



ITALY

LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS

In the European institutional context, Italy is one of the signatory countries of the Istanbul Convention which provides several measures to be implemented to offer a comprehensive support to victims of violence such as shelters, help lines, and tools. It was signed in 2012 and ratified in 2013 by the Parliament. Then, from the ratification, came the law number 119/2013 which provided Italy with an official definition of “domestic violence”. Consequentially, the institutions formally assumed an anti-violence system managed through three-year national plans and annual funding to anti-violence centres and shelters. This system is based on the Extraordinary Action Plan against sexual and gender-based violence, managed by the Department for Equal Opportunities which determines, within its political guidance, the priorities for intervention. In the recent years, some political forces, especially from the centre-right, have questioned the ratification of the convention, raising doubts in particular on the articles about gender identity and the LGBTQ+ community. In 2021, a proposal was made to cancel the ratification, which was strongly opposed by feminist associations and human rights organisations.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is a European Union agency established in 2007 specifically to promote and strengthen gender equality. Italy contributes with EIGE allocating funds to the European budget, participating in activities (working groups, workshops, and specific projects) and adopting studies, reports and guidelines EIGE developed. ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics in Italy) cooperates with the EIGE by providing statistic data on Italy. EIGE supports Italy in the implementation of strategies and actions under international conventions such as the Istanbul Convention.

At national level, the main institutional, political, and economic bodies contributing to gender equality are:

- the Department for Equal Opportunities, the National Committee for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women (the Government's advisory body on gender issues)
- the Extraordinary Action Plan against Sexual and Gender-based Violence (containing objectives and strategic actions on violence issues, established thanks to the Istanbul Convention)
- the National Network of Anti-Violence shelters (facilities that offer legal, health and psychological support to women victims)
- the Fund for policies related to rights and equal opportunities
- the Gender Responsive Public Procurement (guidelines to take gender differences into account in public procurement).

For monitoring and impact assessment, Italy adopts the Gender Balance (analysis of the impact of laws and policies on women) and collects statistical data on gender differences through ISTAT and the National Observatory on Violence.

It is important to mention that active anti-violence centres and shelters are included in national funding plans (above mentioned) where funds are managed independently by the regions. This might create strong division between different territories and regions since it brings to the lack of standardized approaches, guidelines, and resources allocation.

Nowadays and since October 2022, the country has the first government with a female prime minister who is expected to have the mandate active until 2027. Unfortunately, still the percentage of people in the government and ministries who identify with the female gender is only 30%. Less than in previous governments. This indicates that women's political representation and decision-making capacity in the political agenda is very weak.

Not to mention the lack of representation of the LGBTQ+ community. The only relevant case in Italy was the election in 2006 of Vladimir Luxuria, the first openly transgender women member of the European Parliament, and the world's second openly transgender MP after New Zealander Georgina Beyer.

Since her election, the Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, who created the 'Minister for the Family, Birth and Equal Opportunities', has repeatedly shown that she is against abortion, that the protection of women passes through the valorisation of their task of care and the imposition of the role of mothers, that she is against surrogate mothers and above all, against civil unions and adoptions for gay couples.

EDUCATION

The University of Rome La Sapienza, since September 2022, was the first university in Italy to offer a degree programme in Gender Studies, aimed to explore the social and cultural construction of gender and its impact on individuals and society. The course is interdisciplinary and includes tools/sources from sociology, anthropology, psychology, literature, history and cultural studies to explore gender equality and the different forms of gender-oppression.

At the same time, Italy is one of the few countries in the European Union where sex education is not compulsory in schools. Moreover, in April 2024, the Culture Commission of the Chamber of Deputies approved a resolution asking the government to exclude any content related to “gender ideology” from the teaching in schools. This fact seems quite a paradox, since the “gender ideology” does not exist, except as a tool for political propaganda against LGBTIQ+ movements.

According to this resolution also sexual and affective education are potentially falling into “gender ideology” and are not considered anymore a political and social priority. Therefore, they are not included in large budget programmes or economic development plans and it is up to the schools to choose whether to include this subject and how.

For this reason, the only possibility schools have is to introduce courses or workshops or individual information events, through regional calls or sporadic collaborations with local associations, foundations, or non-profit organisations. These collaborations are not always effective, for three main reasons: not all the proposing realities are always competent, sometimes they have pro-religious approaches, they don’t always manage to have a continuity over the time (which is indeed crucial to effectively tackle this subject with young people and adolescents).

After the ratification of the Convention of Istanbul in 2013, the commitment to bring the subject of gender education into the Italian educational context was reaffirmed with the Law 119/2013. The Article 5 of this law indicates gender education as one of the objectives of the Extraordinary Action Plan against sexual and gender-based violence.

Despite the laws and proposals, Italian government has proven many times to be reluctant to introduce certain topics because the objective of sex education is completely misunderstood. A proven fact shown, for example, through the Italy's total rejection of a proposal from the 2010 WHO Europe and Federal Centre for Health Education which was suggesting the adoption of standards for implementing sex and affective education in schools. This example clearly shows how Italy still faces great difficulty in deconstructing binary and patriarchal approaches and perspectives, on a larger scale as also in smaller proposals.

