GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT
AND THE PRESENT STATE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
IN ITALY

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Section 1  The State of Equal Opportunities in Italy

1. Introduction

On having to draft a report on the present state of equal opportunities in Italy, I knew that it was necessary to obtain data and bibliographical references, so that what I wrote would be influenced as little as possible by my preconceptions or prejudices and instead grounded on objective information. Unfortunately, however, I soon realized that the task was anything but straightforward. Considering that the 2000 NAP stresses the lack of experts in information technology, and that as a consequence various projects have been financed to develop the sector, in order to evaluate the gender impact of these measures I asked the equal opportunities observatory of the Ministry of Education for “the number of annual enrolments at upper-secondary schools with information technology streams and the percentage of girls in this total”. I was redirected to the statistics department of the Ministry, which faxed the following reply to my enquiry:

“We wish to inform you that this Service does not possess the disaggregated data on computer streaming at secondary school that you require.”

This reply seemingly conflicts with the statement contained in the Italian Statistical Annual published by ISTAT in 1999 (p. 171):

“In 1995/1996 the Ministry of Education surveyed lower-secondary schools and in 1999/2000 will also continue with the survey of upper-secondary schools already conducted in the previous year on state schools.”

This is not an isolated case; rather, it is indicative of the difficulties still faced in Italy by those who set out to conduct analysis by gender.
2. ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) and the statistical information available

2.1 Contradictions

The lack of precise data on a sector of such topicality, and the development of which has been supported by the Ministry of Education since 1997 (ministerial circular no. 282) may be due to the only recent creation of the equal opportunities observatory at the Ministry. But it also seems that the data collected at the local level are confidential: they are processed according to ISTAT’s criteria and then appear in the Italian Statistical Annual published in Rome. The Trento Labour Agency – cited in the 1999 NAP as an example of best practice and which has an equal opportunities section and a statistical bureau – makes explicit reference in its most recent yearly publication (XV rapporto sull’occupazione in provincia di Trento, Osservatorio del mercato del lavoro) to the national Statistical Annual for a description of the situation in the local labour market. This curious situation highlights the strong centralising thrust of ISTAT, which conflicts with principles of decentralisation announced but only partially implemented and deprives local observatories of important statistical information on local labour markets. Before proceeding with my personal analysis of the quantity and quality of the statistics published by ISTAT, I cite the conclusion of a survey conducted by the well-known temporary employment agency, Adecco, on youth employment:

“The sample of the population surveyed was weighted to make it representative of that population in terms of three parameters: gender, age, and geographical area of residence. The choice of these three parameters was the only one possible given the present state of the information furnished by ISTAT. As regards all the other distinctive features of subjects (educational qualifications, occupational status, and type of occupation), ISTAT does not provide data disaggregated in a form that enables construction of a sample which takes account of all these various features”.

On reading the introductions to the various chapters of the Statistical Annual, one gains the impression that ISTAT must possess further information which is not published in the tables. It is impossible to use the outline data and summary tables provided to conduct

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1 Note that the great majority of schools in Italy are state schools.
2 http://www.adecco.it/temporaneo/4.html
exhaustive analysis. These introductions to the Statistical Annual, moreover, frequently contain obscure and contradictory remarks like the following:

“The economic situation of households is judged to have improved in 1998: 9.3% of households consider that their economic situation has got better since the previous year; 62.5% consider it to be unchanged; and 27.4% say that it has worsened, with an overall evaluation which is substantially more positive than that expressed at the end of 1997”.

One fails to understand how households can consider their economic situations to have improved, given that only 9.3% of them say that their situations have got better, while fully 27.4% say that they have worsened.

2.2 Pay

The Annual published by ISTAT includes tables which set out index numbers of hourly contracted wages and salaries by ranking and sector. But there is no table relative to effective gross hourly wages and salaries; even less is there one that breaks income data down by gender. Knowledge of actual hourly pay rates would be extremely useful, especially if the figures were disaggregated by gender and sector, and at local level. It would thus be possible to determine differences in pay for the same kind of work performed by men and women, in the various sectors and in the various areas of the country.

Reference to net hourly pay seems inappropriate, given that Italy’s tax system is progressive so that the tax levied on an hour of work depends on the total hours worked in the year. In other words, gross hourly pay remaining equal, net hourly pay is greater for those individuals who work few hours. Women, the majority of whom work part-time, therefore seem to be better paid than men who work full-time, if net pay is used as the benchmark. To sum up, the same pay levels for the same jobs mean that men and women earn the same hourly gross pay.

As all researchers on wage differentials by gender are well aware, statistical information on effective pay rates are practically non-existent in Italy. The survey carried out by the Ministry of Labour (on effective hourly pay rates and working hours) was discontinued

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3 p. 257.
many years ago, while ISTAT does no more than survey (and publish) various indicators of contractual pay levels. This explains why the columns relative to Italy in the tables on pay differentials (in the European Union countries) published by EUROSTAT have for many years been left blank.

However, it should be pointed out that two other important sources of statistical information on effective incomes and pay levels disaggregated by gender have recently become available:

1) the annual survey conducted by the Bank of Italy (on household budgets);
2) the database compiled by INPS (the national social security institute), which states the contributions paid by individual employees and therefore their incomes.

Although these databases provide valuable information for analysis of wage differentials by gender, they are not easily accessible to non-specialists (like parity advisors). Nevertheless, the recent EUROSTAT survey of pay differentials by gender (and therefore the analyses conducted and published on the topic) serve at least in part to fill an unjustifiable gap.

