

Women participation in the labour market: current situation and related policy

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The current situation in Italy

In the European context Italy distinguishes itself for the peculiarity of its labour market that is still characterized by remarkable gender differences. Indeed, in the past years despite having witnessed a constant growth in the overall Italian employment rate, and especially in that of women, the objectives set out in the Lisbon Strategy have not yet been attained (total employment at 70% and women employment at 60%).

Table 1. Employment rates 15-64 years by sex and geographical area. Deviation from 2010 Lisbon targets. Year 2007

Geographical area	Percentage			Deviation from the 2010 Lisbon targets	
	M/F	Males	Females	M/F	Females
Italy	58.7	70.7	46.6	-11.3	-13.4
North	66.7	76.3	56.8	-3.3	-3.2
<i>North-west</i>	66.0	75.4	56.4	-4.0	-3.6
<i>North-east</i>	67.6	77.5	57.5	-2.4	-2.5
Centre	62.3	73.0	51.8	-7.7	-8.2
South	46.5	62.2	31.1	-23.5	-28.9

Source: Istat, Labour force survey 2007

The last labour force survey data (ISTAT¹ 2nd quarter 2008 - see Statistical Annex Table 7) show a further increase in women's employment rate (from 46.8% to 47.5% in one year time), but these figures don't illustrate a homogeneous trend in the whole country since the females' employment rate in the North regions reaches 57.8%, very near to the Lisbon target, while that one in the South is still very far from its attainment (31.8%). Furthermore, the gender gap in employment rates is larger than 20.0 percentage points (the total employment rate for men is 70.8%).

When looking at the employment rates of the women in the various age cohorts it is possible to remark that the highest employment rate is recorded by women between 25 and 54 years (respectively: 59.0% for the women in the cohort 25-34 and 59.8% for the women in the cohort 35-54) who are supposed to be in their top reproductive and care giving years.

As far as part time work is concerned 27.2% of the employed women were working in 2007 on a part time basis while men part-timers represented the 4.4% of all men workers. The gender gap

¹ The Italian National Institute of Statistics.

in part time employment rates is evident and its persistence is a source of concern. In fact, although recourse to flexible working arrangements may reflect personal preferences and may help women to re-enter and stay in the labour market (as well as boost productivity, enhance employees' satisfaction and employers' reputation), the fact that far more women than men make use of such arrangements creates a gender imbalance which has a negative impact on women's position in the workplace and their economic independence. This type of contract, indeed, has a number of potential drawbacks. Notably it is associated with lower wages than a full-time contract, lower chances of promotion, and lower investment in training.

Table 2 Part time employment rate by sex and geographical area. Year 2007

Geographical area	Absolute	Changes on previous years	
		2006	2007
Italy	2,421	13.5	14.1
Males	428	4.0	4.4
Females	1,993	26.4	27.2
North	1,323	14.3	14.9
<i>North-west</i>	741	13.7	14.4
<i>North-east</i>	582	15.2	15.5
Centre	530	14.9	15.1
South	569	11.2	11.9

Source: Istat, Labour force survey 2007

As pointed out both in the Host country paper and in the Discussion paper, women participation in the labour market varies strongly with the increasing of the family members. According to the Eurostat labour force survey of 2005, in Italy 6 out of 10 women without children have got an employ (64.5%) while only 3 out of 10 women with more than one child age 0-14 are still working outside the home (35.6%).

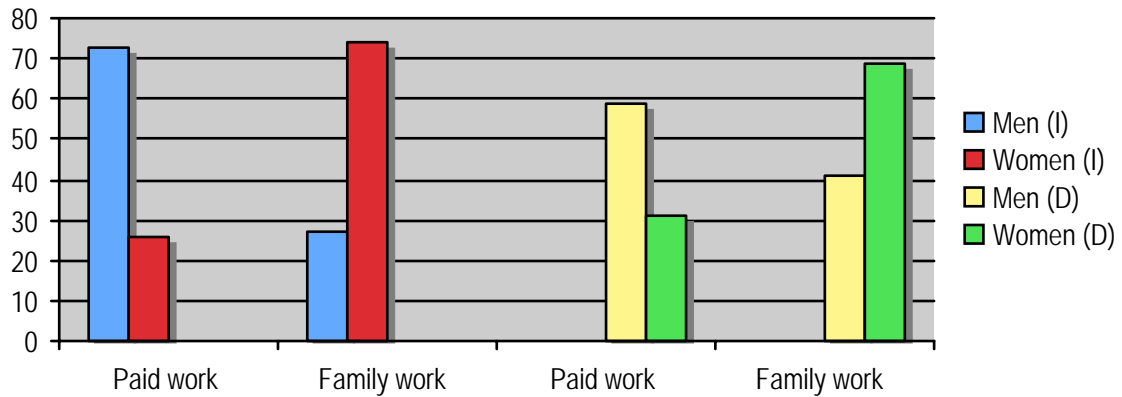
Table 3 Employment rate of women (25-49 years) according to the number children. Year 2005

