4. The Political Role of Italian Anti-violence Centers (CAV) and LGBTQ+ Centers Against Discrimination (CAD) in the Public Sphere

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Abstract

In Italy, violence against women and LGBTQ+ people is constantly increasing, but despite this, policies implemented to address these issues have, so far, been fragmented and weak. This paper addresses the political conflict surrounding gender-based violence and focuses on the political role of Anti-violence Centers (also known as CAV) and LGBTQ+ Centers Against Discrimination (CAD). We present the main results of a research conducted with a qualitative approach (in-depth interviews, interviews with key informants) to reconstruct, from a comparative perspective, some of the best practices in prevention, education, and awareness by Anti-Violence and LGBTQ+ Centers Against Discrimination with a particular focus on the specific case study of the CAD in Reggio Calabria.

Key words
Gender-based violence – Anti-violence Centers – LGBTQ+ Centers Against Discrimination – Good practices – Political conflict

4.1. Introduction[1]

Gender-based violence represents a form of victimization of patriarchal origin, which translates into the production and reproduction of

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[1]   The essay is the result of a joint effort. For a formal recognition of the sections: paragraphs 2, 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 are to be attributed to Valentina Raffa; paragraphs 3 and 3.1 are to be attributed to Fabio Mostaccio and the remaining paragraphs are to be attributed to both at 50%.

structural gender inequalities. It is not only exercised against women but also against lesbians, gay men, transgender people, and gender non-conforming individuals. Like women, LGBTQ+ people, in addition to being subject to stereotypes and prejudices, increasingly suffer forms of physical violence[2]. When we talk about violence, we refer to the marginalization, exclusion, and harm suffered by women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with non-normative or socially unacceptable sexual or gender orientations, behaviors, or expressions. This violence can range from subtle and implicit forms that occur daily to more overt and direct forms that occur daily to more overt and direct forms. In Italy, this phenomenon is constantly increasing.

Data from the Ministry of the Interior[3] and Istat, updated to 2023[4], paint a worrying picture, reporting an increase in femicides in 2022 (103) compared to previous years, with 62% committed by a partner or ex-partner, highlighting a persistently high incidence of domestic violence. Statistics show that, although there is a growing awareness of the phenomenon, gender-based violence remains a deeply rooted social and structural problem. Even the data, albeit scarce, relating to violence against LGBTQ+ people shows a growing trend. The most authoritative source at the European level, the annual Rainbow Map by ILGA-Europe[5], reveals that Italy in 2024 ranked 35th out of 48 monitored countries in terms of the level of democracy and LGBTQ+ rights,

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[2]   G. Mason, S. Tomsen (1997), Homophobic Violence, Sydney, Hawkins Press; S. Tomsen, G. Mason (2001), Engendering homophobia: violence, sexuality and gender conformity, in "Journal of Sociology", 37(3), pp. 257-273; D. Meyer (2015), Violence against queer people: race, class, gender, and the persistence of anti-LGBT discrimination, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick; L. Gahan, k. Almack (2020), Experiences of and responses to disempowerment, violence, and injustice within the relational lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, "Journal of Sociology", vol. 56(4), pp. 507–515; E.M. Lund, C. Burgess, A.J. Johnson (2021), Queer violence: Confronting diverse forms of violence against LGBTQ+ persons and communities, in E. M. Lund, C. Burgess, & A. J. Johnson (Eds.), Violence against LGBTQ+ persons: Research, practice, and advocacy, Springer Nature Switzerland.

[3]   https://www.interno.gov.it/it/femminicidi-i-dati-ministero-dellinterno?f%5B0%5D=data_rassegna_multimediale%3A2024, accessed February 2, 2025.

[4]   https://www.istat.it/statistiche-per-temi/focus/violenza-sulle-donne/, accessed February 2, 2025.

