



UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

Call for contribution: Femicide Watch call 2020

Submission from Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

Geneva, 18 November 2020

ASSOCIAZIONE COMUNITÀ PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII

The Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, (APG23) is an International Catholic NGO, accredited with Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2006.

An Italian catholic priest, Fr. Oreste Benzi, founded the Association in Italy, in the early '60s. All APG23 activities and initiatives involve direct sharing with the poorest and most vulnerable people, with the intent to alleviate their suffering in the short term but also to remove the causes of marginalisation and injustice. Today, the Association runs 500 welcoming structures all over the world, of which 298 are family homes where orphaned children, mentally and physically disabled, and other marginalised persons found a substitute family. It also runs emergency shelters, open families, houses of fraternity, cooperatives and day centres, therapeutic communities for drug users, centres for alcoholics and structures under protection where victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation can find protection and care. The Association is actually present in 40 countries on five continents.

APG23 works in almost every region of Italy with anti-trafficking street units aiming at monitoring prostitution and helping the girls who want to leave the streets.¹ From 2016 to 2019, APG23 got in touch every year with 10,000 victims of human trafficking, more than 1000 new every year. More than 50% of the girls are from Nigeria. During all these years APG23 has implemented a lot of specific projects and initiatives of social inclusion for survivals of prostitution, sexual exploitation and trafficking. In all these projects it is always crucial the recognition of the dignity of the women and the necessity to ensure the fulfilment of all their human rights through their integration and also by addressing the root causes that prevent their achievement.

¹ The regions where APG23 has worked in 2019 anti-trafficking street units are: Abruzzo, Campania, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Umbria, Marche, Piemonte, Puglia, Toscana, Sardegna and Veneto.

FEMICIDE

LEGISLATIVE ASPECTS

In Italy, the Department for Equal Opportunities (DPO) is the national governmental organism responsible for the coordination and implementation of policies related to violence against women. It directly reports to the Premiership and operates under the jurisdiction of the Undersecretary for Equal Opportunities. The DPO coordinates and centralizes the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, in collaboration with the National Statistics Institute (ISTAT)². In 2013 the Italian Parliament ratified the Istanbul Convention and approved the anti-femicide decree-law (number 93 of 14 August). Moreover, following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, in 2017 the *Investigative Parliamentary Commission on femicide and any kind of gender violence* has been instituted, with the scope of conducting investigations on the real dimension of femicide and other types of gender violence in Italy.³ A very detailed and updated analysis of the Italian situation regarding the safeguard and the prevention of gender violation can be found in the studies by GREVIO (2019)⁴.

COVID-19 PERIOD

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the DPO has done a lot to safeguard and prevent gender violence. In particular, the campaign “*Libera puoi (Free you can)*” advertised through a promotional video⁵ the anti-violence toll-free number, soliciting women in difficulty to use it. Moreover, an agreement protocol⁶ with the Federation Pharmacists Order, Federfarma and Assofarm has been established, in order to increase the communication with women subjected to domestic violence and/or stalking during the coronavirus emergency through the drug stores. In fact, these activities remained opened during the pandemic, are well distributed on the territory and are easily reachable by anyone. Following the same rationale of using common and popular places, the DOP created an agreement protocol with Poste Italiane (Italian Postal Service) to publicize the toll-free number.⁷ Moreover, the app *YouPol* was created to denounce, even anonymously, domestic violence acts; just between the 27th of March and the 20th of April 2020, 117 warnings at national level have been received⁸. Furthermore, public fundings for urgent interventions were issued to sustain Home Shelters and Antiviolence Centres in relation to the COVID-19 health emergency⁹; in addition, the

² <https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne>

³ http://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/English_Focus_Femicide_1.pdf

⁴ https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2022614/GREVIO+Report+Italy_First+baseline+evaluation.pdf.pdf

⁵ <https://www.1522.eu/libera-puoi-la-nuova-campagna-per-le-donne-vittime-di-violenza/>

⁶ <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/05/protocollo-intesa-con-farmacie.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/news/il-numero-e-la-app-di-pubblica-utilita-1522-anche-negli-uffici-postali/>

