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CONTRASTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
IN ITALY:
TEN YEARS OF INEFFECTIVE POLICIES

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List of abbreviations

BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women
CVPD	Centro Veneto Progetti Donna
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DPO	Department for Equal Opportunities
DV	Domestic Violence
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
GBV	Gender-based violence
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, Aromantic
MLD	Movement for Women's Liberation
NAP	National Action Plan
NGEU	Next Generation European Union
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NUDM	Not One Woman Less
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UDI	Union of Italian Women
UN	United Nations
VAW	Violence against Women

Abstract

La violenza contro le donne è indiscutibilmente una questione politica, trae infatti origine dalla disparità di potere tra uomo e donna. Si tratta di un fenomeno globalmente diffuso, nonostante ciò, continua ad essere ampiamente ignorato e relegato a questione di secondaria importanza dalle forze politiche. In tal senso il caso italiano è particolarmente esemplificativo e merita perciò una specifica analisi. Lo scopo è quello di rispondere alle seguenti domande: perché l'Italia non riesce a contrastare la violenza contro le donne? È opportuno affermare che il Governo italiano negli ultimi dieci anni ha adottato solo politiche inefficaci?

La tesi è articolata in tre parti; la prima riguarda esclusivamente lo scenario europeo e si pone l'obiettivo di contestualizzare il fenomeno. A tal fine fornisce dati rispetto alla sua pervasività e al quadro legislativo sviluppato in materia. Segue poi un secondo capitolo che analizza in maniera approfondita il contesto italiano, con focus specifico sulla problematica cultura patriarcale da cui trae origine la violenza contro le donne. Più precisamente, viene studiato il considerevole impatto che gli stereotipi di genere hanno sulla formazione dell'identità delle bambine, e vengono riportate considerazioni rispetto al ruolo dei media, colpevoli di veicolare un'immagine stereotipata della donna e ruoli di genere. Questa parte è funzionale alla comprensione delle motivazioni che portano il Governo italiano a continuare ad adottare un approccio emergenziale ed isolato nel contrasto alla violenza di genere: vi è un'incapacità culturale a concepire il problema. La tesi si conclude con un capitolo dedicato, da una parte, alla presentazione dei centri anti-violenza e alla valorizzazione del loro ruolo fondamentale nel sistema anti-violenza. Dall'altra, analizza e critica le politiche in atto per contrastare la violenza contro le donne in Italia, prestando particolare attenzione ai quattro piani nazionali anti-violenza adottati tra il 2011 e il 2022, alla loro inadeguatezza e provata inefficacia.

In conclusione, questo lavoro ha provato la necessità e urgenza di modificare strutturalmente le politiche pubbliche in generale, poiché non è più accettabile che misure riguardanti la prevenzione e contrasto del fenomeno siano incluse solo in documenti che trattano esclusivamente questa materia. Inoltre, vi è l'impellente bisogno di avviare un profondo cambiamento culturale perché se non si interviene alla radice del problema, limitandosi invece a produrre altre politiche frammentarie, isolate e non integrate, donne

continueranno a subire molestie, ad essere picchiate e addirittura uccise per il semplice fatto di essere donne.

Introduction

Almost nine years after the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), Italy continues to contrast violence against women through an emergency-based approach. Undeniably, the country has taken some step forwards in the (still long) path towards gender equality, which constitutes a prerequisite for the elimination of gender-based violence against women. However, they are not enough to eradicate a phenomenon deeply embedded in the Italian patriarchal culture.

My work aims at demonstrating that in the last ten years the Italian government adopted and implemented only ineffective policies to prevent and combat violence against women. I decided to focus on the last ten years of policies for a twofold reason: on the one side, Italy adopted its first National Action Plan to combat gender-based violence and stalking only in 2011. On the other side, in the first decade of 21st century the country was still characterized by low levels of awareness also due to the non-recognition of violence against women as a structural and systematic problem and the limited commitment of political forces to prevent and eradicate it. In other words, relevant changes can be appreciated after 2010 and therefore it would have been pointless to center my work on both decades.

Looking at the methodology, I analyzed both institutional data and reports written by civil society: I employed the former to explain in detail the efforts put by Italy to deal with the phenomenon. Whereas the latter helped me to examine critically institutional documents and actions, considering their concrete impact on the lives of women victims of violence. Furthermore, I largely included statistical data in each chapter to support my research question; through this strategic use of statistics, I was able to develop a structured work based on scientific sources. With regards to my references, I would like to specify that I carefully selected them, trying my best to give space to female authors whom capacities and talent continues to be underestimated and their voices silenced.

Before briefly introducing the structure of my work, it is opportune to clarify that my thesis does not presume to be exhaustive, indeed I am aware of its limitations both in terms of contents and language used. Precisely, I just touch upon the multiple discriminations experienced for example by migrant, black, old, trans women and women with disability. I firmly believe that it is necessary to investigate more the way in which

different typologies of discrimination intersects and to fix the lack of data on these groups of women.

Considering the language, it must be clear up that when using the word 'woman' I refer to the socially constructed category of gender, which implies that I include also trans women. In addition, women are not a homogeneous group, but rather a heterogeneous one and therefore each of them has distinct specific characteristics and needs. Nevertheless, in the text I identify them all in a unique general group for practical issues, so I mainly employed the general term 'women', making only few exceptions.

In relation to the structure of my thesis, it is divided into three chapters: after a general analysis of violence against women in the European context there is a focus on Italy with a detailed examination of the four National Action Plans adopted between 2011 and 2022 to combat gender-based violence. The first chapter provides a definition of the phenomenon, together with precise data on its extent, which are followed by an investigation of public perception of violence against women as a social problem. Then I pay attention to European cultural framings of the phenomenon emphasizing the inadequate protection reserved to immigrant women, minority ethnic women, black women, refugees and asylum seekers and the many obstacles they face in getting support and actual help. This first part concludes with an excursus of the evolution of the EU legal and policy framework on violence against women, making reference also to the advancements in gender equality.

The next chapter concentrates on Italy, dealing with the Italian patriarchal culture. Precisely, it brings into sharp focus gender stereotypes which are at the base of violence against women. In this way it is possible to get a comprehensive understanding of the detrimental impact of stereotypes on society. Furthermore, this second part aims at emphasizing the symbolic patriarchal violence reproduced by the media, which not only perpetuate the stereotyped image of women and gender roles but also invisibilize them. Finally, there is a section dedicated to data collection which makes reference mainly to the official data reported by the National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT).

After a detailed explanation of the Italian cultural scenario and the analysis of the scale of violence against women, I decided to end my work paying particular attention to the Italian legislative framework. Thanks to Law n.66/1996 sexual violence passed from being an offence against public moral and common sense to an offence against personal

freedom. Since it constituted a turning point, I used it as starting point for my excursus of the main legislative changes concerning the Italian regulation on violence against women. Before concluding the chapter with the examination of the four Nation Action Plans, there is a crucial focus on the media narration of the phenomenon. This paragraph puts specific attention on the Manifesto of Venice and the urgency of a monitoring center since the Manifesto alone is not enough. To conclude the thesis and finally give an answer to my research question, I included in the last part a critical study on the public policies adopted by Italy to combat and prevent violence against women.

CHAPTER I

1. Violence against women in the EU

1.1 Violence Against Women¹: defining the phenomenon

Violence against women is a globally spread phenomenon that represents a critical hindrance to gender equality. As stated by the European Parliament in a resolution, in which it called for a European Union large-scale campaign for zero acceptance of Violence Against Women in 1998, it is endemic and constitutes “a formidable barrier to overcoming inequalities between women and men”² In that circumstance the Parliament claimed that gender-based violence against women is “a violation of women’s right to life, safety, liberty, dignity, and physical and mental integrity and therefore an obstacle to the development of a democratic society”³.

These strong affirmations suggest a raising awareness among the EU institutions of the seriousness of the situation and the urgency to intervene effectively. Nevertheless, more than twenty years after, the European Union still lacks a comprehensive EU political framework on ending VAW. Thus, the Member States have tackled the problem through different approaches. Besides the necessity to strengthen EU policy in this field, the EU has not adopted its own definition of violence against women yet. To understand what the EU intend for this term, we need to make reference to the definitions provided by the UN and the Council of Europe.⁴

In December 1993 the General Assembly of the UN proclaims in Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women that

For the purposes of this Declaration, the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or

¹ Since violence against women is increasingly addressed as ‘gender-based violence’, I am going to use the two terms interchangeably.

² Europe: 1999 to be Year Vs. Violence Vs. Women, *Off Our Backs*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (June 1998), p. 7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20836106> . Accessed: 28-12-21

³ Ibid.

⁴ The EU signed both the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). Moreover, the EU started the process for its accession to the Istanbul Convention.

psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

This definition, that follows the 1992 General Recommendation No. 19⁵ of the CEDAW Committee, is extremely relevant because it is the first the international community agreed on. After clarifying the expression, the Declaration covers the various forms VAW can take; it provides a detailed, but not exhaustive, exemplification of the three different forms of violence above-mentioned. In defining these three typology of violence it is crucial to underline and keep in mind that the line between them is not clear-cut and then they intersect (EIGE, 2017).

Article 2

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Nearly all Member States consider most of these forms as criminal offences but there are great disparities in the definitions of such crimes. For example, they all agree on criminalizing rape but they diverge with regards to the circumstances of lack of consent and the nature of the sexual acts covered.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action⁶ (1995) specifies other circumstances that fall into the category of VAW. Precisely,

⁵ “Gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty (Article 6). It is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men (Article 1).”

⁶ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted in 1995 at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, is regarded as the international ‘Bill of Rights’ for women. It

Other acts of violence against women include violation of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy. (Article 114)

Acts of violence against women also include forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/ forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection. (Article 115)

But we have to wait the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence⁷ for the recognition of a fourth typology of violence, that is economic violence⁸. This form, that is mainly used in the context of intimate partner violence, is not covered in the legal definitions of all Member States of the EU.⁹ As EIGE found in its *Study on terminology and indicators for data collection* (2017) only fifteen Member States mention economic violence in their definition, this proves that this typology is still a debated issue. In its *Glossary of definitions of rape, femicide and intimate partner violence* EIGE proposes the following definition:

Any act or behaviour which causes economic harm to the partner. Economic violence can take the form of, among others, property damage, restricting access to financial resources, education or the labour market, or not complying with economic responsibilities, such as alimony.¹⁰

Considering the spread and increasing use of internet-connected devices, social media and technology, it is essential to highlight a new serious dimension of VAW that is the digital one. As a consequence of the extremely high frequency of manifestations of gender-based violence online and in the digital sphere, intergovernmental organizations and international monitoring bodies started to pay more and more attention to the issue. Indeed, the urgency to contrast it, led GREVIO, Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, to publish its first General Recommendation on the digital dimension of violence against women on 24th November 2021. This document is particularly relevant because GREVIO specifies that acts of

recognizes women's rights as human rights and establishes concrete targets concerning issues that impact critically on women and girls.

⁷ The Istanbul Convention represents the most significant, all-encompassing and advanced legally binding instrument on VAW in Europe.

⁸ Actually, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women its causes and consequences, established in 1994, had already dealt with economic violence before the Istanbul Convention.

⁹ BE, BG, CZ, HR, IT, LT, HU, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI.

¹⁰ EIGE's proposed definition takes into consideration the feedback of representatives of MS, international organizations and independent experts that participated to a consultation meeting that took place in Vilnius in April 2016.

violence against women perpetuated in the digital sphere are included among the expressions of VAW encompassed by the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, in the recommendations it states the necessity “to acknowledge violence against women in its digital dimension as a continuum of violence against women offline, which forms part of gender-based violence against women” (GREVIO, 2021, p. 13). Indeed, these two forms of violence are not mutually exclusive but can even overlap with one another, aggravating the impact violence has on the mental and physical well-being of the woman.

Although every woman has a high probability to face violence in the digital sphere, it is essential to underline that some women are more exposed to such violence, among others, for their gender identity, sexual orientation, race¹¹, disability, political opinion or religion. Specifically, young women aged from 18 and 29 are particularly at risk of experiencing online violence due to their frequent use of internet and their active participation on social media platforms.

1.2 Data collection: estimating the extent of the phenomenon

Violence against women still constitutes a critical problem in Europe. On the one side, estimations of its impact on women’s health together with its repercussions on the whole community suggests that VAW concerns everyone. Economically speaking, it is a considerable burden on society. Specifically, the EIGE has calculated that in the EU the costs of intimate partner violence could amount to €109 billion per year (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2014). Considering VAW comprehensively, in 2011 the direct and indirect costs¹² were quantified for €228 billion in the EU (Vázquez, Aizpurua, Copp, & Ricarte, 2021).

On the other side, statistics on the extent of the phenomenon urge an immediate change of course in tackling VAW, or rather, a serious commitment of EU Member States to eradicating it and not just to pretend to do it.

According to a survey¹³ conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014 on a random sample of 42,000 women in all 28 Member States,

¹¹ By using race, I mean a group of people sharing a common cultural, geographical, linguistic or religious origin or background.

¹² The estimated costs have been calculated on the basis of the effects of VAW on medical care, psychological care, law enforcement, employment (sick leave) and Social Security systems.

¹³ This is the most exhaustive survey at the EU level that investigates women’s different experiences of violence, specifically, physical, sexual and psychological violence, stalking, sexual harassment and

one in three women (33%) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. Stalking victims amount to one in five women (18%) and slightly more than half (55%) of interviewed women has been victim of one or more forms of sexual harassment.¹⁴

For what concerns the scale of violence against women in its digital dimension, information is few and fragmented because of the absence of comprehensive data collection. However, there are some surveys and studies on specific forms of violence perpetrated online or through the use of technology that can be very useful for better comprehending the degree of this specific phenomenon. A 2014 report “Virtual World, Real Fear” issued by Women’s Aid discovered that 45% of women who experienced domestic violence told their partner abused them online during their relation and 48% of respondents affirmed they were victims of harassment or online abuse from their ex-partner after the relationship ended. In 2020 Plan International, a no-profit organization that deals with advancing children’s rights and equality for girls, conducted a survey with a sample of 14 000 young women aged from 15 to 25 coming from 22 different countries. According to it, 58% of women reported of having personally faced some form of online harassment on social media: more than half experienced abusive and insulting language; 26% received anti LGBTIQ+ comments and almost one third was subject of racist comments. Unfortunately, similar results are not surprising, as underscored before VAW is a universal phenomenon but some women are more exposed than others since they live multiple discriminations, which intersect. In the findings just mentioned it is clear that women are discriminated not only for their gender but also for their sexual orientation and their race.

These answers help understanding the gravity of the situation but they fail in conveying the current scale of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, they are surely more useful and realistic than administrative data, which are based on reported cases of VAW.

women’s experiences of abuse linked to new technologies. The survey’s ‘Questions and answers’ is available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2012/fra-survey-gender-based-violence-against-women>

¹⁴ Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention regards to sexual harassment as “any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.”

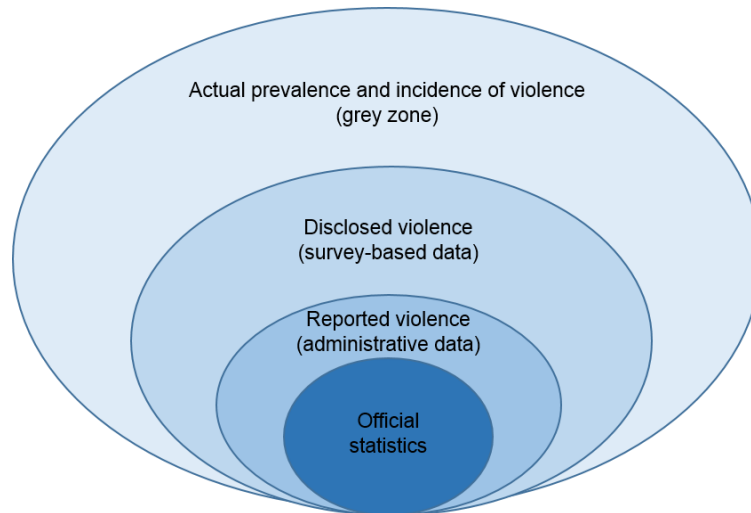
Since VAW remains largely under-reported, we can clearly conclude that data obtained from administrative institutions¹⁵ are not able to capture the actual prevalence and incidence of VAW. Notwithstanding, they are crucial for evaluating the response of public services to the needs of women victims of violence and to check how the trend of the phenomenon changes over time. In other words, administrative data play an essential role in the design and assessment of effective policies to prevent and contrast VAW across the EU. For this reason, it is imperative to improve the collection of data related to gender-based violence against women; this is not a recent, unexpected necessity, the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN had already recognized it in their commitment to eliminate VAW (EIGE, 2022).

Namely, all Member States should disaggregate data by sex of both the victim and perpetrator, type of relation between the two and form of violence. By specifying this information, it is possible to detect cases of VAW recognizing the cause of incidents and avoiding to confuse their nature. At the same time, it is indispensable to introduce an internationally agreed coding system to record data on gender-based violence employed within and across sectors for allowing further harmonization of administrative data. Considerable disparities in legal definitions of typologies of VAW and other associated terms represent another gap in data collection. These differences make it incredibly complex to measure the phenomenon in a comparable way and, consequently, they prevent to capture accurately the scale and effects of GBV across the EU.

To summarize, “eradicating gender-based violence within the EU is dependent on consistent and comparable data, acquired through a robust and coordinated framework of data collection” (EIGE, 2019).

Figure 1.1. The image shows the difference between actual prevalence and incidence of violence and disclosed violence, which includes survey-based data, administrative data and official statistics.

¹⁵ Examples of administrative institutions are the police, justice, or health and social services.



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/data-collection>)

The graphic shows our limited knowledge of the extent of this long-lasting and deeply-rooted phenomenon. The amplitude of the so called grey zone is alarming and the low levels of reported violence suggest that women’s rights are just unfulfilled promises and women’s needs continues to be ignored.

Given this, the EU and Member States must stop being passive towards VAW and must adopt measures and implement actions that are able to meet women’s necessities in practice. Concretely, they should undertake to create an environment that enables women to denounce episodes of abuse and where these reports are followed up. In this way women can get the support they require, together with access to justice.

1.3 Public perception of Violence against Women as a social problem

EIGE’s estimation of the number of women that in the EU will be victims of male violence throughout their lives is upsetting, it amounts to 100 million (EIGE, 2012). Given this and the data mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is evident that VAW cannot be regarded as an isolated problem, rather it is a structural, widespread issue rooted in inequality between women and men.

