



trama di terre

AN INTERCULTURAL ASSOCIATION OF
NATIVE-BORN AND MIGRANT WOMEN
ONLUS - APS
AGAINST RACISM

“HONOUR AND DESTINY”
AN UPGRADE TO
GUIDELINES TO COUNTER AND
PREVENT FORCED MARRIAGES

DISOBEY FREE IN LOVE



With the contribution of 8x100 funds
Waldensian Church
Union of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches

otto
8 per
mille

CHIESA VALDESE
UNIONE DELLE CHIESE METODISTE E VALDESI

FREE DISOBEDIENT IN LOVE

An updated version of “Honour and Destiny”
Guidelines to prevent and counter Forced Marriages.

Edited by

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The current edition, was written thanks to 8*100 Valdese Church funds, is an update to the 2014 edition made possible thanks to the Vodafone Italia and Action Aid funds. It was edited by Alessandra Davide, Tiziana Dal Pra, Patrizia Randini e Barbara Spinelli.

We have thought of all the women's eyes we have encountered.

Young teenagers, ready to discover a type of liberty denied to them by a culture made by men.

Eyes ready to experience their lives, emotions, loves and the sea. Because some of them have never seen the sea since they arrived when they were 18 years old and had no, chance to play with the waves, the sand, and the sun.

In addition, why? Just because they were born women and it is up to them to safeguard the family honour with their bodies, their virginity, and their obedience. However, women pay rebellion costs, and they are expensive. You cannot say "I want to study", "I do not want to get married", you cannot say, "I want to fall in love", and you cannot say, "I break up with you". Moreover, who says so? A hundred-year-old men's tradition. In addition, it is right when this tradition and fundamentalism are the law that it is over for every one of us. It is the same law that in "White Europe" kills you if you break up with your boyfriend and it is the same law that anywhere else kills you if you decide that your body is yours and not their families.

Now we wonder and we ask ourselves what can be done. The political jackals are already there to make a political profit out of the bleeding blood: a racist political campaign against everything and everyone that comes from abroad and therefore considered alien. One country does not want them, the other does not recognize them, and the family uses them as "cows to be sold"*. What can we do? We must support the personal revolution of everyone and each of them: young girls divided between two different worlds that have in mind what they want to build and how they want to live a life against men's rules. None of us believes that your father, your boyfriend can kill you or that your friend can rape you. None of us believes it until it happens. It happened to Saman right when we were about to end this project. We wanted to dedicate this edition to Saman and to the many others, hoping to build new coalitions with the many others that are seeking freedom.

June 8th, 2021

* The quotation is a segment of a conversation with a young woman involved in the project.

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INTRODUCTION

All over the world, women's rights are violated, especially when women are reluctant to accept unfair behaviour and rules that do not consider their will. One of these violations concerns the women's right to decide if, when and to whom to get married to. Millions of girls and young adults are obligated to get married against their own will. Early and forced marriages are based on gender inequality, on those stereotypes and on those rules that mirror the idea that women must occupy a dependant role in nowadays society: the ongoing existence of these practices are associated with the tied consent to the social control over women's bodies and women's sexual choices. More-over, it is connected to the resulting political and economic benefits deriving from them.

Recently many states, to avoid international condemnation, have started to adopt the prohibition to officiate prem-ature marriages. However, many communities and countries culturally and legally legitimate forced marriages: this makes it difficult for women and girls to avoid these practices, not only in their country of origin but also in their host country. Even in Italy, indeed, their families decide to subject them to early or forced marriages violat-ing adolescents' and young women's rights. Until the mid-2000, it was a matter of a hidden phenomenon essen-tially confined to the country-of-origin communities. The years between the violent death of Hiba Saleem, killed by her dad in 2008 and the murder of Cheema in 2018, also committed by her own father, have been the main topic of the news and the mass media while having an impact on a political level. Both the girls share the same background, raised up in Italy but in a Pakistani culture. However, the attention of the media did not take into account the real interest of these two girls and none of the political institutions raised up the issue of their rights and those of thousands of girls who might be living the same struggle.

On one hand, right wing parties took advantage of the fight against early and forced marriages to foster Islam-ophobia and racist assumptions;

on the other, the progressive parties have often maintained too cautious stands just because they were scared to be seen as racist. In this intense and polarised situation of these two perspectives in the last ten years, many young women have disappeared from school or from the Italian territory, and many others have been brought to Italy because of a forced marriage in their country of origin. Many of them have seen their call for help unassisted and many other have never found the courage to ask for help.

From 2009, “Trama di Terre” organization committed to raise sociocultural and legal awareness necessary to the full understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, this organization committed to the field test and the diffusion of operating tools, which will guarantee the effective reception and protection of young girls, and women that were victims of early or forced marriages.

It is right in 2009 that we conducted a research concerning this topic thanks to the Emilia Romagna regional funds. Thanks to this research, that consisted of 45 interviews with both victims of forced marriages and witnesses (cul-tural mediators, social workers, teachers, and institutional representatives); we could evaluate the effect of this phenomenon in the region, analyse the root causes underlying the marriage imposition - mainly the family honour in the eyes of the community of origin and the family heritage preservation- and its risk factors (as the presence of a secret Italian boyfriend). This research has also been an opportunity to comprehend to what extent the reception of foreign women can perceive and address the issue.

The interviews have shown how in many cases no action was taken to handle these distress calls and how the operators tend to underestimate this kind of violence against women.

This first snapshot of the regional context was the initial incentive to identify the best practices to tackle the phenomenon and to take appropriate accountability of these young women requests for protection.

Therefore, between 2011 and 2014, Trama di Terre opened the very first national shelter for young foreign women who decide to avoid marriage imposition.

A valuable laboratory on the field to increase our awareness through the interaction with ten or so women coming from all over Italy- thanks to the other shelters, social services, clinics, and training centres recommenda-

tions - starting from which we could assess both our theoretical, political perspective and our operative tools.

This publication gathers the findings of more than ten years of fieldwork and updates the handbook published in 2014 as a conclusion of the project “Countering forced marriages in the province of Bologna: acting locally with an international perspective” published with the partnership of ActionAid and thanks to Vodafone foundation.

This edition was made possible thanks to the Otto per Mille funds of the Chiesa Valdese in the context of the project “Free, disobedient, in love”. This edition is also the result of a round table held in the spring of 2021 among the organization Trama di Terre, Kariba project of Trento, Casa delle Donne di Brescia, Centro Antiviolenza Goap di Trieste, Associazione Nosotras di Firenze, Fondazione Pangea onlus di Roma, Associazione Thamaia onlus di Catania.

The women’s shelters and organizations that were involved in the project are those, which collaborated with Trama di Terre hosting young women escaping from forced marriages during the last years. Moreover, over the years we have also shared with these organizations the findings of this research and the operative tools.

FORCED MARRIAGES: A WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

The Universal Declaration of Human rights declares that everyone enjoys the right to marry and found a family (Art 16, paragraph 2). It specifies that the spouses be entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Therefore, marriage can be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. Currently this right is established by art 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, art 10 of the international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, art 5 (paragraph D, IV) of the UN Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and art 12 of the European Convention on Human rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

However, in many countries all over the world, women are being discriminated against in accessing these fundamental rights. They are discriminated against based on traditional assumptions that mirror a patriarchal culture, which places women in a dependent position even in a family context. One of the main aspects that makes forced marriages so difficult to eradicate is that for many traditional religions and cultures marriage is a contract where the woman is the object covered by the contract - Mahall for the Islamic law - rather than a subject of it. Therefore, "her transfer" entails an economic value which can be estimated by the contracting families. For this reason, as early as the 50's of the Nine Hundred, the United Nations and other international covenants enacted laws to counter it. In 1956 **the Supplementary Convention on the elimination of Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Institutions and Practices similar to Slavery** - which builds upon the 25 September 1926 Geneva Slavery Convention - under art 1 envisages *the obligation for the institutions to take on administrative procedures, or to enact any other feasible measure necessary to progressively and as soon as possible completely abolish any institution or practice based on which: (1) a woman who enjoys no right to avoid a forced marriage, is promised in marriage through monetary or nature payment, given to her parents, her legal guardians, to her family, to any other person*

or group of persons; (ii) the woman's husband, family or the husband's clan have the right to give her to another man via a monetary payment or any other mean of.

The UN resolution n.843 of 1954, recalled in the preamble of the convention on marriage consent, stresses the incompatibility of certain habits, traditions, ancient laws, traditional practices which concern marriage and the family life which are in contrast with the protection of women's dignity, with the principles enshrined in the UN charter and with the Universal declaration of human rights. Moreover, the Islamic Universal Declaration of human rights of 1981, prohibits the forced marriage practice. It sets off, art.19 paragraph a, that *"no one shall enter into marriage against one's will"*. The United Nations define forced marriages as an odious form of violence against women, considering that the subordinate role of women in the context of the marital and family relation is the result of the *"unequal historical relation of power between men and women, which led to the domination and discrimination against women by men which has impeded the full women's advancement"*.

In 1979, **the UN convention on the elimination of every form of discrimination against women** (known as CEDAW) under art.16 sets forth that the contracting states shall adopt all the adequate measures to abolish dis-crimination against women in every matter related to marriage and family relations.