⁸ <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/youpol-117-segnalazioni-violenza-domestica>

⁹ <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/news/avviso-per-il-finanziamento-di-interventi-urgenti-per-il-sostegno-alle-misure-adottate-dalle-case-rifugio-e-dai-centri-antiviolenza-in-relazione-allemergenza-sanitaria-da-covid-19/> <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/news/violenza-sulle-donne-ministra-bonetti-sblocca-30-milioni/>

Ministry of Domestic Affairs recognized the need of finding further residences to welcome women victims of violence.¹⁰

Notwithstanding the several policies put into action to help women to denounce violence, the institutions observed a general decrease of news related to gender and domestic violence, an average 50%, with significant differences throughout the country (even among big cities): some departments didn't face any relevant change, whereas other departments experienced a dramatic drop (higher than 70%).¹¹ A very detailed study on the topic has been carried out by the Ministry of Domestic Affairs, in particular by the Department of Public Safety- Central Directorate of the Criminal Police, in the report *Gender Violence and voluntary homicides against women (January-June 2020)*¹². This study highlights that warning offences, which decreased during the lockdown, increased again in May and showed a slight inflection in June, while always remaining lower than those of the same period of the previous year. The report dedicates a chapter to homicides, in particular those involving women. Even though homicides decreased by 19% between 2019 and 2020, we assist to an increase of 5% of women victims.



Omicidi volontari consumati in Italia **Voluntary homicides committed in Italy**
(fonte D.C.P.C. - dati operativi) (source D.C.P.C. operational data)

	January - June 2019	January - June 2020	Var %
Omicidi commessi <i>Murders committed</i>	161	131	-19%
...di cui con vittime di sesso femminile <i>... of which with female victims</i>	56	59	5%
...di cui in ambito familiare/affettivo <i>... of which in the family/emotional sphere</i>	73	69	-5%
...di cui con vittime di sesso femminile <i>... of which with female victims</i>	45	53	18%
<i>(...di cui da partner/ex partner)</i> <i>(... of which from partner/former partner)</i>	32	36	13%

¹⁰ https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/05/Ministero-Interno_circolare_vittime_violenza21.03.2020.pdf

¹¹ https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/05/CSM-monitoraggio-violenza-di-genere_delibera-4-giugno-2020.pdf

¹² https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/05/Polizia_covid_violenza_genere_dati_gennaio_giugno.pdf

The same trend is also recorded for homicides in the family/emotional context which, although decreasing (73 in 2019 compared to 69 in 2020), show an increase in the incidence (from 45% to 53%) compared to the total of homicides. Still in the same area, female victims went from 45 to 53, with an incidence of 77% (62% in 2019).

As can be seen from the table below, the lockdown positively influenced the total number of murders, decreasing them, but not on murders involving female victims, whose values fluctuate independently of the period of lockdown.

	Omicidi volontari consumati in Italia (fonte D.C.P.C. - dati operativi)			Voluntary homicides committed in Italy (source D.C.P.C. operational data)		
	January	February	March	April	May	June
Omicidi commessi <i>Murders committed</i>	29	17	16	18	20	31
...di cui con vittime di sesso femminile <i>... of which with female victims</i>	15	7	10	7	10	10
...di cui in ambito familiare/affettivo <i>... of which in the family/emotional sphere</i>	17	7	10	11	13	11
...di cui con vittime di sesso femminile <i>... of which with female victims</i>	12	7	9	6	10	9
<i>(...di cui da partner/ex partner)</i> <i>(... of which from partner/former partner)</i>	9	6	5	3	7	6

PROSTITUTES WOMEN VICTIMS OF FEMICIDE

As APG23 we would like to draw attention to the number of prostituted women victims of femicide, as it is not an easy data to detect. It is a difficult context to investigate as it is inside national and international mafia networks and because it is a topic that culturally in Italy is difficult to tell.

Since 2018 APG23 has been systematically collecting femicide data of which it is aware through its activities that support women victims of trafficking.