But what about public awareness and perception of VAW as a social issue? Does the public perception of its prevalence find confirmation in data? To answer these questions is particularly meaningful because “the perceived importance among the public of violence against women as a social problem, and the beliefs regarding how widespread the problem is, are important factors that shape the social environment in which the

victims and perpetrators are embedded and influences how this social environment responds” (Gracia & Lila, 2015, p. 22). Therefore, to increase public awareness of violence against women is a primarily step for a twofold reason: it contributes to the prevention of VAW combating sexist beliefs and decreasing the social tolerance of the phenomenon. Secondly, it causes public responses: people understand that VAW represents a social threat having impact on everyone’s lives and, consequently, they recognize as their social and personal responsibility putting effort into the eradication of the problem.

Returning to the formulated questions, I am going to make reference to the FRA survey (2014), already mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Besides providing data on the extent of VAW, the FRA survey investigates women’s attitudes about and awareness of the phenomenon, and also their awareness of specific support services in their EU Member State for victims of gender-based violence. According to its results, more than half of women in all Member States regard VAW as a “common problem”; however, the perceived level of gender-based violence varies considerably throughout Europe. For example, in Portugal the percentage of women who consider VAW as very common or fairly common amounts to 93%, whereas it corresponds to 54% in Czech Republic.

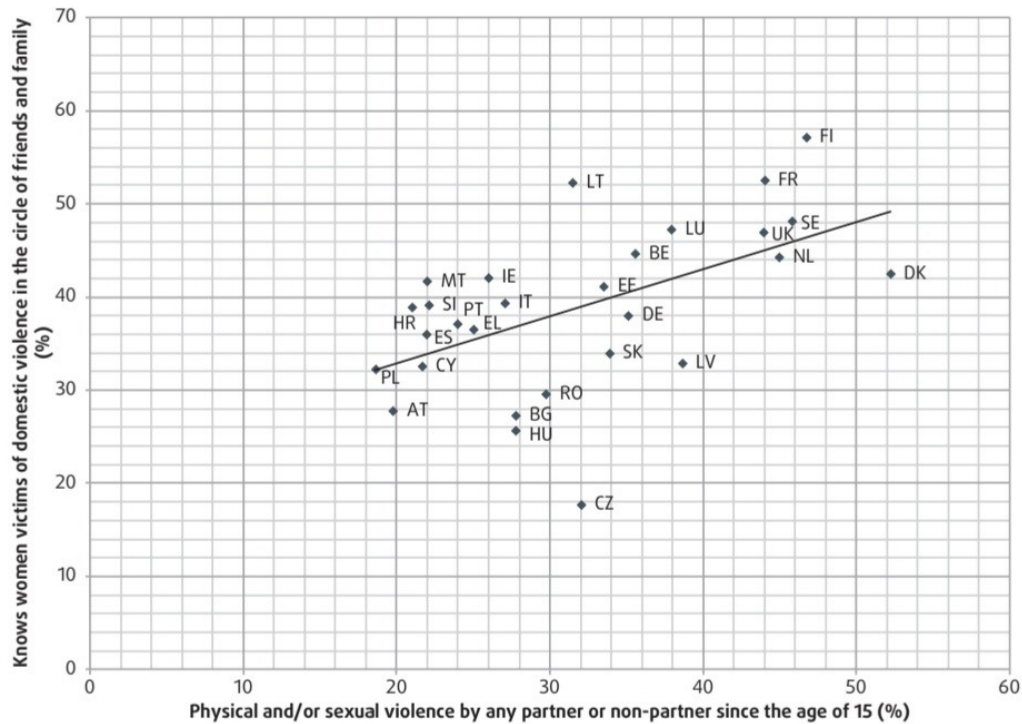
As suggested by the findings of Vázquez et al.’s study (2021), this discrepancy can be attributed, on the one side, to particular individual-level factors such as gender, relationship status, race/ethnicity, education, age, urban residence and financial difficulty. On the other side, the disparity can be ascribed to country-level factors; among these, cultural believes represent a highly relevant variable.

Due to the lack of comprehensive researches concerning factors that influence perceptions of VAW, it is not possible to generalize the above conclusions.

After reviewing perceptions on frequency of the phenomenon, the survey asks: “Do you know of any women who have been a victim of any form of domestic violence? In your circle of friends and family? Where you (used to) work or study?” (p. 154) Examining women’s knowledge about other women that experienced intimate partner violence is notably helpful because it allows to measure indirectly the scope of intimate partner violence against women. Also in this case substantial variations between the EU Member States are noticed: again Czech Republic has the lowest percentage, in the country only

16% of women responded that they are aware of women victims of domestic violence in their circle of friends and family. Similar results are observed in Bulgaria, Hungary and Austria (25%, 25% and 27%, respectively). Conversely, we find the highest percentage of women that say to have knowledge of women who experienced domestic violence among their relatives and friends in Finland (56%), France (52%) and Lithuania (49%). These data have been put in relationship with the prevalence of any physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. The instance of Bulgaria is remarkable because its prevalence rates concerning violence perpetrated only by current or previous partners (22%) and level of awareness about other women victims of domestic violence in a respondent's group of family and friend (25%) nearly coincide. This result can be read in two opposite ways. If we assume that data on the extent of the phenomenon are consistent with its actual prevalence and that domestic violence is regarded as a public issue, we can conclude that the episodes of violence are truly low. Differently, such overlapping can insinuate that domestic violence is perceived as a private matter, that must be kept secret and, for this reason, women who experience it do not confide in anyone, neither in their family or friends. Consequently, they rarely report it to the police or other institutions. These conclusions can be formulated also for Hungary and Austria, which present a situation similar to Bulgaria as shown by figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Relationship between the prevalence of any physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 and the awareness of women victims of domestic violence in respondent's circle of friends or family (%)



Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey dataset, 2012

A comprehensive examination of perceptions of VAW cannot overlook how the community defines this violence, since it has a considerable impact on public acceptability and perceived severity of the phenomenon. Again it is difficult to investigate public definitions of violence against women due to a lack of surveys and studies that deal with this issue. Anyway, the work of E. Gracia & M. Lila “Attitudes towards violence against women in the EU” (2015), that analyses 26 surveys conducted in 14 countries¹⁶, contains meaningful information on this issue.

A survey¹⁷ conducted in Cyprus, directed only to women, asked respondents if they regard or not a list of behaviors as acts of violence by their spouse/partner. It found out that more than 90% agreed that, among others, “threatening physical integrity”, “forced sexual relations” and “object throwing” constitute violence against the partner. However, between 20 and 23% of respondents did not consider “financial deprivation and control”, “controlling correspondence, mobile phone and purse” and “banning me from going out with friends” as acts of violence. These results suggest that one in five Cyprus women

¹⁶ Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

¹⁷Advisory Committee for the Prevention & Combating of Family Violence *Extent, 2014, Frequency, Nature and Consequences of Domestic Violence against Women in Cyprus*.

believe that the definition of violence against women, namely intimate partner violence, encompasses only physical and sexual violence. This means that they are not aware of other forms of violence that do not leave marks on the body of the woman but that heavily affects her mental health and freedom, that is economic and psychological violence. As a consequence, they will show a greater level of acceptability towards these two typologies of violence, underestimating their severity.

An Estonian survey¹⁸ with a general population asks its respondents: “Do you think it is sexual violence when someone does the following...?” and list, as the precedent survey, a series of behaviors. It is thought-provoking that 99% of respondents answered that “forcing another person to have sexual intercourse (incl. oral sex)” “certainly/mostly” is, but only 86% still considers it sexual violence when the person forced is the husband/wife or cohabitant. It seems that a segment of the population has more difficulty in recognizing violence when it is perpetrated by the partner and tends to normalize it. The results of a survey¹⁹ conducted in Poland, also with the general population, supports this hypothesis. According to it, 18,3% of respondents agree that “rape cannot occur among partners/spouses”. Similar beliefs are terribly dangerous because they do not contribute to the prevention and the eradication of domestic violence, rather they foster and legitimize it.

With regard to the definition of sexual harassment, there are two studies²⁰ conducted in Czech Republic with university students’ sample that investigates this specific form of violence against women. They both shows that, despite the elevated number of episodes of sexual harassment, (in the first study 67% of students had experienced some form of it and in the second study 78% of students), around 3% answered positively when directly asked if they had been sexually harassed. The second study emphasizes that students regarded sexual harassment “primarily as a behavior of sexual nature, such as sexual

¹⁸ Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, 2014, *The Survey on Estonian population’s awareness of gender-based violence and human trafficking*.

¹⁹ WYG PSDB for the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2014, *Diagnosis of the extent and forms of domestic violence against adults and children, and providing characteristics of victims and perpetrators*.

²⁰ 1. Vohlídalová, M. (2011). The perception and construction of sexual harassment by Czech university students. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, 47, 1119-1147.

2. Smetáčková, I. & Pavlík, P. (2011). Sexuální obtěžování na vysokých školách: Teoretické vymezení, metodologický přístup, výzkumné výsledky [Sexual harassment at universities: theoretical definition, methodological approach, research results]. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review*, 47, 361-386.

violence or extortion” (Gracia & Lila, 2015, p. 31); given this, it is easier to comprehend the reason behind the outcomes of the study.

As previously touched upon, another decisive issue related to public perceptions of VAW as a social problem is public acceptability of VAW, mostly in intimate partner violence. Four different surveys²¹, one conducted in Spain, two in Poland and the third one in Estonia, address the issue by asking the acceptability of distinct types of violent behaviors by partners. While almost all respondents (general population) of the Spanish survey considered totally unacceptable both “insulting and despising the partner” and “pushing and beating when angry” (96,4% and 98,6%, respectively). The Poland survey finds out that 9% of men and 6% of women think that it is normal, therefore acceptable, if a husband/partner insults a wife/partner during a quarrel. Moreover, for 15% of respondents a husband hitting her wife occasionally is not committing violence. Similar opinions have emerged from the Estonian survey; according to approximately one tenth of respondents from the general population “physical punishment of a spouse (cohabitant) is sometimes inevitable”.

Considering the outcomes of the four surveys, we could assume that in Spain there is lower acceptability of violence against women, precisely intimate partner violence. The findings could be explained, among other factors, by the framing of VAW as a social problem and by the consequent political commitment at national and local level to contrast and prevent the phenomenon. Actions of prevention surely include raising awareness about the different forms of violence because their recognition leads women not to accept and normalize them.

Public acceptability is strictly linked to perceived severity of violence against women. The more a woman underestimates the severity of specific acts of violence, the more she will tolerate them. Hence she will not denounce her partner because she does not regard his behavior as a crime. A survey conducted in Spain²² proves it, indeed it found out that

²¹ 1. Spanish Centre for Sociological Research, 2014, *Social perception of Gender Based Violence*.

2.a Research Agency TNS OBOP for the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2011, *Diagnosis of domestic violence against women and men in Poland* (Part 1 – Nationwide survey).

2.b KRC for the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2012, *Diagnosis of the perpetrators of domestic violence: Domestic violence from the perspective of the Polish adult population*.

3. The Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs, 2014, *Gender Equality Monitoring 2013*.

²² Ministry for Equality. Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), 2012, *Macro survey on violence against women*.

14,1% of women victims of partner violence decided not to report the violence due to the fact that they minimized the incident.

In this respect there are two interesting surveys, one conducted in Czech Republic²³ and the other in Italy²⁴. They both ask women victims of partner violence whether or not they consider the violence as a crime. Those who regarded the incident as something wrong but not a crime amounted to 29,7% of respondents in Czech Republic and almost one in two in the Italian survey. Conversely, 40,5% of respondents of the Czech survey and 19,4% that responded to the Italian one considered it as “just something that happens”. These results indicate that in the two countries levels of acceptability of violence, in particular by partners, are alarmingly high.

1.4 The EU and Cultural Framings of Violence against Women: balancing between universality and inclusive intersectionality

Violence against women still represents a serious problem across Europe, the results of the previously mentioned FRA survey (2014) prove it.

As pointed out formerly, it is no more regarded as a private issue and the awareness around the phenomenon has meaningfully increased throughout the last two decades. As a consequence of its greater social relevance, European governments started to considerably tackle gender-based violence by implementing specific public policies. In spite of their focused interventions, they have not adopted measures able to address all groups of women. Namely, immigrant women, minority ethnic women, black women, refugees and asylum seekers do not receive sufficient protection against violence and face many obstacles in finding support and actual help.

It is undeniable that VAW is a universal problem which may affect any woman regardless of, inter alia, her ethnic and social origin, her class, her age and her sexual orientation. Nevertheless, it can be detrimental to place too much emphasis on the universality of the phenomenon because it can have as side-effect the invisibilization and silencing of specific groups of women’s experiences. As pointed out by Rosa Logar (2011), “such a homogenising approach includes the risk of obscuring and ignoring the ethnic and social dimension of violence against women.”

²³ Charles University in Prague, 2013, *Intimate Partner Violence 2013*. ISTAT, 2015, *Violence inside and outside the family*.

²⁴ ISTAT, 2015, *Violence inside and outside the family*.

In other words, universality should be balanced with intersectionality (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustín, 2013), otherwise it will not be possible to guarantee protection against violence to differently situated women and their children. Indeed, Member States of the EU and the same EU institutions must integrate intersectionality into their approach to combat VAW. Such a change in perspective would permit governments to design and adopt more effective policies.

Instead of reflecting on the most efficient way to incorporate intersecting oppression, the EU has started to draw attention to “cultural” forms of violence and to determinate groups of women. Montoya & Rolandsen Agustín (2013) underline that “this discursive shift places the violence of “others” in contrast to presumed “European” gender equality and anti-violence values.” Accordingly, public policies aimed at contrasting the phenomenon mainly deal with setting boundaries between European insiders and outsiders and only marginally handle the protection and fulfilment of women’s human rights.

As a consequence, women with different backgrounds belonging to the groups above-mentioned are not just ignored, rather, stigmatized. Furthermore, they face cultural relativism, which means that violence is considered as an integral part of their culture, and therefore, it is normalized (Logar, 2011). It can be seen as a form of discrimination and can even endanger the life and personal security of women as happened in Austria in 2002 and 2003. In order, Şahide Goekce and Fatma Yildirim, two Austrian citizens of Turkish origin, were murdered by their husbands, who abused them for many years and against whom eviction orders had been issued. Underestimating the risk of the two cases, the Austrian State did not apply the necessary law provisions to combat violence against women. As a result, Austria did not comply with its obligation of due diligence²⁵, indeed it did not ensure access to justice to Şahide Goekce and Fatma Yildirim and did not do enough to hold their perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Specifically, the women’s public request for help²⁶ remained unheard:

²⁵ I use the term ‘due diligence’ with the meaning provided in Article 5, Paragraph 2 of the Istanbul Convention, which establishes that “Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention that are perpetrated by non-State actors.”

To clarify, here due diligence is conceptualized as an obligation of means, not of results.

²⁶ Since the two cases present similar pattern I am going to quote the facts of only one case, randomly selected. However, this part is followed by sections of both sentences trying to give equal space to the story and injustices Şahide Goekce and Fatma Yildirim confronted with.

From July 2003 Fatma Yildirim was subject to repeated death threats from her husband Irfan Yildirim, who also threatened to kill her children. On 6 August 2003 the police issued an expulsion and prohibition to return order against Irfan Yildirim. The police also reported to the Vienna Public Prosecutor that Irfan Yildirim had made a dangerous criminal threat against Fatma Yildirim and requested that Irfan Yildirim be detained. The Public Prosecutor rejected the request. On 14 August 2003, Fatma Yildirim gave a formal statement about the threats made to her life to the police, who in turn reported to the Vienna Public Prosecutor, requesting that Irfan Yildirim be detained. Again, this request was refused. On 11 September 2003, Irfan Yildirim fatally stabbed Fatma Yildirim near the family's apartment. (Fatma Yildirim (deceased) v Austria (Communication No. 6/2005, p.1)

The Vienna Intervention Centre against Domestic Violence, a support centre frequented by the two women, remained shocked by their killing. For this reason, together with the Association for Women's Access to Justice, it submitted a complaint²⁷ to the CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of the United Nations. Austria was accused of having violated articles 1, 2, 3 and 5 of CEDAW since it did not take all necessary measures to protect adequately the right to personal security and life of the two women.

What the authors of the complaint highlighted is extremely useful for understanding the connection between cultural relativism and these cases of domestic violence: they stressed that the murders of Şahide Goekce and Fatma Yildirim tragically demonstrated the lack of seriousness with which Austrian authorities and institutions dealt with violence against immigrant women. Moreover, they claim that the criminal law system, namely judges and Prosecutors, still had problems in recognizing violence against women as a public problem, considered by them as an almost irrelevant private issue, specific of particular social classes and cultures (Logar, 2011).

Other particularly significant affirmations for the explanation of the dangerousness of cultural relativism comes from the comments of the state of Austria on the complaint concerning the case of Şahide Goekce. In an attempt to justify the Public Prosecutors decisions, it submitted that "it could not be proved with sufficient certainty that Mustafa was guilty of making criminal dangerous threats against his wife that went beyond the harsh statements resulting from his background" (Şahide Goekce (deceased) v Austria (Communication No. 5/2005), 2007, p. 14). Put differently, Austria stated that the

²⁷ More information about the two cases can be found in the following Communication of the CEDAW: respectively, Communication No. 5/2005 and Communication No. 6/2005.

truthfulness of S. Goekce allegations of being threatened with death could be doubted due to the possibility that the threats of murder could stem from the perpetrator's 'background', that is, his Turkish origin. Such a racist assertion insinuates that similar threats represent the normality in this culture and, in consequence, might be labelled as disrespectful but not be regarded as violating any law.

In both cases the Committee came to the conclusion that "the State party violated its obligations under article 2(a) and (c) through (f), and article 3 of the Convention read in conjunction with article 1 of the Convention and general recommendation 19 of the Committee and the corresponding rights of the deceased, Fatma Yildirim, to life and to physical and mental integrity" (Fatma Yildirim (deceased) v Austria (Communication No. 6/2005), 2007, p. 18).

In other words, the Committee acknowledged the multiple omissions and negligence of the Austrian governments in ensuring, on the one hand, protection to victims of violence, and on the other one, effective investigation and subsequent prosecution of offences.

After the analysis of these two cases, we can say that the recent trend of governments towards cultural relativism of violence, mixed with racist prejudice leads them to adopt inadequate measures to safeguard differently situated women against violence. Hence, immigrant women, minority ethnic women, black women, refugees and asylum seekers receive protection in lower level compared to the one the majority population gets.

