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ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN ITALY: CHALLENGES AND GAPS IN COMBATTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On May 11, 2024, the Istanbul Convention celebrated its 13th anniversary, marking over a decade since its inception aimed at combating violence against women and domestic violence. Since 2013, with the ratification of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention and the consequent adoption of Law on Femicide no. 119/2013¹, Italy has formally adopted an anti-violence system. Despite the national legislation providing for laws and measures to combat and prevent gender-based discrimination and violence, in 2023 Italy fell from 63rd to 79th place in the ranking of the *Global gender gap report*², monitoring progress towards gender equality in 143 countries. Considering the 36 European countries, Italy ranks only in 30th place. According to the *UN Gender Social Norm Index*³, which measures the stereotypes that give rise to gender inequalities, 61% of the Italian population have prejudices against women and 45% believe that there are conditions in which physical, sexual and psychological violence from partners is justifiable.

This report delves into the current state of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Italy, examining the gaps in data collection, deficiencies in long-term prevention strategies, and the inadequacies in protection and support systems for women. Through this analysis, we aim to highlight the critical areas requiring urgent attention and improvement to ensure a safer and more equitable environment for women in Italy.

Data gaps in combatting gender-based violence in Italy

Today, in Italy, there is no evidence of an integrated data collection system, making it difficult to fully grasp the complexity of the situation. The *Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (GREVIO) of the Council of Europe, in the monitoring report on the application of the Istanbul Convention in Italy of 2020⁴, underlined that the data collected by Italian institutional bodies were not disaggregated in reference to the gender of the victim, the author and the relationship between them. Moreover, there are cases where underage witnesses were not reported, and a lack of harmonization between the data collected by law enforcement and judicial authorities exists.

According to the *Italian civil society report for CEDAW*⁵, drawn up by 32 women's organizations and four independent experts, coordinated by D.I.Re⁶, the need to create a complete and integrated system has been reiterated in various documents and laws. A significant stride is the recent National Strategic Plan on Male Violence against Women 2017-2020 and 2021-2023⁷, fostering data sharing between

¹ 15 October 2013 Law, n.119, Normattiva: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2013-10-15;119!vig=2017-11-15>

² *Global gender gap: Nessun Paese raggiunge la piena parità di genere*, Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile, 2023: <https://asvis.it/notizie/2-17354/global-gender-gap-nessun-paese-raggiunge-la-piena-parita-di-genere>

³ *Gender Social Norms Index*, Human Development Reports, UNDP, 2023: [Gender Social Norms Index | Human Development Reports \(undp.org\)](https://www.undp.org/publications/gender-social-norms-index)

⁴ *Baseline Evaluation Report – Italy*, GREVIO, 2020: [Final report on Italy \(coe.int\)](https://www.grevio.org/publications/baseline-evaluation-report-italy)

⁵ *Report by “Italian civil society organizations for CEDAW”*, 87th Session, CEDAW Committee, January 2024: https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CEDAW_ENG-1.pdf

⁶ Women in Network against violence – a group of 87 organizations in Italy, which manage 106 anti-violence centers and more than 60 shelters, listening to around 21 thousand women every year.

⁷ *National Strategic Plan on Male Violence Against Women 2021-2023*, Department for Equal Opportunities: <https://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/it/politiche-e-attivita/violenza-di-genere/piano-strategico-nazionale-sulla-violenza-maschile-contro-le-donne-2021-2023/>

DPO⁸ and ISTAT. Under this plan, ISTAT has conducted surveys on anti-violence centers and their users. However, this system heavily relies only on data from these centers, straining their limited human and financial resources.

Another government action in which, once again, reference is made to data collection, goes back to the provisions of Law No. 53/ 2022⁹ on the collection of gender data, which in Article 2 defines the "general obligations of data collection". However, this law:

- does not clearly identify data sources;
- does not define "how" the different entities should collect the data, thus allowing neither standardisation nor harmonisation of the data themselves;
- does not oblige the persons in charge to process and disseminate data broken down by "gender and disability", but only by "gender";
- does not provide any kind of financial support to the entities responsible for the implementation of the various data collection systems, which should merge into a single integrated system;
- does not provide for the collection of statistics on violence in civil proceedings (but only in criminal proceedings), despite the fact that the Commission on Femicide has repeatedly stressed the total lack of data in this area.

Deficiencies in implementing long-term prevention strategies against gender-based violence

According to the GREVIO, and as stated in the recommendations contained in the Report on Italy published on 13 January 2020, the Italian Government should strengthen prevention activities in the field of awareness, education, training of professionals, programmes aimed at perpetrators of violence and in the field of employment, with long-term initiatives aimed at promoting a change in sexist behaviour, which is often based on an idea of the inferiority of women in the social and cultural context. But, as reported by the NGO Action Aid in the study published on 26 October 2023, called "*Prevention below cost*"¹⁰, **there is almost no medium and long-term prevention strategy**, while the prevention activities promoted by the current Government mainly concern interventions to prevent cases of recidivism and increase the protection of women who have previously suffered violence. These are certainly important initiatives, but - according to the Istanbul Convention - States also have the obligation to adopt rules and measures to promote changes in socio-cultural behaviour to eliminate prejudices, customs, traditions, and practices based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotypical models of the roles of women and men.¹¹

The same trend can also be observed from the beginning of 2024, the year in which EUR three million were allocated for continuing and constant training of operators who, in various ways, come into contact with victims or perpetrators of violence. Four million euros were allocated for each of the years 2024, 2025 and 2026 to strengthen the network of centres for the treatment of perpetrators of violence. These are specifically secondary and tertiary prevention interventions to be used during and

⁸ The DPO, acronym of Data Protection Officer, is a figure introduced in Italy by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the well-established European Regulation on the protection of personal data. The designation of this figure, in several cases, is made mandatory by the legislation itself.