In 2018, 5 women were killed:

1. M., 24 years old, Hungarian, strangled by a customer and thrown on the railway tracks near Castelfranco Emilia (MO)¹³;

¹³ The body was accompanied in December in Hungary, for orthodox rite funeral with the whole family, the Mayor, 2 delegates APG23 and 3 delegates of Free Association against the mafias of Castelfranco Emilia, with a councilor of Castelfranco Emilia. <https://www.ilrestodelcarlino.it/modena/cronaca/battaglia-vinta-arietta-avr%C3%A0-un-funerale-1.4890554>

2. V. N. N., 31 years old, Romanian, killed by a client and burned in August 2018 in San Donnino (MO);
3. J., 21 years old, Nigerian, overwhelmed by a car on 5 February 2018 on the Frosinone Equipped Axis;
4. A. M., 20 years old, Albanian, died in June 2018 in hospital because, on the southern ring road of Turin, was thrown out of a client's moving car and overwhelmed by cars that passed;
5. S., 7 years old, Nigerian, murdered by a regular client in a hotel in Dalmine, in January 2018.

In 2019, one woman was killed:

1. B. D., 40 years old Nigerian, was killed by a barricaded client in Albareto di Modena and abandoned in the middle of the campaign in June 2019.

In 2020, until today, 3 women have been killed:

1. In January a 30 years old Bulgarian woman, was overwhelmed by a car while she was near the San Nicola Stadium in Bari, an area sadly famous for prostitution in the street;
2. S.D. 45 year old Italian prostitute killed by a client in her apartment in April. Her murderer has been arrested these days;
3. M. D., 40 years old, Slovak, killed by his partner on 11 May¹⁴.

In total, in three years, we have become directly aware of 9 femicide's victims. The number may seem small compared to the total of femicides in Italy in the three years (206 women¹⁵). Nevertheless, we would like to bring to light on these data as these victims live a double suffering: after being killed, without having a network, they find themselves abandoned both in the report of disappearance, and then in the procedures to give them a dignified burial.

In many cases, if APG23 was not present, these women would remain for months and even for years in the morgue because of investigations. Once these are finished, there is no one who cares about their future. They are, therefore, women who are enslaved in their lives and once they are used and then dead, they are forgotten.

As evidenced by the testimonies, violence is inherent in the system of prostitution, a system that denies the right of women until she becomes only goods. In this situation the woman (in many cases even a minor) suffers an unheard violence as she is compared to a product that we can buy, use and throw away. Here is the story of a 13-year-old Nigerian girl:

The clients looking for girls are mostly elderly between 50 and 60 years old and they are almost always married. Some clients just come to talk to us about their problems, their personal stories, someone seems loneliness-sick and encourages us to leave the street when

¹⁴ <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/prostituta-rumena-uccisa-da-sfruttatore-roma-veglia-di-preghiera>

¹⁵ <https://femminicidioitalia.info>

he realizes that we are little girls. When they realize that we are slaves they start giving us gifts or give us some extra money. Others don't care if we are small... They pay us after consuming and they go away, others do not even pay us, indeed they beat us and then run pushing us out of the car on the sidewalk.

Some ask us to go to their home - the madames agree - because they pay us more, 50/70 euros instead of 30 euros. They have no fear even if they know perfectly well that we are minors. it disgusts me! We are asked for vaginal intercourse but often also oral or anal intercourse. Some come in couple: while the husband has sex with me, the wife looks at us.

Sometimes some groups of friends came and took me away. I am afraid of them, but it is impossible to escape. It is very dangerous, you have to have intercourse with all of them and at the same time oral, vaginal and anal intercourses. It is torture! It makes me sick, it's very painful, and I vomit right after. While all this is happening on my body, there are also people who make videos with their phones.

Why does no one punish them? I remember a client who asked me to poop in his mouth: he would give me 100 euros. Some clients ask you to pee in their mouth, others bring whips and other tools, ask you to whip them and spit on them. I remember another client that asked me to put a plastic bag on my vagina and then he started licking the bag. Some clients ask us to have oral intercourse with them and then, after removing the condom, they drink their own sperm or ask us to drink it.

