



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Support services for victims of violence in asylum and migration

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Support services for victims of violence in asylum and migration in Italy

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1. Relevant country context in Italy

In the year 2017, 119.369 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea¹. This is a 34% decrease compared to the same period last year, when 181.436 persons reached Italian shores. 12,6% of the sea arrivals were women and 13% Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC). Arrivals most commonly originated from Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Mali, Eritrea, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, and Senegal. 91% of them departed from Libya. Departures from Tunisia accounted for 4 % of sea arrivals, followed by Turkey (3 %), and Algeria (1 %)². In 2017, 130.180 new asylum applications were lodged in Italy³. The past year shows a significant decrease of the number of applications, especially those by Nigerians, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Gambians and Ivoirians.

As of the end of the year, 183.681 adult asylum-seekers were accommodated in reception facilities across the country⁴. In December 2017, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and Italian authorities signed a new Operating Plan, which will see EASO expand its support in the country in 2018, with a focus on areas such as Refugee Status Determination, reception, Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) and information provision. Throughout 2017, 985 refugees were resettled to Italy in the context of the Italian Resettlement Programme⁵. In December 2017, the Italian Council of Ministers approved a decree which reformed the set-up of Territorial Commissions, and introduced measures to strengthen child protection and enhance Sexual & Gender-based Violence (SGBV) prevention in reception facilities⁶. The Chamber of Deputies' Budgetary Commission approved the allocation of funds to social cooperatives hiring beneficiaries of international protection. Italy remains one of the main receiving countries in Europe (70% of all arrivals by sea in Europe) due to the high volume of irregular migration flows on the central

¹ January – 30 November 2017- For further details and statistics, please refer to UNHCR updates including Sea Arrivals Dashboards and UASC Dashboards, available on the UNHCR data portal at <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>

² UNHCR, ITALY OPERATIONAL UPDATE – December 2017

³ Ministry of Interior, I numeri dell'asilo, <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/i-numeri-dellasil> (last access 10/01/2018)

⁴ Ministry of Interior, Cruscotto statistico giornaliero, 31 December 2017, http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/cruscotto_statistico_giornaliero_31-12-2017.pdf (last access 10/01/2018)

⁵ Relocations refer to the October 2015-31 December 2017 period. For more information, see Ministry of Interior, *ibid*.

⁶ Council of Ministers, Press release, 18 December 2017, <http://www.governo.it/articolo/comunicato-stampa-del-consiglio-dei-ministri-n62/8672> (last access 04/02/2018): DECRETO LEGISLATIVO: Disposizioni integrative e correttive del decreto legislativo 18 agosto 2015, n. 142, di attuazione della direttiva 2013/33/UE recante norme relative all'accoglienza dei richiedenti protezione internazionale nonché della direttiva 2013/32/UE recante procedure comuni ai fini del riconoscimento e della revoca dello status di protezione internazionale.

Mediterranean route, mainly departing from Libya and consisting of nationals from Nigeria, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, as well as from Mali. Most disembarkations of arriving migrants happen in the Sicilian ports of Augusta, Catania, Pozzallo and Lampedusa.

As of December 2017, 33% of asylum-seekers in Europe were women, a growing percentage (+32%) compared to 2016 (EUROSTAT, 2018). The same growing trend is observed in Italy, where the percentage of women requesting international protection grew from 10% in 2015 to 16% in 2017. About 40% of these women are from Nigeria, a percentage that has been increasing since 2013, 10.9% are from Eritrea and 7.9 from Ukraine (EUROSTAT, 2018).

Comparing Italy with the entire EU, we observe that the quota of asylum-seekers in our country has doubled in 2017 (from 9,8% in 2016 to 19,6%) and that among women the percentage is 10%, also doubled compared with the 5% of the previous year. The number of women arriving in Italy from Nigeria in 2015 and 2016 has also increased, going from 5.633 to 7.665 as confirmed by the latest GRETA⁷ report.

