



## EUROPE-AFRICA CRISIS WE DON'T WANT TO NAME: ORGANISED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

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### Overview of Crisis

As of June 2017, the number of “migrants” which in this case references all those arriving by sea to Italy, rose by 21% in comparison to the same period in 2016<sup>1</sup>. These official statistics present a composite number of economic migrants, refugees, as well as the victims of trafficking in human beings. Nationals of Nigeria closely followed by Guinea account for the largest number of the “migrants” utilising the central Mediterranean route to southern Italy<sup>2</sup>. Statistics would suggest that most of those arriving are young Nigerian males subjectively categorised as economic migrants escaping poverty or civil unrest within their respective nations and becoming the victims of smugglers on their way to Europe.

However, the statistics negate the sharp increase in the number of Nigerian women arriving in Italy. As of March 2017, the International Organisation for Migration estimates that there has been **an almost ten-fold increase in the number of Nigerian women being trafficked to Italy and Europe into prostitution**, as well as, the worst form of it, the actual sexual slavery. This is an increase from just over 1000 to over 11000 in just three years; **this is a women’s crisis**.

The significant increase in the number of migrants and refugees arriving in Italy over the last few months has been successful in garnering rhetorical attention from policy makers from within the EU and at the national level; however, this shifted focus is simultaneously diminishing the focus on the continuing trafficking crisis of women and young girls from the West Africa and the varying forms of violence they are subjected to. This issue has seen little to no focus at the EU level politically with only brave testimonies in well researched and detailed articles in a handful of publications shedding light on the situation, despite the IOM officially documenting the number of Nigerian women entering Italy doubling each year<sup>3</sup>. With an estimated 80% of women arriving in Italy from West Africa being victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation more is needed to tackle this situation head on: these women and young girls cannot be left, unspoken for and abandoned on a continent that professes human rights as its founding principal.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/arrival-of-migrants-in-june-numbers-rising-in-italy-and-spain-U2NSTL>

<sup>2</sup> <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/arrival-of-migrants-in-june-numbers-rising-in-italy-and-spain-U2NSTL>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.liberties.eu/en/short-news/17312>

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## Crisis on the Ground

### ***There is an exponential growth in the numbers of female victims of trafficking arriving in the EU in the current migration context***

Joint statement on the occasion of International Women's Day 2017 Brussels, European Commission

The trafficking of West African women, particularly the females from Nigeria, has been prominent within Italy for at least a decade. A UNICRI report from 2003 documented the increase in the number of adolescent females trafficked from southern Nigeria to Italy for sexual exploitation in prostitution<sup>4</sup>. These characteristics exemplify the current crisis with the exception that the contemporary migrant crisis has precipitated the exponential increase in the trafficking in women and young girls from this region. Within Nigeria, evidence highlights that hundreds of agricultural towns have become target zones, with young women and girls with no access to education targeted by a sophisticated network of traffickers and smugglers.

NGO workers and volunteers on the ground are noting three to four times increase in the number of young females they see on the streets of “hotspot” cities such as Turin, Palermo and Verona.

Persistent economic hardship remains the most significant push factor in the sex trafficking crisis from Nigeria to Italy, however, increased discrimination and violence against women due to civil unrest has worsened the situation<sup>5</sup>. This unrest has also limited support systems, female economic autonomy and has worsened access to education. Vivian Wiwoloku, a Nigerian aid worker operating in Palermo states, “As long as there is a recession in Nigeria, more girls will come.”<sup>6</sup>

In more recent years there has been a significant decrease in the age of the girls arriving in Italy: prior to 2014 the average age was 16-18, this is now closer to an average of 14-16<sup>7</sup>. *Save the Children* reiterates this data, suggesting that of the Nigerian women arriving in Italy a significant proportion are under the age of 18<sup>8</sup>, forced to declare their age as 18 and above to avoid the protections provided to unaccompanied minors by the Provisions on Protective Measures for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors legislation. This is particularly alarming as reports suggest that the girls arriving are obviously as young as 13<sup>9</sup>. This raises the question whether the authorities can and/or are willing to allocate enough resources to the reception centres to identify trafficking victims and victims of sexual exploitation.

