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ACCOMMODATING A TRAVELLING LIFE

A JOURNEY BACK HOME SUPPORTING PEERS

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The ATL closes with a meeting in Florence and giving voice to the peer supporters trained within the project

The last transnational meeting of the ATL project took place in Florence on the 27th and 28th of October. Two days full of experiences for which we have our Italian partners to thank profoundly, as they really let us get to know a hidden side of this city. A city full of art and history, visited by thousands of tourists every day, where many organisations work hard every day to support the city's many homeless and vulnerable people.

Besides the regular team meeting to finalise the project and explore potential ways to move forward, the team also had the opportunity to visit some of the above-mentioned organisations. We learnt about innovative integration programmes, explored street work with a peer supporter, and took part in the project's final International Conference organised by SMES Italia to make the project and its results known to the Italian stakeholders.

First stop: *La Fenice* Day Centre, where holistic assistance is provided to support homeless and other vulnerable people living in Florence, through a series of diversified services that aim to meet the different needs of the people asking for support. These people can access *La Fenice* in three different ways: direct access through the 'first contact interview' and the issuing of an access card, registration or day reception. Through the day reception people have access to services covering their basic needs, such as showering, laundry, psychiatric and psychological support as well as support to start a pathway to recovery from conditions of severe socio-economic deprivation.



ATL project partners visiting the *Albergo Popolare* in Florence

After walking for fifteen minutes we reached *Progetto Arcobaleno*, an organization which offers shelter, legal counselling, protection programmes, vocational training and employment counselling. Open 24/7, it offers accommodation, accompaniment to external services, specialised assistance for drug addicts and victims of trafficking, language courses and vocational trainings. Many cultural activities also take place, such as readings and lectures on topics of interest to the shelter residents, contributing to their process of regaining their self-esteem and the right to a dignified life.

The visit ended in the Java Centre. This is a service located in the heart of the city and runs until late at night. Their aim is to create a safe space where an initial contact and trust can be gained with people suffering from drug addiction and other issues. They have a street outreach team in which a peer supporter trained in the framework of the ATL project is currently collaborating. He goes with the outreach team in their interventions to try to create a bridge between people and services. The team also collaborates with a medical organisation that provides health services, in connection with the National Health System. This networking enables efficient and quality services to be offered.

The day ended with another experience worth sharing. The Italian members organised for us a visit with AMIR, an association composed of a team of archaeologists who have initiated a programme in which refugees and migrants are trained as museum guides and share their perspective on art. We had the pleasure to attend a guided tour in the *Museo degli Innocenti*.

On the 28th of October, the project's final international conference took place. SMES Italia organised a brilliant Conference attended by professionals from the sector, as well as authorities and decision-makers. We had the opportunity to listen to the stories of three people who participated in the ATL training and that are currently collaborating as peer supporters. All of them told us what motivated them to start this program and how they felt during and after the training. In the next page, we report some words of Francesco.



Final International Conference of the ATL project in Florence

"It was not easy to step into the shoes of the peer supporter perhaps because when you face new things in life you tend to be afraid and fear that you are not up to it. There were critical issues for me both during the internship and during the training. My biggest fear was that I was in a role where I would risk deceiving these people by promising a way out of a situation that is in itself complicated: social services do not offer great opportunities to get out of homelessness. I can state this from my own experience."

"Basically, I believe that if a person can, even for just 5 minutes in his daily life, among 1000 obstacles to face, forget the difficulties and feel heard, this can make a difference and be a relief and a small victory for the peer supporter."

"As peer supporters, we must try to approach service users with kindness and openness, being able to assess the various factors that may have influenced making the person homeless; being able to identify the difficulties that these people are going through, without forgetting that there are many factors that can determine this situation and that nobody in our society is safe from the risk of finding him or herself homeless."

"It is important that peer support happens by always trying to convert the people receiving the support into true protagonists of their recovery journey and by ensuring that they gain control of their lives."

The project results

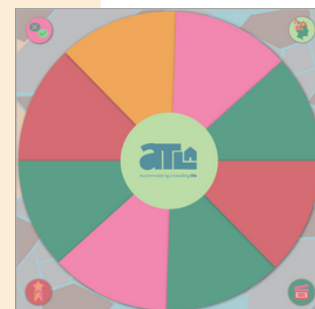
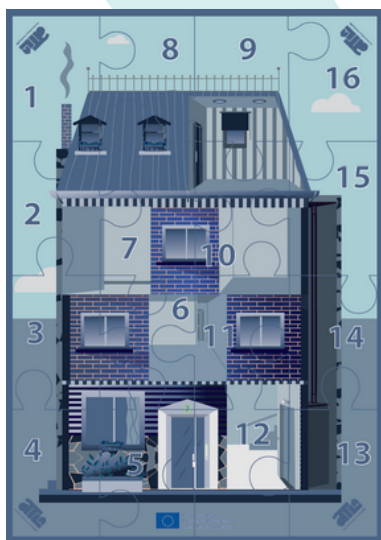
After more than two years of collaboration (2020-2022), although the period was rather complicated due to Covid-19, the project team successfully completed its activities and achieved the expected results. The project was coordinated by the INTRAS Foundation (Spain), while 5 other organisations participated as partners: Restorative Justice for All International Institute (UK), Caritas Archidiecezji Warszawskiej (Poland), SMES Italia - Mental Health and Social Exclusion (Italy), Helsingin Diakonissalaitoksen Saatio SR (Finland), Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos (Greece).

Different training materials have been developed collaboratively by a multidisciplinary team composed by professionals from the partner organizations (psychologists, social workers, educators, nurses, project managers..). A trainer curriculum has been produced to train professionals working with homeless people on peer support and how to introduce peer supporters in their organizations.



A training programme has been produced to provide those professionals with step-by-step instructions to train people with experience of homelessness to become JCS, Journey Certified Supporters, and another manual has been specifically designed as an additional resource to support future peer supporters during the training sessions. In addition, a board game has been designed to promote the assimilation of the contents of the training program and provide future peer supporters with the possibility to practice that role in a safe environment. A virtual version of this educational game has also been developed.





Training courses have been carried out in 5 European countries (Spain, Greece, Italy, Poland, Finland) to test the training materials. A total of 73 professionals and 56 peer supporters have been trained. The results of these training actions have been very positive, especially because the homeless people who have participated have highlighted that the training has been very motivating and has given them the hope of being able to take advantage of their life experience to help other people. Many experiences were exchanged between professionals and peer supporters in different countries, from Southern to Northern Europe. Multipliers events took place in all countries of the partners in order to disseminate the results of the project. This is a key point of every Erasmus+ Project: to bring together the European citizens.

Thanks to the ATL project, it has been possible to offer people with experience of homelessness a chance to be trained and to make the most of the knowledge derived from their own life experience. The training has allowed them to improve a series of personal and transversal competences necessary to support peers on their way to recovery on a voluntary basis, but it has also allowed them to improve their employability.

The results of the project and the findings of the pilot can be used as evidence-based proof to lobby policy makers to integrate the work of peer workers into the design of policies for homeless people and thus create services that better meet their needs and diversity. The project materials provide a comprehensive methodology for the inclusion of peer workers in terms of fair and effective participation. Thanks to this project we have the basis to believe that the integration of peer operators in services for homeless people can improve the effectiveness of care and continuity of services.

All the training materials developed are available on the [project website](#), so that professionals working in this sector can use them to train themselves and future peer supporters.

Project Partners



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