To conclude, one can only hope that ISTAT and the Ministry of Labour will agree to resume the survey on pay levels and working hours – with data adequately disaggregated by gender – as soon as possible.

2.3 Education

The chapter of the ISTAT Annual on education contains several tables, but they are not sufficiently disaggregated to permit analysis by gender. In particular, the tables reporting data disaggregated by type of school, on students awarded high-school diplomas in the year are not broken down further by either gender or region. The tables on enrolments at upper-secondary schools give data disaggregated by type of school but only at the national level. The same applies to the university population (enrolments and graduates). The tables giving regional data are disaggregated by gender but not by course of study, either as regards upper-secondary schools or universities. There is also a table on the employment situations, in 1998, of graduates in 1995 disaggregated at the national level by type of degree course. Once again, they are not broken down by region or by gender.
2.4 The labour force

Many of the tables for the ISTAT labour force survey furnish data disaggregated by gender, but only at the macrosectoral level (agriculture, industry and services) or at that of large aggregates of sectors (energy and water, transport and communications, etc.), many of which comprise both sectors with high proportions of male workers and ones with high proportions of female workers. A further breakdown into more specific sectors or branches would be useful.

For some sectors, there are various tables (defined at a sufficiently disaggregated level) available which furnish data with a good level of disaggregation, but they do not distinguish between males and females. Emblematic in this regard is the R&D sector, which is of increasing strategic importance. In this case, the survey gives national-level tables on R&D employees disaggregated by institutional sector, educational qualification and job, but not by gender.

The following definition of the unemployed is perplexing:

“job-seekers (excluding those who have not actively sought work in the thirty days prior to the interview).”

Admittedly, ISTAT had adopted this definition of ‘unemployment’ in order to comply with EUROSTAT recommendations, so that ‘official unemployment rates’ can be defined which are comparable across the countries of the European Union. But restricting the period in which job-search action has been taken to thirty days means that effective unemployment is underestimated, especially as regards the female component: it is well known that women are more easily discouraged in their job searches. However, there exists other statistical information, furnished by ISTAT on the labour force, which enables more detailed quantification of unemployment.

2.5 Household expenditure

With regard to spending by households, ISTAT comments thus on one of its tables:

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⁴ p. 212.
“Single-parent households (a category which includes both those with minor children and those in which the children, although of majority age, still live with often elderly parents) display levels of expenditure lower than those of other households with children.”

It is obvious that there is no comparison between the expenses of a single parent with a small child, who needs constant surveillance and expensive paediatric examinations, and those of a single parent with a teenage child, who does not need to be constantly looked after, or those of a single parent with an adult child who is normally in employment, or if s/he is a student, can find part-time or full-time temporary work. It would therefore be opportune to consider several types of single-parent household according to the age of the child.

2.6 The use of time

With regard to the use of time, the Annual includes a table entitled ‘Employed persons aged over 14 by means of transport used to travel to work, time taken and geographical area’. Neither is this table disaggregated by gender; if it were, it would be possible to verify whether women, besides their care work and domestic responsibilities, must also devote more time to travelling to work.

Apart from the few data published regularly by ISTAT on the use of time in the Statistical Annual, there is another important statistical source on this topic. In 1997, ISTAT decided to undertake a thorough multiscope survey of Italian households, collecting statistical information on all the main aspects of family structure and family life, including the use of time. Given the very broad area of investigation and the statistical complexity of the survey (based on a stratified sample in two steps), it is organized as follows:

a) the fundamental aspects of daily life and behaviour in the current period are surveyed yearly;

b) different thematic areas are included in sequence (year by year) in the survey, allowing for in-depth analysis of specific areas of family life (such as housing; education and training; housework and work outside the house; free time and social life; lifestyle and health; etc.)

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5 p. 262.
6 p. 457.
It might be useful to bear in mind that:

i. each multiscope family survey takes place over a few years;

ii. each multiscope survey does not necessarily investigate the same thematic area of the previous survey;

iii. there is always some time lag between the survey and publication of the data.

The multiscope survey of 1987-91 included analysis of the use of time, and the results were published in 1993. All the data published are disaggregated by gender, and they consider the following in detail: the use of time and time activity undertaken, the use of time and place of activity. The second multiscope survey (1993-94), which was started in December 1993, did not include analysis of the use of time. In the following years other multiscope surveys have been carried out but none of them has produced a new volume on the use of time up to now.

2.7 The 1991 census

The Annual also includes tables relative to the 1991 census. Those on the active population are broken down by region, economic activity, and occupational status.

By necessity, the ISTAT Annual publishes only a short summary of the census data. Although the other data are available (through direct consultation of the volumes published), the tables in the Annual should be altered by adding disaggregations by gender where appropriate (as in the case of the tables on the active population).

The statistical information surveyed and published by the Census is generally good. All the tables on the active population are disaggregated by gender and are published at both the national and regional levels. ISTAT makes its data available for “further examination and analysis” on magnetic tape or floppy disk. Overall therefore, the Census survey is good and well articulated, and its disaggregation by gender of the data on the active population enables satisfactory analysis of the labour-market situation of women. However, two criticisms can be made of it:

i. the survey data are made available with a considerable delay. For example, the definitive national-level data gathered by the last census of the population have been

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7 ISTAT(1993), L’uso del tempo in Italia, in “Indagine multiscopo sulle famiglie, 1987-9” (vol.4), ISTAT, Roma
published fully four years after the survey was carried out. This makes the timely analysis of problems impossible;
ii. the time intervals between censuses are too protracted. Ten years is a long time if one considers ongoing changes in the labour market. For the purpose of monitoring the labour-market situation of women more accurately, an inter-census survey (every five years) should be conducted on certain specific aspects (and would thus be less complex and more rapid than the census).

