

Concept paper

The 17th Italian Parliament, including a record number of women Members in the history of the Republic, has approved, as one of its first measures, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Following this action, the Italian Parliament subsequently adopted, by conversion of a decree-law, criminal and procedural measures aimed to effectively implement provisions dedicated to the prevention and elimination of violence against women as put forward in the Istanbul Convention. With this document, Italian lawmakers requested the draft of an Extraordinary Plan of Action against sexual and gender violence for which lawmakers would coordinate and involve all levels of government and interventions from a number of sectors: from education in schools, to awareness raising of public opinion; from creating greater capacity for anti-violence centres, to victim support; from the collection of statistical data, to training all operators combating violence. The attention given to the issue of violence against women has led to the adoption of further regulations supporting victims, such as the right to take leave from work for women victims of abuse and, the law envisaging a series of measures protecting orphan children of femicide.

The commitment of both Houses of Parliament has not been limited to legislation alone.

The Senate of the Italian Republic has also established on 18 January 2017 a **Joint Investigation Committee on Femicide and any Form of Gender-based Violence** (Doc. XXII, n. 34)¹. The proposal for the Committee stems from the awareness that violence against women is an issue of global proportions: globally 35 percent of women are subject to, through the course of their lives, some form of violence, particularly in the household. According to ISTAT (Italian Statistics Bureau) 2014 data, approximately 4,400,000 women in Italy are suffering, or have suffered from either physical or psychological abuse from their current partners – which account for 26.4% of the female population living with a partner. Always in Italy, the year 2016 recorded 149 homicides with female victims, 111 of which were committed by a household member.

The Investigation Committee – called upon to monitor the effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention and any other relevant international agreement, in addition to our national legislation – was entrusted with investigating the actual breadth, conditions, typologies and causes of femicide, interpreted as the killing of a woman, based on her gender and, more in general, of all forms of gender violence. The Committee is also tasked with proposing legislative and administrative solutions that can guarantee better prevention and more effective action against violence, as well as the protection of victims and any minors involved². To this end,

¹ The Committee is made up of twenty senators, appointed by the Senate President, according to the number of members of the parliamentary groups, to ensure that there is a representative for each group and that there is a fair representation of both men and women senators. The work and functioning of the Committee and working groups are governed by regulations that have been approved by the Committee prior to launching inquiries. The hearings are public, but the Committee can decide to hold meetings behind closed doors.

² Among the objectives of this activity: verify possible discrepancies or gaps in current regulations for the purpose of protection of the victims of violence and minors involved; examine cases of femicide since 2011 to verify whether there are recurrent conditions or behaviors that can be statistically relevant, which can serve as a guideline for preventive action; verify the level of attention and intervention capacities of central and local authorities and public administration

the Committee held many hearings to listen to the women who were directly involved in violent episodes and associations dedicated to victims, along with institutional representatives.

In addition, the Investigation Committee, which through its concrete experience had become an institutional reference point for women facing serious difficulties, requested that public administration and judicial branches provide a copy of proceedings and documents so that it could further examine specific cases. Among the most significant initiatives undertaken was a survey to be completed by all judicial departments for a general evaluation of the effectiveness of action against gender violence³. The analysis of these survey responses allowed us to outline a general framework of activities carried out by each judicial department and the results obtained in the past six-year period. The purpose of the survey was also to verify whether, on the basis of a generally adequate legal framework, dedicated laws were abided by, fully exploiting their preventative and repressive potential.

The Parliament was thus given indications for **improvement** of the legal framework regarding, among others, a further strengthening of protective instruments of criminal law and extending training to operators in the field of women's protection – from police units to psychologists and social workers.

Since the beginning of this term, the Chamber of Deputies has launched the **Parliamentary Intergroup for Women, Rights and Equal Opportunities**, on the heels of similar initiatives in other European countries and the United States. The Intergroup, joined by **96 MPs belonging to every parliamentary group** sitting in the Chamber, gives space for a bipartisan exchange in legislative initiatives already submitted to the Chamber as proposals and further analysis of issues relating to the lives of women.

Four years from the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and two years from the launch of the first Extraordinary Plan of Action for the elimination of violence against women, the Intergroup in 2017 conducted a **study on the implementation of the Convention** to shed light on the questions that remain open and create a space for intervention in which lawmakers may make an impact in the future. To this end, hearings were held for members of government, representatives of the anti-violence associations, of law enforcement, judges and experts operating in the field of anti-violence against women, and more importantly, the victims themselves were given audience. These were the women and orphan children of femicide whose voices were heard as they recounted the true difficulties suffered and their concrete needs for support.

On 25 November 2017, on the International Day for the elimination of violence against women, **1,400 women sat in the Italian Chamber of Deputies**. For the first time, victims of abuse, family members of victims, and women activists combating gender violence in different sectors took the floor in Parliament.

conducting prevention and assistance activities; monitor the effective allocation of resources to gender violence facilities pursuant to above decree-law N.93 of 2013 and to the laws of stability starting with the 2011 law.

³ In particular, following the amendments of regulations effective as of 2013.