

Statement on Universal Periodic Review of Italy

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom , Fondazione Pangea onlus, Be Free cooperative, Filomena - La rete delle donne, Unione Donne in Italia and other Italian NGO submitted a report jointly.

I will outline the issues addressed in the UPR submission and the report on women's rights only briefly. Please refer to the full versions of these documents, which are available at the back of the room, for more information especially regarding our recommendations.

I will start by giving you a bit of context. Since July 2018, Italy has witnessed the revamping of a ferocious public debate on the so-called natural family, and the strengthening of institutional support to conservative policy fora (such as the Fertility Day campaigns). For example, the controversial the World Congress of Family, which met in Verona in March 2019) was deliberately used by government members to pursue an anti-gender, and ultimately anti-women, agenda. A new government with a centrist agenda came to power in September 2019. Despite some positive public pronouncements and appointments, its policies are obviously untested. Historically, Government's attention to a gender-oriented approach-also pertaining to sexual orientation-is intermittent and residual. In fact, many of the problems described in our reports are long-standing.

Consequently, equality policies with their requisite inclusiveness, coherence over time and adequate financial backing are sorely lacking. A key example of that is that, despite existing laws, equal representation mechanisms are still inadequate and weak.

Some of the issues raised in our reports are:

Stereotype and gender discrimination

Italy has not undertaken systematic action aimed at promoting changes in the stereotyped and unbalanced public perception of genders, and at transforming the patriarchal culture based on unequal and discriminatory power relations between women and men in every sphere of life.

Increasingly, political vision aimed at pushing women away from the public sphere and lock them in traditional family roles is gaining traction among disaffected, but very vocal and growing constituencies for populist, sexist and homophobic demagoguery.

You can see our recommendations on this point on the slide.

Violence against women, femicide and firearms, arms transfers.

On average, every 72 hours a woman is killed in gender-related violence in Italy (on average 120 women per year), usually at the hands of a partner, former partner or relative.

The administrative data collection systems concerning victims of gender-based violence and femicide of Ministries of Justice, Interior and Health are not in line with the provisions of the

Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Possession of a firearm is a risk factor in cases of domestic violence and femicide. This is the case for Italy where, for example, the research institute EURES reported that firearms were used in 28% of cases of domestic violence against women that resulted in death between 2010 and 2014, representing the third most common weapon in femicides in Italy. In 2018 alone, 28 femicides were committed with legally held firearms. It is for this reason that our organisations highlighted serious concerns around the loosening of regulations on the acquisition and use of guns in Italy.

We also raised concerns around the new law on self-defence adopted in 2018 which broadens the legal grounds for private persons to apply lethal force for self-defence stating that “defence is always legitimate” and “the proportionality always exists” between the offence and the defence, making the latter not punishable. Abolishing the principle of proportionality in self-defence regulation is contrary to Italy’s human rights obligations, including under the ICCPR. In this regard, we are recalling the General Comment 36 on the right to life of the UN Human Rights Committee.

You can see the recommendations on the slide.

With regard to weapons, I draw your attention to the fact that our report contains a section specifically on human rights impact of Italy’s arms transfers. We have highlighted that Italy has been the 9th largest arms exporters for the period 2014-2019 and has undertaken arms export agreements with countries involved in the conflict in Yemen, including Saudi Arabia. In our report we recall, among other things, that the CEDAW Committee made recommendations to Italy specifically on issue of regulation of arms transfers.

You can see the recommendations on the slide.

VAW: national and regional mechanism

The lack of coordination between the central and regional governments hampers:

- the action of existing local networks on VAW,
- the timely distribution of financial resources, the transparency on distribution and use of it .

All these weaknesses expose women to a secondary victimization because often it is difficult to access timely to adequate support and protection services, public operators are not enough trained on VAW its causes and consequences; financial resources remain wholly inadequate to meet the demand of specialized women services to ensure the complex task to support and empower survivors.

The Strategic National Action Plan against sexual violence and gender-based violence 2017-2020 envisaged a series of integrated policies but it has limited resources allocated by all ministries to implement it.

VAW and Access to Justice

Access to justice for women living violence is hindered by various reasons and creates secondary victimization. As an example the access to free legal aid is not ensured to all women as required by law 119/2013.

Operators involved in the Investigative and Judicial system lack of knowledge and specialization on VAW issues and often they misunderstand situations of domestic violence with conflicts within the family.

Among criminal and civil courts No info and documents are shared on the same case of crime/divorce/children rights. It is no coincidence that **mediation is not expressly forbidden**, and children witnessing violence is a condition rarely considered in civil courts when defining domestic violence and **custody and visitation rights of perpetrator** without considering his violent record, on the contrary women are stigmatized for PAS (Parental Alienation Syndrome), despite the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee.

Finally, women belonging to vulnerable groups are exposed to greater risk of violence and multiple forms of discrimination, and they encounter greater difficulties in accessing the justice and protection systems, which are not equipped and trained to understand the complexity of their lives.

You can see the recommendations on the slide.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

From 2009 to 2017, investment in health has increased by a meagre 0.6%, with a loss of 70,000 beds and a radical block of turnover. Women's access to health, including to sexual and reproductive health and rights has been negatively impacted by a number of issues outlined in our documents. Access to emergency contraception is made difficult. Moreover, almost 70% of Italian doctors refuse to carry out abortions on 'conscientious objection' grounds. This is something that the European Committee for Social Rights of the Council of Europe has twice recognised the virtual non-application of the law due to the public health system caregivers' objections. It is also worth noting that a mounting trend of migrant women resorting to illegal forms of abortions has emerged in different parts of the country. Sexual education and contraception campaigns are the two aliens in public health policy and measures.

You can see the recommendations on the slide.

Environmental disasters and women's health

In a country endowed with considerable environmental problems there is no official gender-specific analysis of the impact and the health risks caused by environmental disasters nationally. The reality of heavily contaminated industrial plants such as the ILVA steel plant in Taranto, and the presence of areas of toxic waste discharge, like the so-called Land of Fires (*Terra dei Fuochi*), have produced a very serious and well-known environmental emergency, as well as a health one, whose impact on women is harshest. No measures have been adopted to address this and no plan has been put in place to either close the plants or clean the heavily polluted zones, despite the principle of precaution enshrined in European norms.

Concerns around trafficking, gendered impacts of the response to migration flows

Today, early identification, support and protection for all victims of trafficking are at serious risk of being gravely restricted due to the so-called decree on migration. They encounter greater difficulties in accessing the justice and protection systems, which are not equipped and trained to understand the complexity of their lives in a gender perspective.

Women's access to work and welfare

Women in Italy earn less than men, and as of now, the government has not enacted any measure to try to overcome the gender pay gap. These wage differences also have a major impact on women's choices forcing them to choose between private and professional sphere, choosing part time job or stay home if men earn more (as usual). Traditional gender roles and stereotypes limit the women access to, and permanence in, the job market as do discrimination and barriers to their careers and in the working environment.

NAP on UNSCR 1325

Italy is implementing its third National Action Plan for the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325/2000 and subsequent related resolutions (NAP1325), which covers the period 2016-2019. Although Italy's commitment to Women Peace and Security agenda is welcomed, in our submission, we have highlighted gaps in Italy's current National Action Plan.

Women space's rights

The survival of women's hard-won spaces in Italy now under threat is a key issue. In particular, the Case delle Donne at risk in Rome carry nation-wide implications and may set an example for the rest of the country. Placed at the political and geographic center of the country, women's organizations in the Capital have often played a catalyst role in women's advancement in Italy. Actions that place them in jeopardy have already reverberated negatively in other parts of the country.