

WE GO!

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WE GO!3

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From individual IPV empowerment to community activation

White Paper Italy



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVCs, Anti-Violence Centres

FACE Fondation agir contre l'exclusion

INPS Istituto nazionale di previdenza sociale (National Social Security Institute)

IPV Intimate partner violence

IRS Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale

ISEE Indicatore della situazione economica equivalente (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator)

ISTAT Istituto nazionale di statistica (National Institute of Statistics)

NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations

RdL Reddito di libertà (Freedom income)

WE GO, Women Economic Independence & Growth Opportunity

THE PROJECT

WeGo3 as a path to promote socio-economic empowerment of IPV survivors

In 2014 the European Fundamental Rights Agency published the first EU-wide survey on violence against women based on interviews with 42.000 women about their experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological violence, including incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV). The results were alarming: almost 1 in 4 women experienced violence in a relationship with a man. It was a wake-up call.

A year later, the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme funded *WE GO! Women Economic Independence & Growth Opportunity*, a project that allowed actors from seven EU countries to exchange know-how and practices on how to support the social and economic empowerment of women who survived violence. The project thrived especially on the crucial knowledge and expertise of Anti-Violence Centres (AVCs), which eventually led to the development of ad hoc recommendations.

WE GO! 2 - Building Economic Independence, the Way Out of IPV was built on the foundations laid by WE GO! 1. Six organizations from Italy, Spain, Greece, and Bulgaria continued the work begun in 2015, namely 3 NGOs, 2 AVCs, and a research institute. WE GO! 2 aimed to broaden the use and deepen the impact of promising practices to foster the IPV survivors' economic empowerment, through a better coordination among all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector. The project's specific objectives were:

- » To design and deliver transferable training sessions to strengthen the capacity of professionals to support the economic empowerment of IPV survivors, also through the establishment of local networks (Capacity Building).
- » To test scalable models of territorial multi-agency coordination to boost IPV survivors' employability via a local ecosystem capable to provide for workable solutions for IPV survivors (Networking).
- » To update knowledge on the economic empowerment of IPV survivors and share it through trainings for companies, events, and debates, involving a wide range of actors (Awareness Raising).

The third edition of the project - WE GO3 – From individual IPV's empowerment to community activation – started in April 2021 and was built on the main findings of the former WE GO! Projects. It targets 4 countries – Italy, France, Greece and Bulgaria - and is implemented by 6 partners, namely: ActionAid Italia, Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale (IRS), Center for Sustainable Communities Development, Rel.azioni Positive Società Cooperativa Sociale, Fondation agir contre l'Exclusion (FACE), and Women's Center of Karditsa (WCK). WE GO3 aims to increase the local multi-agency networks' capacity to foster the IPV survivors' socio-economic independence through the design and adoption of gender-responsive labour policies. The project's specific objectives are:

- » To strengthen AVCs and support services' capacity to influence institutional processes on socio-economic empowerment-related issues.
- » To increase the active participation of companies and the world of work at large in a multi-stakeholder local ecosystem to promote the economic independence of IPV survivors, also through decent

work opportunities and support. The consolidated networks of companies created in the previous projects collaborated to extend the audience of organizations engaged in the IPV survivors' support.

- » To improve the policies that support IPV survivors to overcome barriers to their economic empowerment.
- » To advocate for the integration of policies addressing IPV survivors' support, socio-economic empowerment, and discrimination both at national and EU level.

AVCs, national, regional and local authorities, job centres, employment agencies trade unions, private sector and training centres co -designed and tested supporting measures for IPV survivors in the field of work, including the adaptation of work-life balance measures to IPV survivors' specific needs, the extension of anti-discrimination policies to GBV cases, the introduction of support measures for IPV survivors searching for a job or employed in precarious jobs.

The participatory process in WeGo!3

The participatory process was implemented between the second half of 2021 and the first half of 2022 and was articulated in:

- » **6 focus groups** with IPV survivors, aimed at highlighting needs and critical issues related to current policies and tools to foster their economic empowerment;
- » **3 workshops** with representatives of companies, trade unions, job and training centres, anti-violence centers, national/regional/local institutions, aimed at highlighting needs and critical issues identified by women, on the current policies, norms and tools to foster the economic empowerment of women survivors of male violence;
- » **3 policy labs**, aimed at discussing the results of the 9 meetings and identifying solutions to improve current policies and tools.

