

Country Report: Italy

The main sources of information for this report are a paper on the health of women prisoners in Italy, the report of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, personal correspondence with the Director of the Osservatorio Regionale sulla Popolazione Detentua,¹ and a visit to San Vittore prison in Milan by a QCEA staff member.

1. Introduction

According to the Italian Ministry of Justice, in 2004 there were 56,532 prisoners in Italy, including 2,660 women (4.7 per cent of the prison population).² According to the International Centre for Prison Studies (ICPS), at the end of 2005 the prison population was at 59,960, including prisoners awaiting trial, and 437 juveniles in juvenile prisons. At the end of 2005, the prison population rate was 102 per 100,000 (based on an estimated population of 59.04 million) and there were 225 institutions/establishments including 163 pre-trial prisons (thirty-six institutions for the implementation of prison sentences, eight institutions for the implementation of security measures and eighteen penal institutions for juveniles). Prisoners awaiting trial (including 295 juveniles) made up 36.6 per cent of the prison population.

Italy has been criticised by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights for problems of overcrowding in prisons.³ At 31 December 2004 there were 56,068 people (including 2,589 women) in prison, although the total maximum capacity of the country's prisons is 42,478. The average occupation rate was thus in excess of 130 per cent. This overcrowding is partly due to lengthy Italian judicial proceedings resulting in a large number of prisoners awaiting trial (in June 2005 over thirty-five per cent of prisoners had yet to be finally convicted). Another reason for overcrowding given by the Commissioner for Human Rights is a lack of alternative measures to imprisonment. He also reported that staff and resources are stretched and that as a result insufficient attention is given to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.

In an attempt to ease overcrowding, Italian MPs voted in favour of cutting the sentences of thousands of prisoners.⁴ This measure would take three years off prison terms for crimes committed before May 2006, freeing between 17,000 and 23,000 prisoners.⁵ The Justice Minister promised that people convicted of serious crimes such as Mafia membership, paedophilia, terrorism, and human trafficking would not be included and said that the pardon would help improve jail conditions.

¹ Daniele Berto, Director of the Osservatorio Regionale sulla Popolazione Detentua. Available [on-line] at http://www.venetosociale.org/index.php?m_nObs=11&m_cMenu=RESET

² D. Zoia, 'Women and health care in prison: an overview of the experiences of imprisoned women in Italy', *International Journal of Prison Health*, Volume 1, No. 2-4 (June 2005), pp. 117-126.

³ Report to the Council of Europe by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights, upon his visit to Italy, 10-17 June 2005, CommDH(2005)9 (2005). See also [on-line] <http://www.coe.int/NewsSearch/Default.asp?KW=alvaro+gil-robles&inD=&outD=&lmLangue=1&Submit=Search>

⁴ The vote took place in July 2006

⁵ Personal correspondence with Daniele Berto, December 2006. See also [on-line] http://www.venetosociale.org/index.php?m_nObs=11&m_cMenu=RESET

2. Women prisoners in Italy

According to ICPS, at the end of 2005 female prisoners made up 4.8 per cent of the total prison population.

Prisons

In Italy there are five women-only prisons and sixty-one prisons which hold men but also have women's sections.⁶ San Vittore prison in Milan is one such prison; the number of male prisoners at any one time is between 1,300 and 1,400 and the number of female prisoners is between 120 and 140. The women's section at San Vittore is the largest in the province of Lombardy. Convicted women and those awaiting trial are held on different floors and are subject to different rules and conditions. The prison holds no juveniles (either male or female). Overcrowding is a problem at San Vittore and this was evident in the women's section and was also acknowledged by staff. Five women are held in cells barely big enough for two bunk beds and a single bed to fit in.

Crimes

According to Zoia, many women prisoners in Italy are sex workers or women who occasionally provide sex for money. Often this is because they need money to finance their drug use, or they are illegal migrants being blackmailed by those who brought them to Italy.⁷ According to a staff member at San Vittore, however, not many women there are imprisoned for prostitution as the police do not pay much attention to it; it is not regarded as a big problem. Prostitution only draws attention if it is related to other crimes such as human trafficking or drugs. Indeed, the majority of offences committed by women in San Vittore are drug-related (trafficking, selling etc).

