

 The background of the page features a large, stylized graphic of two hands reaching towards each other. The hands are rendered in a light beige or tan color, with simple, rounded fingers. One hand is positioned higher and further to the right, while the other is lower and further to the left, creating a sense of reaching or support. The overall composition is clean and minimalist, with the hands framing the central text.

The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe

Focus on **migration flows
of women and single-parent
households of Nigerian nationality
between Italy and Germany**

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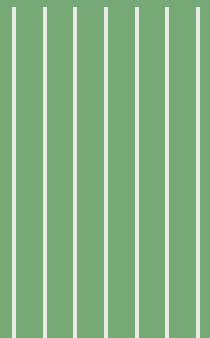
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1. Introduction





The territory of Europe has been and continues to be affected by significant secondary movements of third-country nationals, who for various reasons move from states of first arrival to other countries of destination.

In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the secondary movements of women and minors who are potential victims of human trafficking (VOTs). This caseload includes individuals who are currently in a situation of human trafficking, those who have experienced it in the past, and those who are at risk of being subjected to a new situation of exploitation¹.

Based on this research findings, the described phenomenon primarily affects **women of Nigerian nationality** to a substantial degree.

In 2015-2016, approximately 16,000 female Nigerian nationals reached Italian shores by sea. Of these, 80% were identified by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation².

It is believed that only a part of these women and minors have remained in Italy, while **the majority moved to other European countries** - in particular Germany and France - **for a variety of purposes**, thus **creating a relevant outflow^{3,4}**.

These movements are partly the result of, or have been encouraged by the Nigerian mafia (*the cults*) or well-structured criminal organizations dedicated to human trafficking.

Over the years, they have established transnational networks that operate be-

¹ Definition taken from the Booklet "Project ALFa "Accogliere le Fragilità" Results – Operational Guidelines – Proposals", 2022, English version: <https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/images/landing-page/ALFA/Booklet-Alfa-EN.pdf>

Within the context of the project and for the purpose of this tool, the term "potential victims of trafficking" includes:

- persons already exploited and at risk of further processes of re-victimization;
- persons at risk of trafficking and of exploitation due to personal or environmental factors;
- and persons who are possible victims of trafficking and with a process of identification underway.

² IOM, Human trafficking through the central Mediterranean route: data, stories and information collected by the International Organization for Migration, October 2017, p. 9, <https://reliefweb.int/report/italy/human-trafficking-through-central-mediterranean-route-data-stories-and-information>

³ According to some organisations working at the Italian sea arrival points, in particular IOM, many women and girls of Nigerian nationality, who arrived in Italy in 2015-2017, had on them (*in their hair, in their clothes*) at the time of disembarkation sheets with telephone numbers of the criminal network to call, often with the area code of Germany. This gave rise to the assumption that some of them would be leaving Italy in the direction of other European countries, as these areas would be the places where the exploitation would take place. Information provided by IOM during the interview organised in June 2023 in the framework of this research.

⁴ Therefore, if on the one hand it could be assumed that at least a part of the Nigerian women and minors were destined to reach other European countries (*in particular Germany*) for the purpose of exploitation, on the other hand it was difficult to foresee a subsequent return flow to Italian territory, even though - since they had been fingerprinted in Italy at the moment of disembarkation - the German authorities could have applied the Dublin Regulation. In fact, as a general rule, Italy could be considered as the country responsible to examine their application for international protection, since it was the country of first entry for many Nigerian women and girls, who then moved to Germany.



tween Nigeria, Libya, Italy, Germany, France, and other European countries⁵.

Mostly **since 2019**, this trend has been accompanied by a **phenomenon in the opposite direction**, consisting in the **return of women of Nigerian nationality to the country of first asylum or of entry into Europe**, generally Italy, either as a consequence of the Dublin Regulation implementation or after the rejection of their international protection application.

In most cases - as will be described in detail in the following chapters - these departures from Germany and other European countries can be classified as **“autonomous returns”**, taking place mainly outside of an official transfer procedure between state authorities.

In addition, **another dynamic** that has emerged in recent years is the so-called **“irregular, cross-border commuting or mobility” between different countries⁶**.

For example, several movements of Nigerian women have been recorded among Italy, Germany and France⁷.

Having failed to migrate successfully and lacking viable options for regularization and stability in the European countries where they had resided for long periods of time, these individuals often return to Italy.

According to the results of this study, there has been a **decrease in the flow of Nigerian women between Italy and Germany, particularly since 2022**.

However, a **new trend** has emerged: **the overall scale of secondary movements from countries of first arrival to other northern European countries has grown exponentially, involving an increasing number of trafficked or potentially trafficked women of various nationalities**.

These include women from the Ivory Coast, Guinea Conakry, Cameroon, Gambia, Tunisia and Benin, among others.

5 Italian Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate (Ministry of Interior), Report to the Italian Parliament on the activities carried out and the results achieved, July-December 2021, p. 315, endnote 37, https://direzioneeinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Relazione_Sem_II_2021-1.pdf

6 As emphasised in the course of the research by some organisations operating in France and Germany and by several Italian stakeholders.

7 Several stakeholders, including the Italian asylum authorities, have reported cases of women who first migrated from Italy to France and then went to Germany as a second country of asylum (*or in the reverse order*), before finally returning to Italy.

Insight Box:



Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Conakry, Cameroon, Mali, Gambia, Benin and Tunisia: New nationalities on the move. Is there a risk of human trafficking and exploitation?

Over the **last three years (2021-2023)**, there has been a **growing trend of women arriving in Europe from a variety of countries**, including francophone sub-Saharan African countries such as **Ivory Coast, Guinea Conakry, Mali and Benin**, as well as **Cameroon, Gambia and Tunisia**.

After disembarking in countries of first entry, especially Italy and Spain, the majority of these people, most of whom are potential victims of trafficking, experience secondary movements to other European countries, particularly France and, increasingly, Germany.

An analysis of the data on **arrivals by sea in Italy**, including both men and women, adults and minors, shows a **significant increase in the number of citizens**

from Ivory Coast and Guinea between 2021 and 2023.

In 2021, Italy recorded 3,807 arrivals of Ivorian nationals and 2,446 arrivals of Guinean nationals, ranking these two countries fifth and seventh, respectively, among the main nationalities entering the country that year⁸.

The year **2023** saw an **unprecedented surge in sea landings**, with 18,211 Guineans and 16,005 Ivorians crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy, making these two nationalities the first and third most frequent arrivals on Italian soil⁹.

This trend was confirmed by **stakeholders**¹⁰ interviewed in different Italian regions, notably at the disembarkation points such as Sicily, in central and north-

⁸ Italian Ministry of the Interior, Statistical Dashboard as of 31 December 2021, http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/cruscotto_statistico_giornaliero_31-12-2021.pdf

⁹ Italian Ministry of the Interior, Statistical Dashboard as of 31 December 2023, http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/cruscotto_statistico_giornaliero_31-12-2023.pdf

¹⁰ The term "**stakeholders**" refers to all actors, both institutional and non-governmental, with different expertise and competencies, who come into contact with trafficked women involved in secondary movements on their daily work.



Towards Italy, across the Mediterranean

ern Italian areas where women are accommodated in reception facilities (*regions of Lazio, Abruzzo and Marche, Lombardy*

and Piedmont), at the border areas with other European countries (e.g. *Ventimiglia, Como*), and in destination countries in northern Europe (*mainly Germany*¹¹).

With significant outflows from Italy to France and Germany, it is likely that in the future there will be a return movement to countries of first arrival, such as Italy and Spain, as has been the case with Nigerian women, often as a result of the application of the Dublin Regulation's criteria and mechanisms.¹²

According to **data provided by the Italian Dublin Unit**, in the two-year period **2022-2023, Germany has submitted to Italy a growing number of requests to take charge and take back concerning asylum seekers from Ivory Coast and Guinea Conakry**¹³.

11 The organizations interviewed in Germany, mainly counselling centres specialized in identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking, reported that the first arrivals of women from Guinea Conakry occurred in 2021, with an increase in the first half of 2022. However, the exponential growth of this nationality was recorded from 2023, with an upward trend throughout the year.

12 Regulation (EU) no 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013, establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (Recast), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R0604>

13 According to the Dublin Regulation (Article 18(1)(a), read in conjunction with Articles 21, 22 and 29), a "**request to take charge**" is defined as one made by a Member State in the case of an asylum seeker who has previously lodged an application for international protection in another Member State. By virtue of Article 18(1)(b,c,d), read in conjunction with Articles 23, 24, 25 and 29, the concept of "**take back request**" covers three cases:

- the case of an applicant whose application is under examination and who has lodged an application in another Member State or is on the territory of another Member State without a residence document;
 - the case of a third-country national or stateless person who has withdrawn an application in the course of examination and has submitted an application in another Member State or who is in the territory of another Member State without a residence permit;
 - the case of a third-country national or stateless person whose application has been rejected and who has submitted an application in another Member State or is in the territory of another Member State without a residence permit.
- Regulation (EU) no 604/2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R0604>



In 2022, Germany submitted 63 applications to take charge of Guinean women and 49 regarding Ivorian ones. From January to June 2023, there were 97 requests for female Guinean nationals and 55 for those from Ivory Coast¹⁴.

Looking more specifically at the **profiles of women from Guinea Conakry and Ivory Coast** intercepted on European soil, we notice that the majority of them fall into two average age groups: **18-25 and 26-30**.

Moreover, a change in some profiles can be observed over the time: several actors interviewed in Italy have perceived as a trend in 2023 a **gradual decrease in the age** of a number of **girls from Guinea Conakry** who disembarked in Italy, many of them minors or young adults, and a parallel **increase in the average age of women from Côte d'Ivoire**.

The latter group consists mainly of women who are accommodated in reception centres for asylum seekers and who decided to remain on Italian territory.

In terms of **areas of origin**, many Guineans lived in or around the capital, Cona-

kry, while others stated that they originally come from villages near the towns of Fria, Kindia, Mamou (*thus remaining in the western part of the country*); still others are from the eastern region of Kankan.

For women from Ivory Coast, three geographical areas are the most common: Abidjan and small neighbouring urban agglomerations, the south-central regions of Lagunes and Vallé du Bandama (*villages near the city of Bouaké*), or the western part of the country, particularly small towns around the cities of Daloa and Gagnoa and areas near the border with Liberia.

Among the **ethnic groups** most often mentioned by Guinean women are the Mandinka and the Peul (*Fulani*) of Muslim religion, whereas Ivorian women arriving in Europe belong to various ethnic groups, including the Malinké, Lobi, Djoula¹⁵, Baulé and Bété.

Most of these individuals have a **very low level of education**, with a prevalence of **illiterate or poorly educated women** coming predominantly from rural or suburban areas, while those from large cities are more likely to have attended second-

¹⁴ Similarly, requests for taking charge and taking back submitted by France to Italy have increased significantly, from around 500 requests for women of both nationalities considered in 2022 to around 700 in the first six months of 2023 alone. Namely, in 2022, France asked Italy to take charge and take back 514 women from Guinea Conakry and 551 women from Côte d'Ivoire, while in the period January-June 2023, 735 requests were made for women from Guinea Conakry and 684 for women from Côte d'Ivoire. These data were provided by the Dublin Unit of the Italian Ministry of the Interior on 26 September 2023, for the purposes of this research.

¹⁵ Many women consider themselves Djoula, although the term does not refer to an actual ethnic group, but rather to a variety of populations united by certain characteristics, such as the Djoula language and the Muslim religion.

ary school or at least have studied for more years. An analysis of the **typology of women** who have landed in Europe has revealed a massive presence of **single persons**, some of them pregnant, or **people travelling with other female nationals**.

However, over the past year, the stakeholders involved in the current research have observed a diversification in the sense that they have increasingly come into contact with **women with minors or couples**, mostly of Ivorian nationality.

Focusing on the **migration routes** from the moment women left their country of origin, it is evident that in the majority of cases there is an **absence of a “linear” migration project** aimed at reaching a

destination in Europe, which was defined before the journey began.

In a variety of situations this plan is, in fact, characterized by **different stages and phases** separated from each other, and is shaped over time.

There are **numerous factors that influence the evolution of the migratory path after departure**, such as the diversity of the trafficking networks through which one travels, the North African countries of destination and their socio-economic and security conditions, and the forms of exploitation experienced or to which the woman will be subjected.

For example, it is not uncommon for women to be sold. In other instances, they deliberately turn to various traffickers in order to escape situations of exploitation.

There is also often the presence of intermediaries or benefactors, who appear to facilitate the transition from one stage of the journey to another, thus determining the beginning of a new phase of migration.

Only limited cases were reported where women knew from their country of origin that their final destination would be Europe, highlighting the existence of a planned design from the time of departure.

Multiple **migration routes and transit countries** can be identified according to



Women landing in Europe



an aggregated analysis of data provided by German and Italian actors.

Migration flows from Guinea Conakry to the Maghreb countries have mainly developed along the following diagonal lines:

- Guinea, Senegal, Mauritania, Morocco;
- Guinea, Mali, Algeria, with destination either Tunisia or Morocco;
- Guinea, Mali, Niger to Libya or further to Tunisia;
- Guinea and arrival by plane in Tunisia.

The journey was mostly by land, with some cases of air transport. There were also several situations where women were brought to Senegal and then flown to Turkey and subsequently to Romania by plane, as well.

Regarding the **more common routes** that took women **from Côte d'Ivoire to the shores of the Mediterranean**, the journey often involved direct flight to Tunisia, where "someone" met them at the airport, confiscated their passports, and accompanied them to their place of work (*usually private homes, businesses, or restaurants*).

Alternatively, the itinerary passed through Mali, Algeria and then Tunisian territory. In other cases, when the destination was Libya, female Ivorian migrants crossed Burkina Faso and Niger.

In general, travelling overland through Mali, Mauritania to Morocco was less frequently reported.

There are **three countries from which women of Guinean and Ivorian nationality have reached Europe: Morocco, Tunisia**, and, to a lesser extent, especially as of 2022, **Libya**. The crossing was generally by sea in rubber dinghies or wooden boats.

A change in the length of stay in the Maghreb countries, particularly Tunisia, has been observed for women from Côte d'Ivoire. In fact, until 2022, Tunisia was the final destination of their migration project, where they wanted to stabilize and work.

This was partly due to the possibility of entering the country in an easy and reg-



Migratory routes

ular manner through the issuance of a 90-day work or study visa with simplified procedures.

As a result, Ivorian people tended to stay for relatively long periods, a year or more. From the second half of 2022 and especially from the beginning of 2023, transits appeared to be more rapid.

Various causes reduced the duration of stay in Tunisia, as emphasised by several of the respondents consulted.

In particular, it may be attributable to the restrictive policies adopted by Tunisia on immigration and asylum, but also to a climate of strong violence and the occurrence of repeated abuses against people of sub-Saharan origin by civil society and police forces, tolerated and sometimes incited by the state authorities¹⁶.

Women from Guinea Conakry, on the other hand, stayed in North African countries for shorter periods of time, ranging from three to six months to a maximum of a year, depending on the migration project and the smuggling/trafficking networks involved.

Spain and Italy are the main two countries of first entry on European soil.

However, several cases of arrival in Europe occurred in France or Belgium by air from Senegal or Gambia.



The Mediterranean route and sea crossings

Concerning the time spent in these European countries of first arrival,

German stakeholders noted that Guinean women arriving in Germany made a quick passage through Italy, fleeing a few days after disembarkation.

In Italy, two dynamics have emerged over the years with regard to women from Guinea, and particularly from Côte d'Ivoire.

In an initial period of strong flow, particularly in 2021-2022, there was an extremely fast transit of female nationals from both countries.

They spent one night or a few days in reception centres. It was therefore only pos-

¹⁶ Indeed, the situation deteriorated after the speech of Tunisian President Saïed at the meeting of the National Security Council on 21 February 2023, where he called for "urgent action against hordes of sub-Saharan irregular migrants" and spoke of "ethnic substitution".



sible to fingerprint these people and rarely could the application for international protection be finalized, as the women suddenly left the facilities and continued their migration project in other European countries.

From 2023 onwards, a different trend is observed: some women have continued to run away within a few days to a week after sea landing, while many others have stayed in Italy for longer periods and applied for asylum.

Within the latter group, there is a further diversification: some have settled on Italian territory, while other women have continued their journey to other European States (*France and Germany in primis*), but at a later stage than in the past.

In general, **several interconnected smuggling and exploitation networks** have been identified.

This research **did not find** that a **single criminal organization** is responsible for both arranging the migration route from the country of origin to the country of destination in Europe and exploiting the people once they arrive.

Rather, the stakeholders interviewed noted a segmentation where several entities are involved.

Sometimes there are **several well-articulated and established networks dedicated to different types of trafficking and illegal activities**.

Some are “specialized” in the smuggling of migrants, while others aim to profit from various forms of exploitation of these people. Such networks seem to cooperate with each other.

In other circumstances, there are **less structured groups that intercept people in migration and bring them to Europe** for financial gain, but which do **not necessarily have established stable and long-standing links with those who then carry out the exploitation**.

A **consolidated phenomenon of trafficking in human beings**, as defined in Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol¹⁷ as “*the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons (...) for the purpose of exploitation*” within a single transnational organization, **seems to exist mainly between the women’s countries of origin and various Maghreb countries**, namely Tunisia, Morocco and Libya.

In general, individuals in the women’s family or circle of friends have facilitated the contact with other actors.

The latter have been then responsible for

¹⁷ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted through the General Assembly Resolution 55/25, 15 November 2000, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>



the actual organization of the journey from Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea Conakry and are deemed to be linked to the networks that subsequently place the victims in exploitative situations in North African countries. In these countries, women have been actually forced into domestic servitude, sexual exploitation in closed houses, or labour exploitation in restaurants or businesses.

As regards the continuation of the journey to Europe, new figures have emerged. There is a diversification between **those who have facilitated the smuggling**, i.e. the passage to Europe and the subsequent movement from the countries of first arrival to the northern European countries, **and those who could be identified as traffickers** and who are based in the final destination of the victims.

In many cases, **the passeurs** are unknown persons described as benefactors or random individuals who took advantage of the extremely vulnerable situation of the women (*often alone*) and persuaded them to come to Europe by deceiving them and offering false promises of better working conditions and assistance¹⁸.

They then inserted the victims into new trafficking and exploitation cycles. In some cases, the study revealed explicit situations of sale of women who had experienced abuse and various forms of exploitation in the past.

These individuals were often described as men from Maghreb countries or of the same nationality as the women.

By contrast, those who **"ordered"** women's arrival and forced them into various forms of exploitation with the aim of making a profit in different European countries are people already on EU territory.



Passeurs

¹⁸ It was also noted that sometimes smugglers made the entire journey with their victims to the European destination country, while more often several people were found taking turns to lead women on the route between North Africa and Germany or France, with intermediate stops. In addition, another method used by smuggling networks is to provide women who are about to cross the Mediterranean with a telephone number to call as soon as they arrive in Europe. This contact will in turn communicate precise instructions on where to go and what means of transport to use.



Many German actors have deemed, based on victims' accounts, that the **traffickers** are mainly Ivorian and Guinean nationals or men originally from Nigeria. **No payment is ever made for the journey to Europe**, and any reference is made to the incurrance of a debt. It is assumed that the victims are unaware that behind the apparent generosity of the 'benefactors' who brought them to Europe, there were substantial profits gained from their sale to exploitative networks.

In terms of the **forms of exploitation identified**, Ivorian and Guinean women were often the victims of **severe labour exploitation** by families in Tunisia or Morocco, which in many cases amounted to **domestic servitude**. It was also noted that their living conditions in Tunisia gradually deteriorated after their visas expired and they found themselves in an irregular legal situation.

Sometimes women reported **episodes of abuse and sexual violence** perpetrated by their employers, other family members or by acquaintances who visited the houses in which they were held as slaves.