2.8 Conclusions

Overall, analysis of the contents of the ISTAT Annual yields a somewhat worrying picture of the statistical information available to determine the situation of labour markets, with evident further difficulties for analysis which focuses on equal opportunities. Unfortunately, this is the situation in which those interested in these problems for reasons of study or work find themselves, including among the latter the Parity Advisors.

3. Parity Advisors

The figure of the ‘parity advisor’ was instituted in Italy with approval of law no.125 of 1991. After a long-drawn-out political process involving the various institutional actors concerned with equal opportunities, the government has recently issued a legislative decree which expands the role of the parity advisors and allocates funds for that purpose.

3.1 The appointment of parity advisors

Legislative decree no. 196 of 23 May 2000 provides for the appointment, at the national, regional and provincial levels, of effective and substitute parity advisors. In the

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8 ISTAT, 13º Censimento generale della popolazione e delle abitazioni, 1991, Fascicolo Nazionale Italia, p.33
9 The general thrust of this law was almost universally greeted as positive and innovative. However, its application has been weak and piecemeal, partly because of the inadequacy of the funding provided, and partly because of the lack of facilities to support the work of the institutional actors envisaged by the law (local parity advisors, National Parity Advisor, National Parity Committee, Investigatory Board).
performance of their functions, parity advisors are public officials, and they are obliged to report offences of which they become aware to the judicial authorities. Local appointments are made by the tripartite regional or provincial commission,\(^{10}\) of which the advisor him/herself becomes a member. The Nation Parity Advisor is appointed by the Minister of Labour and Social Security jointly with the Minister for Equal Opportunities. The parity advisor must possess specific expertise and multi-year experience as regards female work, parity legislation, and the labour market. his/her mandate lasts for four years and is renewable just once.

3.2 Tasks of the advisor

The tasks of a parity advisor comprise the following: ascertaining situations of gender imbalances; working with the local labour offices to devise efficient procedures with which to identify breaches of equal opportunities legislation; promoting awareness and the exchange of good practices; providing information and training on the problem of equal opportunities; setting up positive action projects and assessing their results.

Special regional offices for assistance and monitoring, instituted by legislative decree no. 469 of 23 December 1997, will provide the parity advisors with the technical support necessary for their work. On request by the advisor, the local labour offices must provide information and statistics on the employment situations of men and women. To enhance the efficacy of actions and foster the exchange of information, a national network of parity advisors has been created: coordinated by the national advisor, this network must meet at least twice a year.

The advisors are entitled to absent themselves from work in pursuit of their duties. If they are employees, they may take paid leave for a maximum of fifty hours a month in the case of the national or regional advisors, or for thirty hours a month in the case of provincial advisors. If an advisor is self-employed, s/he is entitled to a monetary allowance proportional to the total number of hours devoted to his/her activities, up to a maximum amount fixed annually by decree.

The work of the local (regional and provincial) parity advisors is coordinated and supported by the National Parity Advisor (helped by a vice-advisor and a technical office).

\(^{10}\) Includes representatives of the public, employers and trade unions.
Operating at the national level is the National Committee for Equal Opportunities assisted by an investigative panel (consisting of experts in law, economics and sociology, and two labour magistrates). Among the main activities of these institutions are the following: advisory opinions on cases of discrimination; the assessment and funding of positive action projects submitted year by year. Legislative decree 196/2000, besides extending the remit of the parity advisors, gives an important directive role to the National Committee for Equal Opportunities. This committee, instituted at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, will draw up a target-programme which states the types of positive action projects envisaged, the persons eligible for them, and the criteria to be used to assess them.

3.3 Tools for preventing gender discrimination

When gender discrimination is alleged, should the complainant provide concrete evidence (also drawn from statistics on hirings, the allocation of job tasks, and career advancements) to substantiate the allegation, the burden of proof to the contrary lies with the alleged discriminator. In the case of hirings or promotions on the part of every public institution involving candidates of different sex with the same qualifications and experience, selection of the male candidate must be accompanied by adequate grounds for the decision.

3.4 Conclusions

Although the decree is to be welcomed in general, effective implementation of both law 125/1991 and the legislative decree of 2000 gives cause for perplexity. By way of example, the ‘regional offices of assistance and monitoring’ (which are not the same as the Services to Employment) set up by legislative decree in 1997 are not yet in place. One may surmise that the law has not been applied because of a lack of funding and because of a lack of political will at the local level. The legislative decree of 2000 can unfortunately do little as regards the latter problem. As a result, given the lack of support services, few hours are allocated to the parity advisors for their work.