⁹ 5 May 2022 Law, n.53, Normattiva: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2022;53>

¹⁰ *Prevenzione Sottocosto*, Actionaid, 2023: [Prevenzione-Sottocosto donne 2023.pdf \(imgix.net\)](#)

¹¹ Council of Europe, Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Art. 12-15

after violent acts and prevent recurrence.¹² **The Budget Law does not provide specific resources for primary prevention** to intervene in the patriarchal culture that perpetuates violence, hitting a woman every 72 hours.¹³ This role is probably reserved for the anti-violence plan, which, however, at present does not establish a financial forecast for this type of prevention.

In sum, in Italy, the level of prevention of gender-based violence is currently, as a result of the foregoing, absolutely inadequate.

Protection and support of women

With the law of 15 October 2013, n.119¹⁴, Italy has committed to respect the relationship of an anti-violence center (CAV) per ten thousand inhabitants. Despite this, the latest ISTAT data of 2022¹⁵, published on 24 November 2023, indicate that Italy has 385 active CAVs on its territory. This means that there are 13 centers per million women. On average, the regions of the South have 0.18 anti-violence centres for every 10,000 women, the regions of the Centre 0.13, the islands of Sicily and Sardinia 0.12, while the regions of the North 0.10. These data do not comply with the provisions of the 2023 law. This situation continues to be reiterated as a result of the new ministerial decree on the *Fund for Policies on Rights and Equal Opportunities*¹⁶, which entered into force on 28 December 2023.

A fund of EUR 20 million has been earmarked for anti-violence centres and shelters, but this provides funding only for existing structures and not for the creation of new ones.

Moreover, according to ISTAT data, for most of the centres (63.6%)¹⁷ the promoter of the CAV is a private entity; this means that in Italy the number of local authorities, in single or associated form, is very small. This situation poses a significant risk to the safety and protection of victims of gender-based violence, as there may be situations where private entities may no longer be able to bear the costs associated with such services. Such an eventuality could lead to a significant gap in the protection system, with potentially serious consequences, such as increased dangers and tragic events. Furthermore, the scarcity of anti-violence centers exacerbates the peril for women, leaving them more vulnerable and trapped within the confines of abusive and violent environments. It is also noteworthy that, after the femicide of Giulia Cecchettin¹⁸, there was an exponential increment in requests for help. Some centres are even more at risk than others, and in general there is no adequate allocation or funds for the ordinary activities of the centres. Much more is needed to make facilities work in peace and provide women with the necessary support.

¹² Action Aid, *Legge di bilancio 2024*, <https://www.actionaid.it/informati/press-area/legge-bilancio-2024#:~:text=A%20partire%20dal%202024%2C%20sono,vittime%20o%20autori%20di%20violenza>

¹³ Ibidem

¹⁴ 15 October 2013 Law, n.119, Gazzetta Ufficiale: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/10/15/13G00163/sg>

¹⁵ *Anti-violence centres and women who have started the way out of violence*, ISTAT, 2023: <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/11/reportCAV.pdf>

¹⁶ 16 November 2023 Decree, Gazzetta Ufficiale: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/12/27/23A07064/sg>

¹⁷ *Anti-violence centres and women who have started the way out of violence*, ISTAT, 2023, pag 3: <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/11/reportCAV.pdf>

¹⁸ *Violenza, in crescita le richieste di aiuto da parte delle donne*, 2024:

<https://allegoop.ilssole24ore.com/2024/02/09/violenza-donne-crescita-richieste-aiuto/>

Specific Recommendations:

As mentioned above, although there have been good developments in Italy in recent years since the entry into force of the Convention, there are still some shortcomings. There is a need for substantial work in this area. For a better implementation of the Convention, we have prepared the following recommendations for the Italian government:

1. Provide comprehensive support services, including legal assistance, counseling, and economic empowerment programs, to help survivors rebuild their lives and achieve financial independence.
2. Improve data collection mechanisms to accurately capture the prevalence and characteristics of different forms of violence against women, including those that are underreported
3. Introduce specific legislation or measures to address emerging forms of violence against women, such as online harassment and cyberstalking.
4. Implement measures to promote women's economic empowerment and ensure equal opportunities in the labor market, including access to education, training, and employment support.
5. Implement nationwide awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality, respect, and non-violent conflict resolution.
6. Allocate adequate resources to establish and maintain shelters and support services for victims of domestic violence and ensure their accessibility across the country
7. Collaborate with other European countries and international organizations to share best practices, exchange information, and coordinate efforts in addressing violence against women and domestic violence.
8. Ensure meaningful participation of civil society organizations, including women's rights groups and NGOs, in monitoring and evaluating efforts to address violence against women and domestic violence.