Francesca Bocchino from *Save the Children* in Italy states: “You get one boat where all the Nigerian girls say they are 20, another where they all say 21 — obviously they have been told what to say. So, these tiny girls are put in an adult reception centre where they shower, get dry clothes and then leave. It’s clear there is an organisation behind it. They reach Italy and disappear because they know there is a person waiting for them. We lose track of them within a couple of hours.”<sup>10</sup>. Andrea Morniroli of Dedalus, an organisation that functions as a social cooperative that initiates

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<sup>4</sup> Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy, Report of field Survey in Edo State, Nigeria, July 2003, accessed at

[http://www.unicri.it/topics/trafficking\\_exploitation/archive/women/nigeria\\_1/research/rr\\_okojie\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicri.it/topics/trafficking_exploitation/archive/women/nigeria_1/research/rr_okojie_eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM\\_ET\(2014\)493040\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-italy-nigerian-prostitutes-20161208-story.html>

<sup>7</sup> Alberto Mossino Interview

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/missing-women-of-the-mediterranean-refugee-crisis>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.piamonlus.org/single-post/2017/02/14/%E2%80%99CI-would-tell-any-girls-back-home-don%E2%80%99t-come-to-Europe%E2%80%9D-Becky-16>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.piamonlus.org/single-post/2017/02/14/%E2%80%99CI-would-tell-any-girls-back-home-don%E2%80%99t-come-to-Europe%E2%80%9D-Becky-16>

intervention into areas such as Trafficking, prostitution and addictions reiterates the aforementioned sentiment, *“When we approach them in our camper, it is difficult to get them to tell us their real age... Many girls lie about their age because the organization tells them that underage prostitution is a crime in Italy.”*<sup>11</sup>

Edo state is the centre of the crisis in Nigeria; Benin City remains the central crossroads for all victims trafficked from Nigeria and Ghana. As the crisis has escalated, traffickers have increasingly target states to the South East, as they are the most economically deprived. Women and girls had commonly been offered jobs within the service industry or childcare in Italy with the prospect of obtaining significant wealth. Sister Florence (*Committee for the Support of the Dignity of Women, COSUDOW*), states in an interview: *“Edo girls went to Italy on visas to work picking tomatoes, but ended up in prostitution. Some came back rich, and became examples of success.”*<sup>12</sup> It is hard to determine the number of success stories or if these stories are more than just stories or a reference to the madams who are very much still trapped within the crisis. What is pertinent is that a “mythology” has been created without viable sources to determine any truth. What is also evident from the states being targeted is the emphasis on illiterate women and girls: within the states most commonly targeted literacy rates for girls is roughly 49.80%<sup>13</sup>. This correlation between literacy levels and vulnerability to being trafficked has been raised by charities and volunteers on the ground as a crucial factor in the women targeted by traffickers. It is suggested that many of the girls who are illiterate are from orphaned or very poor families, are unable to get a comprehensive education and are unable to research the experiences of women that have been documented over the last three years.

These young females are taken from Nigeria and are forced to travel through Niger to the desert, where they arrive in Libyan holding centres. Most are subjected to sexual and physical abuse on this initial journey, with some testimonies suggesting that numerous women are abandoned in the desert with no water, forced to drink their own urine to survive, awaiting a very unlikely rescue<sup>14</sup>. Upon arrival at the Libyan holding centres the sexual abuse only escalates. Many women and girls are held within these detention centres for two to three months, persistently raped by Libyan militias<sup>15</sup>. At the onset of the escalation of the crisis, many victims were arriving in Italy pregnant, as a result of which the male sexual abusers in Libya are now forcing the female victims to take Depo-Provera contraceptive jabs, so that the rape can continue undetected<sup>16</sup>.

