

UPR The context :Italy 2020-2024

Since 2019, the issue of violence against women and the inadequacy of the de facto application of all available measures and laws on this issue has been increasingly at the forefront. This issue is visible in the data on the increase of violence among young people, the increase of sexual violence and online violence, as well as the stability of the number of feminicides that shows no signs of decrease after decades.

The governments and policies that followed before, during and after COVID have focused the debate on gender issues mainly by playing with the binomial or LGBTQ+ or 'natural family', and this debate has been to the detriment of women's rights, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Almost as if to symbolise that women in Italy have mistakenly achieved equality, accessing and exercising rights 'de jure and de facto'. This is not the case.

On the pretext of the low birth rate of women, family values are being invoked and women's self-determination is being restricted, including their reproductive rights, without providing any real social services for children from 0 to 5 or for the elderly and the chronically ill persons. The privatisation of health care falls on women's shoulders, and all this increasingly relegates them to the role of free primary caregivers instead of the Italian State.

Governments, in particular, have focused their women's policies on a liberal idea, promoting only an image/stereotype of women as leaders economically successful, as if all the others didn't exist, trapped in precarious jobs and affected by a wage gap that shows no sign of narrowing. This liberalist approach of successive governments can also be seen in the desire to focus mainly on fighting women's economic violence, as if getting out of it would be the solution to everything. On the contrary, we know that violence against women occurs simultaneously in different forms, in a cycle and an escalation that includes all of them: psychological violence, verbal violence, harassment, physical violence, sexual violence and certainly economic violence (but not only).

Climate change became the new challenge in the panorama of Italy as many other countries in the world but women do not play a relevant role at all in reducing the impact of the disaster or environmental pollution. Still they are not part of the change.

At a historical level, the gender approach has always been considered in an intermittent and residual way, and for this reason Italy still faces structural and long-standing problems and obstacles: despite existing laws, there is a lack of substantial protection of certain women's rights, and mechanisms for equal representation are still inadequate and weak.

More than anything else in this historic period, the training of justice system personnel in the field of prevention and the fight against violence would be fundamental.

Stereotype and gender discrimination

- Italy has not taken systematic action to promote changes in the stereotyped and unbalanced public perception of gender and to transform the patriarchal culture based on unequal and discriminatory power relations between women and men in every sphere of life.
- This patriarchal vision is gaining ground along with claims of demographic necessity that echo a sexist and homophobic reading of society that influences public opinion.
- In a survey conducted by the Chamber of Deputies together with Ipsos, about half of the respondents believe that women with small children should not work (53%) and just under half (44%) thinks that, even if they work, they should have the main responsibility for family care. https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_Ipsos_sintesi.pdf
- Sexist, discriminatory and stereotyped expressions and images, the degrading representation of the female body of all ages and gender roles persist in political debate, social media and commercial messages.
- Women in Italy are daily targeted by derogatory comments and face expressions of 'hate speech' that are neither denounced nor repressed by the government and are echoed in many mainstream and social media. According to Amnesty International Italy, in 2024 the amount of offensive discriminatory content (hate speech) grew to 15.3% and actual speech inciting hatred and violence tripled compared to previous years, exceeding 3%. Women are among the biggest targets of this wave of hate: personal attacks constituting hate speech for women are 1.5 times higher than for men and 1 in 10 comments directed at a woman are sexist. <https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-dellodio-delegittimare-il-dissenso/> <https://www.amnesty.en/barometer-of-hate-speech-sexism/>
- As noted by CEDAW on the 2024 Italy report, despite the adoption of Legislative Decree no. 208 of 2021, which gives the Authority for Guarantees in Communication (AGCOM) the power to sanction hate speech in audiovisual media services, the application of sanctions is still sporadic and surveillance and algorithmic profiling systems are practically absent.
- Minister of Education Valditara currently in office launched Directive No. 83 24 Nov 2023 to '*say "enough" to the residues of macho and machismo culture that contaminate our country*'. Through the 'Educating to Relationships' project with 30-hour modules for secondary grade schools in extracurricular hours, for the prevention and promotion of attitudes based on respect and equal opportunities, with an allocation of EUR 15 million from the POC and PN 'Schools and Skills' funds. There are no news of any organised and systematic initiatives activated in the last year. No teachers appear to have been trained and therefore no students specifically sensitised to the issue within the framework of this initiative. <https://www.tuttoscuola.com/educare-alle-relazioni-1-che-fine-ha-fatto-il-progetto-per-contrastare-la-violenza-sulle-donne/#:~:text=Educare%20alle%20Relazioni%2F4.&text=Lthe%20idea%20was%20that%20of%respect%20and%20equal%20opportunities%C3%A0.>