Length of sentences

Seventy-one per cent of women serving a sentence of six months or less are foreign nationals.⁸

The average time spent in San Vittore by women prisoners is six months (this is the time they spend in prison and is not necessarily the same as the length of their sentence). Many women in San Vittore are re-offenders.

Figure 1, below, shows that in September 2005 nearly fifty per cent of women in prison in Italy received a sentence of between one and five years. More than forty per cent of women's sentences were for at least six years.

Figure 2, below, shows a variety in the social status of the same women. Forty-seven per cent of the women were single, thirty per cent were married and eighteen per cent were divorced or widowed. Information was unavailable for the remaining five per cent of the women.

⁶ *Italian Ministry of Justice* [on-line], accessed 16 March 2007, available at http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *Italian Ministry of Justice*, available at http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

Figure 1 : Distribution by sentence length of women in prison in Italy, September 2005

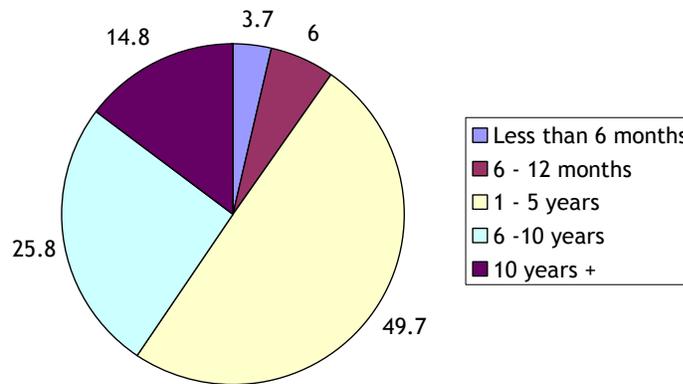


Figure 1: Source: Website of the Italian Ministry of Justice, http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

Social Status

Figure 2 : Social status of women prisoners in Italy, September 2005

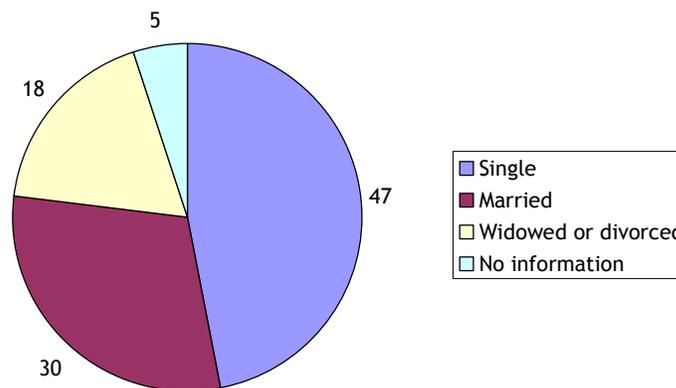


Figure 2: Source: Website of the Italian Ministry of Justice, http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

3. Women awaiting trial

In San Vittore, the cells of prisoners awaiting trial are only unlocked for four hours a day (two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon). During this time they can do things such as go to an outdoor sports area, take part in a workshop, have a shower, wash their clothes or see their lawyer. They are not allowed to leave the prison to work. The sports area for

prisoners awaiting trial is the size of a basketball court, and is partly open air and partly covered. It is modern and has an Astroturf surface. Prisoners can come here to play sports and do exercise classes.

4. Convicted prisoners

At San Vittore there is a small penal section where the women (twenty-two at time of visit) are serving sentences of up to ten years. They have different rights and a different daily routine compared to prisoners awaiting trial or those with serious drug problems. Cell doors on the penal section are unlocked between 09:00 and 21:00 or 22:00, and some prisoners are allowed to leave prison to go to work. Others take part in workshops, attend classes and work within the prison. There is a courtyard where penal prisoners may go, but this is not used much (and hence not very well looked after) since the women have the opportunity to do other things. In the penal section there are women sentenced for international drug trafficking, robbery (often drugs-related) and attempted murder.

