



# **THE CHANGE WE WANT**

**Feminist proposals  
25 years post Beijing**

**JULY 2020**

POSITION PAPER



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Thanks and gratitude to Ruth Dewar for her contribution to this translation.

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# INTRODUCTION

**“M**aybe it’s daring and radical to say that men have failed; but, we cannot ignore the fact that the current crisis of values, of representation and even of democracy facing our society is the model of a management crisis where women have been absent or in extremely marginalised positions.

*We want to be involved. The wealth of our society lies in valuing the contribution of every person, so that every person has the right and duty to contribute to the growth of their community”.*

These words were written not by a militant feminist, but by **Tina Anselmi**, who in 1991 became the President of the National Commission for Equality and Equal Opportunities Between Men and Women, after having been a member of the Chamber of Deputies, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Health. In 1978 she had launched the reform that would implement the Italian National Health System which, at the time, was recognised as one of the most progressive in the world given its aims to improve equity and democratic participation and to deliver as comprehensive a range of health services as possible.

Thirty years later, in July 2020, we are in the middle of unprecedented health, environmental, economic, social and psychological emergencies, crises that governments across the globe, are struggling to manage. In the midst of this, it has been the **women** of Italy **who** have supported our country through care work, family relationships and their roles in health, education and service jobs, all undertaken without the recognition they deserve. The authors of this paper, conscious of the shortcomings of a political, economic and social system that is governed almost exclusively by men, **now demand that their thoughts, proposals and actions be both acknowledged and acted on.**

Twenty five years on from the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, 2020 is the year for feminist movements and women’s organisations across the world to take stock of the progress, delays and, in many cases, the regressions made in the implementation of the 1995 Declaration and Platform for Action and its 12 critical areas of concern.

Alarmingly, Italy has failed to comply with some of the Declaration’s most fundamental actions, a situation that signals the resistance of a traditionalist culture in affording basic women’s and human rights to its population. Many of the issues are steeped in a society that promotes stereotypes based on obsolete notions of male authority and power and governments that lack both the leadership and public policy mechanisms to confront the shortcomings of this societal model. An urgent first step would be to incorporate a gender sensitive approach to all public policies and the development of concrete commitments to achieve gender equality.

The year 2020 also celebrates the fifth anniversary of the approval of the United Nations **Agenda 2030** which foresees a specific Goal (Goal 5) on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, which is linked transversally across the other 16 goals in the Agenda. The aim is to allow the role of women to be framed within a vision of society that is able to achieve sustainable development, equality and peace, so that “no one is left behind”.

Finally, 2020 marks the twentieth anniversary of **Security Council Resolution No. 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**. This Resolution calls for women to be actively involved in peace processes and in the planning of operations that aim to avoid conflicts.

Feminist organisations and networks across the world, alongside the most progressive parts of civil society, have worked on local and international advocacy actions in preparation for the Sixty Fourth Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which was to have taken place in New York in March 2020.

While the event was cancelled due to the global pandemic, it did not curtail the global wave of feminist activity surrounding **Beijing+25** and its work to outline the structural and cultural changes necessary to ensure that ‘no woman is left behind’.

In Italy, we have also accepted this challenge. This position paper has been compiled by a diverse group of Italian women, including those who have already worked on the Shadow Reports for CEDAW and for GREVIO (the last one coordinated by D.i.Re, the first and largest network of Anti-Violence centres in Italy). As experts, individuals and/or with our own feminist activist civil society organisations, we demand change, and in this document are uniting to voice the changes we want with clarity and determination.

This document outlines non-exhaustive proposals related to the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration. Each point showcases the competences and specialised knowledge of all contributing partners. When rebuilding the economy and society post Covid-19, Italy must take into account the experience and knowledge of feminist and women’s organisations, all of which continue to work for the creation of a fairer society. It is no longer acceptable that feminist and women’s organisations are **marginalised by governments in decision making processes**.

As the blog [www.feministcovidresponse.com](http://www.feministcovidresponse.com) effectively states, “A global pandemic [...] does not serve as a great equalizer, but as a great exacerbator, similarly to how climate change magnifies, amplifies, and compounds inequalities. It’s a moment that is challenging us to create deep, urgent and systemic change, and that is showing the deep fault lines in how our societies are organized.”

.This paper proposes ways to combat the ever-deepening social, economic and gender inequalities that exist in Italy, and in doing so aims to highlight the failures and limitations of the current political and economic system. The patriarchal, sexist and racist mores that underpin every aspect of society and culture in Italy, where exploiting people and the environment is the norm, can no longer be tolerated. We must counteract this destructive system of power and resource management with proposals informed by women and which promote other priorities and values that are capable of achieving real change in our post-COVID society. Competent women professionals and experts should be represented in all decision-making contexts (political, economic, labour, in research and in the media), working as leading members of our country and the world. They should not be “forgotten about” when putting together a task force, as was the case in Italy when the COVID Taskforce was established. To create a fair society, it is essential that “*structural barriers to equality, with negative implications on the lives of women and girls in all their diversity and their ability to exercise and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms*” be removed (as mentioned in the **Feminist Declaration of 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020** of the Women’s Rights Caucus (WRC), an international feminist network of around 200 organisations – in Italy, it includes *D.i.Re*, *AIDOS* and *Effe Rivista Femminista*). This same declaration underlines that climate change and the deterioration of the environment are fundamental challenges for our planet and species, and moreover create a structural barrier for gender equality. The Feminist Declaration points out the need to slow down and regulate multinational companies in the industrial, agricultural, service and financial sectors and among other things to reform the fiscal system.

The neo-liberal economic order has exacerbated inequalities within and between countries and towards

genders. These barriers will continue to grow if they are ignored—it is no longer acceptable that profits are prioritised over human well-being or that unacceptable levels of wealth are held by few. Both have the potential to place dangerous political and economic power into the wrong hands.

Structural global change is fundamental to our post COVID world. We must rethink the economic order and production structures and recognise, make room for and value women's work (including unpaid care roles). Culturally, education must be prioritised so that it becomes a means of transforming the material, cultural and symbolic situation of women and men, and be recognised as a critical means to prevent violence. The relentless backlash against women's rights, which has been fuelled by ultra-conservative forces over the past years, must be stopped. Since 2013, nearly one hundred organisations in over thirty European countries have set up the extremist strategy "Re-establishing the natural order", a so-called "Europe Agenda" which foresees the rolling back of rights in the name of a presumed natural law. Their aim is to amend existing laws on divorce, contraception, assisted reproduction, abortion and LGBTIQ+ rights, restoring patriarchal family values and the rigid division of gender roles and limitations of a woman's own sexual and reproductive rights. This group met at the World Family Congress held in Verona in March 2019.

To fulfil the proposals laid out in this paper, strategies, policies, infrastructure and mechanisms are required that place gender at the basis of all their considerations and consistently account for intersectionality in every decision.

All political initiatives must be elaborated on the basis of gender-based data and statistics and with tools that guide and evaluate the gender balance.

## Structure of Position Paper

**T**he implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is reviewed for the first time in 2020 with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related 17 Sustainable Development Goals fully in place.