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In July of this year, the Committee has set itself the following target programme: “Promoting the presence of women in organizations and making organizations women-friendly”.
4. Guidelines

There exist various documents drawn up by the Ministry of Equal Opportunities with regard to the use of structural funds. The one that most effectively sums up the concepts expressed in others as well is “V.I.S.P.O. Linee Guida, Attuazione del principio di pari opportunità per uomini e donne e valutazione dell’impatto equitativo di genere nella programmazione operativa, Fondi strutturali 2000-2006”. This is the official document distributed to the local parity advisors. The booklet lists the bibliographical sources, most of them measures issued by the European Council and Commission, which can be used for more in-depth analysis, while it does no more than set out the basic concepts. There are no outright guidelines, therefore, but in a country like Italy, where concern over the problem of equal opportunities is only very recent, this is a step forward in the fostering of gender awareness. Analysis of local contexts is delegated, rightly I believe, to the local authorities, emphasising the difference between the features and needs of scarcely populated mountain and upland areas and densely populated and industrialised ones, as well as the differing characteristics of their resident populations in terms of age, educational level and type. However it is not clear from the documents examined what body should undertake this complicated analysis and propose the guidelines. I therefore imagine that this complex task depends on the tenacity and good will of the local parity advisors. Carrying out this analysis requires, among many others, the following pieces of information:

- the poverty index (measurement of the feminisation of poverty);
- school/work transition routes; spells of unemployment by women; the percentage of women on mobility lists, those receiving temporary redundancy benefit, etc.;
- the percentages of women on company boards and in managements, by type of firm;
- the occupational and professional distribution of women across sectors and professions (e.g. the percentages of female employment in the textiles and construction sectors);
- wage differentials and incomes analysis;
- educational levels, types of female qualification and employment by qualifications.

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12 Valutazione Impatto Strategico Pari Opportunità
The list could continue. Information of this type, however, is not provided by the ISTAT Statistical Annual (nor by other official publications), and one fails to understand by what funds a parity advisor can order such a complicated and costly research.

The only guideline adopted locally in the management of structural funds is “cross-assessment of the promotion of the equal opportunities principle”, which is based on a series of interviews between the course organisers and the assessors, punctuated by reports written by the assessors, whose final task is the compilation of a ‘notes file’ and of a ‘summary matrix’.

Envisaged for next year in the Veneto region is the use of structural funds to draw up guidelines at the local level. At present, no other examples are forthcoming of good practice at the regional level in the use of structural funds.

Although the picture is not encouraging, it should be borne in mind that concern with the problem of equal opportunities is only very recent in Italy. Consequently, the presence of difficulties and confusion in this initial phase is understandable.

5. Care for children and the elderly

5.1 Incidence of the tax system

Tax in Italy has always been levied on individual incomes, to the extent that the system has provoked discussion among financial experts on the way that single-income households are strongly penalised. This system – which progressively taxes the income of the individual physical person – favours households with two earners or one and a half earners. It is difficult to predict which of the two models will prevail: it is likely that if households with two spouses working full-time find themselves having, for example, to look after small children or elderly parents, they make a calculation of economic convenience. The result of this calculation will depend on the net income of the lower-earning spouse, usually the woman, and on assessment of the availability and costs of local facilities for the care of the elderly and children. Considering the shortage of these facilities and the high cost of placing children or elderly relatives in them, or alternatively of home care services, as well as the high and progressive levels of taxation on work
incomes, numerous women may be induced to choose a part-time job. This decision may produce a situation that is satisfactory for the time being, but in the long term it will be costly: part-time employment relegates workers to low-ranking jobs which inevitably entail the loss of skills and opportunities for promotion, compared with full-time workers, the majority of whom are men, and this exacerbates vertical segregation even further.

5.2 Demographic change

The problem of caring for small children and elderly relatives is a distinctive feature of our age, and it is becoming more and more pressing, especially in Italy. This has been proved quantitatively by surveys conducted by ISTAT:

“Italy has already passed through all the stages of demographic change: of the process, that is to say, characterised initially by high birth and death rates, then by a decline in each of these rates, and finally by a rate of population growth which approaches zero. The result of this process is the ageing of the population. Italy is among the countries with the highest incidences of elderly people: in 1991 the percentage of Italians aged over 65 was 15.3%.”

“Still today, 41.3% of children have housewife mothers and working fathers. However, because of increasing labour-force participation by mothers fully 39.4% of children now have both parents in work. In the 0-5 age group, indeed, children with working mothers outnumber those with housewife mothers (41.6% compared to 39.7%).”

5.3 Public welfare

The public administrations (regions, provinces and municipalities) manage, on their own account or indirectly, a broad array of services and benefits designed to provide welfare for both children and the elderly.

At present, ISTAT surveys on the local agencies furnishing childcare services, kindergarten’s and children’s holiday camps are suspended, while the survey of the social assistance furnished by social-welfare institutions has been thoroughly revised and will be resumed at the end of this year.

13 p. 603.
14 p. 260.
Given this ‘suspension’ of ISTAT’s surveys, I shall refer to the situation in the province of Trento. The region of Trentino-Alto Adige has a special statute of autonomy which entitles it to receive financial resources from the capital amounting to around four times per capita more than those allocated to the regions with ordinary statutes. It is therefore logical to assume that the services delivered by the province’s public agencies are more numerous and of better quality in this region than in the rest of the country on average. Moreover, the political stability that has marked the province in recent years has been to the benefit of the planning and implementation of social-welfare policies.

- Childcare services

The cost to a household of sending a child to a publicly-run kindergarten is proportional to the household’s income, up to a maximum of 800,000 lire a month. This price is relatively low with respect to any level of income, so that it economically convenient for parents to use the service, rather than giving up a job or switching to part-time. If the latter solution is adopted, it will be motivated not by economic calculation but by a choice based on personal considerations. The problem, however, is the shortage of places relatively to demand. Until a short time ago, the alternative was to hire a child minder, but this entailed a cost that an average-income family could not afford.

A recent development in the province is the taking over of the ‘Tagesmutter’ system. These are female careworkers coordinated by a cooperative who look after children on request by their parents, with flexible working hours. A recently-approved provincial law has allocated funds to this initiative in order to reduce the cost borne by the parents using the service. Especially in outlying areas, scarcely populated and therefore with greater problems of transport, this system has considerable advantages compared with the traditional kindergarten, because it does not require a specific building to which the parents must take their children, with a consequent waste of time, and because the “Tagesmutter” work flexible hours.