[5]   This report that, using seven indicators – equality and non-discrimination, family, hate crime and hate speech, gender legal recognition, intersex bodily integrity, civil society space and asylum – measures the level of democracy in European member states. https://www.ilga-europe.org/, accessed February 2, 2025.

falling behind even Orbán's Hungary, known for its radical positions towards LGBTQ+ people[6]. According to the ILGA study, the areas in which Italy lags particularly behind the European average concern, on the one hand, the lack of legal protection regarding the protection of the bodily integrity of intersex people, understood as the exclusive recognition of a person's control over their own body (in particular, the prohibition of medical interventions before the child can give informed consent and the possibility for victims to obtain justice in the competent courts)[7]. On the other hand, there is a lack of laws protecting LGBTQ+ people who are victims of hate speech and crimes perpetrated against them precisely because they are sexual minorities.

Although gender violence is a growing phenomenon, the policies adopted to address and combat it have so far proven to be fragmented, weak, and insufficient. Furthermore, it constitutes a heated field of political conflict, given its deep connection with power dynamics, structural inequalities, and dominant ideologies. In Italy, as in many other parts of Europe, these ideologies manifest themselves mainly in conservative and anti-gender positions, which claim a traditional vision of gender roles and oppose equality and inclusion policies. In this context, gender-based violence also becomes a tool through which right-wing and conservative political forces seek to maintain and strengthen a social order that excludes and marginalizes minorities[8].

On the issue of male violence against women, the Italian government has recently implemented some actions, such as the "Educare alle Relazioni" program, aimed at raising awareness and educating new generations, and the Roccella-Piantedosi-Nordio bill, which introduced countermeasures placing greater emphasis on "alarm crimes" and tightening preventive protection measures. However, these measures remain partial and often lack a systemic approach integrating prevention, education, and protection. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Commission

[6] G. Nuñez-Mietz (2019), Resisting human rights through securitization: Russia and Hungary against LGBT rights, in "Journal of Human Rights", 18, (5), pp. 543-563; E. Kovàts (2020), Post-Socialist Conditions and the Orbán Government's Gender Politics between 2010 and 2019 in Hungary, in G. Dietze, J. Roth (eds.), Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond, Transcript Verlag, PP. 63-85, 2020.

[7] M. Bauer, D. Truffer, D. Crocetti (2020), Intersex human rights, in "The International Journal of Human Rights", 24 (6), pp. 724-749.

[8] F. Mostaccio, V. Raffa (2022), *Genere e politica. Discorsi, rappresentazioni e pratiche per i diritti delle donne e delle soggettività LGBTQ+*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

of Inquiry on Femicide, although active, has largely ignored the educational dimension of the fight against violence, limiting itself to interventions that do not adequately address the patriarchal culture that fuels violence[9].

Regarding LGBTQ+ people, legislative measures remain weak and often absent, with few laws specifically punishing hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity[10]. Attempts to open a political debate in Italy on these issues have proven unsuccessful, starting with the most recent Zan bill (on the prevention and combating of violence based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability), which was definitively rejected in 2021, except for the Program for the Prevention of Violence due to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, implemented by the National Department for Equal Opportunities. The latter led to the funding of 37 projects throughout the country for the creation of 35 anti-discrimination centers (CAD) and two shelters for LGBTQ+ victims of violence.

The inadequate political response to gender-based violence (against women and LGBTQ+ people), aggravated by the persistence of stereotyped representations of violence in the social, media, and legal spheres, responsible for revictimization[11], reflects a broad democratic deficit.

In this context, we view anti-violence centers (CAV) and centers against discrimination of LGBTQ+ (CAD) subjects as key political actors who operate in a transformative way in the public sphere toward the regeneration of the democratic project. They work to reveal gender discrimination and inequalities, promoting processes of awareness and empowerment for women and LGBTQ+ people.

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[9]   M. Belluati, S. Tirocchi (2021), *Tra tensioni e convergenze. Il prima del discorso pubblico sul femminicidio e le pratiche dell'informazione e della politica*, in P. Lalli (ed.), *L'amore non uccide. Femminicidio e discorso pubblico: cronaca, tribunali e politiche*, Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 241-273.