It is always dangerous, every intercourse is dangerous. We're all terrified of getting HIV. Some of us don't want to think and so, before getting on the street, drink alcohol or the controllers give us marijuana. They say it's a way to not feel anything. Yet the clients just want us girls, especially virgins and pay us more.

And many people ask us for sex without the use of condoms, they say they will give us the double price if we accept. They're not men, they're all crazy, perverse!"¹⁶

As it can be heard from the testimony, many girls after the sexual intercourse, are thrown out of the car causing in some cases the death of the girl. They are treated like an object that has ended its life (like A.M. in 2018).

The violence that is found in the prostitution system, however, is not isolated. As Laila Simoncelli, a lawyer who collaborates with the Community Pope John XXIII on human trafficking, international law and immigration, reveals, there are disturbing connections between the behavioural patterns of consumers in the prostitution circuit and the many inside and extra familiar femicides, even recent ones; indeed, many of the perpetrators of the crimes had frequently purchased sexual services from prostituted women. The prostitute

¹⁶ Irene Ciambezi in *Non siamo in vendita. Schiave adolescenti lungo la rotta libica. Storie di sopravvissute. (Not for sale. Teenage slaves along the Libyan route. Stories of survivors.)* SEMPRES publisher, 2018. Pages.133-134

system is only the tip of the iceberg of the severe virulent and aggressive infection that permeates other layers of society, namely discrimination and violence against women.¹⁷

With this analysis, we would like to stress the need to address some aspects that are linked to the femicide of women victims of prostitution:

1. Burial of the corpse

The bodies of girls enslaved to prostitution are not claimed by anyone and many times it is difficult to identify them because the exploiters hand the girls' documents. Since there is no social network around them, no one takes care of this aspect and the institutions do not have guidelines on how to deal with the burial of the body, leaving the body in the morgue for months or even years. In this case, the presence of APG23 in the territory has proved to be fundamental, since it facilitates the identification of the victim and the collaboration with institutions to provide for the burial or repatriation of the body. This is carried out thanks to the work of monitoring criminal activity, the establishment of a relationship with prostituted girls and the collaboration with institutions to save women from racketeering. Most women are foreigners and APG23 seeks to activate the repatriation of the corpse so that they can return the corpse to their loved ones and restore dignity to these women. This act of repatriation has been seen to be important both from a moral point of view, but above all it allows monitoring and awareness actions to be carried out. It helps to monitor because most of the time families are accomplices of their daughter's slavery and therefore having contacts with family members can help to combat trafficking in women; concerning the awareness raise, the action of bringing back the dead body of a woman as well as her whole story can be a warning to other girls to prevent them from entering the world of prostitution. We therefore call for a national procedure for the burial and repatriation of murdered prostituted women.

2. Awareness actions

From the testimonies emerge stories of unprecedented violence up to femicide. This last act shows that prevention did not work. Concerning the prostitution issue, the act of prevention lies in contrasting demand (Nordic model), as also reiterated by the European Union through the Honeyball resolution of 2014. The connecting link to the prostitution system is the client. As pointed out by the French MP Najat Vallaud-Belkacem during the process of drafting the law in favour of the Nordic model, there is a clear gender disparity: *when it is accepted that the dignity of the man and his needs are above those of the woman in a way that it is possible to even buy her body, the equal dignity between man and woman is no longer consistently recognized, let alone equal opportunities! The subject in the prostitution system is not sexuality. The subject of the prostitution system is money. It is money that determines the will of the parties, and it is money itself that rightly feeds the exploitation of prostitution. In*

¹⁷ Irene Ciambezi in *Non siamo in vendita. Schiave adolescenti lungo la rotta libica. Storie di sopravvissute. (Not for sale. Teenage slaves along the Libyan route. Stories of survivors.)* SEMPRE publisher, 2018. Pages 134-136

*prostitution, consent to sexual intercourse is a consent in which those who have the money to pay have the right to submit to those who have no other choice.*¹⁸

