

DARING TO CARE. Creating a network: Eleonora's commitment to help end violence against women

25 NOVEMBER 2021, INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN,



By [Tamara Pastorelli](#)

25th November is the International Day for the Elimination of violence against women. According to the latest estimates, almost 1 in 3 women aged 15 or over worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. The situation has been further aggravated by the repeated lockdowns brought on by the pandemic. But, according to UN estimates, numbers would rise if sexual harassment, violence in digital contexts, harmful practices and sexual exploitation were to be included. The UN has launched a 16-day campaign for activism and awareness-raising on the topic, which will run from 25th November to 10th December, International Human Rights Day. Today, we share the story of Eleonora's commitment. She is a lawyer from Milan, and, over the last few years, she has devoted herself almost exclusively to providing legal support to women victims of violence.



“Is it ok if we talk while I’m on the bus?” – Eleonora asks me – “I got an urgent call from the prison!”. And so our phone call continues with the hubbub of passengers and traffic in the background, as she makes her way to her client. Eleonora is a lawyer, she lives in Milan (Italy), is married and has two kids. She tells me about her decision to become self-employed and open her own office, in agreement with her husband, when she was pregnant with her first child. “Having always worked in an intercultural context, I became aware of the challenges faced by immigrants in Italy, so, while I was still pregnant, I decided to enrol in a Master’s course on the rights of non-citizens promoted by the Milan Bar Association”.

After the course, she got in touch with the [Associazione Arcobaleno](#), [The Rainbow Association](#) which works for the inclusion of migrants in the city of Milan. “I was able to practise what I had studied” – she explains – “from residence permit applications to communal disputes and family law. I got a criminal lawyer colleague on board too. Then, last year, during lockdown, the issue of domestic violence emerged...”. From her privileged standpoint, Eleonora observes that the pandemic has caused the phenomenon to explode: she and her colleague, for instance, went from working on 4 or 5 domestic violence-related cases at a time to 10 in less than a month. They currently have fifteen active cases.

“Forced to stay at home together all the time, people lost their inhibitions and found it harder to control themselves, even in front of children”, she explains. As they came into contact with this scourge, Eleonora and her colleague realised that a “network” approach was needed, so that women victims of violence would not be left alone after reporting the abuse. “We began by providing private psychological support to children who had witnessed scenes of brutal violence, to help them overcome the trauma. When we extended it to women, we at once noticed a considerable shift: little by little they become aware of what they had experienced, they were able to express it even in front of a judge, without minimising, they found a key to free themselves of guilt, they begin to rebuild their lives”. They did not only provide psychological support, they also involved social services so that victim protection measures and support interventions could be activated. “That is how we are building a network that allows women to start again.” – Eleonora explains, adding – “From this experience, the association ‘TutelaMi’¹ (Protect me Milan) will come into being in the next few days, involving volunteers and professionals dedicated to accompanying women along the path of emancipation from violence”.

¹ A play on the words “tutelami” means protect me and Mi is an abbreviation for Milan [*Translator’s note*]. Hence “Protect Me Milan”.