The evidence from the focus groups and workshops were analysed during the policy labs. The issues addressed specifically concerned the tools for re/employment, job retention and income support. Consequently, the issues of access to the welfare system and work-life balance were addressed. Specifically, during the focus groups with the women and the workshop with the workers of the anti-violence centres, the pros and cons of the measures currently in force concerning re-employment, work-life balance and income support were analysed. What emerged was the need to strengthen the tools to facilitate a work-life balance by enhancing paid leave for IPV survivors, measures to support parenthood and the management of women's care responsibilities, the importance of investing in **income support tools** that could support women in their pathways out of violence ; and the need to guarantee decent work and adequately paid work for women, going beyond the tools available (work grants and internships) that have been found to be ineffective.

During the workshop with **employment agencies, trade unions and training centres**, the same themes emerged. Emphasis was placed on the need to rethink income support tools and to pay more attention to the **training needs of both women and companies**. Indeed, the former asked to be adequately trained by the companies that employ them, while the latter asked to be trained on gender-based violence issues in order to better meet women's needs and to guarantee them a **safe working**

environment.

Institutions, on the other hand, discussed the **impact of care work on women survivors of violence** and **opportunities to re-enter the labour market**. The **urgency to intervene in public services** and **to invest in social infrastructures** to ensure a **“social” sharing of family responsibilities** that predominantly fall on women was noted, adopting an **intersectional lens** that considers the specific needs of women (in terms of age, nationality, migration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical and mental abilities, etc.). It also emerged that current policies and services are not only insufficient, but also **inadequate**. There is **little training and even less awareness in the institutions** of the specificity of the needs of women who have suffered violence to which policies and services should respond. The interventions implemented continue to have an **emergency and not a structural character**. In fact, the instruments and measures introduced are not designed to be sustainable in the long term.

The White Paper

This white paper contains evidence from the participatory process that involved IPV survivors, representative of AVCs, institutions, companies, trade unions, job placement, training centres, national/regional/local institutions. Its objective is to present the improvement proposals co-designed during the policy labs concerning the two main issues discussed during the participatory process: the Welfare System access for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) survivors and the role of the income support schemes in achieving socio-economic empowerment. In detail, the first chapter deals with the problems women face in accessing the welfare system. In it, the origin of the issue is explored, policies that could facilitate women's access to the system are analysed, critical aspects of these policies are investigated, proposals that emerged in the policy labs are set out and the results of the trial are summarised. The second chapter analyses income support measures for women survivors of violence and, specifically, the scheme adopted by Italy in May 2020 named *Reddito di libertà*. Finally, conclusions contain a summary of the proposals that emerged from the policy labs and some findings resulted from the trial.

CHAPTER I

The Welfare System access for Intimate Partner Violence Survivors

1.1 - Issue description

The public welfare system represents a fundamental resource in the life of most of the intimate partner violence survivors supported by anti-violence centres (AVCs). In many cases, women are economically dependent from their abusive partner and, because of the violence suffered, they could have been deprived or prevented access to their economic resources. In some cases, to protect themselves and their children from violence, women are forced to leave their homes, their neighbourhood, their city, and often find themselves no longer able to rely on their friendships or family network. Therefore, public services play a crucial role in their socio-economic empowerment path. Access to financial contributions, decent and fairly remunerated employment, support in childcare, identification of safe housing solutions are just some of the needs to which the public welfare system could give an adequate response. However, IPV survivors' access to existing welfare measures and tools is impaired by several factors such as: scarcity of resources, bureaucratic obstacles, complex administrative and financial management, length of procedures, fragmentation of services, and discriminatory access criteria, for example, for migrant women (the language barrier and the criterion of citizenship).

The main problem concerns the rules governing the Italian welfare system. In Italy, its access is generally linked to the applicant's family income, or employment status. For example, to demand for financial support or rental allowance, to access to public kindergarten or ask for aid for the payment of the living costs women are required to present an Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (ISEE)¹ statement of the family unit. For IPV survivors this can be a serious problem. Often, in fact, their family or income status resulting on paper does not correspond to the reality. Their current economic situation, employment status and/or actual access to resources may differ from what attested in the documentation held by the social services, which is often based on data of the previous year. In the meantime, women may have had to suspend or leave their job or turn it into part-time and may need money to cover expenses that cannot be postponed for themselves and for their children. For these reasons, women should have access to income and other forms of support that provide economic and social security in the medium to long-term thus allowing them to rebuild their lives. . In other case, the abuser could be formally still part of the family unit, he could be itself a beneficiary of public aid or his economic status could be higher than that of the woman and hinder her access to public aid. For

¹ The Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator (in Italian acronym ISEE), is a tool to measure the economic condition of households in the Italian Republic. It is an indicator that takes into account income, assets and the characteristics of a household.