More rarely, women from francophone Africa have highlighted **sexual exploitation in connection houses or in closed places**. Instead, according to information gathered by German anti-trafficking organisations, many women from Guinea Conakry reported being subjected to **in-door sexual exploitation in Germany**.

Typically, the victims were **confined to private homes** and were forced into prostitution in such settings.

Some of them spoke of places where several women were accommodated, but with whom they were not allowed to have contact, while in other cases there was only one person in the apartment.

The exploiters went to these premises to receive clients and collect their daily earnings. The duration of this type of exploitation varied from weeks to months and usually ended with the victim's fortuitous escape.

Finally, some elements suggest that a number of women in Europe may have been destined for **forced marriage**, as argued by some actors involved in this research.



Migration flows in Europe



2.

**The research:
objectives,
methodology
and limits.**

**Preliminary
considerations**





This research aims primarily to identify the extent and main characteristics of secondary movements of women - potential victims of human trafficking - between different European countries.

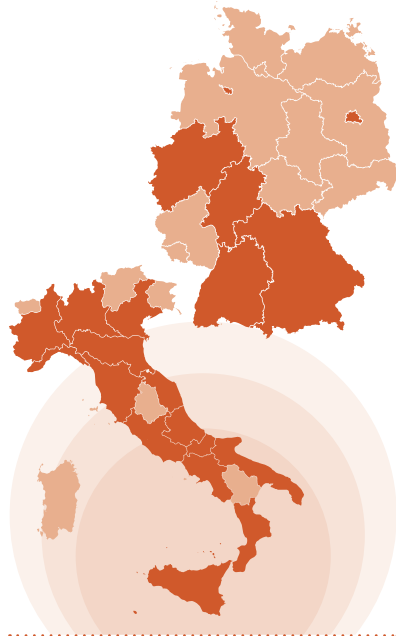
In particular, it focuses on the movements of **women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany** with the objective of understanding the reasons underlying these flows.

It also intends to analyse the risks and negative consequences faced by these people and their children born on German soil once they return to Italy.

Finally, it has the purpose to explore the growing **migration moves of women from French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa** from countries of first entry (*in the first place, Italy and Spain*) to other European countries, particularly France and, increasingly, Germany.

This study has been carried out within the framework of the *“ALFA2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility”* project, promoted by the Prefecture of Turin in collaboration with the IRES Piemonte (*Institute for Economic and Social Research*) and financed by the AMIF 21-27 funds.

It was also supported by the Municipality of Milan, which coordinates the regional project against trafficking in human beings *“Derive e Approdi”*.



Territories that participated in the research



The current research was **conducted over a timeframe of two years** (*January 2022-December 2023*) and covers a **period of analysis** of secondary movements of potential victims of human trafficking **from 2017 to June 2023**.

In terms of **methodology**, it combines **primary field research with desk-based research**.

Data were mainly collected through **face-to-face or online interviews** with a wide range of **stakeholders**.

This term refers to **all actors, both institutional and non-governmental, who** - in different capacities and at different stages of the migration path between countries - **come into contact with trafficked women involved in secondary movements and return flows**.

In addition, **two surveys** were carried out using two standardised questionnaires: one aimed at collecting data on secondary movements of women from Ivory Coast and Guinea Conakry, while the other in-

tended to gather updated figures on the flows of women and households of Nigerian nationality between countries of first entry and northern European countries.

A total of 101 stakeholders in Italy and Germany with **different expertise, backgrounds and experiences** were involved in the research.¹⁹

These included asylum authorities and the Italian Dublin Unit, international organisations (*UNHCR and IOM*), anti-trafficking associations and counselling centres, the Italian anti-trafficking Helpline and the German umbrella organisation KOK²⁰, local municipalities, the coordination office of the Italian reception system for asylum seekers and refugees (*Servizio centrale of SAI*), large reception centres for asylum seekers in Italy, NGOs working in the first reception centres for asylum seekers in Germany²¹.

A number of **case studies** are inserted in this report.

These are real cases of women of Nige-

¹⁹ The research was carried out in Italy in the following regions: Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Emilia Romagna, Latium, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Molise, Piedmont, Apulia, Sicily, Tuscany, Veneto. In Germany, actors are active in the States (Länder) of Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Hessen, Nordrhein-Westfalen and the city states of Berlin and Bremen. An anti-trafficking organisation operating in France was also consulted.

On behalf of the same stakeholder, one or more professionals with different tasks, competences and backgrounds participated in the research, such as legal advisors and lawyers, social workers, cultural mediators, managers or senior executives.

²⁰ This umbrella organisation brings together almost 50 counselling centres specialised in the identification and protection of trafficked persons located throughout Germany. Its main role is to coordinate, advise and carry out advocacy activities vis-à-vis the federal and state authorities.

²¹ A meeting with the German authorities, in particular the Dublin unit, was requested on several occasions and through various channels, but the invitation was declined due to their numerous activities/workload.



rian nationality who have experienced a secondary movement from a country of first entry to other European countries and who, after their return to Italy, have received support by various Italian stakeholders²².



Movements between Italy and Germany

The aim is to highlight some of the characteristics of the aforementioned phenomenon as well as some of the critical issues or negative consequences that these flows or their handling have had **for the women and minors concerned**.


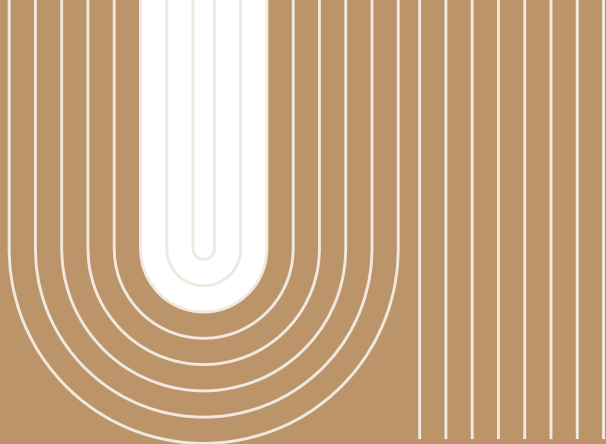
During the course of the research, **three major constraints** emerged that made it **difficult to provide a clear and comprehensive snapshot of secondary movements** of potential victims of trafficking in Europe.

Firstly, movements between European countries are **complex, heterogeneous and little documented**, although all the stakeholders interviewed noted the existence of significant outward and return migration flows between Germany and Italy.



A second challenge was the **lack of aggregated data at both national and EU level**.

Finally, the **great diversity of situations and the inconsistency of practices** developed in the regions covered by the research have further complicated the task of tracing the main characteristics and dynamics of the phenomenon under study.

²² Any reference to personal data or spatio-temporal details has been removed for privacy reasons and to avoid exposing the persons concerned to any risk. The organisations that kindly shared these situations are not mentioned as well.



3. Secondary movements between Italy and Germany: data and key trends





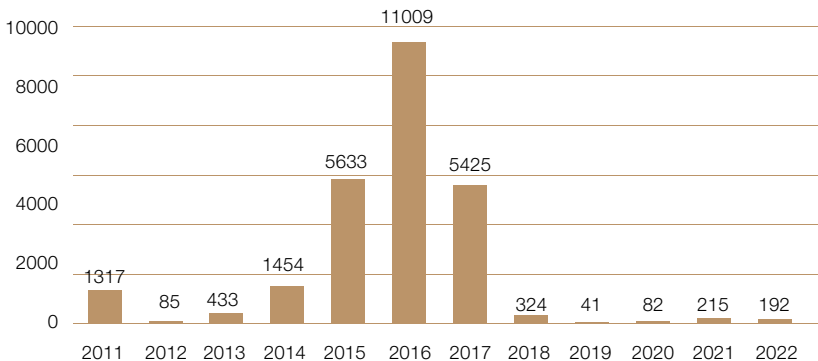
3.1 The arrivals by sea and the international protection applications of Nigerian women in Europe

The main difficulty in illustrating an accurate snapshot of the phenomenon of secondary movements of Nigerian women, potential victims of trafficking, lies in the **lack of aggregated data on both outflows** from first countries of arrival to northern EU countries, **and return shifts**.

In order to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of these movements in Europe, it is relevant to first have an overview of the sea arrivals and applications for international protection lodged by these persons over a period from 2016 to 2023.

Graph 1

SEA ARRIVALS OF NIGERIAN WOMEN IN ITALY. DATA FROM THE NATIONAL ANTI-TRAFFICKING HELPLINE.



Since 2015, Italy has been affected by an **exponential increase in arrivals by sea** of citizens from Nigeria, which reached a **peak in 2017**, with 18,153 Nigerian persons hitting Italian shores that year²³.

This **trend has gradually declined** over the time.

In fact, there has been a very reduced number of disembarkations in Italy of Nigerian women from Libya and Tunisia **since 2018-2019**.

Now, examining the **EUROSTAT** data on **international protection applications** submitted in the 27 EU Member States **by female asylum seekers of Nigerian nationality**, it can be observed that there has been a remarkable increase in the **period 2016-2019** compared to previous years²⁴.

2016 represented a year of significant rise in first asylum applications for both Italy and Germany²⁵.

In the **biennium 2018-2019**, **Germany**

saw a **considerable growth** in first-time applications for international protection from Nigerian nationals, with 4,755 and 4,085 per year, while **Italy** recorded a **sharp decrease**, with 2,530 applications in 2018 and 730 ones in 2019²⁶.

The **year 2022** was characterised by a **major decline** in first asylum applications **for both countries**, with 980 first asylum requests in Germany and 675 in Italy²⁷.

Interestingly, in recent years, a gradual reduction in first-time applications for international protection by Nigerian women asylum seekers has been accompanied by a **surge in subsequent applications**.

It is not clear whether they were lodged following an official transfer to the first country of asylum under the Dublin Regulation or as a result of an autonomous return from another Member State.

They might also be filed by Nigerian women who always stayed in the same country of first asylum and submitted a subsequent application, either because new

23 Italian Ministry of Interior, Statistics, 31 December 2017, http://www.libertacivillimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/cruscotto_statistico_giornaliero_31-12-2017.pdf

24 EUROSTAT, Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex - annual aggregated data, period 2016-2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA_custom_9183902/default/table?lang=en

25 According to Eurostat data, in 2016, 7,515 first-time applications for international protection were made by women of Nigerian nationality in Italy, while 4,580 Nigerian women sought asylum for the first time in Germany.

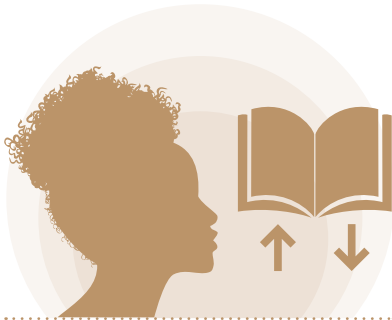
26 EUROSTAT data, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA_custom_9183374/default/table?lang=en

27 EUROSTAT data, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA_custom_9183374/default/table?lang=en



elements have arisen or after their first application was rejected on appeal.

Nevertheless, in the light of the overall picture that emerges **from the statistics on applications for international protection** (both first and subsequent ones), **despite the low number of Nigerian women arriving by sea**, it may be concluded that there is still **a significant presence of female asylum seekers of Nigerian nationality in Europe**, assuming that at least some of them continue to move between different European States in order to regularise their legal status.



Asylum applications



3.2. Outflows towards Germany and return movements to Italy: data and dynamics of development

Focusing now more specifically on secondary movements involving Italy, as the country of first entry, and Germany, as the country of destination for many women of Nigerian nationality, the research revealed that **outward flows** were mainly concentrated **in the three-year period 2016-2018**.

However, according to most of the Italian and German stakeholders interviewed, **Nigerian women continued to migrate to Germany in the following years, in particular in 2020-2021**, albeit at a considerably lower rate than in the past.

The described trend was succeeded by a **substantial backflow to countries of first arrival**, in particular Italy.

The first returns were already recorded in 2018, but the **majority mainly occurred in the years 2019-2022**, reaching a



peak in 2021.

According to **data provided by the Dublin Unit of the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2019** marked the year with the **highest number of returns**, followed

by 2020, although several take charge and take back requests regarding Nigerian women continued to be submitted by Germany to Italy in the years afterwards (*Graph 2*).

Graph 2

**TAKE CHARGE AND TAKE BACK REQUESTS
SUBMITTED BY GERMANY TO ITALY,
CONCERNING NIGERIAN WOMEN***

	2019	2020	2021	2022	I semester 2023
Total take charge/ take back requests submitted by Germany to Italy	11.945	4.513	5.219	11.540	7.804
Take charge/take back requests, concerning Nigerian women	1.613	290	170	146	53
Official transfers of Nigerian women from Germany to Italy.	119	20	7	10	0

*Italian Dublin Unit (Ministry of Interior), provided for the purposes of this study on 26/09/2023

By contrast, the **majority of the stakeholders** consulted, who came into contact with Nigerian women and households on Italian territory after their return,

deemed **that the year with the greatest increase in arrivals from Germany was 2021**, with a **fairly stable trend in the first semester of 2022**.



Outgoing flows

In this regard, the **Italian anti-trafficking Helpline** - created and funded by the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers - recorded 13 cases of Nigerian women returning from Germany in its database in 2019, while 26 referrals were registered in 2021.

In 2022, 24 women contacted the hotline after their return, whereas in the first six months of 2023 alone, the number rose to 13.²⁸

According to the data collected by **IRES Piemonte** in the framework of the European project “*ALFa - accogliere le vulnerabilità*”, in the period January-October 2021, the anti-trafficking network in Piedmont came into contact with and provided shelter to 70 women with minor children, 69 of whom were Nigerian nationals. Of these 70 women, 38 returned from other EU countries: most from France (21), but also a relevant number from Germany²⁹.

Finally, the **asylum authorities of the Piedmont region** assessed in 2021 and early 2022 the international protection applications lodged by 32 women returning from different European countries, 29 of whom were Nigerian nationals.

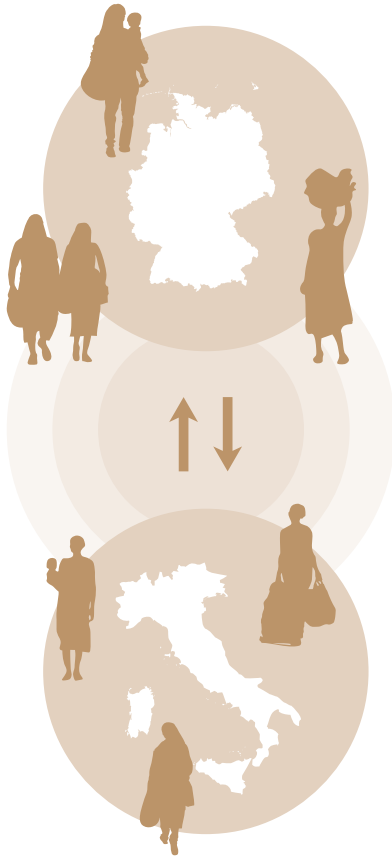
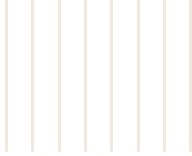
These were often people who left Germany for Italy in 2020, but especially in 2021.

Focusing only on data relating to the year 2022, 37 female Nigerian asylum seekers coming back from various European States were interviewed.

Their return had mainly taken place in the

²⁸ Data extrapolated by the Anti-Trafficking Helpline from its computerised System for the Collection of Information on Trafficking in Human Beings (SIRIT). These data refer to relevant calls received by the Hotline during the period 01/01/2019 - 30/06/2023.

²⁹ IRES - Piedmont Institute for Economic and Social Research, Report on the interconnections between trafficking and asylum: from the current challenges in mixed migration flows to the operational practices of the ALFa- Accogliere le Fragilità project, 2022, https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/images/Report_profondimento_interconnessioni_tratta_asilo.pdf



Return flows from Germany

previous year (2021).

Of these 37 women, an extremely high number (20) came from Germany, 9 from France and 3 each from Switzerland, Austria and Malta³⁰.

Furthermore, in the first half of 2023, 22 Nigerian women coming from Germany were interviewed by the Turin Territorial Commission, while in the months of July-October alone of the same year, as many as 10 cases with an experience in another European country were detected. These are mostly people who returned to Italy in 2022.

The discrepancy between the Dublin Unit and other stakeholders in identifying the key period of return is due to a variety of factors.

In particular, the low number of successful transfers carried out by Germany in application of the Dublin Regulation - compared to the noticeable number of take charge/take back requests submitted to Italy - combined with strong pressures to leave the German territory and intensive removal policies towards Nigerian nationals adopted by the federal authorities, led to a significant outgoing movement of

³⁰ It should also be noted that of the 20 women of Nigerian nationality who came back from Germany, 5 stated that they had spent some time on French territory before re-entering Italy. Data provided by the Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection of Turin in the frame of the present research.



women and families to Italian soil. These returns took place outside official deportation procedures among States, since they occurred in autonomous modalities.

In the **second half of 2022 and the first semester of 2023 (January-June)**, a **change in the return flows** of women of Nigerian nationality from Germany to Italy was observed both **in terms of numbers and with respect to certain characteristics and dynamics of development**.

The movements to Italy decreased overall, constituting a rather homogeneous trend throughout the country.

However, although there has been a reduction in the dimension of the phenome-

non, the flow back from Germany has not stopped.

In addition, it is interesting to note that, since the second half of 2022, there has been a **conspicuous diminution in the number of Nigerian returnees in many large cities**.

Italy's major metropolitan areas such as **Turin**³¹, **Milan**³² and **Naples** have registered significantly lower inflows compared to previous years, with the exception of **Rome**³³.

This situation is not exclusively attributable to the sharp decline in movements from Germany and other European countries towards Italy, but can be explained by a **variety of factors**.

31 According to the data provided by the Foreigners' Office of the City of Turin, in 2022 a total of 95 women of Nigerian nationality were intercepted after returning from various European countries, particularly Germany and France, with a decrease compared to 2021. In the period from January to June 2023, this trend was confirmed, with only 32 Nigerian women coming back to Italy. Data provided by the Foreign Office of Turin municipality in the frame of the present research.

32 The same trend as in Turin was also observed in the metropolitan area of Milan and its hinterland, where - according to data provided by the Legal Office of the Municipality of Milan - in 2021 and the first six months of 2022 there was a strong flow of Nigerian women returning from other European countries, mainly from Germany. However, since September 2022, the number of returns from German territory has diminished considerably. Based on the cases registered by the Legal Office of the Municipality of Milan between September 2021 and April 2023, 105 households of Nigerian nationality with one or more children were assisted by this institution after returning from various European countries. They were mainly single-parent families or families with a mother and a father from Germany, most of whom moved back in 2021 and 2022. Among this group of persons, only 3 households returned to Milan in 2023 (between January and April 2023).

33 In Rome, an opposite trend to the other major Italian cities was observed, as shown by the data collected by the Municipality of Rome (in particular by the anti-trafficking service 'Roxanne' and the Immigration Office). In the period 2019-2021, 352 women and households of Nigerian nationality were detected, of which only 20% returned from Germany. It is therefore estimated that a total of 70 women with a previous stay on German territory (about 23 per year) came into contact with or were assisted by the above-mentioned services of the Municipality of Rome. In 2022, an increase in returns from Germany to Rome was observed compared to 2021. In fact, out of a total of 140 Nigerian women and families recorded in the databases, 28 moved back from Germany.

In the period January-June 2023, the number of women and households of Nigerian nationality returning from Germany amounted to 16, compared to a total of 81 identified in Rome, thus showing a slight growth with respect to the returns in 2022.



Return to Italy

First of all, some stakeholders interviewed pointed out that while certainly a considerable, reduced number of Nigerian women and households in return contacted the anti-trafficking organisations or other institutional and non-governmental actors to receive assistance, nevertheless their **presence in the cities continues to be observed**, especially at the main metro stations or railway hubs.