In accordance with the convention, states shall ensure that young and little girls enjoy the right to not marry or not be married off, establishing that engagement and marriages between minors have no legal effect. In agreement with the recital 1 of the preamble of the UN declaration on the elimination of every form of discrimination against women, if celebrated, they shall be easily cancelled. States shall adopt all the necessary measures, including legal dispositions, to set a minimum age to marry and render the subscription to an official marriage registration compulsory. In addition, every woman shall be entitled, on an equal footing, with men to:

- > The same right to marry (and as a result to an equal right to not enter marriage)
- > The same right freely to choose a spouse and to marry with a full and free consent,
- > The same rights and responsibilities in the context of the marriage and its dissolution and equal personal rights as spouse.

In the current days, on an international level forced marriages are listed by the United Nations amongst those harmful traditional practices against women's rights, which constitute gender violence and that- in accordance with art. 2(f) and 5 (a) Of the CEDAW – contracting states have the obligation to modify or abolish.

WHAT IS A FORCED MARRIAGE?

The right to decide whether, when and whom to marry is a right, which is denied to many women in different countries worldwide. For some cultural traditions, the parents pick the groom or the bride for their sons or daughters. We talk about an Arranged Marriage when the promised spouses, in full freedom, accept to get married even if they have not picked each other but rather they were “selected” by others (usually family members).

In this case, the arranged marriage is not considered as a human rights violation exactly because it was officiated with the full consent of the two adult spouses. The difference between arranged and forced marriage lies in the consent given by one of the spouses, very often the bride, to the tradition consisting of someone else deciding if, when and to whom she must get married to.

To make it easier, a marriage is defined as forced marriage when the consent of one of the two spouses to the marriage is not full and free. However, especially in a non-migration context, the border between arranged and forced marriage can be very difficult to draw because in a specific social context it can be extremely difficult for women to refuse a marriage proposal without being severely affected.

To sum up it is considered forced marriage the one where the bride’s consent is not based on her own free will but rather, she was a victim of interferences, abuses, threats, physical or psychological pressure both from one person – family members, acquaintances or strangers or group of persons. It can also be the case that her consent was determined by the impossibility to decide otherwise without bearing negative consequences for her physical, psychological integrity or even her own life.

The arranged marriage that is celebrated between two minors, or as it happens more often the one when a young woman’s hand is given in marriage to an adult is defined as premature marriage and it is considered as a severe human rights violation. We envisaged it as a type of forced mar-

riage because we can assume that, based on the young age of the bride; the consent has not been freely informed. It is, therefore, an obvious human rights violation both giving a little girl's hand in marriage, and the deliberate act of denying an adult's person possibility to decide if, when and whom to marry to, forcing the woman to an option through coercion, threats, community psychological pressure or luring her into leaving her country of residency and going to her country of origin.

FORCED MARRIAGES IN ITALY

Considering the findings of the women's anti-violence centre and the women's organizations, we note that, today in the Italian context, it is possible to outline three different kinds of forced marriages. When during the year two thousand, as organisation, we started tackling this form of violence against women, the distress calls that stood out in an evident manner were the ones made by second-generation young women, raised up in Italy. These young women were forced, at the end of the compulsory schooling, to return to their countries of origin to get married to her fellow nationals chosen by their families.

This remains the clearer type of forced marriage, but the political and operative research conducted in the last years, permitted us to identify other two potential declinations of this form of human rights violation. The second one sees young women that entered – via different forms of coercion – an arranged marriage in their country of origin and that at their arrival in Italy with their husbands, realise that the marriage does not meet their expectations. Finally, the third type is the one that consists of women asylum seekers who were victims of a forced marriage in their country of origin before their departure for their journey, which brought them to Italy. Although these women were victims of a similar experience, the way they get through it, how and where they make their request for help as well as their specific needs question in different ways the operators of the women anti-violence centres, as well as the male and the female operators that work with migrants.

For instance, the second-generation young women raise up in Italy tend to make their request for help – through the school – when they express their disapproval to get married in their countries of origin are subjected to increasing limitations of their own personal freedom by their family members. On the other hand, those women, who entered an arranged marriage in their country, tend to ask for help to the anti-violence women's centres, to the available service present in the territory or to the public authorities

reporting the violence they suffered. In such cases the forced marriage is not recognised as a form of violence but during the self-determination process it becomes one of the fundamental reasons to escape from the violent situation.

About the young women applying for international protection, being able to recognize, with gender lens, the forced marriage they were obliged to in their country of origin as a violation of their rights can be crucial to support them during the procedures to obtain the refugee status. The Refugee status, indeed, could be granted based on the violence perceived as act of persecution on the ground of their membership to the female gender.

In the Contemporary context, is therefore, necessary to have an articulated perspective able to catch the various forms that forced marriages can acquire in the everyday life of women migrants. This articulated perspective shall be able to put into effect a holistic approach, which consists of legislative and operative tools. The following paragraphs will provide firstly indications to better comprehend the national law on forced marriages, the national laws on immigration and international protection and, lastly, indications for the field work with women that considers the similar elements of the very different experiences, and where it is possible, their own peculiarities.

The legal framework

In agreement with the Italian legal framework marriage between minors is forbidden, except for the possibility for the minor, that turned 16 years old, to apply for an authorisation to the Juvenile Court to get married in accordance with art 84 of the civil code. In cases of forced marriages, the marriage can be nullified: art.122 of the Civil Code foresees, indeed, this possibility when “the consent was extorted with violence or determined by fear of exceptional gravity due to external factors from the spouse”.

In agreement with art 122, paragraph IV of the Civil Code, the marriage dissolution cannot be proposed if there has been “cohabitation for a year after the violence has ceased and the reasons that determined the fear no longer exist”. Once the sentence of marriage dissolution becomes final, the marital status is removed, and the women can claim against her ex-husband to pay the alimony. The woman can also claim against the family member who is chargeable with the marriage dissolution (the father who

forced her to enter into marriage for instance) in order to obtain an adequate compensation.

However, we can stress that it is unusual to officiate a marriage between two minors in Italy. But the latter can happen in their countries of origin, or by power of attorney: the spouses register the marriage, once they become adults so that to avoid the application to the Juvenile Court. The application to the Juvenile Court, indeed, could make the public forces suspicious. Very often, the forced marriage is not officiated in Italy in agreement with the national legislation but rather in the country of origin of one of the two spouses. It must be noted that the forced marriage, in some cases, it is officiated in Italy but in accordance with the national legislation of the country of origin of one of the two spouses or both. In such cases the norms of international private law, and in particular, art. 27 of the Law n. 218/1995 applies: if the marriage was officiated abroad between two foreign citizens without the free consent of one of them and it is legally binding in accordance with the foreign national legislation, the marriage shall be regarded as legally binding in Italy too. The marriage is therefore valid withholding the possibility for the foreign spouse that has acquired the Italian resident permit, to request its dissolution or the divorce. The latter is a possibility established by art. 31, paragraph 2, of the law 218/1995.

In addition, what if the woman flees her country to avoid a forced marriage and arrives in Italy illegally?

The foreign national legislation that blatantly discriminates against women, infringing their fundamental rights, can determine the possibility for the woman to obtain the recognition of International Protection pursuant to de-crees 251/2007 and 25/2008.

Gender violence, in family relations, and when the country of origin is unable to provide an adequate protection, in fact, can constitute a form of persecution based on gender. Every time the woman's country of origin does not have an appropriate legal and judicial system able to impede these persecutory acts at the expenses of women "as such", the violence that is brought into being in the woman's private life, becomes relevant for the purposes of the international protection claim. This violence against women in the sense of persecutory acts, indeed, constitute the basis for the recognition of refugee status or subsidiary protection.

Based on the international organizations data and reports, the national authorities must assess the country-of-origin effectiveness to protect women

in cases of gender violence. As far as forced marriages concern it is worth referring to the CEDAW Committee recommendations. In its recommendation n.55 of 26.07.2011, addressed to Italy, the CEDAW committee recalled the importance of recognizing the persecution based on gender as a legal foundation, pursuant to art. 16, for the granting of refugee status in accordance with The Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951.

The woman, who is victim of a forced marriage, and because of her choice to flee, has lost her resident permit, is protected against expulsion pursuant art.19 of the Consolidated Text on Immigration.

Thanks to the new legal measures introduced by art.4 of the decree 93/2013, as converted by the law 119/2013, the person could even apply for a resident permit for victims of gender violence, in the case she decides to report the crime to the police. The new law n. 69/2019 of 19.07.2019, under article 7, enshrines the new crime of “*obligation or induction to marriage*”.

THE NEW CRIME OF OBLIGATION OR INDUCTION TO MARRIAGE – ART. 558 BIS CP

Art. 7 of the Law. 69/2019 sets out art. 558 bis of the penal code punishes by imprisonment for one to five years anyone that:

- > Forces a person to enter into marriage or a civil union by the means of violence or threats.
- > Induce a person to enter into marriage or a civil union taking advantage of one's vulnerable conditions or condition of psychic inferiority or of necessity, or by abusing family, domestic or labour relations or the authority deriving from the person's custody for reasons of medical treatment, education and surveillance.

Based on the no retroactive principle of the criminal norms (art. 25, II co. Constitution and art. 2 of the penal code) this disposition can be applied only to circumstances committed from 9 August 2009. This crime is spread worldwide, according to UNICEF data, indeed, the percentage of “married” young girls and teenage girls, way beyond 18 years old, who are forced to get married to adult men is estimated in 650 million worldwide (cfr. www.data.unicef.org – as it was mentioned to the supplementary comment to the law of 19 July 2019 n. 69 of P. di Nicola Travaglini and F. Menditto, ed. Giuffr F. L. 2020).

