

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ITALIAN ASSOCIATION D.i.RE¹ – DONNE IN RETE CONTRO LA VIOLENZA TO THE CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE GENERAL RECOMMENDATION ON GENDER STEREOTYPES.

D.i.Re deeply values the vital work of the CEDAW Committee in overseeing the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our insights and contributions toward a future General Recommendation on Gender Stereotypes as we regard this a crucial tool in the fight against discrimination and gender based violence faced by women affected disproportionately because they are women.

Contributions:

D.i.Re will contribute to some articles, basing our observations mainly on what our NGO together with other representatives of the Italian civil society has already developed for the [NGOs Report to GREVIO in 2018](#) and [NGOs Report to the Committee of the Parties in April 2023](#) and the [NGOs First GREVIO Thematic Report 2024](#).

D. STATE OBLIGATIONS UNDER TOPICS COVERED BY THE COMMITTEE

- a. Article 1: Discrimination against women**
- a. Article 2: State Parties' General Obligations - a. Access to Justice**
- a. Article 3: Development and Advancement of Women -**
- f. Gender Based Violence against Women and Girls**
- p. Article 16: Marriage and Family Relations**

¹ D.i.Re is a network of over 80 Italian women's non-governmental organizations running women's specialized services to combat and prevent domestic violence and violence against women in Italy. It was officially established as an organization in 2008, with headquarters in Rome. Every year, our members provide support to thousands of victims of gender-based and domestic violence. D.i.Re collaborates with other networks of women's associations at national, European and international levels. It is Italy's focal point for "WAVE – Women Against Violence Europe" and a member of the "EWL – Women's Lobby", of the international network "GNWS – Global Network of Women's Shelters" and Euromed. It is also in the integrated Civil Society Organizations System developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

D.i.Re has decided to bring these chapters together by highlighting a very specific aspect of **discrimination based on gender stereotypes and roles that affects women (and girls) who experience male violence in all its forms.**

The Italian state is unfortunately a good example of the failure to implement a systemic and structural approach to closing the gender gap, and to implement policies or investment strategies aimed at the empowerment and economic status of women, reinforcing their segregation and all kinds of stereotypes about the role of women in society.

The Italian State is unfortunately a good example of failure in implementing a systemic and structural approach in closing the gender gap and not implementing policies or investment strategies targeted to women's empowerment and economic status, fighting their segregation, and all sorts of stereotypes on the role of women in society. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the well-known Istanbul Convention evidences the link between these forms of violence and the historically unequal power relations between women and men. It says clearly that domestic violence and violence against women and girls are by their very nature gender-based as their roots lie in deeply entrenched inequalities and stereotypes concerning the roles of women and men in society.

This is still largely ignored by those policy-makers and states who, in line with the dominant patriarchal and traditional culture, continue with their unrelenting tendency to reinterpret and redefine gender equality policies in terms of family and maternity policies, considering a woman in all its expressions (education, communication, work, politics) and in most public and private spaces primarily as a woman incardinated in traditional social and family roles (of wife, mother, carer and housekeeper).

The absence of a systematic approach in combating gender stereotypes has therefore severe consequences in tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG).

This has also been demonstrated in the Italian Senate by [the Parliamentary Commission of enquiry into femicide and all forms of gender-based violence](#) in its report on gender-based and domestic violence in the judicial system, which confirms the poor and uneven specialisation of judges and prosecutors in gender-based violence against women and girls, inadequate training of judges, of lawyers and psychologists (appointed court experts), with the worrying consequence that there is a widespread tendency - in the courts and in all childcare services - to label (and thus treat) domestic violence and violence against women as

a 'mere' family conflict, resulting in the violence being 'hidden' if not totally ignored. This undermines the possibility of exposure of the violence, with the further serious effect of reinforcing the perpetrator's sense of impunity and leading to the victimisation and re-victimisation of women and their children.

These prejudicial and biased cultural attitudes towards women in society are reflected in an excessive number of prejudices and sexist stereotypes about women held by the judiciary, law enforcement, health, psychological and social services, which constantly question women's credibility and hinder the recognition of violence against women and sexual violence, resulting in a serious underestimation of the problem.

