

## **What measures for what politics to counter gender-based violence? Assessing the RDL (Reddito di Libertà) policy gap in the protection of Italian and immigrant women victims of violence (2021-2024)**

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International data show that all forms of violence against women (VAW) have intensified with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (Who, 2020). During the confinement periods linked to the pandemic, an overall worsening of the phenomenon was observed, especially an increase in requests for help and reports of violence against women, in particular domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) in several countries (UNWOMEN, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted how the intensification of violence against women is linked to economic and livelihood problems. In fact, it has been clarified that among the main risk factors underlying violence are financial factors and difficulties deriving from economic insecurity, deprivation and dependence. This phenomenon is even more serious in the case of migrant and asylum-seeking women (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). The pandemic has also made it clear that women's shelters and hotlines are necessary but insufficient.

The international legal framework provides for public obligations (Re et al., 2019) on the part of States regarding violence against women which can intervene mainly through two different intertwined practices: the criminalization of violence against women and regulation through funding to implement specific policies to prevent and escape violence (Abraham and Tastsoglou, 2016).

Imagining a greater number and more effective actions to address the economic risks linked to gender violence is a crucial issue that calls into question the welfare policies and systems of states. Therefore, economic empowerment actions are necessary aimed at preventing poverty and reducing economic difficulties within families, as well as increasing women's economic security and autonomy. Acting on social protection with specific interventions would seem to be a promising way to prevent and respond to violence against women (UNWOMEN, 2023).

A wide range of inequalities has been increasing within Italian socio-political system due to the pandemic. Moreover, Covid-19 crisis worsened gender-gap. Surely it did not contribute, to disrupt those backward policy legacy regarding gender-based violence - especially domestic ones - affecting Italian socio-political system, traditionally resistant to political innovation as to cultural contrast to patriarchalism.

What is more, the pandemic breakout further triggered the entanglement between gender-based violence and migration, due to the converging harmful impact that a restrictive immigration policy regime and a unprotective system against gender-based violence had on migrant women and asylum seekers.

GBV - even more severe in the case of migrant women - exploded in Italy as a problem emerging by both sides of a backward policy legacy and of gendered social norms, which traditionally preserve those conditions of unequal relations of power featuring the Italian socio-political system.

Therefore, the decision of the national executive which governed the Covid crisis (Conte II) to endorse, for the first time, measures specifically devoted to protecting women hit by harassment and domestic violence, seemed more like a policy-response to the pandemic than to GBV emergency. Indeed, the RDL (Reddito di Libertà), a housing cash-benefit designed to help women in leaving the family context producing the violence, were inadequately budgeted and thus it had a weak impact on reducing gender-based violence as a general phenomenon.

During its first two-years of implementation, the RDL highlighted a too scarce capacity for change in policymaking, and, additionally, it revealed its doubleness in the selective way the policy worked on protecting Italian and migrant women affected by GBV (Vittoria, Gatti and Perna, 2023).

Nonetheless, the Italian case-study presents a very interesting profile for any research trying to investigate the nexus between gender-based violence and migration from a political and sociological perspective in the Southern European models.

Based on these elements, the article aims to examine GBV and its intersection with migration as a policy issue that needs further attention in the Italian context as well.

Considering the first four-year of policy implementation, we wondered if the RDL show the same capacity of coverage between Italian and foreign resident women hit by GBV and in which sense, this policy could be considered (in)intentionally designed – or implemented – to work selectively in a chauvinist sense, or to furtherly increase the ethnic gender gap.

The article aims to answer these questions, framing its research discourse both on the relation between GBV migration policing and intersectional discrimination.

Starting from the literature on immigration and gender-based violence, and using a framework of social policy analysis, using a quantitative empirical strategy: starting from the INPS data (2022-23), the research tries to advance a regression model for estimating the (gap, chauvinist gap, etc.) potential eligibility for the measure (target) and to measure the effectiveness of the RDL by cross-referencing social demand (take-up). Preliminary findings show that it is a sentinel policy, and that, as it is designed, the measure works in an unsatisfactory way with respect to the demand coming from immigrant women victims of violence.

The analysis of the RDL, although it is a small measure in terms of target and capacity, allows us to highlight the limits of the Italian political system in preventing GBV as well as stimulate the search for new and effective ways to address gender-based violence and violence against women (GBV and VAW).