<b>BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION 12 Critical Areas of Concern</b>	<b>AGENDA 2030 FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT Target of Goal 5</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>A.</b> Women and poverty</li> <li><b>B.</b> Education and training of women</li> <li><b>C.</b> Women and health</li> <li><b>D.</b> Violence against women</li> <li><b>E.</b> Women and armed conflicts</li> <li><b>F.</b> Women and the economy</li> <li><b>G.</b> Women in power and decision-making</li> <li><b>H.</b> Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women</li> <li><b>I.</b> Human rights of women</li> <li><b>J.</b> Women and the media</li> <li><b>K.</b> Women and the environment</li> <li><b>L.</b> The girl child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>5.1</b> End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</li> <li><b>5.2</b> Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls</li> <li><b>5.3</b> Eliminate all harmful practices</li> <li><b>5.4</b> Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work</li> <li><b>5.5</b> Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels</li> <li><b>5.6</b> Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>5.a</b> Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources</li> <li><b>5.b</b> Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women</li> <li><b>5.c</b> Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## AGENDA 2030 FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT- Goals with a gender dimension

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ■ End poverty in all its forms everywhere | ■ Reduced inequality                        |
| ■ End hunger                              | ■ Sustainable cities                        |
| ■ Good health and well-being              | ■ Climate action                            |
| ■ Quality education                       | ■ Peace, justice and inclusive institutions |
| ■ Decent work                             | ■ Partnership for sustainable development   |

To underline the interconnections between the Beijing Platform for Action and the Agenda 2030 concerning women's rights and gender equality (see table), the United Nations invited Member States to report on progress made in implementation 25 years on from Beijing, grouping the twelve critical areas of concern in the following broader and transversal themes:

1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work;
2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services;
3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes;
4. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions;
5. Peaceful and inclusive societies;
6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation;
7. Institutions and mechanisms for gender equality.

This document mirrors the international review process regarding these commitments, using the same seven themes as its structure.

# 1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

## 1.1 The job market and female employment

In Italy, the situation of the **job market for women is extremely critical**. This is due to the long-lasting and negative effects of the 2008 financial crisis, from which the country has not completely recovered, and the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has demonstrated why the current rate of development is unsustainable, not just for women but also for humankind. If decisive strategic measures are not introduced as a matter of urgency, humanity itself is at risk. Today, **structural problems** that have always afflicted female employment are more visible. The employment rate for Italian women is nearing 50% (while the average rate in EU countries is 64.3%), with major territorial differences - in the North, the employment rate is over 70% whereas, in the South, the rate is only 30% (ISTAT – The National Institute of Statistics - 2019)). In populations between 15 and 64 years, only 31.3% of are in work, (26.7% for women, 36.3% for men) compared to 57.8% of the rest of the population (ISTAT 2019). The job market is “blocked”, strangled even, by various factors of **social inequality and gender discrimination** that have not been resolved due to limited and fragmented policies and legislation and insufficient investment (Gottardi, Peruzzi 2017). This is due to a perspective that has always characterised Italian public policies, that is, where women’s work is viewed as complementary to men’s and is marginal to the country’s economy. This perspective is unsustainable.

Female employment must be recognised as a central and indispensable factor in economic development, as well as women’s empowerment and economic investment (increasing female employment could lead to a rise in GDP of 0.8-1.5% (EIGE 2019)). The months of the COVID pandemic demonstrated the critical nature of the care industry professions (75% of which are carried out by women) and the high level of women’s expertise in traditionally “male” scientific professions. In remote working, women have proven themselves capable and flexible while balancing family and work life. In terms of the widespread work problems facing women (low salary, casual, involuntary part-time, gender pay gap, etc.), the urgent need for political, cultural and economic interventions that have the capacity to produce real change is clear.

An increase in participation in productive work, changes to working conditions in various sectors, strengthened laws against discrimination and harassment, improved access to welfare and the availability of permanent, full-time work is required. All development efforts focusing on female participation to increase employment, production and levels of GDP must take place predominantly through the involvement of the Ministry of Work, so that in Italy, work life balance policies can be considered as investments and not in terms of costs or losses.

The recent pandemic crisis situation has shown that **organisational structures should be reviewed**, no longer linking them to the physical presence of workers, but to the ability of organisations to be adaptable and flexible to new and emerging situations. In this sense, the myth of a male workplace becomes obsolete. Organisational models of production have, until now, maintained a stifling grip on female participation with systems that reward physical presence more than quality of work and penalise women who must take on care roles during traditional working hours (part-time, parental leave, law



104/92 allowing for breast-feeding and to look after a sick child). This situation must change. Furthermore, it is crucial to look beyond the current laws on migration to overcome the problem of precarious and invisible labour that women with a migration background often face. This type of labour renders them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and violence in the workplace.

## 1.2 Work-life balance

**W**ork-life balance policies should also be reassessed from the perspective of support for economic development, not only from a family and individual support perspective. The current measures are fragmented and incoherent and should be developed in two directions. The whole subject of parental leave and assistance should be reviewed to include universal extension of **maternity** rights, an increase of compulsory **paternity** leave with a strengthening of optional parental leave, a reduction of pay and contribution penalties with the secondary goal of supporting female employment (37,000 women left their jobs after maternity leave in 2019 (National Labour Inspectorate) and combatting the strong indication of a declining birth rate in the country. **Service infrastructures** for education and childcare must also be reviewed and strengthened, as well as care for persons with disabilities and the elderly from a perspective of flexible working hours and organisation. This way, investments in work/life balance can be seen as productive investments to increase female employment and to create new jobs for other women, and not just as welfare costs.

This backward looking culture, which devalues women's work through discrimination and economic disparity, must be changed. It has produced a **gender equality gap** that places Italy below the European average (Italy ranks 14th with 63 points, four below the average of 67) (ILO 2018). There is a percentage gap of over 20 points in the employment rate for women with children (a quarter of mothers leave their jobs due to workplace problems, a lack of services, an unfeasible work/life balance, etc.) compared to women without children whose employment rate is closer to the employment rate of men. To tackle this structural and cultural asymmetry, and thus combat the underlying stereotypes, legislation and collective bargaining must move from policies concerning work/life balance to **shared domestic labour policies** that balance unpaid work and care roles between men and women. We need to value **trade union bargaining**, which has shown itself as a decisive tool in reducing gender inequalities in the workplace. Unions must act to improve working arrangements using policies and models designed to overcome the various forms of segregation (both horizontal and vertical). This action must proceed not only with the goal of equal pay for women and men by reducing the Gender Pay Gap, (monthly wages show a gap of 24.5%) (ILO 2018) and the Gender Pension Gap, which is around 40% less in final pension payments than men (ActionAid 2016), but also with the aim of strengthening the value of work in some currently underappreciated sectors (health, education, care assistance for people with disabilities and the elderly).

In the last few years, the rate of **non-permanent and informal work** has increased, a situation that disproportionately affects female workers. However, the variety of ways to work online or directly using online platforms has also increased, as has the number of people working freelance and in small businesses. Action must be taken to ensure that these new working models are protected against all forms of discrimination. Since the public administration has made remote working obligatory, we must make sure that this does not become another source of further problems and discrimination.

The **Digital Gender Gap** is higher in Italy than in other countries. In fact, there is a difference of about 10 points in computer use between men and women, due both to the school system and lack of access to training courses in adult life. Horizontal segregation is damaging women in the world of training and research, as it does in the world of work. Data concerning STEM training show us that the "gender selection" starts much earlier than when students choose their university career because it is connected to role and gender models that are seen and transmitted from the first years of infancy. During these

years, prevailing social pressures determine all choices, preferences and likes of the children and influences their self-esteem and self-perception. There is also a training, user and participation aspect to the digital gap in both production and policy. According to the World Economic Forum, in STEM sectors the relationship between job losses and job gains for men is 5 to 1, while for women it is 20 to 1. The Digital Gender Gap will multiply the gender gap in terms of access and job retention in the work market and will increase the gender pay gap. Anyone who displays talent in cutting-edge sectors of STEM is at an advantage and will be able to choose from a wide range of job opportunities with higher wages. It is therefore imperative that specific measures be put in place to close the Digital Gender Gap.