The penalised conduct under the first paragraph of art 558 bis cp is to force someone else, using violence or threats, to enter into marriage or civil union. The reference to any kind of psychological or physical abuse aimed at influencing one's freedom to decide is contained specifically in this provision.

The circumstances that characterised this crime must occur right in the moment when the two persons get into marriage. The action illustrated pursuant art. 558bis paragraph 2 penalise anyone who induces others to enter into marriage or enter into civil union in the presence of two different prerequisites, which must occur at the same time:

- > Taking advantage of the subjective vulnerable conditions, conditions of psych inferiority or necessity of the victim.
- > Abuse of the family, domestic and labour relations or the authority deriving from the person's custody for reasons of medical treatment, education, or surveillance.

The vulnerable condition suffered by the victim must be intended as “*a situation where the person has no other real and acceptable choice rather than accepting the abuse the person is victim*” (art 2 Directive 2011/36/UE on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims) and such abuse must be the consequent result of it. The crime must be committed in the time and place where the civil union or marriage was officiated. It is, furthermore, configurabile the attempted crime, namely, it is punishable every unambiguous conduct associated to the celebration of a forced marriage or civil union.

Pursuant to the first paragraph, the active actor can be anyone while in agreement with the second paragraph, and as it regards a crime, the active actor can only be the person who has a family, domestic or labour relation with the offended party, namely, the person who has an authoritative role in one of the contexts indicated by the penal norm (family and labour, etc.). The offense is officially prosecutable, and the norm establishes under paragraph 3 and 4 two aggravating circumstances based on the person's age. These circumstances implicate an increase of the sentence mentioned in the first paragraph.

In the last paragraph, the legislator envisaged an exception to the territoriality principle of criminal law. Therefore, the crime is prosecutable even when it is committed abroad by an Italian Citizen or by a foreign citizen residing in Italy. In other words, this offense is prosecutable when it is committed against an Italian citizen or a foreign citizen residing in Italy. This exception arose by the cross-border aspect of forced marriages, it was provided by art.44 Istanbul Convention, where it imposes on the contracting states the adoption of every necessary legislative measure to determine the competent court for every type of crime laid down in the convention itself, and therefore, including forced marriages.

Some legal limits of this norm:

- > The new crime is not included in the list of offenses that foresees free legal aid regardless of the offended party's income.

- > The legal sanction does not permit telephone tapings withholding the aggravating hypothesis.
- > The prescribed sanction does not provide for the preventive detention of the person subjected to investigations.

Finally, it is worth noting how the offense laid down by art. 558bis cp was enlisted by the legislator in the Title XI of our penal code, namely, amongst offenses against marriage when it is a crime against the person, against her personal freedom. We can conclude that this offense should be included within Title XII of the penal code.

All the supranational legal sources qualify forced marriages as a crime against women and as an expression of gender violence which legal object is not the family protection but the personal freedom and women's self-determination (CFRP. Di Nicola Travaglini e F. Menditto, ed. Giuffrè F. L. 2020). Is this a simple oversight or is it the result of the cultural heritage of the Italian legislator?

The family reunification and its acquittal

In the case of a forced marriage, men who have recently travelled to their country of origin and married to young women, residing in their countries of origin, apply for a family reunification permit. Their spouses are not only obliged to get married but they are also forced to migrate.

In such a case, the imposition of marriage occurs out of the Italian national territory, but it has effect in Italy through the family reunification procedure established by art 29 of the Italian Consolidated Text of Immigration (Legislative Decree. 286/1998). This norm, in the first paragraph, lists the relatives the person can be "reunited" with, amongst them, under paragraph a) it is indicated, "The spouse not legally divorced and whose age is not inferior to 18 years old".

The sole protection provided by the Italian national authorities is, therefore, the protection of minors, for whom a reunification prohibition is established by law.

Moreover, the Italian law prohibits the reunification with the 'second wife' (art. 29 of the Italian Consolidated Text of Immigration) and the marriage by proxy, which can hide the risk of a forced marriage. The Italian au-

thor-ities, however, do not assess the “consent” that both spouses must give on the spouse choice, and even before, on the decision to get (or not) married on which the family reunification procedure is based. Once the authorization to be reunited with the family member is issued by the competent prefecture, following the assessment of the requirements for the procedure – housing and income – the Italian embassy in the country or origin issues the visa for family purposes following the sole assessment of the authenticity of the documents issued by the foreign authority which validates the marriage without any further forms of verifications. On the other hand, in Denmark for instance, the national authorities prohibit the family reunification of spouses with family relations (spouses who are cousins for instance). The authorities consider “reuniteable” solely the women, who have already turned 24 years old and only when both spouses have given their free and full consent. The Denmark authorities conduct the so called “*shifting of the burden of proof*”, as it is not the authority that needs to prove that there was in-fringement of the consent, but it is the acting party – reuniteable spouse – that needs to demonstrate that the consent was free, as laid down in art. 16 paragraph 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, art. 10 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, art. 5 paragraph. d, IV) of the UN Convention on the Elimination of every form of Racial Discrimination and art. 12 of the European Convention on Human rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

These are preventive verification procedures which effectiveness can be questionable as the woman in the country of origin is, probably, under the full control of the family. It follows that it is illusive to think that she can demand her own rights. It is also important to note that other women, who perceives it as “way out” to particularly oppres-sive contexts, often see the migration to Italy, or to another country, as a betterment in the women’s condition. In the best case-scenario, where the marriage in the country of origin is perceived as arranged and not forced, or any case, it is seen as “accepted” by the woman, the possibility that the marriage can turn into a living hell at her arrival in Italy is not excluded.

There are, however, some useful legal tools to protect the foreign woman in Italy; these legal instruments would lead to her liberation from the situation she falls into following her journey to Italy. In addition, they give her the opportunity to maintain her independence, which is impeded, by the ownership of a resident permit that is con-nected to her husband, and therefore, to her persecutor.

Before diving into the specifics of the Italian Consolidated Text on immigration, it is worth noting that a forced marriage, which has not been officiated in Italy, can be dissolved. Accordingly, the foreign spouse, residing in Italy, can apply for the marriage dissolution pursuant art.31 paragraph 2 of the law 18/1995.

At the arrival for family reunification purposes, the reunited woman receives a residence permit for family purposes. In accordance with art5 paragraph 3 of the Consolidated Text on immigration the residence permit is valid for a period not superior to 2 years and its renewal is subjected to the assessment of the requirements (income and housing). These requirements, at least in the first few years in Italy, will be possible to prove only thanks to her husband's assistance.

Suffice it to know that – pursuant to art. 30 paragraph 3 of the Consolidated Text on immigration – the residence permit for family purposes has the same “*duration of the residence permit of the foreign relative that possesses the requirements for the reunification pursuant to art. 29 and can be renewed alongside the latter*”. In addition, the access to the job market for the reunited woman – at least for the very first (and long) period – cannot be taken for granted.

The consequence of this limitation implies – amongst the many factors – the impossibility for the woman to avoid the forced marriage and to cut off the bond with her spouse without involving a situation of illegal stay in the territory, in clear contrast with art. 59 of the Istanbul Convention.

The convention, indeed, calls upon the contracting states to adopt “the legislative and measure of any other kind to ensure that victims, whose residence status depends on her husband's residence permit, and in conformity with their national legislation, can obtain, upon request, in case of marriage dissolution an independent resident permit, regardless of the marriage or relationship duration” (paragraph.1).

In the same terms, the Convention foresees the interruption of the expulsion procedure “started because their residence status depended on their spouse's or partner's ones, in conformity with their national legislation, in order to allow them to apply for an independent residence permit” (paragraph. 2).

However, in case of legal separation or marriage dissolution, conversion of the residence permit for family purposes is anything but “automatic”, being foreseen as per art. 30 paragraph. 5 of the Italian Consolidated Text on Immigration – the sole conversion to residence permit for work (self-em-

ployment or dependant) or for study purposes. We face the impossibility to convert the residence permit in cases when the woman is not working yet, or she is not enrolled in a study or professional training course.

Besides the application for the residence permit for victims of domestic violence pursuant to art 18 bis TU on immigration, we can evaluate the possibility of conversion to a residence permit for **pending employment** in all those cases where she – even if cannot show that she has previously work – she is registered to the list of the employment Centre. The immigration offices oppose to this kind of solution as pursuant to art. 22 paragraph. 11 TU on immigration, the residence permit for pending employment is issued in case she has lost her job. In addition, however, the concept of work should take *the actively seeking for a job* into account. Accordingly, the job seeking should be relevant for the consequent issuing of the job pending residence permit. Consequently, this obstacle represents an unreasonable limitation to the possibilities of residence permit conversions.

This limitation, would indeed, be in contrast with the required assessment pursuant to art.5 paragraph 9 of the Consolidated Text on immigration. This legal provision imposes on the administrative authorities the obligation to assess – in case the person does not meet the required conditions foreseen for the renewal of the residence permit – the potential existence of prerequisites for the issuing of another type of residence permit.

Such a legislative provision has the clear objective of allowing the foreigner who meets the foreseen requirements aimed established by law to issue any kind of residence permit and to stay in the national territory legally. This legislative provision favours the substantial value rather than the formal one.

In this perspective, the competent authority even if the prerequisites for the conversion do not exist, shall, in any case, conduct the assessment for the prerequisites for the issuing of a *special protection residence permit*, which in the new legislation following the Decree. 130/2020, could include many of the situations where these reunited women found themselves following the decision to be separated from their husbands.