[10] The European Agency (ILGA, 2024) informs us that in Italy, even today, 53% of homosexual people are afraid to hold hands with their partner in public places, 38% state that they have suffered at least one episode of discrimination, and 18% declare that they have been the subject of attempts at "conversion" practices, i.e., people who have tried to "cure" them of homosexuality. Cfr. https://www.ilga-europe.org/, accessed February 2, 2025.

[11] F. Saccà (ed.) (2021), *Stereotipo e pregiudizio. La rappresentazione giuridica e mediatica della violenza di genere*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

4.2. Anti-Violence Centers (CAV) and Political Action

According to Istat findings[12], in 2023, women victims of violence in Italy could rely on a network of 404 anti-violence centers (CAV), unevenly distributed across the national territory: 36.9% are located in the North (with a higher percentage in the Northwest, 21.5%, compared to the Northeast, 15.3%), 31.4% in the South, 21% in the Center, and the remaining 10.6% in the Islands. Compared to 2022, there was an overall increase of 4.9%, with a significant growth of 43.8% since 2017. In particular, the Center experienced the most significant increase, with a variation of + 102.4%, which is higher than the national average. Substantial increases were also observed in the Islands and the Northwest, while the Northeast and South areas recorded a more moderate increase. This scenario highlights a positive trend in the spread of CAVs and evident territorial inequalities in their distribution. It emphasizes the need for political commitment to ensure uniform and widespread protection of women throughout Italy. In this context, CAVs play a fundamental political role, not only as places of direct assistance to victims but also as key actors in a broader debate on the fight against gender-based violence, the affirmation of women's rights, and the construction of a network of solidarity and social protection.

To analyze their transformative action, we use data from in-depth interviews with operators of some CAVs belonging to the D.i.Re network (Women in Network Against Violence), operating in Northern, Southern, and Central Italy[13], on best practices. In their daily actions, it emerges that they intervene in the contemporary political conflict, which is increasingly played out in the field of gender. In particular, through practices that act both at a political and socio-cultural level, they intervene on two "battle nodes" and clashes with the conservative right and the anti-gender movement, namely the two constructs on which the vision of the Istanbul Convention is based: a) the idea of gender as a social construct; b) violence against women as a structural

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[12] chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/stat-report-utenza-cav-2023_def.pdf, accessed February 2, 2025.

[13] The data collection work was carried out as part of the research of the local unit of the University of Messina, within the Prin 2020 project "Stereotypes and prejudices: the social representation of gender-based violence and counter strategies ten years after the Istanbul Convention," coordinated by Flaminia Saccà, Sapienza University.

phenomenon, deriving from power asymmetries between genders and a manifestation of historical inequalities between women and men.

4.2.1. Node a) The Idea of Gender as a Social Construct

The anti-gender movement's critique of the idea of gender as a social construct is based on contesting a relativistic view of gender that would undermine traditional values and the natural family based on the union between man and woman. It implies a binary view of genders and an elaborated traditional view of gender roles.

The anti-gender movement expresses concern about the possibility that the Istanbul Convention represents a "Trojan horse" through which the Council of Europe could expand the rights of LGBTQ+ people, with the risk of overlapping them with women's rights and thus undermining the protection of women from violence.

In this context, the danger of "gender education" in schools is also interpreted as a form of ideological "indoctrination" of children.

One of the main consequences of this discourse concerning gender-based violence is the spread of the so-called "mediation practice." This approach involves a mediation process between the woman victim of violence and her abusive partner, aimed at restoring "family peace"; it is based on the thesis that "men are also victims of abuse or homicides perpetrated by women." This type of discourse, rooted in gender equality logics that lead to the illusion of a "symmetrical balance" between the sexes, risks reducing the complexity of historically structured power inequalities and confusing the responsibility of the actors involved in gender-based violence.