To the good fortune of mothers, it is increasingly common for fathers to help with child care, and to a greater extent if the father’s educational attainment is higher and if the family lives in a larger village or town.
Attendance at a public nursery school (for children aged 3-5) entails a cost that can be described as symbolic (80,000 lire a month), although it is restricted to the traditional opening hours of these facilities (until 3:00 p.m.); any extension costs around 3,000 lire per hour. This cost, too, is very low. With respect to nursery schools there is normally no shortage of places, hence applications for enrolment are invariably accepted.

- Care for the elderly

Even in the ‘rich region’ of Trentino-Alto Adige, care for the elderly is provided mainly by their families, or at any rate by informal networks of relatives and friends. Public welfare provision for the elderly is managed by the municipal administrations, which now frequently contract the service out to social cooperatives. The cost of public home-care services varies according to the elderly person’s income and that of the household in which s/he resides. It may reach a maximum of 19,000 lire an hour, a price which can be considered very high, given that it exceeds the amount usually asked by regularly insured home helps. All types of service, from ‘meals on wheels’ to transport, carry additional costs. There are very few rest homes, and they have long waiting lists and charge high fees. To date, therefore, priority has been given to childcare, while little has been done to solve the growing problem of the elderly.

6. Conclusions

The current state of equal opportunities in Italy certainly cannot be deemed satisfactory in the absolute sense. In the relative sense, however, the verdict must be that it is at least adequate: until some years ago the majority of the population was not even aware of the problem, whereas today it is discussed in the newspapers and on television, and a number of laws have been recently enacted to implement the principle of equal opportunities. These ‘theoretical’ developments of the principle should now be followed by concrete action, although this will predictably be obstructed by the traditional mentality that still prevails, especially in the medium-to-old age groups. Crucial in this regard will be the
work of the parity advisors, whose personal commitment should be given greater support in the form of adequate funding and suitable facilities.

References


Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (1999), Annuario Statistico Italiano 1999


Position of men and women prior to policy development

The IT and high-tech sector is a new sector and therefore in theory it should not lend itself to gender discrimination based on cultural prejudices inherited from the past. And yet it is a sector largely dominated by men and which seems to afford little access to women.

Superficial analysis might come to the conclusion that there are gender differences, not just biological but intellectual as well, which render the theory of gender mainstreaming both pointless and inapplicable. However, more profound analysis carried out by Anna Oliverio Ferraris, a lecturer in developmental psychology at the ‘La Sapienza’ University of Rome, depicts a different situation. Children first come into contact with computers through video games: these are designed by men, and therefore with a male mentality, and they are largely based on adventurous and violent action. This accounts for the scant interest in them shown by girls. But one need only change the content of a computer game, a hypertext or a story viewed by computer for it to become of interest for girls as well: rather than a story set in the Wild West or with a martial arts expert as the hero, one need only create a story in which a bear goes off in search of honey, overcoming a series of obstacles to reach the place where the honey is hidden. In this way girls might solve the same kinds of problems as their male counterparts, but in a different context which is more suited to them. Thus boys and girls might both apply their skills in the same way and solve the same type of problems. If one takes account of the fact that girls at present start from a disadvantaged position with respect to boys, one understands why women are distinctly under-represented in the IT sector.

Trends in men’s and women’s position
One the other hand, the shortage of IT specialists reduces discrimination against women seeking to work in the sector, even though they must adjust to the male perception of work when they do so. In the private sector, the lack of specialists creates strong pressure for the over-utilization of the labour available, so that overtime is often required of workers and applications for part-time arrangements are rejected. At the same time, given this high level of demand for experts, the bargaining power of IT specialists in their dealings with employers is very high, and as a consequence so too are salary levels. Even women no longer in their youth may receive constant job offers and are therefore able to choose those best suited to their needs, without being penalized as regards their careers or pay levels. However, they are required to keep constantly abreast with new developments in their field, and the extremely long hours that they have to work force them to make sacrifices in their personal lives. As a consequence, they are often obliged to forgo the idea of having children, also owing to the lack of suitable facilities, such as crèches, which should be provided by the state or by the company for which they work. Facilities of this kind are very rarely provided, even by large companies, probably because a crèche would be too costly for a company in relation to the very few women, and therefore mothers, on its staff. Apart from such economic evaluations of the provision of in-company crèches, the indifference shown by managers to the specific problems of working mothers may be due to a general absence of gender awareness in the Italian executive class.

*Priority to be accorded to gender equality promotion*

Since there is already unsatisfied demand for IT experts, estimated in the NAP at more than 50,000 units, and since the use of computers in the workplace continues to proliferate, there is no doubt as to the logic of the government’s action to expand the sector, starting with education at all levels including elementary. However, from the point of view of gender mainstreaming it can be criticised, in that the type of language used in the NAP is gender neutral: there is no attempt to adopt a gender perspective in order to desegregate a sector of such importance. Unfortunately, have I found not a single article in a newspaper or specialist journal which conducts analysis that takes account of the greater obstacles faced by women on entry to the IT sector. The sole exception are some publications by the above-mentioned Anna Oliverio Ferraris.
Promoting computer literacy in schools in order to foster the spread of multimedia techniques in society can only have positive outcomes if teacher training is thorough and timely. In the Italian educational system from elementary school to university, however, no assessment is made of the quality of teaching. The prerequisite for such assessment is an innovative teacher training programme. Ministerial circular no. 282 provides a detailed description of the hardware to be bought, but it devotes little space to the problems of training and the content of multimedia products.

