



The practice of begging, between freedom  
of choice, exploitation, trafficking and  
connections with organised crime.

*Focus on Nigerian people.*

Michela Semprebon, Serena Scarabello, Gianfranco Bonesso

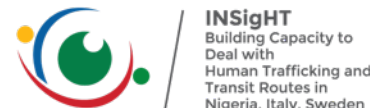


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## List of acronyms

**ANCI:** Associazione Nazionale Comuni italiani (National Association of Italian Municipalities)

**CAS:** Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria (Centre for Extraordinary Reception)

**CARA:** Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo (Centre for the Reception of Asylum Seekers)

**CNCA:** Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza (National Coordination of Reception Facilities)

**DIA:** Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (Anti-mafia Investigation Directorate)

**ILO:** Organizzazione Internazionale per il Lavoro (International Labour Organization)

**N.A.Ve:** Network Antitratta per il Veneto (Veneto Region Anti-trafficking Network)

**SPRAR:** Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati (System of protection for asylum seekers and refugees)

**SIPROIMI:** Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per i minori stranieri non accompagnati (System of protection for holders of international protection and for foreign unaccompanied minors)

**TAR:** Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale (Regional Administrative Court)

**UE/EU:** Unione Europea (European Union)



## Terms used in the text

**Migrant:** In the global context, a person who is outside the territory of the State of which they are nationals or citizens and who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate<sup>1</sup>.

**Unaccompanied minor:** a person who arrives on the territory of an EU Member unaccompanied by the adult responsible for them by law or by the practice of the EU Member State concerned, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person; or - who is left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the EU Member State<sup>2</sup>.

**Trafficking of human beings:** The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, as a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs. A position of vulnerability means a situation in which the person concerned has no real or acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse involved (art. 2 Directive 2011/36/EU)<sup>3</sup>.

**Begging:** art. 2(3) of Directive 2011/36/EU (Trafficking Directive) states that exploitation includes, as a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs<sup>4</sup>. ILO (2004) defines begging as “*a range of activities whereby an individual asks a stranger for money on the basis of being poor or needing charitable donations for health or religious reasons*”<sup>5</sup>.

**Exploitation:** the act of taking advantage of something or someone, in particular the act of taking unjust advantage of another for one’s own benefit (e.g. sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs). Art. 2(3) of Directive 2011/36/EU (Trafficking Directive) states that exploitation includes, as a minimum, the exploitation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Definition reported in the EMN Glossary. Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.0\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/interactive_glossary_6.0_final_version.pdf). Ultimo accesso/last access: 10/03/2021. Sources: Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, supra note 4, art. 24(2); art. 2(l) Directive 2011/95/EU.

<sup>2</sup> Definition reported in the EMN Glossary Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.0\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/interactive_glossary_6.0_final_version.pdf). Ultimo accesso/last access: 10/03/2021. Source: UN, Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration; art. 2(b) and (f) Regulation (EC) 862/2007.

<sup>3</sup> Definition reported in the EMN Glossary. Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.0\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/interactive_glossary_6.0_final_version.pdf). Ultimo accesso/last access: 10/03/2021.

<sup>4</sup> References in the EMN Glossary. Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.0\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/interactive_glossary_6.0_final_version.pdf). Ultimo accesso/last access: 10/03/2021.

<sup>5</sup> ILO (2004) *A rapid assessment of bonded labour in domestic work and begging in Pakistan*, ILO Working Paper 22. Geneva: ILO. Link: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_082030.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_082030.pdf). Ultimo accesso/last access: 30/11/2020.

prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs<sup>6</sup>.

**Smuggling:** the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a (UN) Member State of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Definition reported in the EMN Glossary. Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.0\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/interactive_glossary_6.0_final_version.pdf) Ultimo accesso/last access: 10/03/2021. Source: OIM Glossary, 2 edition, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Definition reported in the EMN Glossary. Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/interactive\\_glossary\\_6.0\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/interactive_glossary_6.0_final_version.pdf) Ultimo accesso/last access: 10/03/2021. Source: art. 3 of the UN Protocol against trafficking.

## Executive Summary

This e-book is part of a series of 5 publications produced in the framework of the INSigHT Action, aimed at strengthening the capacity of key anti-trafficking actors to address human trafficking and secondary movements in Nigeria, Italy and Sweden, with a specific focus on trafficked women and girls <sup>8</sup>. In particular, this work explores the phenomenon of begging by Nigerian nationals in Italy and in the Venice area. The initial research plan included intensive ethnographic research in the historical centre of Venice. This activity, which started in December 2019, was interrupted shortly afterwards due to mobility restrictions imposed for the containment of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was resumed from summer 2020 for a short period (June-September). A decision was thus made to reshape the methodology to use smart working methods. We chose to broaden the focus to the wider national context, collecting information on the evolution of the phenomenon of begging in different Italian urban contexts, starting with interviews, carried out through online platforms, with outreach units engaged in this issue. The units were identified through the Anti-Trafficking Helpline database. The interviews allowed us to learn the history of the outreach units, their projects on begging, the – in several cases innovative – methodologies adopted, the critical issues encountered and the interpretations of the phenomenon, especially with regard to possible interconnections with trafficking, smuggling, exploitation and Nigerian organised crime. These interviews were integrated with other interviews with: law enforcement officers from the Veneto Region (Verona, Padova, Venice) - the main reference territory of the INSigHT Action; magistrates and prosecutors with expertise in trafficking; and Nigerian men who are involved in begging. A documentary analysis was also carried out: a review of the academic literature and reports on begging by Nigerian men in Europe and Nigeria; a non-systematic press review of the last two years on the topic of begging, through the online archive of the National Police press releases, which provided a media picture but also indications on the areas where investigations are on-going (or have been completed); and analysis of files from criminal proceedings on trafficking. The work presented here is therefore the result of experimental and exploratory research on a complex and still little studied phenomenon, especially as regards begging by Nigerian people and the connections with the broader phenomenon of exploitation, trafficking and organised crime in Nigeria. The work has opened up many questions, many of which require further study.

The main questions that guided our research are the following: how is the phenomenon of begging characterised in Italy, and in Venice in particular? How has it changed, both in terms of numerical presence and of the profiles of the people involved? Are there specificities in the forms of begging by Nigerians (modes, organisation, preferred places)? What types of intervention have outreach units carried out for this type of target group, with what methodology and challenges? Are there any correlations between begging, trafficking, smuggling and Nigerian criminal organisations, and if so, what are they?

The available literature on begging is varied. In Europe, sociological and anthropological studies have been published analysing begging in relation to phenomena of severe marginality and poverty, or as a practice existing within the framework of informal economies. Internationally, similar readings can be found, especially with respect to contexts of high urbanisation and rural-to-urban migration. With regard to the context of sub-Saharan Africa, studies have been published that explore the correlation between disability and begging (with a focus on minors, but not only), and begging and religious practices. Both in Europe and in third countries, ample space is given to forms of child exploitation, sometimes with comparative approaches, and often reference is made to forms of "forced begging", with reference to trafficking and

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<sup>8</sup> For more information visit: <https://www.insightproject.net/> Last accessed on: 20/12/2020.

severe exploitation. The EU has funded a number of research projects on child begging, especially on those of Roma ethnicity or East European origin, but also research on the correlations between begging and other areas of exploitation, particularly in illegal economies.

As regards Italy, more recently, two reports have been produced, the result of action-research projects carried out in the period 2013-2015, also funded by the EU. This publication is continuous with this research. It stems from a need strongly expressed by the N.A.Ve project (Veneto Region Anti-trafficking Network). At the moment, the N.A.Ve project does not deal with begging and for this reason considered it important to investigate the issue in order to better understand it, also in view of a reshaping of the projects and the approach in relation to people who are victims or potential victims of trafficking and serious exploitation.

European and Italian legislation have recently included begging as a form of exploitation. Directive 2011/36/EU, later transposed in Italy, mentions the phenomenon. As we will see, since 2013 only a few outreach units among those interviewed have dealt with it systematically. Most started to monitor the phenomenon in 2016, with the increase in the arrival of asylum seekers of Nigerian nationality in Italy, and in 2018, when the phenomenon of begging appeared visibly more relevant in quantitative terms, and in the media, in several Italian municipalities. However, to date, most outreach units in Italy prioritise the monitoring of sexual exploitation and, increasingly, labour exploitation.

Outreach units dealing with begging have adopted different methodologies in their work on the street. Some agencies have used well-established methodologies in their contact with victims and potential victims of sexual exploitation and, in some cases, labour exploitation, trying to adapt them to people involved in begging. Other agencies have launched pilot projects that have allowed them to outline the characteristics of the phenomenon and its evolution. The knowledge gained confirms the need to continue with observation on the territory, also using innovative techniques borrowed from qualitative research, in order to design increasingly effective social protection interventions capable of looking at the phenomenon of trafficking and serious exploitation in its many facets. In general, with regard to outreach, clear challenges emerged, mainly linked to the difficulty of building relationships of trust and an understanding of - and response to - the needs expressed. These challenges led professionals to question the methodologies used and, in some cases, to rethink them.

The phenomenon of begging by Nigerians, confirming what has been reported in the few studies on the subject, has turned out to be a multifaceted, multidimensional phenomenon that does not lend itself to being interpreted through rigid categories. Among these, even the category of "forced begging" is misleading because in begging there are evident forms of exploitation associated with trafficking and exploitation. We collected evidence of people paying a "joint". In other words, people are asked by their exploiters to pay a "fee" for using a given space for begging. It is also evident that different forms of begging coexist within the practice, including 'free' or 'semi-free' forms of begging.

Begging carried out by Nigerians involves mainly men, but also women, albeit to a lesser extent, including sexually exploited women. While in the historic city centre of Venice the number of beggars is around 15 to 20 people per day, in other Italian areas it is much higher and has been increasing in recent years. If we also consider provincial areas, the presence increases even more. As also confirmed by several outreach units, the presence of Nigerian men involved in begging is widespread, especially where there are supermarkets.

Through the interviews, but also through observation activities in the Venetian area, it emerged that the number of people begging decreased sharply until it disappeared during the lockdown (March-May 2020), following the restrictions put in place to manage the pandemic. They only gradually returned to the streets in the summer months.

Begging is, in general, a phenomenon that primarily concerns large cities and some particular places: supermarkets and car parks and sometimes places of transit and passage (in Venice, bridges and places near bridges), but also shopping centres. In some territories, where the outreach units interviewed carried out long-term mapping activities, processes of substitution in key places for begging were evident, with Nigerian people replacing beggars or sellers of small objects who were of African or East European nationality.

It tends to be non-contractual begging, i.e. it does not involve the sale of small objects, but rather an exchange of services, such as helping to carry shopping trolleys or, in Venice, transporting heavy objects across bridges or carrying suitcases for tourists. Begging practised by Nigerians does not seem to be of particular concern to residents because it does not cause harassment. In contrast to other national groups, they don't adopt postures or attitudes aimed at pitying passers-by. There are few reports to the police, who rarely intervene and do not pay particular attention to the phenomenon. The same can be said with respect to the Squadre Mobili, despite the fact that investigations can be carried out autonomously, without prior reporting by citizens. Italian law enforcement agencies have been mainly focusing on prostitution and more and more on drug dealing and Nigerian criminal organisations, more recently considered as having mafia-like elements.

With the exception of begging at festive occasions (e.g. Christmas) and large international events/fairs, this activity is not very profitable (especially when compared to drug dealing and prostitution): 20-30 euros per day can be collected - up to 100 euros on festive occasions. Considering that it is often run on a weekly shift basis, it does not seem to lead, at least in most cases, to a high income. However, it certainly represents a form of subsistence economy for those who are temporarily out of work (e.g. asylum seekers who have left the reception circuit - or are still in the reception circuit). Some interviewees also suggest that begging may represent an alternative for those who are not willing to get involved in drug dealing but still have to pay a debt incurred for the journey to Italy, thus suggesting a connection with the phenomenon of smuggling.

Our work shows that cases of trafficking for the purposes of begging are very rare. One case, which emerged as part of a broader investigation into trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, was reported to us by the Deputy Prosecutor of Catania and we have analysed the file (detention file, pending trial); the other was reported by an outreach unit in Bologna. Apart from that, we can only formulate hypotheses that nevertheless deserve in-depth analysis of what still seems to be an under-the-radar phenomenon, despite the fact that it has been growing steadily since 2018, especially with regard to connections with trafficking, exploitation and, indirectly, Nigerian organised crime.

Ad hoc outreach strategies are clearly needed to provide adequate legal support for regularisation. This is the only aspect that seems to bring about a request for help from beggars, since they are often (but not always) in precarious legal conditions. In fact, it should be noted that, if they are members of a "cult", Nigerian people can receive help, for example for housing, from organised crime, as highlighted by various police investigations although never admitted to outreach unit professionals. We believe that the role of mediators, who are sometimes but not always present in outreach units, is fundamental in facilitating engagement with potential beneficiaries on the street, as well as in reading the trafficking phenomenon in its complexity. It is also necessary to think of activities that favour socio-occupational inclusion, including networking strategies with the relevant territorial services, in order to support the access of beggars to an income that is at least at subsistence level. It is important to note that, from the few interactions we had with Nigerian men (and some women), it emerged that begging is experienced with shame within the community to which they belong, and precisely for this reason those who practice begging often do so in cities other than their place of residence, making it even more complicated to map the paths of possible exploitation and contact with these people.

Many initiatives have been implemented in different regional contexts to address the labour inclusion needs of beggars. Despite this, adherence to services has been, on average, very low. It would therefore be useful to promote opportunities for comparison between outreach units in order to think up new strategies for engagement. For, as emerges from this research, different outreach units have often encountered very similar challenges both in terms of making contact and in taking on people's cases. Such opportunities for comparison would also be useful in order to share a common view of the condition of exploitation, not only from the perspective of repression and fighting crime, but also with respect to the pre-conditions of vulnerability and poverty. For years, the Italian outreach units, through the Anti-Trafficking Helpline, have been engaging with each other through dedicated seminars and an annual national meeting, but, to date, the topic of begging does not seem to have been analysed in depth.

As explained, begging by Nigerian people does not involve harassment and therefore remains under the radar. However, various "tell-tale crimes" (that is to say crimes that point to a connected: i.e. violent fights between Nigerians can point to their affiliation with different cults) can provide valuable insight into the phenomenon, despite there being few reports from residents. We believe it would be strategic to strengthen multi-agency collaborations, in order to intercept the ways in which Nigerian organised crime continues to expand its areas of exploitation, as well as to refine the referral system, also by updating the indicators of trafficking for begging purposes. In this sense, promoting opportunities for updating and training between anti-trafficking services, low-threshold services dealing with serious social marginality and law enforcement agencies is crucial to sharing and developing appropriate intervention strategies.

Studying trafficking and exploitation in isolation from prostitution, labour exploitation and begging can only be misleading. It will therefore be essential to continue researching the roles of the different actors involved in trafficking, not only the madams, but also the men – boyfriends and partners of madams and sexually exploited women – who may also be "cult" members. In other words, studying begging means opening a wider window onto trafficking and encouraging comprehensive monitoring of the phenomenon in its many facets.

## Recommendations

### ***Recommendations for European institutions***

- ✓ Consider the following issues with reference to the proposals made by the new Migration Pact: improvement and simplification of the Dublin Regulation, in particular with regard to the rights of unaccompanied minors and reunification with their families; homogenisation of minimum reception standards in EU countries; combating trafficking of human beings, primarily by ensuring the availability of channels for regular migration, rather than investing in return measures that present the high risk of re-trafficking; improving the system of identification, risk-assessment and referral in all areas of trafficking and serious exploitation, including begging, in full respect of human rights;
- ✓ relaunch and promote the Civil Society Platform Against Trafficking, which could be an excellent tool with which to foster cooperation between EU countries, in particular on the following issues: the functioning of and interconnection between the anti-trafficking and asylum systems; management of secondary movements; functioning and challenges of the Dublin Regulation; and developments in forms of trafficking and serious exploitation, including labour and begging;
- ✓ continue to support, promote and develop forms of transnational cooperation, with third countries but also with Member States, through initiatives such as the Migration Partnership Facility;
- ✓ train, in a systematic way, all competent authorities on the functioning of the referral system and develop an effective European referral system;
- ✓ secure funding for independent research activities on: trafficking and its continuing evolution, including internal movements, different forms of exploitation (sexual, labour, begging, exploitation in illegal economies, etc.) And different connections with organised crime; and secure funds for the mapping of exploitation networks in Europe

## ***Recommendations for Italian institutions***

- ✓ Immediately update the National Anti-Trafficking Plan, taking into account the multiple and increasingly interlinked forms of exploitation associated with trafficking and serious exploitation, the changing dynamics of the phenomenon (including, for instance, the increasing forms of online recruitment) and the new challenges associated with the protection of victims, especially the most vulnerable;
- ✓ provide, within the framework of the National Anti-Trafficking Plan, flexible funding for: the integration of the anti-trafficking system with the asylum system and other complex systems; follow-up activities with beneficiaries, at the end of the social protection programme, in order to monitor their inclusion path and to support them in the face of specific obstacles (discrimination, access to housing, employment, etc.) and risks (re-trafficking, etc.); psychological support services for beneficiaries of social protection projects; and the strengthening of the referral system and multi-agency work;
- ✓ commission an independent evaluation of the implementation of the National Anti-Trafficking Plan (2016-2018), focusing on the outcomes of social protection programmes;
- ✓ re-establish the National Anti-Trafficking Round Table to foster effective and continuous cooperation between anti-trafficking projects, institutions and all relevant stakeholders;
- ✓ organise regular training opportunities to promote and ensure effective implementation of the multi-agency approach at local, regional and national level to combat the trafficking of human beings, involving anti-trafficking professionals, social workers, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judges, territorial commissions and asylum system officials, labour inspectorates, child specialists and health workers;
- ✓ organise awareness-raising activities, at national level, addressed to civil society, but also to teachers, educational staff and professionals, with the main aim of improving the prevention of trafficking, in its various forms, and of providing basic knowledge on the referral system;
- ✓ developing a database on trafficking and related phenomena of exploitation with statistics on investigations, prosecutions and sentences;
- ✓ ensure funding to conduct and support research on trafficking and new trends, such as internal re-trafficking, trafficking for labour exploitation and involvement in criminal activities, as well as begging;
- ✓ continue to develop and strengthen transnational cooperation with third countries, and with Member States in investigations and prosecutions (following the example of the experience developed between Italy and Nigeria, starting with the secondment of an Italian law enforcement officer to the Italian Embassy in Abuja).



### ***Recommendations for anti-trafficking professionals***

- ✓ Monitor the evolution of multiple forms of trafficking and exploitation, in particular begging and labour exploitation, and the potential link with criminal organisations and Nigerian “cults”, by collecting and analysing detailed data on the experiences of beneficiaries of protection projects and the impact of assistance programmes, in cooperation with universities and independent research centres;
- ✓ promote more systematic awareness-raising activities and in-depth seminars with all relevant stakeholders and citizens, not only on the issue of the trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation, but also on the various forms of begging, highlighting the complexity and multiple aspects of this phenomenon, also from a comparative perspective in relation to other national contexts and focusing on both adults and minors, of Nigerian nationality but not only.
- ✓ Collect detailed data on outreach activities not only with the victims or potential victims of sexual exploitation, but also of labour exploitation and begging;
- ✓ continue developing innovative methodologies to monitor begging and contact with beggars, also by soliciting the cooperation of socio-legal professionals, cultural-linguistic mediators, law enforcement agencies and researchers and by organising exchanges of experience on the methodologies adopted in order to develop common guidelines;
- ✓ continue developing and strengthening multi-agency cooperation, at local but also regional and national level, to tackle labour exploitation, begging and other growing phenomena, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, labour inspectorates and other relevant actors;
- ✓ monitor and provide feedback on the (often negative) impacts of public safety mayoral orders; also organise advocacy activities at a broader national level to ensure adequate protection of victims of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation, but also of sex workers;
- ✓ promote continuous reflection among professionals on the use of anti-trafficking indicators in order to assess their effectiveness in identifying victims of trafficking for sexual, labour and begging exploitation;
- ✓ contribute to strengthening the national referral mechanism and, in particular, the cooperation with territorial commissions and bodies dealing with the reception and assistance of asylum seekers, with specific reference to the phenomenon of begging and labour exploitation;
- ✓ ensure increasing cooperation with socio-legal professionals at all stages of the protection programme, in order to promote a shared knowledge, among all professionals, of the critical issues associated with the regularisation process, so as to guarantee all beneficiaries effective legal support and access to their rights.
- ✓ Give due consideration to the needs of potential beneficiaries and the actual employment opportunities available in the labour market and explore the reasons why some potential beneficiaries are resistant to the idea of entering social protection programmes.

### ***Recommendations for researchers***

- ✓ Conduct qualitative research, also using innovative methodologies, to study less explored issues, such as begging, labour exploitation, forced involvement in criminal activities, and the interconnection of all these phenomena with trafficking and Nigerian criminal organisations;
- ✓ promote continuous cooperation between universities and research centres, on the one hand, and anti-trafficking projects on the other, in order to foster the development of action-research projects in line with the emerging trends and evolutions of the trafficking phenomenon, also in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, public prosecutors, judges and, last but not least, diaspora networks;
- ✓ cooperate with the outreach units, supporting them in carrying out monitoring activities aimed at improving knowledge of the phenomena and developing an increasingly appropriate approach for assisting victims and potential victims of trafficking, starting from their specific needs, depending on their age, gender and type of exploitation;
- ✓ develop multi-sited research activities on the topic of trafficking for the purposes of begging, labour and sexual exploitation;
- ✓ multiply the opportunities for the dissemination of research, involving not only researchers but also all the relevant actors, in order to share insights on on-going research activities, and to foster collaboration and self-reflection among professionals and researchers.

## Introduction

This publication focuses on begging by Nigerian people, but also makes some reference to other national groups, especially with regard to interactions in urban spaces. It is the result of an experimental research project conducted out of a desire to investigate a phenomenon that is still little studied and little known in the Venetian area and in Italy in general: only two recent studies - *Stop for beg* and *Third sector against pushed begging*, in the period 2013-2015 - have investigated the phenomenon, but they did so within limited territorial areas. The work we are presenting here is in continuity with these two studies and stems from a need expressed by the N.A.Ve (Veneto Region Anti-trafficking Network) project, of which Equality ATI, a partner in the INSigHT Action, is a part, with a view to evaluating *ad hoc* interventions with beggars and possibly re-modelling future projects.

Begging is a little-studied phenomenon, but, as we shall see, it is widespread all over the world. It takes different forms and characteristics and involves people with different profiles, depending on the specific context in which it takes place. Scholars have given various definitions of this activity. In popular language, it tends to have negative connotations of a specific way of 'being in the world'. In fact, research has shown that the phenomenon is largely linked to the condition of the social marginality of those who practice begging (for the United Kingdom: Anderson, 1993; Ballintyne, 1999; Fooks and Pantazis, 1999; Kennedy and Fitzpatrick, 2001). Other research inscribes it within the informal economy and rural-urban migration pathways (Feige, 1990; Portes and Haller, 2005), also in a contentious sense (Dean and Gale, 1999, Venkatesh 2006, Donovan, 2003). Kirchofer (2010) points out that begging can include both 'free' and 'forced' forms, thus urging us to overcome the begging and forced begging binary.

Forced begging is referred to in European legislation, which only in 2011 included a specific reference to it in Directive 36/11/EU - subsequently transposed into Legislative Decree 24/2014. References to it are also found in Italian legislation, both in Law 228/2003 and in the Anti-Trafficking Plan. It is only from 2013 that some Italian outreach units started to deal with begging (see Castelli, 2014), although most of them started in 2016, with the increased arrival of asylum seekers of Nigerian nationality in Italy. As we will show, begging provides a lens on the dynamics of the increasing precariousness of the reception system. A second lens it provides concerns the issue of urban safety. Some research strands have investigated begging and other activities/behaviours with reference to local policies activated to counter them and to preserve public order and decorum (Pitch 2013). These research strands, particularly developed in Italy, have analysed the public safety orders and local tools adopted in the so-called "*stagione dei pacchetti sicurezza*" (literally, the season of public safety orders), characterised by repressive interventions against all behaviour considered detrimental to "urban safety". These interventions also concerned begging. Paradoxically, begging is still under-the-radar, at least as far as Nigerian people are concerned, because it is generally carried out in a way that does not involve harassment, so does not attract the attention of residents and therefore of the police.

In this e-book we illustrate the work carried out by the outreach units to engage with potential beggars, with the aim of removing them from the meshes of exploitation or trafficking, where

indicators of this can be seen, and we ourselves have been “on the ground” in Venice to observe the phenomenon of begging. Some clear indications emerged from our work suggesting connections between trafficking, exploitation, begging and Nigerian organised crime. These possible connections open up a third key to understanding the phenomenon of begging, which we were only able to explore in part.

Certainly, the phenomenon of begging is difficult to understand through the use of rigid interpretative categories. Among these, undoubtedly the category of "forced begging" is particularly misleading because, as we will see, begging can be associated with forms of exploitation and connections to trafficking, but also with "free" and "semi-free" practices. For this reason, we will generally use the term begging, and not forced begging (except when referring to reports or academic literature using this specific term)

The following pages are structured as follows. In the first part, we will describe the purpose of the INSigHT Action and of this specific publication and introduce the research methodology used. In the second part, we will provide a quantitative overview of the phenomenon in Europe and Italy. In the third part, we will begin the analysis of the main studies on the phenomenon of begging, including forced begging, and on the related trends, with an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of the phenomenon in the Nigerian context. In the fourth part, we will set out the reference legislation, putting it within the broader framework of anti-trafficking legislation. In the fifth part, we will describe the experience of the Italian outreach units in detail: the methodologies of monitoring and intervention adopted in relation to it, and the main challenges encountered, both in making contact with and taking up the cases of beggars. We will also propose a brief reconstruction of the recent evolution of the phenomenon in the various territories, both in terms of interaction between the various groups involved in begging, and in terms of the characteristics and specificity of the practice of begging among Nigerians. In the sixth part, we will address the question of the existence or not of connections between begging and the trafficking of human beings, and then expand our reflection to the possible links with Nigerian organised crime and the *cults*. The seventh part will be dedicated to the phenomenon of begging as we observed it in the city of Venice, first with a reconstruction of the data collected during the *Stop For Beg* research, then with a description of the most recent experience of the anti-trafficking professionals from the N.A.Ve project and with an analysis of the ethnographic material collected during our observation sessions and of the interviews carried out with the police forces. We will end with some concluding reflections, outlining issues that need further investigation.