Recommendations

The Italian government should implement:

- A new inclusive, intercultural strategy that promotes the use of gender-sensitive language in the media and social media;
- Don't use birth rate demographic issues to overshadow women's rights to self-determination,
- Start awareness-raising campaigns aimed at eliminating and changing patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes about women and men and all other categories of people by including the different genders and multiple intersectionality that every Italian or migrant, asylum-seeker or refugee person carries.
- Adopt a national strategy to effectively counter incitement to racial hate, discrimination and violence against specific groups and women, combat stereotypes and promote intercultural understanding and diversity.
- Follow up CEDAW Recommendation No. 26 in particular in allocating adequate human, technical and financial resources for implementation in cooperation with the regions, and ensure the evaluation of sanctions imposed by the Communications Authority (AGCOM) in cases involving the use of discriminatory language against all women and hate speech;
- Studying and implementing a law to hold social media platforms accountable for user-generated content that offends the dignity of women as required by CEDAW;
- Reinforcing education programmes in schools at all levels on human rights, equality and respect between women and men and towards different genders, with a special focus on mitigating hate speech, stigmatisation and discrimination of women from an intercultural perspective and understanding diversity.

VAW and sexual violence-rape and femicide

- The internalisation of stereotypes that endorse subordination and violent behaviour by men towards women of all ages and backgrounds is the consequence of the non-existence of policies aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes. This is alarming, as shown by the ISTAT data collected in 2023. <https://www.istat.it/comunicato-stampa/stereotipi-di-genere-e-immagine-sociale-della-violenza-primi-risultati/>.
- In this context, the current Minister of Education and Merit recently stated that "we cannot pretend not to see that the increase in the phenomenon of sexual violence is also linked to forms of marginality and deviance that are in some way the result of illegal immigration". This statement not only disregards the fact that violence is a structural phenomenon rooted in our society, but at the same time fuels the already strong social stigma against foreigners, when statistically 80% of GBV is committed by Italian men, the husbands, partners or ex-husbands of the affected women. The problem is much greater. Migrant, asylum seeker and refugee women are not targeted by specific measures to facilitate their empowerment and exit from violence. There are no intercultural preventive and protective measures against specific forms of violence such as forced marriages, nor are migrant women consulted by equal opportunities departments.
- The latest report by the Ministry of the Interior (published in May 2024) shows that there are an average of 16 victims of sexual violence every day in Italy, more than six thousand a year, 91% of whom are women. According to 2023 data from the Central Directorate of the Criminal Police, 76% of victims of sexual violence and 73% of victims of gang rape are under 34 years old, and 36% of known alleged perpetrators are between 14 and 34 years old. What is worrying is the increase in violence against adolescent girls perpetrated by young men: The percentage of girl victims aged 14-17 years increased from 24 per cent in 2020 to 27 per cent in 2023. Gang rape is on the rise among girls.
- Police data shows that in 2023, the incidence of young victims (under 34) was 73% for gag rape, 100% for forced marriage and 38% for so-called revenge porn. <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/violenza-genere-e-percezione-fenomeno-i-giovani-report-servizio-analisi-criminale-dipartimento-ps-collaborazione-lautorita-linfanzia> Many teenagers have suffered or experienced violence from a very young age. Almost one in three young people report having received sexually oriented photos/videos from friends or acquaintances, and one in ten say they have posted/shared intimate photos without the consent of the person depicted. This feeds the cycle of violence and is consistently reflected in online crimes data collected by the Postal Police. A Save The Children report in February 2024 states that 40 per cent of teenagers say they check their partner's social contacts, devices or social profiles, while almost 30 per cent ask them to share their geolocation or social or phone passwords. https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/le-ragazze-stanno-bene_1.pdf
- Reports of online violence crimes (threats, harassment, online stalking and revenge porn), although increasing year on year, are still difficult to formalise, mainly because of a lack of serious awareness among the public opinion and women/girls, so that they are not considered serious enough to be reported by those who suffer them. Furthermore, there is a lack of real training in general and specialised services on online gender-based violence. Online crimes are an everyday form of violence and need to be assessed as a concrete threat to the safety of women as well as of the people affected by them in general. https://www.commissariatodips.it/docs/DOSSIER_8_DICEMBRE.pdf
- From 1 January to 17 November 2024, the Ministry of the Interior recorded 98 victims of femicide, 84 of whom were killed by an intimate partner; of these, 51 died at the hands of their partner/ex-partner. Despite this, femicide is still not defined as an aggravating circumstance or specific crime in Italian legislation. The possession of a firearm is considered a risk factor in cases of domestic violence and femicide. According to data collected by Non Una di Meno, in 2024 firearms were the second most common weapon used in femicides in Italy. <https://osservatorionazionale.nonunadimeno.net/anno/2024/>