### 1.3 Sexual harassment in the workplace

In order to protect female employment, we need to strengthen interventions that aim to prevent and eliminate **sexual harassment and sexual blackmail in the workplace**. This includes ensuring a more effective use of already existing mechanisms to root out these forms of violence, promoting the adoption of specific agreements within the private sector (GREVIO 2020, D.i.Re 2019), strengthening the diffusion and application of the positive action plans in the public sector and ratifying the ILO Convention No. 190.

### 1.4 Active employment policies

**P**ositive action has been an object of discussion since the 1980s. However, in the area of active employment policies, positive action has never really been a central part of policies aiming to increase women's access to the workforce, as has happened with other disadvantaged groups (young people, persons with disabilities, migrants), at all levels of the professional hierarchy and within the organisation of production and services of individual companies. Until now, the quota system has been used, whereas positive actions should aim to correct the "employment systems", producing new structures of distribution and sharing of tasks and new forms of labour organisation.

It is essential that a comprehensive and articulated planning process be designed to address both discrimination in the workforce and the underuse of the female workforce. Based on guidelines developed by the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with Trade Unions and Employers organisations, Positive actions plans for large companies and organisations should outline the planning methodology, clear objectives, target measures and timelines. As a first step, the introduction of the Positive action plans could be on a voluntary/opt-in basis.

Law no. 196/2000 defined a system of **governing bodies for equality in the workplace**. Besides the already existing National Committee on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment, Independent Equality Counsellors were instated at the national, regional and provincial levels, with the power to bring a gender-perspective to negotiation and supervisory authorities on Structural Funds and to intervene when resolving disputes on discrimination by conciliation. In the last few years, however, we have seen a continuous disempowering of the role of both the Equality Counsellors and the National Committee at the Ministry of Labour. The role of the Committee is at present limited to the issuing of guidelines on the Positive action plans (although they have never been established) and on the choice of political and economic policies on work. However, the Committee has never been convened for this purpose.

Before changing the entire mechanism system for labour equality, **it is proposed here** that an independent institution should be given the task of executing a detailed evaluation exercise on its current functioning and suggesting improvements and restructuring that should take place, following the indications of Directive 2006/54/EC3 of the European Commission and the Recommendations of the latest CEDAW Report.

## 2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

### 2.1 Women and poverty

**T**he barriers in the job market cited in the previous section inevitably lead to lower pensions for women, often at a minimum level, leaving the majority of women relying only upon a survivors' pension. Single women with dependent children are particularly exposed to the risk of poverty (both relative and absolute) even when many of these women are employed (see the issue of working poor).

**Female poverty is by nature complex, and often intertwines with other social, cultural and economic factors.** Female poverty as a specific category is not documented in ISTAT (National institute of Statistics) reports, which simply show that poverty is rising in general. **Gender disaggregated data** that allow us to see the incidence of poverty among girls or women with a migration background **are currently not available**. Similarly, there is no specific data on the economic situation of women with disabilities. The high rate of unemployment and Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) suggests that women with disabilities are at a higher risk of poverty than the female population in general, and at greater risk than men with disabilities. Law 68/99 and related measures on poverty, enacted by the previous governments, do not foresee effective measures to reduce poverty among persons with disabilities. On the contrary, some provisions put in place by this law treat poor families in which one person is disabled less favourably than other families.

### 2.2 Social protection and social services

**T**he close interrelationship between human rights protection and access to dignified work and public services is pivotal in reducing the risk of poverty: if there are adequately financed and organised public services which take the question of gender into account in the provisions of those services, they can help transform society into a fair and equal place. For this reason, it is fundamentally important to recognise how closely economic inequalities and gender inequalities are interconnected. By acknowledging this, we can change our model of the system of governance which currently regulates women's participation in public policies and get to the root causes of those barriers for women (a lack of dignified work, healthcare, nursing and housing services and uneven distribution of said services across Italy). Within this framework, one of the most important elements is the **process to redefine public services** (starting with those already mentioned) to ensure that services adopt a gender perspective and that policies and standards are co-written by women according to collaborative governance models.

There are legal and economic barriers that prevent women with a migration background from accessing social protection, but responsibility for addressing these barriers has not been taken. The selling-off of social services and the red tape surrounding them, coupled with budgetary cuts, block the development of policies for active citizenship, such as ensuring rights and social participation. Policies that are inclusive of these issues are necessary to overcome the dynamics that arise in the intersection of gender and migration processes. This will require a significant investment in the training of staff on issues impacting

women with migration backgrounds, including issues concerning intersectionality, structural barriers and on common self-determination processes, both collective and individual in order to open services to forms of active and shared social participation.

### 2.3 Gender-specific or gendered medicine

In the years following 1991, research began to demonstrate the different effects of the same illnesses on men and women's bodies. This included risk factors, symptoms, the need for different clinical trials, devices, treatment and pharmaceutical responses, as well as the nature of equipment required to manage the health conditions. This is an issue of gender, not sex, given the interaction between our sexual identity and the socio-economic and historical reality of this identity continues to shape our health status, access to treatments and the way in which these treatments are administered. Italy was the first country in the world to adopt a law on **gendered medicine**, confirmed by the implementation plan approved on 13 June 2019 (Ministry of Health 2019). However, the **lack of gender and age disaggregated data collection and data analysis** is creating a barrier to the achievement of the goal of appropriate medicine, as does the structure of medical guidelines, university textbooks, the medical student body and doctors working in all professional roles and profiles.

### 2.4 Sexual and reproductive rights

The regionalisation and progressive defunding of the public health system, alongside the increase of private health providers, have eroded the ability of the national health system to provide universal and equal healthcare services and instead has introduced inequalities between regions in terms of basic levels of assistance. However, it is essential that issues related to sexual and reproductive health be addressed holistically, along with poverty, gender inequality and at-risk social behaviour, through a public and universal health approach (Glasier et al. 2006). The absence of such an approach is demonstrated by the situation concerning Family **Counselling Centres** where there has been a constant reduction and uneven distribution of services throughout Italy. Family counselling services have been placed in a diverse range of organisational contexts, accessibility to services varies across regions, staff shortages are commonplace and there is an absence of adequate tools and training for new on-the-ground staff during specialisation courses (High Institute of Health-ISS 2019). The network of Family Counselling Centres should be strengthened and direct access to stand-alone services must be provided in all regions, creating a situation that would enhance both the social and health care aspects of the services.

Although data show a significant decrease in the rate of voluntary interruptions of pregnancy over the years (Ministry of Health 2018), access to voluntary abortion in many regions is very difficult, often almost impossible. This is due to the **extremely high number of conscientious objectors in the medical community**. In many cases, it would be possible for the health authority to reorganise its services to ensure access to abortion services, however medical staff are reluctant to do so. As in the rest of Europe, **incentives should be provided for medical abortions**, which allow patients to take the medication at home for up to 63 days into the pregnancy. This should be available through fully equipped counselling services with trained professionals. The latest measures adopted have led in the opposite direction, deliberately making it more difficult for women to access medical abortions by imposing a 3 days recovery period in hospital. These measures are particularly worrying, and must be opposed.