Country	Without children	One child 0-14 yrs	Two children 0-14 years	Three or more children 0-14 years	One child 0-2 years	Two children the youngest 0-2 years	Three or more children the youngest 0-2 years
Italy	64.5	59.0	50.6	35.6	59.6	48.0	33.6
Germany	79.9	66.8	56.5	39.6	45.8	36.0	25.7
EU-25	75.5	68.7	61.9	45.1	62.3	50.9	34.8
EU-15	75.8	68.5	62.0	45.5	64.9	52.8	36.0

Source: EUROSTAT, Labour force survey 2005

Another similarity between the German and the Italian situation can be identified in the persistence of rigid gender stereotypes associated with the sharing of roles within spouses/couples. Italian women still perform the high majority of family care work (5.20 hours per day) while men contribute to the care of children and housework for less than two hours per day (1.35 hours).

Graph.1 Time devoted to paid work and family work by men and women (Italy and Germany). Year 2006



Source: EUROSTAT, 2006

All these figures indicate that Italian women still don't succeed in balancing family responsibilities with professional life and even worse that the most of them have given up their ambition of being carers and workers at the same time (Italy shows one of the lowest fertility rate in Europe).

Parental leave and stereotypes

The Law 8th March 2000, n. 53 has transformed the legal framework related to maternity leave introducing paternity and parental leave in Italy. A too short period (eight years) has lapsed since the coming into force of the Law to remark wide-ranging changes in family/social behaviours and organisational strategies of both private companies and public administrations. It is however possible to gather some indications on trends looking at the data provided by the National Institution for Social Security. These data refer to parental leaves paid by the Institution itself in the period 2002-2003, therefore immediately after the Law's approval.

Parental leave were utilised mostly by working mothers: 96.8% in 2003 and 95,3% in 2002 (99,2% for children 0-11 months and 98,4% for children 1 year old).

As the age of the children grows, it increases the number of fathers taking parental leave, although it remains below 50,0% of all paid leaves granted by the Institution (i.e.: in 2003 the 21,6% and the 44,0% of all parental leave were taken by fathers with children aged 2-3 years).

Data seem to confirm the attitude of Italian people to maintain stereotyped roles for parents: mothers seem to be still considered major responsible for family care, whereas fathers continue to be considered as the breadwinners.

Policies

In order to improve women employment rates and to reduce the existing gender gaps in the labour market, the Italian Government has confirmed gender equality on the labour market as a priority.

Both the National Reform Plan for 2007 and, lately, the Libro Verde on the future of the social model², published in July 2008, point out the need for specific policies to encourage women inclusion in employment especially those who never entered the labour market and those who have enjoyed a career break due to family duties. In the Libro Verde great evidence is also given to the need of a global review of the Italian Welfare System to avoid social exclusion of women and to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life.

The causes of the exclusion of Italian women from employment are identified as follows:

- Lack of acknowledgement in the society of the fundamental role that women can play as medium of economic and social development;
- Weakness of the welfare system;
- Unequal distribution of family responsibilities between partners;
- Persistence of stereotyped social roles for women and men;
- Lack of education and training for women who return to work after a family related employment break;
- Lack of willingness by the side of employers in reorganizing work and working hours in a more flexible manner with a view to the reconciliation of work and private life of their employees.

With the aim of increasing and improving women participation in the labour market the Italian Government has drawn up a four steps strategy:

1. Promotion of women work among employers (i.e. financial incentives for the recruitment of women jobseekers who live in the depressed areas of the Country, such as the exemption of the employers from the payment of social contribution);
2. Promotion of a gender friendly approach in guidance and lifelong learning within public employment services to sustain women's return in the labour market (i.e. implementation of the legislative decree n.181/2000 as modified and integrated by the legislative decree n.297/2002 according to which PES must offer to all women/men jobseekers a set of integrated services aimed to their full and prompt reinsertion in the labour market within 3 months from their first contact with the PES)

² 'La vita buona nella società attiva. Libro Verde sul futuro del modello sociale', Ministero del lavoro, della salute e delle politiche sociali, 25 luglio 2008.