Recommendations

- Since education is at the root of stereotypes and discriminatory behaviour, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against women and others, schools as an institution should overcome the stereotype of sexuality as a taboo that cannot be talked about and provide adequate education on the subject, including on consensual and non-violent sexuality. To date, no action has been taken on CEDAW's requests in its 2024 report to Italy in Recommendation No. 36-c), in which it urges the provision of comprehensive and age-appropriate sex education on sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls and boys, as well as on responsible sexual behaviour and the prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in Italy. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/cedawcitaco8-concluding-observations-eighth-periodic-report-italy>
- Promoting preventive and protective measures against all forms of violence, including forced marriage and FGM, in consultation with migrant women and their organisations.
- Italy must launch awareness-raising campaigns to recognise online violence as a real danger and a crime to be reported. More training should be provided for all general and specialised services on this new form of violence, as on all other forms of violence, especially for the judiciary.
- -Over a period of 40 years, the rates of femicide and very serious injury from attempted femicide have remained essentially constant, despite a ten-year decline in the number of general homicides in the country. Italy should initiate an analysis of the femicides that have occurred in order to understand how to improve its policies and coordinated actions aimed at eliminating violence and femicides.
- -The Ministry of the Interior, which collects administrative data on homicides, does not provide figures to understand how many gender homicides are committed with firearms. Furthermore, the Ministry does not publish information on the exact number of firearms in circulation in Italy, including the total number of licences issued and still valid.

Facts and issue on women's work life balance and welfare

- The gender gap is the disparity between men and women in various areas of social, economic and political life. In Italy, this gap persists in a worrying way, hindering the individual and collective growth of the whole country. This inequality manifests itself in various areas, with a significant impact on the world of work. In 2023, our country ranks 79th out of the 146 nations analysed, a deterioration compared to the previous year. This figure highlights the persistence of significant gender gaps, particularly in terms of economic participation, education and leadership opportunities. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>
- The recognition of full equality between men and women is enshrined in Articles 3, 4 and 37 of the Constitution. However, women still earn less than men and the government has not yet taken any measures to close the gender pay gap. According to data from the INPS Observatory on Private Sector Employees, the average annual salary is consistently higher for the male gender, with a difference of 7,922 euros (26,227 euros for men versus 18,305 euros for women). These pay differences also have a major impact on women's choices, forcing them to choose between private and professional life, to accept part-time work or to stay at home if their partner earns more (as is usually the case). <https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/PP004LA.pdf>
- Economic independence is one of the key factors in curbing gender-based violence and giving women the chance to escape the cycle of violence. According to a survey conducted by the Chamber of Deputies in cooperation with Ipsos, 33% of respondents (39% of female respondents) cited economic dependence on a violent partner as the main reason why women do not report violence. In addition, 40% of respondents believe that the most appropriate tools to combat violence against women are financial tools to help women gain economic independence from their abusers. 83% of respondents like the idea of a state fund for women victims of violence to ensure that they can regain their economic independence. At the same time, the Freedom Fund is not a real and empowering measure, is not enough for all survivors and depends on the judgement of the church-based organisation. https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_Ipsos_sintesi.pdf
- According to Eurostat data updated to 2022, female employment in Italy is around 50 per cent (about one woman in two does not work), falling dramatically in some southern regions such as Sicily (30.5 per cent), Campania (30.6 per cent), Calabria (31.8 per cent) and Apulia (35.4 per cent), where only one woman in three works. The difference with male employment is more than 20 percentage points. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFST_R_LFE2EMPRTN_custom_6470982/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=77d577f1-8b00-47ea-9f5b-b6e26432b489
- The high number of women who leave the labour market after giving birth (one in five, according to Save the Children's 2024 report on maternity in Italy) is due to the lack of family and childcare support structures, such as babysitting and after-school services, and the lack of support programmes for new mothers to facilitate their reintegration into the world of work. In addition, there is still a lack of work-life balance tools for men, who make too little use of paternity leave and do not share adequately in parental responsibilities. <https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/le-equilibriste-la-maternita-italia-nel-2024>