Particular focus must be placed on the rights of women with migration backgrounds and refugee women, given their access to abortion is made even more difficult by various other barriers. These barriers include their need to search for an available hospital, which among other factors contributes to the issue of illegal abortions. Further, they often do not seek medical assistance via Family Counselling Centres in



time due both to linguistic barriers and the problems arising from repeatedly accessing structures to do the tests (data from SIMM – Italian Association of Medical Managers). Finally, the regulations and reception conditions of women asylum seekers often slow down the whole abortion process for those who have suffered sexual violence during their journey. It is also critical that consideration be given as to how to treat FGM, which requires specific training and an approach that overcomes paternalistic and culture-based perspectives.

In terms of access to **contraception**, our aim is to provide free and universal access. Currently, Italy is one of the most expensive countries in Europe in which to obtain contraception and it is difficult to obtain long-term contraceptive options. The establishment of a government website and hotline which provides correct and up-to-date information about reproductive health (in various languages) is an immediate priority. The **COVID-19 pandemic has made access to voluntary interruptions of pregnancy and to contraception even more difficult in some regions, including emergency contraceptives** (EPF 2020). Sexually Transmitted Infections have not disappeared during this pandemic either, and it is recommended that the female condom, not just the male condom, be made available and its use encouraged,

There is limited systematic data regarding **women with disabilities** and their access to healthcare and services provided by the Counselling Centres. Stereotypes and prejudices often undermine their rights to self-determination and their ability to express free and informed consent or be granted dignity and respect for their rights to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and desire to start a family. Forced contraception, abortion and sterilisation of girls and women with disabilities (in particular those with learning or psycho-social disabilities) are still relatively common and morally accepted practices.

Significant attention should be given to issues concerning **pregnancy, labour and childbirth**. While practices vary across regions, the use of episiotomies and c-sections remains too high, and a woman's choice on how she wants to manage the delivery and/or needs of the newborn child is often not considered or even ignored. Efficient painkillers or pain reducing techniques are not always widely available. Furthermore, there is insufficient postpartum care for mothers at home, particularly concerning breastfeeding and post-natal depression. Women must be given timely information throughout all phases of pregnancy and all maternity services should be completely free with access to midwives and obstetricians, while at the same time avoiding the unnecessary medicalisation of childbirth.

In Italy, **Assisted Reproduction Technology (ART)** is regulated by law 40 of 19 February 2004, and subsequent revisions to this law in line with the Constitutional Court's pronouncements. However, both men and women are not always able to rely on adequate public health services to obtain ART and instead are forced to turn to the private sector where 'for profit' practices often push the idea of "a baby at any cost". In Italy, **surrogate pregnancies** are legally prohibited.

Knowledge about women's health, including issues concerning sexuality and reproductive health, is almost completely absent from school curricula. Young women need to be informed about their bodies, reproductive systems, anatomical and physiological structures and sexuality in order to develop the tools to live productive and fulfilling lives. Having these tools at their disposal will do much to combat many of the current problems faced by women in society today, including eating disorders and bullying and gender-based violence. Family Counselling Centres should be resourced to collaborate with schools to **plan relationship and sex education** projects for all classes from infant school to University.

## 2.5 Gender inequality in the world of research and study

**D**espite the growing female presence, gender disparity persists throughout a typical academic career (EIGE 2016). **Female segregation** in the world of research happens on two levels: **vertically**, that is the (poor) presence of women in the highest positions in academia, and **horizontally**, that is the (very poor) presence of many women in a range of study and research fields, especially hard sciences (STEM)





(European Commission 2018). Female scientists are forced to overcome many barriers in their work and their presence slowly disappears as they climb the academic ladder. This phenomenon is known as the “**leaky pipeline**”, whereby **more and more women progressively leave their academic careers**. Historical data show that, notwithstanding a slight improvement, this **rate remains** at around **0.5% every year** (Sdao et al. 2018). Keeping in mind that women in the highest positions of academia represent just over a fifth of total academics, this trend indicates that it will take decades to achieve full equality. There are many reasons for this disproportion.

The **lack of female role models** in academia threatens the creation of new women-inclusive networks, undermining both the self-esteem of women academics and the competitive processes, which are purportedly “gender-neutral”. This can be counteracted by the implementation of **monitoring and evaluation systems**, such as gender reports and budgets, and the integration of these systems into the University’s Budget and Governance documents. Furthermore, all related actions to enforce this change must be monitored and analysed. It is essential to promote a “**female**” **model of research** (particularly regarding working hours) which includes: welfare initiatives to tackle work/life balance that are not directed only at women, remote and smart working initiatives to increase **in women in key roles**, gender-sensitive guidance to eliminate horizontal segregation and valuing studies on gender and the presence of women in education programmes that have traditionally been considered as a “male domain”. Cultural **change** should be promoted (**above all concerning teacher targets**) through the planning of training courses on equal opportunities and combatting discrimination, implementing projects on gender stereotypes in **primary schools** (for example, changing **school textbooks** which are full of gender stereotypes) and progressively adopting non-neutral language (Guidelines for the use of gendered language in the administration of the Ministry of Education and the University and Research, MIUR – DM 137).

## 3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

**M**ale violence against women is deeply embedded and widespread throughout Italy. The problem is structural. Like everywhere in the world, it is based on the historical unequal balance of power between men and women, as underlined in the Istanbul Convention. In its first baseline report on Italy, GREVIO recommends the need to adopt coordinated and multiagency solutions that involve all stakeholders, in particular women's organisations that have historically operated anti-violence centres and shelters.

In Italy, the implementation of National Action Plans has not guaranteed that global and coordinated policies against violence against women are put in place. The experience accumulated over 20 years by the women's NGOs that established the first country's anti-violence centres and shelters has been ignored, as have the skills and competences they have matured in implementing government policies on these issues.

### 3.1 Anti-violence Centres

**A**nti-violence centres are cultural centres working to transform the "social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men". These centres 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. The many good examples of positive networking experiences between anti-violence centres and public institutions, which include collaboration, sharing best practises and exchanging thoughts and ideas, could be replicated elsewhere.

Given the fundamental importance of anti-violence centres in combatting violence against women and girls, it is now necessary to discuss **the type of organisations** that should or should not manage these services. In various parts of Italy, organisations that manage family-houses and host mothers and children by order of the Juvenile Courts, or manage nursery schools, play-centres, 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 combatting 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 centres 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 Strategic Anti-Violence Plan 2017/2020 refers to the principles of the Istanbul Convention, but when specifying the actions to be taken, it does not adequately talk about anti-violence centres managed by women's organisation. 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 plan therefore excludes women's associations from decision-making and project-writing processes and from all levels of governance.

It is essential to continue to *"check and ensure the quality of services provided and financed by public funds and their impact, in the interest of the women who should be received and protected by professional*

and competent authorities using a gender-sensitive approach” (Strategic Anti-Violence Plan 2017/2020) to avoid public funds being awarded haphazardly to organisations calling themselves anti-violence centres, but that do not fulfil this role in practices and approach.

## ■ Fund disbursement

**W**hile there is much discussion on the amount and destination of public money, **the way funds are disbursed** causes particular uncertainty and instability for the work of anti-violence centres in Italy. Compared to the amount of money and resources made available by the Government for regions, there is incompetence within the selection and spending processes for funds, a situation that leads to uneven and discriminatory effects across the country.

Many organisations that do not adopt a gender-sensitive nor feminist support methodology often win these tenders by offering lower prices for their services: “discounts” are accorded due to the vast range of their services which are often strictly economic and/or related to religious institutions. This makes it impossible to compete as organisations that “only” offer services to accommodate women survivors of violence and use professional approaches based on mutual trust among women.