IPV survivors the public welfare system access is therefore hampered by a **bureaucratic problem**.

When women succeed in accessing public services, they are often confronted with their **inadequacy** which may be due to a lack of local services or the absence of adequately trained staff. In Italy, **territorial inequality** has been an unresolved issue since the country was unified. However, more recently, a wider territorial division in the enjoyment of social rights has emerged, also due to the lack of public services in some areas. In addition to the classic North-South gap, a significant East-West gap has grown, while still notable are the territorial differences between the countryside and the city. This situation affects survivors' lives and their opportunity to benefit from state aid, which vary depending on the territory in which they live. For example, a woman who lives in Calabria region has not access to the same services offered to a woman who live in Apulia or Lombardy region. The same happens for women who live in city or countryside. Moreover, the **scarcity of human and economic resources** put a strain on public services that too often find themselves operating in precarious conditions and without solutions to offer to survivors.

Furthermore, the **absence of adequately trained staff** impacts on the type of support solutions offered to women that are often too standardized, insufficient, or inadequate. Public servants don't give due consideration to the specific and intersectional needs of women survivors of violence. They often don't have knowledge and awareness of what are the obstacles faced by women who are leaving violent relationships .

Another obstacle faced by survivors is represented by the **fragmentation of public local services**. Responsibility for the satisfaction of survivors' multiple needs belong to a plurality of subjects and entities that do not always collaborate or communicate with each other and are often located on the territory in distant places and spaces. For example, for job search, women have to refer to employment centers; for the identification of a housing solution women have to refer to social or housing services; for the management of paperwork to tax assistance centers; for the identification of training opportunities to training agencies. The fragmentation of local services, the lack of knowledge of the staff about violence against women and the absence of a territorial support system for women, beyond the support offered by AVCs, have multiple consequences on women's lives. Indeed, all these gaps risk compromising the effectiveness of the services themselves and negatively affecting women's path out of violence.

1.2 - Solutions proposed

Starting from the inputs emerged from workshops and focus groups, during the policy lab the different stakeholders identified some solutions to cope with the major criticalities faced by IPV survivors in accessing to the public welfare system.

In detail, stakeholders discussed the urgency to find solutions to the following issues:

- » **Bureaucratic obstacles:** to guarantee access to the public welfare system is crucial to amend rules concerning the drawing up of the ISEE - on which access to most public services depends. By providing, therefore, the opportunity for survivors to obtain a separate certification from the perpetrator. .
- » **Standardization of public service provision:** to provide women support tailored to their specific needs is fundamental to ensure that national authorities are appropriately equipped to address violence against women and domestic violence; it is crucial that public servants should

use a gender-sensitive lens and carry out an individual needs assessment for protection and support tailored to the survivors' specific needs.

- » **Fragmented nature of public services:** to facilitate women's access to public services, it is necessary to ensure that women can refer to a single office when interacting with public services. To this end, it is necessary to invest, first of all and foremost, in the training of civil servants and ensure that they implement close and continuous cooperation between different sectors (e.g. employment, housing and social policy area) in order to provide women with unified solutions that meet their multiple and multidimensional needs

In addition, issues related to employment, re-employment, job retention and work-life balance were also explored. In this regard, the strengthening of **training and awareness-raising of all actors who come into contact with women** was identified as the most urgent proposal to be implemented to ensure an adequate response to the IPV survivors' needs. But other proposals have also been made. For example, it emerged that to promote an efficient **job placement** and **re-employment** process is necessary:

- » **De-stereotyping the employment pathways** offered to survivors, raising awareness among the staff of employment centres and agencies on gender stereotypes, as well as on horizontal and vertical segregation in the world of work so as to prevent women from being confined to a narrower range of occupations than men and to lower levels of responsibility, regardless of their level of education and the local production system.
- » To raise awareness of training agencies and **provide diversified training opportunities** that meet both desires of women and needs of companies, cooperatives but also of the public administration.
- » To provide staff of employment centers, private agencies and employers with **training on tools to ensure a safe work environment** for women and solutions for managing family caregiving burdens.
- » To identify a contact person for each stakeholder active in the anti-violence network to speed up the job placement and re-employment processes of IPV survivors.