For this reason, APG23 implements many awareness-raising activities to bring out a world that it is culturally kept hidden, but which, as we have seen, cannot be confined because it has repercussions for all people:

- a) The campaign “*Questo è il mio corpo (This is my body)*” to request the Italian government to adopt a bill that affects those who buy paid sexual services, considering instead prostituted women victims of a sex market that hinders gender equality by violating the dignity of woman.¹⁹
- b) Commemorative stones plaques in the places where the femicide of a prostituted woman took place in order to remember and thus raise awareness among the population. During these long periods a public vigil or commemoration is held every year.
- c) The Project “*Nemmeno con un fiore! Stop alla violenza di genere (Not even with a flower! Stop gender violence)*”, awareness raising activities aimed at citizens and in particular at the new generations, which took place in 2019-2020, thanks to a project to prevent and combat gender violence funded by the Department for Equal Opportunities - Presidency of the Council of Ministers. In particular, it was possible to make a short film entitled “*Ballerina*”²⁰ which tells the story of a prostitute from the East; and a theatrical show: “*Nemmeno con un fiore. Il Prezzo dell’amore. (Not even with a flower. The price of love)*”²¹ in which a news story leads characters of various humanity to confront questions, a sense of helplessness and rebellion on the delicate issue of prostituted women and the meaning of love.
- d) *MIRIAM - Free Migrant Women from GBV, through identification and access to specialized support services*²² European call which intends to focus its action on migrant women with particular vulnerabilities, i.e. the victims of exploitation of prostitution, the victims of forced marriages, the victim mothers together with their own children of violence by comrades. These women do not turn to the refuge, but to other services because of their conditions of vulnerability, lack of financial autonomy or poverty, such as counselling centres or low-threshold services. *MIRIAM* therefore intends to act on the staff of operators and volunteers present in these facilities so that they have more tools for a communicative and relational approach appropriate to potential victims, for the early identification of

¹⁸ <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x17s86u>, translation by Irene Ciambezi in *Non siamo in vendita. Schiave adolescenti lungo la rotta libica. Storie di sopravvissute.* (Not for sale. Teenage slaves along the Libyan route. Stories of survivors.) SEMPRE publisher, 2018. Pages.133-134

¹⁹ <https://www.questoeilmiocorpo.org>

²⁰ <https://coffeetimefilm.it>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYz40npeOrw>

²² <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/how-to-participate/org-details/999999999/project/101005463/program/31076817/details>

problematic situations, through specific training on the possible path for women who are subjected to violence by the health authorities and hospitals, and the public utility telephone line 1522.

3. Centers for abusive men

In this sector, Italy has activated the *National Strategic Plan on Male Violence Against Women 2017-2020* which envisages the activation of re-education courses for men who are abusers of violence against women, as recommended in art. 16 of the Istanbul Convention. In reality, they are not very functional as it is difficult for a man to admit and recognize that he is mistreating. Furthermore, the system itself does not favour the emergence of the problem as there are no institutions dedicated to the protection of the family and couple relationships between men and women, so action is taken only when the situation becomes serious and difficult to remedy. A coordinated and structured system of family protection should therefore be developed in order to be able to rapidly intercept violent behaviour and mistreat men.

WOMEN PROSTITUTED DURING COVID19

APG23 recognizes that it is difficult to estimate the number of prostituted women during the pandemic as girls hardly exercise in the street, whereas are favoured closed places such as apartments, in clients' homes, massage centres, online, etc. This does not mean that there is no violation against women victims of prostitution: on the contrary, the possibility of monitoring, helping and reporting are more difficult to achieve.

For further information:

Maria Mercedes Rossi, Main representative of APG23 at UN Geneva - New York

1, rue de Varembe, Case Postale 96 CH, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0) 22 919 10 42

Fax: +41 (0) 22 919 10 48

Mobile: +41 (0) 79 88 24 980

Mobile: +39 348 24 88 152

Email: mararossi@apg23.org, international@apg23.org

www.apg23.org