Through the analysis of the practices of Anti-Violence Centers (CAV), some actions emerged that are part of the routine of these centers and that, in our opinion, in their application, go in the direction of countering the anti-gender drift on the issue of gender as a social construct:

1. Practices aimed at deconstructing the ideal of traditional roles: The reception methodology, based on the relationship between women and the positive feedback of their gender through active listening, is the first practice that goes in this direction. This methodology aims to produce freedom, independence, and empowerment in every woman. As emerges from the stories of the interviewed oper-

ators, every experience of violence is based on the woman's introjection of an asymmetrical relational model, in which there is a hierarchy between the male and female genders, with a sense of inferiority linked to a vision of the strong man and the weak and submissive woman: "There is a correlation between the violence they suffer and the representation they have of the feminine and the masculine… The path we take is also psychological because we try to structure the girls. Also, otherwise, you risk that tomorrow, these women will create other violent or emotionally dependent relationships; they are women who are not aware of their femininity, their autonomy, and their independence. And this also concerns the more educated women" (C., Cedav, Messina).

The other practice is an educational activity that focuses on deconstructing of socialized gender stereotypes, aimed at both young people, such as school students, and adults, such as teachers or police forces. In all the interviews collected, the centrality of the school as a space for the construction of healthy relational models and equal opportunities between genders emerges, a space where cultural change can take root concerning how gender relations are understood and with respect to the issue of gender-based violence. Intervention in schools is particularly relevant, especially in the context of anti-gender propaganda that attacks gender education in schools, accusing it of harming children through the confusion produced by the deconstruction of gender binarism. A discourse that, on the one hand, finds space in the fear of many families who, as highlighted in the experience of the CAV operators, do not allow their children to participate in these educational paths; on the other hand, it clashes with the new generations who "show themselves very interested, eager for a different vision and tired of always carrying the label of violent men" (C., Cedav, Messina).

2. Educational practices on affectivity:
These practices have the fundamental objective of raising people's awareness of emotions and feelings to promote healthy interpersonal relationships:

> "What also emerges in young people, not in all of them, of course, is that there is still the idea, I'll give you an example, that it is legitimate for the male partner to control the female partner's behavior. So there is

no awareness of this. Jealousy is often mistaken for great love, which is particularly evident in the stories of women, especially during the initial phase of falling in love. If the man accelerates the relationship and is particularly possessive, it means he is truly in love. And this happens especially with women who are perhaps in a moment of fragility when they meet the man because they have suffered a bereavement; for their reasons, this aspect becomes very relevant to the level of involvement in the relationship." (F., Artemisia, Florence).

Once again, these preventive and educational actions focused on raising awareness about gender identity and the deconstruction of gender stereotypes.

3. Practices focused on the dimensions of the body, sexuality, and abortion:

Among these, self-help groups for women, sexual education workshops, and awareness campaigns emerge.

Also in this case, these practices have the function of limiting an increasingly widespread anti-gender discourse on the control of bodies, sexuality, and the demonization of abortion. Talking about women's bodies and self-determination is a fundamental "containment" strategy. This happens in a country where free access to anti-abortion organizations is guaranteed in family planning clinics and where the cheapest proposal criterion favors the birth of Catholic anti-violence centers without feminist training and that practice mediation.

4.2.2. Node b) Violence Against Women as a Structura Phenomenon, Linked to Power Asymmetries Between Genders:

Regarding the second "battle node," namely "violence against women as a structural phenomenon," the anti-gender movement acts through the practice of minimizing the phenomenon of gender-based violence.

Minimization occurs through various mechanisms, including the use of a psychopathological perspective to explain male violence, the instrumentalization of the theme of violence or femicide to support causes such as those against abortion or the so-called "gender ideology" (as in the case of the campaigns of CitizenGo and Generazione Famiglia); the discourse on women's violence against men; the denial

or minimization of the severity of spousal violence (domestic violence), which is explained as a phenomenon deriving from the end of marriage and not from marriage itself.

Through the analysis conducted on the CAVs, we have identified public awareness practices as actions that, in our opinion, go in the direction of "containing" the anti-gender discourse on gender-based violence. CAVs play a fundamental role in the daily communication of civil society, developing a counter-narrative that can bring the discourse on violence back to the political level of structural asymmetries in gender relations and strengthen democracy. Awareness campaigns are characterized by a narrative that subverts the stereotyped representation of violence against women, which focuses on the image of victims as wounded, weak, and frightened women.

