

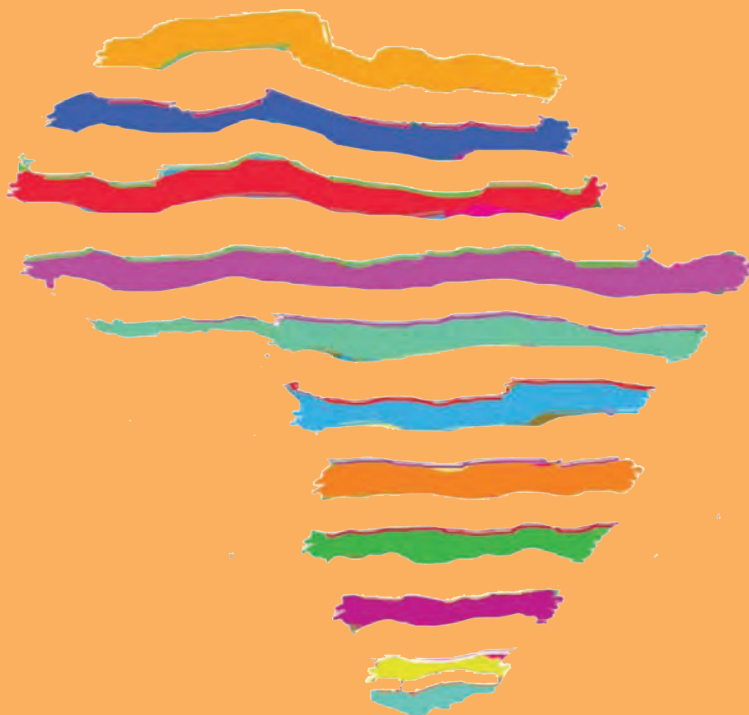


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RIAC

FILI D'AFRICA



Social Promotion Association



ALISEI COOP

FILI D'AFRICA

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Presentation

FEMALE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS: A SPECIAL TARGET GROUP

In an international scenario that is experiencing an enormous expansion in the mobility of people worldwide, for decades there has been a feminization of migratory flows, a salient feature of the contemporary migration process.

The high percentage of women in the makeup of migratory flows, around 50% (ISTAT, 2018), is a trend that shows a kind of “gender revolution on a global scale” (Ehrenreich & Russell Hochschild, 2004).

Migrant women, seeking asylum or no longer having any protection, have been present for some time in all parts of Italy, living in a state of great vulnerability. These are women fleeing from countries of origin where they suffered from wars, conditions of extreme poverty and a state of vulnerability due to gender discrimination that led to a lack of or poor access to income, education and health services, a lack of legal protection, exposure to violence and exploitation.

The women who are forced to migrate, a flow that is increasing especially if they are alone or pregnant due to the perverse effect of the rules on international protection, are exposed to risks and violence resulting from multidimensional oppression: fleeing a country that discriminates against them and endangers their integrity; as foreigners arriving in countries that are increasingly intolerant of differences; and as belonging to the female gender in a society that is still far from achieving equal opportunities and where violence against women remains one of the greatest structural problems.

No less importantly, they experience the difficult and often conflicting definition and redefinition of a female identity that finds itself between two different cultural realities: that which they originally belonged to, and that which they have entered.

Migrant and refugee women mostly come without any knowledge of the language of the host country, do not know how to find their own way in society, remain stuck in menial, poorly paid jobs, and are often victims of violence, abuse and sexual exploitation.

A 2016 study on gender equality by the European Parliament, Department of Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, "Female refugees and asylum seekers: the issue of integration," specifically analyzed the specific and priority needs of women who are refugees and seeking asylum. These needs were divided into four macro areas: housing, vocational training and language integration, health protection, and access to the labor market.

Over the years, migrant women and asylum seekers have been welcomed in regional reception structures in Umbria, where they have made use of services and assistance. This does not change the fact that, having already been victims of countless abuses, they tend not to report crimes that they have been or continue to be subjected to; many of them do not even ask for medical treatment, fearing that doing so could jeopardize their staying in Italy. And this, besides the even more difficult-to-quantify number of women now without protection, who are alone, pregnant or with dependent children, only increases the vulnerability of their position, which is further aggravated today by the consequences of the new law introduced with the recent Security Decree.