5. Contact with the outside world

Letters and telephone calls

Prisoners at San Vittore are entitled to make two telephone calls a month.

Visits

The women at San Vittore are entitled to six hours of visits a month from family and friends. These are usually taken one hour at a time but can be combined into two or three-hour slots if the visitor can give a special reason. For circumstances in which the visitor has to travel a long distance to reach the prison, all six hours can be taken at once. The director may grant the prisoner additional visits in special circumstances such as seeing a child. All visits are observed by prison guards.

Due to lack of space the visiting room was small and could only hold sixteen people in total (four plastic tables with four seats around each one). This meant that prisoners have to wait for seats to become available before being able to see their visitor. Physical contact is allowed between prisoners and their guests. The visiting area had been decorated with murals made by prisoners who attended a painting class. We found them very professional and the effect on the visiting area is impressive, standing out as a welcoming atmosphere in contrast with the rest of the surroundings.

We were told that, although cramped, the visiting room was an improvement on previous visiting facilities in which there was a glass partition between prisoners and their visitors and that there used to be a lot of marble in the room which gave it a morgue-like quality.

According to the prison, visits with children take place two Sundays each month in the small garden in the women's section. In the winter they take place in a room in the men's section. There is no separate room for prisoners to have visits from their children due to lack of space.

For visits between prisoners and their lawyers or NGO volunteers there were two large cubicles, each of which contained a table and two chairs. The cubicles had large windows looking out onto a larger room in which a guard sat, and who could thus observe them. This is because under Italian law all visits must be observed at all times. For this reason no conjugal visits are allowed for either male or female visitors.

Other

At San Vittore there is a workshop run by an NGO called Bambinisenzasbarre which is available to both foreign national and Italian mothers. Here they can make 'relational objects' for their children on the outside such as photo frames, soft toys etc. which are then sent to the children, helping to maintain the mother-child relationship. This is particularly important for foreign national women and their children who live in a different country.⁹

6. Motherhood in prison

Pregnancy and birth

Often there are pregnant women in prison but this is a very delicate matter as by Italian law there should not be. Of course, if a woman is arrested and it is not discovered straightaway that she is pregnant then she may spend a short time in prison. If pregnant, then the woman needs to make a request to be released and can do this at her first appearance in court. Women should not be in prison for long periods of time when they are pregnant and do not give birth whilst in prison. They may be sent to prison with or without their child after giving birth.¹⁰

Babies in prison

If there are suitable facilities such as a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU), babies may stay with their mothers in Italian prisons until the age of three, at which point they are taken away. If there is no suitable family member or friend who is able to look after the child, then the courts decide where the baby will go.

In 2001 a law came into force in Italy called the Finocchiaro law. This introduced the opportunity for special house arrest for mothers of children under the age of ten for women who have served one third of their sentence. The law, although innovative in scope, has not been extensively applied as many imprisoned mothers do not meet the required conditions. Many of them spend long periods in prison awaiting trial but the law cannot be applied until they have actually been sentenced.¹¹

There were sixty children below the age of three in Italian prisons at 31 December 2004 and twenty-four women prisoners were pregnant at that time.¹²

The Commissioner for Human Rights visited the Venice-Giudecca women's prison and assessed the special arrangements made for young mothers.¹³ At the time, ten children were living in the prison with their mothers and there were also alternatives to children living in prison such as care provided by families. The prison has a day nursery, and has set up a programme to prepare mothers for when the child has to leave at the age of three. The programme also helps them to find suitable accommodation for their children outside as most of the mothers have no

⁹ Director of Bambinisenzasbarre, interview held during QCEA visit to San Vittore prison, Milan, 22 May 2006. Bambinisenzasbarre is an NGO working with imprisoned parents at San Vittore prison.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Liz Ayre, Kate Philbrick and Marielle Reiss (eds.), European Committee on Children of Imprisoned Parents (Eurochips), '*Children of Imprisoned Parents - European perspectives on Best Practice*' (April 2006), p. 113.