Moreover, it was stressed that many women, after returning to Italy, **relied on their family and social networks and communities of origin**, without turning

to Italian protection services. Finally, a number of interviewees also underlined the fact that **what happens in large cities cannot be taken as an indicator** to describe the complex and articulated phenomenon of secondary movements.

The analysis of the return flows to Italy has revealed **another peculiar feature related to the destinations chosen**.

There has been a substantial **shift towards smaller centres and provincial areas**, that had not previously been affected by the arrival of Nigerian women and families from other regions or from abroad.

These return places have changed over the time³⁴.

Many stakeholders emphasised that there is an **internal mobility within the Nigerian community**, favouring some areas over others and that the choice of where to go after leaving Germany is not random or arbitrary.

Rather, it is believed to be determined by word of mouth or by indications from third parties.

³⁴ For instance, in 2021, some urban centres, such as Asti, Novara and Vercelli in Piedmont, or Brescia, Frosinone, Parma, Verona or various areas in the Marche region, recorded higher arrivals than in the past from Germany and other European countries. In 2022, localities such as Como and Reggio Emilia experienced a noticeable growth compared to the previous years in the number of Nigerian women and families returning, mainly from Germany and France, which decreased considerably the following year (2023). Meanwhile, in 2023, other areas such as Cuneo, Alessandria and Pescara began to see a slight rise in the number of people returning, mainly from Germany and France.



Moreover, the decision on where to settle after returning to Italy is linked to a **combination of reasons**.

These include, above all, the quality and availability of social services provided by the various municipalities, the access to more affordable housing, or the presence of family and social networks or criminal organisations in a given area.



Mobility of the Nigerian community in Europe



**4.
The Nigerian
women returning
from Germany:
common features
and specific
profiles**





Most of the women of Nigerian nationality, who moved to Germany and later returned to Italy after their experience abroad, share **certain common characteristics**.

They are generally adult women **over the age of twenty-five**; many were born between 1994 and 1998, but there are also **several cases of those in the 30-35 range**.

The majority comes from the **southern part of Nigeria**, mainly from Edo State, but also from Anambra, Delta and Enugu States.

These women have a **low level of education** and lived in extremely poor socio-economic conditions in their country of origin.

The largest number **arrived in Europe in the three-year period 2015-2017**, mainly in Italy and to a lesser extent in Spain, although others disembarked in subsequent years.

With regard to their stay in Europe, two main situations were ascertained.

Some women stayed in Italy - the first country of arrival - **for a relatively long period** (a few months or one to two years) and applied for international protection before continuing their journey to

other European countries.

Others, on the other hand, **transited through Italian territory** and were only fingerprinted by authorities.

Many Nigerian female nationals reported being **victims of human trafficking**, mentioning experiences of **sexual exploitation in Libya and/or Italy**.

As far as the movement to Germany is concerned, the huge number of these persons went directly to this country, while in some cases situations of exploitation occurred in other European countries (e.g. France or Austria) before the arrival on German territory.

In addition to the general characteristics described above, the research identified **two specific profiles** among the Nigerian women involved in secondary movements.

A minority are single persons brought to Germany by trafficking networks and are sexually exploited either in nightclubs and places of legal prostitution with forged identity papers or in closed facilities such as private flats.

Such cases were mainly found in the Länder of Bayern and Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW)³⁵, although similar situations were also reported in Baden-Württemberg, Hessen and Berlin.

³⁵ Mainly in the cities of Dortmund, Duisburg, Düsseldorf.



In contrast, **the majority of women of Nigerian nationality** returning from Germany (**around 90 per cent**) **are mothers of one or more children**, often born on German territory.

Stakeholders noted many **single-parent households**, mostly consisting of the mother and two minors aged 0-5.

Several situations of **women returning pregnant** (*with or without other children in tow*) were also observed.

A peculiarity of this second group of persons is that **no experiences of sexual exploitation in Germany** were recounted.

Another common feature of the latter category is the **presence of alleged fathers of minors born on German soil**. Several actors described these men as extremely inconsistent, ambiguous and, above all, poorly defined in their role, as they are generally absent or marginal in the lives of their children and women.

This study has revealed complex family dynamics that characterise the majority of Nigerian couples, who have been involved in secondary movements between European countries and who share one or more children, often born in Germany.

Many interviewees expressed **doubts about the authenticity of intra-familial relationships**, often questioning whether

the presence of these fathers was affective or whether their existence was in many ways **instrumental**.

In a considerable number of cases, the **figure of the presumed father** - usually of Nigerian nationality - **coincides with that of the partner**.

However, in many instances, the **children are not formally recognised by these individuals**, who often do not appear on the birth certificates issued by the German authorities or do not give their surnames.

It has **also** been observed that in a number of situations the **women's spouses are not the biological parents** of the children.

Looking at the **legal status of the alleged fathers**, it appears that they are generally in an **irregular situation in Europe**.

They are often persons who have applied for international protection in more than one country, but their asylum request has either been rejected on the merits or found inadmissible under the Dublin Regulation.

Sometimes, though, it has been noted by several stakeholders that these men **hold a German residence permit or have acquired German citizenship**, due to a previous marriage with a German national.



This specific situation has been observed particularly in recent years and mainly concerns cases where paternity was acknowledged at a later stage, namely some time after the birth of the child.

Nigerian couples formed in the framework of secondary movements show **different situations in terms of family mobility between European countries.**

In several cases, the presumed fathers remained in Italy after the woman's departure to Germany.

Particularly frequent are also cases where these men moved to Germany with their spouses or settled in this country prior to the woman's arrival.

In many instances, these men became unavailable after the end of the relationship or **unreachable** because they refused to acknowledge the paternity of their children and/or to financially contribute to the raising of them.

The research highlighted the fact that in some cases, when the woman returned to Italy, the alleged fathers remained in Germany.

By contrast, in many other situations these men are referred to as **"wandering or itinerant fathers"** because either moved back to Italy or left Germany and relocated to other European countries, such as the Netherlands or France.

Finally, a large number of stakeholders involved in the study revealed the frequent existence of **violent relationships**, in which the man often exerts a certain degree of control over the woman, for example through her mobile phone or the possession of her documents. **Situations of domestic violence are not uncommon.**

It has also been highlighted that the alleged fathers often have links with cults or criminal networks involved in sexual exploitation or other illegal activities (e.g. *drug trafficking*). Accordingly, in several cases they were found to be the **perpetrators of secondary exploitation of female partners** (*in the form of sexual exploitation, begging, etc.*).



The role of presumed fathers



5.
The
movements
towards
Germany





5.1 Reasons for moving to Germany

The current research revealed a **variety of causes and situations for the migration of women of Nigerian nationality from Italy to Germany.**

In particular, the reasons adduced by the majority of the Italian and German stakeholders interviewed, as well as by those persons who themselves experienced secondary movements, can be summarised in **eight macro-categories.**

There are many cases in which women have reported that they went to Germany **to follow an alleged partner or at the suggestion of the latter**, who, however, turned out to remain in Italy³⁶.

A second set of reasons advanced concerns **the attainment of “someone” who was already living in Germany.**

Often family members were mentioned, such as a boyfriend or the presumed father of the woman’s child³⁷.

Another situation cited as ground for leaving Italy is the **desire to separate from partners** with a view to escaping from forced prostitution and domestic violence.

Similarly, fleeing to Germany **to get away from sexual exploitation by criminal organisations and madams in Italy** is also common³⁸.

Several stakeholders interviewed reported that another reason for secondary movements is that Germany is the destination country for exploitation.

In some instances, the women remained under the control of the same trafficking organisation, which has ramifications in many European countries; in other cases, victims were sold by criminal networks based in Italy to other actors on German soil in order to obtain greater profits.

36 In various circumstances, pregnant women were persuaded by their partners to move to Germany under pressure and blackmail to end their relationship.

37 There have also been cases of women who joined friends or other victims of sexual exploitation like them, with whom they shared the experience of being trafficked in Italy or Libya. These “friends” have escaped and moved to other European countries, encouraging then the women’s departure with the lure of better socio-economic conditions.

38 This macro-category includes situations of women who, having initiated a pregnancy and in order to avoid being forced to have an abortion, go to German territory to protect the unborn child.

Insight Box:



The story of H. (Emilia Romagna)

"My name is H., I was born in 1996 and I come from Nigeria. **I arrive in Italy with false promises and live at home with my exploiters**, three Nigerian brothers. They **force me to prostitute myself in the streets** and then give them all the money I make to pay my debts. In total, **I give them 23,000 euros**. In the meantime, I do the Commission (ed. personal interview before the asylum determining authorities), but I am afraid to tell my whole story.

When I am contacted by an association that helps girls like me (ed. an anti-trafficking organization to which the Italian asylum authorities referred H.'s case based on the identification of several trafficking indicators), I go to a meeting but I do not say anything about my traffickers.

My application for asylum is rejected.

I often argue with the brothers. They accuse me of "not working well", of disobeying them, of wanting to report them to the police, of talking too much.

So, **at the beginning of 2018, they decide to send me away from Italy and force me to go to Germany. Here they have a contact**, a woman from Ghana, who gets me into a reception centre for asylum seekers in Baden-Württemberg. At the same time, **I do 'work' for the**

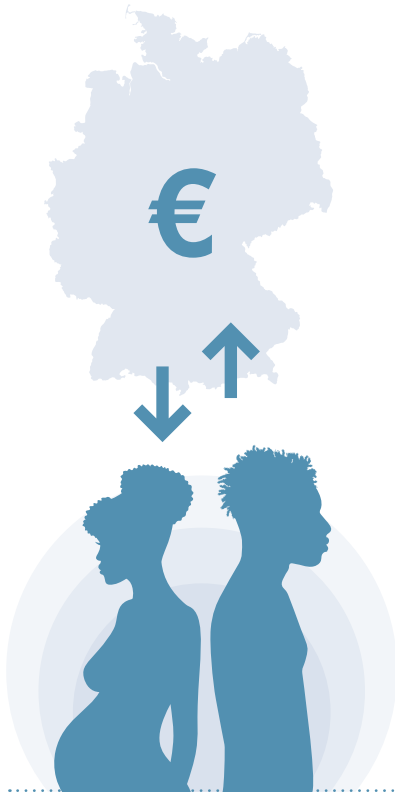
Ghanaian lady in a connection house in the city of Stuttgart.

At the end of the year, **I am expelled from Germany and decide to return to Italy on my own**: first to Milan and then to the region where I used to live. I move from one city to another and try to enter a reception centre for asylum seekers, but without success.

On my return to Italy, I decide to break off all relations with my exploiters, the three Nigerian brothers, both because of the edict of the Oba of Benin and because I heard that one of them has been arrested in another European country for exploitation.

I have no money and nowhere to go, so I continue to work in the streets to support myself. Throughout 2019, I move to different parts of Italy.

In the summer of 2020 I return to Germany for the second time, but after six months I am sent back to Italy. Still on my own, I go to the city of Milan and then to another region. **I begin to prostitute myself again and sleep in a disused building at night**. Thanks to a Nigerian friend of mine, who is living in the same abandoned place, **I finally get in touch with an anti-trafficking organisation that helps me. This is how I start a new path in my life.**"



An emerging form of exploitation?



This research highlighted that in a number of situations the transfer's main purpose was linked to the **intention of giving birth in Germany**.

Indeed, many women mistakenly believed - based on word of mouth within the Nigerian community or encouraged by supposed partners - that giving birth on German soil would entitle their children to German citizenship or a residence permit, thus allowing them to remain in the country on a regular basis.

Finally, **the most common motivation mentioned by both women and key stakeholders** is the **opportunity to access the German welfare system and its social benefits**, which provide significant financial support, particularly in the case of single parents with children³⁹.

This practice has been described as “**nomadism for a better welfare system**”.

³⁹ The amount of fundings for asylum and other social benefits depends on the number and age of the children and their legal status in Germany.



5.2 Pregnancy and access to social benefits as a form of exploitation

In the context of the current study, a number of recurring elements have emerged in relation to Nigerian women involved in secondary movements towards Germany, that are common to the majority of these cases.

The first aspect, observed in many instances, concerns the fact that **outflows occurred in the company of, or at the hint or “encouragement” of, a third party** with a questionable relationship to the woman⁴⁰.

A second very repetitive element relates to the fact that the migration took place at the same time as a **pregnancy**.

As noted in this research, a large number of women in their seventh or eighth month of pregnancy or shortly before giving birth left their reception centres to go to Germany.

There have also been several cases of Nigerians who became pregnant immediately after arriving on German territory.

This may suggest that there was a plan to go to Germany, rather than a coincidence or a sudden and unpredictable escape.

Finally, many interviewees pointed out that **certain statements about the reasons for the move**, such as *“they persuaded me to go to Germany”* or *“they advised me to go to Germany”*, frequently reappeared in the accounts of persons who had returned from Germany.

These declarations seem to be an indication that clear or implicit encouragement and guidance are often **behind these secondary movements**.

The research raised the question of whether the pregnancy and the conse-

⁴⁰ There are **certain figures that stand out** in particular. The presence of partners of the same nationality as the women, who sometimes travelled with them and in other cases used promises, pressure or blackmail to persuade them to move to Germany, is often noted. The situation of boyfriends who already settled on German territory and who invited the women and organized the itinerary and the transport is also quite common. Furthermore, women also travelled to Germany with men, who were identified as members of the criminal network or collaborators of their madams. Sometimes these individuals were described as regular clients who, out of compassion for the women's exploitative situation, suggested them to escape together to another country or planned and financed the journey. A large number of women who left Italy for Germany stated that they had travelled on their own. However, their stories were very detailed with regard to their journey, giving the impression that it was planned in advance. Finally many stakeholders reported the existence of “passeurs” or “border workers” and effective organizations dedicated to smuggling, offering border crossing and “delivery” services at specific, prearranged locations.



quent **access to increased welfare benefits** provided by the German State may have been a **means of repaying trafficking debts or financing third parties**, based on a combined reading of the indicators found in a large number of Nigerian women who migrated to Germany from countries of first arrival such as Italy⁴¹.

Various actors appear to have taken advantage of the German welfare system for their own benefit, including primarily criminal trafficking networks as well as single individuals, generally identifiable as the partners and/or alleged fathers of children born in Germany.

In a limited number of cases, women returning from Germany with minors explicitly **stated that they used the social benefits** they received for their children **to partially or entirely pay off the debts** they incurred to the organisations that trafficked and exploited them in Europe.

Several stakeholders also stressed that **the methods used by Nigerian networks to secure the payment of debts have changed** over time.

In fact, whereas in the past the exploiters (*mainly madams*) tended to resort to coer-

cion and physical violence, with a strong control over their victims, in recent years criminal organisations have adopted a less severe attitude, accepting different modalities for the payment of debts.

Moreover, in various cases, when the women became ‘accidentally’ pregnant, often as a result of sexual exploitation, they were directed to Germany by either the criminal organisation itself, the Nigerian community or acquaintances.

The aim was to continue to pay money to the trafficking network, which would thus benefit from the period of inactivity associated with the pregnancy and the months following the birth.



German welfare

41 Access to social benefits is seen as a possible incentive to move from Italy to Germany by the majority of stakeholders interviewed. However, the Italian actors are more favourable than the German anti-trafficking associations in their view that the funds allocated by the authorities to support families with children are used to repay the debts of the human trafficking or to finance third parties, in particular the partners or alleged fathers of the minors.



Insight Box:

The story of J. (Lombardia)

“My name is J. and I landed in Italy in 2017 at the age of 22. After disembarking, I was placed in a reception centre for asylum seekers in northern Italy. Before arriving in Europe, I knew that my madam was in Germany and that I had to join her there, where I would be forced into prostitution to repay the debt.

At first, I decided not to join my trafficker and to escape from a certain state of exploitation. However, in November that year (2017), my mother in Nigeria received visits and pressure from the criminal network that trafficked me, culminating in her being beaten by some members. So, I decided to give in and join my madam.

During my stay in Italy, I started a relationship with a boy of Ghanaian nationality, with whom I became pregnant.

A few months after the beginning of my pregnancy and after the reprisals suffered by my family for my escape from the exploitation network, I left the shelter in the direction of Munich, with a transit through Switzerland.

I went to Germany on my own, but I knew where to go because I was given instructions on which trains to take and the main stations where to change. When I arrived

at my destination, I contacted my madam again and she told me where to find her.

My exploiter soon discovered that I was pregnant.

So, our agreement was modified according to the new situation: she obliged me to pay her monthly the benefits I received as an asylum seeker and those I obtained after the birth of my child. Then she took me to a centre to apply for asylum.”.

J. gave a very detailed account of the total amount of money she paid to the madam during her stay in Germany, to the Italian anti-trafficking association which identified and assisted her after her return to Italy.

She said that she had monthly appointments to meet this person and hand over the money in cash.

Initially, J. reported that as an asylum seeker she received 150 Euros per month and that she gave more than half of this to the madam (100 Euros per month).

After the birth of the baby (in 2018), she was moved by the German authorities to a house on her own and the subsidies increased to around 700 euro per month.



Victim of exploitation

The madam was constantly pressuring her to get the money. And the amount she had to give (200/300 euros per month to the madam) was higher according to the rise of social benefits she received.

In 2020, she became pregnant again with another boyfriend.

As the family grew, the allowance reached to 1,000 euros. **J. used to pay half of the benefits each month.**



Her application for international protection was meantime rejected by the BAMF.

She, therefore, decided to return with her two young children to the Italian location she had left.

J. stated that **she paid her exploiter a sum of around 13,500 Euros through the German social welfare system**, compared to an initial debt of 30,000 Euros.

This debt was repaid exclusively with social benefits, as J. claimed to have never been sexually exploited, neither in Libya nor in any European country.

She returned to Italy in the summer of 2022. J. said she did not want to continue subsidising the trafficking network, so she changed her telephone number and stopped sending money to the madam.

However, she reported receiving anonymous phone calls, which link to possible renewed intimidation by the madam, as her mother in Nigeria was allegedly threatened after her departure from Germany to provide her new phone contact.

Instrumental access to social benefits is considered by the OSCE and the European Union as one of the emerging forms of exploitation in the context of human trafficking.

Within the EU, in 2013, the **European Police Office (EUROPOL)** was the **first agency to refer to** the so-called **“benefit fraud”**, namely the act of defrauding the social security system in the context of human trafficking⁴².

In its 2016 report *“Trafficking in Human Beings in the EU”*, Europol devoted a specific paragraph to the analysis of the systematic defrauding of welfare, pointing out that *“THB for the purpose of benefit fraud is often perpetrated together with labour or sexual exploitation”*⁴³.

It emphasised that organised crime groups use the identity of victims to submit fraudulent claims for social benefits and family allowances, exploiting in particular those Member States where the welfare system is particularly developed.

Similarly, the **OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe)**,



Trafficking in Human Beings

with a specific mandate on trafficking in human beings) in its 2021 Survey Report has included the exploitation of social welfare among the emerging forms of trafficking in human beings by referring

⁴² EUROPOL's mission is to support Member States in the prevention and combating of all serious forms of organised and international crime, cybercrime and terrorism. In its 2013 report, Europol for the first time included 'benefit fraud' as one of the emerging forms of exploitation in the trafficking of human beings. EUROPOL, Socta 2013 - EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, p. 26, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/socta2013.pdf>

⁴³ EUROPOL, Situation Report - Trafficking in human beings in the EU, 2016, pp. 30-31, https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/thb_situational_report_-_europol.pdf



to the term **“claiming social benefits”**⁴⁴. With regard to the **instrumental use of pregnancies**, **UNODC**, in its recent specific analysis on organised crime in Nigeria, has observed the development of a new phenomenon, which is being orchestrated by structured networks dedicated to the trafficking of human beings for high profits.

It is the so-called **“baby selling”**, which has been identified as one of the emerging forms of trafficking, in addition to the widespread sexual exploitation.