Thus it is a matter of working to improve the offer of socio-health, socio-welfare and socio-educational services in order to respond more adequately to the needs of migrant women who are alone, without protection, or with dependent children, making the complex scenario of regional social, educational and health policies open to an innovative approach that can interweave gender and cultural differences so that all the actors involved, the institutions and organizations in the services sector, may cooperate in order to ensure the protection and safety of women, the prevention of gender-based violence, access to health services, access to housing, language training and integration, job integration, and parenting support, making women the protagonists of their own social inclusion, and making them resilient and active and no longer just the "recipients" of assistance.



1. A GENDER APPROACH IN THE RIAC PROJECT

The aim and method of the European RIAC project is to speed up the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers with their own specific commitment to acquire both job and language skills.

For this reason, a very precise course of action has been developed which is aimed firstly at searching the market for companies willing to offer jobs, and secondly at identifying immigrants interested in the job offers.

To support this process, the project provides a specialized staff that has the specific task of supporting language learning, vocational training, job assistance, and knowledge about rules and behavior in the host country. It thus becomes necessary to attract a specific process of social, cultural and personal empowerment that promotes and strengthens their abilities and aptitudes through ad hoc training that offers them the opportunity for effective and sustainable social integration that subsequently facilitates the job placement process.

Given that the RIAC project did not exclude it, it was decided to offer a group of women participating in the project the opportunity to create an associative form of work, as it was considered a better opportunity for their employability. In essence, specific training was activated for self-employment and self-entrepreneurship in the artisan tailoring industry. Essentially, the need was considered to implement a sort of work inclusion that allowed working in a team (to simplify child care, already shared in the smaller groups of women who very often live together) and that had an element of flexibility essential for their particular condition. Thanks to a specific program of meetings and the exchanging of ideas and opinions, the desire was activated within the group of women to get involved in the first person, working together to create a Social Promotion Association that promotes and strengthens their individual skills and aptitudes through a process of training, self-employment and self-entrepreneurship in the artisan tailoring sector. In this way they were able to create “Fili d’Africa” (“Threads of Africa”), a nonprofit association that promotes personal and social empowerment to favor job placement, integration and, above all, living with others in a multicultural society. Fili d’Africa also promotes forms of intercultural

dialogue and regional events and meetings, aimed also making it possible to present the work produced, which constitutes a meeting between Umbrian textile traditions and the knowledge and colors of Africa.



2. THE PATH TOWARD THE “FILI D'AFRICA” APS

The complex process involved a specialized staff of mediators and facilitators, essential for working with people of different backgrounds (language, country of origin, personal experiences, etc.) and for putting together a working group that had within it the right motivation for the choice to be pursued.

For vulnerable groups at risk of social exclusion such as women seeking asylum, a process of empowerment represents an essential element for job placement and sociocultural integration. In fact, women have greater vulnerability and isolation than men also because of the cultural role attributed to them by their communities of origin and by the men (husbands, brothers and fathers) who are the true custodians of the original cultural identity in the care of children, the home, food and language, a role that, especially for girls, hinders their integration process and increases their cultural and economic dependence. For this reason, the empowerment process is also fundamental in protecting the reproductive health of migrant women and in preventing gender-based violence.

The Project has devoted special time and attention to these aspects, especially in the initial stage, but also in following. With the supervision of the entire Project staff, cultural mediators, language facilitators and experts worked to promote and strengthen individual and group growth, to increase self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-determination, to make latent resources emerge and to lead the individual to consciously take possession of their own potential.

On a more general level, the staff proceeded according to specific steps:

a. Preliminary meetings and assessment of skills

Meetings and specific evaluations showed the adequacy of the choice of tailoring as a field of work for the women involved in the Project: it emerged that they had skills and precise motivations towards the proposed sector.