¹² Report by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles (2005)

¹³ *ibid.*

relatives living nearby. Children who stay with their mothers in prison sometimes get better health treatment than they would outside. The Commissioner had the impression that staff members were very attentive to the needs of the children.

Within the women's section at San Vittore there is a MBU with places for eight mothers and their babies. There are usually between four and eight mothers living there with their babies and at the time of the visit a woman prisoner had just arrived with a seven month old child, bringing the number to five mothers and babies.

In the MBU there is a communal room, a kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. The walls of the large communal room are painted with different cartoon characters (the mothers did the decorating themselves). One corner of the room is dedicated to the children and contains a small play house, bean bags and shelves of toys. At the side of the room was a spacious kitchen with stainless steel surfaces on which the mothers could prepare food for the children.

The two bedrooms each had four beds in and four cots. The one bedroom we saw was light and airy but it was not very spacious. In the bathroom there were two toilet cubicles and a shower. As well as a large sink in which to wash hands, there was a separate large sink for bathing the babies. There was also a washing machine and baby changing mat.

Mothers and their babies can go to the garden during the day. It had a lot of plants in and was very green and also contained some children's playing equipment (roundabout, climbing frame).

The prison tries to make the children's lives as normal as possible, and every day the children are taken out of the prison by staff. However, there is no crèche where the mothers from the Mother and Baby Unit can leave their children if they want to work.

At the prison there is a paediatric nurse and within the MBU there is an expert who is specialised in child abuse.

When the child has to leave the prison s/he will be placed with relatives wherever possible otherwise the courts will decide where the baby should go (often to a foster home or orphanage). Prison officials said that separation from a child when it reaches three years is very difficult.

Children on the outside

We were told that almost all the women prisoners at San Vittore probably have children on the outside, but that many women are afraid to tell the authorities for fear of the consequences for their children. The prison is only aware of the children who come to visit their mothers in prison and of those who are declared by the mothers.

At the time of the visit one woman in the MBU had six other children on the outside.

Bambinsenzaresbarre (BSS) is an NGO which works with imprisoned parents at San Vittore and their children on the outside. In an interview, the director explained to us the difference between the situation when a mother is imprisoned and when a father is imprisoned:

For the women prisoners, imprisonment often means that an emergency solution is needed for the child as they have nobody to look after them. The child has to go into an institution if there is no other option and this means that there may be a period of time when there is no contact between the mother and the child. BSS acts as a mediator between the outside and the inside. This makes it easier for the mother and child from a bureaucratic view and the mothers are not

as frightened to talk to an NGO as they are not in an institutional role. There are usually two steps for BBS:

1. Dealing with the woman's immediate concerns such as where the child is and who s/he is being looked after by.
2. Working with the mother and talking about her relationship with the child and how the mother can maintain the relationship as well as possible whilst in prison.

Often the imprisoned mother will not get to see the child for a long time and BSS can help prepare the mother for the meeting and how the child is going to react to seeing her such as being angry or confused.

For the imprisoned fathers there is not usually the same emergency situation as when the mother is imprisoned. Often the parents separate when the husband goes to jail and this results in a different, but difficult situation. BSS works at mediation for the family. In order for the child to visit their father in prison, authorisation is needed from the mother. BSS can help calm the mother who may be angry and explain to them that it is very important for the child to visit their father. A forgotten or neglected parent in this respect is also not healthy for the child. Even if the child does not feel the need to visit their parent it is still damaging psychologically for them to have this 'missing part'.