It involves the exploitation of two distinct groups of victims: Nigerian women and underage girls who are **trafficked for the purpose of producing newborns**, and the **children themselves, who are then sold on the Nigerian domestic market or internationally** through **illegal adoptions**⁴⁵.

As observed in the frame of the current research, **criminal organisations have diversified the modalities of generating substantial income through women and minors**.

The latter are, in fact, subjected to exploitative situations involving both the reproductive sphere as well as the access to

economic benefits offered by European systems.

It is nevertheless worth pointing out that, although in many cases access to the welfare system has been used for financial gain by various actors (*Nigerian mafia, cults, alleged partners*), the present study has also revealed a **plurality of situations where the receipt of socio-economic benefits does not appear to be linked to any form of exploitation or abuse/profit**.



Instrumental use of pregnancies

44 OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Survey Report 2021 of Efforts to Implement OSCE Commitments and Recommended Actions to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, pp. 30-31, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/1/522934_1.pdf

45 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and National Institute for Security Studies (NISS), "Organized crime in Nigeria: a threat assessment", pag. 82-83, https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/NOCTA_Web_Version_25.09.2023.pdf



5.3 Pregnancy as a method of regularisation

A number of reasons were put forward by the **stakeholders** interviewed to explain why **the vast majority of Nigerian women who left Italy for Germany, particularly in the years 2016 to 2019, were pregnant** at the time of their entry into German territory.

In addition to the fraudulent access to social benefits as a mean to pay off the debt of human trafficking, it was often assumed that the departure of pregnant women was due to **misinformation within the Nigerian community that the birth of a child in Germany would by default give access to regularisation in the country** through the issuance of a residence permit.

Some German entities involved in this research pointed out that there was a widespread misconception by word of mouth that the birth of a newborn child on German territory or an advanced stage of pregnancy would guarantee the **suspension of the Dublin procedure**, thus preventing the return to the first country of asylum.

This information seems to have been derived from the *Tarakhel* judgment⁴⁶.

Certain actors consulted in the context of this study also stressed that the BAMF rarely granted refugee status or other forms of protection on the basis of current or past experiences of trafficking and the resulting risks of return to Nigeria.

In contrast, the risks and consequences of female genital mutilation were more readily recognised by the asylum authorities.

Therefore, according to several organisations, another motivation for many women to become pregnant was to try

46 European Court of Human Rights (Grand Chamber), Judgement, case *Tarakhel v. Switzerland*, 4 November 2014, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22001-148070%22%7D>

Two paragraphs are of particular relevance with regard to the special needs of children when assessing whether there has been a violation of Article 3 ECHR in the case of return to a first country of asylum pursuant to the Dublin Regulation. In paragraph 99, the Court reiterated that: *"With more specific reference to minors, the Court has established that it is important to bear in mind that the child's extreme vulnerability is the decisive factor and takes precedence over considerations relating to the status of illegal immigrant. Children have specific needs that are related in particular to their age and lack of independence, but also to their asylum-seeker status."*

Furthermore, the ECtHR in paragraph 119 emphasised that: *"This requirement of "special protection" of asylum seekers is particularly important when the persons concerned are children, in view of their specific needs and their extreme vulnerability. This applies even when, as in the present case, the children seeking asylum are accompanied by their parents. Accordingly, the reception conditions for children seeking asylum must be adapted to their age, to ensure that those conditions do not "create... for them a situation of stress and anxiety, with particularly traumatic consequences". Otherwise, the conditions in question would attain the threshold of severity required to come within the scope of the prohibition under Article 3 of the Convention."*



Pregnancy as a method of regularisation

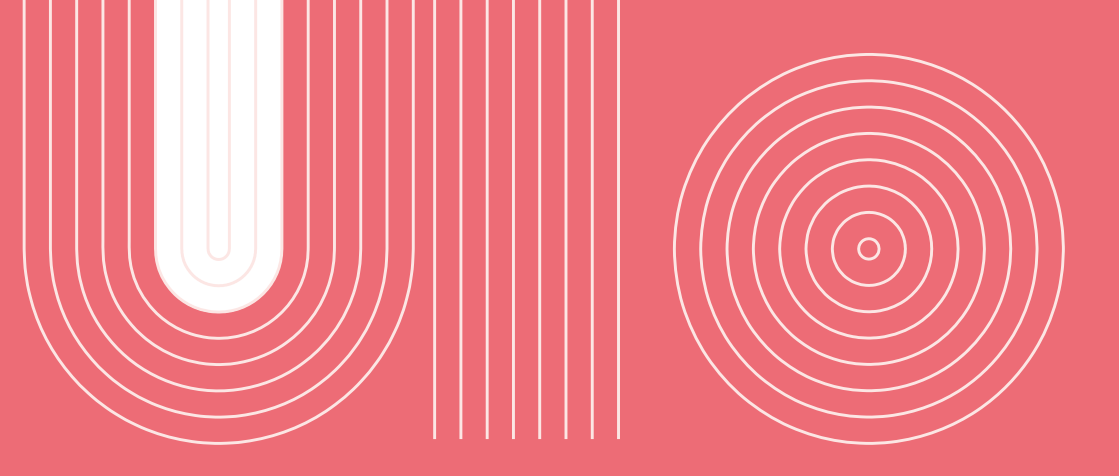
to conceive **female children**, for whom the **potential risks associated with female genital mutilation (FGM)** - a practice prevalent in some areas and among some ethnic groups in their country of origin - would have been more favourably assessed.

Finally, it is worth noting that although pregnancy status is an element that is often found among women of Nigerian nationality who migrated to Germany or which occurred shortly after arriving in this country, it was nevertheless **emphasised**




by numerous stakeholders that **having children is also a cultural factor.**

There is a strong stigma attached to infertility in Nigeria; accordingly, when women become mothers, this increase their value within the Nigerian society.



6.
Returns from
Germany to Italy:
general context





6.1 The legal categories of women returning from Germany

The secondary movements from Germany to Italy involved a wide range of individuals and concerned a variety of different situations.

On the basis of the research findings, women of Nigerian nationality in return may be grouped into **three legal categories**.

The Italian stakeholders intercepting these persons coming from Germany were often confronted with **“Dublin cases”**, the so-called **“Dubliners”**, i.e. asylum seekers who, after applying for international protection or being fingerprinted in the first country of entry, lodged an asylum request in a second Member State and therefore have to be returned to the territory of first arrival in accordance with Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013.

In fact, these are women whose applications have been declared inadmissible by the German asylum authorities on the

ground that Italy is the Member State responsible for the examination of their international protection claim.

Another significant group of female Nigerian returnees includes **“failed asylum seekers”**, namely those who have had their **asylum request rejected** by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugee (BAMF)⁴⁷.

Finally, a third category consists of **those who have moved back to Italy in order to renew their residence permits** previously granted by the Italian authorities - in some cases for international protection, in others for humanitarian/special protection reasons.

A **common feature** noted by almost all the participants involved in the research is the **lack or the shortage of German documentation**.

Indeed, most of those returning from Germany seldom produce documents related to Dublin or asylum procedures, such as residence permits for asylum applications or negative decisions about international protection.

In contrast, women often present birth certificates of children born on German soil, as will be examined in detail in the chapter on minors.

⁴⁷ The **Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF)** is the Federal Office for Migration and Refugee, whose function is *inter alia* to examine asylum applications submitted in Germany by third-country nationals.



Insight Box:

Some data on asylum applications of nigerian women in Germany (asylum applications submitted, recognition rates, rejections and inadmissible decisions) and BAMF practices

An analysis of data published by the German federal authorities on asylum applications and forms of protection granted to female Nigerian nationals reveals some interesting trends, which have had a significant impact on the secondary return movements of these persons from Germany to Italy in recent years.⁴⁸

Looking at the **period 2017-2019**, a **high rejection rate of applications for international protection** lodged by Nigerian women can be observed over these three years.

This figure has remained broadly constant, fluctuating between 34% in 2017,

48 Deutscher Bundestag, "Special protection needs of refugee women" (*Besonderes Schutzbedürfnis von geflüchteten Frauen*), Drucksache 19/1034, Reply by the Federal Government to the minor interpellation by MPs Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, André Hahn, other members and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE (*Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, Dr. André Hahn, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 19/9216*), 20 May 2019, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/103/1910341.pdf>
Deutscher Bundestag, "Questions about the recognition of gender-specific grounds for fleeing" (*Fragen zur Anerkennung geschlechtsspezifischer Fluchtgründe*), Drucksache 19/32684, Reply by the Federal Government to the minor interpellation by MPs Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, André Hahn, other members and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE (*Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, Dr. André Hahn, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 19/32637*), 15 October 2021, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/326/1932684.pdf>
Deutscher Bundestag, "Recognition of gender-specific grounds for persecution" (*Anerkennung geschlechtsspezifischer Verfolgungsgründe*), Drucksache 20/8032, Reply by the Federal Government to the minor interpellation by MPs Clara Bünger, Heidi Reichinnek, Nicole Gohlke, di altri deputati e del gruppo parlamentare DIE LINKE (*Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Clara Bünger, Heidi Reichinnek, Nicole Gohlke, other members and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE – Drucksache 20/7823*), 15 August 2023, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/080/2008032.pdf>



42% in 2018 and 38% in 2019.⁴⁹

At the same time, there has been an **exponential increase in the number of asylum applications deemed inadmissible** under Section 29(1)(1,2,3,4,5) of the Asylum Act.

2019 was the year with the **highest number of international protection requests rejected as inadmissible**: out of 5,885 applications for which a final decision was taken, 2,587 were rejected as inadmissible, representing 44% of the total.

The statistical data examined do not disaggregate inadmissible applications on the basis of the different grounds provided by the law.

However, many applications for international protection submitted by women of Nigerian nationality have been **presum-**

ably declared inadmissible by the BAMF **under the Dublin Regulation.**

This assumption is based on a comparative analysis of these data with those provided by the Italian Dublin Unit, which show a significant growth of take charge/ take back requests forwarded from Germany to Italy in 2019⁵⁰, as well as on the fact that a high number of Nigerian nationals disembarked in Italy since 2015, therefore being the latter the first country of entry in Europe.

In addition, as reported by several institutional and non-governmental actors consulted, the German authorities rarely have decided to assume competence in examining asylum applications of Nigerian women by resorting to the discretionary clause contained in the Dublin Regulation⁵¹.

49 According to data published by the German Bundestag, in 2017, out of 8,195 asylum applications of Nigerian women and minors decided, 2,823 were rejected. In 2018, out of 5,734 applications that were examined and decided by the BAMF, 2,421 were rejected on the merits. Finally, in 2019, out of 5,885 applications for international protection decided and related to the caseload under analysis, 2,240 resulted in a rejection. For more details see: Deutscher Bundestag, "Special protection needs of refugee women" (*Besonderes Schutzbedürfnis von geflüchteten Frauen*), Drucksache 19/1034, Reply by the Federal Government to the minor interpellation by MPs Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, André Hahn, other members and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE (Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, Dr. André Hahn, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 19/9216), 20 May 2019, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/103/1910341.pdf> Deutscher Bundestag, „Questions about the recognition of gender-specific grounds for fleeing“ (Fragen zur Anerkennung geschlechtsspezifischer Fluchtgründe“), Drucksache 19/32684, Reply by the Federal Government to the minor interpellation by MPs Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, André Hahn, other members and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE (Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, Dr. André Hahn, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 19/32637), 15 October 2021, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/326/1932684.pdf>

50 As highlighted above, in 2019 Germany sent Italy 11,945 requests to take charge and take back, of which 1,613 concerned women of Nigerian nationality. Data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, Dublin Unit, provided for the purposes of this research on 26/09/2023.

51 By virtue of art. 17 of Regulation (EU) no 604/2013 concerning **discretionary clauses**, "each Member State may decide to examine an application for international protection lodged with it by a third-country national or a stateless person, even if such examination is not its responsibility under the criteria laid down in this Regulation".



Focusing now on an overview of the different **forms of protection granted** to Nigerian women and girls asylum seekers in the period 2017-2019, the **rates are relatively low** compared to many other nationalities, with a gradual decrease over the years.

In terms of recognition rates for international protection, it is noteworthy that in 2017, 1,239 women and children from Nigeria were granted either asylum on the basis of constitutional law or the refugee status or the subsidiary protection. (*i.e. 15 per cent of the total number of asylum applications assessed in that year*). In 2018 this percentage decreased to around 12 per cent (*672 asylum seekers*).

In 2019, there has been a **significant drop in the recognition figures**: in fact, **only 6% of Nigerian women and minors** whose asylum claims were decided in that year were granted one of the three forms of protection mentioned⁵².

The **biennium 2021-2022** was essentially characterised by the same approach taken by the German federal authorities.

In this respect, the rejection rate of international protection requests lodged by Nigerian female asylum seekers continued to be significant, amounting to 48% in 2021 and 47.8% in 2022.

At the same time, the rate of inadmissible applications stabilised at around 25% of all asylum applications examined and decided in the caseload under review.

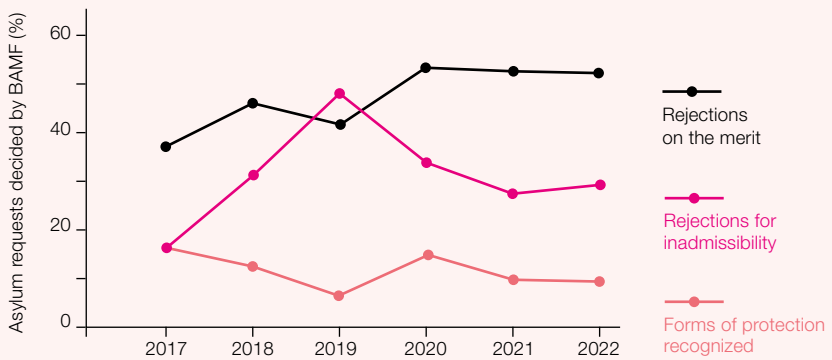
International protection - encompassing asylum under Article 16a of the German Basic Law (GG), refugee status and subsidiary protection under the Asylum Act (AsylG) - was granted to around 9% of women and minors of Nigerian nationality whose asylum claims were decided in 2021 or 2022. (*Graph 1*)

⁵² According to the German federal authorities, of 5,885 asylum applications examined in 2019, only 366 were granted asylum under Article 16a of the German Basic Law, refugee status or subsidiary protection. Deutscher Bundestag, „Questions about the recognition of gender-specific grounds for fleeing“ (*Fragen zur Anerkennung geschlechtsspezifischer Fluchtgründe*), Drucksache 19/32684, Reply by the Federal Government to the minor interpellation by MPs Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, André Hahn, other members and the parliamentary group DIE LINKE (*Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulla Jelpke, Cornelia Möhring, Dr. André Hahn, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 19/32637*), 15 October 2021, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/326/1932684.pdf>



Graph 1

**ASYLUM APPLICATIONS FILED
BY WOMEN AND GIRLS OF NIGERIAN
NATIONALITY IN GERMANY:
DECISIONS AND TRENDS IN THE
PERIOD 2017-2022**





6.2 Returning from Germany: two key modalities

This research has identified **two modalities of return from Germany** to Italy: the **official transfers between Member States following the application of Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013** (“Dublin Regulation”), and the **so-called autonomous returns**.

It has been observed that the **first category of returns has a rather residual dimension**, since most of the movements back to Italy have taken place outside a formal procedure involving the authorities of the two European countries.

An analysis of the **data provided by the Italian Dublin Unit** shows that, on av-

erage, the actual number of transfers of female asylum seekers of Nigerian nationality from Germany to Italy in the period 2019-2023 amounted to 7% of the total number of take charge/take back requests submitted by the German authorities in relation to this caseload⁵³. (Graph 2)

Therefore, more than 90 percent of the total flow of women and families of Nigerian nationality moving from Germany to Italy are **returns that took place outside a formal transfer procedure**.

Two different scenarios have emerged in the context of autonomous returns.

In many cases, we can speak of “**planned autonomous returns**”, where women organized their return to Italy in advance and in detail, using smuggling networks or relying on acquaintances⁵⁴.

Other situations can be described as “**sudden autonomous returns**”, without a precise itinerary and without a plan after reaching in Italy.

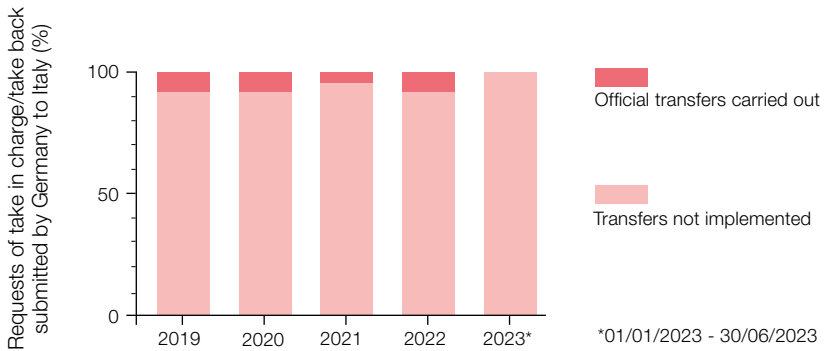
53 In particular, in 2019, out of a total of 1,613 incoming requests concerning female Nigerian nationals, 119 were officially returned to Italy with escort to an airport border crossing point. Similarly, in the following year (2020), out of 290 requests to take charge/take back sent, 20 actual transfers were carried out, confirming a transfer rate of 6.8 per cent. 2021 was the year with the lowest number of official transfers from Germany to Italy of women of Nigerian nationality at the end of the “Dublin procedure”: out of 170 relevant take charge/take back requests, only 7 transfers were finalised. Finally, with regard to the statistics for the first six months of the year 2023, none of the 53 requests from Germany to Italy resulted in an effective removal of persons to the latter country. Data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, Dublin Unit, provided for the purposes of this research on 26/09/2023.

54 The existence of real organisations dedicated to cross-border smuggling between Italy and other European countries such as Germany, arranging transport by minibus or private car, has been reported by several Italian anti-trafficking bodies. In addition, intermediaries have often emerged to facilitate the return, with whom the women come into contact through social media or through other acquaintances (partners, friends) or even by visiting gathering places of the Nigerian community (such as Pentecostal churches, African shops).



Graph 2

TAKE IN CHARGE AND TAKE BACK REQUESTS CONCERNING WOMEN OF NIGERIAN NATIONALITY SENT FROM GERMANY TO ITALY AND THE RELATED TRANSFERS.⁵⁵



In these cases, the women arrived at train stations in major Italian cities and either slept on the streets or asked for support and information from fellow nationals they met by chance in the main railway hubs.

These individuals often seemed disoriented.

Despite the numerous take charge/take back requests submitted by Germany to

Italy under the Dublin Regulation, **since 2019 the majority of Nigerian women and families have returned on their own initiative for various reasons.**

It appears that, due to the limited number of official transfers to Italy, the German authorities have exerted **strong psychological pressure in order to induce Nigerian nationals to leave the territory more quickly without an official procedure**

⁵⁵ Data from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, Dublin Unit, provided for the purposes of this research on 26/09/2023.



with supervised departure.

This pressure was also aimed at facilitating a voluntary return to their country of origin.

In some Länder, such as Bayern, Nigerian nationals, including pregnant women and families with minors, were subjected to **particularly coercive and sometimes brutal methods of deportation** to their country of origin and return to other EU countries⁵⁶.

For example, it was observed the **practice of deportations involving sudden night raids by police forces on homes and reception centres** where Nigerian asylum-seeking women and children who did not meet the conditions for legal resi-

dence were being housed⁵⁷.

The aim was to intercept these people and, at the same time, to transport them to railway stations or airports where they were immediately forced to board a train or a plane.

Other women described a **gradual reduction of social benefits**, which affected certain categories of people especially after the amendments introduced in 2019 to the Law on Asylum Seekers' Benefits Act⁵⁸.