The tendency of the European Union toward an exclusionary approach is demonstrated by the same EU typology of policy discourse on violence against women characterizing the new millennium²⁸. The Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men (2006-2010) (COM(2006)92) and the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015) (COM(2010) 491 final), documents issued by the EU Commission²⁹, illustrate the not properly inclusive contribution of this EU institution to combat violence against women. On the one hand, the Commission proves to be more actively involved in the elimination of violence against women by inserting in the first document the "eradication of all forms of gender-based violence" as one of its six main fields of action on gender equality. On

²⁸ The first years of the twentieth century are marked by a disconcerting spread of xenophobic Islamophobia in Western Europe, which developed also as a consequence of the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

²⁹ The decision to mention only documents of the EU Commission is motivated by the fact that among EU institutions it represents the most relevant in the policy-making process. Nevertheless, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament play an increasing significant role in the development of policies.

the other hand, it urges the necessity of instant intervention referring to specific forms of violence, namely, “customary or traditional harmful attitudes and practices, including female mutilation, early and forced marriages and honour crimes”. With regards to the second document, it deals with the multiple typologies of gender-based violence, but again the emphasis is put exclusively on particular forms; thus, female genital mutilation constitutes the primary action in this area. By calling to attention almost exclusively forms of violence framed as cultural, the Commission implicitly undermines other typologies, such as domestic violence, and in general the overall phenomenon. In this way, it contributes to the normalization or even invisibilization of gender-based violence.

Notwithstanding, it cannot be overlooked a more inclusive and comprehensive attempt of tackling violence against women lately made by the Commission to balance universality and trends of culturalization, which is exemplified, among others, by the Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls Combating All Forms of Discrimination against Them (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustín, 2013).

1.5 The EU legal and policy framework on VAW: from the Treaty of Rome to the process of accession to the Istanbul Convention

Differently from other international bodies, such as the UN, the EU undertook to eradicate VAW quite recently. Due to the fact that the issue was not contemplated among the competences of the European Commission, GBV entered the EU'S agenda after a long time.

Considering that GBV is deeply rooted in gender inequality, it is opportune to retrace the advancements of EU in gender equality.

Since its creation the EU has committed to combat discrimination on grounds of gender as proved by the Treaty of Rome, specifically by articles 6 and 119 ECT (now articles 18 and 157 TFEU). With the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) gender equality became both an objective and a fundamental EU principle. In order to better comprehend the EU's role in fighting gender discrimination it is suitable to analyze the most notable equality measures established by the Union since its creation as the European Economic Community with the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Although the Treaty of Rome set some provisions regarding the issue, their scope was particularly limited, consequently the ECJ considerably contributed to the development of anti-discrimination measures in the period of formation

of the Community. Nevertheless, only with the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999 we witness a widening of the scope of the articles above mentioned. Besides the recognition of equality as a fundamental principle and objective, Articles 137 and 141 (now Article 153 and 157 TFEU) were modified in order to include regulations regarding the sphere of equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation. These amendments constitute an important advancement in the creation of a more comprehensive EU anti-discrimination legislation that broadens the area of support provided to the activities of the Member States, which, at the beginning included only equal pay. Furthermore, through the Treaty of Amsterdam there was the introduction of a precise power, established in Article 13 of the TEC (now Article 19 of the TFEU), aimed at combating discrimination based in the following grounds: sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. In other words, this Treaty amplified the range of equality measures which at the beginning included only gender and nationality. In 2009, with the come into effect of the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU took another step forward with regards to its constitutional framework on discrimination and equality. Indeed, the Treaty amended and enhanced the powers and functions of the EU in this sphere and reinforced the principle of gender equality. In addition, it should not be undervalued the fundamental role played by secondary legislation in this field. Specifically, the EU has passed the two following Directives³⁰: Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights and support and protection of victims of crime; Directive 2011/99/EU on the European protection order³¹ (EPO).

The Victims' Rights Directive has both strengths and weaknesses: on the one hand, it contains a large number of provisions that establishes new, or underlines the purpose of existing, obligations for Member States. On the other hand, many provisions are vague, and do not indicate any specific instrument to be used. Besides being too general, some of them totally lack any reference to victims of GBV (Spurek, 2016).

Concerning Directive 2011/99/EU on the EPO, it is not a harmonization mechanism, rather it is meant for the mutual recognition of protection measures in criminal matters

³⁰ Among the instruments of the EU it is important to bear in mind that only directives are mandatory for EU Member States.

³¹ As stated in the Directive, protection orders are aimed at protecting a person against an act that may endanger their life, physical or psychological integrity, dignity, personal liberty or sexual integrity.

(Cerrato, et al., 2017). Despite of the high number of victims³² covered by protection measures at the level of Member States, this instrument has been used very little and it is impressive given the high probability that part of these people move across the EU regularly or occasionally. Moreover, it should be stressed that the protected subject frequently does not receive sufficient information and not knowing, for example, that they can request an EPO if they are relocating to a different Member State has a damaging impact on victims' protection (Post & Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, 2018).

Among the main legal efforts of the EU there are also directives that pertain to other fields of intervention. Directive 2010/41/EU on the application of the principle of equal treatment between man and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity plays a crucial role in extending the application of this principle beyond employment market and life career and in preventing discrimination. It deals with balancing family life and work, precisely, it is about maternity rights and couples with a joint business³³. Finally, there are two more directives worth to be mentioned, one is Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims and the other one is Directive 2011/92/EU on combating sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.

In addressing the eradication of VAW it is necessary to discuss the following three main instruments, fundamental in formulating definitions of the different types of violence: the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

Subsequent to the 1975 International Women's Year and the setting up of UN Decade for Women (1975-1985), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) committed to drafting a Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In 1979 the UN Assembly adopted CEDAW which became the most relevant instrument for the protection of women's rights, that finally were recognized internationally as

³² The EPRS assessment (2017) found out that according to estimations in 2010 the number of women resident in the EU who were benefiting from protection measures in criminal matters amounted to more than 100 000.

³³ For more information, see the project LIBRA (Let's Improve Bargaining, Relations and Agreements on work and life times balance). www.adapt.it/libra

human rights. CEDAW is so significant because it represents a very strong political standpoint, or rather, a commitment for women's self-determination. Differently from the majority of international human rights conventions, CEDAW does not restrict itself to a passive language prohibiting discrimination, but it sets off duties for the Member States and does. More precisely, Member States undertake to guarantee through positive actions the fulfilment of the rights contained in the Convention, removing all obstacles that prevent their accomplishment (Spinelli, 2008).

It is necessary to point out that CEDAW addresses discrimination but it never mentions violence against women. Since this gap could lead to misunderstandings, in 1989 the CEDAW specified how the Convention applies also to VAW.³⁴ In addition, in the General Recommendation No.19 (1992) it asserted that “gender-based violence is discrimination; that such discrimination violates women's human rights; that the Convention covers both public and private acts; and that governments should take legal and other measures to prevent such violence and, in reporting under the Convention, indicate the measures taken” (Fraser, 1999).

Three years later the Fourth UN Conference on Women took place in Beijing and in that occasion it was restated³⁵ that “the human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights” (Spurek, 2016). The Conference resulted in the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, defined by the UN Women as “the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights” and as “a powerful source of guidance and inspiration”.³⁶ The Platform for Action deals with twelve critical areas³⁷ of concern among which there is VAW, namely, under Strategic Objectives D we can find the list of actions that should be implemented to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence.

Moving from an international system to a regional one, the Council of Europe, we must take into consideration the Istanbul Convention, which entered into force in 2014. It

³⁴ See Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: General Recommendation No. 12, Violence Against Women (8th Sess. 1989), adopted 3 Mar. 1989.

³⁵ The following principle had already been affirmed in the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, 1993.

³⁶ <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>

³⁷ The twelve critical areas addressed by the BPfA are the following: women and the environment; women in power and decision-making; the girl child; women and the economy; women and poverty; violence against women; human rights of women; education and training of women; institutional mechanisms for the advancements of women; women and health; women and the media; women and armed conflict.

constitutes the first pan European legally-binding instrument aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It has also another purpose that is the advancement of greater equality between women and men; without investing in gender equality it is not possible to eliminate violence against women. At the same time, it is necessary to reach gender equality and to change social and cultural attitudes to be able to prevent the phenomenon.

Moreover, the Istanbul Convention stands out for its holistic answer to VAW: its measures cover four main areas that are prevention, protection and support, prosecution and integrated policies and data collection (Council of Europe).

All Member States of the EU are signatory of the Convention and 21 has ratified it; the high number of ratification could be read as a positive sign in committing to combat gender-based violence. Notwithstanding it is fundamental to bear in mind that women's rights are always under attack, as demonstrated by the announcement of the Poland government of its will to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention in July 2020. Dramatically, it is not the only case: on 1st July 2021 Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Convention took effect.

With regards to the EU, the process of its accession is still going on; it signed the Convention on 13th June 2017 but it has not been ratified yet because some Member States persist in blocking it (Shreeves & Jurviste, 2021)

CHAPTER II

2. Violence against women: The Italian context

Violence against women concerns the freedom of people and the power relationship between women and men, therefore it is undeniably a political issue. What Stefano Ciccone stated almost eight years ago in “La violenza maschile contro le donne: una questione strutturale e politica” is still valid: violence against women continues to be regarded as an ‘emergence’ by both civil society and political institutions. Conversely, it is not a phenomenon that occasionally emerges, but a problem entrenched in the Italian culture and having repercussions on all spheres, i.a., economy, politics, work and media. Nevertheless, the tendency to put emphasis on the most severe episodes of violence is not beneficial rather it leads to two major outcomes, as highlighted by S. Ciccone. The first one is directly connected with the toxic and misguided way in which femicides and other forms of violence, such as rapes, are reported by the Italian media. Indeed, people are inclined to believe that a similar episode that has nothing to do with their everyday life due to the perpetuation of the idea the perpetrator of such brutal act is certainly a crazy person, a maniac or a person with a deviant behavior. By dehumanizing the author of the violence individuals persuade themselves that violence against women does not affect them. At the same time, drawing attention to violence as a deviance, there is the risk that people think it is a public problem and therefore it is the police or criminologists who should deal with it. It happens often that violence, if not seen as a deviance, is attributed to otherness, namely, to men coming from different countries with distinct cultures. All these considerations and diverse interpretations of violence have the following side effect: the entire community in general, and men in particular, do not question themselves. They do not reflect on the fact that they are actively involved in the perpetuation and also perpetration of the phenomenon because of their indifference. As a consequence, responsibility is removed from men.

Often campaigns, including the institutional ones, on violence against women contribute to the deresponsibilization of men since they illustrate women crouched in a corner, with evident hematomas but men are always absent. In other words, they depict women as victims and as ‘weak’, whereas men, as authors of violence, are never involved, if not in the role of protectors.

So, how can we reverse this tendency of victimization of women on the one side, and, on the other one, of deresponsibilization of men? First of all, it is necessary to start from an in-depth analysis of the Italian culture, specifically focusing on gender stereotypes, which can explain this trend and, more in general, are at the base of violence against women.

2.1 Patriarchal culture in Italy

2.1.1 Gender stereotyping

It is long time that scholars are studying and discussing how gender stereotypes contribute to the establishment and perpetuation of a social order characterized by an unequally distribution of power and asymmetries in the access to material and symbolic resources. Given that “‘gender’ shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men”, as stated by Article 3 of Istanbul Convention, it can be regarded as a “critical category”, which can be used for questioning the “natural” basis of many social and institutional constructs (Parolari, 2019).

The analysis of gender stereotypes must take into account their pervasiveness. In other words, they do not concern and reproduce only inside the family, rather their naturalization has transformed them in an intrinsic characteristic of labor market, education and political institutions. Adopting this perspective, it is possible to overcome the traditional connection between gender and private sphere, which prevents a complex and comprehensive understanding of the detrimental impact of gender stereotypes on society.

Besides this, it is fundamental to clarify the different functions of these socially constructed conceptualizations. Indeed, stereotypes do not play only a statistical/descriptive role but also a prescriptive/normative one³⁸. To a certain extent, we could say that they have a constitutive function because they lead to the identification of people having specific connotations with a determinate category (Appiah, 2000).

With regards to their descriptive value, stereotypes constitute oversimplified generalizations, which can or cannot be based on statistics. It depends on the percentage of people belonging to the category that have or have not the characteristic socially

³⁸ For further information, see *Gender Stereotyping. Transnational Legal Perspectives*, a book of R.J. Cook, and S. Cusack, published in 2010.

attributed to that group. As specified by R.J. Cook, and S. Cusack³⁹, stereotypes have also a prescriptive value, strictly linked to the descriptive one. Like social norms, they determine how those being part of a certain category should be and also behave, imposing them specific roles in the society (Parolari, 2019). In the case of gender stereotypes, their prescriptive value can deeply influence and even limit people's freedom of choice since they press individuals to take on pre-established roles. It must be point out that often people do not realize their perception of their possible alternatives is conditioned by stereotypes.

Despite the constitutive value of stereotypes, they are often regarded as “natural” due to the fact that individuals start to internalize them during childhood. Then, gender stereotypes assimilated during primary socialization, whose main agents are family and school, are consistently reaffirmed in everyday social interactions. Said differently, this process of internalization, that begins when a person is too young to be able to recognize gender stereotypes as such, does not have an end, rather it is fostered day by day. Consequently, gender stereotypes are not perceived as what they are, that is widely held, generalized believes about women and men. Therefore, their constitutive dimension is invisibilized.

Moreover, it is crucial to underscore the existence of a causal relation between gender stereotypes and discrimination against women, since the former, by reproducing a patriarchal system based on male domination, contribute to the perpetuation of direct and indirect discrimination against women and girls. Cook and Cusack go further and claim that gender stereotyping itself is a form of discrimination.

In spite of the harmful impact of gender stereotypes, mostly on women, but in general on the whole society, the Italian government's efforts to combat them proved to be disappointing, or better said, nonexistent. In its Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Italy, the CEDAW Committee noted in this regard:

(a)The entrenched stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, perpetuating traditional roles of women as mothers and housewives and undermining their social status and educational and career prospects;

³⁹ Rebecca Cook and Simone Cusack wrote *Gender Stereotyping: Transnational Legal Perspectives* (2009), a book that provides a useful classification and analysis of gender stereotypes. Specifically, it identifies the following four categories: sex stereotype, sexual stereotype, sex roles stereotype and compounded stereotype.

- (b) The limited measures taken to eliminate stereotypes in the education system, including in school curricula and textbooks;
- (c) The growing influence of men's organizations in the media, portraying negative stereotypes of women;
- (d) The exposure of women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti women and girls to a heightened risk of discrimination and xenophobic acts, which is compounded by the current social and political context. (CEDAW Committee, 2017)

Consistent with the previous reflections on primary socialization and assimilation of gender stereotypes, it is opportune to elaborate more on the point (b). Since gender stereotypes can be considered as one of the main causes of violence against women, it is crucial a commitment to eradicating them. Therefore, we must intervene in the education system by deeply shifting it, as underlined by the CEDAW Committee. Namely, it urges a change in Italian textbooks which continue to propose discriminative representations of girls/women and boys/men with a negative impact on the formation of students' gender identity.

2.1.2 Italian textbook and the promotion of gender equality: a missed opportunity

Irene Biemmi's paper *The imagery of gender in Italian textbooks. Research into primary school books* (2015) can help to better comprehend the detrimental consequences of stereotyped patterns of masculinity/femininity perpetuated by schoolbooks. In her work she examined a sample of books for the fourth grade⁴⁰ published in the early 2000s. As expected, the overall picture is discouraging. According to the results of quantitative analysis, there is not numerical equality between males and females and the latter almost always play minor roles. Therefore, young and adult women are invisibilized and underestimated. This eclipsing of women should not be mistaken for a "harmless oversight" because it is a clear indicator of a deep-rooted inequality between women and men. "Since women represent about half of the population, if there were not sexist prejudices against them, they would be present in at least half the contents of the texts examined" (Biemmi, 2015, p. 21). Considering qualitative analysis, we can see relevant differences in the professional roles assigned to the two sexes: professions identified as masculine are more prestigious and rewarding than those attributed to women and men

⁴⁰ The publishers of the book studied are De Agostini, Nicola Milano, Piccoli, Il Capitello, La Scuola, Giunti, Elmedi, Piemme, Raffaello, Fabbri.

are represented in a major number of occupations. In this way, the textbooks transmit the stereotyped idea that women can do only a range of jobs, which does not correspond to those reserved to men. By not providing equal window of opportunities, schoolbooks limit career aspirations of pupils, who will perceive themselves as inadequate for the occupations attributed to the other sex.

Moreover, Biemmi found out a discrepancy between the adjectives used to qualify female characters and those applied to male ones. She discovered that adjectives are not neutral, rather have a “gender”. Namely, females are described as “nasty, gossipy, jealous, vain, spoiled, flirt, arrogant, affectionate, anxious, distressed, humiliated, caring, patient, kind, tender, shy, quiet, helpful, understanding, gentle, charming, delicate, desperate, hypersensitive, sweet, innocent.” Conversely, males are depicted as “safe, brave, serious, proud, honest, ambitious, threatening, thoughtful, concentrated, brute, adventurous, authoritarian, furious, generous, proud, tough, selfish, angry, righteous, superior, wise, determined, bold, free, impudent” (Biemmi, 2015, p. 23). Reading the two lists of adjectives, it is evident that those associated to males convey qualities that are inherently positive or that our society classifies as such. On the contrary, those attributed to females are predominantly regarded as negative. Fragility and weakness, which are stereotypically considered intrinsic female traits, are not tolerated and allowed in the Italian capitalist, patriarchal, ableist, transphobic, racist and xenophobic society. In addition, it is “hilarious” that we could even ascribe adjectives recognized as masculine to women, but they would always assume a negative connotation. Indeed, it is not socially accepted that a woman shows to be selfish, ambitious or determined and she is denied to publicly express her angry.

Although in some of the textbooks analyzed we can appreciate signs of change, they are weak and propose alternative models only for girls, while gender stereotypes concerning young and adult men are maintained unvaried. In other words, more than an effective transformation aimed at providing equal opportunities for women and men, the publishers of the book examined do not go beyond a mere adaption of female characters to the male standard.

To conclude, it is crucial to put emphasis on what Alma Sabatini states in *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*:

«Equality» does not mean «adaptation» to the «standard man», but the real possibility of full development and realization for all human beings in all their diversity. Many people are convinced of this, and yet they continue to say that «a woman should be equal to a man» and never that «a man should be equal to a woman», and not even that «a woman and a man (or a man and a woman) should be equal»: what a strange concept of equality this is, in which the parameter is always a man.⁴¹ (Biemmi, 2015, p. 32)

2.1.3 From gender roles stereotypes to the enduring stereotypes on sexual violence

After this focus on education, we can move to the findings of the survey on stereotypes about gender roles and the social image of sexual violence conducted by ISTAT in 2018. In this manner we can obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effects of the Italian patriarchal culture on violence against women. Also because the questionnaire, addressed to people aged between 18 and 74⁴², explored opinions on the acceptability of violence, its causes and stereotypes about sexual violence, demonstrating that these two elements are linked.