In the case of either the mother or father being imprisoned, if the child remains with their own family, then BSS can also help prepare them for visits. If they are in an institution, then BSS can liaise with the people in the institution responsible for the child and inform them about the visit procedures and stress the importance of the meeting for both the parent and the child.¹⁴

7. Health

The Commissioner for Human Rights said that more money needs to be spent on prisoners' health and that access to health care is a major problem for prisoners in general. Prison pharmacies seem unable to meet the prisoners' needs and even seeing the prison doctor involves a wait of several days. This wait may run to several weeks, when an outside specialist is needed, making it extremely difficult to for some prisoners to see one.¹⁵

According to Zoia: 'Where it does exist, health care provision is often directed more towards the needs of male prisoners...As a result of this, women on small sections as part of a larger male prison can experience difficulty in accessing proper health care, and often have to wait longer to see a doctor or to have medical screening tests.'

The infirmary in the women's section at San Vittore is small with two doctors' rooms and four cells, several containing more than one bed. The facilities looked very basic. The infirmary is also used to hold prisoners in solitary confinement, both for health (physical and mental) and for disciplinary reasons or for necessities arising from their court case.

On arrival the women are given a medical check-up which may include a voluntary HIV/AIDS test and an evaluation by a psychologist. The psychologist identifies women at risk and as a result identifies certain things that they are not allowed to purchase which may be used to self-harm (these may be items as simple as tights). However, since their cell mates may be able to buy these things, there is no way of ensuring that a prisoner will definitely not be able to get hold of certain things. This evaluation of the prisoners is not routinely repeated.

¹⁴ Director of Bambinisenzasbarre, interview held during QCEA visit to San Vittore prison, Milan, 22 May 2006.

¹⁵ Report by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles (2005)

However, at the end of each shift the psychologist will write up any particular events that occurred or any observations as a way of monitoring the women.

Although there are female medical staff members, it is not always possible for women to be seen by one. We were told that this is sometimes a problem for Muslim women.

Mental health (including self-harm and suicide)

According to Zoia, women prisoners are more psychologically vulnerable than male prisoners.¹⁶

At San Vittore we were told that women have more problems with depression than male prisoners, and that male prisoners are more violent and thus have more problems with self-harm and suicide. During the visit to the MBU, the prison official pointed out that there are problems with prisoners in the unit who are depressed because of the effect it has on the child (or children) with them.

The female guard and pedagogue told us that the women prisoners are more subject to depression, which is harder to recognise and deal with. This is a problem as it can be a prelude to self-harm and suicide. They also said that women fall into depression easily and that depression can also be a particular problem for foreign national prisoners who are far away from their families and cultures.

HIV and sexual health

A higher proportion of women prisoners than male prisoners present multiple problems related to sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁷

Substance addiction

‘Italy acknowledges the importance of providing drug treatment and rehabilitation making both harm-reduction and demand-reduction programmes available. Italy has specialized external teams providing drug services that are controlled by the National Health System and delivered by community drug addiction teams, called Servizio Tossicodipendenze (SERT).’¹⁸

Research indicates that the proportion of drug addiction and abuse among women prisoners is higher than among male prisoners in Italy and that a higher proportion of women than men present multiple problems relating to drug use.¹⁹ In June 2005, there were 668 women in prison with drug addiction problems, twenty-three per cent of the total female prison population in Italy.²⁰

An entire floor of the women’s wing at San Vittore is for prisoners with drug problems, who are kept separately from other prisoners. If a woman has a problem with drug addiction she will be put in a special cell on her own and watched over by a nurse. She will also be given drug substitutes and psychological assistance. This is an improvement on the past situation where a

¹⁶ D. Zoia, *Women and health care in prison: an overview of the experiences of imprisoned women in Italy*, pp. 117-126.

¹⁷ Zoia, *Women and health care in prison*, pp. 117-126.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Database of the ‘Osservatorio Regionale sulla popolazione detenuta’, currently being printed by the Bulletin of the Osservatorio

woman would just have to go 'cold turkey',²¹ often in a cell with other prisoners. Some of these other prisoners may previously have had problems with drugs and may have had to go 'cold turkey' themselves, making the experience very difficult for everyone.