On the other hand, to **ensure job retention** for women, it is necessary:

- » To **extend the domestic violence paid leave** from three to six months. The possibility of abstaining from work for only 90 days is very reductive. According to Istat² data³, in 2019, the average length of stay in a shelter is 137 days and overall recovering from violence is usually even longer as women might need ongoing legal, and or medical, and psychological support for many months.
- » To **raise awareness in companies** because women leaving situations of violence have specific needs that employers often do not know how to meet because they are not knowledgeable about gender-based violence and how to guarantee a safe working environment, free from gender

² ISTAT is the Italian national institute of statistics, a public research organisation, is the main producer of official statistics in the service of citizens and policy-makers. It operates in complete independence and continuous interaction with the academic and scientific communities.

³ Istat, *Il sistema di protezione per le donne vittime di violenza. Principali risultati delle indagini condotte sulle Case rifugio per le donne maltrattate e sui Centri antiviolenza. Anni 2020 e 2021, May 2022.*

stereotypes. It is thus necessary to provide ongoing training for all staff.

- » Mapping the best practices introduced by individual companies and putting them into a system.

Finally, for a **better management of care burdens** (children and elderly) three main proposals emerged:

- » To **guarantee 'hour flexibility'** in both public and private care services and companies. Care services must consider the needs of women working in shift work, in the evenings or at night and provide an appropriate response. Companies, on the other hand, must offer flexible working arrangements to survivors where necessary.
- » To **ensure 'access to services' for all women** by setting up agreements with private services for reduced fees or by granting monetary bonuses, in territories where there are no public services. They should also intervene on rankings by introducing preferential criteria for women survivors of violence in territories where public services exist.
- » To **raise awareness and inform companies, employment centers and private agencies about 'care burden management'** opportunities in the local area to be offered to survivors, thus informing them about the opportunity to access public or private subsidised services, the presence of alternative solutions or possible monetary bonuses. Training must then involve, in addition to male and female workers, also the managerial level and the Human Resources offices, in different ways and adapted to the different targets.

1.3 - The trial in Rome

From the proposals emerged in the Policy labs, a **pilot project** (TRIAL) was developed that involved AVCs and local authorities in a process aimed at ensuring timely, integrated and personalized responses to the needs of women survivors of violence. Implemented in Rome, in the IV Municipal district, between May and November 2022, the TRIAL was aimed to improve the response of two local public services, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, to IPV survivors' needs. For this purpose, social services and the employment centre of the IV Municipal district of Rome were identified.

Specifically, the aim of the TRIAL was to test whether formalizing some of the informal practices that the local anti-violence centre, and specifically Be Free's Women's Space, has established in recent years with social services and, in a less structured way also with, the public employment centre, could have improved the response of these services to the needs of women survivors of violence. Indeed, as emerged from the policy labs, **to ensure that women receive a timely and agile response to their needs** from public services, it is necessary to establish **forms of collaboration** between AVCs and services. These must **overcome the informality** of personal relationships and **ensure training and awareness-raising** of all people employed by services are expected to work with women survivors of violence. The informal collaborations that often facilitated the response to the needs of women referred by AVCs to services in the territory do not guarantee continuity and still depend too much on the "human factor," that is, on the sensitivity of the individual official. However, address the specificity of the IPV survivors' needs should not be an exception but a right of each woman. **Formalizing practices** that work in informality can therefore help to create a system that can respond to all women who have turned to it, but also to ensure that the same system takes into account the specificity of each woman's needs. It is therefore also urgent to invest in **training the staff of each service** that could potentially

encounter women who have experienced violence.

1.3.1 - Social services case

As part of the TRIAL, social services were involved as the nerve center of the public welfare system. Through collaboration with the service, the main actions and/or procedures used by social workers and women's space workers to facilitate the intake of women survivors of violence and their access to the welfare system were outlined. Among the actions and/or procedures identified, the most relevant ones were selected and tested, using some monitoring tools, its effectiveness from the perspective of women, social workers and social services.