With reference to the most common stereotypes about gender roles, the statement with the highest level of agreement was “for the man, more than for the woman, it is very important to be successful at work” (32,5%). This finding is consistent with the similar percentage of agreement obtained by another statement that is “it is up to the man to provide for the family’s financial needs” (27,9%). These results suggest that one third of Italians is still convinced that the man is the ‘breadwinner’ and that women should stay at home, complying with their role of housewife. These convictions are proved by the fact that 31,5% of respondents believe that “men are less suited to do housework”. It should be noted that gender role stereotypes are more present among older people (65,7% of aged 60-74), among those with lower level of education (79,6% of those with no education or with a primary school certificate) and are more frequent in southern Italy (67,8%).

Analyzing the results about the acceptability of violence, we can observe that a low number of people considers physical violence by intimate partner as acceptable, indeed 6,2% of people think that “in a relationship a slap might occasionally occur”. Differently,

⁴¹ The Italian version of the quote can be found in Sabatini,A., (1993), *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Roma, p.99. Although the first edition of the book was published in 1987 I accessed only the 1993 version and therefore the page indicated could not be the same for both publications.

⁴² The number of respondents to the module on stereotypes amounted to 15 034.

percentages increase considerably in relation to controlling; almost two out ten respondents agree that “it is always or under certain circumstances acceptable that a man habitually control his wife’s/girlfriend’s cell phone and/or activities on social media”. If we examine the answers given by youngest people, the findings are even more alarming: 30,3% of males aged 18-29 and 27,1% of females in the same group agree with the previous statement. In light of this, we could conclude that controlling is not regarded as a form of psychological violence and it is therefore underestimated and tolerated by a great number of people. These data demonstrate the importance of raising awareness with respect to the different forms violence against women can assume.

Moving to the perception of the scale of the phenomenon, there are remarkable differences between women and men. For almost half of women intimate partner violence is widely spread, whereas only 30,8% of men think that it is very common (versus 49,7% of women). We could suppose that, on the one side, this inconsistency is linked to the normalization of violence that leads male perpetrators of IPV not to recognize as a crime their behavior. On the other side, it could suggest that IPV is still considered as a private matter by part of the population and, consequently, women tends not to report the violence suffered or to talk about it only with women of her family or being part of her closest friends.

Focusing on the possible cause of IPV, it emerges that the most common one reported by people surveyed is considering women to be property (77,7%), specifically 92,9% of women aged 18-29 and 90,1% of female graduates. Then we have abusing drugs or alcohol⁴³, voted by 75,5% of respondents and the need violent men have to feel stronger than their girlfriends/wives (75%). The latter cause was indicated more frequently by women.

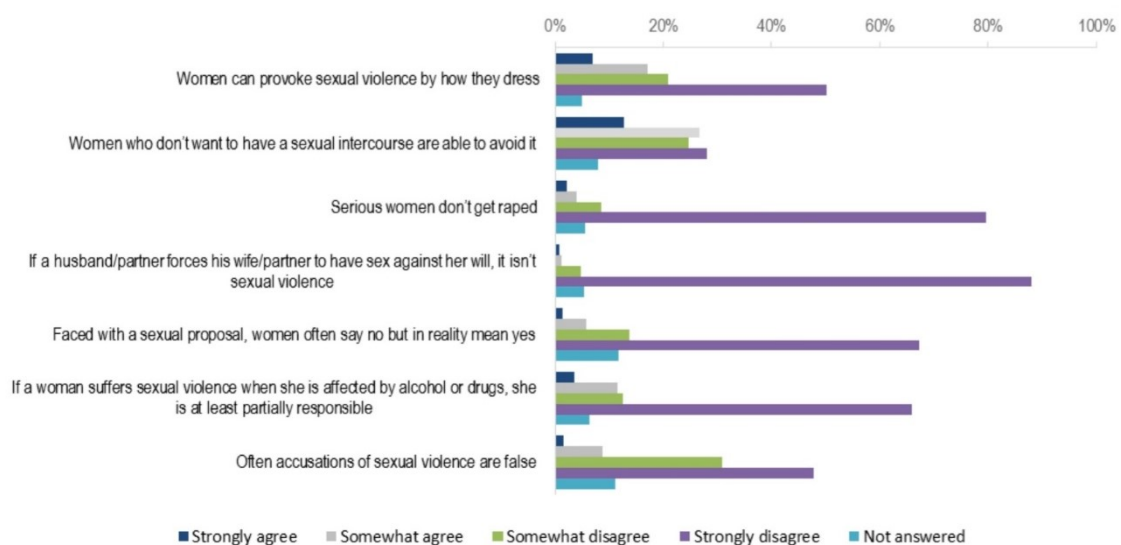
After having dealt with the principal gender roles stereotypes, the perception of the extent of the phenomenon and its possible main causes, it is now opportune to examine the data on stereotypes about sexual violence. The decision to follow this order of topics in my

⁴³ Regardless the fact that abusing drugs and alcohol does constitute a cause of violence against women, I would clarify that it does not have to be mistaken for the real and main motivation of gender-based violence against women. It could be considered a risk factor but violence is mostly perpetrated by men against women because they are legitimized and justified by the patriarchal culture characterizing the Italian society to do so. In synthesis, men commit violence against women as a consequence of gender inequality and norms on the acceptability of VAW. If the cause would be alcohol, then we would have also a higher number of men victims of female violence.

analysis of the 2018 ISTAT survey is due to the fact that in this way the reader can use the information learnt to better understand the results concerning the enduring stereotypes about sexual violence. Moreover, it will realize that it exists a relationship between the latter, stereotypes about gender roles and tolerance for violence.

The findings, showed in the figure 2.1, reveal that for an elevated percentage of the population “a woman always has some responsibility when she suffers sexual violence”. In fact, 39,3% of respondents is convinced that “women who do not want to have a sexual intercourse are able to avoid it”. Additionally, slightly less than one fourth of people surveyed strongly or somewhat agree with the idea that women can provoke sexual violence with their clothing. This belief is more often held by individuals aged from 60 to 74 years and by people with lower levels of education (no educational credentials or primary school certificate). Further to this, women are blamed also for the consumption of alcoholic drinks or the use of drugs: 15,1% considers a woman at least partially responsible if she suffers sexual violence when she is affected by alcohol or drugs. Also in this case answers change significantly among different age groups and distinct levels of education. It is noteworthy to point out that 6,3% of women with university degrees have this opinion, versus 23,7 % of women with no education or that have a primary school certificate.

Figure 2.1. People aged 18-74 years by level of agreement with the following statements about sexual violence



Source: ISTAT, Stereotypes about gender roles and the social image of sexual violence, 2018.

The overall frame is worrying; more than half of population agree with at least one stereotype about sexual violence. It is evident that a very high percentage of people think women who experience sexual violence are to some extent responsible for it. But what does a similar conviction imply? By accusing women who suffer sexual violence for having in some way caused it, the responsibility is removed from men. This leads to shift focus to what can do women to limit their probability a man assaults them sexually. So, what about stop saying women to pay attention and to tell them how to dress or behave and start to tell men not to rape? In other words, it is necessary to educate men and not to protect women.

Concluding, this in-depth analysis of stereotypes, acceptability of violence and its perceived scale is aimed at demonstrating that “prejudices and attitudes which perpetuate gender inequality and fuel violence against women, negative gender stereotypes remain an issue of concern in Italy” (GREVIO, 2020, p. 34) Going further, we could affirm that in the Italian society violence against women is undeniably a cultural problem, which can be solved only changing the patriarchal culture itself.

2.1.4 The impacts of COVID-19 lockdown period on the spread of gender stereotypes

Before studying the actual prevalence of violence against women (Chapter 2.3), I am going to make reference to a recent conference paper on ‘The spread of gender stereotypes in Italy during the COVID-19 lockdown’. Since crisis have never a gender neutral impact, it is opportune to investigate the effects of COVID-19 containment measures on Italian women and men’s attitudes and behaviors. The paper contains the findings of two nationwide web-surveys conducted by the Social Changes, Evaluations and Methods (MUSA) research group of the National Research Council of Italy.

According to numerous scientific researches and reports published by international organizations, gender inequalities have been exacerbated consequently to the diffusion of COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the fact that gender stereotypes constitute the primary factor influencing gender inequalities (Tintori, Cerbara, Ciancimino, & Palomba, 2021, p. 278), the comparison between the data of the two surveys, one carried out at the beginning and the other one at the end of the lockdown period, can be useful to partly explain the intensification of gender disparities.

Although both women and men began to work from home during the lockdown period, childcare and housework were regarded as a women's responsibility once again. It suggests that the opportunity to change the organization within the family, shifting towards a more gender-based egalitarian system, was missed. As could be expected, the results of the surveys confirm an extremely stereotyped and unbalanced division of tasks within families between men and women. The variable used to assess the level of adherence to traditional gender roles was the use of free time. By examining it from a gender point of view it is possible to have an immediate understanding of the persistence of gender stereotypes. Indeed, during the first survey, 68,7% of women declared to spent their free time cooking, against 41% of men; 31,6% of women spent it surfing on the web, compared to 43,7% of men. With respect to the comparison of the data between the two surveys, A. Tintori et al created a specific gender stereotype variable. They found out that the percentage of respondents with a stereotypical view of gender roles amounts to 31,1% during the first survey, whereas it corresponds to 35% during the second. Therefore, we can state that the overall situation exacerbated gender stereotypes acceptance, especially among women (26,3% in the first survey, versus 33,1% in the second one), those with lower levels of education, people aged between 50 and 69 years, believers and housewives, as showed by Table 1. Looking at this table, it emerges that, consistently with the ISTAT's surveys results, age and education constitutes two relevant variables which deeply influence how much a person adhere to gender stereotypes.

Table 1: The spread of gender stereotypes among certain categories of the Italian population (% of respondents who agree with GSDV)

		Survey 1	Survey 2
Gender	Female	26.3	33.1
	Male	36.3	37.1
Education	Medium-low	33.4	37.5
	High	18.5	16.8
Age class	18-29	21.0	26.4
	30-49	28.8	28.7
	50-69	34.4	37.5
	70 +	50.6	51.8
Type of city	Big city centre	26.40	30.20
	other	32.30	36
Political orientation	Left	22.0	27.1
	Centre	38.2	40.9
	Right	45.9	48.9
Religion beliefs	Believer	40.1	44.5
	Not believer	20.2	22.4
Job Position	Unemployed	37.3	37.0
	Student	17.7	29.7
	Intermittent worker	27.2	30.5
	Part-time worker	29.0	27.1
	Full-time worker	30.4	30.2
	Retired	42.7	45.8
	Housewife	40.0	55.4

Source: elaboration on OSC-COVID-19 data base, 2020.

In the findings, A. Tintori et al underline the connection between gender stereotypes acceptance, prejudices and physical and psychological violence against women. Moreover, they emphasize the role played by the COVID-19 lockdown period which, beside increasing Italians' adherence to gender stereotypes, has also led to the intensification of domestic violence episodes. Precisely they argue that "Accepting stereotypes that relegate women to a subordinate social role can lead to prejudices and unbalances. Prejudices can sometimes take the shape of physical and psychological violence. If on the one hand, physical distancing control measures reduced the number and quality of contacts between people to struggle against the virus spread, on the other hand it has forced a large part of the population into close cohabitation in their own home, which is not per se a safe space for everyone" (p. 275).

2.2 The media and the perpetuation of a stereotyped image of women and gender roles

The media in general reproduce symbolic patriarchal violence not only through gender stereotypes, sexism and roles, but also through the invisibilization of women. By underrepresenting women, they reinforce inequality between women and men. Considering that the Italian culture is entrenched in deep-rooted stereotypes and gender inequality, it is not striking that the sexist representation of women in the media is not

perceived as a form of violence. Rather, it is seen as something natural and so inevitable that goes beyond human control. Focusing on gender stereotypes in advertisements, there is a critical and controversial issue connected to the persistence of gender inequality in the media: that has been labelled ‘moral presbyopia’ by Paola Panarese, member of GEMMA (Gender and Media matters), who states that, although Italian advertising practitioners are perfectly aware of the presence of sexist and out-dated gender stereotypes, they absolve themselves because they argue that consumers play a predominant role and what they create/produce is deeply influenced by the Italian audience’s cultural expectations and by the main features of advertising itself, like shortness and messages’ appeal. In this way they justify their ads, avoiding to take on their own responsibilities; therefore, professor Panarese employs the term moral presbyopia to indicate this advantageous optical illusion.

2.2.1 The Global Media Monitoring Project 2020 edition

It must be taken into consideration that sexualised and stereotyped images of women provide limited role models for girls and do not depict women in a comprehensive way; if women work as lawyers, politicians, civil engineer in the ‘real world’, why are they not represented in these occupations in the world of the media?

The results of the Global Media Monitoring Project 2020 (GMMP) can help us to better understand how much and in which roles women are represented in the Italian legacy media (print, radio, TV) and in the digital one (Internet, Twitter). It is the largest and longest longitudinal analysis on the gender in the world’s media. This one-day study examines women’s presence in relation to men, gender bias and stereotyping in news media content. Furthermore, the GMMP constitutes a significant instrument in advocacy work. With respect to the findings, it comes out that less than one third (26%) out of 980 people in the five news media examined are women. Comparing this data with the percentage emerged in the GMMP 2015, it can be said the female presence as news subjects and sources increased, with a significant raise concerning radio, which seems to be the most inclusive media (from 21% to 32%). Nevertheless, the growth is extremely slow. Looking at women function in the news, they appear less frequently as experts than in 2015. This decrease is alarming also because experts have become even more relevant in news content and reports during the COVID-19 pandemic. The opportunity to adopt a more gender-sensitive approach has been missed and the consequences of not including

expert women as doctors, scientist and medical personnel are detrimental and multifaceted. As for the age, it emerges the existence of a reverse relation between sex and age of people in the news. Indeed, in legacy media around one-fifth of subjects in print and TV news aging over 50 are women. Again, 'old' women are victims of multiple discriminations. This finding could be related to the major importance the patriarchal society attributes to women's physical appearance compared to men's physical aspect, which is regarded as mainly negligible. Since women above the age of 50 start to be considered as less attractive for a hypothetic audience of white, straight males, they are gradually excluded. With regard to the social status, the results of the 2020 GMMP edition confirm those of 2015: 25% of women appear in the news as victims, compared to 4% of men. Consistently, one of the news topics where women are more often central subjects is Crime and Violence. In addition, in legacy media women continue to be identified by family status considerably more than men (25%, versus 4%); in other words, they are referred to in the news as the wife, mother or daughter of someone five times as much as men. In digital media the gender gap remains but is smaller, the reference to family status is two times as much as men.

Referring to the "special question" selected to be included in the monitoring framework, the Italian team coordinated by Monia Azzalini and Claudia Padovani chose to concentrate on the use of 'gender-un/fair language' (Azzalini & Padovani, 2021, p. 7), and to check if the media attribute the same recognition, respect and authority to female and male subjects in speaking about them. According to the results, women are presented by both first name and surname to a smaller degree than men; moreover, the latter are more frequently introduced with a professional or institutional title (72%, compared to 54%). As for the language, gender-consistency of the grammatical gender of the title or job name corresponds to 79%, with full consistency in radio.

Not surprisingly, only two news stories in legacy media out of a total of 220 make reference to issues of gender equality/inequality or human/women's rights and just in two stories stereotypes are questioned. Concerning digital media, there are similar findings. Finally, it is necessary to reflect on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the results of 2020 GMMP edition. In the same way in which it reinforced gender roles stereotypes among the general population it had a remarkably negative impact also on the representation and presence of women in the news. As argued by M. Azzalini and C.

Padovani, “The COVID-19 agenda has contributed to an overall decrease in women visibility (from 26% to 11%)” (p. 10).

2.2.2 Italian campaigns to prevent and combat violence against women

As mentioned in the introduction of the second chapter, campaigns on violence against women play a significant role in shaping people’s perception of the phenomenon contributing to the deresponsibilization of men and the victimization of women. In Italy the promoters of anti-violence campaigns are public institutions, (such as the Equal Opportunities Department and municipalities), no-profit organizations, i.a. Amnesty International - Italy and *Pubblicità Progresso* Foundation, and private entities. Generally, these campaigns are mainly focused on domestic violence and have informative/educational purposes (Capecchi, 2019)⁴⁴. The most used typology of campaign depicts women as victims of violence, principally physical violence but also psychological. The main character is a young woman with visible hematomas on her face, which suggest she suffered one or multiple physical aggressions⁴⁵. Deciding to represent a woman who survived violence in this way, promoters of the campaign reinforce gender stereotypes that identify women as weak, passive subjects and victims. Moreover, the absence of the author of the violence, a man, insinuates that violence against women is an exclusively female problem. Besides this problematic understanding of the phenomenon, this typology of campaign blames women that experience violence for not being able to react and denounce the perpetrator. A similar approach to violence against women is inadmissible since it does not take into account the implications of violence, together with the safety and well-being of the survivor. Shifting towards another type of campaign, it depicts ‘the woman in love’ with the purpose of alerting young women with regard to ‘the abusive man’ (Lalli, 2020, p. 280). Among the various examples, the most

⁴⁴ In the context of a Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) 2015 on social representations of femicides coordinated by Pina Lalli, 46 campaigns realized from 2006 were analyzed to identify their principal interpretative frames, that is how they portray violence against women. They recognized five typology of campaigns on violence against women, however, I focused on the following three: ‘the woman victim of violence’, ‘the woman in love’ and ‘the non-violent man’. Pina Lalli is a professor in sociology of culture and communication and author of the book *L’amore non uccide – Femminicidio e discorso pubblico: cronaca, tribunal, politiche* (2020).

⁴⁵ Differently from the other typology of campaigns I chose not to include examples for this one because I consider it as a further form of violence against women. Additionally, it does not take into account psychological and economical forms of violence, conveying the wrong idea that violence against women can be only physical.

emblematic is “La violenza ha mille volti: impara a riconoscerli” (showed in Picture 1) adopted in 2013 by the Equal Opportunities Department.

Picture 1. The Italian campaign to prevent violence against women “La violenza ha mille volti: impara a riconoscerli”, 2010.