These practices, together with word of mouth and the dissemination of videos within the Nigerian community, have created feelings of fear and instability about their future in Europe among many of the

56 A number of Italian and German stakeholders noted that women in advanced stages of pregnancy were being transferred from Germany, some of them close to the legally guaranteed no-transfer period for pregnant women. In some cases, such removals were found to be unsuccessful because the pilots of the aircrafts refused to take responsibility for allowing people with such vulnerabilities on board.

57 According to the findings of this study, based on interviews with numerous actors, such cases have occurred in several Länder, including Bayern, Baden-Württemberg, Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) and the Land of Berlin. It should be stressed that, in general, this type of action seems to find a legal basis in Art. 58 paras. 6 and 7 of the Residence Act, although these practices have been applied in an indiscriminate manner, without taking into account the vulnerability and the specific personal circumstances of the individuals to be expelled. The aforementioned article provides that: Para 6: "The authority carrying out the deportation may, to the extent necessary to carry out the deportation, search the home of the foreigner to be deported for the purpose of apprehending the foreigner. Searches of other persons' homes are permitted only for the purpose of apprehending the foreigner to be deported if there are facts indicating that the foreigner is present on the premises to be searched. Subsection (5) sentence 2 applies accordingly." Para 7: "At night, the home may be entered or searched only if there are facts indicating that it would otherwise be impossible to apprehend the foreigner for the purpose of deportation. Organizing the deportation does not constitute a fact as referred to in sentence 1."

58 For example, within the framework of the study, some stakeholders reported on the practice of pressuring some women whose application for international protection was rejected by the BAMF to cooperate in the preparation of their deportation by asking them to constantly contact the embassy of their country of origin to request the issuance of a passport, otherwise the social benefits received would be reduced. For a more detailed analysis of the categories to which the reduction of social benefits applies, see: The Asylum Information Database (AIDA), Country Report Germany, Marlene Stiller and Paula Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, updated on 31 December 2022, pp. 116-120, https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AIDA-DE_2022update.pdf



As underlined by some stakeholders, it seems that the main objective was to send a clear message to the Nigerian community that the movement of its nationals from other European states to Germany would not be tolerated.

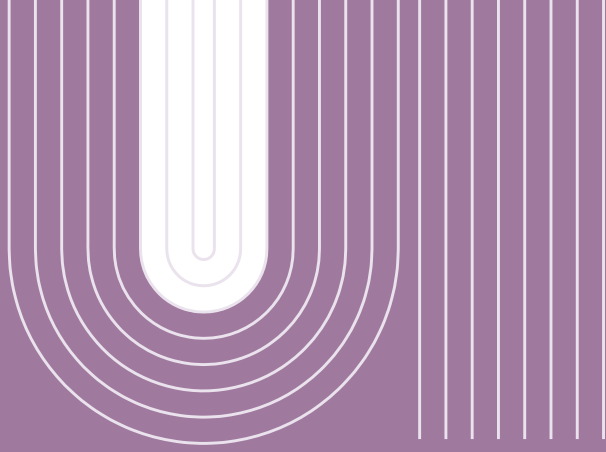


Returns from Germany


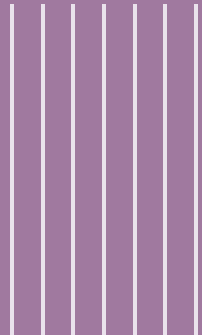

women who have returned to Italy (as their country of first arrival).

Accordingly, it can be assumed that this has contributed to the growth of flows outside official channels⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ This practice was reported both by the women themselves and by various stakeholders interviewed in Germany (particularly in the Länder of Bayern and Baden-Württemberg) and in Italy.



7.
The risks
associated with
a return to Italy.





Nigerian women returning from Germany and other European countries, **whether single persons or mothers with children, are extremely vulnerable** due to their personal profile, previous experiences of trafficking, violence and abuse, and poor socio-economic conditions.

For those who have children in Europe, their vulnerability is compounded by the fact that they are solely responsible for the minors' welfare.

These factors, combined with the often irregular stay, expose women to a wide range of risks.

As will be shown in this chapter, these include the threats and consequences of the initial experience of trafficking and non-payment of debts, as well as the risks associated with situations of re-trafficking or forms of secondary exploitation



7.1 The original debt and the consequences of its payment default

Upon their return to Italy, **only a small number of women expressed concern about their initial experience of human trafficking** and the non-payment of debts to the criminal network that exploited them in Europe.

A current danger on Italian territory rarely arose, as there were few cases of threats and repercussions.

Often the madams and the members of the organisations lost contact with the victims or they moved to other regions or abroad.

Those who reported fear and anxiety about the consequences they might face as a result of escaping and breaking the initial agreement with trafficking networks were mainly single and younger women, sometimes with experience of exploitation in other European countries.

At the same time, almost all of the stakeholders interviewed agreed that **a large number of Nigerian victims of traf-**

ficking in human beings usually repay all or a significant part of the debt to their exploiters over the years.

In this regard, **two parallel trends have been identified which have led to the perception of debt repayment as a widespread condition among Nigerian trafficked women.**

Firstly, a **change in the methods of control** exerted by the exploiting organisations is observed, with less physical control and less use of coercion and violence to demand payment than in the past.

This tendency is **accompanied by a parallel emergence of other forms of pressure and intimidation**, that **target women's specific vulnerabilities and weaknesses.**

Some individuals, due to certain characteristics and elements, are more susceptible to blackmail and more inclined to pay the debt.

Among the profiles most exposed to the threats of criminal networks are undoubtedly those with **strong juju beliefs.**

A number of indicators suggest that psychological obedience remains very strong in a large number of Nigerian victims of trafficking, who are therefore forced to repay the debt partially or completely.

The actors interviewed stress that women are very much affected by juju until the objects and personal body parts taken (*such as hair and nails*) are returned or a counter-ritual is performed by traditional priests.

Furthermore, the present study has shown that another crucial and distinctive factor is the **degree to which the family is compromised**, how much its members are involved in the trafficking through a pre-departure agreement, and how much they can be traced by the criminal network in Nigeria.

In many instances, the family in **the country of origin, under constant pressure and threat of retaliation, demands or forces victims of human trafficking to repay the debt.**

It was also emphasised that paying the debt is not so much a matter of fear, but rather of **gratitude** for the help the women received from the criminal organisation in their time of need.

They therefore want **to honour the debt as a commitment.**

Finally, the persons who pay are those in the **most vulnerable situations.**

This is the case, for example, of **women in an irregular situation with failed migration patterns or single mothers**



without family and social support networks.

The **presence of minors** is exploited by traffickers and undoubtedly increases the vulnerability of VOTs to extortion and debt bondage.

The emergence of new forms of pressure on women coincided with a greater flexibility of the criminal networks and the possibility to negotiate the terms of debt repayment.

As a result, women were subjected to new forms of exploitation, according to the victim's "preference" (*indoor prostitution, e-trafficking or online pornography, involvement in criminal activities as the drug trafficking*)⁶⁰.

In other cases, the trafficking organisations agreed to **settle debts through the payment of income from labour exploitation, or through the transfer of pocket money and social benefits received by the women.**



7.2 Re-trafficking and new forms of secondary exploitation

This research revealed that women returning from Germany and other European countries frequently found themselves in **situations of secondary exploitation or re-trafficking.**

As highlighted above, **some factors have undoubtedly favoured these new situations** of subjection, such as, *inter alia*, the extreme vulnerability stemming from their undocumented status, the failure of a migration path in Europe and the precariousness linked to the state of economic indigence, as well as the presence of children and the lack of support from family and social networks.

These women were subjected to **multiple forms of exploitation by a variety of actors.** In some cases, the exploitation has been **perpetrated by organised criminal organisations, such as cults**

⁶⁰ Criminal organizations diversified the illegal activities undertaken in order to generate ever greater profits. For instance, it was observed in the frame of this research that the Nigerian cults and other criminal networks, who in the past were mainly dedicated to the exploitation of prostitution, over the years have gradually taken over other trades. Accordingly, women are no longer exploited solely for sexual purposes, but are also used for other illegal activities such as transporting drugs, begging and transferring money through their bank accounts.

or the Nigerian Mafia, and other networks involved in illegal activities.

In many other circumstances, women have been initiated into **new forms of exploitation by single individuals**.

They are often identified as **supposed partners/boyfriends** or as acquaintances and **friends**, mostly male and of the same nationality, **met through social media**. The reference to Facebook or TikTok is recurring.

These figures sometimes coincide with those promoting the return to Italy. In exchange for the assistance offered in organising the journey and/or providing hospitality upon arrival, these men demanded sexual services or introduced the women to forms of exploitation, mainly for sexual purposes.^{61,62}

In addition to traffickers, the present research shed some light on a **wide range of actors who facilitated the insertion**



Types of trafficking structures

of victims into new cycles of exploitation and different recruitment sites.

It was often highlighted the ambiguous role of **communities of origin** and **some Pentecostal churches** as key actors in initiating or encouraging forms of re-trafficking⁶³.

61 Although less common among women returning from other European countries, cases were reported of women who, after emancipating themselves from their madams, went to live with their boyfriends who had previously and secretly made arrangements with the exploiters to 'buy' them. These agreements generally provided that the women would be forced into prostitution by their partner, who would receive part of the proceeds, while another part of the profits would go to the original trafficking network to pay off the debt. The women initially see these men as saviours/rescuers, but in reality they are new exploiters.

62 Finally, at other times, other actors have been identified as those who exploit women returning from Germany and other European countries. These are, for example, people who host the women after their arrival in Italy, nationals - men and women - who come into contact with them through other acquaintances, or women with whom one has shared a previous experience of trafficking, who have freed themselves and become madams themselves.

63 Churches are places where information, sometimes false and misleading, is disseminated, where connections are made and where solutions to certain problems are found. They are also recruitment pools: in various situations, victims are co-opted by believers who attend the church, while in other cases the identification of women to be channelled into exploitative circuits is carried out by the pastors themselves, directly involved in trafficking and linked to criminal organisations.



Another method of recruitment identified is the **“lover boy” technique**.

Some men, belonging to Nigerian cults or criminal networks dedicated to various trafficking activities, approached their female targets through social media or met them in public places relevant to the Nigerian community with the apparent intention of establishing a romantic relationship.

Nevertheless, the real objective was to force the selected women into a system of exploitation.

It is worth noting that in many cases the women themselves ended up back in the exploitation cycle because of their poor living conditions, their loneliness and their compromised or very fragile psycho-physical state due to the traumas and violence they have suffered.

This study also emphasised that **in recent years the forms and methods of exploitation** used by Nigerian criminal organisations or individuals in Italy and other European countries, especially Germany, **have diversified**.

Increasingly, **forms of multiple exploitation have emerged, with women being employed in different activities for the profit of the networks**⁶⁴.



7.2.1 Indoor exploitation and online pornography

Since the end of 2019, an increase of the indoor exploitation has been observed in Italy and in Germany as well.

Indeed, the majority of women of Nigerian nationality have disappeared from outdoor places such as streets and subway or train stations, where they could previously be intercepted, to end up in **various types of closed facilities**.

Many stakeholders reported the **emergence or proliferation of the so-called “connection houses” in different areas of Italy**.

This term is used loosely to describe **various closed venues where women are sexually exploited**.

Sometimes these are **real “brothels”**.

They are either **flats where the victims live and receive clients** or, in other circumstances, apartments used exclusively

⁶⁴ These situations, as already mentioned, concern some Nigerian women returning from Germany. More generally, they relate to those who have already been victims of trafficking and who, over the years, have been unable to succeed in integrating themselves in Europe. In the majority of cases, these women are not very young, being them in their thirties, and above all they are not recent arrivals in Italy, having reached Europe several years ago.

for prostitution⁶⁵. Occasionally, the houses are located in abandoned and abusive buildings or are old holiday homes.

Furthermore, it has been noted that **businesses run by Nigerian nationals**, such as **bars, nightclubs, restaurants and mini-markets**, have developed in several Italian regions⁶⁶.

It seems that in a number of cases these places have set up **back rooms with beds**, where some women are forced into sexual exploitation to pay their debt to trafficking networks, whereas other Nigerians themselves rent one of the rooms in the back and pay it through the income from prostitution⁶⁷.

Connection houses are generally situated in disadvantaged and highly urbanised neighbourhoods of large cities or in more suburban areas. They can also be found in **informal settlements** and ghettos.

The phenomenon of connection houses

started to spread before 2020, the year of the Covid pandemic.

This model has been introduced in Europe, particularly in Italy, probably following the “success” of this type of exploitation pattern and facilities in Libya.

In some regions, such as Sicily and Campania, the presence of connection houses is known since many years, while in other Italian regions it has developed more recently.

Similarly, **in Apulia** - which according to this research seems to have a strong link with the exploitation realities and networks centred around Naples and Caserta - their expansion has been observed, especially in the province of Foggia.

Finally, in other Italian areas, such as Turin, Asti, Parma and Rome, various types of closed venues where indoor exploitation takes place have been reported.

In addition to the multiplication of sexu-

65 In some cases, the apartments have a dual function: workplace and dwelling. In these contexts, it has been observed that some women are confined without the possibility of going out. More often, however, they are allowed to leave the premises and move around the area on a daily basis. Victims of sexual exploitation sometimes live in the madam and her husband's apartment, which is used as a meeting place.

66 As well as being places of entertainment and socialisation, these bars, restaurants and night clubs are also used for the exploitation of prostitution. They sometimes were found to be “hook-up spots”, linking the offer and the demand for sexual services.

67 These latter situations, although they could be considered as the result of voluntary choices without being manifestly identified as forms of exploitation, nevertheless represent an evident mixture of two circumstances. On the one hand, there is the women's need to survive. These are often mechanisms that are put in place to sustain themselves and the family unit when they have children, in the absence of effective alternatives and in socio-economic conditions of extreme hardship. On the other hand, there is the profiteering from these women's extreme vulnerability by the many actors surrounding these environments (*mainly the owners of closed spaces where prostitution is initiated*).



al exploitation sites, the **emergence of new dynamics was also recorded.**

Many stakeholders reported a **change in the clientele:** exploitation is actually more within the Nigerian community itself, or clients visiting brothels are mostly foreigners, predominantly of African origin.

Another identified trend concerns the **way in which clients are approached.**

New channels of connecting are arising, including the use of social media such as Facebook, TikTok, Tinder or closed groups on Whatsapp.

Word of mouth within the communities themselves is also often used to find clients, or the exploiters or managers of the nightclubs are those who bring in the customers.

Finally, the **mobility of trafficked women** is another phenomenon that has been observed in the past and continues to occur⁶⁸.

The shift from exploitation on the street or in open spaces, where victims could be intercepted more easily, to indoor prostitution has also led to a **significant increase in online pornography or e-trafficking.**

In particular, the use of platforms like those

already mentioned and more well-known, such as Facebook, TikTok, Only Fans, Instagram, but also new video-sharing applications such as Imo or the so-called Dark Web, where women post videos in provocative positions, is on the rise.

It is believed that these tools are used both to sell pornographic video material and to attract the attention of a certain type of audience.

There is an assumption that the initial public contact with viewers is then followed by private chats and the arranging of meetings.



Online pornography

⁶⁸ Some actors involved in the research reported that women are temporarily moved between different exploitation sites, usually in various territories, within the same week or over longer periods.



7.2.2 Forced involvement in illegal activities

One of the forms of exploitation that has emerged from the research, particularly in the last two years, is the **forced involvement of women in criminal activities, with an increase in the trafficking of illegal substances**⁶⁹.

Criminal networks have, over time, expanded their sources of income beyond the forced prostitution of trafficked persons from Nigeria to Europe, diversifying the forms of exploitation and employing the same victim in a variety of activities.

Women are mainly used as **drug couriers**, either by concealing drug-filled packets into their bodies with the purpose of smuggling or through the delivery of parcels.

Drugs are often carried **within national**

borders. Deliveries or purchases frequently involve neighbouring locations (*from a city to more peripheral areas in the same province*) or places in different regions⁷⁰, thus concentrating within States (*Italy or Germany*).

In a limited number of cases, **transport with a transnational dimension** was detected or hypothesised on the basis of a number of indicators, for example between different European countries (*Italy-Netherlands, Italy-Germany*)⁷¹ or with third countries (*Italy and various African countries*).

It is interesting to note that, according to the findings of this study, such **cases are often uncovered following criminal proceedings against women for drug trafficking or when they are caught in the act by the police**.

Many of the actors interviewed stated that there is a strong reluctance to report situations in which persons are exploited in illegal activities, as opposed to situations related to sexual exploitation.

69 The EU Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU explicitly recognises the “exploitation of criminal activities” among the different forms of exploitation listed in Article 2. As explained in recital 11, the term ‘exploitation of criminal activities’ “should be understood as the exploitation of a person to commit, *inter alia*, pick-pocketing, shop-lifting, drug trafficking and other similar activities which are subject to penalties and imply financial gain.” Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (5 April 2011), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32011L0036>

70 This is the case, for example, between the Marche region (in particular Ancona and Macerata) and Umbria, between Piedmont and Tuscany, between Veneto and Emilia Romagna, between Campania and various Italian regions, both in the south and in the centre-north. It was emphasised that the city of Naples and the surrounding area often recur in the women’s stories as a constant reference point in situations involving drug dealing.

71 A few cases came to light of women who were stopped at the Brenner Pass on their way to Germany, as well as women who made several journeys between Campania or Rome and the Netherlands within a short period of time.



Extreme vulnerability

This is due to a great fear of retaliation by the networks⁷², but also to a lack of

awareness of their status as victims and a poor knowledge of the organisations and their illicit trades⁷³. In many cases, women are not members or affiliates but mere tools used by the networks.

Some indicators may point to the use of women in the transport of drugs, such as:

- the possession of **several mobile phones** in addition to the personal one;
- **continuous movements in the territory with predefined itineraries** and routes;
- the **availability of considerable sums of money** collected suddenly;
- the appearance of **“unjustified” stays abroad** through fingerprints⁷⁴;
- the **high level of vulnerability** and, therefore, **susceptibility to extortion**.

Looking at the **reasons why women are involved in the transport of drugs** or in the commission of other illegal activities, we can see that there are many causes, including (i) economic convenience, because cash is available quickly and with less effort, (ii) the need for money combined with a lack of alternatives, and (iii)

72 Several stakeholders pointed out that, in a very small number of cases, women involved in the transport of drugs have denounced the criminal network due to a strong fear of repercussions.

73 This research has shown that criminal organisations employing women to transport drugs rarely inform them of the goods they are carrying and do not provide details of the recipients to whom they are to be delivered. It is generally explained to them where the product or “traditional medicine” is to be transported. Some people, especially those who are more vulnerable (physically or psychologically), are not aware of the nature of the items they are transporting. In other cases, however, some women understand after their first trips, also in view of the high income after delivery.

74 Several Italian anti-trafficking organizations have identified some individuals who temporarily moved to other European countries during their time in reception centres in Italy, but this was not followed by convincing explanations from the women as to the reasons for such expatriation.

because of coercion, blackmail, plagiarism and lack of awareness of what women are getting into⁷⁵.



Blackmailing single mothers with children

It has been observed that criminal networks select **certain profiles among the victims of trafficking in order to use them for drug delivery.**

Specifically, in the situations identified during the research, people are singled out because they are **particularly vulnerable**, namely because they are in destitution or are easy target to be threatened through retaliation on their children on European territory⁷⁶.

In addition, the women selected are those who have already **repaid a significant part of the debt** incurred owed to traffickers **through their sexual exploitation**, and who are given the 'opportunity' to repay the missing amount in a different way.