Evaluating the application process for “services” with little reference to formal criteria and with **the focus on money saving poses the risk of stripping anti-violence centres of their role as cultural change-makers**. This would leave only those providing essential services, to the detriment of centres that promote innovative strategies and ideas for a fairer society.

There are still many problems connected to the existing set-up of **funds disbursement** for anti-violence centres, including: the provision of resources with no regular analysis of what is needed or actual costs, the repeated late payments of funds (on average it takes two years from the initial fund allocations to its arrival at its final beneficiary), and the lack of transparency about the allocation and liquidation of resources.

There should be multi-year project planning and funding allocation cycles based on transparent policies, clear information on funding models and periodic analysis of the funding needs and actual costs at ground level. This would ensure that anti-violence centres provide continuous support and protective services to women who access their services and at the same time expedite administrative procedures and the efficient transfer of funds.

## 3.2 Access to justice, secondary victimisation in the criminal justice system and for minors, urgent need for training of professional operators

**H**armful sexist stereotypes and prejudices are rife within the justice system. Such stereotypes both disrupt the application of laws and prevent women from reporting acts of violence. This means that violent acts become exempt from punishment, a situation that inevitably leads to the legitimisation of violence itself. The Italian judicial system and post-1995 laws have been characterised 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. Content-wise, the tendency towards tougher punishments is the most striking aspect of criminal law, according to the logic of penal populism. A dominant characteristic of these laws is their lack of broad structural reform.

One of the most pressing issues (which was also raised in the GREVIO first baseline report with a recommended urgent intervention) is secondary victimisation in child custody and during Civil Court and Juvenile Court proceedings. Judicial offices demonstrate a deep mistrust towards women – women are continuously not believed when they express doubts for the safety of their children due to the father’s

behaviour, and even to the point where women themselves are blamed for damaging their children's wellbeing.

This incapability and unwillingness to recognise violence means that many people cannot get access to the required justice, particularly where there are forms of "hidden" **mediation or support for shared parenthood** that must be carried out via social services or by psychologists. Professional figures often refer (sometimes openly) to concepts inspired by Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), which has been declared scientifically invalid by both the Court of Cassation and more recently by the Ministry of Health.

In order to tackle this situation, there is the need for drastic and urgent measures: all references to PAS or similar concepts should be banned in the courts, in social service reports, in use by technical consultants, and registers for specialised consultants should be established for cases of male violence against women. All legal professionals (magistrates, lawyers, law enforcement officers) and other categories of professionals (Court appointed experts, psychologists, social workers) should have on-going training with two fundamental objectives: recognising and evaluating the impact and consequences of domestic violence on relationships and parenthood and combatting sexist stereotypes that threaten the effectiveness of existing legal instruments. **Women's organisations need to be involved in the planning through to implementation of such training programmes** in order to ensure a gender-sensitive approach, to avoid "gender-neutral" training, and to provide an intersectional perspective that considers all forms of discrimination.

### 3.3 Education and training

**G**ender education is an essential tool in combatting violence against women and girls and in fighting against a culture inundated with gender stereotypes based on inequality between men and women. Gender education can also be used to understand the roles that different types of intersectional discrimination play in violence against women and girls, and how consequently these intensify the multiple forms of marginalisation and exclusion from which women and girls suffer. This education must be compulsory from pre-school level onwards, across all school levels and must be a permanent fixture in curricula in order to break down the barriers that permeate every single institute and school culture throughout Italy. Training courses for teachers must also be included ensure that these competences are passed on to all teaching staff.

Promoting a reciprocal and strategic relationship with universities and research centres is of utmost importance, given the for example the importance of sharing information and research results). **The establishment of strong local networks between schools, research centres, anti-violence centres, social services and any other educational institutions that address gender-related issues should be encouraged.** These are in addition to partnerships that must be forged between these institutions and counselling bodies for sex and relationship education. Further, and to ensure that the winners of public tenders are able to guarantee a minimum level of expertise for activities related to gender education and training, registers confirming this expertise should be created in collaboration with anti-violence centres.

Law 107/2015 and its subsequent guidelines seem to disregard implementation and monitoring strategies to combat gender discrimination in school programmes and training. These programmes have not been adequately supported by training courses for teachers. Parts of this law that foresee **informed consent** and **the Pact of responsible co-education must be discussed again.**

### ■ Preventing and combating online violence against women

**T**he serious risks associated with links between online violence and conscious use of technology must be included in educational programmes that focus specifically on ways to identify online grooming

techniques and inappropriate content sharing. It is critical for young men and women to understand and accept that there is no neutral use of pornography or stereotypical gender roles.

Without the involvement of online platform administrators, ways to combat the non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit images can only take the form of punishment after the act has been committed. We must work with online platforms to create awareness of the issue and urge them to improve **early search mechanisms** in order to quickly flag these images, block their distribution and prevent them from going viral. It may be necessary to introduce monetary sanctions against the sanctions if appropriate action is not taken.

### 3.4 Women's representation, gender discrimination and stereotypes in the media

**C**ommitment must be obtained from all those working in the media to eliminate the root causes of culture-based gender disparities, stereotypes and prejudices that directly and indirectly produce gender asymmetry in terms of access to human rights. This is evident, for example, where the right of media outlets to report news has given them licence to transform news into abuse, misinformation and sensationalism.

The Manifesto of Venice was launched by the Equal Opportunities Committees of FNSI and USIGRAI (the National trade unions of journalists), GIULIA Women Journalists and the Veneto Trade Union of Journalists on 25 November 2017 and signed by vast numbers of journalists (the total is now over 1000, including directors of national newspapers). It clearly explains the correct way to narrate a story of violence against women and femicide and points out how to combat stereotypes and protect women's dignity. However, in order for the Manifesto of Venice to effectively use its power and produce real change, there must be a monitoring centre with the capabilities to check these forms of narration across all media outlets. This would make it possible to weed out bad practices and instead promote best practices in news reporting.

Furthermore, **all professionals working in public and private communications (journalists, authors, news presenters etc.)** must be adequately trained 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. The issues presented in the Manifesto of Venice should be taught in all journalism schools and courses. The public broadcaster RAI – which has added a clause on adhering to the Manifesto of Venice in all its contracts – needs to provide corporate training programmes for its staff, especially those in leadership positions. Finally, legal tools are required to monitor and regulate the performance of private broadcasters, both nationally and regionally.

The Manifesto of Venice should be strengthened through the creation of a monitoring centre and to ensure compliance with the RAI governmental contract.

#### ■ Gendered language

**T**he use of “gendered language”, and therefore of language that respects the social and cultural path taken by women, is a socio-cultural and political target that is still disregarded by language used in the media, institutions and everyday communications. On a grammatical level, we can clearly see this through the widespread rejection of the use of the female gender for terms indicating prestigious professions and in institutional roles when women hold these positions. On a content level, the representation of women is far from what is in reality and, being linked to antiquated and restrictive social models of personal, professional and working contexts, sustains the traditional patriarchy. This linguistic behaviour must be overcome by adopting gendered language on an individual level, in professional and working environments, in educational realms, in the media and in institutions, as well as through the introduction



of specific training initiatives.

### ■ Hate speech

**T**he representation of women in the media, and the media itself, brings up the specific problem of hate speech. Hate speech is an ever-increasing form of violence against women, as shown by the *VOX diritti* (the Italian Observatory on rights) mapping of misogyny in Italy. Harassment, hate speech and body shaming are all forms of discrimination that disproportionately target women and undermine their ability to fully express themselves at work and in sports (the campaign “Hate isn’t a sport” (*“odiare non e’ uno sport”*) highlighted a worrying increase in hate speech directed towards female athletes).