8. Education, work and training

On his prison visits in Italy the Commissioner for Human Rights was told by prison directors that the possibilities of working in prison are limited by the regulations and by budgetary constraints and that the legal requirement to pay prisoners the full minimum wage made it difficult to find and finance work that was economically competitive.²²

In the women's prison at Giudecca prison in Venice there are three workshops (organic vegetables, doing laundry for hotels and producing bath products), which are directly connected with tourism, Venice's main economy. The 'project is a source of pride to both authorities and prisoners, but still has too few places to meet the demand - a problem which the introduction of job-sharing has partly solved.'²³ The prison is an open prison where women are allowed out of their cells from 08:00 - 20:00. At the end of September 2006 it held fifty-nine women. Some women also work as tailors.²⁴

At San Vittore all women prisoners have to work in theory but in practice there is not enough work to go around. Each woman has to make a list of her requests in terms of what she would like to do and these requests are accommodated wherever possible. We were told that some women are not interested in working.

Work options there include working in a call centre within the prison, doing data-inputting, working in a co-operative within the prison which makes clothes, or working outside the prison (only available for convicted prisoners). Women are paid for their work. In the co-operative women do sewing for outside companies. There is also a workshop outside the prison where women from the penal section can go to work during the day and where they may be able to find work after release. They are not encouraged to stay on there too long after release however, as the prison wants to be able to provide work for the prisoners still at San Vittore and for those released more recently. Any profit that the internal workshop makes is divided equally among the prisoners who work there and who are partners in the co-operative. They receive the money as soon as it is earned but there is a spending limit of 420 euros per month. This is accessed by using a savings book. The co-operative was large, with a lot of natural light coming through the windows and a relaxed atmosphere. Women taking education courses at the prison can work in the workshop if this does not clash with the times of their classes.

The call centre was set up by a private external sponsor and has been running for two years. The initiative first began in the men's section and the part in the women's section is smaller. The prisoners work as operators for telephone enquiry services and receive training beforehand. There are two shifts with ten women working in the morning and ten in the afternoon.

²¹ A slang expression describing the actions of a person who gives up a habit or addiction all at once, rather than gradually (easing the process through tapering off or using supplemental medication). Sudden withdrawal from certain drugs can be extremely dangerous (even life-threatening), although in most cases the experience of going 'cold turkey' may be extremely unpleasant but not dangerous.

²² Report by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles (2005)

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *Italian Ministry of Justice*, available at

http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

9. Minority groups

Juveniles

According to ICPS, juvenile prisoners accounted for 0.7 per cent of the prison population at the end of 2005.

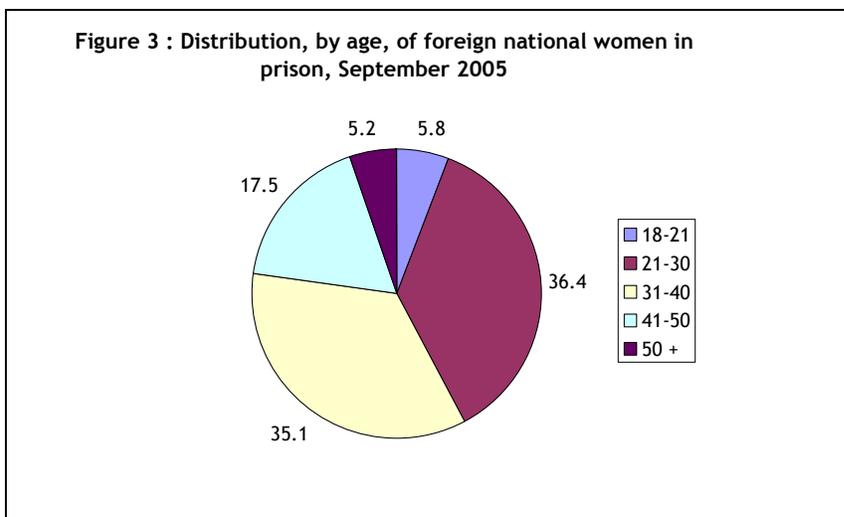
The age of criminal liability is fourteen but children may be arrested and detained awaiting trial only for offences carrying prison sentences in excess of nine years, or other 'serious' crimes (rape, aggravated theft etc.). The report of the Commissioner for Human Rights noted Italy's special arrangements for young offenders which include separate courts for minors, with specialised investigating judges and prosecutors, and a section for minors in appeal courts.