At the same time, the law number 164/1982, 'Regulation on gender reassignment rectification' is a relevant contribution to the Italian national education system. The law includes the recent recommendation for a very important tool: the 'Alias career' - or 'Alias identity'. This is a protocol which provides the possibility of being registered in school with the name that corresponds to one's gender identity, even if this is different from one's registry name. The change only takes effect in the internal bureaucratic processes of the school and has no legal value outside of it. Above all it's useful to protect the educational environment of those requesting, to counteract bullying, discrimination and marginalisation. Unfortunately, this protocol is a tool currently adopted only in few schools since it's up to the good sense of the school director to introduce it or not.

The rejection of good practices and the wide-spread concern regarding their application, doesn't allow the experimentation of new educational opportunities conceived to reach out to the needs and requirements of everyone. Moreover, it deprives teachers and educators of the opportunity to acquire fundamental tools for education and to design new pedagogical approaches.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The political and social system in Italy includes a variety of tools contributing to women and transgender people empowerment, but there are still many challenges, as for example, the lack of LGBTIQ+ political representation. The only relevant case of a political representative from the LGBTIQ+ community elected in Italy was Vladimir Luxuria (in charge from 2006 to 2008).

Italian legislation mainly mentions binary genders, starting with the Italian Constitution (in force since 1948) which in the Article 37 states: "A working woman has the same rights and, for equal work, the same pay as a [male] worker. Working conditions must permit the fulfilment of her essential family function and ensure special appropriate protection for mother and child." In the 1940s this article offered an innovative vision in the role of women: women started to have access to work and with the same rights as men. But, if nowadays we re-read back the same article, it shows a clear conservative vision: work must not interfere with the essential family function of women. Therefore, women were allowed to work like men (and with the same conditions and salaries), but on the condition the work was not interfering with their motherhood situation and was offering appropriate protection (not specified what it means) for the mothers and children.

The Article 37 is 76 years old, but in the 1940s some feminist ideas were already rooted, thanks to the different waves of feminism in Italy.

The first wave started in the beginning of the 19th century with the foundation of the first feminist movement which also attempted to involve women in the unification of the Kingdom of Italy. Therefore, setting the ground for an evolution of women's roles and the way they were perceived in society. Unfortunately, fascism and the Second World War inflicted heavy blows to Italy and to the feminist movement. However, from the post-war period onward, the participation of women in decision-making processes became an important item on the political agenda. In 1945, women's suffrage was introduced and the 2nd of June 1946, all citizens (including women) were asked to vote during the institutional referendum to choose between monarchy and republic. Citizens chose for Italian Republic.

In the 1960s, the second feminist wave started, the first LGBTQI+ associations began to emerge and gender-based violence started to be a sensitive (revealed) issue. In fact, many acts of domestic violence, which until then had been considered normal, were made punishable. People began to talk about sexual and affective education, and the Women's Liberation Movement was founded in 1969, calling for the legalization of abortion. Few years after, the Law 194/1978 was issued to protect maternity and allowing for the voluntary termination of pregnancy, guaranteeing women the right to choose abortion.

Much more laws came into practice with the third feminist wave (between the 1990s and the early 2000s). These laws contributed to make the Italian system one of the richest from the normative point of view, but still many gaps remain.

The real social and political issue in Italy is that, despite all the progresses and attempts made over the years, there is a dichotomy between the normative system (with an ideally feminist basis) and the extremely patriarchal culture (which struggles to change its inner grassroot perspective).

It is not a coincidence that in the 2022 elections, after massive conservative, xenophobic and nationalist propaganda, a coalition of right and centre-right parties came into government. As a result of the elections, for the first time Italy had a woman as head of government. A woman who paradoxically, does not share at all the vision of the current fourth feminist wave.

At the same time, in the country is going on the fourth feminist wave focused on the concept of intersectionality (showing the mechanisms behind the overlapping of different types of discrimination) and on the total deconstruction of patriarchal Italian and western society. This wave aims to deconstruct structural phenomena as: racism (centre to the intersectional concept coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw), ableism, hetero-normativity, post-colonialism. The movements starting from this last wave promote the idea that society needs to be changed in depth because gender-based violence is only a symptom of more deep-rooted dynamics that need to be deconstructed by/for all (not only by/for cis-gender hetero-white women, but also by/for people from the LGBTIQ+ community, migrants, people with different abilities, etc.).

In conclusion, in the last decades the Italian civil society has made great progresses organising itself and providing the Italian system with fundamental tools for the protection of women, above all. Still, and at the same time, institutional policies continue to push back to traditionalist and patriarchal approaches/practices. This is clearly shown by the results of the UN's Gender Social Norms Index, which measures the stereotypes contributing to increase gender inequalities: today still 61% of the Italian population has prejudices against women and 45% believe that there are conditions where physical, sexual and psychological violence by a partner may be acceptable and justifiable.

RELIGION

Religion in Italy has still a very strong role since the Fascist Era. In fact, since 1929, following the agreements of the Lateran Pact endorsed between the new-born Vatican City State and the Italian Fascist regime, one hour of Catholic religion was included in all levels of the school curricula (even though nowadays students can choose whether to attend that class or not).