## FIRST PART

### The e-book and the INSigHT Action

This e-book is part of the INSigHT project that aims to build the capacity of actors to address the issue of trafficking in human beings and secondary routes in Nigeria, Italy and Sweden, with a focus on Nigerian women and girls involved in prostitution and young Nigerian men involved in begging. The main objective of the publication is to explore the phenomenon of begging in Italy, with particular attention to how it occurs in the territory of Venice. The research plan initially envisaged intensive ethnographic activity in the historical centre of Venice. We had to interrupt this activity in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and decided at that point to use the available time to organise (online) interviews with professionals in Italian outreach units who dealt with begging, in order to offer a view of the wider national context. In addition to this, as we will explain in the next section, other research techniques were used to carry out this experimental research project, starting with the following questions:

- ✓ How is the phenomenon of begging characterised in Venice?
- ✓ How has it evolved, both in quantitative terms and in terms of the profiles of the people involved?
- ✓ Are there specificities in the forms of begging by Nigerians (modalities, organisation, preferred places)?
- ✓ What kind of interventions have outreach units implemented for this target group, what methodologies have they used and what challenges have they encountered?
- ✓ Are there any correlations between begging, trafficking, smuggling and Nigerian criminal organisations, and if so, what are they?

## Methodology

Part of the research of the INSigHT Action was aimed at analysing the begging practised by people of Nigerian nationality and the developments that have characterised it, in order to provide elements for reflection and in-depth analysis of a phenomenon that still raises questions for researchers, social workers and legal professionals.

As this was an experimental research project, we used different qualitative techniques to investigate the above questions: 34 semi-structured interviews with different actors; participant observation in the Venetian context, including informal chats with Nigerian beggars (4); documentary research of criminal case files related to trafficking and a non-systematic press review.<sup>9</sup> The interviews were conducted with: Italian anti-trafficking project professionals who deal with begging (14 outreach units, 19 professionals); law enforcement officers from the Veneto Region (5 interviews, 6 interviewees)<sup>10</sup>; prosecutors with expertise in trafficking (David Mancini, Chief Public Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office for minors of L'Aquila; Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania; Lucia D'Alessandro, Deputy Prosecutor of the Anti-mafia District Directorate in Venice) (3); other experts on trafficking (Sebastiano Bartolotta, Vice-*Questore* of the National Police, currently at the Italian Embassy in Abuja; Lorenzo Ortensi, Head of the *Squadra Mobile* of Vicenza) (2)<sup>11</sup>; the "*Servizio Pronto Intervento Sociale, Inclusione e Mediazione*" (literally *First Assistance, Social Inclusion and Mediation Service*) of the Municipality of Venice, which has dealt with social marginality (also including in relation to beggars) (1); anti-trafficking professionals<sup>12</sup> from the N.A.Ve project (3 interviews, 5 professionals); cultural-linguistic mediators from the N.A.Ve project (2).

The interviews with the Italian outreach units dealing with begging were carried out in May-July 2020, following consultation of the database managed by the National Anti-Trafficking Helpline. The issues addressed concerned the methodologies and strategies for social intervention, the dynamics of the phenomenon observed in the various local contexts, the possible indicators of trafficking and/or exploitation that were detected and the operational perspectives for the future.

A series of further significant comparisons, not in the form of interviews but as informal discussions, was made possible thanks to the availability of Fabio Sorgoni, Head of the projects area of the social cooperative *On The Road* (Marche Region), which has encouraged reflection on the issue of begging in recent years, and Commissioner Massimo Pennella of the Local Police of Verona.

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<sup>9</sup> Online consultation of some national and local newspapers for the period 2015-2020 (with the keywords: begging + Nigeria), and targeted consultation of the "press releases" section of the National Police website, for the period 2019-2020: <https://www.poliziadistato.it/archivio/category/1298>  
Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews were with managers and officers of the Squadre Mobili of Verona, Padova, Venice and Vicenza and of the local police of Padova and Venice.

<sup>11</sup> Lina Trovato, Lucia D'Alessandro, Sebastiano Bartolotta and Lorenzo Ortensi were interviewed together with Equality ATI during the preparation of the capacity-building meeting for police forces organised within the ambit of the INSigHT project.

<sup>12</sup> Including the crisis and evaluation unit and host community workers, mediators and Anti-Trafficking Helpline professionals.

On the basis of investigations into Nigerian organised crime, reported in the DIA's 2018 annual report, a request was made to 13 prosecutors' offices<sup>13</sup> for access to criminal case files (concluded or pending, where available) relating to trafficking offences with reference to begging. Access was granted to the files of the prosecution offices of Catania and Verona. The other prosecutor's offices did not respond to the request or explained that they were not aware of any files relevant to the phenomenon of begging. As mentioned above, we also tried to carry out some (more informal) interviews with people of Nigerian origin, who have come into contact, through direct or indirect personal experience, with the phenomenon of begging (4), including two beneficiaries of the N.A.Ve project (a Nigerian man and a Nigerian woman); a man who had been previously in contact with the project; and a man whom one of the authors had previously got to know through her activism.

Finally, ethnographic observation of begging was carried out in the Venetian area, including surveys and mapping in the historic centre of Venice, starting in December 2019. Four preliminary surveys were conducted in December 2019 and January 2020. The health emergency linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the consequent lockdown (March-May 2020), forced the activity to be suspended, resuming again in July, both in the historic centre of Venice and in the centre of Mestre, and ending in September (amounting to a total of 142 hours). Despite this forced interruption, it was still possible to proceed with a survey of the main places in which begging by Nigerians takes place in Venice and of the main characteristics of the phenomenon, also focusing on any changes between the period before and after the lockdown. We were able to informally meet some Nigerian men who beg that we met during the surveys (4), but only briefly, given the priority clearly given to begging. More intense contact would probably have been possible after a prolonged observation activity, which would have made it possible to build up a relationship of trust.

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<sup>13</sup> Verona, Padova, Venice, Catania, Bari, Cagliari, Naples, Palermo, Perugia, Piacenza, Rome, Santamaria Capua Vetere, Turin.

## SECOND PART

### Begging: an irrelevant or under-reported phenomenon?

#### *The European dimension*

According to data reported by the European Commission, with reference to the EU-28 (2020), in the period 2017-2018, trafficking in human beings is associated with different forms of exploitation including: exploitation in criminal activities (11%), domestic servitude (5 %) and begging (1 %) (Chart 1).

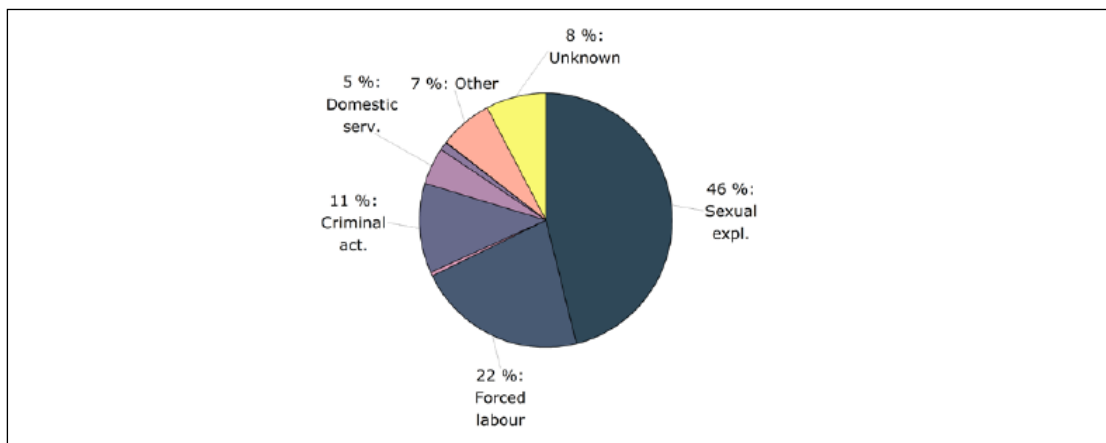


CHART 1: BREAKDOWN OF TRAFFICKED PERSONS IN MEMBER STATES BY TYPE OF EXPLOITATION (EC, 2020)

Most of those suspected of (77%), charged of (58%) and convicted for (54%) the trafficking of human beings were done so in relation to sexual exploitation. Only 2% of those charged were done so for exploitation in criminal activities and just under 2% for begging (Chart 2).

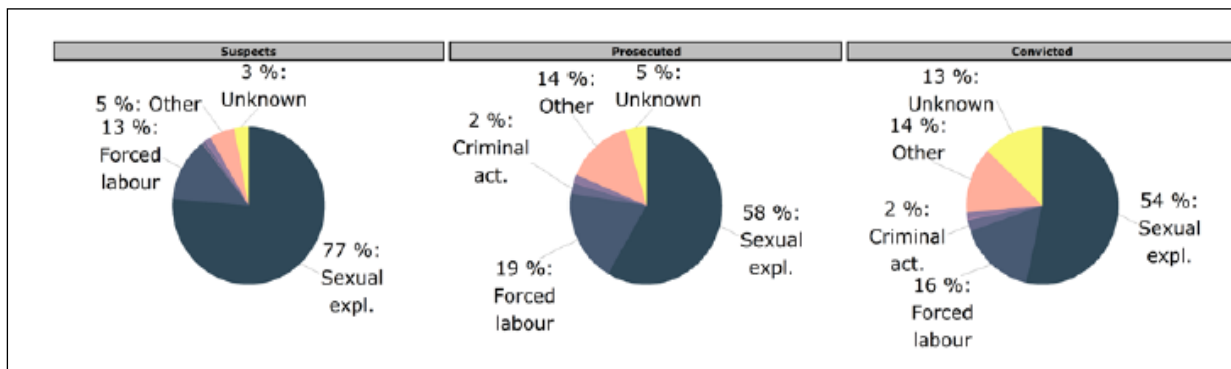


CHART 2: TYPES OF EXPLOITATION (BY PERCENTAGE) OF PERSONS SUSPECTED OF, ACCUSED OF OR CONVICTED FOR THE TRAFFICKING OF HUMAN BEINGS, IN MEMBER COUNTRIES, 2017-2018 (EC, 2020)

Between 2017 and 2019, there was a fluctuating trend in the total number of people exploited in begging, with limited absolute numbers: from 270, in 2017; to 121, in 2018; to 149, in 2019 (Table 1). The data demand attention in relation to the exploitation of under-age people, showing that they account for approximately 30% of the total. From the point of view of their profiles, the majority of people in 2017-2018 were of Romanian nationality (more than 100), followed by



people from Slovakia (43), Albania (35) and, to a much lesser extent, Nigeria (15). To date, exploitation for begging purposes appears to play a residual role compared to other forms, such as prostitution. However, it is worth asking to what extent this figure is indicative of a phenomenon that has been and remains under-reported, as we will discuss in the next sections.

	2017										
	Boys		Girls		Men		Women		Sex or age unknown or non classified		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 658</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2 049</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2 529</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5 471</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12 218</b>
Sexual exploitation	161	3	1 359	23	218	3	3 968	67	232	4	5 938
Forced labour	472	19	91	3	1 510	60	356	14	104	4	2 533
Benefit fraud	10	20	6	12	12	25	21	43	0	0	49
Criminal activities	514	53	80	8	305	32	67	7	1	0	967
Domestic servitude	49	8	75	12	94	15	327	53	71	12	616
Forced begging	33	22	18	12	53	36	22	15	23	15	149
Removal of organs	1	14	0	0	3	43	1	14	2	29	7
Other	81	9	184	21	209	24	363	41	41	5	878
Unknown	337	31	236	22	125	12	346	32	37	3	1 081

	2018										
	Boys		Girls		Men		Women		Sex or age unknown or non classified		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 527</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2 008</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3 351</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5 254</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13 722</b>
Sexual exploitation	190	3	1 402	23	289	5	3 851	64	298	5	6 030
Forced labour	621	20	108	3	1 845	60	330	11	175	6	3 079
Benefit fraud	0	0	2	2	57	68	25	30	0	0	84
Criminal activities	1 233	62	125	6	564	28	73	4	0	0	1 995
Domestic servitude	57	9	44	7	101	17	344	57	57	10	603
Forced begging	27	22	11	9	53	44	30	25	0	0	121
Removal of organs	4	40	0	0	5	50	1	10	0	0	10
Other	90	10	137	16	250	29	372	42	29	3	878
Unknown	305	33	179	19	187	20	228	25	23	3	922

	2017-2018										
	Boys		Girls		Men		Women		Sex or age unknown or non classified		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 185</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4 057</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>5 880</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>10 725</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>1 093</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>25 940</b>
Sexual exploitation	351	3	2 761	23	507	4	7 819	65	530	5	11 968
Forced labour	1 093	19	199	4	3 355	60	686	12	279	5	5 612
Benefit fraud	10	7	8	6	69	52	46	35	0	0	133
Criminal activities	1 747	59	205	7	869	29	140	5	1	0	2 962
Domestic servitude	106	9	119	10	195	16	671	55	128	10	1 219
Forced begging	60	22	29	11	106	39	52	19	23	9	270
Removal of organs	5	29	0	0	8	47	2	12	2	12	17
Other	171	10	321	18	459	26	735	42	70	4	1 756
Unknown	642	32	415	21	312	15	574	29	60	3	2 003

*'Sex or age unknown or non classified' refers to when the sex or age of the victim is registered as unknown or falls under another category'.*

TABLE 1: VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING BY TYPE OF EXPLOITATION, GENDER AND AGE OF VICTIMS, 2017-2018 (EC, 2020)

## The Italian dimension

The most recent quantitative data on exploitation in begging in Italy include data collected by *Caritas Italiana*, in collaboration with CNCA (National Coordination of Reception Facilities), *Gruppo Abele* and the *On the Road Onlus* Association, in 2013 (Castelli, 2014). Other data were collected in the framework of two projects, *Third sector against pushed begging* and *Stop For Beg*. As we will explain later, these projects concern only some regional territories: the former, Umbria and Tuscany, the latter, Triveneto (Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia-Giulia). The Anti-Trafficking Helpline, on the other hand, only collects data related to the assessment and taking on of people's cases, and not that related to outreach activities, with the exception of activities related to sexual exploitation. Based on the estimates by *Caritas et. al.*, the outreach units contacted 23,878 people in 2012, most of them for trafficking for sexual exploitation and only partially for labour exploitation and begging – the percentages are not specified. The main group contacted was without doubt Nigerians, followed by Romanians. The phenomenon has been described as being present in Italy for several years, quite widespread in medium and large cities, but still little studied. Since the 1990s, there has been a progressive increase in the number of people, generally from Eastern Europe (former Yugoslavia and Romania) and Northwest Africa (Morocco). In comparison with other forms of exploitation, begging had specific modalities, which were partly similar and partly different to other forms of exploitation (Table 2).

Modes of exploitation	Exploitation for purposes of begging	Labour exploitation	Sexual exploitation
Sexual abuse	10,50%		
Accommodation and/or transport tied to the employer		25,60%	
Earnings handed over to the exploiter/protector	21,80%		79,70%
Threats, extortion, retaliation	18%	32,00%	74,40%
Obligation to buy false documents		9,80%	
Promise of regularisation		30,80%	
Withholding of documents	11,30%		64,70%
Withholding of part of salary		30,80%	
Salary paid to the <i>gangmaster</i>		18,00%	
Violence (physical, psychological)	21,80%		77,40%
Other (not specified by the authors)	n.a.	3,80%	8,30%

TABLE 2: MODES OF EXPLOITATION FOR THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF EXPLOITATION: BEGGING, LABOUR, SEXUAL (% CHANGE ON TOTAL OF EACH FORM OF EXPLOITATION) (DATA PROCESSED BY CASTELLI, 2014, 61)

As in the case of prostitution, but to a much lesser extent (21.8 % vs. 79.7 %), earnings were handed over to the exploiter. Threats, extortion, retaliation, as well as forms of violence, both physical and psychological, were all present, but always to a much lesser extent than in prostitution and labour exploitation. Finally, as in prostitution, many professionals reported that people had been deprived of their identity documents.

Some reflections on the research were taken up during training organised by *On the Road Onlus* in 2017.<sup>14</sup> The Nigerian target group was growing and a sort of "specialisation" emerged that differentiated the groups from each other: Romanians and Bulgarians begged in the street; Nigerians begged in front of supermarkets and in shopping centres; Senegalese people begged in illegal car parks; Moroccans sold fabrics and Asians sold mobile phone covers and flowers. More generally, the phenomenon was changing from begging for survival to begging for individual or family subsistence. It was increasingly structural, creating a plurality of situations in which begging could also represent a supplementary activity to other occupations, which were often irregular and occasional - and not infrequently illegal.

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<sup>14</sup> See the training report, "*Il fenomeno dell'accattonaggio oggi in Italia (tendenze, problematiche, evidenze, Paesi di origine, ricerche attivate)*", edited by Castelli V., On the Road Onlus. 15/06/ 2017.

## THIRD PART

### Studies on begging as a multifaceted and multidimensional phenomenon

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2004) defines begging as “a range of activities whereby an individual asks a stranger for money on the basis of being poor or needing charitable donations for health or religious reasons. Beggars may also sell small items, such as dusters or flowers, in return for money that may have little to do with the value of the item for sale”. A practice historically present in many social contexts, begging is currently widespread globally, albeit, with different forms, modalities and intensities depending on the different socio-economic and cultural contexts (Jelili, 2013; Namwata and Mgabo, 2014; Riaz and Mumtaz, 2019). It often takes on religious connotations, for example in Christian and Islamic doctrine, and has been the subject of analysis by academic and other literature because of the complexity of the forms and meanings it takes in different contexts, as is also clear from the ILO definition.

From a terminological point of view, Nanni and Posta (2002) proposed a classification of types of begging, dividing it into contractual and non-contractual begging depending on whether or not it consists in offering small goods and/or services in exchange for money. It should be noted that, in the Italian language, the terms “*elemosina*”, “*questua*” and “*mendicITÀ*” are all associated with begging but have different etymologies. *Elemosina* refers to the sphere of compassion, to what is given to the poor out of charity; *questua* and *mendicITÀ* are associated with the first religious orders, which were forbidden to own property and income and were obliged to draw their means of subsistence from alms or from their own work. The term “*accattonaggio*” generally indicates the act of begging, either as a fact in itself or as a social phenomenon, with a more generic meaning of seeking or obtaining something in some way, but almost always used in derogatory manner. The terms *questua*, *mendicITÀ* and *elemosina* refer to an asymmetrical relationship in which those who have more give to those who have less. *Accattonaggio* (translated in this report as “begging”), on the other hand, refers to a mode of existence and defines the precise action of the subject who tries to plead for, receive or take something as a donation by asking for it.

Michel Mollat's (1983) analysis on the medieval transformation of the concept of charity in the Christian context and on the definition of different categories of beggars is useful in giving a historical perspective. In his work he shows how these subjects, all united by poverty, have been over time represented as “poor” (as also adopted by the mendicant orders); in later periods as the “true” or “bogus” poor or the “undeserving” poor; in the periods of the plagues as the “dangerous” poor, as “potential agents of contagion”; and in more recent decades as “dangerous”, but as assimilated to the masses of disinherited or potential agents of insurrection.

More generally, the international academic literature has analysed the issue of begging from three main perspectives: begging as a phenomenon linked to social vulnerability and marginality, begging as a professional practice within the informal economy and, finally, forced begging.

It is mainly in studies on homelessness (for the UK: Anderson, Kemp, Quilgars, 1993; Ballintyne, 1999; Fooks and Pantazis, 1999; Kennedy and Fitzpatrick, 2001) that begging emerges as a phenomenon linked to marginality. It is therefore analysed not as an isolated phenomenon but as an outcome of the process of social exclusion, often determined by socio-economic inequalities (Kennedy and Fitzpatrick, 2001), as well as by forms of 'economic adaptation' (Friberg, 2020). While local government policies often address it in terms of managing public order and maintaining decorum (Hopkins Burke, 1999). As Pitch (2013) and Bukowski (2019) explain, for years there has been continuous repression of the poor, migrants, marginal people, protest movements and people who beg, as well as window washers, street vendors and dumpster divers. They are all described as threats to urban safety, but in fact they have been the objects of a campaign of "securitisation", by the right as well as the left, which has nothing to do with social security, understood in an ontological sense, but rather with urban safety (Stefanizzi and Verdolini, 2019; Gargiulo, 2019). Even if not explicit, the purpose and the effect of these policies has been to delimit an 'inside' and an 'outside', in a tension between 'us', the included, and 'them', the excluded. Even in the case of exploited people, there has been a lexical but also *de facto* shift from victims to perpetrators.

A second line of interpretation considers begging as an activity carried out in the informal economy, where those who practice it are not entitled to the rights and protections provided for activities in the formal economy (Feige, 1990). Portes and Haller (2005) place begging in the sub-category of "survival activities", which are practised as a consequence of economic deprivation. As an informal street activity, Adriaenssens and Hendrickx (2011) emphasise its spatial dimension, the occupation of public space, which can take on ambivalent and conflicting traits (Dean and Gale, 1999; Venkatesh, 2006; Donovan, 2008). Finally, the economic exchange inherent in begging, albeit informal and in contexts of marginality, takes place according to relational and cultural norms, which are elaborated, made explicit and negotiated, depending on social contexts and the beggars' profiles (Thomassen, 2015).

Linked to the interpretative framework just outlined is the literature analysing some forms of begging as professional practices (Tesăr, 2015; Riaz and Mumtaz, 2019). With reference to cities such as Karachi, Pakistan (Riaz and Mumtaz, 2019), begging is described as a voluntary activity that characterises urban contexts traversed by processes of rapid urbanisation, where people are pushed to migrate from rural areas to cities, in search of economic opportunities and revenue strategies, albeit often temporary (Gurav, 2015). Much research, conducted in very different social contexts, shows that migration background, low levels of schooling and poor access to employment opportunities are strong predictor variables of begging (Hanchao, 2005; Olawale, 2007; Ahamdi 2010; Yusuf et al. 2012; Jelili, 2013; Ghimire, 2014).

The commonly made distinction between "work" and "begging" is challenged by some studies, particularly those on Roma groups. Several studies carried out in Europe, show that, for this social group, the practice of begging can be interpreted as a "mercantile activity" (Piasere, 2000), understood and experienced by beggars themselves as a real job, which implies the acquisition of specific skills, strategies and planning abilities (Tauber, 2000, 2008; Tesăr, 2015).

A third line of interpretation focuses on forced begging, a particular form of exploitation linked to human trafficking, which has only recently begun to receive attention from institutions and researchers in the socio-anthropological and legal sciences (Cherneva, 2011), especially with a focus on children. The UN Palermo Protocol (2000) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) do not explicitly mention begging among the forms of exploitation, while Directive 2011/36/EU has adopted a broader notion, including exploitation in the context of begging and illegal economies: "*exploitation includes, as a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, including begging, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the exploitation of criminal activities, or the removal of organs*" (art. 4) .

Kirchofer (2010), analysing various forms of organised begging in Vienna, identified three types: voluntary begging, exploitative begging and human trafficking for begging purposes. Voluntary begging refers to forms of begging that are free from constraints. In cases of exploitation, one person profits from the begging activity carried out by a second person. In cases of trafficking, the trafficked person carries out this activity under coercion, as a result of forced recruitment, threats and actions that force the person to "work" for the trafficker (e.g. seizure of personal documents). Kirchofer points out that situations tend to be blurred and that types of begging may overlap and therefore not be easily distinguishable. It is also problematic to make a clear distinction between begging and other forms of trafficking (for purposes of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, etc.), which might also be overlapping. This also relates to the difficulty in identifying people who are victims or potential victims and highlights the need for further investigation into the characteristics and development of the phenomenon.

As can be deduced from this first part of the academic literature review, begging is a historically stratified phenomenon that has taken and continues to take on multiple forms and meanings, depending on the socio-cultural context and the interpretative key adopted.

## FOURTH PART

### The evolution of the phenomenon of forced begging in Europe and Africa

Over the last decade, a significant number of European reports have documented the evolution of forced begging, that is to say trafficking for begging purposes, adopting the following focuses: (a) comparison between some European and non-European contexts in the exploitation of children of various nationalities (for more on Albania and Greece, India and Senegal see Delap, 2009); (b) the correlation with illegal economies (for more on Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic see RACE project, 2014); (c) child exploitation with an in-depth look at types of begging and related intervention strategies in various European countries (ICMPD, 2012); (d) child exploitation in specific East-European contexts (on Romania see ANITP, 2013; on Hungary see AA.VV., 2015) or in specific social groups, such as amongst Roma people (on Belgium see MYRIA, 2016).

All these studies document the relevance, also in terms of numbers, of child exploitation in begging and highlight the correlation between begging and other types of exploitation, particularly in the context of illegal economies (e.g. drug trafficking, theft, pickpocketing). However, they do not give significant information on trafficking with the purpose of begging among people of Nigerian origin, which MYRIA (2016) discusses only in relation to child exploitation for sexual purposes and RACE (2014) in relation to child exploitation in the context of illegal economies, primarily drug dealing.

As far as the Italian context is concerned, there are limited studies on this subject. Ferraris (2007) made an interesting, but now dated, contribution to the issue, by focusing on exploitation in illegal economies and begging by Roma, Romanian and Moroccan minors. A wide literature has instead explored the more general issue of begging in relation to public orders and urban decorum, as well as the logic and effects of public order measures in countering this social phenomenon (Bellinva, 2013; Giovannetti, 2012; Gargiulo, 2015; Selmini, 2020). In the period 2013-2015, two action-research projects analysed the evolution of the phenomenon of forced begging in specific regional contexts, with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of social interventions that had been implemented to counter this form of exploitation (Degani and Donadel, 2013; CNCA, 2015).