Once in Italy, the women are forced to have sex with on average 10 men per night, with some - to having sex with 20 men or more. They are also subjected to debt bondage with victims “owing” on average 30-40,000 euros for their transit, maintenance and upkeep – a vicious cycle of continued sexual abuse and an increasing normalisation of women’s sexual exploitation and economic misery as the number of prostitutes on the streets of Italy continues to rise exponentially.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.jabcrew.com/underage-nigerian-immigrants-forced-into-prostitution-in-italy/>

<sup>12</sup> Ben Taub, The Desperate Journey of a Trafficked Girl, New Yorker Online, April 2017, accessed at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/10/the-desperate-journey-of-a-trafficked-girl>

<sup>13</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?locations=NG>

<sup>14</sup> <https://theeagleonline.com.ng/nigerian-woman-survives-10-days-in-sahara-desert-52-dead/>

<sup>15</sup> Ben Taub, The Desperate Journey of a Trafficked Girl, New Yorker Online, April 2017, accessed at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/10/the-desperate-journey-of-a-trafficked-girl>

<sup>16</sup> Karen McVeigh, Refugee Women and children beaten, raped and starved in Libyan hellholes, the Guardian online, Feb 2017, access at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/28/refugee-women-and-children-beaten-raped-and-starved-in-libyan-hellholes>

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# Male Demand Culture & Black Axe Gang

## Profile of a User of Women in Prostitution

The Human Trafficking through the Central Mediterranean Route report, published by IOM in June 2017, calls for the immediate action against the “growing demand” and “expanding market” for paid sexual acts<sup>17</sup> highlighting the persistent male demand culture that fuels the continuing and heightened trafficking crisis. Data pertaining to users, their profile and percentage of male population using these victims is scarce and severely under-publicised. A typical analysis of trafficking and related to it market of sexual exploitation focuses on the victims – those abused through prostitution. Little to nothing is usually said about the men who seek, use and exploit these women. What is clear is that there is an increase in the male sexual demand for women and children, or, at the minimum, its complete normalisation, and it is essential that we collect the data on its dimensions and the root causes and bring it to the attention of public as well as the policy makers. As reiterated by IOM project manager Carlotta Santarossa, “*We also feel that it is increasingly urgent that data analysis be accompanied by an examination of the market these girls supply, and the growing demand for paid sexual services*”<sup>18</sup>. Existing research, such as the European Asylum Support office report of 2015, focuses predominantly on the European level. National reports are often voided from the spotlight, with the Italian case highlighting a diminished importance as prostitution is so widely normalised.

However, what emerges is a picture of continued normalisation and increased detachment between trafficking and prostitution - the alarming contemporary trend to identify prostitution as an empowerment of women<sup>19</sup> or a genuine occupational choice that negates the reality and scale of the trafficking crisis. International calls to decriminalise pimps, brothels and “interested 3rd parties” at policy level effectively legalise sexual exploitation of women<sup>20</sup>. In some contexts this results in victims classified as “sex workers/prostitutes” before being classified as trafficking victims. The overall impact of this is normalising the perception of willing “sex workers” and increasing the tendency for users to ignore the signs<sup>21</sup> of trafficking and abuse.

Research conducted by the European Asylum Support office supports this notion of an increased social acceptance of prostitution across Europe<sup>22</sup>. It allows for a diminished responsibility within the European perspective and promotes the perceptions of sexual entitlement among men, including the new and habitual users of women in prostitution, with most of them dismissing the blatant signs of violence, while others taking an active part in it. When trying to develop a profile of a user it is pertinent to consider the available international research on those who purchase sexual acts and draw the links between the different male users of prostituted women, their motivations and perceptions in order to understand why this region has become such a “hotspot” of exploitation. Indeed, many of the women arriving to Italy are looking for improved living and economic conditions within various European countries, however a significant proportion of them remain within the Italian national borders.