### ■ Secondary victimisation in the media

**N**ews outlets, such as TV, newspapers, radio and the internet, often recount stories that re-victimise women, presenting them as guilty or complicit in their own suffering. The Manifesto of Venice for gender equality and correct information of 2017 outlines the need for training and information for journalists to make them more aware of the gendered language they have been using and ways of retelling stories of violence against women. Despite this, however, there are still too many cases where news reporting cases of violence against women describe them in ways that in fact justify the actions of perpetrators. Acts of violence against women are described as “crimes of passion”, “jealousy”, “raptus of madness”, illness, as being justified due to economic problems, or because the woman wanted to take the children away to protect them from violence. These reports confuse violence with family conflicts, often provoking additional suffering for survivors of violence or for the families of those women who have been killed.

The Italian Journalists Association has adopted a code of ethics, The Treviso Charter, to regulate and protect the privacy of children when reporting news concerning children. Even though this Charter is active, reports about children and minors are often written in such a way that the reader is able to determine their identity.

Young children and girls who have survived paedophilia and prostitution are often described as “baby call girls” (*“baby squillo”*) or “baby prostitutes”. This is absolutely unacceptable. There is an urgent need to eliminate this form of secondary victimisation. An action plan and training program for all communications professionals addressing all forms of male violence against women is needed. Further, a governmental task force on the media should be established, with participants that include the Department of Equal Opportunities, professional bodies, and feminist and civil society organisations. A monitoring and strategy implementation body should be established to progress the recommendations made by this task force.

It is also necessary to continue to monitor the public service contract for the national broadcasting corporation RAI and to promote self-regulating codes of conduct for private TV stations, for daily newspapers, online media and magazines. These activities should be supported by widespread and consistent training activities on this issue.

### 3.5 Violence against specific groups of women or women suffering multiple forms of discrimination

**A**s highlighted in the Istanbul Convention, it is important to bear in mind that the gender aspect of violence against women intersects with many forms of diversity and discrimination, such as age, nationality, class, culture, religion, language, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and health

conditions.

### ■ Women with Disabilities

**T**he physical, psychological, economic, sexual and domestic forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities occurring in institutions, health centres and social centres are often covered up by authorities. Reports of these violations are often not made to the public offices tasked with collecting this information, such as women's organisations or anti-violence centres. Organisations working with persons with disabilities or even their own families are also often reluctant to report these forms of violence.

In the cases of girls and women with disabilities, this form of multiple discrimination produces the raft of issues already laid out in part 2.4 of this document. Women with disabilities, in particular those with social and psychological or learning disabilities, are often ignored and their right to make decisions for themselves is denied, fully violating their human rights. Instead, 'choices' are made by third parties, such as legal representatives, tutors, service providers and family members

### ■ Lesbians, bisexuals, trans-sexuals and transgender, non-binary, intersexual and queer people

**L**esbians, bisexuals, trans-sexuals, and transgender, non-binary, intersexual and queer people suffer more forms of discrimination and violence in their daily lives than other women. This can happen in all walks of life: from a young age within the family, at school, at work, in relationships and in society in general. Recognising and bringing this violence to the surface is especially difficult given the traditional gender binary and gender stereotypes on the identity and roles of men and women are still deeply entrenched within our society. Particular attention must be given to the cultural messages and forms of discrimination that reinforce these stereotypes, as well as public support and resources for organisations working on these issues and for the rights of these people.

### ■ Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Women and Girls

**T**he legal and social situation of women and girls within the Roma, Sinti and Camminanti populations is extremely worrying. Their complete lack of visibility in public discourse, their statelessness, even for those born in Italy, the denial of residency permits throughout their lives, and their exposure to multiple forms of discrimination within the school, work and healthcare systems, places these women and girls at great risk. Even those with Italian citizenship are often marginalised and treated as second-class citizens in terms of access to basic human rights and. All these issues expose women to gender-based domestic and public violence (including discriminatory social interventions concerning their reproductive and family rights – e.g. child abduction).

## 3.6 Migration and Asylum routes

**G**ender-based violence in migration and asylum routes requires a feminist perspective focussing on intersectionality. Applying this perspective across the entire migration route, including asylum reception centres, allows us to see how multiple forms of violence, suffering and discrimination act by combining aspects of gender, sex, class, "race" and other overlapping variables. These forms of discrimination are fuelled by structural barriers, such as legal, bureaucratic, economic and linguistic barriers and compromise the women's entitlement to their rights and freedoms.

One of the few ways to legally enter EU territory is through family reunification, a process that can often increase the oppression and control of a family network over a woman's rights. For example, the woman must rely on parents or her spouse to determine the type and length of her residency permit, placing the woman in a position where she is forced to conform to her assigned social role.

Specific residency permits allowing women to escape situations of violence or exploitation are stripped of value by discriminatory practices and application limits. In particular, art. 18bis of Legislative Decree 286/1998 provides for a one-year residency permit in cases of domestic violence. However, its effectiveness is compromised by the need to open criminal proceedings and is closely dependent on the expertise of the law enforcement officers who come into contact with these women. Law enforcement agencies require specific training in order to overcome this barrier.

The cooperation agreements with unsafe countries (such as Libya) and border externalisation violate the principle of *non-refoulement* and disproportionately impacts women and girls. There is a low recognition rate for women refugees, showing the lack of gender perspective in evaluating persecutions and an absence of a gender-sensitive interpretation of the Geneva Convention (1951) (Istanbul Convention, art. 60).

To avoid a "second generation" of uncertain legal status and family dependence, it is necessary to **reconsider the *jus sanguinis* principle** for citizenship. This legal criterion often seriously impacts girls suffering violence within the family network because it prevents them from becoming independent. When confronted with situations of violence and sexual control, this principle can pose the risk of forced marriages, with parents taking girls to their home country for this purpose. Specialised awareness and training campaigns are necessary, including for diplomatic representatives and consular staff abroad. Re-entry visas for young women who have been repatriated against their will should be provided, alongside simplified request and renewal procedures for residency permits which are often purposefully allowed to expire to prevent their return.

### 3.7 Trafficking

**A**t the end of the 1990s, Italy implemented its first phase of anti-trafficking policies and by doing so took a pioneering role both in Europe and across the globe by approving art. 18 of the Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning Immigration (which is still an international benchmark on the subject) and by allocating its management to the Department of Equal Opportunities. However, since this initial push, **anti-trafficking policies have been continuously marginalised and undermined**, forcing organisations working in the sector to compete for tenders and a diminishing source of funding, and to cover the numerous shortcomings in the system through their own means. A new anti-trafficking plan is long overdue.

It is necessary to overturn the current anti-trafficking policies, **basing them on the principle of respect for women's human rights, empowerment and active listening to women**, as well as avoiding any form of paternalism. The traditional identification model gives immigration and police forces the exclusive powers to decide on all trafficking cases, a situation that does not ensure that women are heard or effectively evaluated in terms of personal and social vulnerability. Art. 18 of the Consolidated Act of Provisions concerning Immigration must be applied depending on the social background and needs of the women. Furthermore, any new specialised procedures must be carried out in places of first arrival, where interviews must be performed confidentially by qualified professionals, and the decision on the nature of help to be provided must be given to a multi-disciplinary team.