The training of teachers in the use of multimedia software should address the following three areas:
(i) the use of multimedia materials instead of textbooks;
(ii) the altering of multimedia materials or the creation of new ones by the teacher;
(iii) the altering of multimedia materials or the creation of new ones by the teacher helped by his/her pupils.

In practice, the training of teachers in these matters is proceeding amid great difficulties. The data presented at meetings show that teachers have little awareness of the objectives that they wish to achieve with hypertexts. They have inadequate knowledge on how hypertexts are created, and they are unable to evaluate and document what their pupils have actually learnt by means of them.

Hypertexts indubitably have great educational potential: creating a hypertext in an elementary school may foster critical awareness, interest in its contents, and collaboration among children from different schools. However, these results do not come automatically; rather, they require educators who know how to produce them.

Effect on children

Oliverio Ferraris maintains that children should be first introduced to computers at the age of 8 or 9. There are very few elementary school children, aged 6-8, with the curiosity to explore the keyboard and discover the possibilities offered by the computer: by and large, the latter years of elementary school are more appropriate. Obviously, children must understand how to use a computer and gain familiarity with it; thereafter they usually show
great interest in using computers. However, Oliverio Ferraris advises against the use of the computer by very small children.

In order to establish the minimum age appropriate, she draws on her previous publications on the relationship between children and television, which she believes bears numerous analogies with that between children and the computer. Up to the age of six the boundary between the real and imaginary worlds is indistinct: children believe that the characters leave the screen at the end of the programme, and they are unable to distinguish among television genres: fiction from a news broadcast, sport from a film. Only later do they understand the difference between truth and falsehood, while they still fail to distinguish between truth and likelihood. This is not a real problem, however, because it may also happen to an adult. If a small child is not helped by a parent, s/he has difficulty in distancing him/herself from TV shows and in correctly interpreting their meaning.

A number of English and American studies on language development in the first three years of life have found that children who spend long hours in front of the television set are lexically and verbally backward. Television produces a lot of words, but it does not leave time for reflecting, learning and repeating. Watching television may enrich the vocabulary of a six- or seven-year-old child with a relatively consolidated language competence, but this does not happen with younger children, because they are overwhelmed by the avalanche of words issuing from the television set. The presence of a parent may stimulate active watching: a scene or a remark may give rise to discussion, so that the child acquires a critical stance towards programmes and develops a capacity for analysis. Between the ages of three and five, children are beginning to use their imaginations, and as the protagonists of their games they are able to enter and leave their imaginary worlds at will. However, they adopt a passive attitude towards television, a film or a computer game. Their imaginations are engrossed by the images on the screen, especially if they depict vivid situations or intense values. In order to forestall a passive and consequently harmful attitude to the computer, Oliverio Ferraris advises programming, which is accessible even to non-specialists thanks to simplified languages, and she insists that children must be helped by a trained teacher.

When novices are faced with a hypertext, they may have no idea of what to look for or of the decisions that they are supposed to take; they may therefore fail to benefit from the opportunities offered by the program. It is very probable that they will lose themselves in
the mass of information available, so that they use only some of it without realizing that they are neglecting important data and key notions. Their learning may thus be fragmentary and unstructured, and with no logical sequence. Interesting in this regard are the results of an experiment carried out by a team of psychologists and computer programmers on children presented with two Microsoft Home hypertexts (considered to be the best available on the market), one on science and the other on history. The children were very interested in the hypertexts, and especially in the video clips, the coloured figures and the sounds; and they quickly learnt to understand the structure of the programs. However, although they easily learnt how to interact with the computer, the children ignored most of the written texts and the data options, and they treated the ‘tests’ as if they were games. While exploring the hypertexts, the children missed the bulk of their contents. The audio and the pictures, which most attracted their attention, were not sufficient: if the explanations of the figures were not read, they were difficult to understand, and certain details were susceptible to misinterpretation. Since the written texts contained around 80% of the total information, the navigation was decidedly superficial. Consequently, the children used a trial-and-error approach with the tests and they discovered the answers only *a posteriori*. Ergonomic studies have shown that reading text on a computer screen takes 30% longer than reading printed text, and it is 20% more tiring. It is obvious that even greater effort is required of children aged 8 or 9. One solution is the presence of a trained teacher who ensures that the computer is not used for game-playing. This may reduce the efficacy of hypertexts (which their authors intend to be self-sufficient), but it restores to the teacher his/her fundamental role as the organizer of learning. Another possibility is to involve the children in the creation of a hypertext. By means of programs specially developed for hypertext creators it is possible to switch from reader mode to author mode. Giving children an active rather than passive role in this manner may prevent certain harmful effects giving rise to greater social costs in subsequent years. It should also be borne in mind that it is somewhat risky to use computer software produced by others and not for the specific purpose at hand.

The enormous change brought about in recent years by information technology requires adults to assume responsibility for children, given that it is inevitable that everyone, both adults and children, must adapt to the characteristics, times and spaces of multimedia
society. However, it should also be borne in mind that it is impossible to modify, beyond a certain limit, the biological timing of the intellectual, emotional and motor development of children. There is a gradualness in development and growth that must be respected and protected. Although to a certain extent children are impermeable to things that they do not understand, some phenomena that they find incomprehensible nevertheless affect them emotionally, especially if they concern relationships with human beings, between humans and animals, birth, death and illness. Adults have the duty to assume responsibility for what children see and hear on television, learn with the computer, or encounter as they surf the Internet. Below a certain age (10 to 11) access to the Internet is probably not essential, especially because the environment can be explored in other ways – in reality – which generate more complete involvement.