Protection that is possible to request, even in a direct way, to the police commissioner pursuant the new art. 19 paragraph 1.1 of the Consolidate Text on Immigration, transposition norm of the principle of non-refoulement. This principle includes amongst the circumstances of non-refoulement, also the risk to be subjected inhumane and degrading treatment (art 3. Of the European Convention on Human rights), the pro-

hibition to violate the private and family life, as it is recalled by art 8 of the European Convention of Human rights, besides the constitutional or international obligations of the Italian state, pursuant art. 5, paragraph 6 of the Consolidated Text on Immigration.

Besides the danger to return to a context, where there is a high risk of being discriminated against and the rights of a woman who has chosen to make her own decision opposing the obligations imposed either by her family or by her country-of-origin community; it must be protected the right to private and family life. This right that can be invoked even to protect (the sole) private life.

In this respect, it is worth underlying that the Strasbourg court refers to the notion of private life, as “social private life, intended as being entitled to the right to self-development and the right to establish and maintain relationship with other human beings as well as with the external world (C. Edu, Pretty c. United Kingdom, 4.12.2008, par. 66). Moreover, the court qualifies the expulsion of a foreigner who has been residing in Italy for several years as an interference to the right to respect one’s private life.

The same kind of protection can be requested in the presence of minor children, avoiding the possibility to take proceedings before the Juvenile Court pursuant to art. 31 paragraph 3 of the Consolidated Text on immigration. Accordingly, the parent’s minor shall not request the authorisation before the Juvenile Court so that the minor can stay in Italy.

This provision can be applied in cases where the best interest of the child could be violated by the parent’s repatriation. Thus, to favour the best interest of the child the entry and the residence of the relative would be authorised, for a determined period, even notwithstanding the provisions of the Consolidated Text on immigration. In accordance with the principle of the best interest of the child, this occurs when “*for serious reasons associated with the psych and physical development of the minor and considering the minor’s age as well as his health condition*”.

Concerning this last hypothesis, it is worth underlying that the decree 130/2020 provided for the possibility for many residence permits, amongst them the residence permit for minor authorisation (new paragraph.1 bis art.6 of the Consolidated Text on immigration) to be converted to residence permit for work purposes (previously excluded). Another provision that affords protection to foreign citizens in Italy is provided for art.18 bis of the Consolidated Text on Immigration, named residence permit for domestic violence victims, rarely applied due to its (major) limitations.

Firstly, because it requires the presence of a threat to the woman's integrity as the sole presence of a risk does not suffice. Secondly, the provision requires a precise degree (high) of threat, which must be concrete, real and associated to the decision of "avoiding the violence", or it is the result of her statements made during the penal proceedings for the crime of domestic violence (paragraph 1), to go out of a situation of violence or abuse during the assistance operations of the anti-violence women's centres (paragraph 2).

A double track way (legal and social) which – although it does not oblige women to report the violence- involves the judiciary authorities that shall issue an opinion – albeit not binding – even if when the foreign woman did not report the violence has not done it yet. This is in contrast with art 18 paragraph 4 of the Istanbul Convention which enshrines that the state protection duties shall be disconnected from the penal context. For the circumstances, under paragraph 2, the anti-violence centre has the obligation to inform as a consequent of the judicial request of an opinion, the judicial authority could take proceeding against the offender, infringing the woman's right to self-determination in relation to the possibility to take penal proceeding against her prosecutor, who following a potential sentence, could see his residence permit being revoked (paragraph 4bis).

An obstacle course, then, not compatible – even in this respect – to the spirit of the Istanbul Convention. We must underline that even the definition (more restrictive) of the term "domestic violence" (paragraph 1) is in breach of the objectives of the convention. The residence permit lasts one year and, even if the legislator did not indicate anything at all regarding its renewal, it must be intended as renewable – as per art.59 paragraph 3 of the Convention. The residence permit can be renewed as long the issuing requirements still exist.

It allows the access to the assistance services, the civil registration on an equal footing with Italian citizens, besides the opportunity to work and study and thus it can be converted to another residence permit.

Forced Marriage and Refugee Status

Forced marriage is, without a doubt, an act which violates the fundamental woman's right to self-determination and dignity. It, indeed, forced her to get married to man and confines her in a permanent position of dependency and submission. For these reasons it is possible to qualify it as an act of persecution against the female genre. Alternatively, to the legal in-

struments provided by the Consolidated text on immigration the decision to evade a forced marriage officiated in the country of origin can determine the right to apply for international protection. This legal opportunity not only allows her to escape and inevitable risk to return but also to protect her from the severity of the persecution she has already suffered.

Likewise, the woman who is fleeing her own country on the ground of a risk to be forced to get married or because the marriage has already been celebrated could apply for international protection. Forced marriage is mentioned in the preamble of the Istanbul Convention as a severe form of “*domestic violence*”. As per the Istanbul Convention it constitutes alongside sexual abuse, rape, and crimes committed in the name of the “honour” and the female genital mutilations a serious form of “*women’s, young ladies’ human rights violation and the main obstacle to the achievement of gender equality*”.

In this context, amongst the persecution grounds, laid down in art. 8 legislative decree. 251/2007, in addition to “race, political opinion, religion and nationality there is also the membership to a particular social group” (para-graph d). This latter “*is the one constituted by members who shared an innate or common history that is also immutable, or they share a characteristic or a creed that is so fundamental to one person’s identity or conscience that one ought to be compelled to forego them. It is the case of those who have a different identity in the country of origin, and thus, are seen as different by the society. Considering the country-of-origin situation, a particular social group can be identified based on the common characteristic of sexual orientation, withholding that such sexual orientation does not include relevant offenses for the Italian legislation*”.

The UNHCR includes, with full rights, women in the definition of social group, as “*the characteristic of sex can be enlisted in the category of social group. Women constitute a clear example of social subset distinguished by innate and immutable characteristic that are frequently treated in an unequal manner compared to men*”. (Collection of observations and documents of UNHCR on international protection of November 2009, Guidelines on International Protection, the Genre Persecution in the context of art 1 (2), paragraph n.30 – see paragraphs 29 and 31 as well).

Regarding the acts of persecution, art. 7 Legislative Decree. 251/2007 includes in a non-exhaustive way both sexual violence, physical, psychological violence, and those acts that “for their nature or frequency” represent “a severe infringement of Fundamental Human Rights”, for those that art

15, paragraph 2, of the European Convention on Human Rights excludes any exception.

This provision sets forth the absolute mandatoriness of the following articles: art.2 (Right to life), art. 3 (prohibition of torture, offenses or inhumane or degrading treatments) art.4 paragraph 1 (prohibition of slavery and forced labour) and art.7 (No punishment without law).

The association of the acts of violence against women with the grounds of persecution for the purposes of international protection is envisaged by the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating against women and domestic violence adopted by the European Council in May 2011 made enforceable in Italy by the law n. 77/2013.

Art 60 of the convention foresees that the parties shall take “*take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that gender-based violence against women may be recognised as a form of persecution within the meaning of Article 1, A (2), of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and as a form of serious harm giving rise to complementary/subsidiary protection.*”

Regarding forced marriages the Istanbul Convention calls upon the parties to introduce in their national legislation, if not present, “*the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that marriages concluded under force may be voidable, annulled or dissolved without undue financial or administrative burden placed on the victim*” (Art.32). Measures as the necessary ones to criminalise the intentional conduct of forcing an adult or a child to enter into a marriage, even when it concerns “*of luring an adult or a child to the territory of a Party or State other than the one she or he resides in with the purpose of forcing this adult or child to enter into a marriage*” (art. 37)

In these terms, the provision on consular protection pursuant to art. 18 of the Convention, which establishes the state’s obligation to protect women “*victims of a forced marriage brought to another country with the objective to enter into a marriage and as a consequence have lost their residence status in the country they live in, can regain such status*”. With a specific reference to forced marriages, in a different jurisprudence, on legitimacy and on the merits (see amongst these: The order of the Tribunal of Milan of 12/12/2017, N.GR. 443/2017, Tribunal of Catanzaro decree of 15.11.2018, N.RG. 64/2018, the tribunal of Bologna, order. N. 8507 of 14/09/2017; Tribunal of Catanzaro, decree of 13.06.2018, N. RG. 4434/2017; Tribunal court of Catanzaro, decree of 15.02.2019 N.RG. 1845/2018; Tribunal court of Catanzaro, decree of 24.7.2020, N.RG. 2696/2019; Tribunal court of Cat-

anzaro RG. 2696/2019 decree of 24.7.2020) has granted the refugee status on the grounds of membership of a particular social group, considering that forced marriage constitute a persecutory act in the form of “*acts specifically directed against a sexual gender*”, “even if these persecutory acts (pursuant to art 5 paragraph C), of the legislative decree n.251 of 2007, are conducted by non-governmental authorities and when the governmental authorities are unable to counter them or are unable to provide protection as these violent acts are perceived as a product of local cus-tomary rules” (court of Cassation., section 1, n. 2815272017).

FORCED MARRIAGES: A SNAPSHOT FROM THE FIELD.

From 2011 onwards, we welcomed many girls that evade a force marriage, both hosting them in our reception facilities as well as collaborating with other associations or women's shelters in other regions in cases where it was necessary.

The encounter with these women allowed us to enhance our knowledge on the different experiences of forced, that migrant women who live in Italy, are victims of and what kind of role is played by their families as well as the strategies for their support.

The second-generation young women: between family control and rebellion

Many of the young women we have encountered during the last few years come from Muslim devout families, from countries where marriage is still a deeply patriarchal institution, which is used to control sexuality and female freedom, to ensure men the access to female assistance and sexuality and to maintain family's heritage.