The same concern was expressed by the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Italy](#) - *“the same unfortunately cannot be said for everything that is needed to ensure the effective implementation of the regulations by the persons responsible to ensure that the women and children seeking support to escape the violence receive satisfactory responses. Indeed, along the way, women still encounter too many obstacles with the police and social welfare and healthcare professionals. This is due in part to poor preparation/training concerning the phenomenon of violence, but also to the Italian cultural substratum that is characterized by profound sexist stereotypes, gender inequalities, biases against women who report situations of violence and the persistent tendency to deny the credibility of women”*.

In Italy, for example, the courses organised by the the [Scuola Superiore della Magistratura \(Higher School of the Judiciary\)](#) on these issues are not only negligible in relation to the total number of courses, but they also focus only on legal and technical aspects, without any reference to sexist prejudices, cultural backgrounds or the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW. There is no systematic and structured approach to the issue.

For all these reasons, it is so important to implement and monitor specialised training programmes and capacity-building measures for all actors in the justice system, in order to break stereotypes and, for example, to overcome the widespread tendency to label domestic violence as a "family conflict"; or to see a woman's complaint as an attempt to manipulate men or institutions for other purposes (such as gaining advantages in a separation/divorce or bringing criminal charges against the man on the basis of her "lies").

Such specialised training can make a real contribution to eradicating sexist stereotypes by incorporating a gender perspective in all aspects of the justice system, and to

achieving the goal of avoiding secondary victimisation of women, with real protection and access to justice in conditions of substantive equality.

On this topic the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Italy](#) expresses concern:

“15. (b) *about the use of discriminatory language and secondary victimization in legal proceedings*”.

And recommends that the State Party

“16. (b) *Strengthen capacity building programmes for judges, prosecutors, lawyers and other legal professionals on the Convention, the Optional Protocol, the Committee’s general recommendations and its views on individual communications and inquiry reports under the Optional Protocol, and address judicial gender bias and prevent secondary victimization of women*”.

The judiciary’s pattern of overlooking VAWG in child custody perpetuates secondary victimization.

A global example of how this prejudiced and stereotyped reading of the problem of male violence against women can lead to responses that are not only inadequate in combating violence, but also highly punitive towards women and their children, can be seen in the approach of courts and family experts to the issue of child custody in cases of domestic violence.

In the attitudes of all those involved in the justice system (judges, court experts, law enforcement agencies, social services, psychologists), patriarchal practices are still widespread, with a persistent lack of understanding of the condition of women who have survived any form of violence and of their capabilities, whether as mothers or not; in addition, there are particular intersectional forms of discrimination against women with disabilities, migrants, refugees or women from minority groups, who are at even greater risk of stereotypical interpretations of their situation, with the result that they are denied justice.

As stated in [GREVIO’s Baseline Evaluation Report Italy published in January 2020](#) “*the existing system, instead of offering protection to victims and their children, “backfires” on mothers who try to protect their children by reporting the violence, exposing them to secondary victimisation*” as a result of the lack of adequate training for judges and the lack of a gendered understanding of gender-based violence against women and girls.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem presented in April 2023 a [Report A/HRC/53/36: Custody, violence against women and violence against children - Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#) which addresses the link between custody cases, violence against women and violence against children, demonstrates how mothers in domestic violence situations are discriminated against in custody decisions and reports on various causes.

“C. Conduct of the judiciary and legal professionals

64. Victims of violence have reported feeling belittled by judges and legal professionals and of being revictimized by professionals who lack an understanding of the impact and dynamics of domestic violence. Research reveals women’s frustration with the sympathy expressed by judges towards violent fathers and at witnessing professionals being manipulated by perpetrators of abuse, who behave in a charming manner and are on their best behaviour. Victims of domestic violence have also perceived differential treatment of parents by courts and professionals, with mothers expected to be calm and accommodating while aggressive behaviour by fathers was tolerated in court.

65. Women have reported being advised by their legal representatives not to raise allegations of domestic violence, as it would work against them.