Policy modifications

The foregoing discussion of the current and potential position of women in the IT sector has concentrated on the training of children in the use of computers. The general hypothesis subsumed by my arguments is that low female participation in the Italian IT sector is due to the following factors:

i. the lack of a gender perspective in policy proposals for expanding the sector (page 15 of the 2000 NAP; ministerial plan to increase the teaching of computer skills in schools);

ii. general indifference to the specific problems of working mothers (and care providers) by managements, particularly in highly masculinized sectors like IT in Italy;

iii. a lower proportion of young women, compared to males of the same age, with adequate computer skills, this being due to shortcomings in the educational system, especially when children are first introduced to computers;

iv. inadequate teacher training in order to eliminate gender differences from the moment when children are first introduced to computers.

As a consequence, I regard the following changes to be essential for the development and expansion of the IT sector:
1) the introduction of a gender perspective in all policy documents on expanding the IT sector, in order to forestall discrimination against women;

2) the introduction of incentives to firms, the purpose being to increase female participation. These incentives should heighten managerial awareness of the problems faced by working women in the IT sector;

3) greater teacher training (at all levels of the school system) as regards both new technologies and a pedagogy to prevent educational discrimination;

4) the introduction of a specific teaching methodology for small children in order to stimulate their interest in information technology equally (between males and females) and correctly (from a pedagogical point of view).

The overall conclusion is that the small number of women working in the IT sector is due to the scant interest that the system as a whole – schools, managements, political class – is able to arouse in young women.

References


Section 2.2  Gender Impact Assessment of Part-time

Position of men and women prior to policy development

Part-time is the most widespread form of ‘flexible’ work in Italy. The percentage of part-time workers in the total labour force is substantially lower than the European average, although it has steadily increased in recent years: from 5.5% in 1993 to 7.9% in 1999. A survey conducted by Censis has shown that part-time work is performed mainly by women, who accounted for 67.9% of part-time workers in 1992, and 70% in 1998. This high percentage of female participation is probably due to the fact that many Italian women still embrace the traditional conception that they are duty-bound to devote themselves to carework in the home. This information is backed by data compiled by Censis for 1998 regarding women in part-time work: 25.8% of them stated that they had opted for part-time employment because they did not want to work full-time, and a further 26.5% said that they had done so for personal or family reasons. More than 50% of women therefore work part-time by choice. By contrast, men generally view part-time as an initial stage of labour-
market entry, if they are unemployed, or as enabling them to devote themselves to other work if they are employed full-time.

Analysis of the occupational situations of part-time female workers shows that this form of employment is most common among low-level occupations, while the higher the occupational status, the less it can be reconciled with work commitments: the incidence of part-time employment is 20% among female blue-collar workers, 11.3% among white-collar ones, and 4.1% in management. These figures are for 1998 and are relative to dependent employment. Among self-employed workers, part-time work is easier to reconcile with a career: in this case, the percentage of women working part-time is 16.7%.

**Trends in men’s and women’s position**

Recent figures issued by ISTAT show that female employment has increased annually by 244,000 units, equivalent to 3.2%, while in the same period male employment has grown by only 1.4%. But the increase in female employment consists almost entirely of part-time workers, who now account for almost 9% of the total labour force

These figures and trends show that part-time work in Italy is growing increasingly feminized, as has already happened in other European countries. Companies in the private sector prefer to hire men, because women usually take maternity leave, not only for the compulsory period but also for the whole of the optional period available, even though by law the latter can instead be taken by the father. This already causes discrimination in hirings, so that in households in which both parents work, it is almost always the father that has the higher-ranking and better-paid job. As a consequence, when situations requiring care work arise, it is the parent with the lower-ranking job and worse career prospects – that is, the mother – who makes the sacrifice by quitting work or switching to part-time, even if s/he may have career ambitions.

**Priority to be accorded to gender equality promotion**

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15 Data worked out before the conversion of the legislative decree into Italian law.
While part-time contracts indubitably give women more time to devote to their families and to improve the quality of their lives, the choice of this form of employment reinforces the traditional view of women as solely responsible for carework. This causes a segregation in this contractual form whereby men are confirmed as full-time workers by nature and as the main breadwinners in the household while women are considered to be the source of additional income and devoid of career aspirations.

At high educational levels, with good pay and interesting career prospects, women increasingly prefer to keep their jobs and to delegate care of their children or elderly relatives to outside services or facilities, in the knowledge that otherwise they will miss opportunities for professional development. Female workers with lower educational levels, and on lower rates of pay, may not find it economically convenient to rely on external care services. This fact, together with scant career prospects and low job satisfaction, induce many women in this situation to quit work in order to have children. However, as educational levels rise, increasing numbers of young women are determined to pursue their careers, and for this reason they postpone motherhood to later in their lives. On the other hand, since they are aware of the greater risks of childbearing at an older age, and of the amount of energy required to look after a small child, these women prefer to have only one child. And this is one of the reasons for the falling birth rate. But also in the case of low-level and low-paid jobs, childbearing tends to be postponed, because the couple must accumulate the financial resources necessary to maintain the child, an undertaking which grows increasingly costly.

Impact of policy

The main purpose of the recent law on part-time, which converts the EU directive 97/81/EC into Italian law, is to encourage this type of work within the framework of greater flexibility, which should lead to greater labour-market participation (by women in general, but also by men in the young and elderly age groups) and reduce the unemployment rate.