- » The initiation of the TRIAL required:
- » The participation of the Head of Service in a preliminary meeting during which the project and the work that was carried out in collaboration with the social workers operating in the Municipal district will be presented.
- » The signing of a letter of intent in which the public service commits to actively collaborate with Spazio donna in order to facilitate the intake of women survivors of violence.
 - The active collaboration of the social workers of the service who will be asked to:
 - participate in a workshop with Spazio donna workers, to be organized by the first half of June, during which (good) practices and/or procedures adopted to facilitate the support of women survivors of violence will be mapped and identified,
 - fill out a questionnaire regarding the phenomenon of male violence against women at the start of the Trial (June) and at its conclusion (November),
 - take part in training on the topic regarding the phenomenon of male violence against women that will be organized based on the findings of the questionnaires.

Following the start-up phase, Spazio donna's operators in collaboration with the social workers committed to implement one of the good practices identified during the workshop starting in June 2022 in order to assess how well it enables them to respond to women's needs faster and more adequately and whether to then proceed to formalize it through inclusion within collaboration documents already adopted by the parties.

1.3.2 - Public employment center case

As part of the TRIAL, the employment centre⁴ of IV Municipal district was involved. Through collaboration with the service, the main actions and/or procedures used by the employment centre and Spazio Donna's operators to facilitate the intake of women survivors of violence and their job placement were identified as part of the TRIAL. Among the actions and/or procedures identified, the most relevant ones were selected and tested using some monitoring tools, the effectiveness of the same from the point of

⁴ In Italy, public employment centre (in Italian *CPI*) are public structures coordinated by the Regions or Autonomous Provinces. They facilitate the matching of labour supply and demand and promote active labour policy interventions. They also carry out administrative activities, such as registration on mobility lists and lists of protected categories, the termination of employment relationships and the issue of unemployment certificates.

view of the IPV survivors, the Spazio Donna's operators and the employment centre workers.

The initiation of the TRIAL required:

- » The participation of the Head of Service in a preliminary meeting during which the project and the work to be carried out in collaboration with the employment centre was presented.
- » The signing of a letter of intent in which the public service commits to actively collaborate with Spazio Donna in order to facilitate the intake of women survivors of violence.
- » The active collaboration of the workers of the "employment guidance" service of the Centre who will be asked to:
 - participate in a workshop with the Spazio Donna's operators, to be organized by the first half of June, during which (good) practices and/or procedures adopted to facilitate the job placement of women survivors of violence will be mapped and identified,
 - fill out a questionnaire regarding the phenomenon of male violence against women at the start of the trial (June) and at its conclusion (November),
 - take part in a training on the topic regarding the phenomenon of male violence against women that will be organized based on the findings of the questionnaires.

Following the start-up phase, the Spazio Donna's operators in collaboration with the employment centres have committed to implement one of the good practices identified during the workshop starting in June 2022 in order to assess how well it enables them to respond to IPV survivors' needs faster and more adequately and whether to then proceed to formalize it through inclusion within collaboration documents already adopted by the parties.

1.3.3 - Trial results

The Italian local trial was expected to directly impact the involved IPV survivors and the local public welfare system, through the professionals working with the services. The direct impact on women concerns the quality of the service received, and the improvement of the process that the IPV survivors have to face during the interaction with public services. Considering the specific needs and the vulnerability of women survivors of domestic violence, the relationship with services should not create additional harm. In order to ensure a smooth and helpful interaction, a high level of coordination between AVCs and services was required.

The impact on services was expected to be twofold. On one hand, the trial aimed at increasing awareness and knowledges of professionals about IPV survivors' specific needs. On the other hand, the project tried to set the basis for a formal interaction process linking the AVCs and the services, in order to increase the quality of the services offered.

In the following we report a synthesis of the results of the Trial evaluation performed by IRS.

The pilot was found to be **very innovative**, in a context where the dialogue among different actors is crucial to adequately respond to IPV survivors' needs and so it should be encouraged. A rapid, effective, and adequate access to social and employment services is a key to guaranteeing IPV survivors the support they need to achieve economic and social empowerment. For this reason, there is an urgent need to strengthen coordination between public services and AVCs in order to improve the services to be offered to IPV survivors and to adapt it to their specific needs.