3. Increase in the number and improvement of quality of childcare services as well as of care services for the other dependants that can facilitate the reconciliation of professional and family life (i.e. the National Extraordinary Plan for nurseries and innovative socio-educational services that is implemented by the Department for Family Policies of the Presidency Council in cooperation with local administrations, total amount €156,462,000,00);
4. Incentives to female entrepreneurship (i.e. law n. 215/1992, currently under revision, promotes positive actions for the start up of firms and small enterprises by the side of women).

All these policies are supported by the actions implemented and co-financed in the framework of the regional and national Operational Programmes of the Structural Funds specifically devoted to: occupational inclusion and vocational guidance of women as well as business start up by the side of women.

Reconciliation of professional life and family life in Italy. Best Practices.

In Italy, a great input to the modernization of the internal organization of private companies with the main goal of fostering reconciliation of professional and family life has been given by Law 53/2000 that promotes the balance between work, family care, training and interpersonal relation by means of parental leave and the extension of the support to parents of disable children, the institution of continuous training leave and the extension of training leave, the coordination of the city-times organization and the promotion of the use of time for social solidarity. The actions/projects funded by this Law are promoted by private companies with the aim of implementing renewed internal organization (production/services/ timesheets/etc.) for the bettering of their employees (men/women) quality of life.

It is possible to identify a number of projects that have proposed measures, tools, and sometimes patterns, to reconcile professional and private life. When classifying and describing them, it has been taken into account, beyond this aspect, the aims for which they have been ideated and implemented and it has been chosen to present them focusing on the goals and concrete practices implemented:

- reconciliation and work organization – actions aiming at reducing or organising times and organization of work (part-time, flexibility, tele-work, etc.) differently;
- reconciliation, children's care and care sharing - actions aiming at reducing or facilitating the timetable of family and children care (leave, voucher, kindergarten, etc.);
- reconciliation and scheduling of city-times – actions aiming at reshaping, often personalizing, city-times through the experiencing of new modalities in the provision of services,
- reconciliation and spare time – actions finalized at gaining spare time (flexi-time).

The identified classification has been realised by pointing out, within each project, the main activity, taking into account that, in any case, they are integrated actions intervening on a complex

system such as that of reconciliation of work and private life, within which each aspect is closely linked to the others.

A further remark can be made about the role played by the European Union in this field. The European Union, in fact, has been on the one side a source of stimulus and input in facing the theme of reconciliation of work-time and personal-time and on the other side, it has provided the financial tools thanks to which it has been possible to implement some of the cited projects (ESF and Initiative EQUAL).

As far as the main topic of the Peer review is concerned the project implemented by IKEA and funded by art.9 of the Law 53/2000 "Progetto Work-Life" can be quoted. The action sprang from the aspiration, surveyed among the personnel re-entering from a maternity/parental leave, to reinsert themselves in an adequate way within the working context and not to suspend the path to professional development because of the absence from work due to family care reasons. The action foresaw the planning of a link between employees on parental/ maternity leave and the enterprise first, link that operated through information, and afterwards by means of a training phase within the enterprise. Information was addressed to all employees on a leave and concerned the performances of IKEA's activity and of one's relevant department/ store during the leave period. A contact person was identified within the enterprise and was in charge to keep updated the employees on leave throughout the period of absence. Training on return to work, on the job and in class, took place during the working hours. The training patterns were differentiated on the basis of the professional positions and roles covered within the enterprise. Each employee on return from the leave examined his/her training plan and the topics foreseen during the training/ updating activity within one's relevant department/service. In this way, the contact between employee and enterprise was not interrupted and the resulting benefits concerned both the employee, who could carry on his/ her professional development, and the Company, that sensibly lessened the risks, in terms of productivity, connected to long absences from the work station.

Another example of project funded by the art.9 of the Law 53/2000 is that one of the 'Orari a isole'. It was implemented by *Ipercoop of Imola*, a big cooperative enterprise in food distribution, that has addressed the need to introduce in the corporate network for the sale department a new organizational pattern highly flexible and able to reconcile the presence at job of the employees both men and women, with their families' needs. In this aim, individual needs have been considered a priority opposite to corporate organizational needs in the definition of daily and weekly timetables. The reference pattern is that of "time-scheduled isles" a work organizational system introducing elements of flexibility and time-schedule shaping. In particular, it has been possible for men and women employees working at the checkout counters to build a personalized flexible daily and weekly time-schedule, choosing the time-shifts more suitable to his/her family and social needs, and after having agreed the modification with their colleagues, finally reconciling children care and professional tasks and engagements. The intervention was articulated in different phases: preliminary analysis of the existing situation; subdivision of the supermarket cashiers in "isles" (meaning groups of 15/25 people on the base of complementarities); definition of the needs in covering clients fluxes by the person in charge of the checkout counters coordination; declaration on the part of each cashier of the time-shifts he/she is willing to cover throughout the week; verification of the correspondence between personal choices and covering of all scheduled shifts; adjustments of the differences by means of agreements among colleagues or support by the side of a moderator appointed in rotation.

