

## Long Abstract – Monographic Section

### **Rethinking Welfare to prevent and combat gender-based violence: challenges and opportunities for an integrated system**

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### ***Local Governance and the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women Escaping Gender-Based Violence: Evidence from Three Italian Case Studies.***

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This article investigates the normative, institutional, and relational factors that, at the territorial level, foster the socio-economic empowerment of women escaping gender-based violence. Drawing on a qualitative research project conducted in three Italian regions (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, and Puglia), the study analyses how regional policies, local welfare practices, and service networks contribute to the development of women's economic, employment, and housing autonomy.

The article adopts a multidimensional understanding of empowerment, conceptualised as an ongoing and complex process unfolding across interconnected levels: individual (micro), relational and territorial (meso), and institutional (macro). From this perspective, women's empowerment is inseparable from transformations in power relations, public policies, and organisational practices within the welfare and anti-violence systems. Methodologically, the research is based on a multiple case study design combining document analysis, semi-structured interviews with institutional actors and service professionals, and focus groups with practitioners from general and specialised services. Fieldwork was carried out between April and July 2024, and data were analysed through thematic analysis using qualitative software.

Findings highlight two key enabling factors. First, at the macro level, the institutional recognition of gender-based violence as a structural phenomenon translates into integrated policy frameworks, stable funding mechanisms, and the formal acknowledgement of anti-violence centres as core actors within local welfare systems. These conditions enhance the capacity of territories to implement flexible and personalised empowerment measures. Second, at the meso level, the empowerment of services and frontline professionals emerges as crucial. The autonomy, expertise, and relational work of practitioners - particularly within anti-violence centres and social services - enable tailored interventions and mediate between fragmented resources and women's complex needs.

Overall, the study shows that women's socio-economic autonomy does not depend solely on individual resources, but on territorial systems capable of activating coordinated policies, strengthening professional practices, and sustaining dense local networks. In this sense, empowerment-oriented governance contributes not only to women's pathways out of violence, but also to the long-term resilience and transformative capacity of local welfare systems.

**Keywords:** socio-economic empowerment; gender-based violence; local governance; welfare systems; anti-violence networks

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