Back to its origins, it's possible to see how the writings of the Fathers of the Catholic Church, bring us back to the great contradiction between universal Catholic brotherhood and the marginalisation of women, seen as inferior figures in comparison to men. Figures that distract men from worship and faith. For centuries, the Christian values of monogamy and procreation, overexploited by macho propaganda, have confined women to the role of loving wife and patient mother, depriving them of any other desire or ambition. Therefore, for a very long time, the image of women remained either negative (as potential temptation) or holy and lovely like the one of the Virgin Mary (as a reference point to be inspired by).

At the same time in Italy, female priesthood does not exist at all, and it is also definitely not accepted by a big religious part of the civil society.

Nowadays, Pope Francesco has repeatedly affirmed how women are a source of salvation and that from their womb is born life and therefore hope. But these affirmations contribute only to reinforce and enhance the accent on the reproductive functions of the woman and how they must come before whatever other aspirations/ambitions.

On this logic also lies the criticism of the Catholic and pro-Catholic associations opposing the introduction of sex and gender education in schools. In addition, the 'pro-life organisations' (a mainly religious organization) has repeatedly accused of murdering those demonstrating for the protection of the abortion rights. Furthermore, since April 2024, an amendment was approved which was introducing pro-life associations into family counselling centres, allowing them to have a voice in the pregnancy termination services. The decision was presented as an act to protect motherhood, but feminist associations and movements of the LGBTIQ+ community consider it as an intrusive act, affecting the process of women's self-determination (especially for what concerns their own bodies).

Also nowadays, the challenge is to re-shape a different perspective of the women's role in the current society. Since the role of the mother has been rooted, stable, known and well accepted for centuries, proposing, and accepting another role and perspective for women is really difficult in Italy.

Regarding the LGBTQI+ community and all gender identities: the position of the current pope and his department is unclear. There seem to be some positive elements, such as a proposition launched at the end of 2023 by the Department for the Doctrine of the Faith to give no limitations, based on sexual orientation or gender identity, for those willing to be baptised or becoming wedding witness.

At the same time, the idea that sexual orientations different than the heterosexual, are deviant conditions accepted but not normalised, is still strong in the Catholic culture.

At the same time, we would like to share a relevant social reality gathering the voices of the LGBTQI+ community: "Il Grande Colibrì, being LGBT in the world". This reality is composed by people from the LGBTQI+ community who profess different religions (Christian and Muslim in particular).

LOCAL AREA BACKGROUND

Demographically, Lazio region is the one with the highest female populations in Italy (51.6% in 2022 according to ISTAT data), and this fact is due to the longevity of the lives of the women compared to men. Women are more independent in the capital of Rome and in the large cities, but gaps persist in the provinces.

The ISTAT data on long-term unemployment in 2022 for the 15-64 age group, shows that it is more difficult for women to get out of unemployment, and the process can take even more than 12 months. Moreover, the labour inactivity rate (persons who do not actively seek work) is higher for women in Lazio. Inside the 25-34 age group of women living in Lazio, 47% of them explain that their high inactivity is due to 'family reasons'. Inactivity for family reasons increases to 58% of women part of the 35-49 age group. Moreover, wage differences between men and women are among the highest in Italy, with a gap of 18,7% in the private sector.

Rome and Lazio have one of the highest rates of the country for what concerns calls to the anti-violence and anti-stalking hotline for women. Anti-violence centres and shelters are very active throughout the region, but they face various difficulties in keeping the service stable and guaranteeing its quality, since funds are not enough. The main Network of anti-violence centres in Italy, "D.i.Re Donne in Rete contro la violenza" includes the following centres located around Lazio:

- In the province of Frosinone: Stella Polare Anti-Violence Centre
- Rieti: Il Nido di Ana
- Viterbo: Associazione Erinna - donne contro la violenza ONLUS
- Rome: Associazione Donne in Genere ONLUS, Casa delle donne Lucha y Siesta.

Services for women have increased, thanks also to the (mostly voluntary) work of these centres and most of them are accessible for people with mobility impairments.

"Arci Gay" (a historical association for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community) has also promoted and opened several anti-violence and support services for people from the community. Some of those are also located in rural areas such as the municipality of Albano Laziale, and offer services such as psychological support, telephone and online interviews, support groups, job orientation, legal assistance, and support for housing to people who are victims of violence and discrimination. In the capital of Rome, among the various associations operating in the area, it is also important to mention the "Circolo di Cultura Omosessuale Mario Mieli", a historical association committed to the protection of LGBTQI+ rights.

It is also important to remember that the first Gay Pride in Rome took place in 1994 and that 2024 is 30th anniversary. And every year the event is increasing, in terms of participation in the march.

In 2021, Lazio Region approved the law against homophobia, the first in Italy to penalize aggression based on sexual orientation discrimination. Despite all this work, according to association reports, episodes of homophobia, such as verbal aggression or bullying, are cyclically recorded especially in schools. It is important to know that according to Lazio data, 1 in 5 young people aged between 16 and 26 years old, identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual and many others still make coming out in adulthood, due to unwelcoming family and social environments.