Regarding the **impact on women**, Spazio Donna's operators reported that thanks to the information sheet they used to communicate with Social Services and the employment centre, there was indeed a certain time saving in understanding the women needs and in taking charge of the procedure. On the other hand, it must be said, that this impacted negatively on the relationship between the service operator and the woman. Hence the service was probably quicker, but less personalised. This conclusion prompts us to look further into what elements are necessary to still guarantee women services that meet their specific needs. Among the unexpected impact instead, two cases were reported where services not directly targeted by the trial took contact with Be Free as a consequence of the information sheet: one social service outside the involved municipality and a career guidance service. This means that in those cases, operators who were not prepared on the objectives of the trial created indeed a relationship with the woman and the AVCs that may also result in more effective problem resolution, rather than mere timesaving.

Concerning the **services**, it has been underlined how a real change can only be achieved through the continuation of the relationship between AVCs and the services, with regular meetings where the two actors can discuss issues, analyse procedures and give each other feedbacks on how to better address the needs of IPV survivors. The information sheet is not sufficient to create a cultural change and ensure an adequate service, because operators have to be continuously sensitised and to also have the possibility of adapting certain procedures, not necessarily resulting in quick problem resolution but rather in more adequate approach to the specific needs. However, it must be said that a broader cultural change must be pursued with systemic and integrated actions involving all public services, their structuring and operation. It would therefore be necessary to flank trials carried out at the local level with advocacy activities at the regional and national level that inform the policies that regulate the activities of public services. In order to achieve a public welfare system more responsive to IPV survivors' needs, it is indeed necessary to invest in the creation of ad hoc pathways for their easy access to public services and to finance a comprehensive awareness-raising of all public servants.

Concerning **scalability** of the trial it must be said that it might be **highly scalable** to different levels of governance and different territories. Building a formal relationship between AVCs and public services is a need of many local communities. An important element that should be taken into consideration is the dimensions of the territory and the number of services users, as well as services capacity and resources to deal with the needs of the population. In any case, awareness raising actions about the specific needs of IPV survivors, targeting services professionals, represents a first important step to the formal definition of a more structured collaboration. Furthermore, a possible extension of the program might involve levels of governance, more services, and other private actors, such as training providers, private job placement agencies, and also companies.

The **sustainability** of the trial, on the other hand, will depend a great deal on the effort that institutions and public actors decide to put in place. In fact, the implementation showed that the organisational culture and the structured plan for involving the services are two fundamental aspects for the success of the trial. They are also crucial with regard to the sustainability and replicability of the actions, as well as their effectiveness.

CHAPTER II

The Income Support for Intimate Partner Violence Survivors

2.1 - Issue description

Women's economic empowerment is critical to achieve gender equality and sustainable development, but it is also decisive to help women in leaving violent domestic contexts. Indeed, it is well known that the lack of economic independence is one of the main challenges women face when trying to leave their abusive partner: IPV survivors could be either economically dependent on their partners and/or could be victims of economic violence⁵, namely conducts directed to depriving them of all or any of its economic or financial resources. Control mechanisms may also include controlling women's access to healthcare services, forbidding them to work outside the home, depriving them of personal documents (passport, residence permit, health documents), etc.

According to the survey carried out by the AVCs involved in the first edition of the WEGO project, 82,5% of women who sought for support had a low level of economic independence, 59,1% were unemployed, 73,7% had dependent children, only 13,3% owned a house and 14,8% co-owned their house with their husband/partner.

Forms of income support measures are therefore essential to allow women to achieve economic independence and reduce the risk of being forced to return to the perpetrator for economic reasons. Despite this, the instruments adopted by Italy to support women economically and financially are few, fragmented and inadequate. In 2020, for the first time, a specific type of income support was included in the national legislation⁶, the *Reddito di Libertà (RdL)*. Initially set up to address the specific economic difficulties of women survivors of violence during the Covid-19 lockdown, with the 2022 budget law, the RdL was decoupled from the public health emergency and confirmed as a policy to support women survivors of violence to achieve economic autonomy. The implementation of the RdL started in November 2021 with a budget of 12m euros for 2020-2023 as well as additional regional funding of approximately 1,5m euros. It provides monthly payments of 400 euros up to 12 months. All women involved in a pathway out of violence, who are in a situation of "marked vulnerability or poverty" and resident in Italy are eligible for the measure. Local social services make an online application to national social security institute (INPS)⁷, at the woman's request, and they must certify the woman's

⁵ Economic violence occurs when the perpetrator behaves as to further control, damage, and subjugate the woman financially and economically. For example, by forbidding her from accessing work or training, robbing her salary, controlling her expenses, unilaterally deciding what to buy, transferring debts in her name without consent, not allowing her to access a bank account and so forth.