The latter receive such "offers" because they are **considered more reliable** and at the same time more exhausted and worn - in fact, their age and physical con-

75 This raises the question of the non-punishment of trafficking victims compelled to engage in criminal, unlawful activities. See: Dr Marja Jovanović, and Dr Maayan Niezna, Council of Europe, Non-Punishment of Victims/Survivors of Human Trafficking in Practice: A Case Study of the United Kingdom, September 2023, <https://rm.coe.int/non-punishment-of-victims-survivors-of-human-trafficking-in-practice-a/1680ac86f4>; ICAT - The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, Issue brief - Non-punishment of victims of trafficking, 2020, https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/ICAT/19-10800_ICAT_Issue_Brief_8_Ebook.pdf; Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, former Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, The importance of implementing the non-punishment provision: the obligation to protect victims, 30 July 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Trafficking/Non-Punishment-Paper.pdf>; OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Policy and legislative recommendations towards the effective implementation of the non-punishment provision with regard to victims of trafficking, 2013, <https://www.osce.org/files/documents/6/6/101002.pdf>

76 With regard to this last element, it was stressed that the risk of recruitment and involvement in criminal activities is particularly high for single women with minors because they have the need to ensure an adequate standard of living for their children. This need also overlaps with the fear of removal of the children by the juvenile courts, based on reports of unsuitable socio-economic conditions for the well-being of minors.



Drug trafficking as form of exploitation

dition make them less “attractive” in a sex market - than recently arrived victims, as they have been in the network of exploitation for some time.

By contrast, sometimes the recruitment concerned victims who are more enterprising and who are on average younger, i.e. under 27 years of age.

It was also noted that the offence of transporting drugs is generally committed when there is a **turning point in the migratory process**, such as the end of

the procedure for the recognition of international protection or after obtaining a residence permit, combined with the withdrawal from the reception system, the lack of economic resources and no integration in the country⁷⁷.

Moreover, women have very little awareness of the criminal implications.

⁷⁷ Some stakeholders stressed that the problem that leads some women to be co-opted/recruited by criminal organisations to transport drugs is not necessarily document related, that is, linked to a situation of irregular stay, but rather to poor economic conditions and housing problems. In fact, some women suddenly find themselves “on the street”, without family or social support networks.



Insight Box:

Exploitation through the involvement of victims in the drug trafficking

The case of S. (Sicily)

S. is a very young girl. **She arrives in Italy as an unaccompanied minor** and almost immediately, through a group of people working in her reception centre, she is introduced to a labour market integration programme.

In reality, she finds herself in a **situation of labour exploitation**.

Ostensibly, she is given a contract for a few months to work few hours per week as a cleaner in a hotel, but she actually works long hours each day otherwise the employer does not give her the salary.

As a result of these excessive hours, **she is withdrawn from the accommodation** in which she was placed, because she is sometimes unable to return to the centre at night due to the lack of public transport, or she often returns outside the authorised time slot and therefore receives numerous warnings.

Later, she also loses her job and is unable to obtain a residence permit. **Her appli-**

cation for international protection is rejected by the asylum authorities, without S., who is clearly a potential victim of trafficking due to the presence of several indicators, being referred to an anti-trafficking organisation.

Meanwhile, **she continues to receive threats from the network that trafficked her to Italy** because she fled and did not pay back the debt.

So, S. (*alone and without any means of support*) **begins to ask anyone for help, especially in the church**. She says she does not want to prostitute herself.

Unfortunately, some of the Pentecostal churches are not dedicated to providing support, but are places of different kind businesses.

By word of mouth, some church believers offer her support. They say she can **deliver 'traditional medicines' to a number of clients** in another province. These are short, one-day round trips.



She has to carry small packages and collect money from sales, which she then takes back to her employers. They offer her 200 to 300 euros for each trip.

S. has to repay the debt and live. **She has no much choice: the alternative is prostitution or transporting “traditional medicines”**, as she has been told.

At first, she does not know what she is carrying. When she later on does understand, she tries to break away from the criminal network in which she has been placed, but they threaten her in various ways, including the use of juju.

Throughout her life in Italy, **S has attempted suicide several times**. At times when she has been alone, she has tried to resort to these solutions.

S. goes for her last delivery trip. Perhaps when she realises she is carrying drugs, her attitude is likely to become more agitated, suspicious, and so **she is stopped and searched by the police. They find the drugs on her and arrest her**. She is charged with drug trafficking.


An anti-trafficking organisation in the area is informed, which takes over her case and manages to get **the judge to order her to be placed under house arrest in a shelter for victims of trafficking**.



**Victim
of exploitation**



8.
**Issues related
to the presence
of minors**





The current research highlighted the fact that the **majority of women of Nigerian nationality returned to Italy from Germany with several minors**, on average **2-3 children, often born on German territory and generally aged between 1 and 5 years old.**

The return of these children has given rise to a number of **problems and harmful consequences** that are interlinked and relate in particular to **two areas.**

The first critical point is the recognition in Italy of the birth certificates issued by the German authorities.

Another very dramatic situation concerns the opening of procedures to assess parental capacity and the adoption of measures to limit the responsibility of Nigerian mothers.



8.1 Recognising German birth certificates in Italy: difficulties and challenges

The **only documents** that are generally presented by a significant number of persons of Nigerian nationality returning from Germany are **birth certificates issued by the German authorities.**

In practice, a variety of situations relating to birth certificates have been identified, which may be grouped into **five macro-categories.**

The first category covers those situations in which there is a **lack or absence of a birth certificate**, that represents a minority among the cases of families returning from Germany.

A second, particularly frequent case concerns certificates which contain the **note “Identität nicht nachgewiesen” (identity not verified/proven)** in the margin next to the parent’s names.

A third macro-set includes all those situations that relate to the **personal data of**



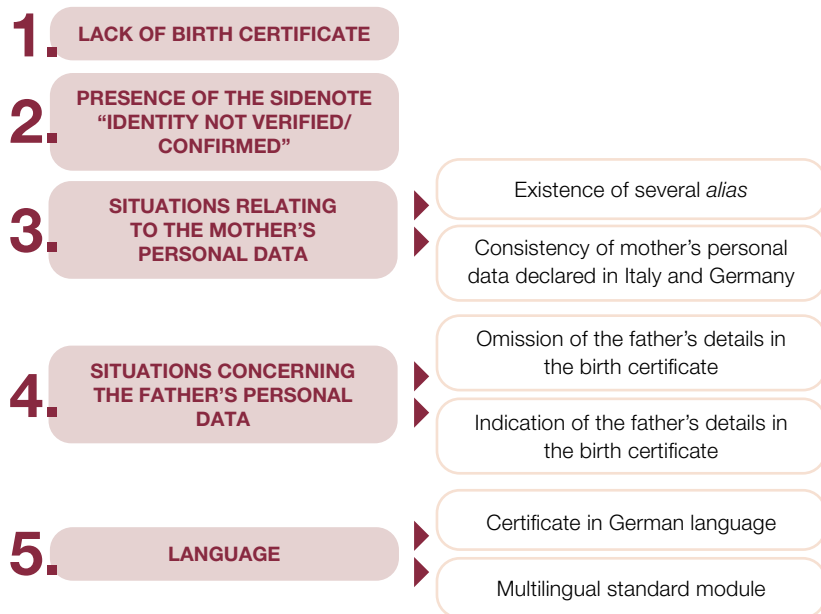
the mother⁷⁸.

A fourth category regards those **certificates that either indicate or omit the father's name**. In fact, in several cases, these documents contain the data of both parents, whereas in most of the situations encountered by the actors involved in the research, this information is not included.

Lastly, a final group relates to the **language** in which the birth certificate is registered: certificates in German only or those with a standard multilingual form, which are however quite rare. (Figure 1)

Figure 1

5 macro-categories of critical situations related to birth certificates



⁷⁸ In many cases, the existence of several aliases is observed because the mother's personal data appearing on the birth certificate differ from those given to the Italian authorities at the time of disembarkation or during the fingerprinting phase. Another common circumstance concerns the consistency of the mother's personal details, having declared the same information in Italy and Germany.



In the context of the present study, the birth certificates presented by Nigerian women after their return to Italy in order to regularise the legal status of minors born in Germany have caused mainly **three types of issues**.

These documents have raised in several cases **doubts about the biological relationship between the child and the woman** claiming to be her/his mother⁷⁹.

Suspicious about the validity and authenticity of birth certificates are also common⁸⁰.

Finally, a third critical issue that has emerged is the presence on the birth certificates of the **personal data of fathers who subsequently abscond** or fail to appear at the request of the Italian authorities to fulfil their obligations, because they are

abroad (*in Germany*) or in another region⁸¹.

The mentioned problems concerning the birth certificates issued in Germany have arisen with different authorities, *in primis* with **the police (questuras) and their immigration offices**⁸².

Very often, **delays and hurdles in lodging international protection applications** were observed because several questuras have indeed prevented or blocked minors and their mothers to formalize their asylum claims or refused to fingerprint these children.

Various requests were urged as a *conditio sine qua non* in order to dispel doubts about the identity of the mother and her biological link with the minor, or to overcome objections about the validity of the documents in German⁸³.

79 In this context, numerous stakeholders interviewed agreed that special attention is needed to protect minors from possible situations of irregularity and exploitation. Nevertheless, they also stressed that in practice this vigilance remains a mere administrative-bureaucratic formality, without the adoption of measures to effectively identify or prevent abuses and forms of exploitations involving the children.

Indeed, some actors highlighted the hypocrisy of this situation. In certain Italian cities such as Rome and Naples, the police immigration offices and the local authorities pay a lot of attention to cases of women returning with children from other European countries, who are sometimes even asked to prove their biological link by means of a DNA test. However, this is generally not accompanied by an effective protection of the minor. In fact, neither the child is accommodated in a special reception centre with his/her mother, nor the case is referred to the social services of the municipality concerned for being monitored.

80 This is due to the fact that such documents often contain the note 'identity not proven/verified' and are issued in German language only, without being supported by a standard multilingual form or other certification.

81 In most cases, these are fathers who, after the birth of their children, abandon them because their relationship with the woman has broken down, or they do not intend to provide economic support for their children, or because they move to other European countries, thus undermining their parental relationship. There are also situations in which, on the instructions of the community of origin, paternity is acknowledged by men who have no biological or emotional ties to the child, but who enjoy a regular legal status in Germany. As a result, contacts are interrupted after the birth certificate is signed.

82 These problems were encountered in many Italian areas, most frequently in the provinces of Caserta, Catania, Foggia, Frosinone, Milan, Naples, Parma and Rome.

83 Police office of Caserta, Catania, Frosinone, Naples, Rome.



Similarly, the presentation of birth certificates issued by German local institutions has often **affected the granting of a travel document and/or a first residence permit⁸⁴**, as well as the **renewal of previous stay permits** given to the mother by the Italian authorities and the inclusion of children born abroad in these documents⁸⁵.

Obstacles were also encountered with **municipal authorities**, in particular **civil registry offices for registration of residence** and, in a limited number of cases, with social services for taking charge of the family unit and placing it in *ad hoc* reception centres for single mothers with children.

A variety of measures have been encouraged or demanded by both police headquarters and local authorities.

The present research revealed a heterogeneity of practices and significant differences across the country in the handling of similar situations with regard to German birth certificates.

For instance, **multilingual standard forms⁸⁶** and **translations of various**



84 This often happened in the case of women who had been granted some forms of protection by Italian territorial Commissions or Courts. Immigration authorities were usually reluctant to issue a first residence permit with the simultaneous inclusion of children born on German territory in such document.

85 Such situations were encountered at the police headquarters in Foggia, Milan, Rome, Naples and Caserta.

86 Art. 6 and 7 of the EU Regulation 2016/1191 of 2016; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R1191>

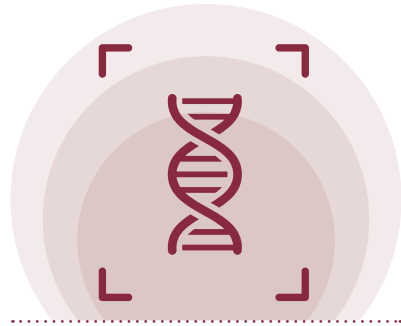


kinds were often required, whereas in many other cases an affidavit of the translation of the birth certificate was demanded⁸⁷.

Police immigration offices or municipal registry offices also asked for translations from the German embassy or consulates in Italy or from the Italian diplomatic missions in Germany.

Sometimes translations were sought from the diplomatic authorities of the country of origin of women.

There have been several cases where institutional bodies have insisted on the **legalisation of a birth certificate**⁸⁸ or the addition of an **Apostille** certificate, despite the fact that such requests are illegitimate under certain international Conventions⁸⁹ and the EU Regulation



DNA testing

2016/1191⁹⁰.

Frequently, the presentation of other documents proving parentage, such as residence permits issued by the German


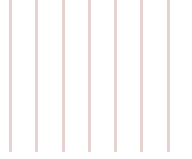
87 The **affidavit of translation** is a sworn document written by a translator stating and confirming that the translation is accurate and reflects the exact content of the original document. It also asserts that the translation has been done in accordance with international translation standards and by a qualified and professional translator. The translator shall take this oath in the presence of a court or a commissioner authorised to do so in the country concerned.

88 The term "**legalization**", as defined by the EU Regulation 2016/1191 of 2016 in article 3(4), means "*the formality for certifying the authenticity of a public office holder's signature, the capacity in which the person signing the document has acted and, where appropriate, the identity of the seal or stamp which it bears*". Regulation (EU) 2016/1191 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 on promoting the free movement of citizens by simplifying the requirements for presenting certain public documents in the European Union and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016R1191>

89 Convention concerning the issue of plurilingual extracts from civil status records (with annexes), concluded in Vienna on 8 September 1976, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201327/volume-1327-A-22132-English.pdf>; Convention abolishing the requirement of legalisation for foreign public documents, concluded in The Hague on 5 October 1961, <https://assets.hcch.net/docs/b12ac529-5f75-411b-b523-8eebe86613c0.pdf>.

90 The European Regulation 2016/1191 provides, in relation to certain public documents - *inter alia* birth certificates - issued by the authorities of a Member State which must be presented to the authorities of another Member State, for a system of exemption from legalisation or similar formalities (Apostille), the simplification of other formalities, and the introduction of multilingual standard forms to be used as a translation aid. Regulation (EU) 2016/1191 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 on promoting the free movement of citizens by simplifying the requirements for presenting certain public documents in the European Union and amending Regulation (EU) No 1024/2012, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32016R1191>




authorities (*for asylum, Duldung on toleration grounds, etc.*) for the child or the parents, was also considered relevant to dispel doubts about the biological mother-child relationship and the authenticity of the birth certificate submitted.

Finally, the **practice of requiring DNA testing** as an alternative means to some of the measures described above was observed in some questuras.⁹¹

The refusal to recognise German birth certificates and the numerous requests made by police headquarters and municipal registry offices have led to a **cascade of negative consequences**.

Minors and their mothers were often left in a **state of total limbo and irregular stay** on the Italian territory for long periods of time, even months, when extreme proofs and burdens were required.

As a result, the lack of a residence permit has prevented them from enjoying fundamental rights. In particular, access to a range of services, such as the national health system (*and thus, for example, to paediatricians*), education in schools or kindergartens, and the placement in reception centres for asylum seekers, was hindered.



8.2 Repercussions and challenges relating to the initiation of the mothers' parenting capacities assessment

The **initiation of procedures for the assessment of parental competence** is another common problem in many Italian regions **regarding single-mother households returning from other European countries**, especially Germany.

It emerged that, in practice, referrals to juvenile courts of situations of harm and prejudice to minors were generally made by the **social services of the municipalities motu proprio**.

At the same time, it was noted that the activation of these evaluations is increasingly based on reports from reception centres hosting Nigerian women (*usually asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection*). In addition, on several occasions other institutions, such as hospitals and medical clinics, have brought cases to the attention of judges.

⁹¹ This practice is implemented in the police immigration office of Caserta, Frosinone, Naples and Rome.



Throughout Italy, **three situations** have been identified in which the courts have been asked to intervene and which have led to the subsequent **opening of a procedure for the assessment of parental capacity**. In most cases, these are situations involving single-parent households with mothers and one or more minors.

A first typology concerns situations in which the mother was deemed **not to provide adequate care for the children** or a family context suitable for the child's psycho-physical well-being and development. Many stakeholders in several Italian regions have pointed out that, in a number of cases, reports were sent to judges following an inaccurate and superficial analysis⁹².

A second set of complaints to the juve-

nile tribunals covers situations where there was a **suspicion of harm to the child because of the poor socio-economic conditions of the family** household.

In this context, some of the actors consulted spoke of **requests for judicial intervention "due to destitution or utter social precariousness"**⁹³.

This category includes those women with minors found on the street, often returning from other European countries, with no means of subsistence and no housing.

Finally, **the third type of reports** relates to those **requests submitted to justify the placement of single-parent families in municipal accommodation centres**. This is sometimes done to overcome the shortage of places in other reception systems, or to provide real support to

92 In fact, they have concerned limited episodes of relatively serious nature, such as the way in which children are scolded or the daily management of minors, who are often carried on the back of their mothers.

93 The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, in the case of Saviny v. Ukraine, no. 39948/06, found a violation of Article 8 because, *inter alia*, the placement of the two applicants' children was justified without any in-depth analysis, mainly on the grounds of the parents' inability to provide adequate living conditions (lack of financial resources) and their personal qualities (disability of both), which, according to the Ukrainian authorities, had endangered the life, health and moral education of the children. In paragraph 50, the Court had specifically stated that: "*the mere fact that a child could be placed in a more beneficial environment for his or her upbringing does not on its own justify a compulsory measure of removal.*", underlining that "*Neither can this measure be justified by a mere reference to the parents' precarious situation, which can be addressed by less radical means than the splitting of the family, such as targeted financial assistance and social counselling*". Moreover, in paragraph 57, the ECtHR emphasised that: "*there is no appearance that the judicial authorities analysed in any depth the extent to which the purported inadequacies of the children's upbringing were attributable to the applicants' irremediable incapacity to provide requisite care, as opposed to their financial difficulties and objective frustrations, which could have been overcome by targeted financial and social assistance and effective counselling.*" European Court of Human Rights (Fifth Section), Judgement, 18 December 2008, case Saviny and Savina v. Ukraine – Application n. 39948/06, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-90360%22%5D%7D>

In its 2014 judgment in Zhou v. Italy, the ECHR reiterated in paragraph 58 that. "*The role of the public authorities in social protection is precisely that of helping people in difficulty, guiding them in their actions and advising them, inter alia, on the different types of social benefits available, on the possibilities of obtaining social housing or other means of overcoming their difficulties*". European Court of Human Rights (Second Section), Judgement, 21 January 2014, case Zhou v. Italy, Application n. 33773/11, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22appno%22:%5B%2233773/11%22%22%22%22%5D%7D>



mothers with the children in special family shelters. However, it is worth noting that, as pointed out by many interviewees, the initiation of such referrals must be carefully and conscientiously considered, as the outcome of these procedures is often uncertain.

This is notably the case for those foreign women with children, who are highly vulnerable because of their personal situation, past experiences of exploitation and lack of family and social support networks.

Furthermore, the consequences of parental capacity assessments may be particularly detrimental to the mother and the minors themselves.

This research emphasised a number of **critical issues and consequences following the opening of parental capacity assessment procedures** in the case of Nigerian women returning to Italy from other European countries.

Firstly, many Nigerian mothers shared a **great fear of having their children taken away by judges and social services**, combined with **feelings of instability and resentment** as these parental capacity evaluations take time⁹⁴.

This was fuelled by various episodes of child removal and was exacerbated by word of mouth within the community of origin, which has often not distinguished between incidents of serious harm and danger to minors from other less severe circumstances.

Many stakeholders highlighted as a common problem the **lack of backup of mothers by social services during the parenting competencies assessment**, and expressed the need to combine monitoring activities with methods of shadowing and supporting women in the practice of motherhood.

Similarly, it was observed that **little attention** was given to **mothers' background and cultural aspects**.

The **recurrent application of a single "Eurocentric parenting model" and prejudices against other educational standards**, that are not considered suitable, were described by multiple actors.