The project *Third sector against pushed begging* (CNCA, 2015)<sup>15</sup> analysed the dynamics of begging in Umbria (Perugia) and Tuscany (Florence), using a comparative perspective in relation to other European countries (Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland) and with a specific focus on the practice of begging among Roma people. The *Stop For Beg* project, coordinated by the Veneto Region (Degani and Donadel, 2013)<sup>16</sup>, investigated the dynamics of forced begging in the Triveneto

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<sup>15</sup> The *Third sector against pushed begging* project was carried out with the financial support of the EU's "Prevention of and fight against crime" – Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs. The project was coordinated by the CNCA (National Coordination of Reception Facilities). More information about the project is available at: [https://www.cnca.it/wpfd\\_file/the-third-sector-against-pushed-beggings-prevention-of-and-fight-against-crime-final-manual/](https://www.cnca.it/wpfd_file/the-third-sector-against-pushed-beggings-prevention-of-and-fight-against-crime-final-manual/). Last accessed on: 30/11/2020.

<sup>16</sup> The *Stop for beg* project (AgainstST emerging forms of trafficking in Italy: exploited immigrants in the international phenomenon of FORced BEGging) was conducted with the financial support of the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Commission - Directorate-General Home Affairs. It covered the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 to

area. Both studies start from the observation of the evolution of the phenomenon of begging that, since the first decade of the 2000s, has been characterised by the passage from a subsistence economic practice, exercised by subjects with extreme social marginality, to an organised market in which two groups are the most active: the first is largely composed of Roma people from Eastern Europe, in particular from Romania; the second is formed by people of migrant origin mostly arrived from Sub-Saharan African countries. In terms of modalities, typologies, hierarchies, the division of roles, and the allocation and control of the places used for begging, they have more in common with the *modus operandi* of organisations that manage markets in exploitative economies than with a self-organisation of people aimed at responding to conditions of poverty or severe social marginality (Degani and Donadel, 2013).

Regarding Nigerians in particular, the hypothesis that there is an organisation that controls people, places and profits, potentially using forms of exploitation, is also put forward in research carried out in Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, which suggests that it is a form of exploitation carried out between peers rather than being managed by a top-down organisation (Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, 2017).

### ***The phenomenon of begging in Nigeria***

Most studies on begging in Nigeria are quantitative and concentrate on the socio-economic conditions of beggars, with a focus on those of Nigerian origin, looking at the causes and possible strategies for controlling and reducing the phenomenon in urban contexts, mainly in Lagos and Ibadan (Nigeria's two most populous cities), but also in smaller cities, such as Akure and Ogbomosho, which are also in the south-west of the country (Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009; Fawole et al., 2011; Gabriel, 2014; Gabriel et al., 2015; Taiwo, 2016). In the recent final conference of the INSigHT Action<sup>17</sup>, several Nigerian speakers pointed out that begging has also become evident in recent years among segments of the population who have migrated from the rural areas to the cities<sup>18</sup>.

Some contributions on begging in Nigeria focus on foreign nationals, generally referred to as 'transnational beggars'. In this case, begging takes place mainly on a seasonal basis, reaching Nigeria from neighbouring countries such as Mali. None of the contributions mention the issue of trafficking, nor are there any indicators associated with it. The cause is traced to situations of severe socio-economic marginalization, conditions of poverty but also physical and mental disabilities (Yusuf et al., 2012; Onagun, 2016). Qualitative studies explore the intersection of multiple socio-political, cultural and religious aspects (Jelili, 2013), also focussing on Islamic doctrine, correlated

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28<sup>th</sup> February 2015. The Leading partner was the Veneto Region. More information at this link: <https://www.regione.veneto.it/web/immigrazione/stop-for-beg> Last accessed on: 07/01/2020.

<sup>17</sup> For more information see: <https://www.insightproject.net/project/final-conference/> Last accessed on: 07/04/2021.

<sup>18</sup> The same dynamic was also confirmed by Sebastiano Bartolotta (interview, Vice-Chief of National Police, currently at the Italian Embassy in Abuja, 11/12/2020. Organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement on 27/01/2021).



with the religious practice of *zakat* (Ogunkan, 2011)<sup>19</sup> or on the different cultural nuances among ethnic groups (Bamisaie, 1974).

Interestingly, the tightening of migration policies is repeatedly suggested as a suitable policy tool to combat the phenomenon of transnational beggars (Ojedokun and Aderinto, 2016; Ojedokun, 2018). At the same time, social policies for the reduction of inequalities and marginality take a back seat to processes of neo-liberal urban planning and public space management, in line with a trend already underway in Western countries. In the case of Lagos, for example, between 2015 and 2017, entire neighbourhoods were demolished to make room for the construction of new buildings for the wealthy and the international population, and 'cleared' of street vendors and beggars, who were seen as contributing to urban decay (Nwanna, 2018). In some studies, begging is described as a social ill that needs to be managed within broader urban policies (Ogunkan and Jelili, 2010) and addressed in criminological terms (Igbinovia, 1991).

There is no shortage of reflections on possible strategies through which the local social services could address these issues, especially with regard to underage and disabled beggars, with the adoption of psychological (Ogunkan and Adeboyejo, 2014) and sociological (Obioha, 2009) perspectives, which emphasise the conditions of extreme marginality of their families of origin, as well as the social stigma and the institutional and structural violence suffered by the minors themselves. A lot of space is devoted to a phenomenon prevalent mainly in Northern Nigeria - but also in many African states (on Senegal see Perry, 2004; Brown, 2008; Carr, 2012; HRW, 2014; and Zoumanigui, 2016; on Guinea Bissau see Einarisdóttir et al., 2010; on Mauritania see Ballet et al., 2012) – which is the practice of alms-giving among the *almajirai*<sup>20</sup> (Aluaigba, 2009; Unicef, 2011; Abari and Audu, 2013).

With regard to the practice of begging among the disabled, the multiple forms of discrimination suffered (Etieybo and Omiegbe, 2016) and the survival strategies implemented by beggars are analysed in a context in which there is not yet an adequate welfare system capable of addressing their needs (Edewor, Abimbola and Adekeye, 2010)<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, the phenomenon of begging in Nigeria appears to be very complex and with similar aspects to those observed in other sub-Saharan urban contexts, namely the intersection between severe poverty, social marginality and religion. On the other hand, it does not seem to show elements of continuity - in terms of forms, methods, strategies and socio-cultural profiles - with what is generally observed in the low-threshold services of European cities, at least as far as Nigerian citizens are concerned.

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<sup>19</sup> The term *Zakat* refers to one of Islam's most important religious practices, and one of its pillars. It is a form of almsgiving, in which the believer makes a contribution to the community, based on their property, in order to 'purify' their wealth.

<sup>20</sup> In colloquial terms, this refers to minors who are forced to leave their families to go and live in a Koranic school and are then forced to beg.

<sup>21</sup> For further analysis of disability and begging in sub-Saharan African contexts see the studies on the Congo (Devlieger, 2018) and Ghana (Kassah, 2008). For analysis on child begging in other sub-Saharan African countries, see Bledsoe (1990), D'Hondt and Vandewiele (1984); Ennew (2003).

## ***The Italian Normative Framework on Human Trafficking*** <sup>22</sup>

The Italian legislation on human trafficking and serious exploitation consists of a number of laws and policy documents:

- **Art. 18 of Legislative Decree 286/1998** “*Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero*” (Unique Text with provisions relating to immigration and norms on the condition of foreigners)<sup>23</sup>;
- **Law 228/2003** “*Misure contro la tratta di persone*” (Measures against the trafficking of human beings)<sup>24</sup>;
- **Legislative Decree 24/2014** “*Attuazione della direttiva 2011/36/UE, relativa alla prevenzione e alla repressione della tratta di esseri umani e alla protezione delle vittime, che sostituisce la decisione quadro 2002/629/GAI. (Transposition of EU Directive 2011/36)*”<sup>25</sup>;
- ***Piano nazionale d'azione contro la tratta e il grave sfruttamento 2016/2018*** (National Action Plan against human trafficking and the serious exploitation of human beings)<sup>26</sup>.

### ***Art. 18 of Legislative Decree 286/1998***

Art. 18 states that “when, in the course of police operations, investigations or criminal proceedings relevant to either of the offences under article 3 of Law 75 of 20 February 1958 or under article 380 of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure, or in the course of welfare services provided by local authorities, cases of coercion or serious exploitation are found with respect to a foreigner and his/her safety is seriously endangered as a result of his/her attempts to escape the pressures exerted by an organisation involved in either of the said offences or as a result of statements made during the pre-trial investigations or the trial, the Questore<sup>1</sup>, also upon request by a Public Prosecutor, or upon the latter favourable opinion, shall deliver a special residence permit to allow the foreigner to break free of the violence and the subjection to the criminal organisation and to participate in a programme of assistance and social inclusion”.

Art. 18 refers specifically to prostitution and other forms of exploitation, not begging. It gives people who are victims and potential victims of trafficking the right to be issued a residence permit “for social protection” and the right to access a social inclusion program, not only whereby people report their exploiters to the police (*judicial procedure*), but also if they do not do so and yet have been identified as victims of trafficking and exploitation (*social procedure*) by competent

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<sup>22</sup> This section is taken from the e-book, *Coping with the evolving trends of human trafficking in Italy before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Insight from the N.A.Ve network and from Nigerian women and girls* by Semprebon M., Caroselli S. and Scarabello S. (2021). Venice: SSIIM UNESCO Chair, luav University. It has been supplemented by the authors of this e-book with specific parts on begging.

<sup>23</sup> Link: <https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/98286dl.htm> Last accessed on: 20/12/2020.

<sup>24</sup> Link: <https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/03228l.htm> Last accessed on: 10/12/2020.

<sup>25</sup> Link: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2014/03/13/14G00035/sg> Last accessed on: 19/09/2020.

<sup>26</sup> Link: <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Piano-nazionale-di-azione-contro-la-tratta-e-il-grave-sfruttamento-2016-2018.pdf> Last accessed on: 12/12/2020. At present, the new National Plan has not yet been approved: a previous delay in drafting was exacerbated by the emergency situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which further postponed approval of the plan.

stakeholders registered in the section 2 list of associations and entities (including stakeholders conducting assistance and social protection interventions in the field of anti-trafficking)<sup>27</sup>, as defined by **Decree 394/1999 of the Italian President of the Republic**, later modified to **Decree 334/2004 of the Italian President of the Republic**<sup>28</sup>. Upon entry into the inclusion program, the association or entity that takes care of the beneficiary can apply for a residence permit and it is the Questore who either provides authorisation for it or does not.

These two procedures, the social and juridical ones, are not mutually exclusive. A beneficiary can follow the social procedure, thus obtain a residence permit without reporting to the police, as well as access the inclusion program, or can follow the juridical procedure, thus reporting to the police, to then obtain a residence permit and access the inclusion program. There are also cases in which the beneficiary follows the social procedure to then move on to the judicial one.

The “social procedure” is the most significant and peculiar aspect of art. 18 legislation as it grants effective protection to people who are victims or potential victims of trafficking, particularly when they do not want to report because of fear of retaliation by their exploiters. However, the choice not to report does not nullify law enforcement agencies’ efforts to fight trafficking. The social procedure provides the grounds for investigations to be conducted, considering it is the *Questore* that provides authorisation for the art. 18 residence permit and, being a public official, they have the obligation to report to judicial authorities any situation of violence or exploitation identified upon issuance of a permit. When the beneficiary receives a residence permit and accesses a social inclusion program, a relationship of trust is likely to develop between the beneficiary, the association or entity that manages the program and the *Questura*<sup>29</sup>. Trust may turn into an incentive for the beneficiary to cooperate in the scope of investigations, thus proceeding with the juridical procedure (Mancini, 2008:77)<sup>1</sup>.

Although art. 18 has positively influenced international legislation, including impacts on the Palermo Protocol and on the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, and the United States legislation, it has been criticised on the following grounds. First, the validity of the art. 18 residence permit is very limited, it lasts only six months, although it is renewable. The permit can be convertible to a work permit or a study permit, but conversion to the former is dependent on finding a job. This is challenging in a socio-economic situation, that of Italy, that is very fragile – even more so now with the on-going pandemic – not only in terms of limited employment opportunities but also of frequent episodes of racism (De Masi, 2014).

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<sup>27</sup> Link: <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/registro-associazioni-ed-enti/Pagine/Attivita-e-servizi.aspx> Last accessed on: 16/12/2020.

<sup>28</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic 394/1999 “*Recante norme di attuazione del testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell’immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero, a norma dell’articolo 1, comma 6, del decreto legislativo 25 luglio 1998, n. 286*” (Laying down rules for the implementation of the consolidated text of provisions regarding immigration and rules on the status of foreigners, in accordance with article 1, paragraph 6 of Legislative Decree No 286 of 25<sup>th</sup> July 1998). Link: [https://www.esteri.it/mae/normative/normativa\\_consolare/visti/dpr\\_394\\_1999.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/normative/normativa_consolare/visti/dpr_394_1999.pdf) Last accessed on: 16/12/2020.

<sup>29</sup> The *Questura* is an office of the Dipartimento della Pubblica Sicurezza (Department for Public Safety), with provincial competence, and it responds to the Ministry of the Interior. Its main duty is associated with ensuring public order and public safety and it carries out activities to prevent crimes. It also exercises administrative functions associated with the issuance of passports and of residence permits for immigrants. The *Questore* is the Head of the *Questura*.

Second, art. 18 has been interpreted and implemented in an increasingly restrictive way. Various stakeholders have testified that the *Questura* across the country tend to provide authorisation for the juridical procedure - and only in very rare cases for the social procedure - only upon receiving the agreement for the issuance of a permit from the Public Prosecutor in charge of an investigation resulting from a victim's report.

**Law 228/2003** modified articles 600, 601 and 602 of the Italian Criminal Code with the aim of establishing serious and effective punishments to fight new forms of slavery. Art. 13 provided for the establishment of an Emergency and First Aid program for people who are victims of trafficking and serious exploitation, which was complementary to the programs introduced by art. 18 of Legislative Decree 286/1998.

In order for a person to access the program, it is not necessary for them to be currently in a situation of danger, nor is it necessary that the exploitation has already been experienced. If all requirements are met, the person who enters an art. 13 program could also be accepted, at a later stage, in an art. 18 program, which offers a much more articulated form of protection.

It must be added that according to **art. 32 of Legislative Decree 25/08, paragraph 3-bis<sup>30</sup>**, the Territorial Commission who is responsible for examining asylum applications shall forward relevant documentation to the *Questura* if, during an interview, well-founded elements emerge and suggest that the asylum seeker has been a victim of one of the crimes referred to in articles 600 and 601 of the Criminal Code, so that the *Questura* can decide on the issuance of a residence permit for humanitarian reasons.

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<sup>30</sup> Legislative Decree 28<sup>th</sup> January 2008, 25, "*Attuazione della direttiva 2005/85/CE recante norme minime per le procedure applicate negli Stati membri ai fini del riconoscimento e della revoca dello status di rifugiato*". (Implementation of Directive 2005/85/EC on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status.) Link: <https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/08025dl.htm>. Last accessed on: 21/12/2020.

### *Legislative Decree 24/2014*

**Legislative Decree 24/2014** transposed **EU Directive 2011/36/EU** on the prevention and fight against human trafficking and the protection of victims. It introduced the requirement of individual assessment in light of specific situations of vulnerability, including particularly the situation of: children; unaccompanied minors; elderly people; people with disabilities; women, particularly during pregnancy; lone parents with minor children; people with mental health problems; and people who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical, sexual or gender-based violence. Additionally, art. 10 called for the identification of coordination measures among competent institutional actors, a very ambitious and yet crucial objective aiming to overcome the fragmented approach adopted for the assistance and protection of vulnerable people while favouring mechanisms of collaboration with other systems of protection.

As far as begging is concerned, Directive 2011/36/UE includes it among the various forms of exploitation. Legislative Decree 24/2014 that has transposed it, states, in art. 2 (modifications to the Penal Code) that:

"It is punishable with imprisonment from eight to twenty years whoever recruits, introduces into the territory of the State, transfers outside it, transports, transfers the 'authority' over the person, harbours one or more persons who are in the conditions referred to in article 600, or, carries out the same conduct on one or more persons, by means of deception, violence, threat, abuse of authority or taking advantage of a situation of vulnerability, physical or mental inferiority or need, or by promising or giving money or other benefits to the person having authority over them, in order to induce or force them to work, to engage in sexual activities or begging or in any case to engage in illegal activities involving their exploitation or submission to the removal of organs. "

### *The National Anti-Trafficking Plan and anti-trafficking projects in Italy*

Pursuant to **art. 9 of Legislative Decree 24/2014**, the Italian Government adopted the National Action Plan against trafficking and serious exploitation of human beings covering the period 2016-2018. It aimed to define a multi-year intervention strategy to prevent and combat the phenomenon of trafficking and serious exploitation, as well as to raise awareness, favour social prevention, the *emersione*<sup>31</sup> and social inclusion of victims. The Plan identified the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers as the body responsible for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of relevant anti-trafficking policies and interventions. The new plan is currently awaiting approval.

There are five priorities along which the plan is articulated, in line with the priorities of the **EU Strategy towards the eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012-2016**:

- 1 identifying, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking,
- 2 stepping up the prevention of human trafficking,

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<sup>31</sup> The term "emersione" is used to refer to phases in which a person first comes into a contact with the anti-trafficking system to ask for help.

- 3 improving outcomes regarding the prosecution of traffickers,
- 4 improving coordination and cooperation among key stakeholders,
- 5 increasing knowledge on emerging issues and trends related to all forms of trafficking in human beings and providing an effective response.

The plan encouraged the adoption of an approach with attention to the dimensions of gender<sup>32</sup>, transnationality and inter-regionality. It also encouraged working towards the interconnection of and integration of policies, and the creation and/or strengthening and management of networks with relevant stakeholders that operate in the field of anti-trafficking. The implementation of the plan resulted, thanks to resources made available by the Department of Equal Opportunities, in the launch of 21 anti-trafficking projects, with reference to each Italian Region (with the exception of the Lombardy Region that launched two projects). Generally speaking, the plan has the merit of providing a national strategy to fight human trafficking and it has provided a useful tool for the definition and implementation of anti-trafficking projects. It remains to be seen whether the new plan will fully take up the challenge of addressing the newly emerging phenomena of exploitation as well as the on-going challenges in the field of anti-trafficking.

The National Anti-Trafficking plan explicitly mentions the phenomenon of begging. In order to adhere to the EU Strategy for the Eradication of Trafficking (2012-2016)<sup>33</sup>, it identifies 4 main guidelines: coordination; prevention; assistance and protection of trafficked persons; investigation and law enforcement activities. The prevention activities include: the promotion of awareness-raising activities with groups at risk of trafficking, with reference to sexual, labour and begging-related exploitation; the consolidation of *emersione* activities, stressing the importance of the role of outreach units and identification, especially with regard to the most invisible targets, including beggars. The plan also encourages the consideration of all potential forms of exploitation involving children, including begging, and the collection, organisation and systematisation of relevant statistical data through the creation of a database with integrated information on profiles, types of exploitation and routes taken. The Anti-Trafficking Helpline now manages a database that includes detailed data on the presence of sexually exploited people on the street and on sexually exploited people and beggars who enter a protection programme. But data on the street presence of the latter are not known.

### *The intersection between the anti-trafficking and international protection systems*

People who are victims of trafficking have right not only to an art. 18 residence permit but also to apply for international protection. Until recently, these two systems were completely unconnected, although the first UNHCR guidelines on international protection, dating back to

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<sup>32</sup> Directive 2011/36/EU was the first to adopt a gender-based approach to trafficking in human beings, recognising that women and men, girls and boys are trafficked in different circumstances and need gender-sensitive forms of assistance and support. Furthermore, the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy identified violence against women and gender inequality as root causes of trafficking and outlined a number of measures to address the gender dimension.

<sup>33</sup> Link: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0286&from=ES> Last accessed on: 07/04/2021.

2006, stated explicitly that some victims or potential victims of trafficking may fall within the definition of refugee contained in the Geneva Convention. New guidelines have recently been published by UNCHR that take into consideration the most recent evolution of the phenomenon of trafficking.

Victims and potential victims of human trafficking were not explicitly mentioned in the list of vulnerable people indicated by the EU Directives (**Qualification Directive 2004/83/EC, Procedures Directive 2005/85/EC, Reception Directive 2003/9/EC**). Following the recast of all three Directives, victims of trafficking have been explicitly included in the list reported in both the Qualification and the Reception Directives. Upon transposition, Italy addressed the need for the harmonisation of the anti-trafficking and the international protection systems. For example, an important change was introduced with the coming into force of **Legislative Decree 142/2015** transposing **Directives 2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU**. Art. 17 is particularly significant, as it refers to victims of trafficking as vulnerable people.

In recent years an increasing intertwining of the anti-trafficking and international protection systems has become more and more evident, to the point that, in 2016, UNHCR and the National Commission for Asylum published specific guidelines, targeting in particular, but not only, Territorial Commissions, on the referral and identification of people who are victims of trafficking, especially during the international protection procedure. The National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan also took up this issue, but not in detail.

### *Urban public safety orders and the regulation of begging that involves harassment*

According to our research, most of the projects on begging developed by Italian outreach units were set up between 2016 and 2018 as a response to the first calls for projects that followed the publication of the National Anti-Trafficking Plan, in a period that saw a significant increase in migration flows from the Mediterranean and Balkan routes. In 2018 Decree Law 113/2018 was also approved, which reintroduced begging that involves harassment among the offences listed in art. 669 *bis* of the Criminal Code<sup>34</sup>. We will return to the decree later.

This regulatory framework has led to the tightening of urban safety and public space management policies and is part of the broader context of what has been called the 'season of public safety orders', which began in the first decade of the new millennium.

It was in 2008 that the notion of "urban safety" entered the Italian legal system (Stradella, 2010). The specifically "urban" aspect, often referencing urban decorum and public order, has legitimised the implementation of interventions restricting freedom from a political and legal point of view (Gargiulo, 2019), which have been configured as forms of the regulation of "internal boundaries", between "deserving citizens" and "undeserving citizens", and have produced effects both at a symbolic and material level (Semprebon, 2011; Gargiulo, 2012).

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<sup>34</sup> For a legal analysis of the offence of begging that involves harassment, also from a historical-legal perspective, see: Cassano (2019), Curi (2019), Telesca (2019).

Before 2008, urban safety was only addressed in the so-called “Patti” between mayors and *prefetti*<sup>35</sup>, and was not a legislative matter (Stradella, 2010; interview, Venice Local Police, 10/09/2020). As pointed out by Gargiulo (2019), some projects were already underway, such as the Emilia-Romagna region's “Città Sicure” project (literally “Safe Cities”), which addressed the issue of micro-crime prevention, taking inspiration from international literature (Selmini, 1999). In addition, in 2007, the year of Romania's entry into the European Union, following media coverage of some violent episodes involving Romanian citizens, the then Ministry of the Interior issued Decree Law no. 249 of 29<sup>th</sup> December 2007<sup>36</sup> - which was eventually not converted into law - with the aim of allowing the immediate expulsion of European citizens for reasons of public safety. Italy at that time was governed by a centre-left coalition.

Ministerial Decree 92/2008, the so-called Maroni Decree - later converted into Law no. 125<sup>37</sup> of 24<sup>th</sup> July 2008 - defined behaviours considered to be detrimental to the public good of 'urban safety. The powers that mayors had on this issue were rewritten, and extended beyond contingent and urgent situations (Italy, 2010; Bedessi and Desii, 2010).

Since the summer of the same year, there has been a spike in the number of public safety orders in various Italian municipalities (Galantino and Giovannetti, 2012; Giovannetti, 2012), especially in northern regions (mainly in Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Emilia Romagna), apparently in areas with a higher number of citizens of immigrant origin (Manconi and Resta, 2010; Vitale, 2012) and characterised by both right-wing and left-wing political orientations (Vitale, 2012). As highlighted in the literature, public safety orders have had different functions (Ambrosini, 2013): public safety orders that *exclude access to social benefits* (Usai, 2011); that *counter cultural-religious diversity* (Bombardieri, 2010; Lorenzetti, 2010); and that *limit migrants' entrepreneurial activity* (Magrassi, 2010; Semprebon, 2011). They can also aim to reassure citizens through media-discursive strategies that are more discursive than material, or to take advantage of citizens' fears for electoral purposes (Gargiulo, 2021). It is important to point out that, being based on the notion of 'contingency', public safety orders have a simplified regulatory process. They require only the decision of the mayor, without the approval of the *Giunta* or *Consiglio Comunale* – that is to say the normative and executive bodies of the town council – (Cardilli, 2009) and *de facto* they strengthen mayors' powers, as explained above. However, while their content is determined by

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<sup>35</sup> The “Patti” between mayors and *prefetti* refers to partnership agreements that defined the collaboration between these two actors (see Stefanizzi and Verdolini, 2019). The term *prefetti* refers the Heads of the prefettura that are Italian peripheral body of the Ministry of Interior, with representative functions at the provincial and metropolitan levels. Their main task is to ensure the coordination of administrative activities of State peripheral bodies. Their tasks include also granting order and public safety, for example through the organisation and coordination of provincial meetings for public order and safety. furthermore, they carry out activities in relation to migration and asylum seeker reception.

<sup>36</sup> Decreto Legge 29 dicembre 2007, no. 249, “*Misure urgenti in materia di espulsioni e di allontanamenti per terrorismo e per motivi imperativi di pubblica sicurezza*” (Urgent measures on expulsions and removals for terrorism and overriding reasons of public safety). Link:

[https://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/servizi/old\\_servizi/legislazione/sicurezza/0996\\_2007\\_12\\_29\\_decreto\\_espulsioni.html?pageIndex=5](https://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/servizi/old_servizi/legislazione/sicurezza/0996_2007_12_29_decreto_espulsioni.html?pageIndex=5) Last accessed on: 20/03/2021.

<sup>37</sup> Law no. 125 of 24th July 2008, “*Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 23 maggio 2008, n. 92, recante misure urgenti in materia di sicurezza pubblica*”. (Conversion into law, with modifications, of the decree-law no. 92 of 23rd May 2008, containing urgent measures in the field of public safety). Link: <https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/08125l.htm> Last accessed on: 20/03/2021.



mayors and is therefore discretionary (Stradella, 2010), they are “administrative” in nature and do not have the “force of law”, that is to say they cannot conflict with the constitutional principles of matters subject to (state) law.