# 4. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

## 4.1 Participating in public life and decision-making

**T**he **gender gap in politics** must be treated as a cultural issue. Notwithstanding the legislative changes, amendments of municipality statutes, pressure and advocacy from civil society organisations, nothing has changed the fact that in Italy **women are less represented in political institutions than men**. This imbalance compromises the quality of democracy itself and is a **limitation to representing the specific interests and rights of women**.

We are still a long way from real gender equality in terms of participation in public life and in decision-making processes. There are ongoing cultural patriarchal prejudices about women in powerful roles and various material barriers that block women from participating in public life. For this reason, there is the need to remove these barriers and encourage significant cultural change to eliminate existing gender stereotypes and discrimination (ANPAL 2019). Furthermore, we must encourage inclusive governmental decision-making and open up compulsory discussions with the non-profit sector and active citizenship, both of which comprise mainly women members because they tend to be more accessible than traditional political parties (Il Sole 24 Ore 2019). The **unacceptable set-up we saw of government-appointed all-male task forces** during the COVID-19 emergency is a clear sign of this exclusion.

As soon as women are engaged and visible in the world of work or politics, they become targets for **hate speech and harassment**. Sexist language and references to women's bodies and image (which is combined with racism for non-white women and/or women with a migration background) are used to demonise, stigmatise and ultimately exclude women from public and working life.

The silence and invisibility of women also contribute to this marginalisation. The lack of a law to allow children to take their mother's surname violates the principle of equality and reinforces stereotypes from birth.

## 4.2 Access to expression and participating in decision-making in the media

**D**espite the large presence of women in the Italian media, over 40%, this representation does not correspond to an equal proportion of female journalists in decision-making processes.

The first major effect of this is that in newspapers and on TV, gender-sensitive issues are either completely absent or confined to dedicated spaces and channels. Not only are women's and feminist organisations not being heard, female professionals from different sectors are not called to offer their expertise on various subjects. This is also true for the public service broadcaster RAI which is required (by contract) to publish an annual report on monitoring women's participation, highlighting that "the default profile of people (...) is predominately represented by men, adults, heterosexuals, middle-class, ethnically westerners, Catholics, and normally able in appearance".

We now come to the widespread and pervasive issue of **sexual harassment towards female journalists** by evaluating the results of the first survey in Italy to cast light on this hidden problem (FSNI

2019). The survey sampled over 1000 female journalists and survey results revealed that harassment is a constant part of the job. This is evident given the fact that 43% of female journalists, regardless of the sector, have been victims of online harassment. These critical issues concerning women's work and presence in the media does not just affect journalists. Deliberately blocking careers, hate speech and harassment are tools used to **gag women's freedom of expression and as a consequence present an obstacle to women's representation in the world of media and information.**

This situation may well get worse in the next few months. The pandemic has fuelled a huge editorial crisis. Targeted interventions are needed in the media that give priority to women's work, including wide-ranging projects like those dedicated to other industrial sectors in crisis.. This does not just apply to journalists but to other media roles as well..

### 4.3 Proportion of the budget invested in promoting gender equality

**G**ender budgeting was introduced in Italy in 2001. While it enjoyed an initial development between 2003 and 2010, it has been given less attention at political and institutional levels since then. The COVID-19 crisis seems to have triggered new interest in the concept, however decisive action towards the political use of gender budgeting has not been evident.

In current financial laws and the budget, there are no mechanisms that require full recognition and financial reporting on the amount of money invested in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. The need to "institutionalise" the concept of **gender budgeting brings us back to the need for strategic planning in all government initiatives and at all levels** and with horizontal and vertical coordination between all initiatives. This forces a change of direction for the decision-making process towards respect for the SDGs, and promotes equality between men and women.

Promoting gender budgeting as **a tool to catalyse political change** could positively affect governmental policies and send a strong signal to society about the importance of equality. To do this, it is essential to provide training to public administration employees and policy makers, to support the implementation of laws that put in place gender budgeting with adequate penalty mechanisms in case of non-compliance, to fund research on gender auditing/budgeting methods, to use gender-disaggregated data within public IT systems and to promote strategic alliances between the world of politics, public administration and civil society, all in order to establish a political use for gender budgeting.

### 4.4 Proportion of public development aid funds invested in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

**F**rom 2007 to 2017, Italian funds for international cooperation projects promoting gender equality (both as a main aim and in meaning) have risen significantly, although still not as much as other G7 countries. Italian **investments** have to **increase both in resource allocation and investment in expertise in project planning and management centres.**

We urge the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation to complete the revision process for guidelines on equal opportunities and empowerment of women, girls and children 2019-2024, given that the latest version is from 2014. Further recommendations include taking into consideration the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, supporting women human rights defenders, **changing from a project-based perspective to long-term programmes**, supporting women's organisations and networks, promoting a comprehensive approach that takes into account the need to transform the social situation and welfare system which surrounds women and urging all international cooperation stakeholders to adopt intersectional gender equality policies and policies on women's and girls' empowerment.





## 4.5 National Human Rights Institution

**N**ational Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are in a unique position to help and protect women's human rights. NHRIs perform an essential role in the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, as well as guaranteeing full participation of civil society actors. Despite receiving numerous recommendations across the years from various international and regional organisations reminding of its international obligations, Italy is the **only country in Europe** (apart from Malta) **with no independent human rights authority as set out in the Paris Principles**.

As an independent authority, an NHRI would have an important role in combatting negative social norms and in the fight against gender stereotypes and multiple and intersectional stereotypes.

Other than reporting violations and adopting provisions for non-compliance, it would also carry out an active role in lobbying for legislation, policies, interpretations and best practices—all to promote awareness of the international human rights treaties and their correct application, especially concerning women's rights. It would also support the implementation of a transparent and merit-based selection process for human rights experts at international and regional organisations.

# 5. Peaceful and inclusive societies

## 5.1 Implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

**2**020 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first UN Security Council Resolution (N. 1325) on Women Peace and Security. As the focal point for implementing Resolution 1325, the Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights (CIDU) has stood out for its commitment to ensuring consistent and in-depth dialogue with all stakeholders, especially with civil society actors, and in implementing over the years the three National Action Plans. Their work has always aimed to guarantee specific focus on the most vulnerable categories of people, as well as the participation and protection of Women Human Rights Defenders.

It is therefore essential to strengthen this process by guaranteeing continued specific funds for implementing Resolution 1325 and the other Resolutions through National Action Plans. Italy is one of the few UN Member States that have understood the need to give concrete attention to this sector given its critical transversal impact.

Likewise, the next Action Plan should focus equally on national and international perspectives. The new Action plan must strengthen the scope of the Goals and Actions in terms of how they operate, supporting women's organisations working in conflict areas and working with women as key stakeholders to reduce or transform conflict situations. There is the need to consider the role of young women, as well as strengthening the focus on the impact that multiple and intersectional discrimination may have in these situations. It is also necessary to invest more in services, support networks and organisations that work with women and girls who are survivors of male violence and in initiatives to prevent such violence. Particular attention must be paid to women's and girls' reproductive health and rights and towards measures to prevent rape and sexual violence in conflict situations.

It is important to extend gender issues in conflict solutions training to all components of the armed forces by valuing the presence of women in the armed forces and ensuring that they are promoted into the highest decision-making positions without discrimination and via transparent recruitment processes. This is particularly important when discussing political and peace processes in which Italy is involved, as well as in conflict prevention and resolution, and including mediation and negotiation processes.