Failure to provide women with **adequate information**, as well as **lacking or limited access to cultural mediation**, was found to be a further significant shortcoming⁹⁵. A very harmful consequence

94 The assessment of parental capacity decided by the juvenile courts often includes measures of household and maternal supervision, but may also provide or envisage the suspension or restriction of parental responsibility, or the separation of the child from the mother and its placement in foster care, up to the most extreme case of termination of parental responsibility.

95 In this regard, it was stressed the importance of explaining to mothers through detailed information the following topics: i) the reasons why their case was reported to the courts; ii) the roles and functions of the various actors involved (*court, social workers, etc.*); iii) the consequences that such procedures may entail and the path to be followed; iv) the support measures for the family that might be put in place.



inferred from the adoption of measures restricting parental responsibility – which sometimes are taken in an indiscriminate or automatic manner and without a comprehensible information given to women – is the **phenomenon of women fleeing with their children to informal settlements or ghettos**⁹⁶.

These shantytowns are located in the southern regions of Italy, mainly in Apulia. They are complex realities, defined by those who experienced them as **“places to return to or where to go when there is no hope left”**.

Some actors have observed an **increasing presence of minors** in these informal settlements in recent years, although it was underlined the difficulty to intercept them and to understand the real extent of the issue.

The **women hide and seek refuge in these slums**, abandoning the shelters in which they have been placed, for fear of being reported to the social services for an assessment of their parental capacity, or because a child protection case was already pending before a juvenile court. They therefore **“choose to save themselves and their children”** in informal settlements in order **to avoid having them removed**.

Another very worrying repercussion deriving from the initiation of parental capacity evaluations lies in **informal fostering of minors to other families**.

This practice has allowed mothers living outside reception systems and without social support networks to financially maintain their households.

However, some stakeholders pointed out that these situations of informal fostering outside official procedures hide or may conceal **new forms of subjugation or bondage**.

Coercion and physical violence are no longer used to force women, who are in a very vulnerable and socio-economically precarious situation, to accept exploitative situations; instead **pressure and blackmail in relation to minors** are more effective. There have been cases where children were taken in by members of the Nigerian community, usually living in another Italian region, with the aim to exploit their mothers.

There were also several cases where, in order to enable women to travel for work purposes, children were temporarily placed in the care of families **identified through social and friendship networks, against the payment of a fee**.

⁹⁶ This situation often concerns single-parent households headed by women. Some are Dublin cases returning from Germany or France, while others are women with children coming from other regions, particularly northern Italy - Piedmont, Lombardy, Tuscany, Marche and Campania - who sometimes had a previous failed migration experience in another European country.



Insight Box:

“Informal fostering and termination of parental responsibility”

The story of B. (Campania-Apulia)

B. is a woman of Nigerian nationality. She arrived in Italy as a **victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation**.

She is a **single mother of a six-year-old child**. She has no family support network.

She had a **residence permit** for humanitarian protection, which has **expired**. In any case, due to the so-called decrees introduced by the Interior Minister Salvini, her old document cannot be renewed because this form of protection has been abolished and it is difficult to convert the residence permit into another type in the absence of a regular job.

B. is therefore in a **situation of irregular stay**.

She has no job, but she has to cover the expenses for her son.

Through acquaintances, she hears that people are needed in Puglia to work in the fields; the pay is not good, but it is the

only opportunity she has.

She goes with her son to the informal settlement of Borgo Mezzanone, one of the many ghettos in Apulia, in the province of Foggia. It is the only place where she can live.

But she quickly realises that the living conditions there are inadequate for adults, much less for children.

What can she do?

So, she decides to leave her son informally with an “aunt”, a “friend” who lives with her husband in Castel Volturno, a town in the Campania region.

She calls him every day to see how he is. She sends money to this woman to look after him.

One night, the police find the child on the street in his pyjamas.

He ran away because the partner of the



woman in whose care he had been is a violent and abusive man.

The child is immediately placed in a children's home and the social services report the case to the juvenile court in Naples.

The judge issues a termination of parental responsibility and an order for the child's adoption.

The situation is aggravated by the mother's irregular status on Italian territory.

In this extremely difficult situation, B. is fortunate to have the support of some experienced and competent people, in particular a lawyer from Campania and a legal adviser from a migrant counselling centre in Apulia, who follow her case.

Two proceedings are conducted simultaneously: one in Campania before the juvenile court to allow the woman to resume contact with her son and regain parental responsibility; one in Apulia to appeal against the negative decision to renew her residence permit.

The woman has to fight for her status to be regularised on Italian territory; she has to go to the family counselling centre in Apulia to have her parental capacity assessed; she has to have periodic meetings in Campania with her son (*who in the meantime feels abandoned and develops*

feelings of anger and aggression towards his mother).

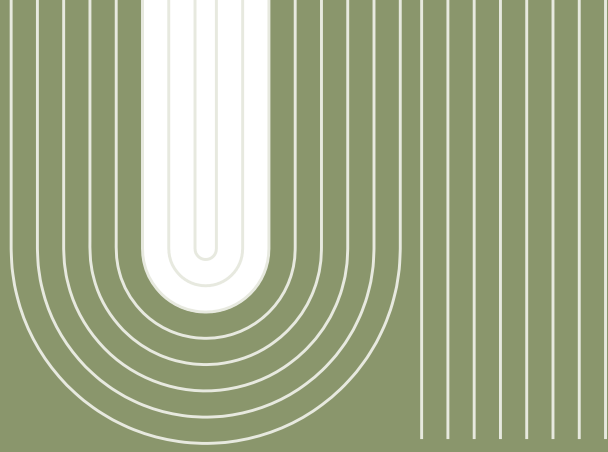
She also has to work to support herself and pay for travel between the two regions.

After a long process, **the court of Naples considers that B. is a caring and capable mother and therefore able to take care of her son.**

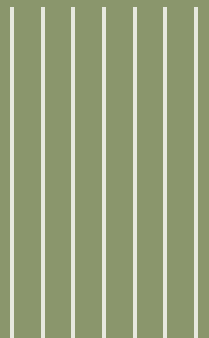
Parental responsibility is re-established.

The obstacle that now arises is the need to find a regular job and a house that can accommodate both of them.





Conclusions





Secondary movements of women and minors, who are potential victims of human trafficking, are a heterogeneous phenomenon that is constantly **growing in dimension** and **changing in its trends and dynamics**.

They also involve an **increasing number of nationalities** (*i.e. Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Guinea Conakry, Cameroon, Gambia*) **and affect many European States**, as countries of first arrival, subsequent destination and return.

At the same time, **a diversification of forms and modalities of exploitation** has been observed in the context of this research. Forced prostitution on the streets has gradually been replaced by **indoor sexual exploitation**.

Various types of enclosed premises, such as **connection houses** in first instance, have developed significantly in recent years, with the associated difficulties in carrying out victim outreach activities.

There has also been a considerable increase in **online pornography** or e-trafficking, facilitated in particular by the **massive use of social media** (*Facebook, TikTok, Only Fans, Instagram*) and new channels for finding clients.

Simultaneously, **new forms of exploitation** have been identified, such as the forced involvement of **women in criminal activities** (*mainly drug transport*), the **baby-selling trade and the abuse of social benefits for children**.

Furthermore, there has been a **proliferation of actors** who take advantage of women's extreme vulnerability by 'using' them for personal gain or by facilitating their initiation in exploitation systems.

In particular, this study has highlighted the existence of several **criminal organisations** rooted in different European countries and interconnected with each other, as well as the gradual appearance of a **plurality of individuals**.



These persons are often identified with **alleged partners or acquaintances and friends**, mainly male and of the same nationality as the victims, met through the web.

Finally, a **myriad of different forms of pressure and intimidation** tactics has been detected. These have replaced the massive use of physical control and coercion of the past, and target women's specific weaknesses or vulnerabilities.

Certain characteristics of the victims and peculiar factors make some profiles more susceptible to blackmail, such as: a strong belief in juju; the presence of children in single-parent households in combination with the absence of family and community support networks; disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, and situations of irregular stay.

Nevertheless, the **secondary movements** of Nigerian women in Europe should **not be described according to a rigid categorisation**, deeming these transnational flows **exclusively as the result of human trafficking or as aimed at the so-called "social benefits shopping"**.

This assumption may be misleading with regard to the complexity of the phenomenon and does not provide an accurate and comprehensive picture of the multiple facets and nuances of these movements.

Many cases, concerning both people moving from countries of first entry to other European countries and those returning to areas of first arrival, are a **mixture of several circumstances**.

On the one hand, there is the **women's need to survive and support their family unit** when there are children, in the absence of effective alternatives and in extreme destitution, that brings many of them to rely on ambiguous figures



and to fall back into exploitative cycles.

On the other hand, it emerges the **role of several actors, whose intention is to take advantage of women'** extreme vulnerability and to subject them to various forms of exploitation.

However, one fact is evident: there is an **increasing number of people "in orbit"** who, because of their fragility combined with their irregular status on European soil, tend to become **invisible** and easy prey for organised and well-established exploitation networks or single individuals.

Therefore, taking into consideration the findings of this research and the transnational dimension of secondary movements of potential victims of trafficking between European countries, as well as the constant evolution of criminal networks and forms of exploitation, the **need for a European response by strengthening effective cooperation between Member States' authorities** becomes crucial.

The need for **greater involvement of non-governmental organisations**, both in identifying and protecting victims of human trafficking and in accompanying them and their children on the path to integration, has also been emphasised in Germany and Italy, since they could make a significant contribution through their expertise and consolidated experience in this field.

In order to adequately address the phenomenon described, it is therefore critical to **create or strengthen a synergy between several institutional actors** (*such as, first and foremost, asylum authorities, the Dublin Unit, law enforcement agencies, local authorities, judges, to name but a few*) **and non-governmental entities** (*in particular, anti-trafficking organisations and counselling centres*) through various channels and cooperation mechanisms.

Attachment I: List of stakeholders interviewed



	NAME	TYOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
1	Association Autres Regards (France –Marseilles)	Anti-trafficking organization	Roberta Derosas
2	Association Be Free	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lazio and organization against domestic violence	Francesca De Masi
3	Association Caleidos (Comune di Modena)	Ente del progetto antitrattra della regione Emilia Romagna	Tatiana Hincu
4	Association Casa dei Giovani onlus (Palermo counselling centre)	Body of the anti-trafficking project of Palermo and Trapani provinces (Sicity)	Stefania Russello, Bisola Ajayi, Simonetta Bellotti
5	Associazione Casa dei Giovani onlus (Trapani counselling centre)	Body of the anti-trafficking project of Palermo and Trapani provinces	Stefania Lo Coco, Jessica Restivo
6	Associazione Casa dei Giovani onlus	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Emilia Romagna	Maria Carlotta Rossi, Maddalena Bonafini
7	Association Comunità San Benedetto al Porto (Alessandria)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Federica Falcone, Fabio Scatritti
8	Association Free Woman	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Marche	Giulia Atipaldi
9	Association Gruppo Abele (Turin)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Simona Marchiselli, Luca Rondi
10	Association Penelope	Body of the anti-trafficking project of Catania and Messina provinces (Sicity)	Oriana Cannavò, Vanessa Montante, Giuseppe Bucalo
11	Association Progetto Arcobaleno (Florence)	NGO	Cristina Baldi
12	Association Tampep (Turin)	Body of the anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Piera Viale
13	Asylzentrum Tübingen e.V. (Tübingen – Baden-Württemberg)	NGO specialized in asylum and migration	Dana Pietsch, Karin Migesel
14	BBMeZ (Bremen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Helene Gustschew



	NAME	TYOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
15	Blessing Igjehon	Cultural mediator of the regional anti-trafficking project of Veneto	
16	Caritas Diocesana (Como)	NGO	Anna Merlo
17	Caritas (Tübingen – Baden-Württemberg)	NGO	
18	CAS Agordat – Fondazione Progetto Arca	Reception centre of the Prefecture of Milan	Silvia Scotti, Simona Angelillo, Stefano Capizzi, Francesca Cavana
19	Casa Dalia - cooperativa Medihospes (Rome)	Reception centre for mothers with children	Daniela Cesaretti, Cristina Nazzaro
20	Casa di Cristian - Cooperativa Roma Solidarietà onlus (Roma)	Reception centre for mothers with children	Andrea Bianchi Cecilia Russomanno
21	CAV “Olympia De Gouges” (Grosseto)	Shelter for victims of domestic violence	Carmen Klinger
22	Reception centre for women asylum seekers and refugee, run by ARCI e Be Free associations (Rome)	Reception centre for women (SAI accommodation system)	Antonella Grossi
23	CISS – Cooperazione internazionale Sud Sud (Palermo)	NGO	Pasqua De Candia
24	Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection of Torino	Italian asylum authorities	Presidente Laura Cassio, Focal group tratta: Veronica Carretto, Alessandra Matarangolo, Ester Salis, Dario Vitiello
25	Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection of Milano	Italian asylum authorities	Presidente Elena Scalfaro, Focal group tratta: Debora Racano, Serena Viscardi



	NAME	TYPOLGY	INTERVIEWEES
26	Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection di Agrigento	Italian asylum authorities	Presidente Ester Mammano, Alessandro Rizzo
27	Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection of di Trapani	Italian asylum authorities	Presidente Ester Mammano, Simona Altese
28	Municipality of Milan – legal department for minors and families	Local authorities	Sarah Nocita
29	Municipality of Parma	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Emilia Romagna	Silvia Chiapponi
30	Municipality of Parma - CIAC onlus	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Emilia Romagna	Micaela Oliviero
31	Municipality of Reggio Emilia - Ufficio Informazioni Stranieri	Local authorities (immigration office)	Manuela Rapetti
32	Municipality of Reggio Emilia – Project Rosemary	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Emilia Romagna	Giovanna Bondavalli
33	Municipality of Rome - Sala operativa sociale	Local authorities	Elio Pittiglio
34	Municipality of Rome - Servizio Roxanne	Local authorities (anti-trafficking office)	Alessandra Casagrande, Michela Mariani, Alessandra Brussato
35	Municipality of Rome - Sportello Ufficio Immigrazione (Sportello Unico per accoglienza migranti - SUAM)	Local authorities (immigration office)	Mattia Rocco Esposito, Antonella Caputo
36	Municipality of Turin - Ufficio Minori Stranieri	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Paola Giordano
37	Municipality of Turin -Servizio Stranieri	Local authorities (immigration office)	Giovanna Carucci



	NAME	TYOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
38	Municipality of Verona - Servizi Sociali Accoglienza e tratta	Local authorities	Valentina Maraia, Vittorio Zanon
39	Comunità Oasi 2	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Puglia	Luisa Gissi
40	Consiglio italiano per i rifugiati - CIR (Rome)	NGO specialized in asylum and human trafficking	Daniela Di Rado
41	Consorzio Monviso Solidale (Cuneo)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Elena Sordella, Annalisa Mondino
42	Coop. soc. Liberazione e Speranza (Novara, Vercelli)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Comfort Akande
43	Cooperativa Alice (Alba e Cuneo)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Valentina Ambu
44	Cooperativa Alternata Silos (Latina)	Reception centre for female asylum seekers (CAS)	Antonella Grossi
45	Cooperativa E.V.A. (Caserta)	Association specialized in human trafficking and gender-based violence	Lella Palladino
46	Cooperativa Lotta Contro l'Emarginazione (Brescia)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia 2 "Mettiamo le Ali"	Gessica Gosetti
47	Cooperativa Lotta contro l'emarginazione	Anti-trafficking body	Tiziana Bianchini
48	Cooperativa Lotta contro l'emarginazione (Sondrio)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia	Graziella Corbo
49	Cooperativa Lotta contro l'emarginazione (Como)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia	Laura Castegnaro, Cecilia Lindenberg
50	Cooperativa Lotta contro l'emarginazione (Como)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia	Luisa Tarantino



	NAME	TYPOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
51	Counselling Center for Refugees (Caritasverband Heidelberg e.V., Diakonisches Werk Heidelberg und Deutsches Rotes Kreuz Kreisverband) working in the Ankunftszentrum of Heidelberg - Baden Württemberg	NGOs working in arrival reception centre for asylum seekers	Natalia Vejar, Katharina Kramer
52	Dedalus cooperativa sociale (Naples)	Body leading the regional anti-trafficking project of Campania	Enrica Di Nenni, Paola De Martino, Fiorella Liotti
53	Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechts (Germany)	Research Institute	Naile Taniş, Teona Tschaidse
54	Diaconia – Cooperativa sociale di Frosinone	NGO specialized in asylum, human trafficking and accommodation of migrant women	Flaminia Masi
55	Diakonie Mark-Ruhr gemeinnützige GmbH (Hagen – Nordrhein-Westfalen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	
56	Differenza Donna (Rome)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lazio	Giovanna Bruno
57	Dortmunder Mitternachtsmission (Dortmund – Nordrhein-Westfalen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Andrea Hitzke Heike Müller
58	Eine Welt Zentrum (Herne - Nordrhein-Westfalen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	
59	Erminia Rizzi	Legal advisor at the counselling centre for asylum seekers and migrants of Bari; member of ASGI	
60	Human rights and international protection expert at the Territorial Commission for International Protection of Naples	Italian asylum authorities	Novella Ricciuti
61	Farsi Prossimo onlus	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia	Silvia Foralosso



	NAME	TYOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
62	FIM - Frauenrecht ist Menschenrecht e.V. (Frankfurt - Hessen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	A. A.
63	Fondazione Somaschi onlus	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia	Isabella Escalante
64	Francesca Nicodemi	Lawyer specialized in trafficking of human beings	
65	Frauenberatungsstelle Düsseldorf e.V. (Düsseldorf - Nordrhein-Westfalen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Anita Pavlovska, Flora Schaefer
66	Fraueninformationszentrum FiZ- VIJ e.V. (Stoccarda – Baden-Württemberg)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Muriel Gahl, Magdalena Berrer
67	Idea Donna Onlus (Turin)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Federica Gagliostro
68	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	International organization	Gilda Violato
69	International Rescue Committee (IRC Deutschland)	NGO	Vivia Paravicini
70	Interos Foggia	NGO	Daniela Zitarosa
71	KOK e. V. (Germany)	Federal Coordination Group against Human Trafficking	Larissa Hilt
72	La Casa - Ce.I.S (Centro Italiano di Solidarietà don Mario Picchi) (Roma)	Reception centre for mothers with children	Elio Catalano
73	Laura Barberio	Lawyer, expert in the filed of minors, asylum and migration	



	NAME	TIPOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
74	Lule Onlus	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lombardia 2 "Mettiamo le Ali"	Monica Piacentini
75	Magliana 80 (Roma)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Lazio	Fabiana Anzaldi
76	Medtraining (Foggia)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Puglia	Concetta Notarangelo, Marianna Carusillo, Filomena Guerrieri
77	Mitternachtsmission (Heilbronn – Baden-Württemberg)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Jessica Anderson
78	NADESCHDA (Herford – Nordrhein-Westfalen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Corinna Dammeyer
79	Numero Verde Antitrattra (Italia)		Gianfranco Della Valle, Dario Fava, Anna Zaffin
80	On the Road cooperativa sociale	Leading body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Marche, Abruzzo, Molise	Stefania Massucci
81	PIAM (Asti)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Alberto Mossino, Zahra Ouhami
82	Progetto IN.C.I.P.I.T.	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Calabria	Rosanna Liotti
83	Progetto N.A.V.I.G.A. Re.	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Veneto	Giuseppina Di Bari
84	Progetto Tenda (Torino)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Valentina Melchionda, Romina Collu, Rebecca Bernatti



	NAME	TYOLOGY	INTERVIEWEES
85	Roberta Aria	Lawyer specialized in the field of asylum and minors	
86	SERMIG (Torino)	Body of the regional anti-trafficking project of Piemonte	Beatrice Veglio
87	Servizio centrale of SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione)	Italian Reception System for asylum seekers and refugees	Maura Laureti, Lucia Iuzzolini
88	SOLWODI Bayern e.V. (Augsburg)	Italian Reception System for asylum seekers and refugees	Linda Greiter
89	SOLWODI Bayern e.V. (Regensburg)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Eva Maria Danner
90	SOLWODI Berlin e.V.	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Sarah Stöfl
91	SOLWODI Deutschland e.V. (Bonn – Nordrhein- Westfalen)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Jasmin Schützendorf
92	The Justice Project e. V. (Karlsruhe – Baden-Württemberg)	Counselling centre for victims of human trafficking	Luisa Eyselein
93	Ulrich Stege	Lawyer of ASGI; legal clinic of the International University College of Turin	
94	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	International Organization	Andrea Pecoraro
95	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	International Organization	Sara Reggio, Chiara Scipioni
96	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	International Organization	Fabiana Giuliani
97	Dublin Unit (Italy)	Italian Ministry of Interior	Matteo Tedde

*** A total of 101 stakeholders in Italy, Germany and France were involved in this research.**

However, this list does not include four stakeholders who participated in the interviews, as they did not give their explicit consent to be included.