178. Research and submissions demonstrate that women experience considerable pressure from courts and their lawyers to agree to contact arrangements or to attend mediation, in some cases without any assessment of child welfare concerns or obtaining the views of the children.

180 In some countries, women who are judged as being uncooperative in mediation sessions are required to pay fees”.

And more:

“1. The tendency to dismiss the history of domestic violence and abuse in custody cases extends to cases where mothers and/or children themselves have brought forward credible allegations of physical or sexual abuse. In several countries, family courts have tended to judge such allegations as deliberate efforts by mothers to manipulate their children and to separate them from their fathers. This supposed effort by a parent alleging abuse is often termed “parental alienation.”

2. The report examines ways in which family courts in different regions refer to “parental alienation” or similar pseudo-concepts in custody cases, ignoring histories of domestic

violence, which may lead to the double victimization of victims of such violence. The report also offers recommendations for States and other stakeholders on how to address the situation”.

And further in same Report:

“14. The use of parental alienation is highly gendered and frequently used against mothers.
18. The consequences of biased custody decisions can be catastrophic, resulting in specific incidents when contact has been awarded to fathers with a violent history, in the death of children and women and children being placed at gunpoint. In some cases, women have been imprisoned for violating custodial rights and protective restraining orders have been overturned”.

In fact, there is a worrying growing global trend for court and social service decisions in cases of allegations of domestic violence by mothers to restrict the mother's parental rights by placing the child in foster care.

The Special Rapporteur Report continues on this issue by quoting “26. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that the stereotyped roles of women and men also manifest themselves as gender stereotypes and prejudices in judicial systems, resulting in the denial of effective justice to women and other victims of violence.² The Committee urged States to ensure that gender stereotypes are addressed and dealt with appropriately. In 2014, [in its decision on the case of Gonzales Carreno v. Spain](#), the Committee recommended that the history of domestic violence be taken into account when determining visitation schedules to ensure that women or children are not at risk.”

Finally, a specific issue raised in this report is **the disproportionate impact on minority women**, who face additional barriers to family justice, including access to justice and negative stereotypes.

“43. Most of the women reported feeling revictimized and “very belittled, very diminished, not really listened to” by professional, intersecting vulnerabilities along lines of race, disability, immigration status and sexuality compound the difficulties women face when experiencing domestic violence in child custody cases. Mothers in structurally disadvantaged

² See CEDAW/C/GC/33.

positions are more likely to have their children removed or their parenting capacities judged harshly”.

Another relevant aspect mentioned by the Special Rapporteur in this report is the gendered application of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of Child Abduction (1980), which covers international parental child abduction.

“37. Around three-quarters of all cases filed under the Hague Convention are against mothers, most of whom are fleeing domestic violence or seeking to protect their children from abuse. Article 13 of the Convention states that an order for the return of a child can be rejected if there is a “However, courts have been reluctant to accept exposure to domestic violence as a reason not to return children to another State party. In some cases, courts have returned children to their country of habitual residence even where they have found that violence has occurred against the children, frequently compelling women and children to return to abusive and life-threatening situations”.

Following the example of Australia, it is to recommend that Governments introduce a specific legislation requiring domestic courts to consider seriously allegations of family and domestic violence before making return orders for children under the Convention.

Access to Justice

In the light of the above, it is difficult to deny that the problem of unjustified and harmful sexist stereotypes and prejudices is widespread in the justice system and in all proceedings involving women, ultimately influencing judgments and leading to miscarriages of justice, disrupting the application of the law and denying women effective access to justice.

The UN CEDAW General recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice from August 2015 ⁴ declares that the right to access to justice for women is essential to the realization of all the rights protected under the CEDAW Convention. The Committee recalls the obligations of the States to ensure that women have access to justice and observes about the obstacles and restrictions they encounter in practice: , the Committee has observed a number of obstacles and restrictions *“that impede women from realizing their right to access to justice on a basis of equality, including a lack of effective jurisdictional protection offered by States*

³ CEDAW/C/GC/33

⁴ CEDAW/C/GC/33

parties in relation to all dimensions of access to justice. These obstacles occur in a structural context of discrimination and inequality owing to factors such as gender stereotyping, discriminatory laws, intersecting or compounded discrimination, procedural and evidentiary requirements and practices, and a failure to systematically ensure that judicial mechanisms are physically, economically, socially and culturally accessible to all women. All these obstacles constitute persistent violations of women's human rights. women from realizing their right to access to justice.”