During the years, we talked to young and adult women coming from families of different social classes. But every of them was characterised by a clear introjection and demarcation of female and male roles: the father is seen as the person who passes down the code of conduct and, together with the older brother ensures the respect of this code; the father is the one that makes the family income and manages it ensuring that the wife and the daughter enjoy a certain level of economic welfare. These young women's mothers, in most of the cases, do not work and few of them can speak Italian. The mothers have the full responsibility of the care work, of the house and the offspring.

In the stories of these young women the mother is often described as fragile and passive person who only under certain circumstances plays an intermediary role compared to the strictness of the male characters. The mother, being traditionally in charge of guaranteeing the rules execution and the protection of her daughter's honour, she often assumes the role of "family guardian". She is the one responsible for the female educational model, when the only model she can refer to is the one that was used with her.

The older brothers who are empowered with the "operative control" of the lifestyle, and therefore, the control of the young sisters back up the mother. Because of this family scenario the second-generation young women we have met are committed to a strenuous way of identity building: a double process which seeks to keep together the country-of-origin cultural traits as well as the immigration country ones.

These young ladies, indeed, though they reject the representation of "oppressed women" that very often, their mother are associated with, and even if they are attracted by the opportunities and freedoms of the lifestyle in the country of arrival, they are likely to reproduce a reality that is very tied to the culture of their country of origin with regard to the affectionate choices, especially the value attributed to marriage as an cornerstone moment of their lives.

The only but very relevant request made by these young women is freely to choose their spouse. However, since the infant ages, the families tend to raise up their daughter into a romantic and very traditional reality, based on a system of family values, on marriage, on family honour and on the respect of the hierarchies.

These young women must face a real an emotional division: the filial love, the adherence to a system of traditional values and the guarantee of a good standard of living are often used as a leverage to obtain their daughter's consent to a marriage proposal. Very often, indeed, these young women understand they are "promised spouses" and know that the forced marriage decision with a relative an economic related profit for themselves of for their families, the possibility to maintain the family heritage or to reinforce the family ties between family groups are hidden. The conflict with the family system of values and traditions is usually triggered when since the adolescence these young women ask freely to express their affectivity and sexuality.

In these cases, in front of the young women's reluctance towards the promised marriage, the family conducts gradually violent forms of coercion which mainly imply her distancing from every context (school, social contexts, friends seen as dangerous) where the young lady can cultivate a critical thinking or contrary to her family traditions. In the worst-case scenarios, such a conflict can end up with the rebellious daughter's murder to protect the community and family honour.

The young women that decide to ask for help and cut off every relation with their families on one hand expose themselves to a high risk, as the family's respond in case they fail escaping could be extremely violent. On the other hand, when they succeed at escaping from their families, they experience an extreme pain, both for the sudden loss of their affectionate references and emotional ties as well as for the long-term consequences of the inclusion in their country-of-origin communities. In addition, nowadays just because forced marriage gained a lot of media and institutional attention, these young women's families and communities know what are the networks through which they can ask for help and what are the way out possibilities: this implies that the control and the isolation are higher and early to prevent that the young lady comes to understand that marrying a person chosen by her family without her own consent is a form of violation of her women's rights.

The women that got married in their country of origin: between economic necessities and ill treatments.

Based on the data of our observatory, that were forced to get married in their countries of origin and were brought to Italy via family reunification come from the Maghreb area (Tunisia e Morocco in particular), from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Albany, Kosovo e Montenegro. Even in this case they are women between their twenties and thirties, who are very often married to way older men than them, who have been residing in Europe for a long time. The forced marriage motives are different: in some cases, as in the case of the Pakistani and Bengalese women, the obligation to get married is the product of the same patriarchal models and the same logics that the second-generation young women that live in Italy are victims of. A model and a logic in which the notion of family honour is crucial.

In other cases – as in the case of the women coming from the Maghreb area – the obligation to get married besides the patriarchal and honour model is tied to the poor economic conditions of their families which sees

the daughters as a burden to be freed of through a “good marriage” as it is perceived the marriage with a man that lives in Europe: in this scenario the daughter not only stops being a burden for her family, but she will be also able to guarantee remittances for their relatives that remained in the country-of origin. The economic aspect is significant in the experiences of women coming from Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro where the daughter is “sold” by their families either as complementary labour force – domestic or in the fields at the disposal of the husband or his family.

In other cases, women were considered too old compared to the marriage market of their country of origin because as daughters, or they contributed to the family’s economy by working or they were responsible for the care work of the family members usually the younger brothers. When their care services are considered no longer necessary (for instance, when their brothers were married and left home) from a resource, they turned into an economic burden for the families. Therefore, the families decide to marry them off: as they are not that young compared to the age standards of their country of origin, the marriage with an older fellow national, who lives abroad, remains one of the available options. Once they arrive in Italy, through a family reunification procedure, these women not only found themselves trapped in a marriage with a person they did not choose but also very often in a violent marriage. Their husbands that have been living in Italy for long are familiar with the socio-cultural context and very often, they mediate all their relations with the external world, making it difficult for them to go out, learn the language or build friendship to avoid that by doing so they can become aware of their situation or become independent. It is right this condition of violence and ill-treatment – not the marriage obligation itself - that pushes women to seek help and to start a self-determination path. The condition of semi-segregation that these women were forced to experience, however, makes the request for help particularly difficult, so much so that the network built in the territory was crucial: in some cases, the family counselling, which take care of women during their pregnancy, managed to talk to them about the domestic violence they are victims of. In other cases, the distress call comes from the First Aid, or the schools attended by their children, where the teachers were able to catch the signals of discomfort and suggest them the available resources in the territory to start a path that will lead them out of the violent situation. The condition of semi-segregation that these women experienced during the years of their marriage is the condition that renders the construction of a full autonomy – economic and psychological- a very

long path for these women who found themselves not only without a job but also without knowing the language and social context where they live.

These young women's families play a secondary role in comparison with the experiences of these women. Although, in the first instance even when the family pressures the woman to not report the violence to the police, and to not proceed with the divorce request; when the woman takes an economical Independence path which implies the possibility to send money to maintain their families, there is a tendency to re-establish the family relations.

Finally, as their arrival at the anti-violence centres is associated to the ill-treatment they have suffered and not to the forced marriage, it is crucial to understand the different contexts they come from and the path of growth and awareness they are part of to support them during their path of acknowledging the violence they were victim of. A violence which started with the marriage imposition by their families.

The women asylum seekers: the right to see recognized the violence they were victim of as such.

The forced marriage for many women asylum seekers or refugees is part of their life experience. Almost every one of them were minors when the forced marriage occurred, and they became mothers very young with the awareness that their daughter might suffered from that kind of violence too. They are women who endured the same violent experiences suffered by the young migrants who live in Italy: the same ways of persuasion, the same family and community threats. The same words: honour, virginity and the same ways: marital rape, selective abortion that are part of their marriage life. It is their social status to make them different from the rest of the other migrants: they do not come to Italy thanks to a family reunification procedure.

They ask to be protected from a persecution via the application for international protection. There is still too much opposition from the asylum commissions to recognize the limitation of the human rights of a woman caused by her reluctance to traditional and religious impositions and the founded fear to be subjected to violence in their country of origin as a persecution. The forced marriage is a type of this violence: as the legal appendix of this guideline has demonstrated it should be considered as a form of persecution.

When we establish a relation with these women, in a very first moment through the collection of their life stories, we shall not read their escape neutrally, but we should read it in a complex manner with a gender perspective.

We shall be able to catch the different connections between the need of a better life for themselves and their offspring, and the way out from a system of patriarchal violence which found its own basis in tradition as well as in the community. We can also read it as a gesture of strong disobedience against a system that renders them invisible in achieving gender rights. They leave their circumstances, revolting and understanding that where they live there is no space to choose otherwise.

The migration from their countries of origin represents therefore a self-determination process and a path of progressively awareness concerning the male violence they were victims of and the systematic violence against their rights because of their gender.

We cannot cancel the forced marriage, the marital rape, the multiple pregnancies ever since they were 14, 16 years old. All these aggressions have already occurred. But we must give a reception that is able to respect the examination time of the violence and turn it into a status recognition which guarantees the universal gender rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OPERATORS

Despite the so-called ‘Red Code’ containing the definition of the crime of forced marriage and, although the sensitivity of women’s associations and some institutions to this form of violation of women’s rights has been steadily increasing in recent years, the road to the development of structural and concrete prevention and contract policies is still very long. The right of children and young women to a dignified life requires protection and support from the institutions, and this is only possible if there is a willingness to regard the problem as a political one and to tackle it through the availability of the necessary economic and human resources.

Even today, however, the success of interventions in the paths of taking charge and protection is determined above all by the favourable and random intersection of competence, individual sensitivity to the theme of violence and the spirit of collaboration of individual operators and operators of the services and not by shared tools and procedures created from the specific needs of women who face this type of experience. In the last ten years of field work we have met dozens of workers and operators in the field of social services, law enforcement and community operators.

The encounter with the knowledge of anti-violence centres and women’s associations dealing with forced marriages has enabled them to learn to recognize this form of violation of rights and to act appropriately and effectively. Unfortunately, however, at national level there is still no proper attention and capacity and the deployment of means for an appropriate way of working, to male versus women that is transversal to every nation and every culture.

The following councils want to help fill this gap by sharing some good working practices built over time to accommodate women forced into marriage as effectively as possible.