In the light of the quantitative increase of women in flows and international protection requests, the adoption of a gender perspective seems ever more urgent in the reception of immigrants, particularly for international protection requests. If we look at the characteristics of women's forced migration, we cannot avoid considering the specific and peculiar role that violence, and the high probability that they be victims of it, plays during the migratory journey⁸. Only a gender-sensitive approach, for example, enables us to underline the tight connection existing between women requesting international protection and trafficking in human beings: not only when they are sold for sexual exploitation in the country of destination but also when they become victims of such trafficking during their migration journey. The gender specificity of migrant women also appears in the OIM⁹ research that highlights gender differences at the base of migrating motives: "compared to men, a considerably higher percentage of women leave their country for reasons connected to their family situation (37% to 17%). As a matter of fact, many women say they left their home to escape from violence, abuse and forced marriages or to follow their mates" (p.28). Also, even from a more general perspective on the migratory phenomenon, it is clearly necessary to adopt a gender-sensitive approach considering the multiple vulnerabilities and discriminations to which migrant women are simultaneously exposed, both as women and migrants. In Italy, according to 2014 data from ISTAT, resident foreign women are more exposed than Italian women to physical violence, rape and attempted rape (ISTAT, 2015), while there is scarce information about violence against women refugees/asylum seekers.

Fundamental, for the adoption of a gender perspective in the reception system for migrants and asylum seekers, is the reference to the European Council Convention on the prevention and combating violence against women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) ratified by Italy with Law 27 of June 2013 n.77 and effective as of August 1° 2014. In particular, articles 59, 60, 61 in Chapter VII, "Migration and

⁷ GRETA, Report on Italy under Rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure for evaluating implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Being, 2016.

⁸ GENOVIVA F. R. , *Questione di genere: chi e quante sono le donne che chiedono asilo in Italia*, Open migration, 2017 <http://openmigration.org/analisi/questione-di-genere-chi-e-quante-sono-le-donne-che-chiedono-asilo-in-italia/>

⁹ Organizzazione Internazionale per le Migrazioni (OIM), *Study on migrants' profiles Drivers of migration and migratory trends*, Rome, 2016.

Asylum”, refer to the adoption of an approach that is sensible to gender specificity with regards to violence against migrant women and asylum seekers and the relative updating of national normative on the subject. It is important to note that the National Strategic Plan on Male Violence against Women 2017-2020 (Piano Strategico Nazionale 2017-2020), recently adopted by the Italian Government (Nov. 2017), contains a specific section dedicated to migrant women based on “a non-discriminating approach declining human rights, multiculturalism and gender orientation”. The Plan seeks to develop an intervention (with relative goals and actions) aimed at curbing the mechanisms of reproduction and reiteration in Italy of violence against migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker women. The main interventions set up in the Italian Plan regarding migrant women are the following:

- Guidelines for the early identification of victims of Female Genital Mutilation or other harmful practices addressed to reception centre staff operators of CPSA (first aid and reception centres), CDA (reception centres), and CARA (reception centres for asylum-seekers), working with male and female asylum-seekers; (published on 22.12.2017)¹¹;
- Training of all public and private sector operators (NGOs, Cooperatives, Associations etc.) who are involved in various facilities in ‘first phase’ reception (Hot Spots, CARA, CIE) and in ‘second phase’ reception (CAS, SPRAR, associations, migrants in general and women’s associations) with the goals of preventing or addressing situations of violence, informing and orienting women on how to act in order to exert their own human rights and the ‘right to health’ for women of all ages who are asylum-seekers or international and humanitarian protection beneficiaries (Refugee Status and Subsidiary Protection), and on how to act, and through which territorial networks, in order to overcome traumas and re-victimisation.
- Training of translators and members of Territorial Commissions on the themes of violence and the adoption of a gender approach with regards to identification and referral of violence survivors.
- Information campaign for migrants and asylum seekers including referral services for violence survivors.
- Awareness and information activities for migrants/asylum-seekers (men, women, girls, boys) adopting a participative, peer to peer approach aiming at making reception programs more efficient and personalised, and at reducing the risk of repeated violence and penal or civil consequences.