Source:<https://www.paolaconcia.it/b/la-violenza-ha-mille-volti-impara-a-riconoscerli-presentata-la-campagna-realizzata-da-un-gruppo-di-donne-oltre-gli-schieramenti/>

Also in this case the campaign is directed to women, who are ‘encouraged’ one more time to report and it aims at ‘teaching’ them not to confuse violence with love. Although the group of experts coordinated by Anna Paola Concia, who created the campaign, clearly stated they wanted to distance themselves from the previous typology, it is evident that they failed. Surely, they avoided to portray women through sensationalist images, however, they blame women for choosing the ‘wrong’ man and for not being able to recognize violence. In other words, it does not succeed in raising awareness about the ‘thousand faces of violence’ mentioned in the title. On the contrary, it indirectly depicts women as the responsible of what they faced, leading to secondary victimization. Finally, we have a third typology ‘the non-violent man’. Differently from the other two, it targets men; the protagonist is a ‘non-violent’ man, often a famous person, who tries to involve men in eradicating violence against women and pushes them to question their ‘wrong’ behaviour. The presence of a man in the campaign conveys the idea that violence against women is an issue that concern all. Moreover, there are usually one or more claims aimed at deconstructing the gender stereotype that describes men as inherently aggressive and violent. In synthesis, men can choose and, as stated in Picture 2, it is not necessary to be a hero to respect women.

Picture 2. Print campaign of Fiocco Bianco (2008) with the headline “Contro alla violenza alle donne non servono superpoteri!”



Source: <http://www.difesadonna.it/campagne-sociali/contro-la-violenza-alle-donne-non-servono-supereroi>

In conclusion, we do not need other campaigns based on the spectacularization of violence, rather, it is necessary to involve men in contrasting violence against women. Moreover, promoters should move towards a gender-sensitive communication, which respects the dignity of the person represented, includes different points of view of women and of LGBTIQ+ people. Most of all, this approach is fundamental because it aims at deconstructing gender stereotypes.

2.3 Measuring Violence against Women in Italy

Although violence against women (VAW) in Italy constitutes a historical consolidated phenomenon, it is also classifiable as “emerging” because political institutions and the scientific community started to pay attention to and to analyze it properly recently. It is particularly important to keep in mind this aspect because it is directly linked to the lack of sources of information, which are fundamental for a precise and objective assessment of the phenomenon. Recognizing the importance of data collection, the Istanbul Convention, ratified by Italy by Law no. 77 of 27 June 2013, establishes in Article 11 that “Parties shall undertake to collect disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention”. Lamentably, Italy is not complying with its commitment, indeed we have little information about the scale of violence against women in Italy. As a result, this section

will be mostly based on the ISTAT survey conducted in 2014 since in the last seven years the National Institute for Statistics has not carried out any similar investigation.

According to this survey, 31,5% of women aged 16-70 have been victims of/survived to some form of violence during their life, either physical or sexual. 4 400 000 of women (26,4%) declared they have experienced psychological violence (including verbal, emotional and financial abuse) from the current partner. Often this form of violence overlaps physical and sexual violence. With regards to stalking, as intended by Law no.38 of 2009, 16.1% of women have faced stalking; in half cases, 1 524 800, the author was the ex-partner. Considering the most serious crimes (i.e., rape), they are mainly committed by a man the survivor knows: the current or former partner (62,7%), relatives (3,6%) or friends (9,4%). On the contrary, strangers are more frequently authors of sexual harassment (76,8%). Moreover, it emerges that the groups of women more at risk of suffering physical or sexual violence are young women (until 34 years old), nubile, separated or divorced women and female students. Referring to the effects of intimate partner violence, for one out of two women it had negative repercussions on their self-esteem; with almost the same frequency, it caused anxiety, panic attack, sleeping disorders, eating disorders and depression. In addition, it led to loss of memory and even self-harm and thoughts of suicide (12,1%).

The ISTAT survey (2014) is undoubtedly useful because it allows to update official data on the phenomenon, which do not detect its actual prevalence. As a matter of fact, 12,3% of survivors reported the violence suffered to the police; mostly they talked about it with friends and relatives. It is thought-provoking that just 12,8% of them was aware of the existence of antiviolence centers or other services providing support to survivors. The results of the previously mentioned survey of ISTAT ‘Stereotypes about gender roles and the social image of sexual violence’ (2018) suggests that the lack of knowledge about antiviolence centers concerns the whole population. Indeed, to the question ‘what would you do if you knew a woman who suffered violence by her husband/partner?’ two out of three respondents answered they would advise reporting the violence to law enforcement. By contrast around 20% of Italians would recommend going to antiviolence centers. Such a low percentage suggests that the Italian government does not sufficiently and adequately inform its citizens about antiviolence centers, which play a fundamental role in helping women getting out of violence. Denouncing is surely important: on the one side, it

contributes to the collection of more precise data on the phenomenon and, consequently, to measuring its scope. On the other side, it is a fundamental step for the prosecution of the authors of violence. Nevertheless, the focus should be on the survivor's well-being and therefore on designing with her a specific way to get out of violence. This path does not necessarily include reporting to the police, which, in particular circumstances, could worsen the situation. In addition, in Italy the level of impunity for the crime of sexual violence is shocking. In 2015 the number of men investigated for sexual violence amounted to 5886, but only 52,6% of them faced a trial; the other complaints were dismissed (Di Nicola, 2018, p. 123).

Although the ISTAT survey 'Violence against women in and outside the family' is particularly relevant, it has serious limitations and, as a result, it is not able to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent of violence against women. There is no precise information about old women (over sixty-five years), who are partly excluded by the survey, since it addresses women aged between sixteen and seventy years. The phenomenon of violence against old women has received little attention in Italy, it has not been studied properly yet. Since there are not national statistics about this issue, we know almost nothing about its extent and its peculiarities.

With regards to migrant women, the survey found out that they face sexual or physical violence on a degree almost identical to Italian women's. Differently from the latter one, they are more exposed to the most serious forms of violence, such as rape, which are mainly committed by current or former partners. As for the citizenship of migrant women the most affected are Moldavian women, followed by Romanians and Ukrainians. Besides this, there are few more information about them. We do not know anything about their status and their migration projects, therefore we need in-depth analysis to fill this gap. Moreover, it is essential to examine the greater quantity of obstacles migrant women have to overcome to access justice or ad hoc forms of protection. This data would be extremely useful for policy makers for designing appropriate policies to tackle and prevent the specific phenomenon of violence against migrant women.

Another weakness of the survey concerns the lack of statistics about violence experienced by women with disabilities⁴⁶, also in this case there is the urgent need to investigate the

⁴⁶ I decided to use the so called Person-First Language and not the term 'disabled women' because the latter tends to identify a person with its disability, condition or diagnosis and therefore can be

prevalence and characteristics of this precise phenomenon. It is no more acceptable the invisibilization of women with disabilities

Finally, the language used in many parts of the paper reporting the results of the ISTAT survey (2014) is highly problematic. Saying that women bettered their capacity to combat, prevent violence against them and get out violent relationships (ISTAT - Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2015, p. 1) is misleading. It erroneously suggests that it is up to women eradicating the violence they disproportionately face. Once again, it seems that men have no responsibility and, as a consequence, are not mentioned among the people appointed to change the current patriarchal society.

disrespectful and dehumanizing. Nevertheless, it is always opportune to ask people how they prefer to be called.

CHAPTER III

3. The Italian legislation on Violence against Women

After having focused on the Italian patriarchal cultural and the data on VAW in Italy, it is opportune to consider the (useful but insufficient) developments in the legislative framework. Starting from Law n. 66/1996 “Law against sexual violence” and concluding with the Prime Ministerial Decree D.P.C.M. of 17 December 2020 “Freedom Income for women victims of violence”, I am going to analyze the main laws and decrees that deeply changed the legislation on VAW, introducing important novelties.

3.1 Sexual violence: from an offence against public moral and common sense to an offence against personal freedom

The predominant literature depicts the passing of the Law n. 66/1996 as a “major legislative victory in Italy” (Laviosa, 2015, p. 2); nevertheless, it must be noted that the legislative process of this law lasted nearly twenty years and the initial draft law has practically nothing to do with the bill that finally passed. Therefore, it is simplistic to define this Law ‘revolutionary’⁴⁷, so a more in-depth study is required. In this way it is possible to recognize the remarkable role played by women’s organizations and feminist collectives during the overall legislative process.

In December 1977 the communist deputy Angela Bottari was the first to sign a proposed legislation on new rules to protect sexual freedom, which conceived sexual violence almost as an offence against the person. Considering that sexual violence was regarded by Article 519 of the 1931 Rocco Penal Code⁴⁸ as “an offence against the theoretical concept of morality and the abstract principle of public decorum” (Laviosa, 2015), this approach was quite innovative. Notwithstanding, it was not even discussed.

In the summer of 1979 an organizing committee, composed by UDI (Union of Italian Women), MLD (Movement for Women’s Liberation), the feminist collective of Rome, female trade unionists and by feminist newspapers and Radio stations, drafted a bill of popular initiative *Norme penali relative ai crimini perpetrati attraverso la violenza*

⁴⁷ See the Journal article *Violenza sessuale, finalmente legge*, La Stampa, 8th February 1996, n.38 p.7.

⁴⁸ The Rocco Penal Code was repealed only in 1989, when it was replaced by the current Code of Criminal Procedure

sessuale e fisica contro la persona and started gathering signatures. After having collected 300 000 signatures, the next year they submitted the legislative proposal to the Parliament. The objective of the draft law was not tightening up the penalty system, rather it aimed at moving sexual violence among offences against the person, at introducing a new type of crime, ‘group violence’, and at unifying lewd violent acts and rape under the offence of sexual violence. Besides this, it opposed the criminalization of consensual sexual intercourses between minors by deleting the hypothesis of alleged violence. Hence, it is clear that the main purpose was to combat violence and not sexuality. With respect to the trial, the legislative proposal introduced the possibility for associations defending women’s rights to sue as a civil party, together with open door hearing so that feminist and women’s organizations could take part to the discussion, providing psychological support to victims of violence. Another significant novelty concerns guarantees to the person offended by the crime, who should not be turned into the defendant. More concretely, during questionings it is no more allowed to ask the woman about her past obsessively or to judge her behaviors, clothing or private relationships.⁴⁹ On the one side, this proposed legislation of popular initiative constituted an important milestone for women, who, for the first time, took a step towards institutions. On the other side, it was object of criticism; as underlined by the Italian sociologist Tamar Pitch, in the proposal symbolic interests prevailed. Namely, the principal objective was to transmit to men the following message: women are “people” and therefore they should be treated as such also in sexual relationships. In other words, the traditional chauvinist culture, according to which women are objects that can be used by men as they wish, must be eradicated (Cocchiara, 2014).

Obviously, this bill was not the solution to the problem of VAW, however it drawn attention to two key aspects. One is the conceptualization of violence as the manifestation of male power and dominance over women, identifying sexuality as a means. The second one is related to consent and non-consent, neither of the two could be presumed. Disappointingly, both these crucial point did not become part of the Law n. 66/1996.

⁴⁹ It is discouraging that, after over forty years, survivors continue to undergo secondary victimization when reporting to the police and during the trial. It must be noted that Law n. 66/1996 prohibits questions on the victim’s personal life and sexuality during the hearing, but it specifies they are allowed if necessary for the reconstruction of the facts.

In *La mia parola contro la sua – Quando il pregiudizio è più importante del giudizio* (Di Nicola, 2018) there is an extensive analysis of prejudices women subjected to violence still face in the courtroom.

Indeed, together with the majority of the novelty presented in the legislative proposal submitted by UDI, MLD and other feminist and women's organizations, were removed during the long and agonizing law-making process.

In the following legislatures several bills were discussed but we must wait until 1996 for a definitive compromise between different political forces and the consequent passing of the current Law on sexual violence, permitted by the across-the-board commitment of female deputies. The resulting law has been harshly criticized; Tamar Pitch defined it "hurried, vague, imprecise, with an emergency-based approach and not so innovative compared to the Rocco Penal Code" (Cocchiara, 2014, p. 133). Indeed, it introduced a restricted number of novelties. In synthesis, sexual violence was finally included in the offences against the person; punishments were increased, moreover, there was the introduction of a new offence, that is group violence. According to Angela M. Bottari, it is undeniable that the Law has many and varied limitations, however, its approval represents a step forward in combating VAW. In particular, she affirms that it enabled successive legislative actions, such as Law n.38/2009 on stalking and so-called Law on Femicide n.119/2013 (Bottari, 2014).

By bringing this Law and its legislative process into focus, it is possible to better comprehend how difficult and how much time it is needed to move forward towards a cultural change and, generally, in the fight against VAW.

3.2 The main⁵⁰ legislative changes characterizing the new century

The twentieth century ends with an important novelty regarding migrant women: with the Legislative Decree 25th July 1998, n. 286 on "Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning immigration and the condition of third country nationals" there is the introduction of the residence permit for women victims of domestic violence. Lamentably, the Italian government restricted its actions to this law, avoiding to provide women adequate instruments to denounce. According to the project *Seconde A Nessuno* (2020), migrant and refugee women show an apparent little awareness or, at least, low consideration of the violence suffered with respect to their reasons to migrate. Given this, it is easier to

⁵⁰ My selection of the main laws and Ministerial/Presidential/Regional Decrees is based on the ISTAT webpage of the Italian National Legislation and on the list of regulation I found in the website of the Italian Department of Equal Opportunities.

<https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne/il-contesto/normativa-italiana>
<http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/materiale/elenco-normative/>

understand why it is so difficult that during the procedure of international protection the episodes of violence come out as eligible factors for issuing a residence permit. At the same time, this element calls attention to the necessity of having an adequate knowledge of the different contexts of origin of these women and also the gendered dimension of migrations. Furthermore, it is indispensable to fill the gap of female interpreters, of qualified staff that is able to detect violence indicators and of safe spaces.

In 2001 Italy approves Law n.154/2001 containing measures combating violence in family relationships. Precisely, the Law deals with preventative measure of removal from the family home and protective order in case of family abuse; it specifies that the same regulation applies also to the other components of the household and not only to the partner. Then it explains which are the penalties for those who do not respect the protective order.

Looking at the following year, it is important to emphasize Article 76, paragraph 4-ter of the Presidential Decree n.115/2002, which provides the possibility of free legal assistance by way of derogation from income limits for victims of gender-based violence.

Giving consideration to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), it is only in 2006 that the Italian government passed a law (Law n.7, 9th January 2006) aimed at explaining the actions that should be taken to prevent, contrast and punish FGM. With this term the World Health Organization refers to “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons”⁵¹. Although religion has been used for long as a justification for these practices, FGM have complex cultural reasons. Consequently to globalization and huge migratory flows that interested Europe in the last decades, they spread also in the European continent. According to estimations, almost 500 000 women victims of FGM live in Europe. Moreover, it is alarming that in Italy between 15% and 24% out of 76 040 young girls coming from States that practice FGM risk to be subjected to these procedures (EIGE, 2018). Therefore, the Law n.7/2006 is extremely relevant but it is not enough: the Italian should concretely commit to the eradication of this specific form of VAW.

In 2009 there are other important changes: on the one hand, stalking is finally recognized as an offence with Law n.38/2009; on the other one, the women’s hotline number 1522 is implemented, providing a multilingual support service available twenty-four hours on the

⁵¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation> accessed 09/02/22.

whole national territory. Besides agreement protocols with the police concerning stalking, the Department of Equal Opportunities signed also agreement protocols with the Ministry of Education to promote awareness-raising campaigns on VAW and discriminations based on gender (Centro Veneto Progetti Donna, 2021). Two years later we have the adoption of the first National Plan on GBV and stalking, that will be further analyzed in paragraph 3.4, followed in 2013 by the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the passing of the so called Law on femicide. Besides, that year is particularly crucial also for Veneto, which finally approved the Regional Law to combat GBV. Paying attention to the Istanbul Convention, it constitutes a landmark step in the advancement in the protection of women's rights since it classifies VAW as a serious violation of human rights, affirming that it represents a form of discrimination too. Surely, Italy made a breakthrough by ratifying it; nevertheless, we will see that it is not complying with it.

Considering Law n.119/2013, it brought some changes to criminal and procedural rules related to VAW. Specifically, there is the recognition of specific legal value with regards to witnessed violence and the Law provides more protections for abused women and for victims of stalking. Notwithstanding, it contains several contradictions, for whose it has been harshly criticized by anti-violence services and feminist associations. For example, the male abuser can remain in the house and, as a result, the woman victim of violence is forced to move.

Although it is based on three of the four Ps described in the Istanbul Convention, (prevention, protection and punishment), it mainly focuses on strengthening police. In this way, it overlooks the fundamental role played by all those structures that support survivors daily. Furthermore, there is no distinction between private and public centers with respect to allocating funds. This hinders private associations since their employees' salaries are not paid by the State and thus they are at risk of closing due to the lack of sufficient funding (Centro Veneto Progetti Donna, 2021).

As previously mentioned, 2013 is a crucial year also because of the passing of the Regional Law⁵² on GBV in Veneto. CVPD made big efforts for obtaining this Law; as

⁵² I decided to include a focus on the Regional context of Veneto and, namely, on this Law for a twofold reason: on the one side, living in this region I have a better and deeper knowledge of its regulation on preventing and combating VAW. On the other side, *Centro Veneto Progetti Donna*, that highly contributed to the writing of the text of this Law, is the feminist association where I am doing a university internship. Consequently, I had the possibility to get more detailed information about their involvement in the policy making process. In addition, I think that anti-violence centers are not valued enough and so it is opportune

the President of the association, Mariangela Zanni, explains, the center participated firsthand in writing. Particularly, she gathered and compared laws promulgated by the other Italian regions and, starting from her findings, she prepared a draft for the Regional Council, involving also several anti-violence centers. The work, begun in 2011, ended two years later when the Regional Council approved the Law unanimously.

Looking at the provision of more guarantees for victims of violence, Article 24 of the Legislative Decree n.80/2015 containing measures aimed at reconciling health, life and work necessities represents a turning point. In summary, Art.24 deals with leave for women victims of GBV: it provides women who start a protection program related to GBV the right to abstain from work for reasons connected to the mentioned protection program for a maximum period of three months. During the leave, the worker has the right to receive compensation amounting to the last salary. Furthermore, the Decree guarantees the possibility to pass from a full time job to a part-time job. In 2015 we witness two more significant changes: on the one hand, Law n.107/2015 concerning the reform of the national educational system. According to the so called *Buona Scuola* reform the three-year plan of training of the schools should promote an education based on gender equality, aimed at informing and raising awareness of students from grammar, middle and high school, teachers and parents on subjects related to VAW and gender-based discrimination. On the other hand, the Legislative Decree n.212 of 15th December, which establishes minimum standards with regard to victims of crime rights, support and protection.

