



8th International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Trafficking in Persons

8 February 2022

The Power of Care

Women, Economics, Human Trafficking

The theme of the eighth International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Trafficking in Persons is "The Power of Care - Women, Economics, Human Trafficking".

Trafficking is one of the deepest wounds inflicted by the current economic system. Wounds that affect all dimensions of life, personal and community. The pandemic has increased the "business" of human trafficking and has exacerbated the pain: it has favored the opportunities and socio-economic mechanisms underlying this scourge, worsening the situations of vulnerability that involved the people most at risk - disproportionately women and girls. The latter, particularly penalized by the dominant economic model. The gap between men and women has thus grown.

According to the United Nations Strategic Plan 2022-2025 "Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)"¹ with a general improvement in the condition of women globally, until the arrival of the pandemic, inequalities in all the most important areas of life: health, work, education and politics remain significant. Below, some unequivocal data:

- the participation rate, between the ages of 25-54, in the workforce is 90% for men and just under two thirds for women;
- for 2.7 million women there are important legal obstacles, as well as cultural, to equal employment opportunities.
- the global wage gap between women and men is estimated at 23%;
- women do three times more unpaid domestic and care work than men;
- women aged 25-34 have a much higher risk of poverty than men. The economic fallout is expected to push an additional 47 million women and girls into extreme poverty in 2021, reversing decades of progress.
- in parliaments, on average, women represent only a quarter of the seats;
- 30% of young women do not study, do not work, do not follow any training courses (while for young men it is 13%); two thirds of illiterate people in the world, are women;
- 245 million women and girls over 15 have suffered physical and/or sexual violence by their partner in the last year;
- only 13% of the anti-COVID fiscal, labor and social protection measures concerned the economic security of women.

¹ "Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)", Strategic Plan 2022-25, pages 3-4

According to the United Nations statistics on trafficking in persons (2020 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons) women and girls represent 72% of identified victims of trafficking and the percentage of women and girls increases significantly in the context of trafficking for sexual exploitation; a market that represents 2/3 of the profits generated by exploitation.²

Faced with the failure of economic models based on exploitation, women are called to take on a leading role as agents of change to create an economic system based on caring for people and the common home, involving everyone. Care is a lifestyle and is Jesus' way of loving, as he proposes to us in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37), taken up by Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*. We have to take care to transform our relationship with nature and social and economic relationships, which too often are centered on an aggressive competition that impedes all forms of cooperation and respect for human dignity.

The empowerment of women is not only a question of justice in terms of equal opportunities, but also of expanding the capacity of human resources. With a greater involvement of women, new social and economic processes can be fostered: various development agents open new horizons to development itself. A system that excludes women, and other vulnerable social groups, is not only an “inequitable” system, but also an “inefficient” one, because it does not maximize its capacity to promote integral human development.

With the pandemic, the society and institutions have rediscovered the value of caring for people as a pillar of security and social cohesion and the commitment to care for the common space in order to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation, which mainly affects the poorer.

The power of care is the only way to tackle human trafficking and all forms of exploitation.

Rome, 2 December 2021

² Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour , International Labour Organization, 2014.