2. Policy debate

The theme of migration is highly controversial in Italy, both in the public opinion and in the political parties’ positions. Italy’s rapid transformation into a destination country for regular and irregular migration flows, the humanitarian crises tied to the escalation of conflicts within the Mediterranean area, the recent surge of ‘push

¹⁰ <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/contro-la-violenza-sessuale-e-di-genere/piano-dazione-contro-la-violenza-sessuale-e-di-genere-2017-2020/>

¹¹ <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/notizie/22122017-linee-guida-per-il-riconoscimento-precoco-delle-vittime-di-mutilazioni-genitali-femminili-o-altre-pratiche-dannose/>

factors' in many African countries (wars, droughts, religious conflicts, extreme poverty etc.) resulting in mass landings on Italian coasts and the slow, feeble answers from EU policymakers, have all contributed to an extremely inflamed climate about the migratory phenomenon as a whole. Over the last year, however, migratory policy in the country has been characterised by the introduction of new measures (Law n. 461-20172; memorandum of understanding on cooperation with Libya to curb the flow of migrants to Europe) aiming at curtailing illegal immigration, rationalising the entire reception system, speeding procedures for access to asylum status. Even in the light of the recent diminution of migration flows and landings – and as an effect of the strong politicisation of the theme – the perception of the phenomenon in Italy is shaped by various factors such as the overstating of the numbers (many Italians believe that immigrants amount to about 30% of the population while the actual percentage is 7%), the overstating of crimes committed by immigrants, and an increasing number of episodes of intolerance and racism. At the same time, changes in the Italian immigration policy have been heavily criticised by individuals and migrants' rights organisations¹².

Regarding the phenomenon of male violence against women, Italy has recently adopted new policy instruments such as the abovementioned National Plan on male violence against women¹³; the Guidelines for the protection of the victims of violence¹³ in hospital emergency departments; and in 2016 the National Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings (NPA)¹⁴. The strategic approach of the “National Strategic Plan on male violence against women” has been defined through a process of coordination with central, regional and local administrations, women's associations and anti-violence centres networks; the debate has dealt with the main issues regarding the strategy to combat violence against women. In full compliance with international standards – the Istanbul Convention and other international ratified Conventions – the Plan is structured in three areas (Prevention, Protection and support, Pursue and punish) plus a service provision (Assistance and promotion). The Plan gives specific attention to migrant women, refugees and asylum seekers due to the peculiarity of their migratory status, which exposes them to multiple discrimination and consequently to a greater risks of hardship and marginality in the host country. The themes related to managing the reception of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in general and of women in particular, in accordance with European Directives, the Istanbul Convention and Italian normative are at the center of attention of the civil society and of the NGOs dealing with migrants' rights and violence against women.

3. Related good practice initiatives

The adoption of the national Plan is a good premise to address violence against women and migrant women issues jointly. The transversal approach adopted in the

¹² Esposito, F. (2017) A Critical Look at the Italian Immigration and Asylum Policy: Building ‘Walls of Laws’. Available at: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2017/07/critical-look> (Accessed [20/01/2018])

¹³ art. 1, comma 790 e 791 della Legge 28 dicembre 2015, n. 208 “legge di stabilità 2016” Italian platform “CEDAW: Work in progress” CEDAW Shadow Report, with reference to the 7th periodic report on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention submitted by the Italian Government in 2015.