Recommendations

Therefore, we recommended that the Italian government:

- Ensure structural investments to reduce the huge female employment gap between the regions of North and South and reduce, in particular, the growing poverty among young women and single mothers;
- Redefine the welfare system from a gender perspective, so as to move from the present family-oriented Mediterranean model to a universal one.
- Ensure major social protection to women working in precarious job and precarious working conditions.
- Appropriate government policies and sanctions are needed to eliminate the costs of the gender gap in the labour market. Report to Parliament on the state of the gender pay gap (GPG) and the pension gap is needed.
- Monitor and facilitate the use of obligatory paternity leave for men. Elaborate solid measures to avoid women's leaving work at the birth of children unless is a voluntary decision;
- Policies for work/life balance should be improved, and the provision of services for 0- 5 years should be increased to a coverage of 33% throughout the country as part of the universal right to education, and therefore be free of charge;
- Increase the provision of public or mixed public/private services of long-term support/assistance for the disabled and elderly, whether requiring long-term care or not. The Government needs to augment the state fund for social policies and intervene.

Climate change and environmental pollution

- Women living in the so-called 'land of pyres' reported higher levels of bisphenol A in their blood and follicular fluids, as well as high levels of polychlorobiphenes (PCBs), chemicals found in plastics and thought to be carcinogenic. The area has also been found to have an abortion rate that is three times higher than that of other neighbouring areas. <https://www.sanitainformazione.it/salute/sostanze-chimiche-e-cancerogene-nelle-giovani-donne-della-terra-dei-fuochi-a-rischio-la-fertilita/>
- Concerning PFAS, the Veneto Region has disseminated a series of information on the incidence of pollution, showing how certain female pathologies, such as altered menstrual cycle, endometriosis, difficulties in conceiving, miscarriages, premature and underweight births, can be correlated with PFAS interfering with progesterone, the hormone that regulates uterine functions. <https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/pfas-alterano-ciclo-mestruale-fertilita-donne>
- In addition to the effects of pollution and toxic waste, Italian women are also affected by the consequences of climate change. Italy is experiencing extreme weather events and climatic disasters such as floods, droughts and heat waves. How climate change affects women more negatively in many ways is illustrated by a report from the Tuscany region. <https://www.ars.toscana.it/clima-e-popolazioni-vulnerabili/crisi-climatica-e-disuguaglianze-di-genere.html>
- There is also a correlation between climate disasters and higher rates of gender-based violence. After losing their homes, many women are forced to sleep on the streets. Girls are separated from their parents and live with acquaintances or unfamiliar adults. Overcrowding and the lack of safe spaces for children increase the risk of abuse.
- The escalation of violence in the aftermath of a disaster does not only take place at the hands of strangers, but also in a domestic context. "The fight against climate change is not just a fight to keep our planet livable," wrote several experts in a recent post on the United Nations Development Programme blog, "for many women, climate change can be a trigger for violence. " <https://www.actionaid.it/blog/catastrofi-naturali-violenza-donne>

Recommendations

Therefore, we recommended that the Italian government:

- To implement policies in all polluted areas of the country to prevent their further deterioration and to stop the consequences and negative impacts on the health of all people, and in particular on the reproductive, neonatal and child health of women.
- Collect and disseminate data on the health consequences for women and girls living in highly polluted areas in Italy.
- To develop specific research on the consequences and development of diseases and deformities of people living in highly polluted areas, in particular research should be differentiated between women and men, because until now research has been mainly carried out on men and deformities than men. Women have different hormones and anatomy, which is why gender medicine should be a priority for research.
- Women should be put at the centre of climate change programmes. Their leadership should be recognised to guide the development of local communities and to access resources to develop responses to manage their polluted or climate-disaster-affected lands to reduce risks and health impacts.
- Planned specific VAW measures and responses during the climate disaster management situations.

Thanks

- We hope the mentioned recommendations will be taken into consideration and accepted in accordance with the Italian Government's mandate to uphold the rights of the people, women at all ages living in Italy .