⁶ Law-decree no. 34/2020 - Urgent measures on health, support for work and the economy, and social policies related to the Covid-19 epidemiological emergency, Art. 105-bis.

⁷ The National Social Security Institute (INPS) is the main social security institution of the Italian public pension system.

'need based on extraordinary or urgent circumstances. The anti-violence centre must declare, through their legal representative, that the woman is involved in a pathway out of violence. Furthermore, the RdL can be accessed in addition to other income support measures (for example the Citizens income⁸, Nاسpi⁹, CIG¹⁰, Emergency income¹¹, and other monetary contributions available at the regional and or local level).

The RdL has been welcomed by both beneficiaries and anti-violence centres. It was especially appreciated because it did not require presenting an expense sheet or an ISEE declaration. In fact, the RdL was developed as a no strings attached income support: a tool that, in the words of some AVC's staff, allows women to access a small allowance to cover expenses without strict conditionalities. Even though the policy prescribes spending the money to cover independent housing or dependants' expenses it does not impose restrictions or requires a balance sheet. Nonetheless, due to the scarcity of resources, the RdL will hardly be able to fully contribute to the economic independence or housing autonomy of the beneficiary women. According to INPS data on the first year of implementation, up to 20th May 2022, 600 women had received the RdL against 3.238 who applied. Lombardy was the region that accepted the highest number of applications (101), followed by Campania (70) and Sicily (57). The **budget allocated is not enough** to support all those who are entitled to it. In 2020, the 3m euros allocated covered only 600 applications, while the remaining funds from the 2021/2023 budget will fund 2.186 applications. These are small numbers considering that, according to INPS, each year 21.000 women could benefit from income support schemes and compared to the approximately 50,000 women who are supported by AVCs annually (ISTAT). In addition, the monthly payment is not adequate for the cost of living. And the RdL does not account for discrepancies of purchasing power in different areas, therefore, running the risk to exacerbate existing regional inequalities and even create new ones.

Further critical issues identified during the policy lab concern the RdL are:

- » **Residency requirement**, this criterion discriminates against homeless or foreign women as well as those who, due to violence, are not able to submit an application to the local authority where they reside.
- » **Public services discretion** on which the assessment of 'state of need related to the situation extraordinary or urgent situation' is based. No common guidelines have been adopted at national level. As a result, each service uses its own evaluation method resulting in heterogeneous implementation of the scheme. In some cases, the AVC carries out a first evaluation based on one-on-one meetings with the woman as well as the details of her individual pathway out of violence. However, in other instances the evaluation is carried out by social services, including a review of the applicant's economic condition even though this is not required to apply for the measure. AVC's staff registered that social services often only consider objective data (for example, income, employment, ownership of property or other material goods) without allowing for the

⁸ The citizens' income (Italian: Reddito di cittadinanza - RdC) is a social welfare system set up in Italy in January 2019 with Decree-Law no.4/2019. Although its name recalls one of a universal basic income, this provision is actually a form of conditional and non-individual guaranteed minimum income. The citizens' income was proposed by the Five Star Movement (M5S) and was approved under the Conte I Cabinet.

⁹ The New Social Employment Insurance (NASpl) is a monthly unemployment benefit, established by Article 1, Legislative Decree No. 22 of 4 March 2015 in relation to involuntary unemployment events.

¹⁰ The Wages Guarantee Fund or CIG (Italian: cassa integrazione guadagni) is an institution provided for by Italian law consisting of an economic benefit, paid by INPS or INPGI, in favour of workers who are suspended from work or who work reduced hours.

¹¹ Emergency Income (Italian: Reddito deemergenze - REM) is a financial support benefit established by Article 82 of Decree Law no. 34 of 19 May 2020 (Relaunch Decree) for households in financial difficulty due to the epidemiological emergency of COVID-19.

specific violence-related issues that affect women (such as, amongst others, owning a property which might be occupied by the perpetrator, part-time job, precarious or low pay employment, inability to access a joint bank account, number of minors in the household).