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16 This latter objective has not been achieved.
The law ensures parity of treatment proportional to the hours of work effectively performed: the part-time worker enjoys the same rights as a comparable full-time worker (in terms of hours worked). Guaranteed in particular is the same treatment as regards hourly pay rates, the duration of the trial period and of annual holidays, the duration of compulsory and optional maternal leave, job maintenance in the case of illness, workplace injury or work-related illness, and access to vocational training courses organized by employers. Though laudable in theory, this principle of non-discrimination is apparently unable to prevent effective discrimination as regards career advancement, especially in the private sector. Full-time workers acquire greater expertise, their employers are more willing to offer them in-service training courses, and as a consequence they more easily gain promotion and higher pay levels.

Under the new law (as already established by the first law on part-time), part-time work contracts must be stipulated in written form, and they must state the duration of the employment and define the work schedule in terms of hours per day, week, month and year. This entails that an employer cannot force a worker to accept a work schedule different from the one initially agreed (except by consensual renegotiation). This constraint is regarded as damaging by numerous employers because it introduces rigidity into working hours arrangements.

The law also provides various forms of protection for part-time workers. Should the employer request a worker to change from part-time to full-time, or vice versa, this can only come about on prior written consent of the worker concerned. Prior written consent is also required before any change can be made to the agreed working hours, with the further condition that the worker has the right to 'reconsider': that is, to withdraw his/her consent on justified family or health grounds, or because s/he must attend to other work activities.

Further protection has been introduced by the provision that, when hiring full-time personnel, an employer must give precedence to employees working on part-time contracts in production units situated within 100 kms of the production unit in which the vacancy (for the same or similar type of worker) has arisen; and the employer must also give precedence to applications by workers who have already changed from full-time to part-time employment, and among these, to workers with heavier family responsibilities and

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17 There is no provision, however, regarding requests by workers to change from one type to the other.
more seniority. Again, when taking on new workers, the employer must inform full-time personnel in production units situated in the same municipality about the vacancies available, and s/he must consider applications by full-time workers wishing to change to part-time contracts. Rejection of these applications can only be made on justifiable grounds.

This flexibilization of the employment relationship is incentivized by the granting of tax relief amounting to a maximum of 600 billion lire over three years. However, tax relief is granted only for hirings in excess of actual staffing levels, and provided that the new jobs created are permanent ones. Priority will be given to longer-term contracts: relief on social security payments, in fact, ranges from the minimum of 7% for contracts stipulating 20 to 24 hours of weekly work to a maximum of 13% for those stipulating 32 hours per week. If the amount set aside is insufficient, precedence will be given to contracts relative to young people aged under 25, and to women with under-age children or with cohabitating disabled persons.

_Effect on children_

The spread of part-time work may have a positive effect on small children, in that they need to be accepted for what they are, understood and guided, if they are to grow into happy and self-confident individuals. They need physical contact; they need someone to listen to them, to do things with them, and to pay attention to them. This task has been traditionally assigned to the mother, but it can be performed equally well by the father: the presence of different figures of attachment does not damage a child as long as each of them is liked and a good relationship is formed. It is the sudden handing-over of the child to strangers that may cause alarm and anxiety; a state that is inevitably exacerbated if the physical environment is strange as well.

It is widely accepted that the various aspects of development are inter-related, so that one cannot – as was the case until only a few years ago – concentrate exclusively on cognitive development without considering that a distressful social and affective environment may have consequences on the other aspects, too.
It is only towards 2 or 3 years of age that, after tumultuous changes, the general development of a child (under the close supervision of the parents) tends to slow down, at least in physical terms, and new and powerful language skills enable the child to explore the outside world, form fuller relationships with others, and develop a broader set of social relations.

Because it is often the case today that both parents work, the optimal situation just described can only be achieved if both parents change to part-time jobs at alternating times of the day, so that the child is cared for by both parents around the clock. The main obstacle against this arrangement is the difficulty of subsequently returning to full-time employment, which is not guaranteed by the law as it stands. It is therefore obvious that there is no incentive for the parents to ask to change to part-time. Necessary as a consequence is legislation that introduces a form of part-time work with an automatic return to full-time employment for important family reasons, one of which is undoubtedly the need to care for a small child or for a temporarily non-self-sufficient elderly relative.

**Policy modifications**

The law on part-time work is already exerting positive effects on the female employment rate, which is now gradually approaching the male one, although the latter is still decidedly higher. One may therefore confidently predict that the law in question will have a beneficial impact on persons in need of family care (most notably children, the elderly and the non self-sufficient). I do not believe, however, that the law will improve the general situation of equal opportunities in the labour market, in that it will tend to shift increasing numbers of women to care work.

Yet the problem of balancing work and family responsibilities is an extremely complex one. The only means to achieve equal opportunities is promotion of a culture that induces men to accept greater responsibility for care work. However, this will require a great deal of time and certainly cannot be imposed by law. Since Italy is only just beginning to concern itself with equal opportunities issues, the introduction of a parity culture, which must perforce begin with the younger generation, will encounter predictable resistance by men, but also scant acceptance by those many women still bound by the tradition and the mentality prevailing in the social environment. It is nevertheless to be hoped that attempts
will be made to reverse the trend towards the segregation of women in part-time employment. Useful to this end would be the following: policies to promote part-time employment in high-ranking occupations, and incentives to encourage the use of part-time arrangements in sectors of predominantly male employment.

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