Italy took one more step forward thanks to the Law n.69/2019 adopted 19th July. It is known as *Codice Rosso* since it introduces a fast line for complaints and investigations on gender-based violence comparable to the one used in emergency room for the most severe patients. According to this Law, judicial police must refer a crime report to the public prosecutor immediately, also in oral form. Successively, the public minister must hear the victim or the person who made the denunciation to get more information within three days of notification of the offence. The victim has no more only six months to file

to start recognizing their commitment and concrete efforts in preventing and combating violence. In light of this, I choose to draw attention to the essential work of CVPD to eradicating gender-based violence. I find the internship an extremely enriching experience, thanks to which I am learning to look at VAW from a different perspective, centered on women, their specific necessities and their agency.

a police report, but rather twelve months⁵³. Furthermore, one of the major novelties of Law n.69/2019 consists in the introduction of the following four offences: the commonly called ‘revenge porn’, forced marriage, facial disfigurement (for example provoked by an acid attack) and the violation of provisions requiring the perpetrator to leave the house or of the prohibition from coming into the proximity of the places frequented by the offended person. With regards to ‘revenge porn’, it is not correct to use this expression in referring to this offence, but it is more opportune to call it ‘non-consensual image or video sharing’. Indeed, it can be defined as “non-consensual sharing of nude or sexual images (photos or videos) of a person or threats thereof include acts of image-based sexual abuse” (GREVIO, 2021). Hence, it has nothing to do with revenge; it is rooted in the long-standing power imbalance between women and men. Specifically, this form of digital violence aims at disparaging and controlling the person who is victim of this crime (Centro Veneto Progetti Donna; Belluno-Donna; Spazio Donna - Questacittà, 2020). Penalties for sexual offences and stalking are made even stricter: in the case of sexual violence, now the penalty goes up twelve years, which are fourteen years if we deal with group violence. With respect to stalking, now the maximum penalty amounts to six years and six months. Lastly the funding for supporting orphans of femicide and the mandatory courses for police are increased.

Ultimately, it is worthwhile to take into account the Presidential Decree 17th December 2020 because it establishes the so-called freedom income for women victims of violence. In a press release⁵⁴ of November 2021 Antonella Veltri, President of D.i.Re, talks about the approval of a circular INPS containing the prerequisites and the procedures for having access to the freedom income. She states that anti-violence centers welcomed this measure, however Mariangela Zanni, National Councillor of D.i.Re and President of CVPD, recognizes that it is just a feigned action. Indeed, the 302 anti-violence centers counted by ISTAT in 2018 assist almost 50 000 women per year but the funding reserved to the freedom income (three million €) are sufficient only for maximum 625 women. In addition, A. Veltri claims that a subsidy of 400€ per month is undoubtedly useful but it

⁵³ It is obviously positive that the amount of time at disposable of the survivor to make a complaint is doubled; nevertheless, it is still not enough because each person that suffered violence needs a different quantity of time to process what happened. Therefore, a year could not be sufficient, which means that this Law should be modified in order to finally be inclusive and protecting of all victims of GBV.

⁵⁴ For reading the full press release see the following website page <https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/reddito-di-liberta-la-realta-dietro-i-proclami/>

does not allow women to acquire real freedom and concludes that it is necessary to turn this measure into a structural intervention.

Considering what emerged from this focus on the main legislative changes on laws, decrees and measures related to VAW, we can conclude that “the judicial system and post-1995 laws have been characterized by the principle of “Primacy of Criminal Law”, in the application of both legislative and judicial power. Government (and Parliament) base all their actions on criminal law – symbolically a powerful statement of intent, but intrinsically the weakest way to bring about real change concerning the balance of power” (The change we want. Feminist proposals 25 years post Beijing, 2020).

3.3 The media narration of VAW: The Manifesto of Venice and the need of a monitoring center

Recently, VAW has gained major visibility in the Italian media, which could be seen positively. However, the fact that GBV against women has started to take up more space in newspapers, TV or radio programs has not lead to an increased awareness of the gender roots of violence. This missed opportunity is the result of a toxic narration of VAW perpetuated by Italian media. Specifically, the public representation of violence often distorts the real causes of this phenomenon and shows a tendency towards the reproduction of the traditional gender hierarchy. Indeed, women are depicted as victims without agency and men as subjects with irresistible impulses. Moreover, the media should not aim at raising social alarm and indignation because it just contributes to reducing violence to a deviant behavior. In this way, male violence is “de-gendered” and the individual pathology is adopted as the reading key, preventing an analysis that takes into account gender and power as variables (Cicccone, 2018).

Since femicide is the form of violence most commonly reported in the news, it is worthwhile to focus on the way in which the media, namely newspapers present it. It is extremely useful to take into account the results of a study carried out by Chiara Gius and Pina Lalli on how three principal Italian newspapers (*Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa*) frame crimes of intimate partner femicide. In 2012 the press reported 53 intimate partner femicide; examining 166 articles, they analyze the capacity of Italian news media to account for these femicides. In figure 3.1 the two authors provide a perfect synthesis of frames employed to explain the crime.

Figure 3.1: Frames employed to explain the crime

<i>Frames</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<i>Romantic Love</i>	Femicide explicitly presented as <i>crime passionelle</i> Violence motivated by jealousy Violence motivated by unrequited love Violence motivated by separation or divorce Perpetrator explicitly presented as “in love” with the victim Victim explicitly presented as “in love” with the perpetrator
<i>Loss of Control</i>	Perpetrator was in love and lost control Violence is explicitly connected to a <i>raptus</i> Femicide occurred “out of the blue” Violence followed an argument between the victim and the perpetrator Article make reference to recurring arguments among the victim and the perpetrator Loss of control was used by the perpetrator as self defence
<i>Other Contextual Elements</i>	Crime could be connected to perpetrator substance abuse (alcohol/drugs) or mental illness Perpetrator described as a monster-violent-bad man Crime is linked to poverty/social marginality Violence linked to perpetrator cultural background (immigrant origins) Victim should have known better Violence briefly reported as commonplace violence

Source: Gius, C. & Lalli, P. (2014). “I loved her so much, but I killed her.” Romantic love as a representational frame for intimate partner femicide in three Italian newspapers, p.61.

Looking at the themes included in the frames ‘Romantic love’ and ‘Loss of Control’, there is a common denominator: the majority of articles conveys the idea that “the perpetrator acted upon a moment of emotional instability deriving from love” (Gius & Pina, 2014, p. 69). As a consequence, femicide is perceived as something unpredictable and not as what it really is: the result of “an asymmetrical relationship in which a man acted violently to maintain control over the object of his love” (ibid.).

From the examination of articles comes out that in the few ones not characterized by the unpredictability of intimate partner violence, the victim is accused of lack of “better judgement”. This expression suggests that the woman would still be alive if she would have chosen more prudently or wisely her partner, therefore a loss of control at some point could have been expected considering that she was engaged in a relationship with a jealous and maybe occasionally violent man. Said differently, the victim is blamed for her incapacity to anticipate her death.

Besides there is another typology of articles, in which we do not find the implicitly condemnation of the victim but rather the explicit condemnation of the perpetrator. Lamentably, the only articles that holds the man accountable for his actions depict him as a “monster”, in this way the perpetrator is de-humanized, suggesting that the femicide was just an isolated case since only a horrible and insane person could do something similar.

As concluded by C. Gius and P. Lalli,

Femicide in Italy is still largely represented in national newspapers by reproducing traditional understandings of romantic love, or by defining the crime as the outcome of irrational behaviors. Like the main characters of a contemporary tragedy the murderers are represented as men who act moved by feelings of jealousy and tormented passion and who suddenly lose control in an extreme act of domination over the body and the life of the woman they love. Then, like in the gloomiest dramas the ending is not a happy one. By offering a depiction of femicide strictly connected to tormented love, the newspapers convey a representation that confines femicide to the private dynamics of that particular couple, or in a dimension of individual action that little has to do with socialization processes to gender roles, power relations and processes of gender construction. In this scenario, romantic love is often used by the press to legitimate the men’s necessity to regain control over his feminine partner who tried to escape her role as object of possession. (p. 71)

Consequently, the Italian news media have got to go a long way to achieve more, or better, real, gender-sensitive representation of femicide and VAW. Surely, a good way to speed up this process would be introducing a monitoring body in charge of assessing the effective fulfilment of the Manifesto of Venice. To fully comprehend why the institution of such body of control is so fundamental, it is necessary to take a step back: first of all, what is the just mentioned Manifesto of Venice? On 25th of November 2017 the Equal Opportunities Committees of FNSI and USIGRAI (the National trade union of journalists), GIULIA Women Journalists and the Veneto Trade Union of Journalists launched this Manifesto. In summary, it illustrates not only how a story of VAW and femicide should be narrate, but also the way to combat gender stereotypes and ensure women’s dignity. It is articulated in ten points; it is particularly interesting to focus on number five and ten. The fifth point affirms that journalists should use the specific term

“femicide”⁵⁵ for referring to murders of women killed just for being women and to eradicate the traditional culture that has always underestimated any form of violence: physical, psychological, economical, legal and cultural. With regards to the last point of the Manifesto, it requires using a correct and respectful language; specifically, it should not be suggested mitigated circumstances or justifications for the murderer, also if not on purpose, explaining the violence as the consequence of economic difficulties, depression, infidelity and others (Tringali, 2019). From the two mentioned points it is possible to understand how crucial it would be to give effectivity to this Manifesto. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen it through setting up a monitoring center, so that it does not restrict to be a well written list of guidelines that remains unimplemented.

Beside this, the authors of the Position Paper ‘The change we want’ emphasize that it is crucial to training adequately all professional working in public and private communication “on the best ways to portray a correct, respectful and multi-faceted image of women, and more importantly when talking about male violence against women” (p. 21).

3.4 Anti-violence centers and shelters

How does the Italian institutional system support women willing to undertake a path to get out of violence and their children? The services provided are of various nature; an initial key division of anti-violence centers can be made between general services and specialized one. As specified by the Explanatory Report of Article 20 of the Istanbul Convention, general services are those offered by the public sector, such as social, health care and employment services. In other words, they are not services conceived exclusively for women victims of violence, but rather for a wider public. Conversely, specialized services are described as those that provide ad hoc support on the base of women victims of violence specific needs, mainly offered by no-profit organizations (Busi & Menniti, 2021).

⁵⁵ Here, I use the term “femicide” to indicate the murder of a woman for being a woman to be the most faithful to the source text as possible. Anyway, in the rest of the work I employ the word ‘femicide’, even if in the Italian news media, it is more common to find the expression ‘femminicidio’ which in English can be translated as ‘femicide’. Notwithstanding, I chose ‘femicide’ not for the sake of simplicity; considering the origin of the term, coined by Marcela Lagarde, and its initial meaning and scope, I do think that it is simplistic and, therefore, not adequate to use it for indicating only the most extreme form of violence against a woman.

It is now opportune to go more into detail, so, what are anti-violence centers and what is their role in combating VAW?

In the 1980s in Italy some women's associations worked hard for setting up the first anti-violence centers, which were able to introduce the issue of GBV against women in the political agenda (Rete Nazionale dei Centri Antiviolenza e delle Case delle donne, 2007). In other words, the associations succeeded in turning VAW into a public issue, that was formerly considered exclusively as a private question.

As defined by the previously mentioned Position Paper "The change we want", anti-violence centers are "cultural centers working to transform the "social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men". These centers should be valued not only for the services they provide, but also for their ability to network and collaborate with public offices and their cultural work in challenging patriarchal stereotypes". D.i.Re describes them as women's places, where women that suffered any form of violence can go in order to get help but also simply to be heard and believed (D.i.Re - Donne in Rete contro la violenza, 2014). Since their creation, anti-violence centers have provided services to society, specifically, giving women the necessary instruments to recognize violence, supporting them out of it and in their emancipation and empowerment. It is crucial to put the emphasis on their construction of projects that involve women, which transformed their work in political action for changing the whole society. Therefore, it is belittling and unfair to depict anti-violence centers merely as care services. Beside compensating for the inadequate welfare services supplied by the State, they are places where knowledge, competences, experiences, planning and hopes arise from women's interaction and collaboration. As explained by D.i.Re, the establishment of a shared agreement with the received woman and the other entities being part of the local network makes anti-violence services political subjects.

With regards to the methodology adopted by anti-violence centers, each action, which are for example the formal complaint to the police, separation from the violent partner and activation of services, can be taken only with the consent of the woman. The work puts at the heart the survivor and her needs and is based on the following premises: protection, confidentiality and non-judgement.

It is extremely important to clarify that anti-violence centers, which consider VAW and witnessed violence a violation of human rights and a criminal offence, never work with abusers but only with women victims of violence.

Looking at the methodological principles used by anti-violence centers, they do not employ a standardized and a priori approach, but rather a method that gives credit to the woman's story and roots in the construction of a relationship of trust between the woman and the professionals of the center. Indeed, it is misleading and detrimental to regard women victims of violence, violence itself and its consequences as homogeneous groups and phenomena. Restating a crucial concept previously mentioned, women cannot be considered as a uniform group because they are not and a similar conceptualization would deprive the word women of a real meaning. At the same time, it is simplistic and does not take into account all the existing differences between women, which are related, among others, to sexual orientation, race, religion and socio-economic status. On the other side, the term VAW does not refer to a single typology of violence and its diverse forms can overlap. Consequently, professionals cannot approach in the same way a migrant woman that suffered sexual violence and a woman with disability, who, besides having been sexually assaulted, is also victim of psychological and economic violence.

Furthermore, the methodology builds on the empowerment of women's identity, fostering their agency, and on the relation between women. Since its creation D.i.Re has promoted a particular type of networking, that should be anti-bureaucratic, flexible, focused on women's needs and the necessities of their children. An anti-violence networking to be effective should adopt a shared language, comprehensible to all, and should safeguard the autonomy and self-regulation of all subjects making part of it (D.i.Re - Donne in Rete contro la violenza, 2014).

Moving on to the main standards of anti-violence centers, it must be noted that all services provided to women are "gender-oriented", in this way they are able to satisfy the specific needs of women. Additionally, they share a common interpretation of VAW; they intend this phenomenon as the result of a social construct. So, this vision implies that it is not connected with an individual pathology of the perpetrator, but it originates from power disparities between women and men.

Before explaining in detail the following two associations: D.i.Re and Centro Veneto Progetti Donna, (the former is a national association, conversely the latter has a local

dimension), I would like to make clear a crucial point in the understanding of the work of anti-violence centers. A woman that turns to these specialized centers is an acting subject, indeed she represents the protagonist in her exit path from violence, which will allow her to take back control of her own life. Each woman defines her own project together with the professionals of the center and no decision is taken without the agreement of the survivor. Finally, anti-violence centers do not provide “assistance”: welfare-kind actions give immediate answers to a victim of violence, notwithstanding, they do not enable her to have an active role, but just a passive one.

To get a more complete view of the variety of services offered by anti-violence services, it is opportune to take into consideration the first ISTAT survey on anti-violence centres, realized in 2017 in collaboration with the National Department of Equal Opportunities, the National Research Council of Italy and the Regions. It analyses 281 centres and provides valuable information about the actors involved, the total and the type of funding they receive and also the different typologies of anti-violence centres.

It is worthwhile to focus on the activities held outside the centre, in this way it is possible to grasp the fundamental role played by professionals of anti-violence centres in order to eradicate the phenomenon. Indeed, the centres are involved in projects of prevention and training. Besides helping survivors in their journeys to recovery, 81% of the centres included in the ISTAT survey provide information and training actions predominantly targeted at social workers and healthcare workers (respectively 71,7% and 60.5% of centres offer these services to the two diverse category of subjects). Whereas less than half of centres provide information and training to law enforcement officers and solicitors. It must be noted that all centres carry out cultural prevention activities in their territory and very high amount of them (91,7%) perform programs in the schools.

With regards to the 4,403 women⁵⁶ working in anti-violence centres, the majority are volunteers, specifically, 1 933 of female staff are remunerated versus 2 470 women who are not. However, the proportion of volunteers changes depending on the area of Italy considered; namely, in Southern Italy only slightly less than one third of anti-violence centres workers is engaged as volunteers. In the northern-west area the scenario is different, indeed the Regions located in that part of the peninsula largely use unpaid

⁵⁶ The 2014 Agreement between State, Regions and Autonomous Provinces establishes that in anti-violence centres can work only women.

personnel. In figure 3.1 we can see the different types of professionals working at the centre. Besides coordinators, which are present practically in all centres (94,5% on average), we have other three categories that can be found in at least nine out ten centres, that are solicitors, psychologists and specialized support provider. Only 75,5% of centres are equipped with an administrative staff; the percentage is much lower if we make reference to the presence of educators and social assistants. Finally, just 28,9% of centres has cultural mediators, an essential position taking into account the relevant amount of migrant women that seek help from anti-violence centres.

Figure 3.1 Centres by type of professional working at the centre. Year 2017, per 100 centres in the same area

GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS	Coordinator	Specialised support provider	Psychologist	Social assistant	Educator	Cultural mediator	Solicitor	Administrative staff	Other staff
North-west	96.4	94.6	98.2	42.9	35.7	35.7	94.6	89.3	41.1
North-east	82.4	88.2	74.5	27.5	39.2	29.4	88.2	82.4	60.8
Centre	97.5	97.5	95.0	37.5	45.0	37.5	95.0	72.5	47.5
South	98.8	82.4	96.5	87.1	63.5	18.8	96.5	63.5	42.4
Islands	95.2	90.5	90.5	85.7	71.4	33.3	95.2	76.2	42.9
ITALY	94.5	89.3	91.7	57.3	50.2	28.9	94.1	75.5	46.6

Source: ISTAT survey on Anti-violence centres – Year 2017, p.8

In view of the crucial contribution of anti-violence centers in combating GBV, it is imperative at least to touch upon a significant issue discussed in the Position Paper ‘The change we want’, that is the typology of organizations that should or should not run these centers. Precisely the authors of the paper argue that

in various parts of Italy, organizations that manage family-houses and host mothers and children by order of the Juvenile Courts, or manage nursery schools, play-centers, or services for vulnerable people, have been awarded funds via public calls for tender for managing anti-violence services. These are not women-only organisations, nor do they have statutory aims for combating violence against women. These organisations do not “work on reception procedures based on a gender-sensitive approach and/or on the principles of the Istanbul Convention”. They are not cultural centers that work to transform the patriarchal cultural models that feed and justify male violence against women and they are not “a central element of a coordinated system of local governance and related networks” (The change we want. Feminist proposals 25 years post Beijing, 2020, p. 18).

Appointing organisations that do not have as primary goal the eradication of VAW, which do not employ a gender-sensitive approach and are not composed only by women is alarming because these associations do not have the sufficient expertise and knowledge that feminist women’s organizations have developed during the last three decades. Concurrently, it diminishes the political importance of anti-violence centers and their actions of awareness-raising and training of professionals among others.