## 5.2 Root causes of conflicts

**T**he need to tackle the root causes of conflicts is a fundamental issue. Root causes include gender inequality and discrimination, militarisation and weapons proliferation, the political economy of war, climate change and violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

For this reason, and in compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty, fuelling the economy of war must be stopped. This includes stopping the provision of support to fighting parties or providing weapons when there is a risk of them being used to commit human rights or humanitarian law violations. There must be a reduction in expenditure for the army and defence, in line with the recommendations in the Beijing Platform of Action and a reassignment of the bulk of available financial, human and technological resources to reconstruction and public services.

# 6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

## 6.1 Active participation and leadership of women and girls

**T**he environmental and climate crisis is the fundamental challenge for our planet. It is also a structural barrier to fulfilling the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action and ensuing agreements. Tackling the environmental and climate crisis at an intergovernmental level cannot be only limited to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Rather a holistic approach carried out by all international institutions, bodies and processes is needed.

**Women must be empowered to take on the responsibility to lead processes of change**, showcasing the experience that is currently seen in the sustainable development sector. The **contribution of women in the food and agriculture industry** (30% of Italian companies) is crucial and is often guided by green economy initiatives. They are also able to create social development whilst valuing the traditions of the territory, organising training sessions for adults and youth, thereby demonstrating it is possible to successfully combine profit and social development. In every political, economic and cultural sector there should be positive action plans and training for men and women that enable them to face and implement the drastic changes needed to prevent future pandemics by reducing pollution and reconverting the economy to a more sustainable environment. It is, therefore, fundamental that the younger generations are involved in this, given that they are already experimenting in start-ups, food and agricultural companies and in voluntary activities and in ways to create a fairer, more eco-friendly and non-violent society. All of these adhere to the values of a circular economy. At the same time, the provisions put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic must be the start of a **just and fair transition towards a healthy and equitable planet for everyone**.

Recognising the impact of the climate crisis and, more generally, the environmental damage inflicted by humankind, is crucial. These issues are tightly linked to gender relations. **Active participation and leadership from women and girls in all their diversity** will help manage and reduce their impact. A fair transition towards a green economy must take women's unpaid care work into consideration as it currently underpins our economy. The task of calculating women's unpaid work within Italy's GDP, a commitment taken in Beijing, has not yet been fulfilled.

# 7 Institutions and mechanisms for gender equality

## 7.1 National strategy for gender equality

According to a recent EIGE study (2020), Italy's level of responsibility in promoting gender equality has diminished, as has its commitment to implementing gender-mainstreaming policies.

Even though the Legislative Decree 5/2010, art. 1 para. 4, foresees that equal treatment and opportunities for women and men must be integrated in the planning and implementing of regulations, administrative acts, policies and state activities at all levels, the situation in Italy stands out due to its **lack of comprehensive integrated policies on gender equality at the national level**. Although some specific policies and action plans (on issues such as employment, education, health, violence against women, human trafficking etc.) have been implemented, these are stand-alone policies that have been strictly enacted for specific sectors, and are therefore not capable of systematically tackling the issue of gender and the intersection of this with other diversities, such as age, nationality, class, culture, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, different ability, religion/spirituality, and so on. Besides, there is a **growing tendency to reinterpret and redefine gender equality policies in terms of family and maternity policies** (GREVIO 2020; CEDAW 2017).

In other words, the **principle of equality is not fully integrated into government action as an essential and indispensable component in the implementation of every policy**. Furthermore, technical, human and financial resources that are allocated to facilitate the integration of the gender dimension in public administration are very limited and often do not include specific training or competences.

## 7.2 National Infrastructures for gender equality and empowerment

Despite all the progress made thanks to pressure from women's movements, civil society and European legislation, Italy **lacks adequate centralised gender-specific mechanisms to promote, coordinate and monitor gender equality initiatives**. There is no structural body coordinating the various ministries which, when carrying out specific evaluations of the impact of specific laws or general regulatory acts (such as finance laws or the budget), are forced to work on a case-by-case basis to evaluate political choices and resource allocation.

Despite its broad mandate, the Department of Equal Opportunities has always suffered as a political institution given its secondary (sometimes regarded as inferior) position within the hierarchy of Government. Any action carried out by the policy maker in charge of the Department has always been undermined by a lack of resources, short terms in office (13 changes in 24 years) and therefore a lack of experience and specialisation on gender-related issues. This problem is evidenced throughout the civil service.

Both at the policy level and at the institutional level, the Department of Equal Opportunities and other mechanisms involved in combatting discrimination, such as the National Office against Racial Discrimination, the Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination, the National Observatory on the Condition of Persons with Disabilities, do not carry out their work with an intersectional perspective.

Furthermore, they are governmental bodies and are therefore not independent entities.

Overall, gender equality mechanisms are particularly vulnerable to Government changes. This influences the continuity and coherence of equality policies, as well as how effectively civil society organisations are involved. This is due both to the **lack of institutionalised consultancy channels** and the absence of compulsory consultation with civil society organisations, both of which are necessary to give legitimacy to policies.

### 7.3 Equality mechanism proposal for the Office of the Prime Minister

**W**e call for the establishment of a new, permanent consultancy and discussion mechanism for equality within the Office of the President of the Council of Ministers. This should be independent from the Government and chaired by a person with appropriate expertise on gender issues. It should be properly funded with adequate staffing to enable it to fully carry out its function. Members of this mechanism of gender equality should be representatives of equality institutions, the Parliament, relevant feminist and women's organisations, universities and research centres and independent gender experts. This mechanism would be charged with the promotion of studies, analysis and research to formulate proposals and recommendations, to ensure that all laws and decrees passed are evaluated for their impact from a gender perspective, and to work alongside the Inter-ministerial Commission within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers charged with the follow up of the achievement of the Agenda 2030 targets.

### 7.4 Instruments for gender equality

**S**o-called “positive actions” are the most powerful and effective tool for the achievement of equal opportunities between men and women. These measures are an expression of “Politics of Difference” which, by challenging and refusing to adhere to the model constructed by the dominating group of men, gives value to the differences of women who in the past have been stigmatised by exclusion.

The last law passed introducing a **gender quota mechanism** to overcome the persistent gender gap was law No. 120/2011, known as the *Golfo-Mosca* law within the body of **Italian corporate legislation**. The data shows that these regulations have been implemented successfully and women's participation in the Board of Directors of listed and State-controlled companies has increased significantly. Without the mechanism set out in the *Golfo-Mosca* law, the quota of women would have increased more slowly, as a result of general demographic trends and greater gender diversity among younger generations. Unfortunately, these **legal measures have not produced the knock-on effects expected** and therefore more permanent structural changes are necessary.

The quota system has also proven itself insufficient in ensuring real gender equality in accessibility **within the electoral process**. Political parties simply find loopholes in the operating mechanisms of quotas, revealing the impact of the absence of a binding “zipper system”. When respect for basic principles of participation, representation and equal pay is not guaranteed by sanction mechanisms, Italian political leaders (sometimes even the Parliament or the Government) often feel free to violate these principles, depending on the moment in history, the state of the economy or simply political will.

**We must rethink gender equality and women's empowerment mechanisms** in politics, institutions and in the workplace through a **change in perspective** in order to directly combat gender stereotypes and support a long-awaited change in the pace for equality. One example, as suggested by political scientist Rainbow Murray, could be by **reframing gender quotas**, using them not as minimum quotas but as maximum ceiling quotas for places assigned to men or women. Following this logic, as 49% of the population, men would only be able to fill 49% of seats in Parliament and other institutions. The results



seen over the past few years confirm that the **quota system can only ever be a partial and temporary tool** to even out the political playing field for women. Equality in politics will not be achieved without major social and cultural changes in society to eliminate the obstacles facing women in accessing political participation.

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