Returning to the Maroni Decree, subsequently converted into law, it should be noted that, with sentence no. 115 of 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011<sup>38</sup>, the Constitutional Court declared art. 54, paragraph 4 of Legislative Decree no. 267 of 18<sup>th</sup> August 2000 - as replaced by article 6 of Decree Law no. 92 of 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2008, and converted, with amendments, by article 1, paragraph 1, of Law no. 125 of 24<sup>th</sup> July 2008 - to be constitutionally unlawful. The judgement of constitutional illegitimacy specifically concerns the part of the rule that allows the mayor to adopt measures with “indefinite effectiveness”, in order to prevent and eliminate serious dangers that threaten urban safety, even outside of situations of contingency and urgency (see also Manfredi, 2013). The legislator therefore intervened to limit the power of mayors. In the wake of this decision, also on the indications of ANCI, (National Association of Italian Municipalities), several municipal administrations have transformed public orders into municipal regulations (interview, Venice Local Police, 10/09/2020) - although public safety orders have not disappeared completely. These regulations allow for the norm to become permanent. In some ways, local governments have thus circumvented the regulatory obstacle of 'contingency', although municipal regulations still require the approval of the *Giunta* or the *Consiglio Comunale*, thus a more complex regulatory process, which definitely makes their introduction less discretionary.

More recently, in 2017, the then Minister of the Interior, Marco Minniti, signed Decree Law no. 13 of 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017 - later converted into Law no. 46 of 13<sup>th</sup> April 2017<sup>39</sup>. The Decree revised the behaviours to be sanctioned, including, amongst others: street prostitution in “ostentatious” ways, begging involving harassment modalities, through simulating deformities or diseases or using fraudulent means. The most important change concerned the new extension of the power to issue public safety orders beyond contingent needs and the introduction of the urban DASPO measure - which takes its cue from the sporting arena.<sup>40</sup> This measure allows sanctions to be applied and access to spaces to be forbidden for 48 hours (or even longer) to those who have committed an offence in that space (indecent behaviour, drunkenness and illegal trade).

The 2018 Salvini Decree takes the Minniti Decree to its extreme consequences and expands the types of behaviour for which the DASPO can be applied, also introducing the offence of begging involving harassment, specifically the offence referred to in article 669 *bis* of the Criminal Code. It

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<sup>38</sup> Link: <https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=2011&numero=115>

Last accessed on: 20/03/2021.

<sup>39</sup> Law No. 46 of 13th April 2017, Conversion into law, with amendments, of Decree-Law No. 13 of 17th February 2017, containing “*Disposizioni urgenti per l'accelerazione dei procedimenti in materia di protezione internazionale, nonché per il contrasto dell'immigrazione illegale*” (Urgent provisions for the acceleration of proceedings in the field of international protection, as well as for fighting illegal immigration). Link: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/18/17G00059/sg>  
Last accessed on: 20/03/2021.

<sup>40</sup> The DASPO was introduced, in the field of sport, by Law 401/1989. It provides that the *Questore* can prohibit a person from entering places where sporting activities take place, following an arrest in *flagrante delicto* for an offence committed during or on the occasion of sporting events. Link: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:1989-12-13;401> Last accessed on: 20/03/2021.

has thus reinstated the previous legal provisions and changed the wording of the repealed article 670, paragraph 2 of the Penal Code, sanctioning those who beg in forms involving harassment or through the use of fraudulent means with imprisonment from three to six months and a fine from €3,000 to €6,000.<sup>41</sup> There is a further amendment in article 21 *octies* of the Decree, which added a second paragraph to article 600 *octies* of the Criminal Code (on the use of minors in begging), to sanction the organisation of begging. Although it is included in article 669, on begging by minors, it appears to penalise the organisation of begging in general.

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<sup>41</sup> In the past, begging was covered by article 670 of the Criminal Code, which contained two distinct offences: in the first paragraph, the arrest of anyone who begs in a place open to the public; in the second, the arrest of anyone who commits the act in a harassment manner, or by simulating illness or deformity or using other fraudulent means to arouse pity. In 1995, the Constitutional Court declared that the first paragraph was unconstitutional, stressing the unreasonableness of the idea that public tranquillity could be threatened by a request for help. The second paragraph remained as an offence, as it was intended to target fraudulent conduct, but, with Law 205 of 25th June 1999, the entire case was repealed, on the basis of a change in society's moral and legal values.

## FIFTH PART

### Projects focusing on begging

We now turn to the work carried out by the Italian outreach unit that we interviewed. As we wrote in the methodological section, we conducted 15 interviews with different Italian outreach units that deal with begging. These are third sector associations, which in some cases have also collaborated with local authorities, and which operate in various Italian territories, as shown in the map (Map 1) and table (Table 3) below.



**MAP 1** MAP OF THE AREAS OF OPERATION OF THE INTERVIEWED “UNITÀ DI CONTATTO”

	Name of organisation (and website where applicable)	Geographical area of intervention	Year of start of activity	Type and composition of outreach unit/team
1	Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII <a href="https://www.apg23.org/">https://www.apg23.org/</a>	Bologna	2013	Team specifically for begging: 1 anthropologist expert in begging; 1 outreach worker who is an expert in homelessness; other outreach workers, in turns
2	Lule Onlus <a href="https://www.luleonlus.it/">https://www.luleonlus.it/</a>	Milano (area provinciale sud-ovest), Pavia, Bergamo	2014	Team specifically for begging: 2/3 educators; 1 mediator (only in rare occasions)
3	On the road Onlus <a href="https://www.ontheroad.coop/">https://www.ontheroad.coop/</a>	Pescara	2016	Team specifically for begging: 3 outreach workers (2 male professionals and 1 lawyer or 1 doctor or 1 mediator, in turns)
4	Ciac Onlus <a href="https://www.ciaconlus.org/">https://www.ciaconlus.org/</a>	Parma	2016	Team specifically for begging: 3 outreach workers (1 educator, 1 socio-legal professional, 1 professional; mediator if required)
5	Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete, Progetto FreeLife <a href="http://www.borgorete.it/fuori-dal-labirinto/">http://www.borgorete.it/fuori-dal-labirinto/</a>	Perugia, Assisi	2016	Team specifically for begging: 2 outreach workers; and a specific helpdesk for begging available
6	San Benedetto al Porto <a href="https://sanbenedetto.org/">https://sanbenedetto.org/</a>	Alessandria	2017	Team specifically for begging: 4 outreach workers (2 educators, 1 psychologist, occasionally 1 educator)
7	Cestrim (Centro Studi e Ricerche sulle Realtà Meridionali) <a href="https://cestrim.com/">https://cestrim.com/</a>	Potenza	2018	General team: 3 outreach workers (1 educator, 1 psychologist, 1 mediator) and, in turns, 1 social worker or 1 lawyer
8	Fondazione Somaschi <a href="https://fondazionesomaschi.it/">https://fondazionesomaschi.it/</a>	Milano	2018	Team specifically for begging

9	On the road Onlus <a href="https://www.ontheroad.coop/">https://www.ontheroad.coop/</a>	Termoli	2018	Team specifically for begging: 2 outreach workers and 1 mediator, only if necessary; and low threshold helpdesk service available, where necessary
10	Afet Aquilone/ San Benedetto al Porto <a href="https://www.afetaquilone.org/">https://www.afetaquilone.org/</a> <a href="https://sanbenedetto.org/">https://sanbenedetto.org/</a>	Genova (centro storico)	2018	Team specifically for begging: 2 outreach workers and 1 anti-trafficking professional
11	Associazione San Martino, Progetto FreeLife <a href="http://www.associazionesanmartino.eu/">http://www.associazionesanmartino.eu/</a>	Terni	2018	Team specifically for begging: 2 outreach workers
12	Free Woman Onlus <a href="https://www.freewoman.it/">https://www.freewoman.it/</a>	Ancona, Pesaro	2018	General team: 4 outreach workers (1 who speaks <i>pidgin</i> English, 1 who speaks Arabic, Chinese, French and English, 1 psychotherapist)
13	Cooperativa Lotta Contro l'Emarginazione <a href="http://www.cooplotta.it/">http://www.cooplotta.it/</a>	Varese	2018	Team specifically for begging: 4 outreach workers (3 female and 1 male)
14	Noemi Società Cooperativa Sociale <a href="https://www.centronoemi.org/">https://www.centronoemi.org/</a>	Crotone	2018	General team: 2 outreach workers (1 social worker and 1 mediator)
15	Tampep <a href="https://www.tampepitalia.it/">https://www.tampepitalia.it/</a>	Torino	2018	General team: 3 outreach workers (2 outreach workers and 1 mediator of Nigerian origin)

TABLE 3: LIST OF INTERVIEWED ORGANISATIONS, GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF INTERVENTION, YEAR OF START OF ACTIVITY AND COMPOSITION OF BEGGING UNITS/TEAMS

### ***The genesis of the first monitoring and outreach interventions***

Anti-trafficking professionals have become active around the issue of begging, on the one hand driven by the clear increase in the phenomenon in urban contexts, and on the other hand directly or indirectly prompted by the growing attention to it within public opinion, local administrations and the media. Although, as shown above, most of the projects were set up between 2016 and 2018, some organisations had already started to explore the issue, on an experimental basis, in the years beforehand.

In 2013, in Bologna, the *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* started voluntary monitoring and outreach in the city centre, an activity that merged, in 2016, with the regional anti-trafficking project "*Oltre la Strada*" (Beyond the Street) and was subsequently supported and sponsored by the Municipality

of Bologna (see Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, 2017). In 2014, *Lule Onlus*, an organisation that has twenty years of practical experience on the issue of trafficking and serious exploitation in Lombardy, began its own monitoring as part of a project on labour exploitation. From their observation of the Rho local market, begging emerged as unexpectedly relevant, as did the involvement of asylum seekers and refugees in illegal economies. The *CIAC Onlus* cooperative - which, over the years, has developed strong skills in the field of legal protection and the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in the city of Parma - started to observe the phenomenon between 2014 and 2015, and then began a collaboration with the municipality in 2016. The Veneto Region and the Municipality of Venice were among the first bodies to monitor the issue of begging through promoting the *Stop For Beg* project in 2013. Subsequently, in 2015, the CNCA promoted the *Third Sector against pushed begging* project.

### **Media landscape**

A non-systematic review of the online press<sup>42</sup> showed that begging is mainly mentioned in local newspapers, from northern to southern Italy. A few articles can be found as early as 2016, but media exposure increased in 2017, at least with regard to Nigerian people. The press speaks of 'begging rackets'<sup>43</sup> and warns residents about the risk of giving money to people who are exploited and involved in criminal organisations. There is talk of forms of controlled begging, with paid pitches<sup>44</sup>, and of at least 50% of earnings going to the exploiters<sup>45</sup>. In 2018, we first hear about the Nigerian mafia and the *cults*<sup>46</sup> - we will come back to this term later - and about collaborations with Italian mafia organisations<sup>47</sup>. However, in the National Police press releases in 2019, there is only one mention of begging, with reference to an operation conducted in the city of Bari, which involved begging amongst other issues<sup>48</sup>. It does not seem that begging by Nigerians caused particular social alarm. However, according to many of the outreach units we interviewed, the

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<sup>42</sup> For the period 2016-2020, with reference to Italy, searching for the specific locations in which the interviewed outreach units operate, with the following keywords: begging + alms + Niger\* + trafficking, through the dedicated google search engine: <https://news.google.com/> Last accessed on: 10/10/2020.

<sup>43</sup> Agenti G., "L'ombra del racket dietro i mendicanti: fenomeni fotocopia da Corso Lodi a Porta Venezia". *Repubblica*, 14/11/2017. Link: [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/11/14/news/milano\\_elemosina\\_migranti\\_racket\\_carita\\_-181062102/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/11/14/news/milano_elemosina_migranti_racket_carita_-181062102/) Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

<sup>44</sup> Bulian L. "Così la mafia nigeriana controlla il racket dell'elemosina in strada". *Il Giornale*. 27/01/2019. Link: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/cos-mafia-nigeriana-controlla-racket-dellelemosina-strada-1634914.html> Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

<sup>45</sup> Natile L. Bari, "Torna il racket delle elemosine". *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*. 16/05/2020. Link: <https://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/bari/1225987/bari-torna-il-racket-delle-elemosine-dobbiamo-aiutare-i-fratelli.html> Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

<sup>46</sup> Buccini G. "La mafia nigeriana in Italia: eroina gialla, prostituzione ed elemosina". *Corriere della Sera*. 21/10/2018. Link: [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/18\\_ottobre\\_21/mafia-nigeriana-eroina-gialla-prostituzione-elemosina-ec45a33a-d562-11e8-aaed-2b3ed62ff47b.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/18_ottobre_21/mafia-nigeriana-eroina-gialla-prostituzione-elemosina-ec45a33a-d562-11e8-aaed-2b3ed62ff47b.shtml) Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

<sup>47</sup> Di Pisa A. "Cosa Nostra e 'Ndrangheta "cedono" alla mafia nigeriana prostituzione e tratta di esseri umani". *Il Sicilia*. 26/06/2020. Link: <https://www.ilsicilia.it/cosa-nostra-e-ndrangheta-cedono-alla-mafia-nigeriana-prostituzione-e-tratta-di-esseri-umani/> Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

<sup>48</sup> Bari: Operation Drill. 03/12/2019. Link: <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/20155df0a328b5583428874230> Last accessed on: 12/01/2021.

publication of new public safety orders has often gone hand in hand with an increase in begging and its media exposure. In some cases, outreach workers say that the media narrative took on a securitarian and sensationalist character in relation to episodes of aggression and violence, however isolated (interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020)<sup>49</sup>. In other cases, the press focused on alternative forms of begging, which we will describe in more detail below, including beggars who display placards declaring that they "want to become integrated". In other cases the media focused on the risk of urban decay and the potential social danger of beggars, with reference to the begging racket and the criminal organisations with which they are allegedly affiliated. This has worried some municipalities, prompted by the suspicion that the beggars were in the care of the asylum seeker reception system. For this reason, monitoring activities were put in place, for example in the territories of Parma, Perugia and Milan, in cooperation with the outreach units, with the aim of also understanding their possible assistance and protection needs.

As pointed out by an outreach worker of Alessandria, the effects of interventions by the police were generally temporary. As a result of the enforcement action, begging moved to other places or was suspended for a few days (interview, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto outreach unit, Alessandria, 9/04/2020). A similar effect was observed by the workers of several other outreach units interviewed, following anti-begging public safety orders in their respective regional territories (Lombardy, Liguria, Marche, Abruzzo, Basilicata - in the municipalities of the metropolitan area of Milan and the provinces of Monza and Brianza; Genoa; Pesaro, Senigallia; Pescara; Perugia, Terni, Assisi; Potenza) and of the urban DASPO (in Umbria). There should be a more thorough analysis of the outcome of the repression of begging on those involved and in particular the extent to which such interventions preclude effective intervention by outreach units.

### ***Anti-trafficking projects and the role of outreach units: developments***

Since the early 2000s, following the introduction of articles 18 and 13, respectively of the Consolidation Act on Immigration (Legislative Decree 286/98) and Law 228/2003, a network of projects has been set up to provide services and assistance measures to victims and potential victims of trafficking throughout most of the Italian territory. Specifically, initial assistance programmes (article 13 projects) and assistance and social integration programmes (article 18 projects) were set up, co-financed by the Department of Equal Opportunities and implemented by local authorities and accredited third sector organisations. The system of interventions was reorganised in 2016, with the adoption of the National Anti-Trafficking Plan, following which 21 anti-trafficking projects were launched, one for each Italian region (two in Lombardy), which include a series of interventions, classified by phases: outreach activities with populations at risk of exploitation, multi-agency work to identify victims of trafficking through an effective referral system, activities aimed at strengthening operational procedures linking the anti-trafficking system with the system for the reception and protection of asylum seekers and refugees, first aid and

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<sup>49</sup> Also see interviews with outreach units in Termoli, Bologna, Alessandria, Milan and Monza.



immediate protection activities, activities aimed at regularisation, reception, vocational training activities aimed at the socio-occupational inclusion of beneficiaries.

The National Anti-Trafficking Plan recognises the central role of outreach units in contacting people who are victims and potential victims of trafficking, not only in the area of sexual exploitation, but also in labour exploitation and begging. In most of the territories, the experience of outreach units dates back to well before the drafting of the National Anti-Trafficking Plan, as it also emerges from the research report edited by Castelli (2014)<sup>50</sup>: in 2013, many of the anti-trafficking projects had outreach units (64 entities out of 148 interviewed), some operated also helpdesks (37 entities out of 148 interviewed), mainly in the area of sexual exploitation. In the same year, almost all the agencies involved in the research (148 out of 156) stated that they mainly assisted victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation; two thirds of the agencies, mainly operating in northern Italian regions, also helped people who were severely exploited in the sphere of labour (98 out of 156), while less than half of the agencies (61 out of 156), of which more than 50% were concentrated in central Italy, dealt with begging exploitation.

Interviews confirmed that outreach units have developed more experience in the sphere of sexual exploitation. It is therefore not surprising that monitoring and outreach activities in relation to begging were carried out by already existing outreach units initially focused on sexual exploitation (Table 3). In only four cases were *ad hoc* outreach teams set up for begging (Lule Onlus, Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto, Cooperative Lotta Contro l'Emarginazione).

### ***Outreach unit teams***

The teams consist of a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 male and female professionals, aged between 20 and 50, who participate in outreach activities on the basis of rotation or their specific expertise (legal, social, etc.) and the needs of the target groups. Female professionals predominate, but there are also males. As far as their profiles are concerned, they are mainly educators and psychologists, but also social workers. Socio-legal professionals and lawyers often do shifts or are called when needed, with the exception of the *CIAC Onlus* team which has a permanent socio-legal professional. This choice is linked to the fact that CIAC's experience has highlighted the centrality of this role in facilitating contact with beggars. Among the few requests they make are requests for legal information. There are also mediators in various outreach units, but for most teams their presence is occasional (11 out of 15) and instrumental to the management of specific needs.

### ***Outreach methodologies***

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<sup>50</sup> The report is the result of research carried out in 2013, conducted by *Caritas Italiana* in collaboration with the CNCA, *Gruppo Abele* and *On the Road Onlus*. The qualitative-quantitative research involved 156 organisations, of which 94 were in northern Italy, 30 in central Italy and 32 in southern Italy and the islands. Questionnaires were administered to collect quantitative data on different phenomena, policies and interventions, and 17 territorial focus groups were held with professionals.



The methodology used by the outreach units interviewed has been defined mainly by adapting from and innovating with the methodology used for contact with sexually exploited people. In many cases, these were experimental projects, accompanied by a reflection on the methodological challenges encountered and on the definition of an effective approach to the phenomenon, which appeared to be elusive, fluid, multidimensional and difficult to frame with the mere categories of "trafficking" or "exploitation".

After a preliminary observation phase, most units organised regular outreach activities, mainly during the day (given the main begging hours), with the aim of mapping the numbers of beggars and their needs, but also in order to identify possible indicators of trafficking and/or exploitation.

In Perugia and Termoli, a low-threshold helpdesk was set up to orient people to services, as well as to gather information about needs (interview, Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete outreach unit, Perugia, 11/05/2020). In Perugia the helpdesk was aimed at beggars, whereas in Termoli it was migrants in general, working on the assumption that it would be easier to intercept situations of exploitation through a "generic" desk (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020). The outreach units are very useful for monitoring the evolution of the phenomena and the needs of people in conditions of marginality, as emphasised by the professionals in Alessandria, where there is a wide network of low-threshold services that are well known by people living in the city - less so by those who commute, such as Nigerian men who travel from Turin to beg (interview, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto outreach unit, Alessandria, 9/04/2020). Helpdesks are also considered to be the most appropriate spaces for building a relationship of trust with beneficiaries, which is much more difficult in places of exploitation, where people have to "work", which are only suitable for making contact. The relationship can be built elsewhere, as emphasized by the professionals of Lule Onlus, who are setting up dedicated low-threshold helpdesks in the Milan area (interview, 27/04/2020).

As explained, the methodology used in outreach is often derived from the methodology used with sexually exploited people, which in most cases is characterized by a harm reduction approach, including making contact on the street and offering services related to health, legal protection and job placements. Some organisations, such as Lule Onlus, have adapted the methodology used in the field of labour exploitation instead, which involves making contact in the places of exploitation, but also in gathering places, where contact is deliberately aimed at a wider target group. This methodology includes a study of the territory and the identification of public places in which people spontaneously gather, such as parks, shops and squares. In these places initial contact is made, offering people a leaflet with a list of available services (health accompaniment, information and legal support), drawn up in collaboration with other local actors. If the initial contact is followed by a call from the beneficiaries, the professionals organise accompaniment in accessing services and/or in-depth interviews, starting from the expression of a specific need (e.g. request for support in drawing up a CV). During the interview, professionals also try to explore possible indicators of trafficking and/or exploitation.

Sometimes people contacted in these gathering places are found again begging in front of supermarkets: this double contact has generally had positive results, as it has improved the association's knowledge and allowed for a more complete monitoring of people's living conditions. Nigerian Pentecostal churches can also be useful places to contact people, as suggested by *Fondazione Somaschi* in Milan, which introduces itself to pastors as an organisation offering services to support the social integration of people of migrant origin (in looking for work and housing solutions), asking them to make this known to their congregation during the Sunday service. Normally the pastors are available for help. However, at times, ambiguous perspectives have been encountered in relation to trafficking and exploitation, as several professionals confirmed. They explained to us that many pastors do not take action against exploitation and trafficking and show indifference towards those who participate in the religious community's celebrations and activities and have ambiguous roles in criminal organisations (interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020; interview, Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII outreach unit, Bologna, 14/07/2020, interview, cultural-linguistic mediator, N.A.Ve project, Verona, 30/07/2020). This aspect certainly requires further investigation both in understanding how exploitation networks work, but also in aiming towards the continuous improvement of the outreach units' approach. Collaboration with churches is a complementary activity that was tested in order to address the difficulties found in establishing a dialogue with beneficiaries when they identify the service as an anti-trafficking project. Reluctance to tell their stories and fears of retaliation are evident.

### *Challenges of outreach activity*

Several difficulties emerged in contacting beggars. First of all, in the identification of needs, which is crucial for facilitating engagement. The professionals in Ancona, after an initial phase of monitoring the territory, used a leaflet with a list of local services for people in poverty, assuming that the most frequent needs were related to this. They then realised that basic services were already guaranteed to most of the people contacted, as they were guests in asylum seeker reception centres (interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020). As also emerged in Genoa, the main needs are related to the sphere of work and the regularisation of a person's legal status. Housing needs are specifically associated with people who have left the reception circuit, which have increased in numbers in the last two years.

In Genoa, a network of dedicated services has been set up, but no beggars have ever accessed these services, despite the guidance provided by the outreach unit and the drop-in centre in the city centre (interview, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto outreach unit, Genoa, 17/04/2020). Difficulties in accessing and even more in attending the sessions of some services, especially those related to training and job orientation, were found both in Genoa and Bologna, where specialised services have existed for some time. Professionals often wondered about people's actual desire to abandon begging or to change their situation, convinced that those who really wanted to find a job

could find it (interview, Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII outreach unit, Bologna, 14/07/2020; interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020). While noting the actual possibility of access to the labour market at least in these two urban contexts, as suggested by the professionals, we believe it is essential to continue exploring the reasons for non-attendance in order to better understand whether it depends on the characteristics and approaches of the services, and their lack of suitability for beneficiaries, or on the situation of the beneficiaries, for example probable strong links with the exploitation network.

As explained, an important need that clearly emerged from the beneficiaries of the outreach units interviewed was related to regularisation, but not all outreach units can count on the presence of a lawyer or socio-legal professional on the street, with the exception of CIAC Onlus in Parma and San Benedetto al Porto in Genoa. These figures are available when necessary, but rarely in the initial contact phase.

The importance of mediation was also discussed with many professionals. Some emphasised the need for close cooperation with cultural-linguistic mediators. Their intervention is considered methodologically strategic not so much when making contact with people, who do not always need translation, but in interpreting the phenomena and dynamics of exploitation and the characteristics of the diaspora. For example, in the case of Senegalese street vending, the organisation was often understood more as a support network between compatriots than as an exploitation network (interview, Lule Onlus outreach unit, Abbiategrasso (MI), 27/04/2020; interview, CIAC Onlus outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020). In the case of Nigerian begging, the Nigerian mediator who is constantly present in the outreach activities of Tampep in Turin, provided useful information regarding the functioning of the *cults* in the control of pitches, starting from monitoring some of the blogs managed by compatriots. Her account of an argument that took place related to the control of a pitch confirmed her hypothesis that some pitches are managed by members of a “*cult*”, while others are free, which forces those who want to beg in a certain place to become members (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020). As we will see later, the “*cults*”, as commonly understood, are a type of Nigerian criminal organisation that evolved out of university fraternities.

The needs of beggars and the dynamics of the phenomenon have changed radically following the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. At first, during the lockdown in March-May 2020, people disappeared from the streets and low-threshold services were only contacted in order to meet basic needs, especially food, in cases of extreme hardship. The delivery of shopping vouchers, where possible, was an opportunity to cultivate relationships with people, for example by entering their homes and thus having access to intimate spaces that are generally inaccessible (interview, Lule Onlus outreach unit, Abbiategrasso (MI), 27/04/2020). Potential indicators of exploitation also emerged through requests for help: one man, in Perugia, asked for support to pay his rent. His difficulty was not linked to the risk of eviction by the landlady, a Nigerian woman, but rather to the fact that he refused to go out and beg because he was worried about possibly contracting the virus (interview, Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete outreach unit, Perugia, 11/05/2020). However, their absence from the streets was short-lived. Many people resumed begging, albeit with less intensity, with the

loosening of lockdown regulations in the summer of 2020, as we will explain with reference to the historic centre of Venice.

