

Sex and work slaves

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The **sex trade and exploitation** phenomenon in Varese Province affects limited numbers, but it is one of the things that frighten people most. Young women, sometimes even minors, came to Italy with the dream of wellbeing, convinced they were helping the communities they had left behind, but **instead found themselves as slaves**. The **cooperative "Lotta contro l'emarginazione"** (Fight Alienation), in collaboration with the Prefect's Office and the provincial council, have organised a public meeting on this dramatic subject and on the labour exploitation of immigrants.

"Lombardy is the most virtuous and attentive region," explained **Tiziana Bianchini**, the spokeswoman on the theme of prostitution, for C.N.C.A., an association that protects the rights of immigrants. The region funds projects to welcome people and help them fit in, and with 350 out of 800 cases, it is taking care of the highest number of women in Italy."

The Deputy Public Prosecutor, **Sabrina Ditaranto**, then explained the regulations that relate to exploited immigrants.

"**Prostitution in the street has all but stopped**, although there are some worrying signs," said **Roberta Bettoni**, the coordinator of the working unit of the "Fight Alienation Cooperative". "In our province, there are still three areas where prostitution involving Nigerian girls can be found. But now, most of the work takes place indoors, in houses, night clubs and some massage parlours. We're carefully monitoring this constantly increasing phenomenon."

Paolo Catenaro, head of the immigration office in the central police station, **Massimiliano Abbiati** of the flying squad, and Loris Baldassarre, commander of the Carabinieri, described their experiences on this topic. "The exploitation of women on the street is almost always done by people of the same nationality, and it's a very fragmented phenomenon, which makes wide-ranging actions difficult. We also monitor the press to discover where prostitution takes place, but often, everything's in order, and at that point the only thing we can do to discourage this activity is report it to the owner of the premises," Abbiati said.

What it is disturbing is that a third of the girls are minors. Lieutenant-Colonel Baldassarre also spoke of a boom in the number of prostitutes in houses and no longer on the street.

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to labour exploitation, for which the figures are even more worrying. "In 2011, in Italy, we confirmed there were 337,000 immigrants working illegally, 12.2% of whom were illegal immigrants," Baldassarre went on. "Our province is doing its part, because, in 247 checks, we found 360 violations of the regulations, of which 120 were criminal. There are numerous cases of actual prisons, where the people are forced to work and live."

Paolo Cassani, from the cooperative, explained that illegal employment must not be confused with situations of actual slavery, where there is violence, limitations of

freedom, threats, a large debt, as a result of coming to Italy, and a lack of documents, because they are seized by the employer. "Over the last few years, we've discovered 140 cases of genuine exploitation, 71% of which, thanks to the work of the forces of law and order. Our province is the first to have an operating protocol procedure in Italy."

Domenico Oliveto of the Finance Police, **Marco Bellumore** of the territorial employment office, **Franco Stasi**, general secretary of the trade union CGIL, and **Sergio Moia** of the trade union CISL also spoke on this topic.

"We're not in perfect world, and at times of crisis, the situation gets distinctly worse. Don't think that the saddest cases are only in little workshops, because we've discovered incredible situations, even in firms that were above suspicion," Stasi said.

According to Moia, the law is partly responsible, because "it doesn't respond to the actual numbers. We need to speak more about these phenomena, because people don't believe it when they hear that certain phenomena, like exploitation, are so deeply rooted, even in these parts."

The meeting was brought to a close by Roberta Montagnini, a representative of the cooperative, who presented the programs for social assistance and protection.

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redazione@varesenews.it