Alarm bells

In the case of second-generation girls, it is very often the reporting of forced marriages and requests for help that take place at school with confidences made to teachers or educators close to girls, in the young spaces of counselling or at listening desks, as well as to friends who are asked to act as spokesmen.

If the girl's accounts show a strengthening of the family's control mechanism, it is likely that the conditions for a forced marriage are being prepared: for example, if the girl is supervised more and 'accompanied' by family members in situations where it did not happen before, if she is suddenly forbidden to enter school activities, out-side school, or extracurricular activities, and to meet friends or acquaintances. Engagement or falling in love with a self-chosen guy is a crucial factor in accelerating all these processes. Other indicators of a possible marriage promise may be frequent and prolonged absences from school or the sudden decision to abandon it, although apparently justified by family problems such as the death of a relative or loss of work by the father; and clearly the announcement of a sudden 'engagement' in the country of origin, or an expected return for the holidays. In these cases, there are typical signs of a growing malaise of the girls involved, ranging from unmotivated sadness to a drop in academic performance, to drastic physical deterioration, episodes of self-harm to suicide attempts. In the case of forcibly married women at home, however, it is important to note their linguistic competence and the relationships they have on the territory: if they do not speak Italian, they do not have friends or neighbourhood relations or do not show signs of knowing the area they live in, it is very likely that they are experiencing segregation.

When meeting a woman in a similar situation it is crucial to offer her a space of autonomy from her husband by guaranteeing her access to information through cultural and linguistic mediation, as well as using that moment to try to know her family situation and make her aware of the available options to escape violence. If a girl expresses the fear that family members are organizing a marriage against her will, it is essential not to resort to family mediation (for example by offering to speak to her parents). This, in fact, would expose the young woman to an even greater exacerbation of control by her family and, presumably, would accelerate the organization of the wedding or lead to a forced return to her country.

Although offering oneself as mediators in the relationship with parents or family members arises from a genuine desire to support the girl and to

‘convince’ the family to change their beliefs, there is no margin for this to actually happen and the risk of obtaining the opposite effect is high. Since it is a form of male violence, there is no room for any form of mediation, as it is in domestic violence cases. Family mediation can only be implemented if a girl, after fleeing and a period of separation from her family of origin, asks to return home. In this case, the mediation by the operators is functional in building a protected return - a choice that we strongly advise against - and is a form of monitoring the psychophysical well-being of the young woman, as well as a form of family control.

Welcoming: the interview

All interviews with girls and women must take place in reserved form respecting the utmost confidentiality. The interview with the girl or woman must always be held in a place that is perceived by her as safe and that effectively considers the potential dangers. In the case of second-generation young women, it is important to find a place that does not make the families of origin suspicious or that they do not recognize as a place where the daughter can ask for help: for example, it may be better to carry out the interview at school during class hours instead of anti-violence centres.

During the interview, all risk factors must be considered and evaluated, and the utmost confidentiality must be maintained on the request for help: family members, colleagues or members of the girl’s community must not be informed of this. If the woman does not speak Italian, it is essential never to use relatives, friends or mediators belonging to the community of reference as interpreters because the presence of people from their community can not only prevent the woman from expressing herself freely on the situation of violence suffered and to ask for help directly, but also expose them to greater risk because compatriots can only partially translate or manipulate information as well as frighten them or judge them about their choices. In the case of young women of the second generation - especially if the interview takes place in an emergency, that is when the news that the girl might leave or abandon school within a few days - a safe and direct form of contact must be immediately established. For the future that does not jeopardize the safety of the woman. In addition, an escape plan must be drawn up together if it becomes urgent for the young woman to escape or “be taken in”, meaning the shelter that will be offered to her.

Taking in charge: information to women

To be able to welcome women effectively, it is essential to explore the experience and history of every woman trying to understand in which process of self-transformation she is inserted and which and how much awareness she has of the violation of her rights, in a way to accompany her in the most effective way possible in the process of self-reconstruction and in the hardships that being included in a path of protection entails. The possible solutions, both from a legal and organizational point of view, must be explained briefly and clearly to the woman. The young woman who asks to leave her family must be informed about the possible consequences of her choice in the short and long term. It is important to work with girls so that they can become aware of the short and medium-term consequences of leaving their family and undertaking a protection project outside their city.

In the case of young second-generation women, in the first interview most girls explicitly ask if the request for protection will lead to the initiation of criminal proceedings against their parents. This scares many young women who openly refuse to file a complaint. For them, the search for autonomy should not imply the ‘criminal-isation’ of parents.

A protection network must be built immediately, involving social services, school, anti-violence centre and / or home-refuge, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. The multidisciplinary training of the ‘nodes’ of the network is important not only for deconstructing prejudices, but also for defining common objectives and strategies that put women and her rights at the centre. It is important that anti-violence centres have a leadership role in this network by making available the knowledge and methodologies developed in the reception of women, ensuring that there is no development of a neutral reception in both intercultural and gender. When possible, it is desirable to provide real training to operators and service operators in the area to improve their perspective on the phenomenon and strengthen shared work processes. This is also important in the case of women seeking asylum who are in reception facilities: it is crucial to experiment with new connections between anti-violence centres, reception facilities and local authorities, trying to enhance the value that Gender view of the CAV could lead, not only in the reception, but in the process that leads to the recognition of the status, for example by accompanying the woman in the recognition of the forced marriage at home as a form of violation of her rights.

Escape plan

In the case of second-generation young women, the creation of the network is also crucial for the development of an escape plan, which is the most dangerous moment for the girl. It is important not to underestimate the danger and the violence that can be caused by the families of origin when the young woman escapes their control. In the initial interview you must be informed about the behaviour to be kept at home and the precautions that must be adopted at this stage to ensure your personal safety and that of those who assist you in the removal. While, after the expulsion, it is advisable for the woman to immediately communicate her decision to her family and the desire not to be sought (with a telephone message first and then by letter) to avoid complaints for disappearance. It is essential that no information is given to the families about the girl's whereabouts: for example, the letter must be sent from a city other than the one where she is in reception.

All services involved must be alerted and aligned on the escape to ensure the highest possible levels of safety. The planning and execution of the escape may be the moment in which even the operators are most exposed to risks since family members could have threatening or retaliatory attitudes. It is important that operators implement all the necessary strategies to work safely, but at the same time the fear of the girl's family must not for any reason slow down or prevent taking charge.

The reception

Women must be moved to a female's only place, not mixed, and immediately the protection path must be respectful of their identity: a welcoming environment but equipped with all the necessary requisites to guarantee their safety, since they are people in danger. In the case of young women of the second generation, the telephone is immediately picked up, with their consent, at the time of reception. The practice of removing the mobile phone is explained (she must not undergo any kind of pressure; she needs a period of personal reflection). With her we discuss the further rules to be respected for her safety, pending evaluation of the reactions of the family to her removal.

Minors who want to escape a forced marriage.

In case of requests for help from minors it is necessary to consider that control mechanisms within the family are usually more stringent given their age.

The role of the teachers, educators, staff of the youth spaces of the counselling centres is fundamental for the reporting to the network of suspicious cases and the consequent activation of the network even in an emergency, such in the case of a departure already planned for the country of origin aimed at marriage.

The training of social services is essential to avoid the underestimation of this specific form of domestic violence.

In the presence of a notification by the school of scheduled departures of young women and girls in their countries of origin - and in the presence of the parents' confirmation to go to 'betroth' the child -, when the operators do not immediately take action to guarantee the minor with suitable protection, then her freedom and perhaps her very life are exposed to very serious risks. In such cases, the mayor - having detected the existence of a real, immediate, and concrete risk for the minor - can and must order the removal from his home and his placement in a protected structure with an urgent measure (article 403 of the Civil Code) taking care to specify the conditions for accompanying the minor, also providing directives to the police, and agreeing with the school conditions and methods of her removal.

To better protect the minor at risk of forced marriage, both with respect to parents and with respect to the institutions, it is appropriate that in these cases the social services or the mayor make a request to the competent court for minors for the appointment of a guardian. The project for the protection and self-determination of a

minor must be built with the following objectives:

- > Offer the minor immediate support in a protected place capable of guaranteeing conditions of confidentiality and anonymity.
- > Build a housing project capable of enhancing the gender and cultural differences of adolescents.
- > Build a 'care relationship' thanks to the support of professionally trained operators.

- > Activate successful experiences and positive personal strengthening, through an individual project.
- > Prevent the girl from dropping out of school.
- > Strengthen his level of knowledge of the Italian language where necessary.

Initially, the work of the operators concerns reception and socialization activities, to facilitate the insertion of the adolescent in the new housing context. The first few days are often not easy: the child's request for help implies a removal from home and family and her feelings oscillate between sadness and the desire to start a new life. At first, the girl's attitude towards the operators may be one of distrust. However, according to our experience, after the first few days the young girls begin to open up, talking about themselves. The days are organized in moments in which it is possible to spend time with the female workers and confront new experiences: for many, especially for those who did not go to school, everything is new and to be explored with amazement. Often, due to the control they were subjected to in the family, these minors show a lack of autonomy and ability to manage their time. As all adolescents are full of questions and curiosities about sexuality and the relationship with their body and eager to know better the Italian way of living sentimental experiences. On this topic they often seek comparison with other women, they declare they have not received a sexual education and that often the arrival of the 'period' has resulted in the abrupt end of affection in the family. By addressing these issues, it is clear to them the importance of knowing and dating a person before marriage. The desire of many of them is to marry a boy in the future, but by loving him and choosing him freely. The dimension of affectivity and feelings is for girls (it could not be otherwise) a very slippery terrain, painful and full of contradictions.