## The characteristics of begging in Italy

The monitoring and mapping activities of the outreach units interviewed made it possible to observe the places and modes of begging and the profiles of the people involved. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we provide a summary of this information in Table 4. The quantitative data on the number of contacts with beneficiaries of different nationalities are approximate, as they are not promptly recorded in the database of the Anti-Trafficking Helpline, which, however, does record contacts with beneficiaries in the area of sexual exploitation on a regular basis (twice a year).

Organisation	Modalities/places	Main nationalities
Cestrim <i>Potenza</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> stationary, in front of big supermarkets and pharmacies in the centre	Mainly from <b>Nigeria</b> , but also <b>Niger, Sudan, The Gambia</b> and <b>Ghana, Poland, Italy, Romania</b> (2019 data).
Fondazione Somaschi- <i>Milan</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> in front of supermarkets, bars and pastry shops, in very central areas <b>Romanians</b> and <b>Bulgarians:</b> in more suburban areas, next to traffic lights	Mainly from Nigeria, but also from <b>Romania</b> and <b>Bulgaria</b> . 140 people contacted, of whom 7 were women, 90% were Nigerians and the rest were Romanians and Bulgarians (2019 data).
Afet Aquilone/San Benedetto al Porto <i>Genoa</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> stationary in the streets in the centre, in front of supermarkets and bakeries	Mainly <b>Nigerian</b> men, between 25 and 30 years old; a few Nigerian women; a few other people with <b>East-European</b> nationalities (2019 data).
On the Road Onlus <i>Pescara and province</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> stationary, car parks near to large shopping areas, initially contractual then only asking for money	Both men and women of <b>Nigerian</b> origin (around 20 in total) aged over 35 (data from 2019); in 2016 there were also large numbers of <b>Roma</b> people (60-70 people in 2016).
On the Road Onlus <i>Termoli</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> stationary, in front of supermarkets People from <b>Eastern Europe:</b> in front of restaurants and bars	<b>Nigerian</b> men between the ages of 20-35, men and around 20 women from <b>Eastern Europe</b> (data from 2019).
San Benedetto al Porto <i>Alessandria</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> predominantly in the car parks in front of local hospitals and supermarkets, some at traffic lights	Different nationalities, the presence of <b>Nigerians</b> between 20 and 30 years old increased in recent years, they were mainly men, and almost all “commuting” from Turin; <b>Roma</b> people who have long been begging locally, also Italians (data from 2019).
Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete- Free Life Project <i>Perugia</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> in front of supermarkets and at the car park near the weekly market <b>Roma</b> people: in the streets of the centre and near the station, also window washing at traffic lights	From 2015, 45 <b>Nigerians</b> ; 7-10 <b>Roma</b> people in the streets in the centre (data from 2019).

Associazione San Martino, Free Life Project <i>Terni</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> stationary, in front of supermarkets, bars and pastry shops <b>Senegalese:</b> stationary, in a large car park, contractual	The <b>Nigerians</b> are stationed in front of around twenty supermarkets; <b>Senegalese</b> and <b>Pakistani</b> ; a few <b>Roma</b> people.
Free Woman Onlus <i>Ancona</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> stationary, outside of supermarkets and in large car parks Also book selling by <b>Senegalese</b> people and <b>Gambians</b>	Mainly young <b>Nigerian</b> men, a few Nigerian women, a few men from <b>The Gambia</b> and a few older men (over 50) from <b>Romania</b> .
Cooperativa Lotta Contro l'Emarginazione <i>Varese</i>	<b>Donne Rom:</b> stationary, in the streets of the city centre <b>Nigerians:</b> stationary, near shops and restaurants <b>Senegalese</b> people: mainly in the hospital car parks and a group outside an underground station	<b>Senegalese</b> people selling small items and offering services; <b>Nigerians</b> , aged between 18 and 25; <b>Roma</b> women (2019 data: 20 Senegalese, 5 Nigerians, 5 Roma women).
Noemi Società Cooperativa Sociale <i>Crotone</i>	<b>Roma</b> people: in the city centre streets, in front of supermarkets and pharmacies <b>Nigerians:</b> men in car parks, women with children in front of supermarkets	Mostly <b>Nigerian</b> men (25-30 boys, weekly), a few Nigerian women with children.  People of <b>Roma</b> origin: mostly women, not in winter, mostly in spring-summer.
CIAC Onlus <i>Parma</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> in front of supermarkets, in car parks <b>Senegalese</b> and <b>Gambians:</b> in the main streets of the city centre	<b>Nigerians</b> mainly begging, <b>Senegalese</b> people mainly selling gadgets and <b>Bangladeshis</b> mainly selling roses in the street.
Lule Onlus <i>South-west Milan area, Pavia and Bergamo</i>	Itinerant in markets, stationary in front of supermarkets	Mainly <b>Nigerians</b> , <b>Senegalese</b> , <b>Romanians</b> : Nigerians in different proportions depending on the urban area, in Bergamo and Milan mainly Nigerians, in the south-west Milan area mainly Senegalese people, in the Pavia area mainly <b>Romanian Roma</b> people.
Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII <i>Bologna</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> in front of shops <b>Romanians:</b> in front of places of worship and on trains	About 70/80 people in the old town centre, mainly <b>Nigerian</b> men, the rest made up of very few <b>Italians</b> , <b>Romanians</b> and <b>Bosnian Serbs</b> , both men and women; <b>Pakistanis</b> in the streets of the historical centre selling small gadgets.
TAMPEP <i>Turin</i>	<b>Nigerians:</b> in front of supermarkets, local markets, recently also in car parks, shops and arcades in the city centre <b>Senegalese:</b> street vendors  People from <b>Eastern Europe:</b> stationary <b>Moroccans:</b> window washing	Mostly <b>Nigerians</b> but also other Africans; <b>Senegalese</b> people and <b>Moroccans</b> , almost exclusively male; men and women from <b>Eastern Europe</b> of various ages.

TABLE 4: MAIN MODES/PLACES AND NATIONALITIES OF BEGGING IN OUTREACH UNITS' INTERVENTION AREAS (2019 DATA).

Although there is a big difference between the areas, the professionals interviewed identified recurring factors, both in the evolution of begging and in the ways in which it is practised and in the profiles of the people involved. With regard to the latter, there are clearly more men, although there are also women, with an average age of between 18 and 35 years - with the exception of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens who can also be 50-60 years old. Nigerian nationality (particularly people from Edo State) is dominant, followed by Romanian and Bulgarian nationalities. Other nationalities, especially African (Senegalese, Moroccan, Malian, Niger, Ghanaian and Sudanese), are present but to a more limited extent. Below we will show how the phenomenon has evolved. In almost all the territories analysed, the landscape of urban begging has changed significantly with the increase in migration flows in the period 2015-2018. Some outreach units observed an earlier change, at the turn of the 2011 migration wave, when the first people of sub-Saharan origin were noted in front of supermarkets and shops. Their presence gradually increased from 2014 onwards (interview, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto outreach unit, Alessandria, 9/04/2020<sup>51</sup>). However, the profiles of the people observed in these two phases are different: those who arrived in 2011 had lived and worked in Libya for a long time before arriving in Italy, and had a higher average age than those who arrived later. Moreover, since 2015, there has not only been an increase in beggars of sub-Saharan origin, but also the arrival of migrants from other countries (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) mainly engaged in street vending and other informal economies (ibidem).

According to the outreach units, the increase in begging may also be related to the changes that have affected the reception system for asylum seekers and refugees, following the enactment of Decree Law 113/2018. The latter limited access to the SIPROIMI (System of protection for holders of international protection and for foreign unaccompanied minors, formerly SPRAR - System of protection for asylum seekers and refugees) to refugees, holders of subsidiary protection or special protection<sup>52</sup> and unaccompanied minors, effectively reducing the number of people who could access these facilities and excluding those seeking international protection, or who already have humanitarian protection. It seems that the exclusion of an increasing number of people from the reception circuit - due to the impossibility of access, but also due to the loss of the right to reception (for example, in cases in which beneficiaries decide to leave the centre, albeit temporary) or the completion of the process - has led to an increase in the number of people engaged in begging (interview, Cestrim outreach unit, Potenza, 30/03/2020; interview, outreach unit, On The Road Onlus, Pescara, 8/05/2020). Moreover, the moving of many of these people from reception centres to independent accommodation, often with people of the same nationality, and even outside of urban centres, has made it more difficult to monitor regularisation paths. Outreach unit professionals emphasised the greater risk of exploitation for this group of people due to their conditions of marginality and precariousness - compared to the "historical" Romanian groups, who

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<sup>51</sup> As was also revealed in Perugia (intervista, unità di contatto *Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete*, Perugia, 11/05/2020) and Turin (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020).

<sup>52</sup> Special protection is aimed at people who are victims of violence or trafficking, of domestic violence or of labour exploitation, or at other people for reasons related to health, disasters or acts of particular civic value.

are more settled and known to social services (interview, Associazione San Martino outreach unit, Terni, 11/05/2020).

From 2015 onwards, in all the territories, an increase in Nigerian begging was observed, mainly - but not exclusively – by adult men between 20 and 35 years old, and never involving minors, which represents a discontinuity with previous dynamics. In Ancona, for example, before 2016, there had never been a significant number of Nigerians in car parks or outside supermarkets, but only Senegalese and Bangladeshi people engaged in informal trade (sale of small goods or counterfeit goods) and Roma people begging in front of churches (interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020). In Milan a significant number of Nigerian people have been observed from 2016 onwards, with a decrease after 2018, probably due to the reduction in arrivals in Italy and increasing mobility towards other European countries (interview, Fondazione Somaschi outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020). In the province of Monza and Brianza a very similar dynamic was observed, along with the presence of other groups of Senegalese people selling small objects and Roma people begging (interview, outreach unit Cooperativa Lotta Contro l'Emarginazione, Varese, 06/05/2020).

### ***Interactions between groups of beggars***

In different urban contexts, the professionals also looked at the interactions between the different groups simultaneously present in the territory. In the urban centre of Bologna, the numbers remained stable, between 80 and 100 units: a change was registered, in proportional terms, in nationalities. With the increase of Nigerians, a clear decrease of Bangladeshis was noted, who count on a very organic network and who are more recently active only in the less profitable time slots. The Nigerians have positioned themselves in front of shops, where previously older (50-60 year old) Roma people from Eastern Europe were stationed. This transition led to the outbreak of fights. A small group of Roma citizens (around 40), all from the same region, almost all members of the same family group and with a clear division of roles by gender and age, were threatened and forced to leave almost all shops. In turn, this group took the place of the Bangladeshis, again in an aggressive manner (interview, Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII outreach unit, Bologna, 14/07/2020). Similar substitution dynamics have been observed in other cities. In Termoli and Pescara, up to four or five years ago, only people from Eastern Europe were stationed in front of supermarkets and shopping centres; now these spaces are occupied by Nigerian citizens (interview, outreach unit, On the Road Onlus, Termoli, 05/05/2020; interview, outreach unit, On The Road Onlus, Pescara, 8/05/2020). In Pescara, alongside this substitution, other forms of begging of a contractual type continued, in particular by Senegalese and Bangladeshi people (interview, outreach unit, On The Road Onlus, Pescara, 8/05/2020).

Different forms of begging were also reported in specific urban spaces. In some Milanese neighbourhood markets, the simultaneous presence of people of different nationalities and genders was observed: Nigerian men and women, Pakistani men, Serbian and Romanian people performing non-stationary begging, moving with passers-by (interview, Lule Onlus outreach unit,

Abbiategrosso (MI), 27/04/2020). Thus the market in Milan, but also in other places, for example, Turin (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020) appears to be a "free zone", that is "for everyone", unlike other places in the city, such as supermarkets, where begging is more stationary, with more easily controlled locations.

In Perugia, a first change in the phenomenon of begging was observed in 2010: at that time, Romanian Roma people, members of two or three permanent family groups, were stationed in front of supermarkets. A major police operation, carried out in cooperation with the Juvenile Court, led to the arrest of several members of these families on charges of exploitation, significantly reducing begging activity<sup>53</sup>. A second change took place between 2014 and 2015, when several CAS facilities (Centre for Extraordinary Reception) were activated in the city. With this, the Roma people in front of the supermarkets gradually disappeared and their place was taken by Nigerians, who now cover the entire network of supermarkets (around 45) and therefore all the places considered most attractive for begging, including supermarkets in the more suburban areas which were previously unoccupied. In addition to the supermarkets, Nigerians are also present in a large city car park on the day of the weekly market. Roma people, on the other hand, have moved to the traffic lights, working as window washers, or begging in the streets between the train station and the city centre.

This process of replacement in front of the supermarkets was not without conflict: supermarket managers reported witnessing clashes between old occupants and newcomers (interview, Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete outreach unit, Perugia, 11/05/2020). According to the outreach unit professionals, Roma people moved as soon as they realised that the Nigerian business was run by an organisation (ibid.), but this is speculation. Conflictual dynamics were also reported in Terni, where a Roma community begged in front of some of the city's supermarkets and at some traffic lights. They were moved on in the period 2008-2009, following protests by residents. Again, from 2015 onwards, the pitches in front of the city's 20 supermarkets (in the centre and on the outskirts) have been occupied by Nigerian people, who are also stationed in front of the main bars and pastry shops. In parallel with this stationary begging, another type of begging continued, namely contractual begging involving the sale of small objects, carried out by people of other nationalities. Unlike in the Perugian context, however, it is Senegalese people who are present in the car parks (interview, Associazione San Martino outreach unit, Terni, 11/05/2020).

Turin has seen the expansion of Nigerian begging in different parts of the city, alongside activities practised by other nationalities (petty trading and window washing). So what has brought about the changes in the begging scene in urban contexts? Several factors have been indicated by the professionals: a) processes of place appropriation by new groups, replacing previous groups; b) local policies against begging and the control of public spaces with the often temporary effect of displacing begging; c) the effect of investigations and judicial proceedings on child exploitation and human trafficking managed by East-European organised crime; d) the increasing inaccessibility of the reception system.

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<sup>53</sup> Various police operations were conducted across the whole of Italy, including in the territories of Verona and Milan (interview, Fondazione Somaschi outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020).



### ***Begging among Nigerians: profiles, places, methods***

In the scenario described above, begging emerges as a practice which takes different forms, sometimes in continuity, sometimes in parallel, with the involvement of various national groups, often with "specialisations": from the occupation of spaces in front of supermarkets or car parks, to begging at traffic lights, to "itinerant" begging in markets. As explained above, conflicts have often emerged over the appropriation of spaces, especially between Roma people and Nigerians, who are more involved in non-contractual forms of begging. If we focus on begging carried out by Nigerian citizens, we can see similarities, but also differences, from one territorial context to another.

#### *Profiles, legal status, gender, age*

The Nigerian citizens involved in begging are mainly young men (18-30 years old), most of whom have arrived in Italy recently (in the last 1-3 years) and are often part of the reception system for asylum seekers. They generally hold a regular residence permit as asylum seekers or are in the process of appealing the rejection of their application. Since 2018, coinciding with a high number of rejections<sup>54</sup> and, in part, due to numerous interruptions of the asylum procedure, there are also many people without a regular residence permit. Precisely for this reason, legal support aimed at regularisation is a crucial element in fostering effective contact on the street (interview, CIAC Onlus outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020).

From more in-depth contacts with some of the men, professionals report that most come from Edo State - the Nigerian state most associated with trafficking as evidenced by numerous international reports and academic literature - and are Christian. Some come from other northern Nigerian states (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020), from Delta State or from other eastern states with an Igbo majority.

The presence of Nigerian women is less frequent, but still significant. In the south-west province of Milan, in 2015, more women were met, who told of a double type of exploitation: begging by day, prostitution by night, with the aim of paying off the debt with the traffickers in the shortest possible time. Over the years, begging by Nigerians has become predominantly male. Out of 30 people who met in the markets, there were between three and five women, who in most cases commuted from Novara (Piedmont) (interview, Lule Onlus outreach unit, Abbiategrasso (MI), 27/04/2020). Commuting was also seen in Terni, where women with very young children take the train to the

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<sup>54</sup> In 2018, only 7% of asylum seekers of Nigerian nationality were granted refugee status, 1% subsidiary protection and 17% humanitarian protection. 69% were refused and 7% were untraceable. In 2019, 15% were granted refugee status, 1% subsidiary protection, 19 people were granted special protection, 67% were refused and 8% were untraceable (Quaderno statistico della Commissione Nazionale per il Diritto d'Asilo (Statistical Notebook of the National Commission for the Right of Asylum)).

Link: <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/i-numeri-dellasilolo>. Last accessed on: 01/02/2021).

city and beg for money in the streets of the centre, often in front of the most crowded bars, never in front of supermarkets (interview, Associazione San Martino outreach unit, Terni, 11/05/2020). In Perugia, since 2018, professionals have only had contact with 4 Nigerian women engaged in begging, all of whom were known to the anti-trafficking service as beneficiaries of the reception system or of other services. These limited contacts led them to reflect on the female dimension of begging and its combination with prostitution, as indicative of a possible evolution of the types of exploitation and trafficking. This remains an open question, which requires further investigation (interview, Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete outreach unit, Perugia, 11/05/2020).

### *Places, methods, organisation*

The places where Nigerian beggars are most frequently encountered are city centres, in front of shops or restaurants, where non-contractual and permanent begging, in which people ask for money, is practiced, or in car parks and in front of supermarkets, where sometimes services are also exchanged (finding free parking spaces, help with shopping trolleys). In some territories, in Pescara and Turin for example, contractual forms of begging were also observed for a certain period, and then gradually abandoned from 2015 onwards, and even more so after 2018 (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020). For some cities, including Bologna, Turin and Pescara, a third, more appealing, type of begging was also reported: the cleaning of public areas with a request, through signs visible to passers-by, for a donation (see for instance interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020). Professionals of the outreach unit in Pescara told of young men, positioned at a distance of about one kilometre from each other, holding the same kind of sign, with the same printed wording "I don't want hand-outs, I want to be integrated in the city", who also organised in groups to buy dustpans and brooms (interview, On The Road Onlus outreach unit, Pescara, 8/05/2020).

Begging practised by Nigerian citizens is described as not being of a harassing nature (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020). The relationship between Nigerians and the supermarkets that they beg outside of is generally good, thanks also to the fact that they choose places suggested by the supermarkets as being invasive (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020; interview, Fondazione Somaschi outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020). Most supermarket customers seem to willingly accept the presence of these men begging and also offers of help with trolleys. In some cases, outreach units have intervened to facilitate and encourage this exchange, with a view to conflict prevention and mediation (interview, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto outreach unit, Alessandria, 9/04/2020). In other cases, it is customers themselves who intervene to defend the Nigerians when other customers complain about their presence.

Despite the generally non-invasive mode of begging, in territories such as Ancona, a gradual deterioration of the relationship with residents was recorded, particularly between 2018 and 2019, with increasing episodes of intolerance and verbal aggression, of a racist nature, towards not only Nigerians who practised begging, but also women who prostituted themselves on the street. These episodes were associated with the negative influence of political and media narratives on migrants

(interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020), in line with the literature on the subject.

A clearly distinctive factor of Nigerian citizens who beg, in comparison to other groups, is the fact that they are often well dressed, stand up and do not assume attitudes aimed at inducing pity (making a disability particularly visible, displaying a sign describing precarious family conditions, etc.). The use of a cap with a visor and other symbols (tattoos, clothing colours) that, as observed by some professionals, can refer to "*cult*" membership, were not found on a regular basis - with the exception of caps in the Milan area and in other contexts (interview, Fondazione Somaschi outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020). According to a cultural-linguistic mediator in Turin, the use of symbols has been gradually and voluntarily reduced to divert the gaze of the police who, following several investigations into Nigerian organised crime and *cults*, are more attentive to relevant symbols (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020).

Another fundamental aspect that outreach units frequently observed in their monitoring activities was the "organised" way in which begging sites are managed. In Potenza and Crotone, a constant rotation between several people was often seen, in order to cover the same location throughout the day (interview, Cestrim outreach unit, Potenza, 30/03/2020). The same was observed in Milan. Professionals in Pescara reported that people divided into male and female groups alternated on different days, with fixed and regular schedules (9am - 6pm), moving by public transport and sometimes accompanied (interview, On The Road Onlus outreach unit, Pescara, 8/05/2020).

A professional from Termoli reported the absence of conflicts between compatriots in the allocation of places, in line with colleagues in Milan (interview, Fondazione Somaschi outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020). Both suggest that this element, together with the precise organisation of hourly shifts is to be read in terms of "internal organisation between compatriots" and that access to these places is not free but controlled. This hypothesis was also confirmed verbally by some Nigerian men: in one case, at the end of a medical accompaniment, the man reassured the professional that he did not have to "resume service because he had already called a substitute" (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020). This management is sometimes interpreted as a form of self-organisation among peers. This is supported by the outreach unit in Alessandria, on the basis of specific monitoring carried out early in the morning to observe how people were positioned in stationary begging spots. Violent fights over the occupation of particular places were then observed, which ended with the removal of those who arrived later. This led to the idea that the organisation was not vertical, with possible payments for pitches, but rather horizontal (interview, Comunità San Benedetto al Porto outreach unit, Alessandria, 9/04/2020).

Nevertheless, many of the interviewed professionals had different feelings about top-down forms of control (interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020; interview, CIAC Onlus outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020), as well as of the relations of male and female beggars with *madams* who are generally associated with prostitution (interview, Noemi cooperative outreach unit, Crotone, 14/05/2020). When describing their experiences of exploitation, women hosted in anti-trafficking projects also tell stories of *trolley-boys* – young boys engaged in smuggling

across borders - engaged in begging, who accompany them to places of prostitution (interview, Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII outreach unit, Bologna, 14/07/2020).

## SIXTH PART

### Trafficking or exploitation?

The hypothesis that begging may be managed by organised crime, in the form of exploitation or trafficking dynamics, has been confirmed by some anti-trafficking professionals. They involve mainly East-European and Bangladeshi people, but insights emerged also in investigations concerning both Nigerian and East-European criminal organisations.

The *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* referred to an interview with a person of Bangladeshi origin, in which it emerged that begging and window washing were necessary for repaying the debt incurred for the trip, thus highlighting a situation of smuggling. The same association followed up two beggars, in cooperation with the social services. Both were Romanian, disabled and, as later emerged, victims of trafficking (interview, *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* outreach unit, Bologna, 14/07/2020). The *Fondazione Somaschi* in Milan has experience with several male Romanian beggars. They all emerged as victims of trafficking as part of a major international investigation in 2016, which uncovered a European network comprising several countries including Romania and Italy. The *On The Road* association also followed several cases of people of East-European origin engaged in begging and trafficking, coinciding with an investigation targeting a criminal organisation operating between Bulgaria and Italy (informal discussion, *On The Road Onlus* Coordinator, 23/04/2020). The N.A.Ve project took on people exploited for begging, mainly of East-European nationality, who came forward during the *Stop For Beg* action-research. As will be explained later, during this research the existence of a family-based network that organised begging for people of Roma origin was detected. For people of sub-Saharan origin, there was no evidence of a network run by a criminal organisation. In line with the project's findings, at a national level it was very rare to find begging among the Nigerian people who were part of the anti-trafficking projects. They were mostly victims of labour exploitation, which in no case resulted in subsequent reports to the police. The professionals of the *Papa Giovanni XIII* outreach unit seemed to have little doubt that begging by Nigerian citizens in the city was controlled. They were equally convinced that it was a 'front' for much more complex dynamics associated with the evolution of organised crime and its systems of exploitation. A detailed observation of some Nigerian men has provided a first important step in outlining this wider picture. One example was the observation of a young Nigerian man who regularly walked along Via Indipendenza, one of the main streets in Bologna, talking to all his peers engaged in begging, who in turn seemed to respond with a submissive look. Another example came out of the repeated observation of the dynamics between the beggars, which showed that they constantly exchanged money. A second piece of evidence concerned the estimates of money that can be made through begging, which can even be significant in places with a large influx of people, although much lower than in prostitution, and therefore certainly attractive to a criminal organisation. From conversations with several beggars, not only of Nigerian nationality, the professionals understood that at international trade fairs, even up to 100 euros can be made in a few hours. The Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office

of Catania, Lina Trovato<sup>55</sup>, suggests that on public holidays (e.g. Christmas Day) it is possible to collect as much as 200 euros in one day and that the activity can be complementary, for example for women forced into prostitution who do not earn enough according to the *madam*. Observation of begging near supermarkets has shown that, at busy times, people manage to collect up to 30 trolleys in 20 minutes: assuming that one euro can be made per trolley, they could collect more than 30 euros in half an hour. The fact that, as some beggars stated, there is a number to call to go begging and to resolve disputes over pitches suggests that it may be used as a form of outpost for controlling the territory in order for a group to become the "masters of the street"<sup>56</sup>. A third element arose in several conversations between the Bologna professionals and the local *Squadra Mobile*<sup>57</sup>. Among the (nine) people arrested in the police operation "*Bibbia Verde*"<sup>58</sup>, there were people with very important roles within the investigated Nigerian organisation. One had the task of planning expeditions in the territory to control and threaten people and, at the same time, was begging daily in front of a supermarket in another area, in the province of Vicenza. Precisely because of this, the Head of the *Squadra Mobile* encouraged the professionals to continue monitoring the phenomenon. Following multiple telephone interceptions, it became increasingly evident that begging was a phenomenon of organised exploitation, even if apparently imposed with less violence than prostitution. A fourth element is related to the specific case of a Nigerian man who reached out to anti-trafficking professionals for help. It will now report in more detail about this.

In 2018, the man had been reported by the SPRAR (System of protection for asylum seekers and refugees) to the anti-trafficking professionals after they saw him begging. He claimed that he had incurred a debt to reach Europe and was being exploited through begging. He reported to the police, as it rarely happens. As he refused to enter into the social protection programme for trafficked persons, he remained in a SPRAR centre, which he left after obtaining international protection. In March 2020, the lawyer who followed him in the criminal proceedings contacted the anti-trafficking professionals to ask if they had collected any evidence related to exploitation. A few days before the trial, the boy was found dead in the territory of Ferrara, suggesting that the killing could be associated with the on-going trial. In fact, during the hearing, he had given many details to the judge and for this reason it seems that he fled Bologna immediately afterwards, for fear of retaliation, but without giving details to his lawyer.