The project 'Futura', co-financed by the ESF, has been addressed to women mothers of children younger than 15 yrs or with elderly or disabled family members living in the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia. It aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of family care burdens and working/training times. It was conceived with a wide range of objectives, although, on the operational plan, it focused on the network of the social services of support. The main characteristics of the project were the capillarity of the networks of counters collecting the demands for services and the identification of the women beneficiaries. Every 15 days a list of applicants/eligible persons was elaborated. These people were granted a voucher that, without involving any money transfer, allowed them to acquire care services for their children or elderly or disabled family members. In this way, the services that were distributed corresponded to the assigned value of the voucher and they could be both services to the persons (at home or in structures), and services to the environmental and living context of the persons needing care (cleanings, meals, accompanying). Some women operators, specifically trained, active in the various areas of the region, met the applicant women in order to orient them and to agree the typologies and the modalities of distribution of the services. Afterwards, they activated the social cooperatives, which were the main supplier of social services. This project is particularly interesting because, in the attempt to propose reconciliation measures, it delineates typologies for labour policies, suggesting integrated and personalized intervention.

Transferability of the German policy to the Italian context

As far as the transferability of the German policies and proposed model to the Italian context is concerned, it must be recalled that the quoted 'Libro Verde' on the future of social model foresees the revision of the entire welfare system (i.e. social shock absorbers). This will bring Italy to carefully observe all policies successfully implemented in other member states with the aim of increasing women participation on the labour market, most of all of those women who have never entered it or who have experienced a long break.

The three pillars model of the Perspektive Wiedereinstieg Programme: PES, local level and ESF funding has been designed according to the German federal context that is very similar to the Italian one. In particular Italy could be interested in the cooperation agreements implemented amongst the central and the local levels since the employment policies, and the related social services, are developed by the Regions and differ greatly according to the relevant geographical area, as shown before.

Italy can share with Germany its experience in the implementation of art.9 of the Law 53/2000 as well as the outcomes of the funded actions/project that are permanently monitored.

STATISTICAL ANNEX

Table 4 Activity rate 15-64 years by sex and geographical area. Year 2007

Geographical area	Levels		
	M/F	Males	Females
Italy	62.5	74.4	50.7
North	69.1	78.3	59.7
<i>North-west</i>	68.6	77.8	59.3
<i>North-east</i>	69.8	79.2	60.2
Centre	65.8	76.0	55.8
South	52.4	68.4	36.6

Source: Istat, Labour force survey 2007

Table 5 Unemployment rate 15-64 years by sex and geographical area. Year 2007

Geographical area	Levels		
	M/F	Males	Females
Total	6.1	4.9	7.9
North	3.5	2.6	4.7
<i>North-west</i>	3.8	3.0	4.9
<i>North-east</i>	3.1	2.1	4.5
Centre	5.3	3.9	7.2
South	11.0	8.9	14.9

Source: Istat, Labour force survey 2007

Table 6 Fixed term employment rate by sex and geographical area. Year 2007

Geographical area	Levels	Changes on previous years	
		2006	2007
Italy	2,269	13.1	13.2
Males	1,100	11.2	11.2
Females	1,169	15,8	15,9
North	963	10.5	10.8
<i>North-west</i>	506	9.7	9.9
<i>North-east</i>	457	11.7	12.2
Centre	460	13.1	13.1
South	846	17.9	17.7

Source: Istat, Labour force survey 2007

Table 7 Employment rate 15-64 years by sex and geographical area. 2nd quarter 2008

Geographical area	Percentage			Changes on 2 nd quarter 2007		
	M/F	Males	Females	M/F	Males	Females
Total	59.2	70.8	47.5	0.3	-0.2	0.7
North	67.2	76.4	57.8	0.5	0.0	1.0
<i>North-west</i>	66.6	75.9	57.2	0.5	0.3	0.8
<i>North-east</i>	67.9	77.1	58.6	0.4	-0.5	1.3
Centre	62.9	72.9	53.0	-0.3	-0.8	0.1
South	47.0	62.5	31.8	0.3	-0.2	0.7

Source: Istat, Labour force survey 2nd quarter 2008

Table 8 Time devoted to work by men and women (20-74 years). Year 2006

Country	Paid work		Family work		Total work	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Italy	4:15	1:52	1:35	5:20	5:50	7:12
Germany	3:20	1:52	2:21	4:11	5:41	6:03

Source: EUROSTAT, 2006