From a wider perspective, an overall profile of users of women in prostitution across Europe has long been established. Official qualitative research indicates that the age of first experience of men

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<sup>17</sup> A Tratta di esseri Umani attraverso la rotta del Mediterraneo centrale: Dati, Storie E Informazioni raccolte dall'organizzazione internazionale per le migrazioni, IOM Report, June 2017, accessed at [http://www.italy.iom.int/sites/default/files/news-documents/RAPPORTO\\_OIM\\_Vittime\\_di\\_tratta\\_0.pdf](http://www.italy.iom.int/sites/default/files/news-documents/RAPPORTO_OIM_Vittime_di_tratta_0.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://africadiplomatic.com/2017/07/22/sex-traffic-from-nigeria-at-raise/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/08/most-sex-workers-are-modern-day-slaves/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/22/kate-banyard-industrialised-sexual-exploitation-pimp-state>

<sup>21</sup> Country of Origin Information Report; Nigeria Sex Trafficking of Women, European Asylum Support Office, October 2015, doi:10.2847/620594, accessed via <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5631cf0a4.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Country of Origin Information Report; Nigeria Sex Trafficking of Women, European Asylum Support Office, October 2015, doi:10.2847/620594, accessed via <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5631cf0a4.pdf>

buying sexual acts ranges from as low as 14 to 49, however by the age of 27 more than three quarters of the men surveyed had bought sex<sup>23</sup>. The preceding significant age range are those of 49 and over, both age groups had show comprehensive understanding that the majority of the women in the sex trade they have used had been lured, tricked or trafficked into prostitution<sup>24</sup>. In fact, according to experts, having the knowledge that women have been sexually exploited or trafficked does not deter users from buying sex from these victims<sup>25</sup>. In conjunction with this, measured in among 40% of the men surveyed, is the high level of normative perceptions justifying the sexual violence and exploitation of women. This set of patriarchal myths about sexuality and sexual behaviour identified in the male users of women in prostitution, commonly known as the “rape culture”, states that men being able to pay for sex reduces the likelihood of rape, whereas abolishing the system of prostitution will significantly increase the number of rape cases<sup>26</sup>.

Within Italy the data makes a clear correlation and, more so, a wider acceptance and tolerance for prostitution and the evident abuse of trafficking victims. An average profile of the users of women in prostitution within Italy is that of the users in most other countries: young, heterosexual men; educated, including many university graduates; employed in various occupations (service people, truck drivers, migrant workers and businessmen)<sup>27</sup>. It is extremely common for the women to be forced to perform sexual intercourse without protection. Victims are often forced to sleep with multiple men for anywhere between 10-40 euros, with cases of groups of men seeking sex from one woman in a single instance relatively common<sup>28</sup>. This can occur in designated properties or, more often, in local parks or town squares.

As of 2014, roughly 2.5 million men were actively seeking paid sex in Italy, with an alarming increase in men seeking sex with minors (5-12%), in particular with Sub-Saharan African girls<sup>29</sup>. These perceptions and quantitative trends have facilitated the conditions for the escalation of trafficking of young women and girls from West Africa, the emphasis on this region is partially explained by certain cultural perceptions. Though the research conducted has not expressly indicated underlying race issues within the current crisis, On the Road official Fabio Sorgoni has stated that Italian men “*think these girls come from a culture where it is normal to be a prostitute*”<sup>30</sup>.

The male demand culture and an antiquated perception that men, as inherent sexual predators with needs that require satisfying, allow for the continued escalation of the crisis. It’s these conditions that have led to the astronomical rise in the now infamous Nigerian Black Axe Gang.