Law enforcement agencies have also investigated begging by Nigerians in the Milan area, and the associated forms of control and exploitation, calling for a strengthening of collaboration with outreach units to gather information on the phenomenon (interview, Fondazione Somaschi

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania 11/12/2020. Organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSIGHT webinar with law enforcement services on 27/01/2021.

<sup>56</sup> As explained both by a Nigerian mediator in the anti-trafficking project (fieldnote, 30/07/2020) and by the Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania (webinar Anti-trafficking Helpline with Lina Trovato, 28/01/2021).

<sup>57</sup> The *Squadra Mobile* is a specific department/section of the National Police. It operates in each *Questura*. It conducts investigations either under its own initiative or as delegated by the Judiciary Authority.

<sup>58</sup> "*Mafia Nigeriana in Italia, trovata "Bibbia Verde": regole rigide punizioni e riti di iniziazione*". 18/07/2020. Link: <https://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/media/Mafia-Nigeriana-in-Italia-trovata-Bibbia-Verde-regole-rigide-punizioni-riti-di-iniziazione-bf74530a-1d8b-45bf-98e2-3e1ea9796f4b.html#foto-1> Last accessed on: 10/01/2021.

outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020), although this has not resulted in systematic multi-agency collaboration<sup>59</sup> Yet, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office for minors of l'Aquila, David Mancini, who has been working on trafficking for many years, reiterates that some phenomena, including begging, as well as the evolution of criminal organisations, can only be understood through a double perspective made possible by multi-agency work: the social and socio-anthropological perspective, on the one hand, and the investigative perspective, on the other. However, collaborations of this nature have decreased in recent years, due to two main factors: on the one hand, the increasing recourse to the channel of international protection for the regularisation of trafficked persons, rather than social protection, which involves reporting to the police (although this is not compulsory); on the other hand, the chronic lack of a national coordination to foster multi-agency interventions, identify standard procedures and act as a link between systems<sup>60</sup> (interview, Mancini, 20/10/2020).

With regard to judicial proceedings, we have followed one still on-going criminal case, which includes a case of trafficking from Nigeria for begging purposes. The relevant file, and specifically the arrest warrant (nr 1438/17 RGRN) was made available by the Deputy Prosecutor of Catania<sup>61</sup> in response to our request for access (see methodology section). The investigation began with a complaint by the manager of a reception centre in Sicily. The man reported suspicious contacts between some newly accepted under-age girls and probable victims of trafficking and some external persons who had offered to help them escape from the centre. During the resulting investigation, a Nigerian citizen who was a victim of trafficking for the purposes of begging was found. Specifically, telephone tapping revealed contacts between a *madam* and the man, during which they talked about his recruitment, transfer to Italy and a still outstanding debt of about 5,000 euros, which had to be paid through begging<sup>62</sup>. The man repeatedly justified himself by explaining that through begging he wasn't able to earn more than 50 euros a day. Deputy Prosecutor Lina Trovato confirmed that signs of begging have rarely surfaced in her investigations and that the investigations are mostly associated with drug dealing and trafficking offences. In her opinion, in 90% of cases, begging is a subsistence economic activity that people choose to practice in the absence of job opportunities and other income. Alternatively, *madams* can ask for their help in controlling women forced into prostitution (Anti-Trafficking Helpline webinar with Lina Trovato, 28/01/2021). The same opinion was shared by some Nigerian mediators who collaborate with the

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<sup>59</sup> The only multi-agency collaboration that emerged from the interviews was carried out in some cities in southern Lombardy, by the Lule association and the local police, but they were more focused on reducing social marginality than in investigative activities (interview, outreach unit, *Lule Onlus*, Abbiategrasso (MI), 27/04/2020).

<sup>60</sup> As also emphasised in the GRETA report (2019).

<sup>61</sup> Alleged offences: 110, 81 cpv; 601 paragraph 1; 602 ter c.1; 4 L. 146/06. The accused, by means of a threat (juju) and by taking advantage of a situation of vulnerability, recruited, introduced, transported and housed in the territory of the State, Persons XXXX (first and last names) in order to force them or in any case persuade them to carry out sexual services with the view to exploiting them and Person XXXX (first and last name) in order to force him to engage in begging. With the aggravating circumstances of having acted to the detriment of minors and having contributed to an offence committed by an organised criminal group engaged in activities in several states.

<sup>62</sup> As suggested by various professionals, it has been difficult to go deeper into the issue of debt. There is more accumulated awareness on debt contracted by Nigerian women, although it seems clear that the debt contracted by men is generally lower, at around 5-7-10,000 euros (see for example: interview, *Fondazione Somaschi* outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020; interview, *CIAC Onlus* outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020).

N.A.Ve project in Veneto (fieldnote, 28/01/2020; 30/07/2020). The Chief Public Prosecutor Mancini argues that the proceeds of Nigerian organised crime - which can be huge, and are then reintegrated within legal credit channels in Nigeria - derive from three main activities: sexual exploitation, drug trafficking and begging. According to the magistrate, it is when the *cults* enter the begging market that the pitches begin to be managed and controlled, for example through the payment of the so-called “*joint*”<sup>63</sup>. The investigations rarely came across the crime of trafficking for begging, but they confirmed that the activity is organised and that several of the people subsequently arrested for mafia association are members of “*cult*” groups (interview, Chief Public Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of l’Aquila, Mancini, 20/10/2020).

The outreach workers interviewed generally agreed that cases of trafficking for begging purposes were rare and that begging was more often a form of exploitation. At no point did people of Nigerian origin state during their interviews that they had been forced to go to a certain location or that they were controlled while begging. There is also a shared awareness that this activity can be associated with trafficking and serious exploitation and/or also with free or semi-free activity, and that the boundaries between these various forms are hard to identify, also because of the difficulties in building relationships of trust with the people involved. The outreach unit workers that we interviewed generally believe that in some cases the choice of begging is dictated by circumstances, including conditions of severe marginality and destitution. There may be people who are victims of smuggling who, in order to repay their debt, and in the absence of an alternative income, turn to a compatriot in order to get involved in begging, and some mentioned the payment of a “*joint*” (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020).

A cultural-linguistic mediator from the Tampep project in Turin confirmed the payment of pitches - which are considered the property of those who control them, as in prostitution - and strict forms of control, with threats and violence when a pitch is occupied without prior agreement (interview, Tampep Turin outreach unit, 10/07/2020).

Although a systematic shift from begging to drug dealing, or vice versa, was not observed, professionals see possible connections between these two economies: some Nigerian men who came forward in Milan reported that they 'chose' begging to avoid dealing drugs, as initially requested by a “*cult*” group of which they are members. This suggests that in some cases people may have a certain freedom of choice, however limited. According to the Venice Local Police (interview, 10/09/2020), there is no obvious link between Nigerians practising begging and Nigerians dealing drugs, at least according to the findings of observations on the Venetian territory. We will return to this below.

The dynamics are therefore complex and the possible links and/or overlaps between different forms of trafficking, smuggling, exploitation and (free or semi-free) choice are evident. The objective of the traffickers is undoubtedly to make money, and it is therefore likely that they target the most profitable activities, such as prostitution and drug dealing (ibidem), although, as explained, begging can also be quite profitable. Assuming that traffickers aim to collect the balance

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<sup>63</sup> Some signs of the payment of a “*joint*” have been reported by Abbatecola e Popolla (2019).



of the debt incurred by the exploited people as soon as possible, it is also likely that where a person is considered unsuitable for drug dealing, he or she may be left "free" to opt for begging. On the other hand, those who opt for begging may do so out of fear of becoming involved in illegal activities, while accepting that it tends to be a less profitable activity. According to outreach workers, however, it should be remembered that drug dealing, with the risk and gain it entails, can be associated with achieving a certain status, which is difficult to give up (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020; see also Palmisano, 2019).

According to the *Ciac Onlus* professionals, it remains unclear whether, and in what circumstances, the criminal organisation that arranged the transport of people to Italy also recruited them, once they arrived, for begging or instead "left them free to choose" how to repay the debt (interview, CIAC Onlus outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020). Doubts also remain on the existence of possible collaborations/connections between several organisations, some of which are engaged in the organisation of the journey, others in the management of exploitation in Europe, in order to make the trafficking chain more complex and fragmented and therefore more difficult to intercept. In other words, this would be an evolution in the models of exploitation used by Nigerian criminals. Doubts in this regard were also raised by the *Lule Onlus* outreach unit, according to which very few Nigerian men gave evidence of the recruitment process in their country of origin and of a ritualised oath. In these cases, collective rituals, different from those for women, were described (interview, Fondazione Somaschi outreach unit, Milan, 02/04/2020; interview, CIAC Onlus outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020). The reticence to talk about this is clear with both Nigerian men and women - as observed for many years in cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation (see for instance interview, On The Road Onlus outreach unit, Pescara, 8/05/2020).

However, the difficulty of creating relationships of trust is particularly evident with men and has been the subject of reflection by many anti-trafficking professionals. The willingness to tell their stories has often turned into resistance when it comes to recounting their memories for their asylum applications, with the heaviest censorship in relation to everything concerning the present (interview, CIAC Onlus outreach unit, Parma, 29/04/2020). The general complexity that characterises attempts to understand migratory experiences in search of possible indicators of trafficking and exploitation is also linked to a "very nuanced" perception that the men have of their conditions of exploitation. They do not readily identify themselves as victims. Awareness of exploitation comes after a long time, if it comes at all, and it is therefore much more difficult than with women to identify "the breaking point" when they are ready to ask for help (interview, Free Woman Onlus outreach unit, Ancona, 10/04/2020). Much of the literature on this subject has analysed categorisations within anti-trafficking systems and asylum procedures, underlining the performativity of categories such as "victim", but also of "real" and "bogus" refugees, and how professionals relate them to possible forms of agency and subjectivation processes (among all, see Zetter, 1991; Malkki, 1995; Serughetti, 2017). But it is worth remembering that both women and men do not always perceive their exploiters as such. They often see them as the people who, even if they deceived them, allowed them to arrive in Europe.

At the same time, many people, and even more men, rather than lacking awareness of their exploitation recognise that they have no alternative. If they choose to report the criminal organisation to the police, they know that they are risking their lives, and often that of their families; if they choose to enter an anti-trafficking programme, they are unlikely to find a job quickly, thus having to postpone paying their debts (which they feel obliged to pay if they are not totally freed from the organisation) and delay access to the labour market which, in the medium to long term, is necessary for their subsistence.

As the mediator at Tampep suggested, several variables come into play that hinder cooperation in relation to reporting to the police: the fear of retaliation, the oath taken, but also a precise representation of gender identity: "*if you are a real man, you must not report to the police*" and, in some cases, the link of belonging to a "*cult*", which makes them "blood brothers" (interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020).

### ***The infiltration of the Nigerian mafia in Italy and Europe and the complex interconnection with trafficking, exploitation and begging***

Our research did not reveal clear and direct connections between begging and the Nigerian mafia, but it did lead us to explore this issue and the broader topic of Nigerian mafia organisations, also because the outreach unit professionals we interviewed complained about the lack of knowledge on this subject. Thus, in this section we give an overview that we intend to develop further in the future, to give an account of information gathered from: academic literature, interviews conducted as part of the INSigHT Action, and an Anti-Trafficking Helpline webinar with the Deputy Prosecutor of Catania, Lina Trovato – who was previously involved in INSigHT.

### ***Italian outreach units and limited knowledge of the cults***

In general, with respect to begging, but even more so with respect to Nigerian criminal organisation and the *cults*, the interviewed professionals had the shared sense of dealing with "something different" from what they had learned from their experience with female victims of sexual exploitation. The common perception was that they were not sufficiently trained on this subject, and had fewer tools with which to understand and intervene. There was a shared awareness that there are continuous evolutions of different but potentially interconnected phenomena. This is suggested, for example, by the apparent increase (or increasing visibility?) of men in some areas of trafficking and exploitation: women who prostitute themselves are still linked to a *madam* but also mention "boyfriends" who, as some professionals hypothesise, albeit without direct evidence, could be affiliated to a "*cult*" (informal discussion, On the Road Onlus Coordinator, 23/04/2020).

With respect to the evolution of male and female roles, it should also be noted that Nigerian criminal organisations seem to be continually re-organising themselves, extending their areas of

intervention and the people involved (interview, Mancini, 20/10/2020). This can be deduced, for example, from the fact that many Nigerian women have stopped working in prostitution despite not having finished paying their debts. The hypothesis is that being linked to a boyfriend may help a person to move up the ladder by carrying out activities such as transporting drugs (see also Palmisano, 2019: 182).

No service-user ever openly referred to a “cult” during interviews with the professionals we interviewed, neither with reference to indirect experiences nor to direct experiences as a member. Although they seem reluctant to talk about it, probably for fear of retaliation (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020; interview, Lule Onlus outreach unit, Abbiategrosso (MI), 27/04/2020), professionals generally believe that there is a very strong “cult” network in Italy and that it is a great support to its members. This could be one of the elements hindering people from coming forward and reporting to the police (interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020). On the one hand, the criminal organisation functions as a sort of welfare agency, in the absence - in the perception of Nigerian men - of an equally efficient system favouring access to employment and housing opportunities; on the other hand, once you have entered the network, it is difficult to get out.

### ***The birth and evolution of cults***

The term “cult” is associated with the term 'fraternities', now considered by many to be synonymous with Nigerian fraternities. The original term referred to the sense of brotherhood and the charitable and religious purposes inherent in them. As mentioned above, the Nigerian “cults” in their present form are an evolution of the university fraternities operating since the 1950s in the universities of Southern Nigeria, particularly in Delta State. Inspired by the American model, they were born with humanitarian and pacifist aims. However, for Nigeria and most of West Africa, the modern connotation of fraternities is as criminal organisations, only partly (still) connected with the university. Gradually, some of these fraternities have degenerated into criminal organisations, and have extended their influence well beyond the university sphere and the Nigerian geographical borders, infiltrating the socio-economic fabric of the country, but also its institutions<sup>64</sup>.

The media also refer to fraternities using terms such as “cults”, “killer cults” and “campus cults”. Rotimi (2005) defines them as “groups of people whose activities are carried out in exclusive places and at unusual times without being exposed to the 'uninitiated'” (80), thus underlining their “secret” character, as well as the rituals required of new members<sup>65</sup>. It should be added that in the last twenty years, the fraternities have expanded considerably, often using violent methods,

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<sup>64</sup> Also see the interview with Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania 11/12/2020. Organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement services on 27/01/2021.

<sup>65</sup> See also the definitions of Richardson (1993) and Zablocki *et al.* (2001)

leading Nigerian institutions to prohibit their setting up<sup>66</sup>. Nevertheless, the “cults” are still active and well rooted in Nigeria, and have a clear transnational vocation.

### ***The spread of “cults” in Italy and the growth of investigative activity***

Due partly to its strategic position in the Mediterranean basin, Italy is affected by the activities of Nigerian criminal organisations. There are now several investigations conducted by the judicial authorities<sup>67</sup>, also using the experience gained in the fight against Italian mafia organizations (interview, Chief Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office for minors of l’Aquila, Mancini, 20/10/2020). The many investigations highlight the gradual infiltration of Nigerian organisations into Italy. Some CARAs (Centres for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) have unfortunately proved to be an ideal context for the “cults”, due to their tendency to host groups that are homogeneous in terms of nationality<sup>68</sup>. Surveys also indicate the presence of several groups of an extremely violent character - as confirmed by many of our interviewees<sup>69</sup>. Among the best known are the Black Axe and the Eiye. But there are also the Maphites, the Vikings and the Buccaneers.

The knowledge that has been gathered by the Italian judicial authorities and police forces about “cults” has led to consider them mafia-type associations, insofar as they use the same methods, as we will explain.

### ***“Cult” and Mafia associations***

In the first half of the 1990s - when foreign criminal organisations were becoming stronger in Italy - Giovanni Falcone, an important and experienced Italian magistrate who fought against the mafia and was ultimately murdered by it, hypothesized that the mafia model was characterised by specific elements typical of the environment in which it operated. He believed that international organisations, with their own specific features, could also adopt a mafia approach, characterised by the accumulation of considerable financial means, the use of violence, etc. (Ciconte, 2017<sup>70</sup>).

In quantitative terms, the mafia-like nature of Nigerian criminal organisations has been revealed, for example, by the recent report of the Italian Central Directorate of Criminal Police (*Direzione Centrale della Polizia Criminale*) (2021)<sup>71</sup>. For the year 2019, it shows, a strong growth in reports of

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<sup>66</sup> In 2001, the Federal Government of Nigeria enacted the "Secret Cult and Secret Society Prohibition Bill" (that cannot be found online), which introduced the "constitutional offence" of creating or participating in any "secret cult" activities. However, there is no evidence of how effective or ineffective it has been in combating cults.

<sup>67</sup> For an overview of the main investigations carried out, see DIA (2018) and Central Directorate of Criminal Police (2021). On the first investigation conducted by the Anti-Trafficking Squad at the Turin Public Prosecutor Office on the Nigerian mafia see Nazzaro (2019).

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania 11/12/2020. Organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSIGHT webinar with law enforcement services on 27/01/2021.

<sup>69</sup> See for example the interview with Chief Prosecutor Mancini, Deputy Prosecutor Lina Trovato, *Questura* of Padova, Verona e Venice.

<sup>70</sup> Op. cit. Falcone G., “Che cosa è la mafia”. *MicroMega* 3/1992: 12-13.

<sup>71</sup> Webinar: “Cults nigeriani e il loro ruolo all’interno della tratta di esseri umani” (Nigerian cults and their role within human trafficking), Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania. Anti-trafficking Helpline. 28/01/2021. Recording available in Italian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuqMYF9O7SA> Last accessed on: 10/04/2021.

Nigerian citizens linked to mafia-type associations (no precise data are available on convictions). It should be noted, among other things, that during the lockdown, in March 2020, investigations by law enforcement authorities intercepted a number of “cult” meetings in southern Italy<sup>72</sup>, thus confirming that the “cults” continued their activities even during the pandemic - unlike the trafficking business whose activities were heavily affected, at least as far as street prostitution was concerned.

The webinar organised by the Anti-Trafficking Helpline in January 2021, with the participation of the Deputy Prosecutor of Catania, provided valuable information for better understanding, from a more qualitative point of view, the mafia-like character of Nigerian “cults”<sup>73</sup>.

The issue of the Nigerian mafia has been the subject of criminal proceedings, but also of appeals and rulings by the *Corte di Cassazione* (Court of Cassation – the highest Court in the country). The analogy between Nigerian “cults” and Italian mafia groups is referred to in sentence No. 24803, issued on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010, in relation to two criminal proceedings by the Turin Public Prosecutor Office, involving the Eiye and Black Axe groups (DIA, 2018: 534). Specifically, the *Corte di Cassazione* argued that these groups are not 'mere minority groups' and should be analysed paying close attention to their internal dynamics. This was fundamental as, prior to this ruling, there was a widespread tendency among Italian judicial authorities not to consider “cults” as mafia associations. This conviction stemmed from the fact that their members were not armed and did not control the territory, unlike Italian mafia organisations. In fact, “cult” organisations cannot have control over the Italian territory, where it (or parts of it) are controlled by local groups. Thus this control can be exercised only within the group or extend to a part of the territory, as in the case of part of the Ballarò neighbourhood (in Palermo) - in which the Italian organization is no longer interested -, or where a collaborative "agreement" has been drawn up with them. Another difference between the “cults” and the Italian mafia organisations is with becoming a member: whereas in the latter entering into the group is voluntary and done through gradual steps, in the former, entry occurs quickly and in a forced manner, through a violent rite of affiliation, followed by an inviolable oath (on pain of death).

As for their similarities, “cults” have both internal and external characteristics in common with mafia organisations. The former include: hierarchical structures and the subjugation of members; rites of affiliation; the collection of large sums of money that go into a common pot; their own internal organisational language; reprisals against members who try to leave; mutual aid and support of prisoners in jail. As explained by the *Corte di Cassazione*, external characteristics must also be considered: intimidation and silence of those who suffer the group's aggression; and members' belonging to a single and specific group.

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<sup>72</sup> Webinar “Exchange of experiences between law enforcement officers and anti-trafficking professionals in the Veneto Region”, Lina Trovato, 27/01/2021. For more information see: <https://www.insightproject.net/exchange-of-experiences-between-law-enforcement-officers-and-anti-trafficking-professionals-in-the-veneto-region/> Last accessed on: 10/04/2021.

<sup>73</sup> Webinar: “Cults nigeriani e il loro ruolo all'interno della tratta di esseri umani” (Nigerian cults and their role within human trafficking), Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania. Anti-trafficking Helpline. 28/01/2021. Recording available in Italian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuqMYF9O7SA> Last accessed on: 10/04/2021.

A further set of characteristics common to “cults” were also observed, although each has its own peculiarities<sup>74</sup>: strong ties with the country of origin, which translate into financial remittances and strict directives from Nigeria for the organisation and members operating in Nigeria and beyond; and precise rules to follow, including secrecy and absolute loyalty, guaranteeing a level of respect. The fact of having gradually associated “cults” with mafia organizations has had two important effects in terms of the fight against Nigerian organized crime: the competence of the investigations has passed to the Anti-mafia Investigation Directorate; and prosecutors can legitimately avail themselves of the instruments used in the fight against mafia-type crimes (such as, for example, telephone interceptions, collaboration with cooperating witnesses). This is how knowledge of the Nigerian mafia has been built. Prosecutors became familiar with the symbols and colours used by the various “cults”, which for a time provided useful clues for their investigations. However, as the investigations grew, so did “cult” members’ attempts to avoid over-exposure, so that they could act undisturbed (see also interview, Tampep outreach unit, Turin, 10/07/2020). A few years ago, Ciconte (2017) had already noted the capacity of Nigerian criminal associations to act effectively as intermediaries and to use regular work as cover, thus escaping the spotlight.

### ***The functioning and perception of “cults” in Nigeria***

“Cults” in Nigeria have a very significant role. Belonging to a “cult” means having a clear path to Nigerian universities and easier access to the drugs market (even outside of Nigerian borders, such as in Italy). Palmisano (2019) explains that the organisation Black Axe created a 'private welfare' system in order to secure the favour of governmental institutions: it financed hospitals, police stations, the digging of wells, and the distribution of food to people living in poverty. In the 1990s, it also became a tool for winning over the Nigerian electorate, by means of threats and violent acts. At the time of writing, it is the interlocutor of South American and Asiatic drug traffickers and, being able to count on large sums of money deriving from illicit activities, is the interlocutor for banks based in tax havens.

It is important to note that Nigeria does not classify mafia association as a crime, even though it cooperates with Italian prosecutors in combating it. This should not come as a surprise. For a long time, it was the same in Italy with respect to local mafias, although we have to go back to the

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<sup>74</sup> For example, Palmisano (2019) recounts the peculiarities of Black Axe, one of the most well-known cults in Italy. This brotherhood, also known as the Neo Black Movement, was founded in 1977 at the University of Benin City. It is characterised by a tripartition similar to that of the Italian mafia organisations (“ndrangheta” and “cosa nostra”), with sub-zones of control, at various territorial levels and with a “dome” at the head. All the zones must, however, relate to the organisation in Nigeria. The “temple” is the intermediate area that has to be located in a university in Nigeria. In total there are at least 40 zones and they include both states and cities/metropolises. The ‘Murder Temple’ is located in Benin City, which is as sacred as a religious place. The Axeman’s rivals are the Tingo (or Bird) of the Eiye and the Baggers of the (Sealords of) Bucaneers. The leadership is managed by male figures. The movement is crucial for the members: when you join it, it comes before family. In Nigeria there is no work and the movement provides work, as well as giving a person status - attractive to those who have nothing -, a charismatic leader who guides them, and a (secular) faith. The movement helps those who are arrested: it supports the family and when the arrested person gets out of prison, they are sent abroad to build the network of Nigerian churches.

1960s<sup>75</sup>. The Nigerian press does not regard the Nigerian mafia as a criminal organisation and regularly gives space to statements by its representatives - for example Felix Kupa from Black Axe (Palmisano, 2019). Many Nigerian citizens, like many Italian citizens, are not afraid of the mafia because they do not see it. As Palmisano points out, "Nigerians do not think they have a mafia in Nigeria" (41). On the contrary, many citizens are afraid of petty crime, although there are considerably fewer real dangers from the latter. But media narratives put the emphasis on the latter and are reluctant to recognize the criminal and mafia nature of some organizations, also due to the high level of corruption and their *omertà* – failure to collaborate with the police.

### ***The “cults” and the colonial experience***

Let's take a step back in time. To understand organised crime in Nigeria - and the high levels of corruption - it is necessary to look at the colonial experience and the so-called “Indirect Rule”, and to reflect on the importance of the “spirit world”, as explained by Ellis (2016)<sup>76</sup>.

While in the European tradition law is derived from a written authority, and individuals have to adhere to a fixed code, in older African tradition, a morally correct course of action is not deduced from a written source but is formed in the process of consulting the invisible world (17). (...) All over Nigeria when people had disputes they continued use tried and tested techniques rather than going to colonial courts. In the South where shrines and oracles were in theory made irrelevant or even illegal by colonial laws, banning the administration of oaths and ordeals, these institutions continued operating unofficially (19-20)<sup>1</sup>. Oracles continue functioning clandestinely to fulfil a judicial function unrecognised by the colonial government. It was because they were perceived as having the ability to communicate with the invisible world. (...) The oracles also performed other roles which the colonial system was not competent for, such as dealing with problems of premature death and infertility, communicating with ancestral spirits (196-198).

Colonial officials attempted to impose a formal separation between religion and politics that they though was crucial for the proper exercise of government, even as shrines continue performing their roles (207-209). Also, colonial rule in Southern Nigeria involved a high degree of deceit and manipulation that amounted to training in subterfuge for anyone who had experience of it. [Both aspects which characterised the colonial ruling] contributed to an early culture of corruption (21). Corruption is the product of: patron-client relations, but also the use of technocratic and academic paradigms that are ill-adapted to the reality and the actual history of governance in Nigeria (207-209).