The above concerns of the CEDAW Committee are unfortunately still very relevant, especially in cases of VAWG. Here, women continue to face significant challenges in accessing justice, reflected for example in the very high dismissal rates of reported VAWG cases, the low conviction rates in these cases and the lack of adequate training on judicial bias.

Furthermore, women's access to justice is not adequately supported by legal aid, due to parameters that do not take into account women's disproportionate economic disadvantage, resulting in women being denied access to justice altogether or with unequal weapons compared to men, who are often the economically stronger party.

The [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Italy](#) expressed concern about:

“15. (a) The limited access to free legal aid for women without sufficient means, especially those belonging to disadvantaged groups, including rural women, women with disabilities, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women, Roma, Sinti and Caminanti women”

Recommending that the State party:

“16. (a) Expand and adequately fund public legal aid services to ensure access to free legal aid to women without sufficient means, in particular rural women, women with disabilities, migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women, Roma, Sinti and Caminanti women, in criminal, civil and administrative proceedings relating to gender-based violence and discrimination against women”.

h. Articles 7 and 8: Political Participation

D.i.Re will present some reflections on the Italian situation, already described in its **Report by “Italian civil society organizations for CEDAW”** submitted on 8 January 2024 for the [87th periodic Report for Italy by the CEDAW](#) as an example of a socio-political and cultural situation that strongly penalises women's enjoyment of full rights and de facto equality with men, in general and here in terms of political participation and education.

The gender gap in politics in Italy must be recognised as a cultural issue. Despite legislative changes, amendments to municipal statutes and advocacy by civil society organisations, no progress has been made since the last CEDAW report was submitted in January 2024. Cultural and patriarchal prejudices against women in positions of power remain strong and no concrete measures have been taken to address them. Women's participation in governance is declining, despite the first female Prime Minister in office. The current legislature is only 33% female, a decrease from previous terms. Similarly, only 30.8% of ministers are women, a reversal from previous governments. This trend is also evident at regional and local level. Electoral laws in three regions still lack provisions for dual gender preference, and only two regions have a female president. Regional governments and councils remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, with women making up only 25% of regional administrators as of January 2025⁵. Since 2018, the proportion of female councillors has fallen from 33% to 28%, and only 15.3% of mayors are women⁶.

Furthermore, women who are visible and active in politics or the workforce are often targets of hate speech and harassment. Sexist language and attacks on women's appearance - often compounded by racism against non-white women and women from immigrant backgrounds - are used to demonise, stigmatise and ultimately exclude women from public life, with their private lives and appearance threatening their public image to a far greater extent than is the case for men in the same positions: they have to offer reassurances about their family desires or organisation, their attractiveness, their bodies, their sexuality.

⁵ Department for Internal and Territorial affairs, <https://dait.interno.gov.it/elezioni/open-data/amministratori-locali-e-regionali-in-carica>.

⁶ Annuario statistico 2024, C. 11, <https://www.istat.it/storage/ASI/2024/capitoli/C11.pdf>.

Women are also less likely to vote than men. In the 2022 general election, 62.19% of women voted compared to 65.74% of men. This is particularly striking given that women outnumber men among eligible voters in 68% of municipalities⁷. This shows that the issue goes beyond representation and is also about personal engagement and interest in political and public life. The less women participate, both actively and passively, the less likely their interests are to be represented and addressed.

This imbalance undermines the quality of democracy and limits the representation of women's specific rights and interests. Genuine gender equality in public life and decision-making remains a distant goal. Political equality will not be achieved without major social and cultural changes to remove the barriers to women's full participation in political life.

j. Article 10: Education.