There are seventeen young offenders' prisons in Italy, four of which have sections for girls. Juvenile crime is commonest in Northern and Central Italy, but juvenile detention centres are located in the south.²⁵

Foreign nationals and ethnic minorities

According to ICPS, foreign prisoners accounted for 33.5 per cent of the total prison population at the end of 2005.²⁶ Foreign prisoners come from more than ten geographic areas and the number of migrant women prisoners has been constantly increasing during the last ten years.²⁷

Foreign national women make up 46.3 per cent of the total number of women in prison (the equivalent figure for the male prisoners is thirty-two per cent). Women prisoners make up 6.7 per cent of the total number of foreign national prisoners.²⁸



²⁵ Report by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles (2005)

²⁶ *International Centre for Prison Studies*, World Prison Brief, Prison Brief for Italy [on-line], accessed 16 March 2007, available at <http://www.prisonstudies.org/>

²⁷ Zoia, *Women and health care in prison*, pp. 117-126.

²⁸ *Italian Ministry of Justice*, available at http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

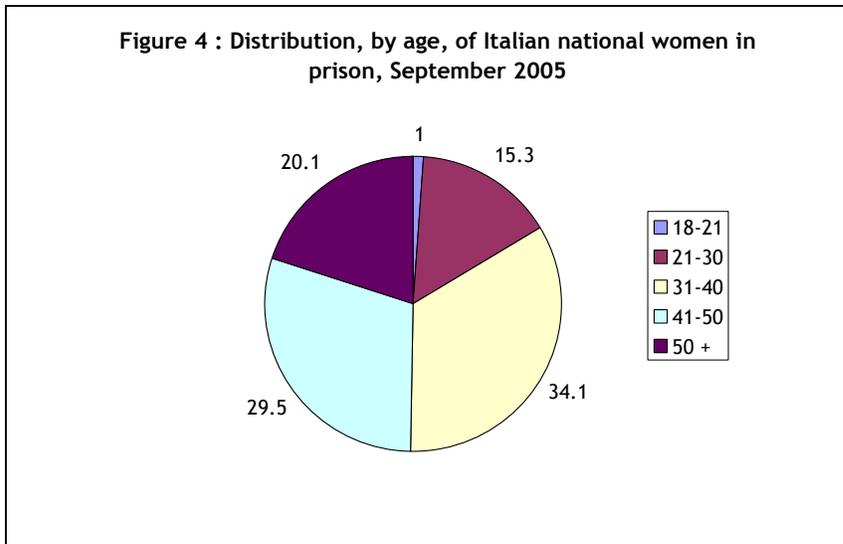


Figure 3 and Figure 4: Source: website of the Italian Ministry of Justice, available at http://www.giustizia.it/statistiche/statistiche_dap/dap_indice.htm

From the pie charts it can be seen that only 16.3 per cent of Italian national women in prison are between eighteen to thirty years old while foreign national prisoners within the same age range make up 42.2 per cent of the total of foreign national women in prison in Italy.

Eighty per cent of the prisoners at San Vittore were foreign nationals at the time of the visit.

When asked about the problems facing the prison because of its large proportion of foreign nationals, the governor of San Vittore said that problems do arise when there are prisoners who are not able to speak Italian and the prison has no interpreters for their language. In these circumstances the prison has to try and get interpreters from outside. The fact that foreign prisoners do not receive visits from family and friends also makes prison life harder for them.

At San Vittore there are quite a number of people from volunteer organisations and NGOs who come in to work with the foreign national prisoners.