The assessment methodology that was used in the first meetings was initially aimed at getting to know the women involved and also at

having them get to know each other; this is how the idea of creating an association developed and how specific assessment meetings were held to help specific skills and motivations. Cultural mediation was a fundamental tool in this for strengthening a heterogeneous group that also had to open itself up to new members; the work of specific mediators and facilitators was essential for working with people of different backgrounds (language, country of origin, personal experiences, etc.) in order to put together a work team and to find the right motivation and objectives.



b. Training

- *Teaching socio-linguistic literacy*

The basic linguistic and cultural literacy process envisaged by the RIAC project was further developed with notions of civic education. In this regard, Italian language courses provided accurate information on their rights and duties, as well as on the codes of conduct and habits inherent to the condition of being a tenant in collective housing.

Two specific manuals were developed.



- **Training in the use of electronic sewing machines**

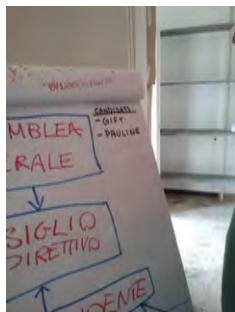
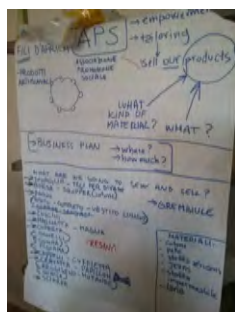
Specific training courses were set up on the use of electronic sewing machines. The theoretic and practical lessons allowed the participants to learn new techniques with more efficient tools and to express their creativity through their manual skills, while at the same time offering occasions for socialization, experimentation and the sharing of “knowledge.”





- ***Specific self-entrepreneurship training***

Concepts were imparted regarding the administration and management of the simplest forms of associations and of business and trade language. More specifically, training was provided for setting up and managing a small artisan tailoring cooperative. The training process involved: instruction on legal and tax concepts and information (the drawing up of the association's articles of association and by-laws, and legal, tax and administrative management); information on the criteria for the fulfillment of legal obligations for the creation of an APS (election of internal bodies, registration of the association with the Revenue Agency), and the development of a strategic crowdfunding plan.



c. The legal form chosen

The legal form of the APS (Social Promotion Association, a special legal form in Italy) was chosen from among the different forms of associations. This is an association whose purposes include job placement as well as social activities for providing awareness and empowerment. It is characterized by administrative and economic simplicity, it is flexible and, lastly, its objectives (as we read in the legal documents regularly presented) include those of vocational training, job placement and also social activities, intended for both members and non-members.

In addition to the classroom training and accompaniment in fulfilling the requirements for the creation of the APS, a multilingual management guide was provided, which among other things also served for the main management and tax obligations, as well as outlines and forms for the minutes of meetings, accounting records, financial statements, etc.. Lastly, a feasibility check was carried out to validate the completion of a non-classic process, presented and implemented during meetings and evaluations. After this the administrative staff was elected and the Association's by-laws were drawn up.





d. Promotion of the APS Fili d'Africa

The support of a network of local associations and businesses has allowed Fili d'Africa to make its production known and to establish the foundations for marketing it.

Privileged sales channels such as events, shops and special orders have been identified, among other channels. In this regard, the Strategic Fundraising Plan developed for the Association can be consulted.





During the quarantine



Projects for the summer ...



Promotional Card

Fili d'Africa

It is an APS, a Social Promotion Association, which aims at the personal, cultural, and economic empowerment of women seeking asylum, to help them find jobs and to live in the host country.

The specific goal of Fili d'Africa is to promote and strengthen the skills of each member through self entrepreneurship activities in the field of artisan tailoring.

Duly registered with the Revenue Agency, the Association offers the sale of its own products, which represent the meeting between Umbrian textile traditions and the colors of Africa.

In order to make its business grow, the Association aims at creating a network with other local associations and businesses, counting on their collaboration.

Those who want to know more about the APS's by-laws, governing bodies and activities are invited to contact the Association, also to arrange any possible meetings.

Aliseicoop Cell. 340.3501705 – segreteria@aliseicoop.it

http://www.fasttrackintegration.eu/_li-africa/



