

# Italian network ReTe AIDS: telephone intervention based on counselling skills for the prevention of HIV and STIs

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## Introduction/Summary

- ReTe AIDS is a network of Helpline services managed by public and non-governmental organizations in various Italian regions. It was established in 2008 and is coordinated by the UO RCF - Istituto Superiore di Sanità, including 13 Helplines which provide primary and secondary prevention activities in the area of HIV and STIs throughout the national territory.
- The main characteristics of the users who accessed the ReTe AIDS Helplines in 2023 are reported herein, with a focus on their attitude to testing, and on the most addressed areas dealt with during the telephone counselling interventions.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of users of Helplines of ReTe AIDS

Helpline	Calls (N)	Questions (N)	Females	Males	Not Binary	Median Age [IQR]	Main group of users (%)
ANLAIDS Sez. Laziale – Roma	578	1490	106	471	1	37 [29-45]	Heterosexuals (41.5%)
ANLAIDS Sez. Lombarda G.V.M.A.S. – Milano	271	429	25	246		38 [32-45]	Heterosexuals (16.6%)
Associazione ARCOBALENO AIDS – Torino	75	269	4	71		37 [27-42]	Heterosexuals (61.3%)
ASA-Associazione Solidarietà AIDS Onlus – Milano	87	141	11	76		36 [27-41]	Not Risk Reporters (39.1%)
Associazione / Verein Pro Positiv Südtiroler AIDS HILFE	278	1223	92	184	2	36 [28-45]	Heterosexuals (74.1%)
Associazione Spazio Bianco A.I.D.S. - Perugia	1	3		1		42 [42-42]	Not reported
ATS Città metropolitana di Milano – Centro MTS	939	939	207	731	1	30 [27-35]	Heterosexuals (64.5%)
Segreteria AIDS - Caritas Ambrosiana - Milano	111	138	43	68		57 [44-57]	Not Risk Reporters (58.6%)
Filodiretto Telefono Verde AIDS Emilia Romagna-Bologna	1300	3011	221	1079		36 [27-45]	Not Risk Reporters (52.4%)
Telefono Verde AIDS e IST-Istituto Superiore Sanità-Roma	9083	33462	1280	7801	2	34 [28-43]	Heterosexuals (62.9%)
Unità HIV – Fondazione Villa Maraini Onlus – Roma	112	186	10	102		39 [27-46]	Heterosexuals (51.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>12835</b>	<b>41291</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>10830</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34 [28-43]</b>	<b>Heterosexuals (57.8%)</b>

## Study Design and Methods

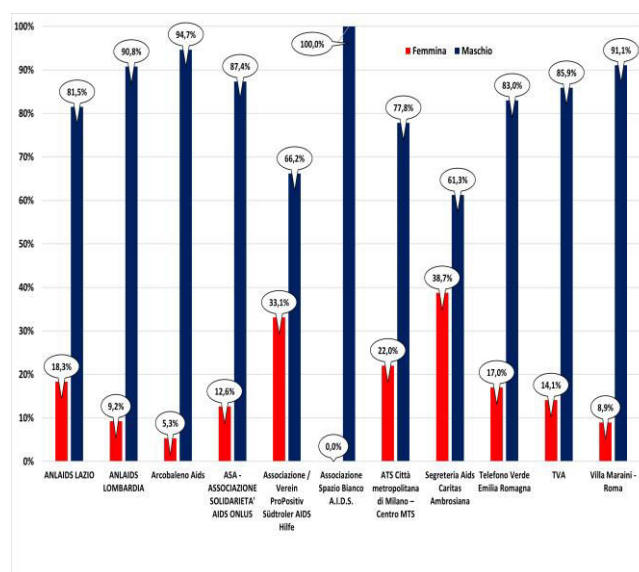
- The ReTe AIDS Helplines share the communicative-relational method applied in the telephone intervention. It is structured according to the basic skills of counselling, with a rigorous methodological procedure.
- A common data-entry software allows to catalog and archive the data emerging from telephone interventions, in a completely anonymous form. Only data related to the gender, age and geographic area of the user are collected. Information on risky behaviors and other questions arisen during the intervention are collected based on standardized and shared classification criteria.
- A descriptive analysis of calls received during 2023 was performed collecting aggregate data from 13 Helplines by means of the Access 365 software.

