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DIALOGUE, TRAINING, BARGAINING: WORK AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE AID 11604

Newsletter n. 6



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"WORKING FOR UPSKILLING IN ERITREA"

THE RESEARCH

The research **"Working for upskilling in Eritrea: research on labour market, education and professional training needs in Asmara and Massawa"** (**"Lavorare per lo sviluppo delle competenze professionali in Eritrea: ricerca sulle necessità del mercato del lavoro, dell'istruzione e della formazione professionale ad Asmara e Massawa"**) is one of the actions foreseen in the project **"Dialogue, training, bargaining: work as an instrument of peace AID 11604"**, funded by the **Italian Agency for Development Cooperation** and implemented by **Nexus Emilia Romagna**.

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Soon to be published and presented (in English and Italian versions), the research is probably **one of the very few works carried out in Eritrea in recent years in the field of rights and labour market**. The merit of the research's results is not only to shed light on some data related to the Eritrean labour market today, but also to **highlight how important the role of cooperation and development is in promoting a decent work agenda at a global level**. The research therefore presents a **significant cross-section of the Eritrean labour market**, about which very little information, analysis and sources are available, and focuses on **three production chains of key Eritrean economic sectors** (tourism and hospitality, ICT-information and communications technology and the cold chain), that could be **driving forces for the future development of the country** and **significantly improve the living and working conditions of a large part of the population**.

By studying the training needs of those three job sectors, the research is therefore the point of arrival of an important state of the art, but also the **basis for planning future vocational training projects**, in the perspective of an **increasingly effective international cooperation action**.



THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF WOMEN IN ERITREA IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

INTERVIEW WITH DINO LORIMER (ISCOS)

We asked **Dino Lorimer (ISCOS)**, an expert on the Eritrean situation, to give us a report on the situation of women's employment in the post-pandemic period, gathered during a recent mission.

When did the mission take place, and with what purpose?

The mission, which lasted about ten days, took place in July 2021 with the aim of re-establishing contact with the Eritrean trade union, with which relations had been difficult – throughout the period of the pandemic – due to the serious lack of internet connection in the region. For the project **"Women's Councils: models, skills and voice for a just society in Eritrea" (EIDHR/2019/412-527)**, it was important to try to figure out in which direction to develop the project, after the Covid-19 emergency meant that many of the original assumptions in the project became impractical, due to the travel ban.

The project EIDHR/2019/412-527, implemented by ISCOS in partnership with Nexus ER, Prosud and VIS, contributed to the sending to Eritrea of part of the materials purchased with the AID 11604 project.

What is the current situation in Eritrea?

At the time of the mission, Eritrea had just come out of a **very tight lockdown**, which entailed, in addition to locking people in their homes for 8 months and a nightly curfew, very strong restrictions on movements and on the opening of businesses and meeting places. In July, activities in accommodation services, such as bars and restaurants, had just resumed, albeit with many restrictions, but – the union reported – many businesses and factories had been closed for several months, with a consequent very high social impact. In order to help the resumption and to guard against contagion in open workplaces, the union took steps to prevent and mitigate the effects of Covid-19, for example by distributing individual protection devices and equipment, such as masks and hand sanitiser.

In this context, what has been the impact of the pandemic on women's employment status?

The lack of data makes it very difficult to understand the already complex situation of women in Eritrea. One of the reasons why women are targeted in many cooperation initiatives is because there is a **very high number of female-led households**, in which the woman plays

the role of the head of the family, after the disappearance of many men in the various conflicts that have taken place in the region, on the (legal and illegal) emigration routes, and in the military service.

The closure of factories and services has also been a major setback for women's employment, both because many companies have not reopened and because, even in the context of reopening, staff cuts have hit the lowest-skilled jobs, which are those – mostly – held by women.

What are the possible steps to help women in difficulty?

The main form of help is training, especially **basic training**, for the unemployed, but it's not easy, just to give an example: if we want to exploit the opportunities of new technologies by resorting to distance learning, we would come up against infrastructures that are not always reliable, and connection costs that are prohibitive. Without good internet support it is difficult to organise projects involving (also) qualified contributions from abroad.

However, in order to meet the most immediate needs of the female population and to provide income support, particularly for women in disadvantaged situations, it is useful, in addition to **monetary subsidies**, to provide **support for agriculture and livestock farming in rural areas** (where a significant proportion of the population lives).





Lastly, it is important to emphasise a **characteristic trait of the Eritrean people**: Eritreans **believe in trusting their own strengths**, a principle – that of the self-reliance – which, beyond the tones of propaganda, certainly derives from a history in which the Eritreans have always had to rely only, or mainly, on their own resources.

A **continuous dialogue and exchange of ideas is therefore essential** to understand where international cooperation can help, in order to detect the country's real needs.

The pandemic has made even the most everyday activities difficult, and the recovery in Eritrea is in serious difficulty, due also to the complex political situation of the pacification process in the Horn of Africa.

Finally, there is an element that the Eritrean trade union sees with optimism: thanks to the country's mineral resources, a new mine should soon be opened. Of course, the direct effects in terms of employment of women will be few. What is certain, however, is that **more resources in circulation mean more investment in the service sector (which often employs women)**. We only hope that the provisions to control the pandemic do not lead to new restrictions on the opening of accommodation services (bars and restaurants), especially in Asmara and Massawa, because this would add a further element of suffering for the employment of Eritrean women.

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