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<sup>75</sup> As Ciconte (2017) explains, many people and institutions have long thought the mafia played a kind of role of mediation in society, even when it was clearly illegal and violent. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a prevalent idea that the mafia did not exist or was not a form of organised crime. "For some people the mafia does not exist and for others everything is mafia." (Ciconte, 2017), op cit. Falcone, Cose di Cosa Nostra, Rizzoli, Milan, 1992). We have to go back a long way in time. At the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, various trials of mafia clans took place, but little attention was paid to this by intellectuals and in public opinion and so it went unnoticed. During the first decades of the unification of Italy, the mafiosi were used to maintain public order: with the fall of the Bourbons, the institutions often resorted to camorrist groups in the face of a complex social situation.

<sup>76</sup> This section contains literal excerpts from Ellis' book (2016).

The confraternities are part of the same story as shrines. Once student associations became not only politicised but also militarised the step was quick to being used for instrumental purposes in personal quarrels. Some cultists have made connections with politicians to make a career and developed networks of influence that pervade the society (210-212).

Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, there was little perception in Nigeria that organised crime [trafficking and smuggling] were a problem at all [and the perception is still scarce]. Trafficking and smuggling reflect the long historical legacy of slavery. In spite of the abolition of slavery by the colonial administration by the 1930 many networks and practices were still intact. Additionally, ambivalent positions have been and are still held with respect to the state and to state corruption: some condemn it, some are willing to profit from it. And traditional shrines and initiation societies came to acquire a highly ambivalent position in regard to the State. This did not happen in a vacuum. When the bubble of Nigeria's oil economy burst in the early 1980s, large numbers of people, including many with college diplomas, went abroad, introducing Nigerian-style crime to the rest of the world. [It is legitimate to wonder] whether the current culture of state corruption is linked to pre-colonial concepts of honour and gift-giving or, more recent, external influences. [One element is evident]: while precolonial Nigerian societies used money, they did not capitalism (220-239).

### ***The “cults” and trafficking markets***

As explained by the Catania Deputy Prosecutor<sup>77</sup>, clear links have emerged between “cult” groups and those involved in human trafficking. They have emerged for example in “cult” meetings and parties, where often, thanks to collaborations with *madams*, girls and women exploited in prostitution are asked to offer sexual services as a sign of respect for the participants. “Cult” members also sometimes recruit girls for prostitution when members from different cities are visiting. There are also cases in which women and girls are prostituted in a *connection house* run by a “cult” member rather than a *madam*, or where a “cult” member asks a girl who has been sexually exploited to collaborate as a drugs mule - in the belief that the girls are controlled less often and therefore more likely to succeed in the task.

According to the recent report by the Italian Central Directorate of Criminal Police (2021), the most profitable markets for the exploitation of trafficked persons, both adults and minors, are those of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation (mostly in agriculture, construction, manufacturing and catering), begging and illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, theft and receiving stolen goods. In some cases, criminal groups involved in trafficking in human beings have been found to be simultaneously involved in other criminal activities (drug trafficking or dealing, property crime, as well as document forgery, extortion of African shop owners, computer fraud and fraudulent money transfers). With regard to drug trafficking in particular, the regions most affected are Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia Romagna (in the north) and Campania and Sicily (in the south).

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania 11/12/2020. Organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSIGHT webinar with law enforcement services on 27/01/2021.



Investigations confirm that the activities carried out in this sector on Italian territory do not currently conflict with those carried out by Italian mafia groups.

The experience of the Catania Public Prosecution Office<sup>78</sup> suggests that “*cults*” are not normally engaged in activities directly related to trafficking. They mainly deal in drugs, as it is more lucrative: they offer a secure, quick and consistent income and it is the cults who manage the market, decide who does what and control their own actions on the territory.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania 11/12/2020. Organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement services on 27/01/2021.

### ***The “cults and involvement in begging***

According to the DIA (Anti-mafia Investigation Directorate) report (2018), the Vikings and Buccaneers are engaged in begging, amongst other things. However, the interviews we conducted with law enforcement officers in Veneto did not bring to light any evidence in this regard. The interviewees (with one exception) confirmed that they were aware of the growing influence of “cults” in Italy, that they had observed “tell-tale crimes” (e.g. stabbings) that suggest conflicts between different groups, perhaps also for the control of the territory, but they have not yet collected any evidence of the management and control of begging (see for instance interview, Verona *Squadra Mobile*, 29/10/2020; webinar Anti-trafficking Helpline, with Lina Trovato, 28/01/2021). The Deputy Prosecutor of Catania pointed out that begging is characterised by forms of control - although not directly and necessarily associated with trafficking and serious exploitation (as made evident by some of the dynamics observed between those involved) - but it is not clear what mechanisms are activated when one or more members of a “cult” start begging in a place already occupied by other Nigerian people. It is possible that there is some kind of a chain connecting prostitution, drug dealing, begging and cults in some way, but it is not clear exactly how it could work (interview, Venice *Squadra Mobile*, 10/09/2020). There is only a sense of a strong organisational connection, facilitated by the strong cohesion of the Nigerian community. As the Questura of Padova said: “*On the street everyone is subject to subordination*”, (interview, 24/06/2020). And investigations highlight that the occupation of pitches (sometimes) requires the payment of a “joint” (Anti-Trafficking Helpline webinar, with Lina Trovato, 28/01/2021; interview, On the Road Onlus outreach unit, Termoli, 05/05/2020), and that many “cult” members practised begging (Anti-Trafficking Helpline webinar, with Lina Trovato, 28/01/2021).

### ***Conflicts between Italian and foreign criminal and mafia groups***

For many years, Italian mafia organisations have been collaborating with mafia organisations in other countries. Initially, these collaborations concerned the smuggling of foreign cigarettes; later, drug trafficking. Over time, previously unknown groups emerged, often closely connected with high levels of corruption in their countries of origin. The first years of the new millennium were characterised by the restructuring of criminal markets and the establishment of foreign mafia groups on Italian territory. With rare exceptions, Italian and foreign organisations have cooperated (Ciconte, 2017). In general, Nigerians use refined operational methodologies and avoid any kind of conflict with other criminal organisations, both Italian and from other countries (Central Directorate of Criminal Police, 2021).

Nigerian organisations are particularly well-established in the areas of drugs, prostitution and human trafficking, and actively collaborate with Italian mafia organisations in the area of drugs. Some of the more marginal and risky tasks, such as drug transportation, are entrusted to non-Nigerian affiliates, for example from Mali or Senegal. Like other foreign organizations, Nigerian organizations also seem to have made a qualitative leap forward with the construction of an

efficient network with their leaders in their country of origin, to which the organizational branches established in foreign countries such as Italy refer.

There are also territorial specificities in the types of collaboration made with Italian criminal organisations: in northern Italy, in line with reports in the press, drug dealing is solely managed by Nigerians, suggesting the absence, or minor influence, of Italian groups (see for example interview, Padova Questura, 24/06/2020). In Sicily, Nigerian groups rarely try to get involved in drug dealing, with some exceptions, for example in the area of the Ballarò market in Palermo. In the Foggia area (in the southern region of Puglia), Nigerians buy marijuana from mafia organisations based in Gargano (northern part of the region of Puglia) paying for it with the proceeds made with exploitation through prostitution. Having proved trustworthy, they have over time replaced the Bulgarian and Romanian groups, ultimately obtaining hegemony over the territory (Palmisano, 2019).

Nigerian organisations have also established collaborations with Albanian criminal organisations for the importation of cocaine, heroin and marijuana, and with the Russian mafia and the Marseilles *camorra*<sup>79</sup>, making them even stronger and more influential. In other words, Nigerian organised crime does not work in isolation. There are several active collaborations with different criminal groups in Italy and elsewhere, making it even more dangerous and difficult to fight.

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<sup>79</sup> According to that reported by an anonymous agent of the DIA in an interview. For more information see: Mbengue T. “*L'ascesa della mafia nigeriana in Italia e nel mondo*”. 05/04/2021. Link: <https://www.antimafiaduemila.com/home/mafie-news/261-cronaca/83078-l-ascesa-della-mafia-nigeriana-in-italia-e-nel-mondo.html> Last accessed on: 05/04/2021.

## SEVENTH PART

### Focus: begging in the city of Venice

After having reconstructed the wider picture of begging in Italy, as told to us by the outreach units interviewed, we now move on to explore the territory of Venice, which we have carefully studied through using participatory observation. We first present the (little) available data on the phenomenon, as collected by the *Stop for Beg* project in the period 2012-2013.

#### ***Begging in 2012-2013: data from the Stop For Beg project***

The only systematic data on begging in the Venetian territory that we know of come from the *Stop For Beg* project report. The project was carried out between 2012 and 2013 in the Triveneto territory (Veneto, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige) (Degani and Donadel, 2013). The data concerning the Venetian territory were collected in the period April-August 2013. In general, it showed the presence of two main groups, Romanian Roma people and Nigerians, who together constituted 80% of those engaged in begging.

As far as the Romanian Roma group is concerned, begging was carried out by people of both sexes, between 20 and 40 years of age, and was characterised by the involvement of family groups, within which the oldest member was responsible for organising and managing the begging. These groups were mainly from Transylvania in northern Romania and had a sedentary lifestyle. Most had low levels of education (or were illiterate), with little previous work experience. The decision to move to Italy to engage in begging was associated with a family migration project and therefore generally accepted by all members, and begging was the main source of income. Despite the fact that it was clearly organised, none of the territories analysed in the project demonstrated conditions of trafficking and severe exploitation for begging purposes, but rather an "exploitation of people's conditions of vulnerability" (minor age, pregnancy, disability, etc.) (Degani and Donadel, 2013: 53).

The Nigerian group was mostly composed of men who averaged 30 years old, from Lagos and Benin City or Delta State. Many of them gravitated around the reception system for asylum seekers and, if legally residing in the Italian territory, had a residence permit as asylum seekers. Their level of schooling was medium to high (no illiterate people were identified) and many of them had previously carried out other work in their country of origin, albeit low skilled work. The choice of begging was not planned when they set off from their country of origin, unlike the Romanian Roma group. The role of the family in the planning of their journey was marginal and, even in the case of people who relied on a network of traffickers to get to Italy, no links emerged between that network and their entry into the begging market. As for the Romanian Roma group, no indicators of exploitation emerged, but it was assumed that they were involved in a network managed by compatriots who had built up a fully-fledged begging market on the basis of the experience gained with regard to: the choice of places in which to operate, the amount of control necessary, forms of police repression, and knowledge of low-threshold services. (ibidem). In contrast to Romanian

Roma groups, who used begging as a form of subsistence, the Nigerian group mainly expressed a need to look for stable employment, and their constant frustration with having to beg.

The monitoring data showed that there were more people in Venice than in other cities in the Veneto region. The difference between the context of Mestre and Marghera and that of the island of Venice was also emphasised: if in the latter the phenomenon was strictly linked to the presence of tourists in the city, Mestre and Marghera followed the trends of the other big cities, in particular in terms of their being a smaller numbers of beggars.

The monitoring in the territory of Venice focused on specific forms of begging, namely begging carried out in explicit or semi-explicit forms, excluding possible forms of possible begging associated with organised markets, for example the itinerant selling of black-market or counterfeit goods or of flowers<sup>80</sup>. The main places where stationary begging was observed were supermarkets (10 people), arcades (15 people), while there were only 2 people engaged in itinerant begging. Only about 50 contacts were recorded, including 35 men and 12 women, 26 from sub-Saharan Africa, who were mainly Nigerians, and 17 from East-European countries (some of the data are missing). If the monitoring made it possible to contact a maximum of 49 people per day, from the combination of the mapping data and the data provided by the Local Police it was estimated that the number of people begging in Venice exceeded 50 per day.

City	Max. No. of daily contacts	Max. No. of people	Places	Gender	Nationality
Venice-Mestre	28	80	Supermarkets (10), itinerant (2), arcades (15), other (1)	35 men, 12 women	18 East-European, 26 African (Sub-Saharan), 2 African (North African)
Verona	20	90	Supermarkets (10), traffic lights (1), hospitals (2), itinerant (3), train/stations (3), musicians (1)	65 men, 19 women	27 East-European, 56 African (Sub-Saharan), 2 African (North African)
Padova	38	83	Places of worship (1), supermarkets (11), traffic lights (3), hospitals (1), itinerant (7), markets (4), arcades (11)	33 men, 8 women	16 East-European, 26 African (Sub-Saharan) (and other nationalities)

TABLE 5: MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PEOPLE CONTACTED WITHIN THE STOP FOR BEG PROJECT, IN THE PERIOD DECEMBER 2013-AUGUST 2014, IN THE CITIES OF VENICE-MESTRE, PADOVA AND VERONA (ELABORATION OF DATA FROM THE STOP FOR BEG REPORT).

<sup>80</sup> The choice was justified by the hypothesis that these markets could be related to forced illegal economies rather than begging (34).

### ***Begging in the experience of the Municipality of Venice and anti-trafficking professionals***

Before beginning our observation in the Venice area, we met some of the professionals in the Municipality of Venice who were engaged in low-threshold services or were in contact with marginal people, among them the head of the current *"Servizio Pronto Intervento Sociale, Inclusione e Mediazione"* (literally *First Assistance, Social Inclusion and Mediation Service*). Some of them participated in the *Stop For Beg* research, which we believe to be the most significant that the municipal services have carried out in the field of begging, although it has been involved in outreach work for a long time, especially in relation to drug addicts and/or homeless people. This action-research mainly led to the *emersione* of Romanian Roma citizens, and Bulgarian and Hungarian citizens, with whom very laborious projects were set up: they had serious health problems and all came from conditions of severe coercion. All of them eventually abandoned the project and returned to their family networks (interview, Coordinator of the Crisis and Evaluation unit, N.A.Ve project, Venice-Mestre, 28/05/2020; interview, professionals, Reception facility, N.A.Ve project, Venice-Mestre, 26/06/2020).

The service professionals confirmed that most of the beggars are currently of Nigerian origin. Their numbers have increased, particularly in recent years, but they do not appear to be of concern to the police because they do not harass people and the residents do not normally complain about them. The professionals assume that they are "commuters" who do not live in Venice, considering that they do not use the low-threshold services, and do not seem to have any particular vulnerabilities. They also hypothesised that they are currently hosted in asylum seeker reception facilities and expressed concern about the possible increase in the number of asylum seekers turning to begging, at the end of the reception process, as many people are not able to reach a situation of autonomy with respect to work. There was only one case in which a young man, who was hosted in a centre in Venice, asked for help from the emergency services of the Municipality of Venice to break free of the exploitation network, but it seems that he later re-joined the organisation.

The Venice anti-trafficking professionals, and also their colleagues in the rest of the Veneto region, who all belong to the N.A.Ve project, report that they have not taken on any Nigerian beggars, even if the outreach, crisis and evaluation units have often reported their presence in the Veneto region. They mentioned a Nigerian woman with a child who was begging in Treviso but who never asked for specific help (interview, Coordinator of the Crisis and Evaluation Unit, N.A.Ve project, Venice-Mestre, 28/05/2020). Begging has also been observed in Verona, especially in relation to Nigerian women – the numbers of men seem to be much lower (interview, linguistic-cultural mediator, N.A.Ve project, Verona, 30/07/2020).

It should be noted that the N.A.Ve anti-trafficking professionals, in line with what was reported by the outreach units interviewed, declare that they have never had cases of Nigerian citizens coming forward who were engaged in begging, but that usually sporadic engagement in this activity has emerged several times during the social protection processes of people who entered the project after reaching out to the anti-trafficking professionals to ask for help in relation to labour exploitation. One example is that of a man who, as part of a multi-agency intervention with the

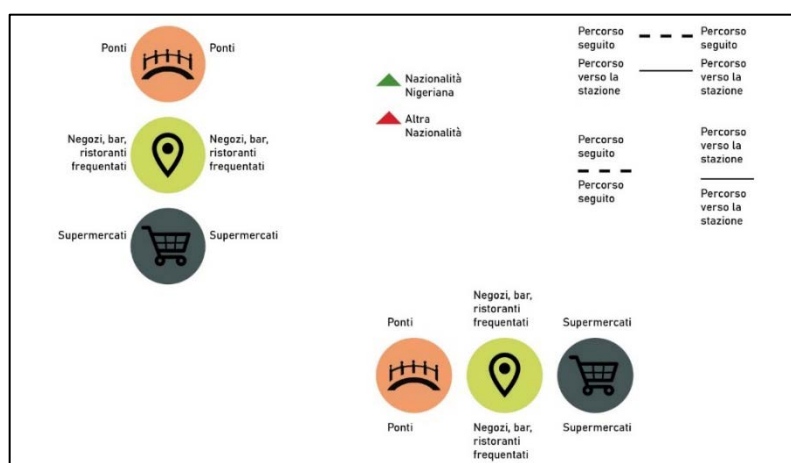
labour inspectorate, reported, together with four of his compatriots, the exploitation he had suffered in a manufacturing company. For several years he had been living in the Rovigo area (southern Veneto), with a difficult path towards regularisation and reiterated asylum applications. The begging, which he carried out by commuting to Ferrara, was necessary to support his grandchildren who were still in Nigeria, for whom he felt very responsible. Another example is a woman who, during preparation for her hearing in the Territorial Commission, reported that she paid her rent with the proceeds from begging, which was therefore a form of subsistence. She also explained that she moves to cities other than where she lives, both in order to find the most profitable places for begging and so as to avoid feeling ashamed in front of people she knows.

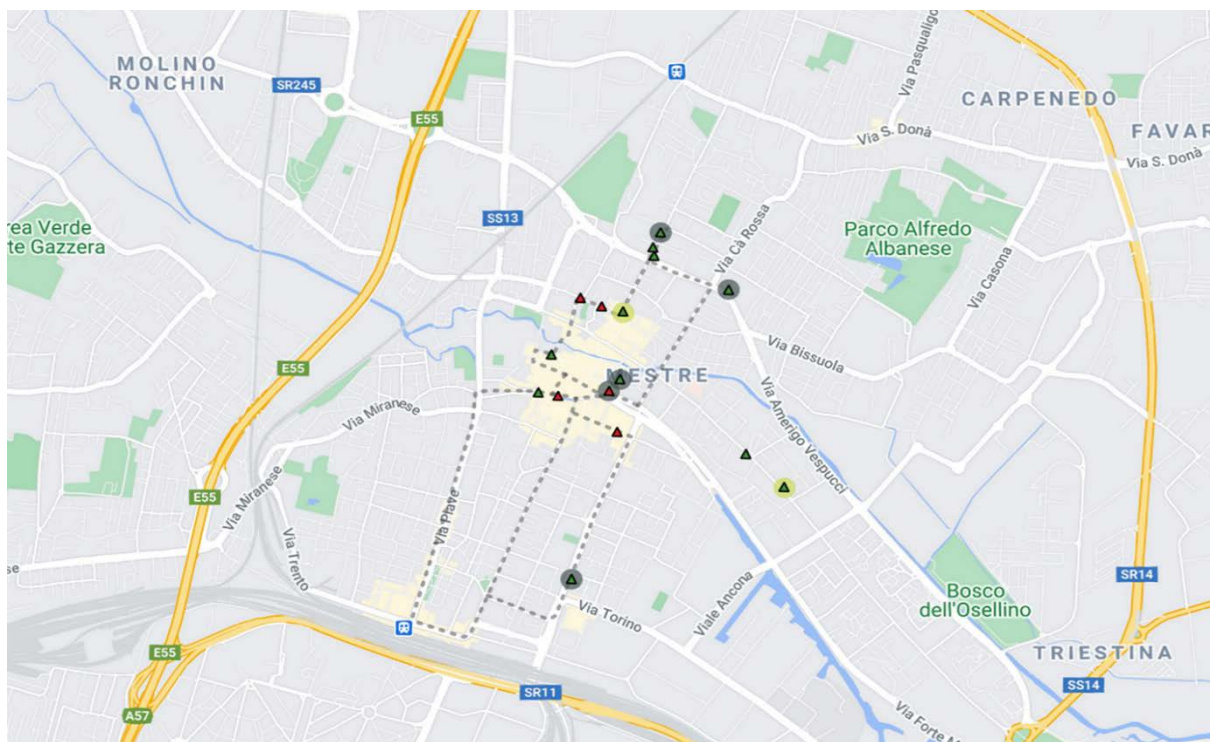
In general, therefore, most of the professionals and mediators in the N.A.Ve project, while continuing to ask themselves questions about begging, do not have much direct knowledge of it, as few of them have had experience with people involved in it. Some mediators have the impression that, as far as the territory of Padova is concerned, there is free access to the streets – people can freely decide where to do begging –, but they do not claim to have strong evidence to confirm or deny this (interview, cultural-linguistic mediator, N.A.Ve project, Padova, 10/06/2020). The Coordinator of the Anti-trafficking Helpline, based in Venice, associates begging with the recruitment, in Italy, of vulnerable people who are then exploited by criminal organisations, and not with the phenomena of trafficking (interview, coordinator of the Anti-trafficking Helpline, Venice-Mestre, 03/06/2020), which is in line with the interpretation made in the *Stop For Beg* project report.

### ***Ethnographic observation in the period December 2019 - September 2020***

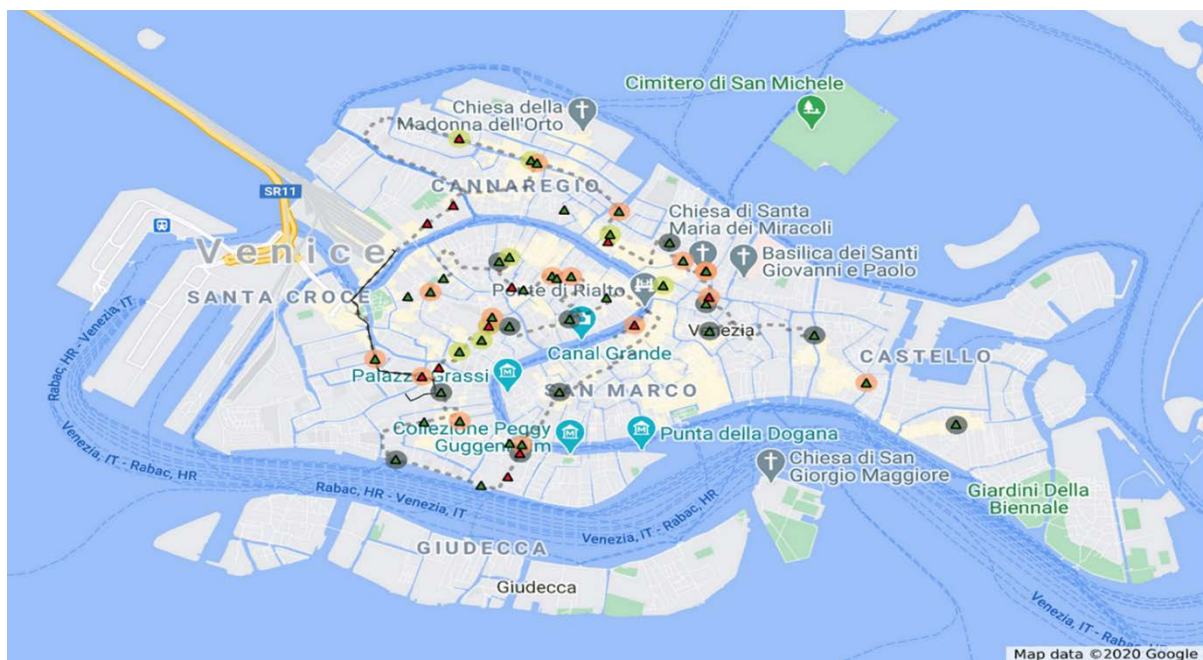
As explained in the methodological section, our research team's ethnographic observation of begging began in December 2019 with four preliminary observations. It was interrupted from February to July 2020 due to the lockdown imposed for the containment of the Covid-19 pandemic, and then resumed in July, August and September 2020. The observation was mainly concentrated in the historical centre of Venice, which is a very distinctive area, as it is generally characterised by a continuous heavy flow of tourists. In August and September it was also extended to the centre of Mestre (see maps 2 and 3).

#### **Legenda**





MAP 2: ROUTE TAKEN DURING THE OBSERVATION AND PEOPLE IDENTIFIED IN THE MESTRE AREA (SCALE 1:20,000), OBSERVATION PERIOD JULY-SEPTEMBER 2020



MAP 3: ROUTE TAKEN DURING THE OBSERVATION AND PEOPLE IDENTIFIED IN THE VENICE CITY AREA, INCLUDING PLACES OF INTEREST (SCALE 1:20,000), JULY-SEPTEMBER 2020



Observations carried out in the historic centre of Venice revealed the consistent presence of Nigerian beggars. Before the start of the pandemic, from December 2019 to mid-February 2020, about 15 to 20 people in total were observed at 20 different locations. These were predominantly young Nigerian men, but also two young Nigerian girls. A smaller number of East-European men and women, probably of Roma ethnicity, were also observed. In the pre-lockdown period, the Nigerians were engaged in non-contractual and permanent begging in front of supermarkets, bars and bridges. Their begging methods did not include postures aimed at arousing the pity of passers-by. Often the beggars held a hat in their hands to collect money. We observed that the women also frequently held a plastic cup and often positioned themselves in a street near but not in front of supermarkets.

The level and type of interaction with passers-by and the local population varied greatly: some just said hello, others stopped to exchange a few words, usually in good English, and others said nothing, just held out their hats. In general, it never appeared to involve harassment.

The same men were often seen in the same positions: in a given position, the same people were to be found, alternating for two or three days a week, usually on weekdays and mostly in the morning, until about 12 noon. It seemed to us, therefore, that there might be some kind of rotation between people, but the observation did not last long enough to understand whether it was a horizontal organisation, managed between peers, or hierarchical, managed by others. In several cases we noticed recurrent telephone calls. We also noticed men approaching gradually and observing beggars in an inquisitive manner. However, we have no evidence of the “controlling” nature of these episodes.