What could happen to women forced to go to their country-of-origin?

Since 2019, by virtue of the so-called 'Red Code', the crime of forced marriage is configured as transnational and for this reason it is possible for women to formally seek help from the Italian embassy in the country where they were conducted. It may happen that a girl asks for an interview before a trip to her country, already planned by her parents, who reassured her by telling it is not aimed at a forced marriage, a version of

which she doubts. In these cases it is best advise her, if she decides to leave anyway, to leave a copy of her documents in Italy and to write a statement in which her fears are made clear. If the risk materializes and the young woman, once she has left, is unable to communicate, that very statement can be used by her contacts in Italy to activate the competent authorities, as well as the Italian embassy in the country where she was brought. and any local human rights or feminist organizations. One of the first problems is therefore the identification of an institutional contact person for contacts and interventions.

It must be clarified with the girl that a way must be found to activate the aid network even in an emergency, that is, when she, having arrived in the country of origin, realizes the deception. Also, because it will almost always happen that her documents will be withdrawn, and travel tickets cancelled for her return. If she is forced to marry, she may be raped on her wedding night, then forced to live with her husband and in-laws, under very strict control. She will not be able to date anyone alone. She will often live in remote and poorly connected villages. More reason when the woman is abroad, her request for help and the information received must be treated as highly confidential. The main rules:

- > The aggressor or other family members must never be informed about the request for help made by the victim. This error can lead to a transfer of the girl, or the search for and the seizure of the mobile phone, therefore the interruption of possible contacts.
- > You should never ask for help in her community or to a religious leader, because experience shows that women's rights are never taken into consideration.
- > Never try to get information or ask for the support of third parties without having agreed with the girl who is safe to ask for help.

Pregnant women in forced marriage

If the welcomed woman has chosen to keep the child born because of the unwanted marriage and the violence suffered, the path of protection is accompanied by that of accompaniment to motherhood. In the activated support there must be the possibility to participate in pre-birth courses. Attending places where to socialize anxieties, uncertainties, happiness of

such a particular moment of life becomes even more important given the absence of the mother figure. Loneliness, feelings of guilt, nostalgia for a 'family community', even if violent and disrespectful, could have devastating effects on psychophysical health and lead the girl to turn back, ready to accept any consequence. and protocols of action, it is necessary to agree with the hospital particularly stringent confidentiality procedures also for hospitalization at the time of birth and to plan home visits by the paediatrician and midwife. After the birth of the child, the legal process to obtain the residence permit must be activated. One of the main problems in the case of these births is precisely to obtain the identity document of the minor, which is essential for ascertaining the nationality and the consequent issue of the residence permit by the police headquarters. young people who want and must recognize the child do not have a divorce certificate nor obviously can be accompanied to the embassy by a family member who may have reported them in their country for abandonment of the spouse's roof. This constitutes a danger for their entry into the embassy with the child because the country of origin exercises its jurisdiction over citizens / and wherever they are. If they have been reported by the family, they could legitimately have the child stolen considering that - according to the laws of some countries (for example Pakistan) - the mother of the child has custody, but the father is the only one entitled to exercise parental authority.

The only solution provided by our legal system, suitable for allowing the minor to have a residence permit issued, in the absence of an identity document, is for the mother to obtain refugee status, recognizing gender persecution. , until the minor reaches the age of six months, it is necessary to adopt particularly stringent safety measures: in fact this is the time limit in which the father has an interest in tracing and recognizing the minor in order to obtain the regularization on Italian territory if entered illegally.

The importance of work for autonomy

Work has an essential value in building a path to autonomy and independence for people, as a moment of growth, training, self-enhancement. Even in the case of young women who escape forced marriage, access to a job and the consequent economic autonomy is a fundamental step. In the case of second-generation girls, they are often very young with limited, or non-existent, life and work experiences. it is necessary to plan paths of personal support and professional retraining to favour their job place-

ment, their assertiveness, the ability to make decisions independently, the ability to manage their time. A real accompaniment to the world of work is necessary through a reconstruction of one's abilities and skills, of one's knowledge, to bring out and enhance aspirations and transversal skills in a realistic perspective, to avoid a sense of inadequacy, creation of false expectations and possible failures. Since it is almost never possible for these girls to imagine continuing to study after the end of compulsory schooling as families prevent it, when they wish, it is important to support their desire to finish higher education or to continue post-graduate studies: training and emancipation through schooling can be very important levers in the decision to escape from the family of origin. In the case of women who came to Italy following a forced marriage, however, both the learning of the Italian language is crucial, as well as the recognition of the skills and professionalism they had at home. Since it is often impossible to have qualifications obtained abroad recognized or, when technically possible, it is extremely expensive, it is important to take stock of their skills and include them in training courses that enhance them.

WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Although a lot has been done during the past ten years from the very first research on the topic conducted by Trama di Terre, the path for the full acknowledgement of this form of women's right violation, and the adoption of effective operative tools to counter it is very long.

As it has been done in many other European countries it is crucial to develop an institutional awareness campaign on a national level that addresses young women with a foreign background that live in Italy. This campaign must be distributed widespread in every territory: in hospitals, in clinics, in schools, in the institutional headquarters, in the gyms, and in youth centres. A campaign able to communicate in a clear and unequivocal manner that to decide if and whom to marry is an inalienable right and consequently to force a woman to get married is a crime. An obligation and a crime that a woman can avoid by entering a reception facility or a women's shelter.

- > To guarantee women that want to avoid a forced marriage an effective and adequate reception, it is vital that the operators that provide this service have the skills and the knowledge to do so. It is therefore necessary to plan a specific training for the legal operators, the police officers, the school personnel, the social and community services. It is crucial that this training is provided by those women's organisations and women's anti-violence centres that during the years have acquired both the specific knowledge and operative tools concerning this phenomenon to ensure a non-impartial view on both gender and culture.
- > In the case of young second generation women, it is important to foresee specific reception centre given that neither the minors community centres nor the women's anti-violence centres are adequate places: the minor community centres cannot guarantee the necessary safety in case the young woman is escaping from her family and these centres

do not have the adequate knowledge - neither the gender knowledge nor the intercultural one - to address the complexity of this young woman's experience. On the other hand, even if the women's shelters have both the right knowledge and adequate operative tools to address these distress calls, these young women or teenage girls must live in reception facilities where grown women live usually with their own kids. Furthermore, as they are reception centres for independent women, they cannot address these young women's requests for help. The latter ones need the ongoing presence of an educator to process what has happened to them as well as the separation from their families. Without an adequate facility that welcomes them, these young women find themselves with no place to go, and this facilitates their return to home, with the high and real risk of endangering their lives.

- > The process of safeguarding these women who escape from their families and run serious risks for their integrity is essential. Nowadays, to modify your own name, your place of residence or to keep your personal data secret is extremely complicated and this exposes these young women to serious risks. It can be concluded that facilitating the process of safeguarding and establishing specific procedures for women, that are escaping from a forced marriage as it is foreseen for other persons at risk, is extremely important.

Finally, in the context of feminist activism, it is important to build a stronger network between the women's anti-violence centres and the women's organisations that during the last years have been working from a political and operative perspective on forced marriages: so that to guarantee an advocacy exchange, to share the common knowledge and practices, to address in a prompt and joint manner the distress calls, to make joint advocacy programs on a local, regional and national level.

Operative Tool:

see page n. 52 for the hands on and useful recommendations addressed to young girls. This operative tool should be cut out, hung, and distributed in every counselling centre.

LEGAL APPENDIX

The legal relevant framework to counter forced marriages.

In the context of International and European law many acts have been adopted to counter both early and forced marriages.

Among the most relevant international law acts regarding the subject matter, we can point out:

- > **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948**, which although does not specifically mention the phenomena of premature and forced marriages, recognizes the right to marry and protects the freedom to get married. Art. 16 establishes that: Men and women of full age have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Accordingly, marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
- > **The Convention on consent to marriages, minimum age for marriages and registration for marriages of 1962**, under art. 1,2,3 and 4, besides prohibiting forced marriages, in other words, marriages that have been celebrated without the free and full consent of both parties, obliges the contracting states to establish a minimum age (not inferior to 15 years old) to get married remarking that: “No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons and in the interest of the intending spouses.
- > The supplementary convention **on the abolition of slavery, slave trade and the institutions and practices similar to slavery adopted in 1956** specifically mentions forced marriages and equates this practice to the so-called new forms of slavery.

- > **The international covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights** adopted in 1966 (ratified by L. 881/1977) under art. 10, remarks that “A marriage that shall be celebrated with the full and free consent of the two future spouses”.
- > **The convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women** adopted in 1979 (ratified by L. 132/1985), which envisages that: “The contracting states shall take all the appropriate measures to abolish every form of discrimination against women in every matter concerning marriage and family relations. Accordingly, the contracting states shall guarantee women on an equal footing with men: a) an equal right to get married; b) the equal right freely to choose her future spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.” (art. 16);
- > **The convention on the rights of the child adopted in 1989** (ratified by L. 176/1991) which tackles the matter of premature and forced marriage considers them as a blatant violation to children rights (art. 1-3,6,12,19,24,28,29,34-36);
- > **The CEDAW GENERAL RECOMMENDATION n. 21 of 1994**, on equity in marriage and in the family relations, for the very first time explicitly refers to forced marriages, authorized in some countries based on habits, traditions, religious or community principles.
- > **The UN General assembly resolution on premature and forced marriages of December 18th, 2014**, urges states to ensure the celebration of marriages only with the full and free consent of both parties and to abolish any form of early or forced marriage.
- > **In the Human rights committee resolution, aimed at reinforcing the efforts to counter and abolish early and forced marriages of July 2nd, 2015**, forced marriages are considered as a severe human rights violation which limits the possibility for adult women and young women to live free and far from violence.