The campaigns do not show scenes of violence, as the spectacularizing of violence, as highlighted by the center operators, produces dependence and emulation. The objective of the campaigns is to show how violence is not an exception but a normalized structural phenomenon; therefore, as in the case of the 2023 campaign by CADMI (Casa delle donne maltrattate di Milano), the protagonists are normalized men, probably middle-class professionals, and the communication is based on phrases that subvert stereotypes.

The campaigns often also emphasize the intersectional dimension of violence, exposing the most hidden and multiple forms through which it manifests, as in the case of women with disabilities. An example is the "Adesso parlo io" campaign by the Merano anti-violence center: eight images and audio tell the stories of South Tyrolean women, immigrant women, elderly women, women with disabilities, and young girls, chosen to exemplify the transversality of the phenomenon of gender-based violence.

The practices of the anti-violence centers analyzed offer us, upon closer inspection, a framework in which the transformative action of the CAVs in the Italian context translates into political practices consolidated within the methodology of the centers, which seem to us to be "containment" concerning the spread of an anti-gender ideology and conservative right-wing policies that threaten the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people. Anti-violence centers daily build paths of inclusion and access to social rights (health, work, study, etc.) for women in vulnerable conditions (trans women, migrants, disabled women), becoming spaces for the construction of democratic processes in a complex

moment in which the feminist movement shows weaknesses and fails to impact at the institutional level significantly.

The analysis of data collected through interviews with CAV operators highlights the persistence of some critical issues, such as the problematic interaction between the centers and political-institutional voices in the public discourse space. The attempt to orient institutions towards the political dimension of the phenomenon of violence requires decisive action, including cultural action, as well as differentiated interventions based on the needs of each woman. This approach generally clashes, with the tendency to standardize policies to combat it; these latter are based precisely on a technical-organizational approach to care at the expense of relational practice[14]. On the other hand, there is a difference in the interaction between the various local territories, whose characteristics (collaboration by the local government and functionality or not of the service network) affect the implementation of good practices.

4.2.3. CAVs and the Territorial Component

The territory is a central category in reading the material collected through interviews with operators. Each narrative returns a representation linked, inevitably, to the specificities of the social context in which the CAV operates. In this sense, the territory must be considered multidimensional in its geographical, socio-economic, cultural, and political dimensions. Each of these aspects plays a crucial role in the effectiveness and accessibility of anti-violence centers.

The geographical position, for example, affects the center's ability to be accessible to women who come from rural areas or to women with disabilities, even if, starting from the COVID pandemic, all the anti-violence centers investigated have institutionalized the practice of online interviews.

In the territory, the presence of an integrated and efficient service network is another essential element for the effectiveness of the intervention actions of the CAVs, as it is culturally context-sensitive and

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[14] E. Greblo (2009), A misura del mondo, il Mulino, Bologna; M. Payne, G.A. Askeland (2008), Globalization and International Social Work, Postmodern Change and Challenge, Ashgate, Londra; B. Giullari, D. Caselli, D. Whitfield (2019), A job like any other? Working in the social sector between transformations of work and the Crisis of welfare, in "Sociologia del lavoro", n. 155, pp. 33-53

permeable to the issue of gender-based violence. Last but not least, the presence of local institutions that promote collaboration between public and private social actors for a solid anti-violence system is decisive.

The interviews reveal that the territory is crucial to define a "good practice" in the work of anti-violence centers. There is, in other words, no absolute definition of "good practice"; it can be considered as such when it adequately responds to the challenges, needs, and requests of the territory in which it operates.