¹⁴ National Action Plan Against Trafficking and Serious Exploitation 2016-2018 Adopted by the Council of Ministers at the meeting of 26 February 2016, <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/index.php/archivio-notizie/2717-adattato-the-first-national-level-counter-trafficking-and-exploitation-ofbeings-human/>

Plan with activities specifically aimed at migrant women, is the methodological response to tackle the complexity of the issue and to integrate interventions on migrant women in all strategic areas of the Plan. In this context, the publication of the Guidelines for the early identification of victims of Female Genital Mutilation or other harmful practices, promoted by the Department of Equal Opportunities and conceived by a pool of experts from NGOs, institutions and women's associations¹⁵ working in the field, is a first achievement of the Italian strategy to support migrant women: a good practice that involves both institutions and civil society.

Among the experiences developed in Italy in the field of supporting victims of gender based violence, extended to asylum seekers and migrants, there are two associations that present a long and consolidated knowledge of the topic, acquired through field-work, projects, and networking activities based on a gender sensitive methodology.

Trama di terre was established in Imola in 1997 by a group of fourteen women of five different nationalities. The founding approach is based on sharing the idea that for migrant women, the struggle for access to material and symbolic resources puts them in a condition of double vulnerability. The association is therefore specialised in supporting migrant women from the beginning; dealing with issues such as forced marriages and female genital mutilation, it has developed a unique form of expertise in the field of supporting migrant women and girls. The activities of the association are developed in various sectors. The Intercultural women's Centre (managed by migrant women) is part of the Anti-Discrimination Network of the Emilia Romagna Region and is registered in the "Register of Associations and Organisations against discrimination" of the Ministry of Equal Opportunities. The association also runs an anti-violence centre, an emergency housing service, a shelter and a transition house for native and migrant women. Since 2015 Trama di Terre manages the first reception structure (CAS) for women and minors (88 women and 30 minors in 2015-17) and is part of the SPRAR network (13 women 5 minors) assisted between 2015-17, the Italian system of second level reception. The association provides a wide range of services: accommodation, specialised victim support, counselling and specific assistance for asylum applications.

Nosotras was founded in Florence in 1998 as a place of exchange and meeting between women from different countries. It enables women - Italian and immigrant, young and old, mothers, girls and children - to plan together actions and strategies for a path of autonomy, emancipation and dignity. The women of Nosotras elaborate gender policies and offer the appropriate training to stimulate socio-economic projects. The association provides a real, continuous accompaniment for the entire integration process. Nosotras actively collaborates with public and private bodies offering, among other things, a qualified range of projects and initiatives of social mediation and promotion of intercultural dialogue. The association has a specific experience on FGM and forced and early marriage issues, acquired through a work of awareness raising, training, elaborating guidelines and counselling. In 2011 they ran two linguistic projects - cultural mediation addressed to refugees and asylum seekers at the temporary reception centre in Florence. In the same year, they ran an ethno psychology project aimed at the reception, support and accompaniment of refugees and asylum seekers with psychological distress. The project, led by the Co & So Consortium and the Municipality of Florence with Nosotras, Arci and Servizio Sprar, was financed by the F.E.I. (European Integration Fund) of the Ministry of the

¹⁵ Associazione Parsec Ricerca e Interventi Sociali; Coop. Soc. Parsec; Patrizia Farina (Università di Milano - Bicocca); San Camillo Forlanini Hospital; Nosotras Onlus; Associazione Trama di Terre.

Interior. Nosotras managed the cultural linguistic mediation services with the use of about 30 different languages and dialects.

A third promising practice proposed is the **GEMMA** against Violence project: Gender based Empowerment of Migrants through a Multiagency Approach, financed in the framework of the Rights, Equality And Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) , run by Gruppo per le Relazioni Transculturali (GRT), a group of associates working in the third-sector, especially educators, psychologists, psychiatrists, teachers and doctors in Milano.

