



### **Invisible Victims - Gender-based Violence Against Migrant Women in Italy**

Palermo, 20. November 2024 - Gender-based violence is a problem that affects women from all social classes, young and old, Italian and foreign. On average, a woman is murdered by a man in Italy every two days, usually by her partner or ex-partner.

However, gender-based violence can coincide with experiences of discrimination that women in Italy suffer because they are migrants, and this makes it all the more serious. For some time now, it has been observed in the migrant community in Palermo that more and more women need access to protective measures due to situations of abuse and domestic violence. In these cases, it may be that the women concerned have an unresolved residence status and are reluctant to contact the authorities, thus not reporting acts of violence at all. It has also happened that violent Italian partners have threatened to "have them deported" if they report the violence.

When violence is reported, however, migrant women often find that public authorities are either unwilling or unable to provide them with adequate protection. It is a general phenomenon that women's reports of violence are devalued, pursued half-heartedly or the women are not even believed. However, this happens even more often to migrants, due to factors such as language barriers, a possible lack of family support and thus social isolation, as well as prejudice on the part of the public servants. Violent conflicts within families have been trivialized as 'cultural idiosyncrasies' and women sent back home, where the perpetrators were waiting for them. When victims find themselves in the same dangerous situation from which they were trying to escape, they lose all trust in the system and are less likely to report subsequent acts of violence.

Another deficiency on the part of the authorities is the inability to refer women to appropriate social services. However, it is eminently important for the mental and physical health of the women concerned that they receive help immediately. Social workers are usually aware that anti-violence centers and associations offer specialized psychological and social support. This is rarely pointed out by authorities. In addition, any signs of violence on the body must be documented by a medical expert as quickly as possible in order to increase the credibility of the victim's statement. The authorities often fail to provide such

advice.

Women would also need to be helped to move out of their homes and into a safe place. Finding a cheap apartment on their own is difficult to impossible due to the tight housing market. More and more apartments in Palermo are falling victim to hyper-touristification, not to mention the fact that many landlords do not want to rent their apartments to migrants for racist reasons. On the other hand, accommodation in a shelter means that women are not provided with sufficient privacy and thus protection for themselves and their children.

Overall, public officials lack the necessary expertise to deal with victims of violence in an empathetic way. Officials need to be made more aware of this issue: Training that aims to recognize the specific type of danger that comes with domestic violence, to treat it appropriately and to refer victims to services such as anti-violence centers, lawyers and trained psychologists, would be crucial to improving the protection of women affected.

The impression is unavoidable, though, that there is a lack of political interest in such further training.

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