- » **Delayed implementation**, it was caused by the lack of training of social services on the use of the platform and on the eligible criteria, but also by the institutions' delay in issuing implementing decrees.
- » Other topics linked to the RdL were explored during the policy lab. First of all, the one related to the nature and origin of the measure adopted at national level. The various stakeholders questioned the nature of the measure. Whether the latter can be considered a welfare or anti-poverty instrument, a compensatory justice means or whether it is simply a tool to set IPV survivors free. And secondly, the relationship between the RdL and existing regional measures with a similar objective was examined in depth.

2.2 - Solution proposed

Starting from the critical aspects of the measure, identified through workshops and focus groups, during the policy lab the different stakeholders discussed some aspects of the RdL scheme that should be improved in order to make the measure more sustainable for the state, from an economical point of view, and to respond more effectively to IPV survivors' needs.

In detail, the proposals emerged concern:

- » **Economic sustainability**, it is mandatory to introduce an obligation to finance the RdL annually by law in order to make the measure sustainable in the long-term period and free it from political will. In this regard it should be useful also to consider the opportunity to include the RdL among essential levels of assistance. It's furthermore necessary to establish the annual budget to be allocated starting from an analysis and subsequent estimate of national IPV survivors' needs, taking into due account data about the number of women supported each year by AVCs. Similarly, the maximum expenditure of the individual regions can't be the result of a mere mathematical calculation on the female resident's population, but it should be determined starting from the analysis of territorial needs. Moreover, it's essential to introduce adjustments to respond to variations in purchasing power that affect different geographical areas, to avoid the widening of existing territorial gaps.
- » **Implementation**, in order to avoid any kind of discretion and prevent forms of unintentional discrimination by social services, it is crucial to draw up application assessment indicators or guidelines to be made compulsory throughout all the country. Furthermore, all social service workers should be trained, not only on the procedures to activate and the assessment criteria to be used, but also on issues concerning male violence against women and specific IPV survivors' needs.
- » **Access procedure**, to speed up the procedures to access the RdL and facilitate women who are reluctant interacting with social services, it would be optimal to consider adopting the access procedure established for another measure, namely the "paid leave for women survivors of violence". The latter allows women to submit the request for support to INPS themselves and don't involve social service workers. This kind of procedure would optimize resources by eliminating an often merely "formal" step for cases already supported by AVCs (as is the case for some similar

regional measures¹²).

- » **Optimization of national and regional resources**, it would be best to differentiate the target group or the purpose of regional measures from the national one. Indeed, given the general scarcity of funds, it is important to optimize economical resources in order to better support more women. Another solution would be to invite Regions to allocate their own resources for the financing of the national RdL, as Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Emilia- Romagna regions already do.

¹² Cfr. ActionAid Italia, Diritti in bilico. Reddito, casa e lavoro per l'indipendenza delle donne in fuoriuscita dalla violenza, November 2022.

CONCLUSIONS

The policy labs provided an essential opportunity for stakeholders to voice the biggest obstacles that IPV survivors face. As a result of these discussions, the local trial was designed and piloted. Choosing a municipal area allowed us to experiment with possible solutions to overcome the obstacles that women generally face in accessing to the public welfare system. The local trial showed the importance of developing synergies between the different actors involved in the socioeconomic empowerment process. Each structure has a specific role to play in this process and improving collaboration between them directly benefits IPV survivors. Indeed, when the specific needs of IPV survivors are identified and responded to with consideration for the situation of women, the socio-professional integration is more likely to be successful. On the other hand, working in synergy also facilitates public services by optimising their economic and human resources and meeting their own objective. However, the trial showed also that there is much work to be done on this issue. In particular, it is necessary to flank the local trials with an intense advocacy activity towards national and regional institutions so that the change can be structural and leave no-one behind.

Discussion emerged from the policy lab also show that women need income support that provides economic security in the medium to long-term thus allowing them to rebuild their lives . Therefore, training and employment seeking programmes are useful but should not be a requirement to access income support. Providing income support that meets the specific needs of women recovering from violence is crucial. The Italian *Reddito di libertà* could fulfil this mandate but it is urgent to improve it, to make it more responsive to IPV survivors' needs.

Partnership

ActionAid Italia, Italia

Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale (IRS), Italia

Rel.Azioni Positive Società Cooperativa Sociale, Italia

Center for Sustainable Communities Development, Bulgaria

Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion (FACE), Francia

Women's Center Of Karditsa (WCK), Grecia

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