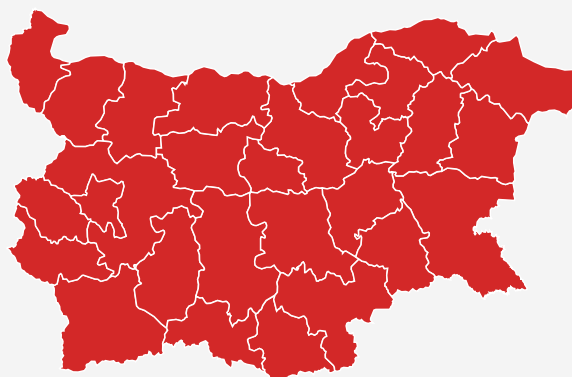
In this regard, the labour market integration for the survivors of human trafficking should entail a holistic approach, which takes into consideration many different aspects of women' and girls' lives, while national authorities should remove all the bureaucratic obstacles that prevent women from reaching a successful integration.

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► In Bulgaria:

The team of Animus supported 48 women.

The biggest challenge in Bulgaria was reaching third-country-national victims of trafficking. Bulgaria is the external border and the entryway to the EU for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The country remains mostly a transit country for refugees and asylum seekers and very few of them seek integration in it. Most of them try to continue on their route to other European countries. In practice, there is no identification of victims of trafficking coming from third countries. There is a huge disproportion between men and women who arrive in Bulgaria – only about 1/6 are women. This gender profile creates gender specific vulnerabilities that can lead to victimization and risk of trafficking, and require timely support and services.



Due to the lack of clear identification of victims of sexual exploitation among women from third countries, the team focused on identifying vulnerabilities that might lead to increased risk of trafficking and different forms of exploitation.

Here is an example from our work.

Aisha is a young woman from a country in Africa. In her home state, she is a victim of severe domestic violence by her husband. The violence becomes even more brutal when Aisha gets pregnant. In order to save her life, she is forced to run away from home. Using the services of smugglers Aisha ends up in Bulgaria. She is found helpless on the street and it is clear that she had been a victim of violence which she refuses to disclose. She is accommodated in a RIC and then in the Mother and Baby Unit managed by Animus which provides shelter to pregnant women and mothers with their young children..

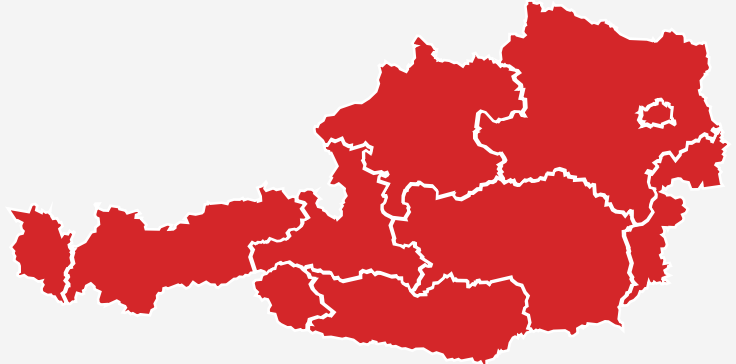
Aisha speaks English and is able to communicate partially with the staff but not with the other women accommodated in the Unit. She is completely alone without any support. Aisha gives birth to a healthy boy. She receives comprehensive support for raising him. While the child is growing up, Aisha begins taking individual Bulgarian language classes. She works with a psychologist and a social worker. The child is enrolled in a nursery at the earliest possibility and Aisha can begin looking for a job. She is very vulnerable to being exploited due to prejudice in society, not knowing Bulgarian well enough, having difficulties adjusting to the environment, lack of sufficient level of education, and no professional experience. In addition, her behaviour is often impulsive which is a typical symptom of psychological trauma. Aisha is actively accompanied during the process of looking for a job – together with a consultant Aisha is looking over the offers on the labour market and discussing which are suitable for her and what should be her behaviour during job interviews. The consultant contacts potential employers to help her negotiate the best possible working conditions. Aisha is actively going to interviews. She joins a group for learning the next level Bulgarian. Aisha is starting work under a labour contract. She is supported to find housing. The work on the case continues as Aisha is still vulnerable but now she is more autonomous and is coping better.

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► In Austria:

The team of LEFÖ supported 60 women with a total of 410 services

In Austria, as in the countries of the partner organisations, the service provision was heavily influenced by the COVID-19 outbreak and services had to be adapted accordingly. LEFÖ responded promptly to international and national public health recommendations by relocating all but essential office operations to “home office”, including the provision of the integrated employment support services in the frame of the project. Communication between beneficiaries and LEFÖ’s case worker took consequently place mostly via phone or e-mail. This development resulted in challenges for the women accessing the services as many are uncertain about how to use a computer and its accessoires. Therefore, there was a high demand in the upscaling of digitalisation skills to which LEFÖ dedicated an entire series of courses which was very well accepted. Covid-19 had not only a heavy influence on the service provision during the project, but more important so, has an immeasurable impact on the labour market inclusion of trafficked women with language courses suspended and a rising unemployment rates, only to mention two examples. Consequently, there to has be a joint effort of state authorities, service providers and the entire civil society to continue working towards a sustainable labour market inclusion of trafficked women, providing more needs-based support services empowering vulnerable groups to become independent, especially in times of crisis.



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