The most compelling example lies in the differences between the territories, which are very distinct from each other, of Bologna and Palermo or Messina. In the case of Bologna, the operator of the "Casa delle donne per non subire violenza" interviewed returned the photograph of a territorial context favorable to networking, thanks to the presence of a network of services that works very well and to the support, first of all economic, of the Municipality of Bologna and the Emilia Romagna Region. For these reasons, operating in a city like Bologna, despite the limits of some critical issues, is for anti-violence centers a certainly demanding but, all in all, fluid and well-integrated job:

> "[…] Then the other level is the political action of mediation and confrontation with the entire political and institutional part of the municipality and the metropolitan city. Bologna is indeed a happy island, as I often say, compared to other colleagues who struggle; even in the South, many realities struggle a lot because perhaps the council does not share or does not share everything, but it is also true that precisely because there is this possibility of listening, there are also proposals, possibilities to work together with the prosecutor's office and the courts" (L., Casa delle donne per non subire violenza, Bologna).

The networking is, therefore, the primary "good practice" indicated by the Bolognese operator, which has materialized in the construction of the Table of the City Protocol, signed by the highest institutions (courts, prosecutors' offices, police forces, hospitals, social services) and by all the associations that deal with feminism, gender issues, violence against women, and services for abusers.

The Sicilian cities of Palermo and Messina present a more complex situation. Anti-violence centers work within a more hostile, less permeable territory, in general, to the issue of gender-based violence and, often, characterized by a stereotyped gender culture even among the youngest. The collaboration of the Institutions, moreover,

is more discontinuous, especially from the perspective of economic support for anti-violence centers. The network of third-sector services represents another critical issue.

Particularly in the case of Messina, there is an institutional recognition of CeDav as the leading actor in the system of combating gender-based violence in the city. Still, it matched by solid and constant support from the Institutions themselves, nor is there a well-articulated and organic network of services capable of guaranteeing a coordinated and systemic response to violence.

The lack of a unitary network not only limits the effectiveness of the actions implemented by individual anti-violence centers but also contributes to a fragmented vision of the problem of violence, which does not recognize the complexity of the dynamics that fuel it and the needs of the victims. In these cases, the informal network of the CAV, which represents a precious resource, supports the action of the anti-violence centers:

> "[…] We have protocols, but by now, the same ones sometimes fail. Sometimes, you are forced to call a friend to remember how to move, and it is difficult, especially regarding protected houses. Many times, we have private contacts, and you struggle. Still, in my opinion, this is a problem of Messina or a problem that concerns the institutions, perhaps because, at the political level, there is so much talk about violence. Still, it has not yet been understood how important it is to give immediate, practical solutions." (C., CeDav, Messina)

Messina area is characterized by a depressed and not very mobile labor market; in general, Messina is a city that is not very capable of absorbing workers, especially in the private sector.

This characteristic represents a disadvantage for women victims of violence, whose priority is to become economically independent from their abuser. The CeDav has responded to this need by setting up a job desk that can help women victims of violence find employment in the city. The desk represents, in this sense, a good practice.

The difficulty mentioned by the CeDav staff, in Messina, in the previous interview excerpt is the one shared by the interviewed operator who works at the Le Onde anti-violence center in Palermo. Palermo also turns out to be a very complex territory in which to operate, both for the institutional and political context and for that of the third sector:

> Regarding, for example, funding, we have no continuity guaranteed; we have standards that classify us and give us precise standards to respect, but in reality, this never corresponds to an economic guarantee. They are increasingly binding standards, but then we are the ones who have to look for resources. A huge part of our work is finding resources, without which we could accomplish do anything. […] The relationship with the institutions can be favorable, but favorable does not mean having an easy life in the sense that there is recognition, but nothing is given, and it is taken for granted. (Le Onde, Palermo)

Despite the difficulties, Le Onde is characterized by having managed, over the years, to interact profitably with the third sector and build an "institutional network against violence against women, children, boys, and girls – metropolitan city of Palermo" of which it is the coordinator. The coordination of the anti-violence network by the center is specific compared to other realities in the national territory and, indeed, represents a good practice.

4.3. Italian Anti-Discrimination Centers: A Case Study

The lack of specific laws protecting people from homophobic and transphobic violence in Italy encourages systemic discrimination. It contributes to increasing the inequalities experienced by LGBTQ+ people, who are also denied access to resources and, in general, citizenship rights. For this reason, Italian LGBTQ+ communities have self-organized to create anti-discrimination centers and shelters for young victims of violence.