## Black Axe Gang

With connections to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra mafia and a reputation for mutilating those who opposes them, the Black Axe have experienced a significant rise to prominence, with human trafficking and prostitution the basis of their operations<sup>31</sup>. The sharp rise in the number of trafficking victims can be attributed to the gang’s extensive and highly profitable network. The gang oversees

<sup>23</sup> Erika Schulze et al. Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality study, 2014, accessed at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM\\_ET\(2014\)493040\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Country of Origin Information Report; Nigeria Sex Trafficking of Women, European Asylum Support Office, October 2015, doi:10.2847/620594, accessed via <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5631cf0a4.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Erika Schulze et al. Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality study, 2014, accessed at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM\\_ET\(2014\)493040\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Erika Schulze et al. Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality study, 2014, accessed at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM\\_ET\(2014\)493040\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/493040/IPOL-FEMM_ET(2014)493040_EN.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Roberta Lunghini; Who is the prostitute’s typical client?, accessed via <http://www.west-info.eu/who-is-the-prostitutes-typical-client/>

<sup>28</sup> Nigerian Women forced into prostitution, DW News documentary, accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snFQHx3rflw>

<sup>29</sup> Roberta Lunghini; Who is the prostitute’s typical client?, accessed via <http://www.west-info.eu/who-is-the-prostitutes-typical-client/>

<sup>30</sup> Tom Kington, Italy says thousands of Nigerian women who arrive as migrants are forced to work as prostitutes, LA Times, December 2016, published online, accessed at <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-italy-nigerian-prostitutes-20161208-story.html>

<sup>31</sup> Lorenzo Tondo, Mafia at a Crossroads as Nigerian Gangsters hit Sicily’s Shores, The Guardian online, 2016, accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jun/11/mafia-palermo-nigerian-gangsters-hit-sicily-shores>

every step of the process: from the solicitation and manipulation of girls in agricultural and poor regions from the target states, to the transit from Nigeria to Libya, to smuggling across the Mediterranean and finally the picking up from the reception centres in Italy.

The international network extends through Algeria, Libya and Nigeria, with a significant and somewhat obvious presence at the arrival centres on the Italian coasts. Some charity experts on the ground have suggested that the crisis has become so prominent that some potential victims are aware of the high possibility of being trafficked into prostitution in Italy, however, are not in the position to fully comprehend the gravity and the consequences of their potential sexual exploitation. According to Alberto Mossino, if young women were able to analyse the actual experiences of victims already in Italy, many would have reconsidered pursuing a life in Europe.

Once in Italy “madams” - the women who control their cash intake and inflict severe physical abuse in cases deemed as disobedience or attempts to escape, closely monitor the victims. Many of these madams are former victims themselves, who, having been within the cycle of debt bondage for several years, became exploiters in order to escape the act of prostitution, often suffering from severe psychological damage. The male traffickers of the gang are known to portray themselves as a “friend” to the victims, monitor activity on the streets and order the torture or murder of families in Nigeria should a girl escape or attempt to<sup>32</sup>.

The “success” of the Black Axe gang and its established network does suggest a certain level of corruption and/or lax approach to the escalating trafficking crisis currently developing. Within Nigeria, it has been suggested that the Gang actively reinvests in the slow and weakened Nigerian economy, treated as “VIPs” when returning from Italy and left alone by the authorities<sup>33</sup>. Correspondingly, this feeds into the perception of an idealised wealthy Europe and is used to further manipulate vulnerable young women and girls into believing the few success stories they have witnessed are easily achievable. On the Italian side, the prominence of the gang is evident on the streets and at reception centres. Maria Ludovica Bottarelli, prominent women rights activist and president of the Italian Coordination of the European Women’s Lobby suggested that the network is so well established, that girls are picked up from the centres in the evening and returned in the morning after being forced to prostitute themselves at night<sup>34</sup>.