D.i.Re refers again to the Italian State's policy, specifically here to the one on education, to highlight how certain political and cultural choices have a strong impact on girls' and women's ability to access educational curricula and careers on an equal footing with men, and are an expression of harmful gender stereotypes (women are mainly carers, men are breadwinners). The Italian State is still far from respecting and implementing the important recommendation of the CEDAW GR No. 35 and the GR No. 36 , as the following comments will show.

Despite the well-documented impact of education and prevention in dismantling gender stereotypes and combating violence against women, Italy still lacks a systematic approach and will to eliminate gender stereotypes in education. Public funding remains insufficient: in the last ten years, only 13% of the funds allocated by the "Legge sul femminicidio" (Law on Femicide, Law No. 119/2013) have been used for prevention and education, and only 5.6% for primary prevention⁸. Under the current government, these funds have been cut by 70%,

⁷ <https://www.internazionale.it/essenziale/notizie/donata-columbro/2022/09/29/voto-delle-donne>.

⁸ Black Freeday - Prevention at a Discount', ActionAid, November 2023, <https://actionaid->

[it.imgix.net/uploads/2023/11/Prevenzione-Sottocosto_donne_2023.pdf](https://www.actionaid-italia.org/it/imgix.net/uploads/2023/11/Prevenzione-Sottocosto_donne_2023.pdf).

from over €17 million in 2022 to just €5 million in 2023. Moreover, the initiatives promoted by local bodies are often shaped by pro-life ideologies that portray education against gender stereotypes as an ideological threat rather than a fundamental right. According to these perspectives, education against gender stereotypes and discrimination would be "an extremely serious failure of the centre-right majority in the face of the pro-abortion hysteria of trans-feminist collectives"⁹. The national budget law for 2025 initially allocated 500,000 euros, a ridiculous amount, to initiatives for sex and relationship education in schools, but these funds have been diverted to training for secondary school teachers on male and female fertility¹⁰. This shift clearly signals the government's disregard for gender equality and violence prevention in favour of policies that reinforce traditional family stereotypes. Genuine attempts to implement gender training remain sporadic, driven by individual teachers and proactive local authorities rather than a national education policy. As a result, initiatives are fragmented, inconsistent and lack uniformity. While gender stereotypes remain deeply rooted in society, the Italian government's response is limited to symbolic actions linked to international observances rather than structural, long-term reforms.

Ministerial programmes and textbooks still fail to address stereotypes related to gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other forms of marginalisation. Current curricula reinforce masculine universalism in language, texts and historical narratives. There's very little, if any, representation of gender equality in textbooks, which often portray brave women and girls, and very rarely caring men and boys. Challenging gender stereotypes by ensuring that positions of power are accessible to all is as important as raising new generations capable of caring for others, both emotionally and physically. This is particularly important because reproductive work falls almost exclusively on women's shoulders, placing a significant burden on them while they strive for social, political and economic equality, and this responsibility is imposed on them from a very early age.

Educational disparities between men and women persist, leading to systemic disadvantages. While women perform well at school, they tend to be concentrated in traditionally low-paid,

⁹ https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2024/12/19/news/pro_vita_educazione_sessuale_scuola_gender-14895712/.

¹⁰ https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2025/01/08/news/ciriani_fondi_educazione_sessuale_formazione_docenti_fertilita-423926544/.

female-dominated sectors such as care work. Even in sectors where women are well-represented, such as education and health care, leadership positions are overwhelmingly held by men. In academia, for example, the 'leaky pipeline' phenomenon - where the number of women declines as they climb the academic ladder - is due to a lack of female role models and exclusion from influential networks¹¹. Despite gradual improvements, women in top academic positions still account for just over 20% of all faculty, and progress remains painfully slow at an estimated 0.5% increase per year, making it impossible to close the gap in the foreseeable future.

¹¹ Veltri, A.; Vivona, S.; Sdao, P., "Women's Empowerment and Leadership in Academia: A Case Study", *International Conference on Gender Research*; Reading : Academic Conferences International Limited. (Apr 2018): 581-590,XVII.