Analyzing the numbers of anti-violence centers, they are 366 overall, according to data updated to 1st January 2018. Considered alone this amount is not very useful; to better understand their territorial diffusion it can be convenient comparing it to the number of women that potentially could seek help from them. It comes out that, at the national level, there are 1,3 anti-violence center every 100 000 women being fourteen years old or older. Hence, we can conclude that the number of anti-violence centers is clearly insufficient, the amount of women that contacted and have been received by anti-violence centers demonstrate it. As showed in figure 3.1, the number of women that sought help from an anti-violence center corresponds to 49 021, data detected by 315 centers, and 32 632 women have been taken in charge, 104 per center on average. Paying attention to migrant women, averagely each center has in charge thirty women (8 711 in total); whereas women in charge with their underage children are 15 543.

Figure 3.2: Number of women that sought help from anti-violence centres and started a path for recovering from violence, according to some characteristics (absolute and average values).

	Total number of women	Anti-violence centres that detected data ⁵⁷	Average of women per centre
Women who contacted a centre	49.021	315	156
Women in charge	32.632	313	104
Migrant women in charge	8.711	292	30
Women in charge with underage children	15.543	297	52

⁵⁷ This column has been added because not all 366 anti-violence centres were able to provide information about the number of women supported and their characteristics.

Women in charge sent by local services	11.429	272	42
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The source: Beatrice Busi and Adele Menniti's elaboration of ISTAT and CNR-IRPPS, 2018

Regarding the number of anti-violence centres, it is noteworthy that almost one third have been opened after 2014, so after the approval of Law 119/2013. According to B. Busi and A. Menniti, this increasing could be read, on the one hand, as the result of a growing awareness about the importance of strengthening the services offered by the third sector for supporting women victims of violence. On the other hand, it could represent a consequence of an action aimed at promoting access to funding (allocated subsequently to Law 119/2013) for the opening of new centres. From the geographical point of view new centres differ from the older, indeed the former are located mainly in municipalities that are not provincial capitals and in the South of Italy. Conversely, the latter are placed in provincial capitals and in the North of Italy. Therefore, it is opportune to state that the new centres contributed to a territorially fairer balance.

Figure 3.3 Anti-violence centres for typology of municipality, the distribution and opening year

	Before 2001	2001-2013	After 2013	Total
Type of municipality				
Provincial capital	84%	41%	22%	45%
Other municipality	16%	60%	78%	55%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Distribution				
North	58%	38%	29%	40%
Centre	21%	21%	10%	17%
South	21%	41%	61%	42%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Beatrice Busi and Adele Menniti's elaboration of ISTAT and CNR-IRPPS, 2018

With respect to D.i.Re, it is a national association founded in 2008 that currently includes 60 organizations of women situated all over Italy and involved in combating gender-based violence. Moreover, it is part of the Executive Council of Global Network of Women's Shelter, the international network of anti-violence centers and is a member of WAVE (Women Against Violence), the European network of centers against violence. Its purpose is to foster national actions able to bring about cultural transformations, as a way to increase awareness on violence against women. Moreover, its work aims at strengthening the anti-violence centers and at broadening their network. The association plays a fundamental role in furthering local, national and international policies that take into account the necessities of women victims of gender-based violence.

Paying attention to Centro Veneto Progetti Donna, it is a no-profit association, part of D.i.Re network. It was funded in 1990 by a group of women that had previously worked at the labor union Cgil and at the help desk Telefono Rosa, created to put an end to harassment in the workplace. Ten years after its inauguration, CVPD opened its first anti-violence center, which will be followed by four more centers; this opening constituted a turning point for CVPD because it started to define its identity and mission. Another significant year is 2008, when the Statute of the Center was modified; specifically, its main purpose, that until that moment was promoting new services for women, became the elimination of any form of violence against women and their children. Currently, CVPD represents a reference point for women living in Padua district and for the whole community since it engages in actions of prevention, such as, raising awareness on GBV. Namely, some professionals of the Center are appointed to go to schools for giving students information about the phenomenon, so that they learn how to recognize it.

3.5 Italian Public Policies to combat violence against women: the four National Action Plans

Summarizing what has been said until now, in Italy VAW entered the State's agenda only starting from mid-90s, precisely 1996 with the adoption of the law on sexual violence, and mainly thanks to feminist and women's groups, who deeply influenced the Italian legislation since 1970s. Indeed, their strong commitment to the cause contributed to the following two relevant achievements: the abolishment of "matrimonial authority" (1975) and the removal from the penal code of the crime of honor and corrective marriage (1981).

Nevertheless, also international, supranational and European agreements played a crucial role in developing the Italian VAW policy regimes, specifically, the Beijing Declaration (1995) and the Istanbul Convention (2011).

3.5.1 The first National Action Plan to combat gender-based violence and stalking

The Italian government adopted the first National Action Plan to combat GBV in 2011. It must be noted that the 2011 NAP results from the collaboration of different actors, both public and private entities. Precisely, the Italian National Network of Women's Shelters (D.i.Re) took part to the meetings organized by Mara Carfagna, Minister of Equal Opportunities from 2008 to 2011, for the creation of the Plan. D.i.Re contributed considerably to the definition of the priorities for action, indeed it presented to the Minister a document containing the major needs detected in the national territory. The Plan adopted the same starting point shared by the document, defining VAW as "all acts of violence that result in, or are likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private spaces" (Art.3 of the Istanbul Convention). Notwithstanding, the 2011 NAP was particularly disappointing with respect to its goals, the actions outlined to achieve them and the amount and distribution of public funding.

According to what emerged from the 13th WAVE Conference, the Plan lacks clear indications of sources, typology and quantity of money to be allocated for each planned action, including the funding for anti-violence centers. D.i.Re underlined the difficulties many centers have to face due to economic resource shortages, which can even lead an anti-violence center to close. Moreover, in the Plan there is the absence of any criteria for guiding local authorities in allocating funding to specialized subjects. Besides this, the NAP makes reference to anti-violence centers and it states its commitment to providing them support but it does not specify which criteria they should satisfy in order to be recognized among the subjects charged with guaranteeing women's safety. In this way, also general private and public structures are included, which are not even required to train their employees adequately.

Regarding prevention, the NAP plans realizing campaigns aimed at raising public awareness. Lamentably, it is an extremely vague measure and it does not take into account the necessity to create appropriate educational material for different categories of society,

with specific attention to schools. In addition, it does not involve men in activities of awareness-raising; this decision was criticized by D.i.Re, who, in its document, had expressly recommended the involvement of men in these actions.

In relation to training courses, it is not clear who is designated to train socio-health operators and police agents and also the contents of these courses is not indicated. These courses are extremely important because several studies and surveys carried out in Italy demonstrated the degree of institutional tolerance towards VAW is still high, most of all in the case of domestic violence.

Additionally, it remains deeply-rooted the tendency of social services, counselling centers, emergency room and police to blaming women for the violence suffered (practice called secondary victimization). Finally, the Plan never mentions the need of adopting a gender-sensitive approach to VAW and it does not give value to training skills of anti-violence centers, which come from their well-established experience in supporting women and helping them out of violence.

3.5.2 The Extraordinary Action Plan on sexual and gender-based violence (2015-2017)

Referring to the Istanbul Convention, it was ratified by Italy in 2013 and with the Legislative Decree n.93/2013 and successive Law n.119/2013 there was the adoption of regulations aimed at preventing and combating violence against women. Besides measures related to the penal field, it was established the necessity of a National extraordinary action plan on sexual and gender-based violence (Article 5, Law n.119/2013), adopted between 2015-2017, followed by the National Strategic Plans 2017-2020 and 2021-2023.

Despite some recent steps forwards, the Italian VAW political framework is extremely problematic since it is characterized by fragmentation and heterogeneity at both the regional and national level.

Considering the first NAP adopted after the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the two-year Extraordinary Action Plan against sexual and gender-based violence was approved 7th July 2015. Synthetically, it is an instrument aimed at planning the actions to combat VAW, which gives effect to the urgent measures on security and VAW contained in the Decree-Law n.93/2013, converted in the so-called Law on Femicide.

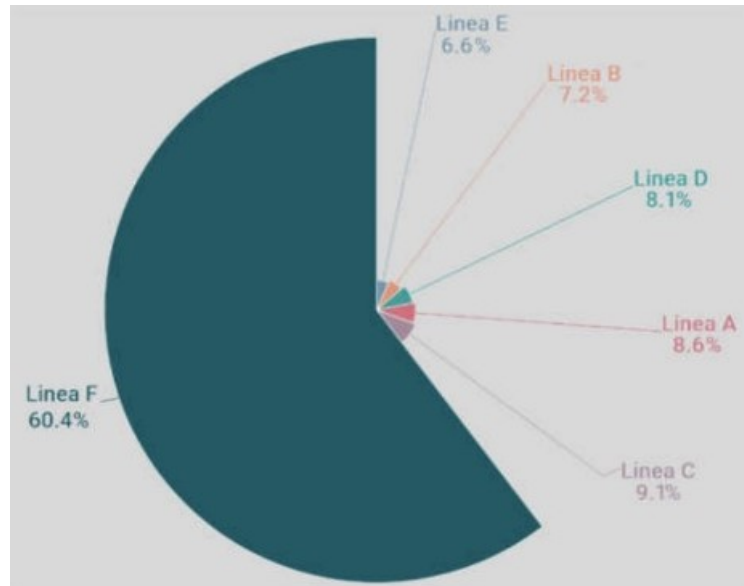
With regards to the writing of the Plan, a task force was appointed to drafting it. Precisely, it composed by representatives of the different Ministries (of Justice, Interior, Health, Education, Foreign Affairs, Defense, Economy and Finance, Labor and Economic Development), besides the Department of Equal Opportunities, and the representatives of associations operating to combat VAW at the national level (Udi, Telefono Rosa, D.i.Re, Pangea Onlus, Maschile plurale and Centro di ascolto uomini maltrattanti). Remarkably, for the sake of transparency, the draft was object of a public consultation, which allowed greater sharing.

In line with the Istanbul Convention, in its foreword the Plan recognizes that VAW constitutes a violation of human rights and of fundamental freedoms, besides being a “manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women” (Gagliardi & Molteni, 2019).

According to the structure of the Plan, there are the following three areas of intervention: prevention, protection and punishment. The first one is aimed at promoting a cultural change, concerning attitudes, gender roles and gender stereotypes that contribute to increasing the degree of tolerance of VAW. The objective of the second one consists in implementing measures that protect and support women and their children out of violence and in their individual project of emancipation.

Finally, the Plan commits to a more efficient prosecution of criminal offences related to gender-based violence. The following graphic clearly shows that three out five founded projects regards prevention, especially action of communication and awareness-raising. Conversely, only 6,6% of projects addresses and offers support to women victims also of economic violence, and in less than 10% of cases we deal with programs for perpetrators of VAW.

Figure 3.4: Funded projects according to the lines of action. Percentage Values

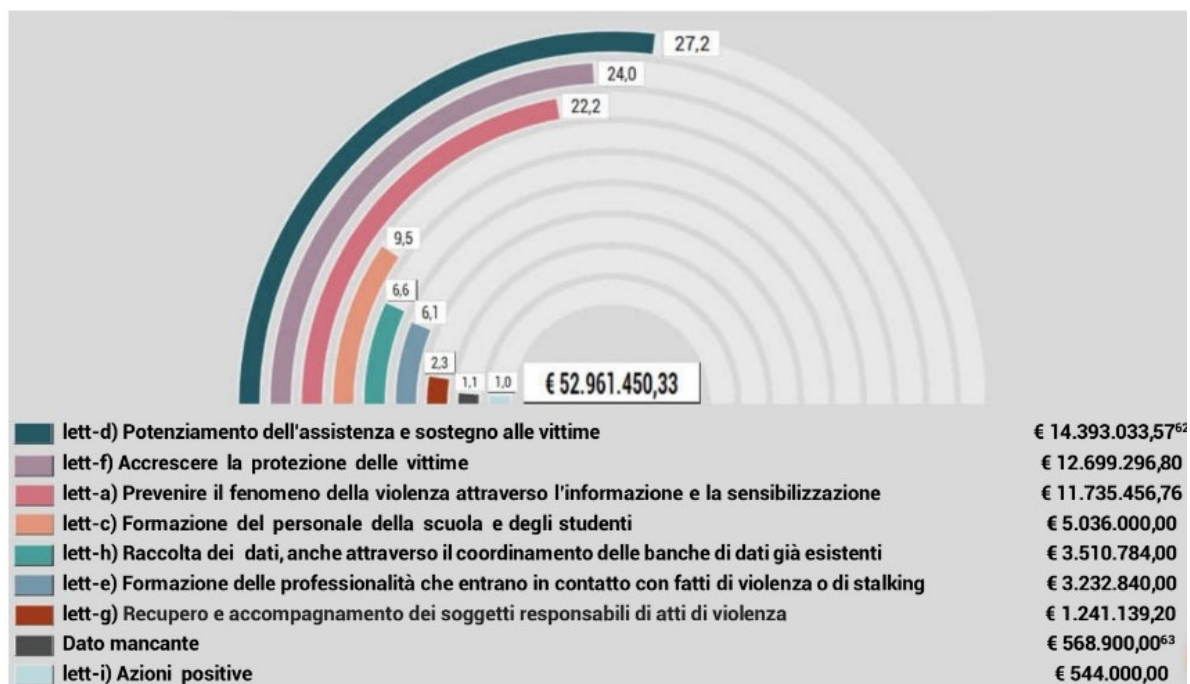


Source: First Report on the Evaluation of the Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and gender-based Violence 2015-2017 (2019), p. 64.

LINEA A. Projects aimed at improving the modalities of job placement
LINEA B. Projects supporting detained women who suffered violence and actions for raising awareness about GBV against women in penitentiary institutions
LINEA C. Treatment programs for perpetrators of VAW
LINEA D. Projects for improving services for migrant women victims of violence
LINEA E. Innovative projects supporting and protecting women experiencing also economic violence
LINEA F. Projects concerning communication and territorial awareness-raising aimed at preventing gender-based violence.

Looking at the synthesis of financed actions in figure 3.5, a little more than one fourth of them concern the enhancement of assistance and support provided to women victims of violence (lett-d). Similar amounts of money are used to fund actions for increasing the level of survivors' protection (lett-f) and for preventing the phenomenon through informative and awareness-raising campaigns (lett-a). The paltry sum of five million euros is destined to training school personnel and students (lett-c); conversely, 6,6% of public funding is used for collecting data on VAW (lett-h). An even inferior percentage is for the training of police, healthcare workers and the other professionals that deal with episodes of GBV or stalking (lett-e). Then there are actions for treating perpetrators of VAW, to which 2,3% of economic resources is dedicated (lett-g); and with regards to positive actions, the budget used corresponds to 544 000 € (lett-i).

Figure 3.5: Synthesis of financed actions



Source: First Report on the Evaluation of the Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and gender-based Violence 2015-2017 (2019), p. 104.

3.5.3 The National Strategic Plan on male violence against women (2017-2020)

Differently from the previously mentioned NAP, I am going to examine more extensively the National Strategic Plan on male violence against women (2017-2020) for a twofold reason: on the one hand, it is notably similar to the new NAP 2021-2023 on which we have little information since it was adopted recently. On the other hand, it has been object of in-depth analysis. Thanks to the research activities of the Viva Project, we have comprehensive data on the current system of support services available in Italy and also the first evaluation of a NAP on GBV.

Taking into consideration its structure, it is in line with the holistic response to VAW provided by the Istanbul Convention, indeed it adopts the “4Ps approach” too. Starting from the main goal of the Plan, that is, the eradication of gender-based violence, it is possible to distinguish four routes of intervention that constitute the orienting principles that are prevention, protection and support, prosecution and cross “service” route, which are developed through specific objectives.

The first route works towards the eradication of the cultural roots of violence. For this reason, it focuses on making people sensible of the seriousness of the phenomenon by

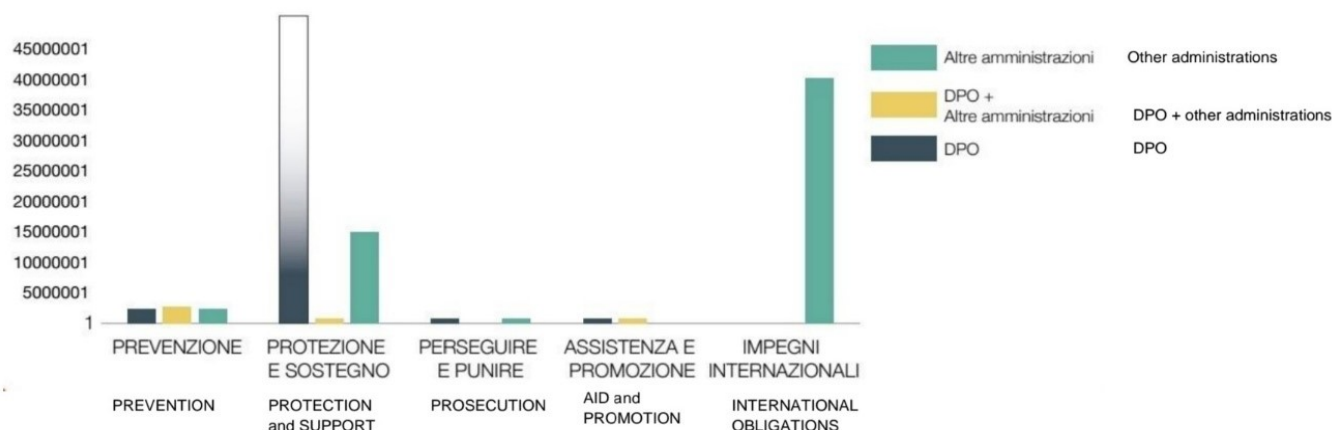
using awareness programs and campaigns. Concretely, this principle translates into the following priorities: accurate formation of professionals working in both the private and public spheres; capturing the interest of the private sector and mass media regarding the role of stereotypes and sexism in perpetuating male violence against women; perpetrator treatment programs; and the prevention of all kind of violence against women that are migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers.

Then there is the second route of intervention, which emphasizes the significant role of women's shelters and centers in giving support and protection to women victims of violence and their children. Furthermore, it establishes a limited number of primary objectives that dealt with taking charge of women victims of violence, the creation of paths of economic and working empowerment, reinforcing the free helpline violence and stalking 1522 and the protection and support of minors who are victims of or witnessed domestic violence.

With regards to the prosecution and punishment principle, the Plan establishes the necessity to improve the efficacy of legal proceedings aimed at protecting victims of rape and other crimes related to male violence against women. In addition, it determines that it is imperative to guarantee protection to women victims of violence through an efficient and fast evaluation and management of the risk of deadliness, reiteration, and seriousness. Finally, the cross "service" route aims at reinforcing the management, monitoring, evaluation and data collection.