Generally, begging always happened in the same places. Only in a couple of cases did we notice begging in places that we had not seen before. Although it tended to be non-contractual, interactions and forms of exchange with the resident population or tourists were also observed. Near a bridge, we saw Nigerian men helping people to carry trolleys or goods in exchange for a small fee (5 euros). It is clear that some of the beggars have been in the city for a long time because they interact in a friendly and informal way with bartenders and shopkeepers. In the more touristy area, near the Rialto bridge, Nigerian men were also seen helping tourists with their suitcases, in a kind of itinerant begging, as they moved around looking to make contact. This was not seen in other tourist hotspots in the historic centre, such as Strada Nuova and Piazza S. Marco. One hypothesis is that this is due to an increased and constant police presence in these areas.

As far as we have been able to investigate, the Nigerian men who practice begging in the historic centre of Venice come from other cities, such as Padova and Vicenza, and get to Venice by train. In September 2020, we noticed that at around 12 noon Nigerian men gathered together, in Campo S. Margherita, after leaving their posts. From there they moved in a group towards the station: we had the impression that they had “finished” their shifts and were returning together.

As for Roma people and people from East-European countries, they are of a very different age, around 40/50 years old, they beg while sitting down, unlike Nigerians, and use small containers or paper or plastic cups to collect the money. They are predominantly male: during the fieldwork, only one Roma woman was found begging quite regularly and at the same location. The members

of these groups tend to sit in front of churches, bars and near bridges, and always in places that are separate from and never overlap with the Nigerians. During our monitoring we also encountered a few street artists (painters and musicians, both Italian and of other nationalities), who were there everyday for a week at a time, or anyway for a limited period.

In the period following the lockdown, from August onwards, an increase was observed in people from the Indian subcontinent (probably from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh), Italian men (2), aged between 50 and 60, sitting with plastic containers to collect money and sometimes holding a sign with a request for help. It will be important to observe whether, as a result of the economic difficulties caused by the pandemic, there is an increase in begging among different groups of the population, including Italians.

With the temporary easing of restrictions on mobility during the summer period, people of Nigerian origin also returned to the same locations, although in slightly lower numbers (about ten) than those observed between December and February 2020. The begging locations remain the same and so did the rotation system, on different days and mainly in the morning until about 12 noon. We also went to the centre of Venice in the afternoon (from 2pm until 6pm) but we found at most two Nigerian men - in addition to the Roma woman also encountered in the pre-lockdown period. In the same time period we saw a couple of Nigerian men cleaning in front of a bar in the Zattere area. The two men had a sign saying, "We are trying to make ourselves useful in the city", in line with the alternative form of begging observed in other cities in Italy.

In September we extended our observation to the Mestre area, exclusively in the morning: we saw a maximum of five people, mainly Nigerian men, but also some Italian and East-European men and the Roma woman. Only in one case did we see begging at traffic lights, while the other beggars were stationed in front of a restaurant, a supermarket and a cinema. Two young men were seen sweeping the street, holding a sign similar to that displayed by the men in Zattere.

### *Interviews with officers of the Local Police and the Squadra Mobile*

As anticipated, part of this research and of the broader research carried out for the INSigHT project, aimed at analysing the functioning of Veneto's anti-trafficking system, led to a series of interviews with the region's law enforcement agencies on the general topic of trafficking, prostitution and begging. Specifically, we interviewed: the Local Police of Venice (10.09.2020) and Padova (24.06.2020) and the *Squadre Mobili* of Venice (10.09.2020), Padova (24.06.2020) and Verona (29.10.2020). Below we report their experience in relation to the specific phenomenon of begging in their respective territories.

According to the Venice Local Police, begging in the city is predominantly carried out by a group of Roma people. In 2011, there were up to 140 people, both men and women. In September 2020, there were about 30, a reasonable figure, according to the police, "*given it is not possible to completely eliminate begging from the streets*".

As confirmed by the *Questura*, Nigerians, who arrived after Roma people, were also observed in the area. For a while, the two groups coexisted, although in different spaces: the former in front of supermarkets, the latter on bridges. Apparently, the Nigerians took a maximum of 15 euros per day, which is very low.

In the Padova area, the Local Police and the Police Headquarters report the presence of Romanian beggars on the road that links the railway station and the historical centre; Roma people in front of churches; and people of Nigerian or other African nationalities (from Togo, Senegal, etc.) in front of supermarkets, with a solid presence throughout the area. No conflicts were registered between the groups with respect to the locations, probably also because they occupy different positions. According to the Police, the number of Nigerian men has recently decreased due to the limitations linked to the pandemic. Many arrived in Padova by bus in the morning, by bus, often from Cona, a town about 30 km south of Padova where there was a large reception centre for asylum seekers - which made headlines for its degrading conditions. Begging by Nigerians has never involved harassment and is apparently not run by a criminal organisation. As suggested by the local *Questura*, it mostly involves men, with a few rare exceptions.

In recent years, the presence of illegal sellers of bags and clothing, mainly of Senegalese nationality, has also been seen, but they disappeared following a heavy crackdown by the police. Finally, the *Questura* reported the presence of mainly Nigerian illegal car park attendants near a city hospital. Little information has been gathered from the Veronese context, where both the *Questura* and the Local Police have only observed the presence of beggars, mainly of Nigerian nationality, stationed in front of supermarkets. As in other Italian territories, following a major police operation carried out in around 2016, the number of Romanians engaged in begging who exploit children with impairments decreased sharply (fieldnote, 25/09/2019).

### Law enforcement's approach to begging and local police regulations

The Venice local police claim to have achieved excellent results in reducing begging, thanks to the repeated clearing of areas where makeshift encampments of Roma citizens have been set up.

Current police regulation<sup>81</sup> does not include penalties for begging, regardless of whether it involves harassment or not. Following the opinion of the Constitutional Court<sup>82</sup>, which ruled on the unconstitutionality of a ban on begging tout court on the entire urban territory, it was decided not to include this activity in the regulation and to penalise it, where it creates problems, with a measure associated with obstructing traffic (art. 71).

The decision of the Constitutional Court was the result of an appeal in 2009 to the Veneto Regional Administrative Court (TAR) by *Associazione Stop Razzismo*, against the Municipality of Selvazzano Dentro (province of Padova), which had imposed an anti-begging public safety orders on the whole territory<sup>83</sup>. The judgement was crucial not only with respect to the appeal to the Regional Administrative Court (TAR) against the above-mentioned municipality, but also with respect to subsequent appeals against other public safety orders issued by the Municipality of Padova that were heavily supported by the former mayor Massimo Bitonci (including anti-Ebola, anti-prostitution and anti-kebab public safety orders - the appeal was accepted for the first two, rejected for the third). He gained a reputation as being a "sheriff mayor" in the news, due to these various repressive public safety orders. As far as the Municipality of Padova is concerned, the current police regulation<sup>84</sup> prohibits begging, but only if the person adopts forms of harassment, displays signs, shows physical disabilities or begs in conjunction with minors or animals. This is punished with a fine of 100 euros, as well as an accessory administrative sanction of the confiscation of the money (with reference to art. 20 of Law 689/81 - concerning administrative sanctions). However, as explained by the Local Police, in recent years repressive interventions have been carried out on both begging that involves harassment and that which does not. In some cases – following an approach similar to that used in Venice – the urban DASPO has been used, with reference to art. 5 *bis* of the local regulation regulating conduct that prevents or limits accessibility to and use of urban areas.

In Verona the urban DASPO is not used against beggars but only against shopkeepers and illegal car park attendants, as provided for by municipal regulations<sup>85</sup> (art. 67 *bis*). On the other hand, art. 28 *bis* explicitly prohibits begging throughout the municipal territory, and in particular near monuments and tourist-cultural sites and along the main roads leading to the city centre, providing for the application of an accessory administrative sanction of the seizure of the money deriving

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<sup>81</sup> Venice Local Police. Regulation on urban policing and safety. Last updated on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2019. Link: <https://www.comune.venezia.it/it/content/clone-regolamento-polizia-urbana> Last accessed on: 09/04/2021.

<sup>82</sup> Sentence no. 115/2011. Link: <https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=2011&numero=115> Last accessed on: 09/04/2021.

<sup>83</sup> For more information on the appeal to TAR see: <https://www.meltingpot.org/Ordinanza-anti-accattonaggio-Accolto-il-ricorso-dell.html#.YHBfEegzaiM> Last accessed on: 09/04/2021.

<sup>84</sup> Padova Local Police. Regulation on urban policing and for civil co-existence in the city. Last updated on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018. Link: [https://www.padovanet.it/sites/default/files/attachment/2018\\_09\\_24\\_REGOLAMENTO\\_DI\\_POLIZIA\\_URBANA\\_1.pdf](https://www.padovanet.it/sites/default/files/attachment/2018_09_24_REGOLAMENTO_DI_POLIZIA_URBANA_1.pdf) Last accessed on: 09/04/2021.

<sup>85</sup> Verona Local Police. Regulation on urban policing. 20<sup>th</sup> March 1990. Last updated on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Link: [https://www.comune.verona.it/media/Redazione%20web/ente\\_comune/regolamenti/regolamento\\_polizia\\_urbana.pdf](https://www.comune.verona.it/media/Redazione%20web/ente_comune/regolamenti/regolamento_polizia_urbana.pdf) Last accessed on: 09/04/2021.

from the violation. This prohibition, which extends across the entire city territory, appears to be in contradiction with the abovementioned judgement of the Constitutional Court.

#### Reports to law enforcement, investigations and possible “cult” connections

With regard to the characteristics of begging, all the interviewees confirmed that begging by Nigerians does not involve harassment and therefore does not bother local people or stir up public opinion. Sometimes, beggars are even appreciated because they help elderly people with their shopping bags or trolleys, etc. As a result, very few reports are made to either the *Squadra Mobile* or the Local Police.

We recorded opinions that tended to converge on its organised nature, with some nuances. The precise observation carried out by the Venice Local Police, not only in the city centre but also on the trains, following people's routes at the end of their begging shift, did not reveal anybody controlling the activity and collecting the proceeds. However, there are still doubts as to whether it is just self-organised. The three *Questure*, in Venice, Padova and Verona, are inclined to think that begging is managed by a hierarchical organisation that controls shifts and the occupation of pitches. At the same time, they do not rule out there also being forms of 'free' begging. The Local Police of Padova emphasised that doubts remain about the controlled nature of begging but that they do not have the resources to carry out adequate investigations, which are instead focused on drug dealing, which is more evident in the area. The Padova *Questura* has a different opinion, according to which begging is not organised and controlled as in other cities, such as Milan and Rome. There is a form of self-organisation, but there doesn't seem to be any top-down organisation. It is also interesting to report that the same *Questura* witnessed several episodes of arguments between Nigerians, which could reasonably be considered to be conflicts between different cults, although the interviewed officer suggested that it is rather a widespread way of operating among Nigerians, who often have exaggerated reactions.

None of the investigations carried out so far in the Veneto Region have found any evidence of a clear connection between begging and “cults”. What is evident, however, is the complexity of the phenomenon of trafficking and serious exploitation, which has various connections to drug dealing and prostitution. At present, the focus of the investigation is on drug-dealing and trafficking. Both Verona and Padova are important centres in this market, and in prostitution (especially in Verona). The Local Police of Venice excludes any connection between Nigerians who deal drugs and Nigerians who practice begging, as evidenced by careful observation in recent years. The Nigerians who deal drugs have all been identified. None of them engage in begging, at least not in Venice.

#### *Conversations and interviews with beggars*

During our research in the Venetian territory, we also had the opportunity to have a few informal chats with four men who beg (19<sup>th</sup> December 2019; 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019; 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020; 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020). We approached them with the offer of a coffee and a request to know what needs they had that justified begging, but the conversations did not last long, showing a clear reluctance to

tell their stories, as we expected. All four men were from Edo State and were currently residing in Vicenza, either in a reception facility or in a flat with other Nigerians. They were all asylum seekers, either in the application or appeal phase. One man explained that he was moving to Venice because he was more likely to find work there, by handing out his CV, since it was a tourist city. A second man explained that he moved in groups with other men who alternated “in shifts” to beg, which he did in the absence of other employment, primarily to support himself, but also his family who are still in Nigeria. A third man explained that he alternated between Padova and Venice in order to get more money, giving us the idea that he knew the different 'local markets'.

Through the professionals at the N.A.Ve project, we had the opportunity of meeting a man (who the project got to know during an information workshop on labour exploitation), who was originally from Agbor, a city in Delta State, who arrived in Italy in 2016 and is currently hosted in a reception centre in the province of Padova. During our interview, he told us that he was part of a group of university students in Nigeria who were trying to raise awareness on the issue of trafficking, also building links with the main anti-trafficking agency in the country, NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons). This collaboration was later interrupted because NAPTIP revealed the names of the activists, exposing them to serious risk. He did not beg, but had the opportunity to talk about it to other Nigerians during his stay in Italy. He noted that most were from Edo State and only a fraction were victims of forced begging. From his point of view, even though they had a debt from their journey to Italy, many of them were not forced to beg and the “cults” were only minimally involved - they are mainly engaged in drug dealing which is much more profitable. He claimed that most people chose begging because it guaranteed a fairly high immediate income, which he suggested could be as high as 150 euros per day (informal conversation, 7/03/2020).

A fourth Nigerian man, whom we met in the territory of Trento, and whom one of the authors already knew from their previous activism, said that he had always chosen freely to do it, due to a lack of work, and that he had never had to pay for the pitch and had abandoned it as soon as he had found a stable job. He knew many Nigerians who begged, also in Venice, and who generally commuted there to avoid the embarrassment of meeting people they know. When discussing his experiences in Italy, he explained that it was crucial for him to keep away from other Nigerians and the places they frequent, to avoid being approached by groups that may help you to find a house and a job but then won't leave you alone. We have good reason to believe that he was referring to the “cults”, even though he did not explicitly mention them and repeatedly reiterated that begging was not controlled by them. We should point out that this person has a higher than average level of education and comes from the Biafra area, which is associated with separatist movements but not with Nigerian “cults” or human traffickers (informal conversation, 21/02/2020). A number of interpretative hypotheses emerge from our observation of the phenomenon of begging by Nigerians in the Venetian territory: it is a complementary activity, perhaps providing a 'bridge' to other activities. It is clearly organised, at precise places and times, on the basis of daily (half-day) shifts. Many travel by train from neighbouring cities to Venice, as it is a tourist city and therefore more profitable, but also to avoid people they know.

## EIGHTH PART

### Concluding remarks

Begging is a global phenomenon, taking on different characteristics and forms in different social, historical and cultural contexts, but is still little studied. Various definitions describe it as contractual or non-contractual, often associated with a form of subsistence, carried out by people in conditions of social marginality and/or involved in the informal economy. Begging is also a form of possible exploitation, more or less directly linked to the trafficking and smuggling of human beings. Italian and European legislation against trafficking refers to it, but not extensively, perhaps because it is at present not the main form of exploitation or perhaps because it is not yet visible as such.

This e-book is the result of exploratory research, which had to contend with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed in Italy between March and May 2020. This forced us to interrupt the observation initially planned in the Venice area, which was the focus of our analysis, but at the same time provided us with the opportunity to use other research strategies. We thus chose to interview professionals of Italian outreach units that dealt with begging. It was more difficult to come into contact with Nigerian men encountered during the observation activity, once we took it up again in summer 2020. We had some brief informal exchanges, but, as we expected, in order to build up trust and engage in more in depth dialogue a much longer period of contact would be needed.

Confirming what has been found in the (small number of) previous studies on the phenomenon, begging by Nigerians emerged as multifaceted and multidimensional, not lending itself to interpretation through rigid interpretative categories. Nigerian begging mainly involves men, and, to a lesser extent, women. While in the Venetian territory there are around 15-20 beggars, in other Italian territories these numbers are much higher and have been increasing in recent years. However, during the lockdown, the professionals observed the disappearance of these people from their respective territories and their progressive reappearance beginning in the summer months.

Why do Nigerian men beg? With the exception of a few places where there are a lot of tourists, such as historical town centres, the centres of large cities and places where fairs and international events take place, begging is not very profitable. It is possible to collect around 50 euros a day, in some cases even 100 euros in the holiday period. Considering that it often involves only a couple of weekly shifts, it does not create a high income. Some evidence suggests that begging may represent an alternative for those who are unwilling to deal drugs but still have to pay a debt for their journey to Italy, thus connecting it with the dynamic of smuggling.

Begging by Nigerians has not created any particular social alarm. It does not seem to worry local residents as it is not seen as harassment. Unlike other groups, Nigerians do not adopt poses that call for the pity of passers by, such as kneeling and stooping on the ground, or exhibiting disabilities. Few reports are made to the local police, who thus have rarely intervened. If, on the one hand,

begging (that doesn't involve harassment) is generally not repressed by police forces, on the other hand, we have the sense that neither the practice nor the needs of the people involved in it are understood: for example, those with no economic resources who, after having left the reception system, live in a state of institutional abandonment, making evident the precarious outcomes of the reception system.

At a municipal level, several cities have adopted urban regulations prohibiting begging that involves harassment. In some of them, such as Padova and Venice, the Local Police have also used the urban DASPO to repressively intervene against begging that does not involve harassment. In these cases, the repression has led to people moving to other locations or suspending their activity, usually temporarily. However, we encourage outreach units and researchers to closely monitor the effects, including in terms of maintaining contact with beneficiaries.

There were no reports of minors begging alone. There were only isolated cases of women begging with small children, but in each case the child was never active in the act of begging.

Begging is a phenomenon that mainly affects large cities and some specific places: supermarkets and car parks and sometimes places of transit (such as bridges in Venice), but also shopping centres. We thus believe that it would be useful to reflect on the growth of begging and forms of urban development (shopping centres and supermarkets *versus* small neighbourhood shops).

Our work shows that cases of trafficking are rare. Only two have emerged: one from a file in the Catania Public Prosecution Office and the other from what we were told by the Bologna outreach unit. We can thus only formulate hypotheses, which deserve in-depth examination, on what still seems to be an under-the-radar phenomenon, despite its steady growth since 2018. We believe it is crucial for outreach units to continue to observe the phenomenon, which seems to be connected to the broader issue of exploitation and trafficking – even if it is not sufficiently clear to what extent and in what way. Ad hoc outreach strategies are needed, with a strong focus on legal support and regularisation, which appear to be useful for effectively engaging with beggars.

Many are in a legally precarious situation, if not without a residence permit, so support in this regard is certainly valuable. They are also often much more mobile than Romanian beggars, which can make it even more difficult to contact and monitor their conditions. Thus, we believe that cultural-linguistic mediators should be constantly present in outreach strategies, not only because they can further facilitate engagement with beneficiaries, but also the reading of their living conditions and of the phenomenon of begging in its complexity. This means looking at the conditions of exploitation, to improve the ability of all relevant actors to identify victims and potential victims of exploitation and to ensure their adequate protection. It also means looking at the pre-conditions of vulnerability and poverty, with a view to preventing forms of forced begging, as well as at the evolving dynamics of the phenomenon in its many facets, in order to better understand the connections with trafficking and Nigerian organised crime and to take increasingly decisive action against them.

When talking about fighting crime and also identification, we are addressing the police. As repeatedly emphasised, Nigerian begging generally does not involve harassment and therefore remains under the radar, with very little attention from law enforcement agencies, which are much



more focused on drug dealing. However, various “tell-tale crimes”, starting with fights, can provide valuable insight into the phenomenon, despite there being few complaints or reports to the police by residents. The fights are likely to involve conflicts between different “cults”, which points in the direction of organised crime and the Nigerian mafia, a theme we have addressed in this e-book and which has clearly emerged in the broader analysis of trafficking and serious exploitation. There are many factors that suggest strong links, especially at an organisational level. The fights could certainly be attempts by a “cult” to impose its supremacy over the territory, while there seems to be collaborations with criminal organizations in Italy and other countries.

We also address all those who are in some way involved in multi-agency collaborations who can contribute to observing and better understanding the ways in which Nigerian organised crime works, which continues to expand its areas of exploitation, emphasizing the urgency of updating the indicators of trafficking for begging purposes. It is thus essential to promote opportunities for discussion and training between anti-trafficking services, low-threshold services dealing with serious social marginalisation, asylum system professionals, and law enforcement agencies, in order to share and develop intervention strategies that can then be adapted to the particularities of each individual territory. It is crucial to continue to promote the consolidation of the referral system to ensure the protection of victims and potential victims of trafficking and serious exploitation, especially in view of the fact that they rarely perceive themselves as such, and even less so when exploited in the context of labour or begging.

It would be misleading to study trafficking and exploitation in isolation from prostitution, labour exploitation and begging. As confirmed by many of our interviewees, we believe that all of these phenomena should be read as much as possible in their complexity, trying to shed light on their reciprocal connections.

This work clearly shows how studying begging means opening a window on trafficking, but also on exploitation more generally and on cults. We have found evidence that suggests the payment of a “joint” fee for occupying begging pitches, and there is a lot of evidence to suggest that begging is a controlled activity. However, it is clear that different forms coexist, including free or partially free begging. In some cases, begging is associated with the subsistence of the individual and their family, for example, in the case of men who have escaped from shelters without adequately paid work. As we have explained, begging involves men, but also women, and we believe it is important to encourage analysis of the intertwined roles of different women, such as madams, and the boyfriends of women exploited in prostitution, who can often have links to cults, thus creating connections between the two areas.

“Cults” seem to be more connected with drug dealing, but we cannot exclude links, however indirect, with begging as an activity that is complementary to illegal and other activities. Therefore, begging should not be understood only as an individual response to conditions of poverty or social marginality but also as a possible market for illegal and exploitative economies and, according to the interpretations of some professionals, as a form of territorial control by the organisations themselves. The distinction between begging and work is definitely artificial, since the facets and implications of begging are much more complex. It is thus necessary to cultivate dialogues with

those who carry out this activity, to better understand how they perceive it and how they perceive themselves, and to highlight continuities with begging in their country of origin and the existence or not of forms of stigma that might drive people away from their community.

## Appendix

**Table of interviews**

Outreach unit (association name, city, role of interviewee)	Date, time, modality/place of interview
<i>Cestrim</i> outreach unit, Potenza - Outreach and <i>emersione</i> area representative	30.03.2020, 14.30-16.00, telephone interview
<i>Fondazione Somaschi</i> outreach unit, Milan - Outreach area representative	02.04.2020, 14:00-17:00, online interview
<i>San Benedetto al Porto</i> outreach unit, Alessandria - Outreach area representative	09.04.2020, 11:30-13:00, online interview
<i>On the Road</i> outreach unit, Termoli - Outreach unit professional	05.05.2020, 9:00-11:00, online interview
<i>On the Road</i> outreach unit, Pescara - Outreach unit professional	08.05.2020, 12:00-2:00, online interview
<i>San Benedetto al Porto</i> outreach unit, Genoa - Outreach unit professional	17.04.2020, 17:00-19:00, online interview
<i>Arci-Solidarietà Borgorete</i> , Perugia and <i>Associazione San Martino</i> outreach unit, Terni - Professionals (3)	11.05.2020, 17:00-19:00, online interview
<i>Free Woman Onlus</i> outreach unit, Ancona - Outreach area coordinator	10.04.2020, 10:30-13.00, online interview
<i>Cooperativa Lotta Contro l'Emarginazione</i> outreach unit, Varese - Outreach area coordinator	06.05.2020, 15:30-17:30, online interview
<i>Noemi Società Cooperativa Sociale</i> outreach unit, Crotone - Outreach area coordinator	14.05.2020, 15-16:00, online interview
<i>CIAC Onlus</i> outreach unit, Parma - Outreach unit professional and socio-legal professional (2)	29.04.2020, 14:30-16:30, online interview
<i>Lule Onlus</i> outreach unit, Abbiategrosso, Milano - Outreach area coordinator	27.04.2020, 14:00-17.15, online interview
<i>Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII</i> outreach unit, Bologna - Outreach unit professionals (2)	14.07.2020, 11:45-13, online interview
<i>Cooperativa Tampep</i> outreach unit, Turin - Outreach unit coordinator and cultural-linguistic mediator (2)	10.07.2020, 9:30-11, online interview
Prosecutors (name and surname, role, city)	Date, time, modality/place of interview
David Mancini, Chief Public Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office for minors of L'Aquila	20.10.2020, 11.00-12.30, online interview
Lina Trovato, Deputy Prosecutor of the Public Prosecutor Office of Catania	11.12.2020, interview organised with Equality ATI, in preparation

	for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement agencies on 27.01.2021
Lucia D'Alessandro, Deputy Prosecutor of the Anti-mafia District Directorate in Venice	21.12.2020, interview organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement agencies on 27.01.2021
Law enforcement (role, city)	Date, time, modality/place of interview
Vice-Chief of Police and Head of Verona <i>Squadra Mobile</i>	29.10.2020, 10.00-11.00, online interview
Chief Inspector, Padova <i>Squadra Mobile</i>	24.06.2020, 14.30-16.30, Padova
Officials (2), Padova Local Police	24.06.2020, 11.30-13.30, Padova
Deputy Commissioner, Venice <i>Squadra Mobile</i>	10.09.2020, 14-16.00, Venice
Head of Venice Local Police	10.09.2020, 10.00-12.00, Venice
Professionals and mediators in the N.A.Ve Anti-trafficking Project	Date, time, modality/place of interview
Coordinator of the Crisis and Evaluation unit, N.A.Ve Project, Venice-Mestre	28.05.2020, 15.-17, online
Professionals, Reception facility, N.A.Ve project, Venice-Mestre (3)	26.06.2020, 10.30-13.30, Venice-Mestre
Anti-trafficking Helpline Coordinator, Venice-Mestre	3.06.2020, 10.30-13.00, online
cultural-linguistic mediator, N.A.Ve project, Padova	10.06.2020, 10.00-13.00, online
cultural-linguistic mediator, N.A.Ve project, Verona	30.07.2020, 14.00-16.30, Verona
Other interviews	Date, time, modality/place of interview
Coordinator and professionals of the "Servizio Pronto Intervento Sociale, Inclusione e Mediazione"	13.12.2019, 11.00-12.30, Venice
Lorenzo Ortensi, Head of the <i>Squadra Mobile</i> of Vicenza	12.01.2021, interview organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement agencies on 27.01.2021
Sebastiano Bartolotta, Vice-Questore of the National Police, Italian Embassy in Abuja	11.12.2020, interview organised with Equality ATI, in preparation for the INSigHT webinar with law enforcement agencies on 27.01.2021

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