The Gemma project seeks to develop an intervention model in the field of prevention, and treatment of gender-based violence for a particularly vulnerable group: women and girls of migrant and ethnic background. The intervention model, from a transcultural point of view, is a multidisciplinary and multiagency strategy based on three key pillars: (1) Psycho-social, legal and physical support to survivors of violence; (2) Networking among services and the strengthening of a culturally sensitive and integrated approach (across physical, psycho-social, and legal fields) (3) Empowerment and awareness-raising within migrant communities, to enhance internal self-help and the activation of care safety nets and access to services. The GEMMA Project intends to develop a coordinated multi-sector approach in order to effectively address and tackle the root causes of violence and properly assist migrant/ethnic minority women survivors of violence. The target groups of the project are: (i) Professionals in the physical, psycho-social and legal field: 150 trained plus hundreds potentially reached through dissemination; (ii) Migrants and ethnic minority communities. Final beneficiaries are: migrant women, or women belonging to ethnic minorities, victims or at risk of violence.

4. Learning

Italy and Greece are the European countries are at the forefront of the current humanitarian crisis and the management of mass arrivals on their shores and borders. In this crisis, Europe's response needs to comply with international obligations, responsibilities and common values. The European Union, as well as the various governments in Europe, with the support of international humanitarian actors such as NGOs, are called to increase the resources dedicated to the process of reception and protection, especially for persons with specific needs and those who are at risk in this crisis. In particular, it is important to strengthen the protection responses the EU institutions, governments, humanitarian actors and NGOs provide to fulfil the needs of women and girls fleeing to Europe.

The approach adopted in the two countries shows some common elements in the effort to provide a strategic framework which adapts and reinforces the already existing networks and services and in this way offers specific assistance to refugee and asylum-seekers women, girls and children. It is evident that this requires training, and awareness raising actions that can enable the reception system to recognise, address and support the specific needs expressed by women and girls. The adoption in Greece of the Cooperation Protocol between all central and local agencies and the anti-violence service system is an important response.

It would be very interesting, during the seminar, to share and discuss our thoughts and ideas on how to implement and guarantee better, homogeneous and specialised services, and on how to avoid the fragmentation of skills and responsibilities and the lack of consistent, qualified responses.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

It is very difficult, in this context of prolonged emergency, to agree on priority actions even after many recommendations accurately identifying strategic elements and shortcomings of the system of reception and management of refugees and asylum seekers on the part of international organisations (such as IOM, UNHCR, United Nations Refugee Agency, United Nations Population Fund, Women's Refugee Commission) and CSO's (CEDAW Shadow report-2017, Caritas, etc.) have been proposed. But the specificity of the needs of women and girls and, in particular their exposure to gender-based violence, (which is often a reason for migration), both during migration and after migration, requires further attention. In this context it is important to underline the urgency of targeted system measures allowing for the recognition of the specific support and assistance needs of migrant women victims of violence. This is necessary in order to avoid re-victimisation, further discrimination and the risk of missing proper identification, differentiating asylum seekers, so-called economic migrants and victims of human trafficking. Here are some suggestions:

- **Data collection** at national and European level (only aggregated data is collected of first arrival and poor gender statistics are available to monitoring and evaluating).
- **Training** of institutional actors and NGOs on the obligations arising from national and international standards for the protection of unaccompanied minors and migrant girls, and a gender oriented approach should be mainstreamed in all migration policies and measures.
- **Training** on gender discrimination and violence in multiple forms (migrant women's traumatic experiences, women fleeing conflicts, victims of torture, survivors of group rapes, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and trafficking of staff operators of the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, SPRAR, of anti-violence centres and shelters, local government agencies for social and job orientation or inclusion measures.
- **Information and training** regarding gender based discrimination and violence as experienced by asylum seekers should be provided throughout the Italian territory in all migrant reception facilities, including hot spot operators, interpreters and cultural mediators of the Territorial Commissions.
- A regional register of translators and cultural mediators should be created for experts on gender-issues and gender-based discrimination who can assist asylum seekers and migrants in all phases of their migration experience.

Methodologies

- Develop, adopt and use a standard set of vulnerability criteria to ensure that all engaged actors identify, prioritise and respond to women and girls who have heightened protection risks.
- Adopt a multidisciplinary and multiagency strategy.