As stated in the preamble, the Plan (2017-2020) limits itself to the definition of the overall Italian strategy for the fulfilment of the Istanbul Convention. Therefore, it does not contain any reference to funds allocated for the implementation of concrete actions related to the strategies it outlines. In order to acquire precise information about the financial instruments it is necessary to refer to the Operative Plan published in July 2019. According to it, the total expense amount to 132 000 000 €, specifically 15,5 million to finance interventions exclusively entitled to the DPO (Department of Equal Opportunity), summed up to 52,7 million that are distributed among the Italian Regions as established in art.5 bis of D.L. 93/2013. Then, 60,6 million are designated to the activities exclusively entitled to other central administrations. Finally, 2,4 million are allocated for financing actions whose entitlement is shared between the DPO and other central administrations (ActionAid, 2020, p. 9).

Figure 3.6 Estimated cost for each route of intervention – Operative Plan (23rd July 2019)



Source: ActionAid re-elaboration of data contained in the Operative Plan

Looking at the actors, it is suitable to divide them into institutional and non-institutional actors⁵⁸. The former macro-category is composed of a specific National Direction Cabin, which has strategic-political functions and whose participants are the political authorities selected for each central administration, the representatives of regions and local authorities. Moreover, there is a Technical Committee, with a specialized nature, that supports the former actor and which is led by the head of the Department of Equal Opportunity. The National Direction Cabin and the Technical Committee represent two of the three levels composing the governance model of the Plan. The third one is local governance, which should connect the central government and the local one and coordinate the existing territorial network. It aims at the creation of anti-violence networks that guarantee an operative link among general and specific services, which are i.e., women’s centers and shelters, the police, the judiciary and prefecture.

Among public actors, the ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) and the IRPPS (Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies) are extremely relevant respectively for the agenda-setting phase and for the evaluation.

With respect to non-institutional actors, women’s organizations and associations played a fundamental role in the advancement of women’s rights and in the construction of support centers for women victims of violence. Considering this NAP, the representatives of female associationism and of labor unions were part of the group work created for

⁵⁸ In this section international actors intentionally are not mentioned in order to focus the attention on national and local ones. However, it is important to underline that the Council of Europe played a crucial role in the entrance of VAW in the Italian political agenda.

defining the strategic guidelines and contents for the proposal of a “strategic national plan on male violence against women” for the 3-year period 2017-2020. Women’s associations and particularly women’s shelters and anti-violence centers⁵⁹ have been crucial during the implementation of the concrete actions defined in the operative plan.

Bringing the policy process into sharp focus, it is opportune to underline that the formulation of the National Strategic Plan 2017-2020 was preceded by the analysis of the data resulting from the second ISTAT survey (2014), together with the consideration of the experience developed during the implementation of the Extraordinary NAP on VAW 2015-2017. The appraisal phase is followed by the creation of a specific working group by the DPO composed not only by institutional-actors but also by non-institutional ones (e.g., women’s associations), aimed at defining the guidelines of a hypothetical plan for the period 2017-2020. During the dialogue phase there was the real formulation of the policy. In the decision-making stage, the proposed plan received the favorable opinion of both the State-Regions Conference and the Joint Conference and it was adopted by the Council of Ministers 23rd November 2017.

As explained previously, the NAP (2017-2020) determines the comprehensive strategy for the realization of the principles contained in the Istanbul Convention, and establishes the necessity of an operative Plan designated to translate its objectives into concrete actions with allocated resources and, consequently, to implement them. This operative Plan was approved by the direction cabin 18th July 2019 and had flexible nature, indeed it could be updated and integrated with new actions and funds. Its implementation concerns a substantial number of actors (e.g., the DPO, ANCI, that is the National Confederation of Local Authorities, the police and D.i.re), who interact among each other on different levels: the national actors with the local authorities and the institutional actors with the non-institutional ones.

Besides the Plan, in 2017 there was also the signature of a cooperation agreement on “Monitoring, assessing and analyzing activities provided in the NAP, according to the commitments undertaken by Italy following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention” between the DPO and the CNR-IRPPS. This agreement led to the definition of the Viva project which has a twofold aim: on one side, it pursues the mapping of the specialized

⁵⁹ More detailed information about anti-violence centers can be found at the following link: <https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/i-centri-antiviolenza/>

and general services to assist women victims of violence. On the other side, it works towards the assessment of both the NAP (2015-2017) and the NAP (2017-2020), which means the appraisal of implementation processes, achievements and results of the former and the ex-ante and ongoing evaluation of the latter.

According to the report presenting the ex-ante evaluation of the NAP (2017-2020), which is based on 15 interviews with social researchers and some stakeholders in VAW program planning, there are some relevant matters that jeopardize the Plan, limiting its effectiveness. Although the strategy of the plan is consistent with national and international policy documents, and is internally coherent, it provides an excessive number of actions (92) that can overlap and, therefore, can prevent the optimization of resources. One more issue concerns the governance model because, like the implementation and management procedures, it is poorly defined. Moreover, the Plan lacks indicators to check the advancement of the different actions and their results and it does not contain any specific information about the funds allocated.

It is undeniable that since the first National Plan against Violence and Stalking, the institutional approach towards gender-based violence has evolved by taking some steps forward. Indeed, it has been finally recognized as a social and cultural issue, grounded in gender hierarchies, power relations and inequalities. Nevertheless, there are still problems with the recognition and inclusion of women's organization in the policy-making process of the national Plan.

As underlined in the Position Paper "The change we want. Feminist proposals 25 years post Beijing" referring to another critical aspect of the Strategic Anti-Violence Plan 2017/2020, "when specifying the actions to be taken, it does not adequately talk about anti-violence centers managed by women's organizations. Instead it treats them as complementary services to government interventions that give support during emergencies and with no key role in prevention initiatives or training operators in various services". The Position Paper concludes that "the plan therefore excludes women's associations from decision-making and project-writing processes and from all levels of governance".

3.5.4 A new NAP but the same old problems: anti-violence centres continue to be excluded from the policy-making process and their role is still undervalued

During the first six months of 2021 the DPO organized four days of meeting with social stakeholders, grassroots and associations specialized in preventing and combating VAW. In each day a different theme was object of discussion – Prevention, Protection, Punishment, Assistance and Promotion – and this process of public consultation ended 18th May. As stated in a press release⁶⁰ published in the website of the DPO, the draft of the new NAP was submitted to the attention of the National Direction Cabin on 20th July and presented in the Joint Conference⁶¹ of 3rd November. Two days after, the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24ore* published an article, written by Simona Rossitto, titled “Violenza sulle donne, ecco il nuovo piano strategico 2021-2023”, which reveals some details of the new Plan. Criticisms from the civil society were not late in coming: D.i.Re wrote an open letter to the Minister for Equal Opportunities and the Family Elena Bonetti, arguing feminist and women’s associations have been consulted but not seriously taken into consideration, indeed it is completely wrong to speak of “participatory process”. Finally, on 17th November 2021, a week before the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25th November), the DPO published the Strategic Anti-Violence Plan 2021-2023. Lamentably, there is still no specific Operative Plan and therefore it is not yet operational. As happened for the previous NAP (2017-2020), also this one does not include any information on the public funding for implementing the identified lines of intervention. In addition, it does not outline neither a timeline nor which administrations are responsible for the execution of the various actions. It defines only the priorities of action and provide some updates on what the Italian government, and in part also the Parliament, has done recently to prevent and combat the phenomenon (Action Aid, 2021).

⁶⁰ *Violenza sulle donne, la Ministra Bonetti riunisce la Cabina di Regia: più vicino il nuovo Piano Strategico Nazionale.*, 20th July 2021. To read the press release see <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/news/violenza-sulle-donne-la-ministra-bonetti-riunisce-la-cabina-di-regia-piu-vicino-il-nuovo-piano-strategico-nazionale/>

⁶¹ To know more about the report of this Unified Conference see [Conferenza Permanente per i rapporti tra lo Stato, le Regioni e le Province Autonome di Trento e Bolzano - Report del 03/11/2021 \(statoregioni.it\)](http://www.statoregioni.it/Conferenza-Permanente-per-i-rapporti-tra-lo-Stato,-le-Regioni-e-le-Province-Autonome-di-Trento-e-Bolzano-Report-del-03/11/2021)

Furthermore, in the Plan there is a paragraph on the lessons learnt from the NAP 2017-2020 and its points of focus. It is particularly interesting to take it into account because it contains lots of contradictions, demonstrations of the inconsistency characterizing Italian Anti-Violence Plans. With regards to the planning of actions, we can read in the document that, it was useful to reflect on the problems of precedent scheduling since it led to understand the importance of establishing preliminarily the financial ceiling in order to structure a more realistic and coherent planning. Notwithstanding, the new NAP does not include any reference to overall financial allocations. Besides this, it states that the operative planning of the actions should be developed together with the definition of the strategy. Moreover, each intervention should be followed by the enunciation of its general and specific purposes, the available funding, the modality of implementation and the expected results among others. Also in this case, we cannot find any sign of the lessons learnt in the new NAP. Additionally, the Plan claims it is necessary to pay close attention to the typology of actions it should include and to go beyond the emergency-based approach adopted till now, allocating adequate funding for preventing the phenomenon⁶². We do not know yet the amount of money for this intervention area, however, it is highly predictable that insufficient financial resources will be destined for it once again. Bearing in mind the words of D.i.Re on the fake “participatory process”, it is absurd that the Plan recall the need of strengthening the recognition of the immense value of women’s organizations and anti-violence centres experiences and then it is the first to not take their opinions, critiques, recommendations and proposals into account in the policy formulation. Obviously, it is positive that it provides for a substantial, systematic and continuous involvement of associations managing Anti-violence centres and shelters also in the following phases of the policy process: implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless, there is the risk that these words remain just other void promises. Looking at the procedures for implementing the Plan, it aims at gathering financial resources coming from EU, national and local intervention programs efficaciously, to be able to give responses having a beneficial impact and producing significant changes in people’s lives. Specifically, it makes reference to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), one of the two financial instruments related to the program Next Generation

⁶² According to the findings of Action Aid report *Cronache di un’occasione mancata. Il sistema antiviolenza italiano nell’era della ripartenza* (2021), the DPO has allocated only 14% of funding to actions of prevention since the entry into force of the Law Decree 93/2013.

EU (NGEU)⁶³. The adoption of the NGEU allowed Italy to plan structural actions for intervening in critical socio-economic issues, which have a heavy impact on the reproduction of gender inequalities.

The first version of the NRRP explicitly recognized that VAW hinders women's full participation in economy, politics and social life of the country. However, the planning of interventions provided only an action addressing women victims of violence, namely, the access to credit for business creation. Clearly, it constitutes a questionable action since it can have a limited impact on women's life; furthermore, it does not contribute to the prevention of the phenomenon or gives an answer to the multiple and specific needs of survivors.

Conversely, the final version of the NRRP does not include this action, which has been financed by the DPO. Although the Parliament promoted several recommendations⁶⁴, taking into consideration the demands expressed by civil society during the analysis of the NRRP draft, in the Plan prevention and action for combating VAW are totally absent. Looking at the objectives to be achieved by 30th June 2022 contained in *Monitoraggio dell'Attuazione del Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza* (updated on 11th February 2022), there is only a brief reference to the possibility of including women who started the path for recovering from violence among the recipients of social housing programs. Neither the National Strategy for Gender Equality deals with preventing and combating VAW, doing it intentionally. Indeed, the initial pages of the Strategy explains that it does not consider this phenomenon on purpose, referring to the Strategic Anti-Violence Plan 2021-2023. Therefore, it is hypocritical to define it a cross-sectional strategy. Also supposing that it is transversal, there is an even bigger problem: the Strategy on Gender Equality is relegated to an isolated sector, the so-called women's policy, as if equality were something separated from the general framework. Obviously, it cannot be considered as a sustainable and efficacious approach in the long-term (Editorial staff, 2021).

⁶³ NGEU is a temporary program adopted by the European Union to respond to damages provoked by COVID-19 pandemic and to promote economic recovery of the most affected EU countries.

⁶⁴ Specifically, the Senate Committee of Constitutional Affairs and Justice underlined the necessity to include projects supporting economic independence of women victims of violence and strengthening Anti-Violence network in the NRRP. Whereas, the House of Representatives Commission for Social Affairs emphasized the urgency of intervening also in primary prevention, for example, including in the "*Missione 4 – Istruzione e Formazione*" of the NRRP educational programs on prevention and combating VAW.

By deciding to create two strategic documents, one dealing with gender equality policies, and the other one on preventing and combating VAW that are distinct and separated from the NRRP, the Italian government demonstrates that its approach to issues concerning women's rights is inadequate. As a matter of facts, it faces them adopting policies and actions which are not integrated with economic, social and cultural planning (Action Aid, 2021).

Conclusions

After having analyzed in depth the Italian legislative framework and the specific policies to combat Violence against Women (VAW) adopted by the government, it is possible to provide an answer to my research question by concluding that the measures taken by Italy in the last ten years have been insufficient and inefficient.

Surely, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention led the Italian government to a major commitment in eradicating the phenomenon and, considering the last decade, the country has undeniably taken some steps forward. Nevertheless, the Italian patriarchal culture, which constitutes the main cause of gender-based violence, has not been uprooted yet. After all we could expect a similar result; as demonstrated by the analysis of post-1995 laws, Italy has combated VAW relying almost exclusively on criminal prosecution. Obviously it is important to define an adequate system of measures which regulates the punishment of perpetrators, however it represents only one of the four pillars on which the Istanbul Convention is based. Consequently, it is necessary to concentrate also on prevention, protection and co-ordinated policies. Only in this way, it will be possible to eliminate any existing power disparities between women and men. In other words, male violence against women is a cultural fact and therefore it cannot be combated by using the sole criminal procedures.

Beside the problematic criminal law approach, there are other shortcomings in the Italian policies contrasting VAW. Precisely, public politics lack proper evaluation instruments; indeed, during the policy-making process the evaluation phase continue to be overlook. Consequently to the cooperation agreement between the DPO and the CNR-IRPPS signed in 2017 that led to the definition of the Viva project, we finally obtained the first assessment of a National Action Plan. It is absurd that the previous NAPs did not contain any instruments or even any reference to the appraisal of implementation processes, achievements and results. Without knowing if the actions implemented had or not an impact there is the extremely high risk to propose ineffective interventions and policies again. For this reason, the drafting of a new NAP should take into account both failings and accomplishments of the preceding plans in order to include in it only successful actions.

Looking at the emergency-based approach adopted by Italian institutions, it can be read not only as scarce knowledge and wrong understanding of the phenomenon, but also as a

choice of convenience. By combating unequal power between women and men, the Italian patriarchal society, in which the free female care work replaces state welfare, would be shaken. Data on the allocation of public funds proves the inadequacy of the Italian approach to VAW. Since the entry into force of the Law Decree 93/2013, which laid the foundations of the current anti-violence system, the DPO destined 75% of funding allocated for actions of “protection”. Just 14% of funds were allocated to interventions concerning “prevention”; this scarceness of resources destined to this area is the outcome of little attention and relevance public institutions paid to it. Indeed, it has been anti-violence centers who, in all these years, have taken charge of actions for preventing VAW without being paid or making use of part of the public funds received for the functioning of their structures. Taking this into account, the Italian government should allocate appropriate economic resources for actions of primary preventions and for raising awareness, integrating them not only in documents that specifically and exclusively address gender-based violence.

Then, only 2% of funding was used for activities of “assistance and promotion”; with regards to the remaining 9%, there is no information available.

In general, the Italian anti-violence system is still characterized by fragmentation in the planning of actions, scant and discontinuous public funding and weak governance lacking transparency. Moreover, institutions do not regard anti-violence policies as a strategic priority, as a consequence, they deal with the phenomenon defining inappropriate timing and modalities.

In the last decade the issue of VAW has finally entered the public discourse and institutions started to deal with it adopting laws, drafting national and local policies and allocating resources for strategic actions. Notwithstanding, it is not enough, as demonstrated by the continuous murders of women killed just for being women. In synthesis, what Italy has done until now to prevent and combat VAW is ineffective and it is no more admissible that the Italian government addresses this phenomenon only once a year during the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It is time to stop with the rhetoric and fake promises characterizing 25th November, since they do not produce any effect. Rather the government should aim at dismantling the Italian patriarchal culture; the first step to reach this goal is changing approach. It is fundamental to work hard for overcoming the fragmentation in the design and planning of actions,

together with a structural and transversal intervention in public policies overall. Specifically, they must be reformulated, in order to stop being isolated and to avoid gender discriminations they often reproduce. Furthermore, it must be ensured that main laws, policies and spending decisions systematically include measures for preventing, protecting and contrasting VAW.

Secondly, delays in the allocation of funding for anti-violence centers and shelters are no more acceptable. Although anti-violence centers constituted the sole provider of support for women victims of violence for long time, they obtained formal recognition and public funding only starting from 2013 with the introduction of Article 5-*bis* of the Law Decree 93/2013. Looking at the percentage of funds that have been allocated, the situation is alarming: precisely, Regions allocated 74% of national funds of 2015-2016 destined to anti-violence centers, 71% for 2017, 67% for 2018, an even lower percentage (56%) for 2019 and just 2% for 2020. With regards to 2021, the DPO has not allocated any economic resource yet. Considering how long it took to transfer public funds from DPO to anti-violence centers in the different years going from 2015 to 2020, we can conclude that the number of months can be drastically reduced if there is political will, as proved during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the Minister Elena Bonetti adopted a fast-track procedure for the disbursement of the funds signing the Prime Ministerial Decree of 2nd April 2020. So, delays result from the inadequate bureaucratic system of governance and political lack of prioritization of VAW. Therefore, it would be useful to develop a central governance and to set up a technical secretariat, which should help the DPO in managing anti-violence funds and in monitoring their use. In this way, both planning and allocation of funds would be more efficacious. Focusing on the lack of assets, it is imperative to modify Article 5 and 5-*bis* of Law Decree 93/2013. On the one side, Art.5 should establish an appropriate continued funding of Anti-violence NAPs and of the actions defined by the corresponding Operative Plans. On the other side, Art.5-*bis* should provide for an increased amount of resources for the functioning of anti-violence centers and imposing that Regions, Anti-violence centers and shelters must receive them within the first semester of the year.

Furthermore, there is another crucial issue concerning transparency of political processes and the anti-violence system by the DPO. Taking as example the public consultations for the drafting of the Strategic Anti-Violence Plan 2021-2023 and the Strategy on Gender

Equality that took place between January and June 2021, the criteria used in selecting the associations and organizations to be heard and contents of the consultations are unknown. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the transparency of both political processes and funding allocation not only for improving the anti-violence system, but also because it is an institutional duty and one of citizen's rights.

Concluding, Italy must seriously commit to preventing and eradicating VAW, it cannot go on pretending to do it through inadequate policies and scarce funding. It is necessary to intervene in the patriarchal culture as soon as possible because time has run out.

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