The goal is to provide support and assistance for vulnerable people without social protection. These organizations, providing essential services to sexual minorities, carry out a political action that enters the public sphere, helping to combat violence and raise public awareness, reiterating the need for recognition of LGBTQ+ people's rights.

Through the funds of the "Program for the Prevention of Violence due to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," many LGBTQ+ organizations have had the financial resources to open new CADs. Thus, for the first time, even in smaller or peripheral cities, there has been the opportunity to experiment with activities to support members of the LGBTQ+ community.

From this perspective, one of the most stimulating case studies concerns the "LGBTQIA+ Anti-Discrimination Center Calabria," in Reggio

Calabria, in southern Italy. This organization is interesting to study for various reasons: the project was born in an area considered very weak from a socioeconomic and, more specifically, political perspective. This area exhibits low political participation and is characterized by a widespread lack of civic culture. In this direction, studying LGBTQ+ communities in their ability to activate participatory processes can help grasp the stereotypes and prejudices with which southern Italy is often described. Furthermore, precisely because of the marginal condition of the area, it can be interesting to verify if actions attributable to good practices are implemented and how they are organized.

This research, started in 2023 and still in progress, aims to investigate the political role played by CADs and shelters for LGBTQ+ people. It intends to analyze the practices, methodologies, relationships with the local community, and their connection with similar organizations or movements at the national level. A further objective is to identify any good practices that may be useful for proposing innovative policies.

For this reason, the approach used is to examine three levels that respond to the specific research theme of our project.

The "micro-level" examines the internal functioning of services and intervention strategies, such as counseling, intervention in crises, case management, community organization, advocacy, and active listening; the "meso-level" concerns the relationships between movements; the "macro-level" considers how this work can be seen as good practices.

We used a qualitative methodology, specifically in-depth interviews with "key informants," people aware of the current situation in managing these services, and an ethnographic research approach within the CAD.

This CAD offers numerous services: the LGBTQ+ counseling desk for orientation to local services, psychological support, legal desk, job orientation, health support for LGBTQ+ migrants, and training for administrative staff and volunteers. However, it is becoming an essential point of reference for public health: between March 14, 2022, and December 31, 2023, they received more than 200 requests for help (in 2024, so far, the requests are about 20), especially for legal support for sex change and medical support for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV testing.

The staff members define themselves and their projects as part of a national movement, a regional and national network node. This CAD

was born within Arcigay (the most popular Italian LGBTQ+ organiza-tion), but above all, they recognize a crucial political role in their work:

> "When the CAD project was written, it was never considered only Reggio Calabria. The lack of services for LGBTQ+ people concerned not only our city but the entire Calabria region. This is why it is called "CAD Calabria." We wanted to be a point of reference for all Calabri-an people. For this reason, we have also established a service point in Cosenza, another significant city in our region. The most important thing is networking because it is the only way to overcome the mar-ginalization of LGBTQ+ people." (legal advisor, CAD Reggio Calabria)

From the beginning of the project, the CAD has tried to propose itself as a local actor, carrying out activities aimed at citizens. It has therefore tried to find allies outside and promote good practices also in the health sector, which should be routine, such as respecting privacy for anyone who needs an HIV test:

> "Until last year, in violation of all legal provisions, in our Local Health Department, to do a free HIV test, it was necessary to have a medical prescription, or you had to go to a private paid practice. It's incredible! We reported the issue, and we opened a negotiation with the new man-ager – who is much more sensitive -, and we quickly established a new agreement that respects the principle of anonymity at no cost, and that also gives us the possibility of having a doctor who cyclically comes to our office to perform the tests." (M., staff member, CAV Reggio Calabria)

In addition to the health role, the CAD has organized events throughout the city aimed at young LGBTQ+ people. They involve cit-izens by promoting a culture of respect for LGBTQ+ people. This is the purpose of Space-Q:

> "We created Space-Q with a precise idea: to put everything that every young Calabrian needs inside. It is an itinerant queer community space. Every month we organize events around the city, in clubs and bars that host us, and we organize training sessions on queer history, LGBTQ+ people's rights, sexual education, and sometimes film screen-ings to comment on together. We often invite prominent people (most-ly Calabrian) to tell us their story and their experience because often the youngest think they are alone, the only queer in the city, who must necessarily escape from here. We want to offer them another point of view, another opportunity." (M., staff member, CAD Reggio Calabria)

Regarding the difficulties encountered in their activities, the CAD staff highlights some critical issues related to the context in which they operate. One of the most essential problems concerns some reported cases of homophobia. For the CAD staff, there are two interpretations: on the one hand, it could mean that LGBTQ+ people are afraid, do not trust the police, and do not feel protected by the law. On the other hand, it is a sad signal: many people who live in violent contexts are not aware of being abused.

4.3.1. First outcomes

According to the people interviewed, the results obtained so far are considered satisfactory despite the highlighted difficulties. Regarding the initial questions we asked ourselves, the first results emerging from the research reveal data of great interest: the CAD's ability to act as an institutional actor in producing good practices, as well as its capacity as a local actor to understand the needs of LGBTQ+ citizens. needs of LGBTQ+ citizens. However, at the same time, although LGBTQ+ people recognize them, they struggle to be recognized by the entire city or region. This still raises significant questions regarding the issue of civic culture, which deserves to be further explored. On a more general note, it should be emphasized that these projects may not have the necessary longevity without specific laws supporting systemic change. To achieve long-term results, these CADs must be able to network with all other institutional actors, as demonstrated by their experience with the local health service. If these centers fail to establish a strong network among themselves and with political institutions, this could compromise the development of the best practices necessary to improve policies.

4.4. Findings

In conclusion, the analysis conducted on the political role of anti-violence centers (CAV) and anti-discrimination centers (CAD) has highlighted the importance of these spaces in the fight against gender inequalities and structural violence. CAVs, while carrying out a primary action of assistance to women victims of violence, are configured as political actors capable of influencing cultural and social processes,

countering anti-gender rhetoric and conservative policies through practices that aim to deconstruct gender stereotypes and promote an equal vision of roles. This approach fits into the context of a broader political conflict, in which the representation of gender as a social construct and the vision of violence as a structural phenomenon are at the center of the public debate.

The daily practices of the CAVs, such as the empowerment of women, training, and awareness-raising in schools and communities, as well as advocacy, play a crucial role in opposing the anti-gender movement, which attempts to delegitimize the idea of gender as a social construct and to minimize the severity of gender-based violence. In particular, the deconstruction of traditional roles and awareness-raising on domestic violence and sexual violence are tools to counter the patriarchal image that the conservative movement seeks to preserve.

Similarly, CADs, in their work, respond to the growing discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in Italy, offering support and reception spaces in a context where the absence of adequate legislation fuels the marginalization of these subjects. These centers, particularly in the more peripheral areas, represent a fundamental point of reference for the LGBTQ+ community, acting politically to promote the human rights, health, and safety of these vulnerable people. The creation of local and national networks between CADs favors a political resistance against homophobia and transphobia, building a counter-narrative that aims to overcome prejudice and spread a culture of inclusion and respect.

Despite the effectiveness of these practices, significant critical issues emerge. The difficulty of interaction between CAVs and political institutions, often characterized by a technical-organizational approach that does not adequately respond to the needs of vulnerable women, represents a barrier to the implementation of genuinely transformative policies. Furthermore, territorial differences in the management of services, due to local specificities and collaboration or not by public administrations, contribute to inequalities in access to services and their quality.

Ultimately, CAVs and CADs represent spaces of political activism and cultural resistance, where daily support and awareness-raising practices intertwine with broader political actions to counter discriminatory logic and promote a structural change in gender relations. However, the challenge remains to have a more profound impact on institutional decision-making processes, creating a fruitful dialogue

with political institutions and strengthening cooperation between the various local and national actors. For both CADs and CAVs, this is the path to follow to ensure that the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people are truly protected in a uniform and widespread manner throughout the national territory.

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