Arrests and prosecutions of Black Axe Gang members have been slow and insignificant. Indeed, there has been an increase since 2016, with twenty senior members arrested in Palermo in November<sup>35</sup> and further arrests in Verona and Asti, however this has done little to stem the flow of victims into cities such as Palermo and Turin. The gang is not only exploiting the male demand culture of Europe, but the instability and lawlessness of Libya and the economic hardship of Edo State to develop a well-established and highly profitable trafficking network.

**It should always be asked who is profiting in crises such as this and it is clear that at every stage of trafficking of women in prostitution various groups are either profiting economically or physically from the abuse and torture of these vulnerable women.**

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<sup>32</sup> Alberto Mossino, Director of Piam Onlus, Interview

<sup>33</sup> Alberto Mossino, Director of Piam Onlus, Interview

<sup>34</sup> Maria Ludovica Bottarelli, Italian Coordination of the European Women’s Lobby, interview

<sup>35</sup> Jen Offord; “Italian Police Arrest Members of Notorious Black Axe Mafia Gang”, International Business Times, Nov 2016, accessed at <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/italian-police-arrest-members-notorious-black-axe-mafia-gang-1592454>



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## Supranational & National Failures

With significant strains on national resources, the ability for the Italian government to handle the crisis efficiently is low. Local governments have been criticised for their ineffectiveness and for potential corruption in favour of the crisis: this includes turning a blind eye to trafficking activities within their local areas, allegations of bribery and some officials being caught using the victims for sex<sup>36</sup>.

The numerous incidents of local government officials being involved in trafficking have not resulted in any investigations, prosecutions or convictions<sup>37</sup>.

Italian law enforcement agencies have been criticised for lacking systematic approaches to training their public officials at arrival centres<sup>38</sup>. There is a desperate need for more training, focus on victim support and, more importantly, a human rights based European response detached from securitised 'migration management'. However, with such a huge increase in the numbers of people arriving, it is simply not possible for each arrival to be afforded the required amount of time and inspection in order to determine if they are a victim of human trafficking. It is widely accepted that the ages the young refugees report, in particular those of female adolescents, are to be taken at face value, thereby bypassing the Provisions on Protective Measures for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors<sup>39</sup> implemented in May 2017. Simultaneously, as the Italian interior Ministry introduced the special protection for female victims of violence, little is being done to implement these available measures<sup>40</sup>. At present, it is estimated that the Italian government is only able to afford aid and protection to about 20% of the victims - this is simply not enough<sup>41</sup>.

Across Europe, the crisis is worsened by the lack of humanitarian response or willingness to tackle the crisis, as well as the persistent reluctance on behalf of both EU institutions and the NGOs alike to adopt a gender sensitive and female-focused perspective. Alberto Mossino notes that many girls who leave for the countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Germany are sent back to Italy under the Dublin Convention which places them back in the hands of their traffickers creating a circle of violence. The "juju rituals" and the extensive network able to inflict violence upon the family members of victims further solidify this violent circle. In some cases victims are sent back to Nigeria having been deported for immigration offenses, which puts them at an immediate risk of being re-trafficked, particularly if still under the debt bondage<sup>42</sup>. Similar cases are being seen within Italy despite Italian law dictating that trafficking victims are not to be punished; reports of arrests under immigration offences are also not uncommon<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/10/the-desperate-journey-of-a-trafficked-girl>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55b73bdfc.html>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55b73bdfc.html>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2017-04-7;47>

<sup>40</sup> <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-nigeria-trafficking-italy-idUKKCN11Y366>

<sup>41</sup> Alberto Mossino, Director of Piam Onlus, Interview

<sup>42</sup> Country Information and Guidance; Nigeria and Trafficking of Women, UK Home Office report, Aug 2016, accessed at

<https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/887031/download>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55b73bdfc.html>.