On a European level it should be noted:

- > **The European convention on Human rights and Fundamental freedoms (ECHR) adopted in 1950**, which under art. 12, explicitly mentions the right to marry establishing that: “Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and found a family”.
- > **In the council of Europe recommendation n. 1450 of 2000 concerning the protection of women**: “forced marriages are explicitly

contemplated among the religious and traditional practices that are not compatible with women's fundamental rights and freedoms. The Member states are urged to counter and abolish these practices.

- > **The general assembly of the Council of Europe recommendation n.1723 of 2005** calls upon states to adopt counter-measures for the phenomenon of forced marriages. States are urged to criminalise persons who contribute or assist in the celebration of these marriages.
- > **The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 2005** on early and forced marriages, which calls upon the contracting states to enact legislative amendments to counter this practice.
- > **The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of 2011 (Istanbul Convention)** which tackles the forced marriage issue, especially under articles. 32-37.

The Istanbul Convention, ratified by Italy via the Law. 77/13, is the first international and legally binding tool aimed at creating a holistic legal framework to protect women against every form of violence. Very relevant is the explicit recognition of the violence against women not only as a human right violation but also as a form of discrimination against women (art. 3 of the convention). The convention establishes a clear connection between its gender equality objective and the elimination of the violence against women. This convention directly addresses the forced marriage issue, by obliging the contracting states to adopt civil, penal measures to counter it (respectively art. 32 and 37). Art 37 qualifies forced marriage as “*the intentional conduct of forcing an adult or a child to enter into a marriage*”, and “*the conduct of luring an adult or a child to the territory of a Party or State other than the one she or he resides in with the purpose of forcing this adult or child to enter into a marriage*”.

- > **The parliament resolution on women and fundamentalism of March 13th 2002** that reaffirms the absolute incompatibility of forced marriages with the European Law principles and stresses that: “*the rights of women laid down in the international treaties and conventions cannot be restricted or breached on the pretext of religion, religious interpretations, cultural traditions or customs or law*” and maintains that “*within the EU the defence of women's rights means that it is impossible to apply opposing or incompatible rules or traditions*”. Finally, as it is remarked in the preamble

“considers it necessary that rights derived from the family law of the Member States should prevail over those of the countries of origin”. (Par. 1, 3 e 7).

- > **Thanks to its motion on forced marriages of October 7th 2002**, the European Parliament urged the European Council, the Commission and the Member States to: *“1. to consider forced marriage as a serious infringement of the right to give one’s consent freely; 2. to acknowledge that the risk of being subjected to a forced marriage is sufficient reason for a person to be granted the right to repatriation to their EU country of residence if the marriage is due to take place in a third country; 3. “to make action to combat forced marriages a priority in EU relations with third countries through the application of the ‘human rights clause’; 4. “to support NGOs working towards the elimination of such practices in countries where they are allowed on grounds of culture and tradition.”*
- > **European Parliament Resolution on the exploitation of children in developing countries**, under art 23. calls for: *“particular attention to be paid to the primary education of girls, who encounter more barriers and obstacles than do boys (cultural factors such as early marriage, discrimination, their social and family role and so, on playing a part) preventing them from enrolling and remaining in school and from completing their studies; furthermore asserts that girls who have been educated have smaller, healthier families and help to increase productivity and reduce poverty;”*;
- > **The European resolution on women’s immigration and violence against women** n. 2006/2010 condemns forced marriages and urges Member States to incorporate direct measures to criminalise those citizens that attempt to enter into such a marriage even when they are out of the national borders into their national legislation.
- > **Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council** of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, in its recital n.11 takes the phenomenon of forced marriages into account.
- > **Directive of the European Parliament and of the council** of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime, in its recital n.17 includes forced marriages amongst the different forms of gender violence.

- > **EU action plan for human rights and democracy** of 2015 2019 which reiterates that Member states must prioritise the prevention of forced marriages (n. 14).
- > **EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling** (2015 - 2020) of 27 May 2015 which affirms that: “Actions against migrant smuggling will be enhanced in the context of EU action plan against organised crime and other international criminal forms, including the cross-border collaboration against frauds concerning documents, sham marriages and other forms of illicit entry procedures and legal residence”.
- > **European Parliament resolution of 4 July 2018** Towards an EU external strategy against early and forced marriage. This resolution starts from an analysis of data collected by UNICEF on the conditions of adult women, young and little girls and in its recital E) – sets out the strategy on a multiple level that European countries must follow to eradicate early and forced marriages not only in Europe.

Suggestions for women that want to avoid a forced or arranged marriage¹

Dear,

These suggestions are not meant for every woman. They are meant just for you. For you that are willing to build your own life and feel limited in your personal freedom by your family, your husband, or by your community of origin's control. For you that want to decide who to marry to by yourself. For you who want to be you to decide, and not your relatives or community or whoever when to get married and to whom. For you that want to decide when to have your children and how to educate them. For you that know the feel of being trapped in a marriage after the initial joy that lasted three days. For you that can no longer bear your family's oppression and want to leave your house and feel the sun on your skin and see the sea. If you do not have these suggestions, already in mind, they might be useful.

1 - GET READY TO LEAVE

Ask yourself this question: do I really want to leave? Why do I want to do it? Is there any other option? Give yourself time? Is this time over? Your decision will upset your parents. They will accuse you of dishonouring the family's honour. They will say that there will be consequences for everyone. Your family will make the impossible for you to come back home: they will try to talk to you privately, threaten to repudiate you, curse or to physically abuse you. Do not underestimate the threats. "Ever since you left our mom has been so sick that she has been hospitalised" is the kind of accusation that you will hear. Be prepared!

¹ Re-elaboration of a group of young women coming from Pakistan and Bangladesh taken from the book "Not submissive. Against the segregation in the Islamic society" of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Einaudi Edition, 2005..





2 - YOU SHOULD ANALYSE YOUR WEAKNESSES

Are you in good shape? What kind of personality do you have? Do you stress out immediately or are you able to adapt to new situations? Think about how your departure can be kept secret if possible: how much free time for yourself do you have every day? Does your family notice if you are away for a few hours? You must know that once you leave, for some time, it can be a long time; you will not be able to come back. Consider it.

3 - YOU MUST HAVE TRUST, ESPECIALLY IN YOURSELF.

You will go through moments of fear, insecurity and you could even regret your decision. It is normal. You will be tormented by so many doubts. However, you must remember that the way you wish to live your life is not compatible with the way your family wants you to live it. You will need to trust others. Look for someone that will help you out and will not demand for anything in return. Do not trust everyone. Be cautious.

4 - EXPLAIN HOW YOU FEEL AND ALL THE ASPECTS OF THIS ISSUE ONCE YOU HAVE THE INTERVIEW WITH THE SOCIAL WORKER AND THE POLICE OFFICERS.

Explain to them what your family and your community think about the sense of shame and guilt. When you enter a women's shelter it is crucial that your new address stays secret. Try to follow the suggestions that will be given to you, even when you feel in prison more than ever before. It is for your own safety; it will not last forever but you will have to respect the rules. The cost of freedom will seem higher for you, but it is not your fault.

5 - CONSIDER YOUR INCOME

Economic independence is another step towards freedom. Ponder over your skills if you decide to work but do you even if you decide to study. Completing your studies is the key to a long-lasting independence. However, it is up to you to outline your life project. Now you can do it. Learn to ask for help when you feel like you cannot do it by yourself.

6 - TO VIOLATE THE FAMILY RULES AND TRADITIONS IS A TOUGH CHALLENGE

Now you feel strong but at the same time extremely vulnerable. Despite all the external assistance, you will be alone. In addition, you must be aware of it. You will miss your family, their warmth, and your everyday life: every family has its own special moments (births and religious festivities for instance). In those days, you will feel extra lonely. However, should bear in mind that contacting your family can have serious consequences for you. Console yourself: many women as you managed to build a positive relationship with their families. Nevertheless, this usually occurs after a few years.

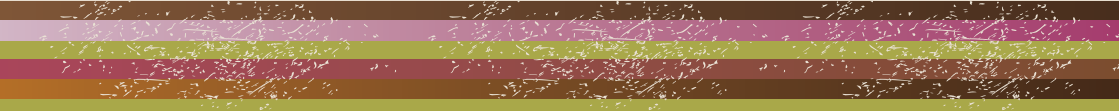
7 - NOW YOU ARE READY

You are sure about what you are going to do. You have friends that are ready to help you out. You trust yourself, them, and your future. You secretly brought out of your house all your stuff that was valuable to you. Even your Italian residency permit. Nobody has noticed it. You will sleep in a new house or in your room for the very first time. Is there anything else left to do? Will you just go and close the door behind you without saying anything? Yes, because you cannot be noticed. Did you do it? Now?

8 - YOUR PARENTS WILL NOT KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

Both your young sisters and your older brother will ask for you. They must know that no one forced you and that you made your decision with your own free will. You would leave a letter where you explain to them that you want a different life for yourself. A very different life from the one they demand you to live. You would explain to them that you respect their lifestyle, but you want to take your own path. Apart from the many issues, your education taught you something: you can adapt to others, you learnt how to manage difficult circumstances and you are aware that you can get whatever you want. But you have so much to learn, be open minded. It is worth it.





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