Attachment II

**Conclusions out of the
focus group discussion
with Nigerian women
returned from
Germany to Italy**



Introduction



This document aims at providing an initial insight into the needs and challenges faced by **Nigerian women, survived or at risk of human trafficking** and applying for international protection in Italy and in Germany.

In particular, the document offers information on the phenomenon known as **“secondary movements”** within Europe.

In this context, this term refers to the movement of women - mainly from Nigeria - who arrived in 2015-2017 in Italy by sea and subsequently moved from Italy to Germany from where they have been returned to Italy. To achieve this, **the document compiles inputs and reflections gathered during a focus group discussion with Nigerian women** hosted at a reception center in Asti, located in the Piedmont region of Italy.

The focus group, held in May 2023, took place at a shelter dedicated to survivors of trafficking with minors, run by the local anti-trafficking organization PIAM Onlus¹.

The discussion was organized with the support of IRES **Piemonte within the framework of the country visit to Italy of KOK and FIZ.**

¹ PIAM onlus is a specialized anti-trafficking organization providing victims of trafficking with safe accommodation and assistance for more than twenty years. It also runs shelters for victims of trafficking and reception centers for asylum seekers and refugees. Further information available at: https://piamonlus.org/en/home_en/.



IRES Piemonte is the research institute of the Piedmont region, which also provides technical support to the regional projects focusing on trafficking and labor exploitation².

KOK e.V. (Koordinierungskreis gegen Menschenhandel) is a German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings, which brings together 43 member organizations³.

Fraueninformationszentrum FIZ is a counselling centre based in Stuttgart, specialized in human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced labor as well as in gender-based violence (*e.g. female genital mutilation*)⁴.

As part of its mandate to provide the regional anti-trafficking network with scientific support and assistance, IRES Piemonte played a key role in organizing the visit of KOK and FIZ to meet the Piedmont region anti-trafficking network.

The mentioned focus group discussion was arranged due to the relevance of the phenomenon of Nigerian women returning from Germany to Italy.

The purpose was to offer the staff of the German organizations with a direct knowledge and understanding of women's experience in Germany.

Additionally, it aimed at facilitating the exchange of perspectives and promoting cooperation on this topic between Italian and German anti-trafficking organizations.

² More details on IRES Piemonte and its areas of activities at: <https://www.ires.piemonte.it/index.php/ires-a-short-history>. The Regional anti-trafficking project is "Anello Forte" (<https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/progetti/item/1983-l-anello-forte-4-rete-anti-tratta-del-piemonte-e-della-valle-d-aosta>). A project focusing on labor exploitation called "Common Ground" is also currently implemented at the Regional and inter-regional level (<https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/progetti/item/1996-progetto-common-ground>).

³ For further details: <https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/en/kok-organization>

⁴ For further information: <https://www.vj-wuerttemberg.de/fraueninformationszentrum-FIZ>



The focus group consisted of **four Nigerian women, specifically mothers of minor children**, who had been forcibly deported from Germany to Italy and who were all recognized as refugees on their return.

The participants also included the anti-trafficking staff of PIAM Onlus, researchers from IRES Piemonte, and representatives from the German anti-trafficking network KOK and the German anti-trafficking organization FiZ.

To establish a safe environment and encourage survivors to express their views, the meeting started with an introduction and an ice-breaking session facilitated by the social workers of PIAM Onlus, who are actively involved in assisting the women on a daily basis.

This was followed by an open exchange and discussion, during which the women shared their experiences and voiced their concerns.

Participants actively engaged in stimulating discussions, gathering additional information, and collectively deciding to compile the findings of the focus group into a document.

This is the background of the current note that aims at giving voices to survivors of trafficking who experienced secondary movements within European countries.

Based on the focus group discussion, this document draws conclusions from the stories of the survivors, providing insights to be shared with both national and European authorities, practitioners and decision-makers.

The conclusions included in this document could also represent a first step in strengthening cooperation between EU Member States and referral mechanisms among anti-trafficking organizations shaped on a person-centered approach.



Brief description of the phenomenon of secondary movements and returns of potential victims of trafficking from Germany to Italy

To clearly present the recommendations proposed during the focus group discussion it is necessary to briefly introduce the context and the phenomenon of trafficking survivors - in many cases single mothers or pregnant women from Nigeria- who moved from Italy to other EU countries where they spent a period of time and then have been forced to return to Italy.

Since 2015, an increasing number of women of Nigerian nationality, after their arrival in Italy, moved to other European countries - namely Germany - due to a variety of factors.

This trend has been accompanied mostly since 2019 by another opposite phenomenon, consisting in the return of the mentioned women to the first country of asylum/arrival either as a consequence of the Dublin Regulation application or after the rejection of their international protection claims.

According to the data provided by the Italian Dublin Unit in the frame of a research on secondary movements of victims of human trafficking in Europe⁵, 2019 represented the year of peak return, followed by 2020, although in the following years still a significant number of take charge/take back requests

5 Daniela Maccioni - IRES Piemonte, "ALFA 2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility" Project, "The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe - Focus on migration flows of women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany", March 2024.



concerning women of Nigerian nationality have been submitted by Germany to Italy.⁶

By contrast, the majority of Italian and German stakeholders involved in the mentioned study deem that the year where return movements from Germany to Italy reached the highest level was 2021, with a relatively stable trend in the first semester of 2022.

In this regard, the anti-trafficking Helpline - created and funded by the Italian government's Department of Equal Opportunities - recorded 13 cases in its database concerning female Nigerian nationals returning from Germany in 2019, while 26 referrals were registered in 2021 and 24 calls were made in 2022.

Focusing on the return flow that has affected the Piedmont region, according to the data provided by the Foreigners' Office of the Municipality of Turin, in 2022 95 women and/or families from Germany requested assistance, highlighting a slight decrease in numbers compared to the previous year.⁷

⁶ In 2019, out of 11,945 take charge and take back requests sent from Germany to Italy, 1,613 were those relating to women of Nigerian nationality, of which 119 were then the actual transfers completed in application of the Dublin Regulation. There is no information available on the women who could not be deported to Italy through the official transfer procedure. It is assumed that many of them returned to Italy on their own, creating the so-called "autonomous return flows".

For further details: Daniela Maccioni - IRES Piemonte, "ALFA 2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility" Project, "The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe - Focus on migration flows of women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany", March 2024.

In 2020, of the 4,513 requests from Germany to Italy to be taken back, 290 concerned Nigerian women, with only 20 women officially returned to Italy via one of the airport border crossings.

In 2021 Germany lodged 170 take charge/take back requests related to Nigerian women, while in 2022 these demands to Italy amounted to 146.

⁷ Data provided by the Foreign Office of Turin municipality in the frame of a research on secondary movements of victims of human trafficking in Europe, Daniela Maccioni - IRES Piemonte, "ALFA 2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility" Project, "The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe - Focus on migration flows of women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany", March 2024.



In the period January-October 2021, IRES Piemonte and the regional anti-trafficking network - in the frame of the EU-funded project "ALFa-accogliere le vulnerabilità" - entered into contact with and provided shelter to a total of 70 women (69 of whom are Nigerian) with minor children. Of the 70 women, 38 were returnees from EU countries: the majority from France (21), but with a relevant amount also from Germany (13).⁸

Finally, in 2022 asylum authorities in the Piedmont region interviewed 37 cases of Nigerian women returning from various EU countries, who mainly arrived from Germany in the preceding year.⁹

The discrepancy between the Dublin Unit and other stakeholders' data on the key period of return is due to a variety of factors. In particular, the low number of effective transfers carried out by Germany in application of the Dublin Regulation in the years 2019-2020 - compared to the noticeable number of take charge/take back requests submitted to Italy - combined with strong pressures to leave the German territory and intensive removal policies towards Nigerian nationals adopted by the German authorities, led in 2021-2022 to a significant outgoing movement of women and families to Italian territory autonomous modalities, being therefore these returns outside an official deportation procedure among States.

In the second half of 2022 and the first semester of 2023 (January-June), a change in the return flows of women of Ni-

⁸ IRES Piemonte is conducting research on this topic since 2019 in the context of the "ALFa-accogliere le fragilità" project - further information and findings at: <https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/lp/alfa> and of ALFa2

⁹ Data provided by the territorial Commission and Sub-Commissions of Turin in the frame of a research on secondary movements of victims of human trafficking in Europe, Daniela Maccioni - IRES Piemonte, "ALFA 2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility" Project, "The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe - Focus on migration flows of women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany", March 2024.



gerian nationality from Germany to Italy was observed both in terms of numbers and with respect to certain characteristics and dynamics of development.

The movements to Italy decreased overall, constituting a rather homogeneous trend throughout the country. However, although there was a reduction in the dimension of the phenomenon, the flow back from Germany did not stop.¹⁰

Secondary movements between Italy and Germany and returns to the first country are a complex phenomenon caused by several factors. In this respect, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture, it is interesting to analyze the recognition rates of asylum applications by the German authorities, which could have encouraged the return of Nigerian women to Italian territory.

In 2022, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Germany (BAMF) decided on 41,725 applications from female asylum seekers of legal age in Germany, with an overall protection rate of 51%. The BAMF recognized 18,512 female asylum applicants as refugees under the Geneva Refugee Convention in 2022.

Only 15.1% of these recognitions were granted due to gender-specific persecution. For Nigerian women, only 5.7% of refugee recognitions were granted due to gender-specific persecution in 2022^{11,12}

10 Daniela Maccioni - IRES Piemonte, "ALFA 2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility" Project, "The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe - Focus on migration flows of women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany", March 2024.

11 Data available in the Federal Government's response to a minor interpellation by the Left Party in July 2023, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/080/2008032.pdf>

12 These figures go in line with what FIZ observes in its daily work as they show how low the recognition rate of female asylum seekers regarding gender based persecution is in Germany.



According to the experience of the FiZ counselling centre, return to Italy is a major option considered and recommended within the Nigerian community, especially when an asylum application is rejected and there is a concrete risk of deportation to the country of origin.

As FiZ social workers have observed, many women never perceive a voluntary return to Nigeria as a viable option and often express an immense fear of forced deportation and therefore prefer to return to Italy.

With regard to the specific characteristics of Nigerian women on the move, two main profiles emerge.

A minority of women are single individuals, who have experienced a situation of forced prostitution in night-clubs or in private apartments in Germany.

By contrast, the majority of them (around 90% of cases) have children, two or more, aged between 0 and 5 years, mostly born in Germany. In some cases, it was observed the presence of pregnant women.

The latter do not report a situation of sexual exploitation during their stay on German soil, although most of them refer that they have been victims of sexual exploitation in Italy.

FiZ social workers have noted, that the main reason why the victims left Italy was the fear of the human trafficking network.



Key aspects emerged during focus group discussion: the voices of the survivors

The focus group discussion and the information collected during research on the phenomenon¹³ outline that survivors of trafficking who experienced secondary movements within Europe and who (forcibly) returned to Italy reported practical difficulties, discriminations, and a lack of adequate information concerning their legal conditions.

They have been subjected to procedures of forced return to countries of first asylum -within the context and outside of the Dublin Regulation- without a proper assessment of their specific needs. These needs encompass various and overlapping protection needs, including the prevention of risk of re-victimization and exploitation along with considerations related to child protection.

In particular, concerns emerged over the following key issues:

- **Information and cultural mediation services.**

As emphasized by a survivor in the focus group "*You have to know your rights*". Women revealed that, according to their experience, they did not receive adequate and/or understandable information related to the asylum procedure in Germany, the Dublin Regulation, return procedures to Italy, and the subsequent steps in the country of first arrival. In particular, they outlined their unawareness about their transfer or deportation to Italy even in the presence of their child or while pregnant. Moreover, the women highlighted that they had no information about NGOs or special an-

¹³ IRES Piemonte is conducting research on this topic since 2019 in the context of the "ALFa-accogliere le fragilità" project - further information and findings at: <https://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/1p/alfa>) and of ALFa2



ti-trafficking organizations in Italy and did not have access to an effective support system upon arrival. In addition, survivors affirmed that throughout the processes there were no **cultural mediators** to support their proper understanding of the procedure involving them. In their experience cultural mediation is even more crucial if compared to services received in Italy where in hosting centers they have been assisted by cultural mediators speaking their dialects and understanding their culture. In their view, this enabled disclosure processes on trafficking experiences.

- **Legal counseling.**

Women participating in the focus group also stressed the relevance and the need of legal assistance in order to be prepared for their asylum and Dublin interview.

- **Risks related to deportation to Italy.**

Women expressed that they perceived several risks and consequences linked to their forced return to Italy and that these concerns were not taken into account by German authorities. Specifically, they voiced fears connected to their past **trafficking and exploitation experiences in Italy**, including concerns about the presence of members of the criminal networks, unpaid debts and effects of Jujù rituals. A clear sense of danger of re-trafficking emerged, coupled with a feeling of having limited alternative options. In addition, they expressed worries about the wellbeing of their minor children during deportation. They were scared that children would be taken away from them or that the family would be deported all the time. Some women were also pregnant at the time of deportation, and they expressed concerns related to their health conditions.

- **The situation of their children.**

The women who attended the focus group were all mothers of minor children and they reported facing several practical issues, in addition to the risks of returns



to Italy outlined above. They declared that, according to their own experience, they encountered problems in the registration of the birth of their children and in obtaining the related documentation necessary also upon their return to Italy to substantiate their family status. Furthermore, women were very surprised by the negative asylum decision issued by the German authorities, although the presence of underage children and babies. The women emphasised that they were not informed in an understandable way about these negative decisions, which surprised them and created feelings of fear, anger and insecurity. In addition, they expressed confusion about how the assessment of asylum claims for minors less than one year old was conducted.

• **Asylum decisions and trafficking.**

Regarding asylum decisions and trafficking, these women are trafficking survivors mainly recognized as refugees in Italy based on the risks linked to their trafficking experience. However, in Germany, their asylum claims have been rejected or declared inadmissible according to the Dublin Regulation. From the perspective of the women in Germany, “trafficking is not a reason for asylum”. Divergent standards and outcomes create confusion.

• **Referral and cooperation among EU countries.**

Women did not understand why their documents and transnational documentation were not shared among the different organizations who provided them with support. As a result, this led to the repetition of medical examinations, such as medical documentation for therapies or for children. Survivors expressed frustration over having to repeat their stories and gather legal, health, and children’s documents again. They also shared these files with hosting organizations upon deportation to Italy.



Conclusions

The experiences shared in the group discussion are not individual experiences; rather, they reflect trends and information collected on the phenomenon over the past years.¹⁴

Recognizing the specific needs of women on the move and fostering the ability to identify them as victims of trafficking or individuals at risk of trafficking require improvements, including within the Dublin system at the European level.

In light of the concerns that emerged during the focus group discussion, the following conclusions are drawn:

- **Information and cultural mediation services.**

Victims should receive comprehensive information about their rights and the support system available to them. There is a need for more cultural mediators to break down barriers at all stages of the asylum and Dublin procedures. Low threshold information and communication is needed as it appears that many of the women do not understand the information the government authorities provide them with. Low threshold information material based on the needs and level of literacy must be provided. Information material -clear, translated and effective- is also needed in all the crucial points of the different countries. Additionally, peer-to-peer information sharing should be promoted, for example, through apps and user-friendly websites.”

- **Legal counseling.**

Free and professional legal counselling and access to legal representation must be ensured.

¹⁴ Daniela Maccioni - IRES Piemonte, “ALFA 2 - Beyond the boundaries of fragility” Project, “The secondary movements of women and minors, potential victims of human trafficking, in Europe - Focus on migration flows of women and single-parent households of Nigerian nationality between Italy and Germany”, March 2024.



• **Risk related to deportation.**

All potential risks related to deportation should be carefully assessed during the adoption of Dublin decisions, especially for pregnant women, minors and people at risk of being re-trafficked. An adequate, gender-sensitive and rights-based implementation of the Dublin Regulation should be promoted. Risk of re-trafficking should be assessed during the adoption of Dublin decisions.

• **Child protection considerations.**

The well-being of the children should be a guiding principle in the Dublin procedure or in the implementation of deportation measures. Their best interest should be considered in all the stages of the asylum procedures and in all the administrative procedures involving them, also promoting information sharing among EU countries.

• **Asylum decisions and trafficking.**

Asylum decisions and deportations have to be compliant to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. The risks upon return in the country of origin linked to the trafficking experience should be properly assessed in the refugee status determination procedure.¹⁵ EU countries should harmonize their decisions in this regard. Potential victims should be informed and well aware that their experience of being trafficked is crucial to their asylum decision. More awareness should be raised on intersectional discrimination

¹⁵ In this regard, UNHCR, Guidelines on International Protection No. 7 (available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/en/media/guidelines-international-protection-no-7-application-article-1a-2-1951-convention-and-or-0>) and GRETA, Guidance Note on the entitlement of victims of trafficking, and persons at risk of being trafficked, to international protection (available at: <https://rm.coe.int/guidance-note-on-the-entitlement-of-victims-of-trafficking-and-persons/16809ebf44>).



• **Referral and cooperation among EU countries.**

There must be a standardized system of identification of potential victims throughout all services and authorities, police and law enforcement, reception centers and social services for asylum seekers.

• **A financially strong and sustainable support system in all EU countries,** consisting in institutional actors and entities of the third sector, for potential and identified victims of trafficking should be funded in order to

- a) create Sufficient safe reception centers for Dublin returnees and adequate accommodation for refugee women and children, including strong violence protection concepts
- b) support the exchange between EU anti-trafficking organizations, safe houses and asylum authorities
- c) create a transnational referral systems through the cooperation between institutions, anti-trafficking organizations of different countries.

More into practice: to support survivors in collecting the relevant documentation (*legal, health, children*) and to share these files with hosting organizations while deported in Italy.

• **Racism and discrimination.**

Raise awareness on the phenomenon of potential victims with minor children, sharing their stories and experiences and promote a different narrow view on migration and movements within the European Union.

Author and contributions



This research was conducted, and the report was drafted by **Daniela Maccioni**, consultant researcher at the Ires Piemonte Institute.

After graduating in International Relations and specialising in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights at the ADH in Geneva, the author has been working in the field of asylum and trafficking in human beings for more than ten years.

Initially, she collaborated with several NGOs in the implementation of transnational projects and as a legal advisor. From 2015 to 2021, she worked for UNHCR in the “Protection - Refugee Status Determination” unit in various Italian regions.

In particular, she initially held the position of Eligibility Expert, in charge of assessing applications for international protection in cooperation with government authorities.

Later she carried out capacity development activities aimed at training asylum authorities in Italy. Currently, she is a researcher at IRES Piemonte.

*This report also benefitted from the **valuable input of the team specialized in human trafficking of IRES Piemonte**, Martina Sabbadini, Chiara Cirillo, Paola Cavagnino, Elide Delponte, Francesca Nicodemi, Laura Ruggiero, and Laura Sicuro.*



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