## ***This is not an Italy - Nigeria problem, this is a Europe - Africa problem***

Alberto Mossino, Director, PIAM Onlus

The need for a comprehensive and supranational strategy to tackle the crisis of organised sexual exploitation of women and girls is understated. In the human rights activist circles, a lot of discussions about the “refugee crisis” are centred around humanity and solidarity – **little is done from the perspective of serious political analysis of the organised crime profiting from violence and discrimination against women.**

The national strategy within Italy indeed suffers from certain failures, lack of political will and the prominence of a well-established and well-funded gang, however, this can only be resolved on a supranational level. The securitisation of migration experienced over the last five years has not only led to the increased number of refugees drowning at sea; it had led to the escalation of the trafficking crisis that we bear witness to now. The intolerant perception of “refugees” is clearly being exploited by the traffickers to increase their cycle of abuse in the knowledge that the European community will not come together to tackle the issue head on.

**The solution is clear, the solution is known;** there needs to be more cooperation with the NGOs, particularly those working on Violence against Women and Girls, sexual abuse and exploitation, including the migrant women organisations, as well as the national networks working with the victims of trafficking. The European institutions need to coordinate their efforts to focus on protecting the victims, discouraging the demand for prostitution and depriving the traffickers of their essential tools and networks. Preventing violence and abuse against any woman or girl is a priority that fulfils European values and it needs to be urgently detached from the umbrellas of “the migration issues” and “border control”. Not doing this minimises the significance of the crisis and leaves thousands of women and girls seeking escape from abuse without the help they desperately need. In conjunction with this, the Africa-Europe relationship need to be seriously reconsidered.

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## **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

- **A long term, comprehensive protection and rehabilitation programme of 18-24 months**
  - The programme must provide proper protections such as shelter and financial support. It must be gender sensitive, including specialised sex-segregated facilities for female victims, with education, language and training programmes so that victims are able support themselves after rehabilitation. It must include psychological and community support; an appropriate time should be given to the victims to begin healing and to integrate.
- **Improved training programmes for officials and volunteers at reception centres<sup>44</sup>**

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55b73bdfc.html>



- There needs to be a significant improvement in the screening process of irregular migrants and asylum seekers. The victims need to be identified as early as possible so that they are protected under the Provisions on Protective Measures for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors legislation.
  
- **Traffickers must be targeted monetarily**
  - Property, funds and resources must be ceased to eliminate the foundations of the network within Italy. Collaborators within reception centres need to be identified and prosecuted.
  
- **Corruption within state authorities needs to be addressed**
  - The problem of corruption that facilitates the existence of organised international trafficking networks must be recognised at state level and concrete measures must be put in place to stop it.
  
- **European ‘Development work’ in Nigeria needs to be reconsidered**
  - Lack of cooperation from state governments within Nigeria and continued development aid leaves little room for bargaining with the Nigeria government to enforce legislation against trafficking. These options must be considered alongside increased cooperation with the Nigerian government to end the crisis. Additionally, the development funds currently allocated to Nigeria need to be directed towards structural development of local economies, grass roots NGOs and women, not INGOs and the multi-national corporations.
  
- **End Male Sexual Demand for Women’s Bodies**
  - The culture of demand for commercial sex among the European men must be discouraged at all levels: the users of women in prostitution must be criminalised. This criminalisation should not depend on whether a woman in prostitution presents visible signs of abuse – **the degree of violence against women should never be a prerequisite for men’s understanding that sexual contact can only be possible on a mutual and equal basis.** Men and boys need to be educated that expecting women to be available for their sexual satisfaction is neither their right, nor it is compatible with women’s dignity and fundamental freedoms.

**EUROPEAN NETWORK OF MIGRANT WOMEN (ENOMW), OCTOBER 2017**

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**Interviewed:** A Mossino, Piam Onlus; M L Bottarelli, Italian Coordination of European Women’s Lobby

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European Network of Migrant Women (ENOMW) is an Europe-wide platform of migrant women NGOs advocating for the rights, freedom and equality of migrant & refugee women and girls in Europe. [www.migrantwomennetwork.org](http://www.migrantwomennetwork.org)