Other

Among the women prisoners in Italy, Roma women, who have strong family ties and rules, represent a small community. A high proportion of Roma women have small children with them and many will also have young children at home, for whom they feel responsible, causing additional anxiety and stress.²⁹

10. Security and punishment

A prison police corps, the Polizia Penitenziaria, is responsible for security in Italian prisons. Female prisons and female sections are entirely managed by women, but the organisation and the rules that govern them are the same for men and women, with no particular allowance for gender.³⁰

²⁹ Zoia, *Women and health care in prison*, pp. 117-126.

³⁰ *ibid.*

11. Staff and management

The following information comes from a visit to the women's section of San Vittore prison.

Staff in the women's section include a psychologist, criminologist, educational personnel, doctors, nurses, guards, and volunteers from NGOs and other outside organisations. In addition, some nuns volunteer in the prison. Cooperation and coordination with volunteer workers is close and the services provided by volunteers are important to the functioning of the prison.

We spoke briefly with a male guard and more extensively with a female guard who had been working at San Vittore for a long time. Only female guards are allowed to work in the women's section. We were told that an environment in which only women are present can be problematic.

Although not working in the women's section, the male guard we spoke to was sometimes in contact with female prisoners when they were in transit. Although there has to be a female guard present as well, the male guard said he had had no special training on dealing with women prisoners (restraint etc.).

The female guard said that there was a positive relationship between the prisoners and the guards. She had been working as a guard for over twenty years and pointed out that the role of prison guards had changed dramatically over that time. Services provided within the prison have increased since she started and a lot of services that guards used to provide informally (such as handling prisoners with drug problems, psychological support for depressed prisoners and the distribution of medicine etc.) are now provided by other prison personnel and volunteer organisations.

There is no shortage of guards because of high unemployment in Italy and many guards come from the South as unemployment is higher there. Recruitment for prison guards is similar to that for the police force. Candidates have to do a national public exam and those with the best marks are chosen. In addition, certain criteria apply to candidates; they have to be at least twenty-six years old, above a certain height and in good health etc. Once they are chosen they have to do a six-month course in which they learn about the prison system, the law, rights of prisoners, visiting procedures etc. Guards also have training in firearms, because although guards do not carry firearms in the prison they are armed whenever they take prisoners elsewhere, for example to a hospital appointment or to court.

It is not uncommon for people to move from southern Italy to the North to find jobs. State jobs such as prison work are popular because there is a possibility of requesting a transfer to one's home city after hiring and an initial work period. A lot of people find it difficult living so far away from home and hope that they will have an opportunity to move back south. Some guards are as much as 1,000 kilometres from home and find the job harder as they do not have support from their family. They have a difficult time in Milan, and are often sick and absent from work. Work as a prison guard is psychologically demanding.

The role of guards is to make sure there is no violence or disruption amongst prisoners and to unlock cells and escort prisoners between different areas. Sometimes the guards will chat to the prisoners if, for example, someone is looking unhappy, but generally this side of things is left to professional psychologists and social workers.

If there is a problem between two prisoners or one reports abuse from the guards, then the prisoner(s) in question can ask to speak to the director of the prison. If there is a serious problem then the prisoner may be transferred to another institution. If there is a problem between prisoners in the same cell then one may have to change cells. A committee involving the psychologist can decide on punishment of prisoners if they misbehave. We were not made

aware on the visit of any punishment cells or what a typical punishment would involve. The impression though was that there were rarely cases in which prisoners needed to be punished and we were told that there have only been a few cases of real abuse (whether that meant between prisoners or between guards and prisoners was not clear).

We were told that in terms of security, the men's section is more rigid than the women's. In the women's section there are a lot of different activities and on the whole there is much more opportunity for the prisoners to leave their cells.

The pedagogue told us that there is much more 'sensitivity' around the women prisoners. Although the prison was designed and organised to detain men, the women's section is very different. She said it would be much better if women were detained in an institution that was created specifically for them and it is very difficult to work with the women in this 'male reality', where the rules and the environment are designed for and by males.