### \* Helplines included in ReTe AIDS

- ANLAIDS Sez. Laziale – Roma
- ANLAIDS Sez. Lombarda G.V.M.A.S. – Milano
- ASA-Associazione Solidarietà AIDS Onlus – Milano
- Associazione / Verein Pro Positiv Südtiroler AIDS HILFE - Bolzano
- Associazione ARCOBALENO AIDS ODV – Torino
- Associazione Spazio Bianco AIDS – Perugia
- Centro Giusy InformAIDS – Salerno
- Filodiretto-TELEFONO VERDE AIDS Emilia Romagna – Bologna
- ATS Città Metropolitana di Milano Centro MTS – Milano
- Linea Verde AIDS - ASL Napoli 1 Centro – Napoli
- Segreteria AIDS-Caritas Ambrosiana – Milano
- Telefono Verde AIDS e IST Istituto Superiore di Sanità – Roma
- Unità HIV – Fondazione Villa Maraini Onlus – Roma

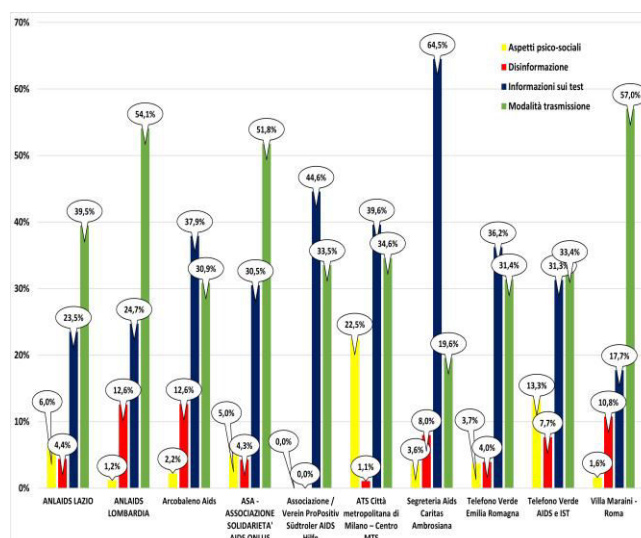
**Figure 1.**

Distribution of gender in users calling Helplines of ReTe AIDS



**Figure 2.**

Distribution of question topics in calls to Helplines of ReTe AIDS



## Results

- In the year 2023, 12,835 telephone calls were collected by the Helplines of the ReTe AIDS.
- Most calls (70.8%) arrived to Telefono Verde AIDS e IST of the Istituto Superiore di Sanità and 29.2% by the other Network Helplines. Most calls (63.0%) were the first ones by Helplines users, which were prevalently males (84.4%). The age ranges reported by users were mainly 25 – 29 years (19.6%), 30 – 34 years (17.8%), 35 – 39 years (14.6%).
- In 57.8% of the calls, the users reported heterosexual relations and in the 14.2% relations between men who have sex with men. The execution of the HIV test was reported in 58.6% of phone calls in consequence of risk behaviors, pregnancy, surgery or blood donation while in 24.1% of phone calls the test was never performed.
- In 2023, ReTe AIDS experts answered to 39,064 questions from users, focusing mainly on transmission ways of HIV and other STIs and on diagnostic procedures.

## Conclusions

- ReTe AIDS can be considered a national observatory for the study of users' needs in the field of HIV and other STIs, with the possibility of reporting the specific requests that emerge during each counselling intervention.
- The AIDS ReTe is a powerful tool to raise awareness and disseminating strategic Health information, through the involvement of professionals providing solid and up-to-date information, promoting effective prevention of STIs through healthy behaviors.
- The Network promotes the fight against the stigma and discrimination related to STIs, which is still very widespread in Italy, thus promoting a culture of inclusion and the promotion of testing for STIs.