Title: Assessing The Implementation Of Gender Mainstreaming In Italy

Country: Italy

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Executive Summary

The Italian labour market exhibits a feature which has informed the drafting of all Italian NAPs: the persistent and marked differentials in economic performance between Northern and Southern areas that are the cause of major concern to politicians and economists. This theme, highlighted by all pillars of the three NAPs considered, clearly shows the particular attention paid to this national problem. Due to Italian macroeconomic constraints (a large and intractable public debt, a rising inflation rate, and commitment to monetary stability), it is difficult to envisage far-reaching action, although great efforts are being made to address the employment emergency in depressed areas according to European Commission recommendations. Nevertheless, during the period considered (from 1997 to 2000) notable progress has been made regarding gender issues in the drawing up of NAPs and in other initiatives, and it is largely to be attributed to the European Commission’s recommendations and criticisms, which have generated a certain sensitiveness towards equal opportunities in Italy.

The 2000 Italian NAP still does not integrate gender issues in all policies, although it shows significant progress with respect to the two previous NAPs, due to references made under all pillars to women’s particular difficulties. The declared intentions are to be followed by more concrete measures to foster female participation in the labour market.

In Italy the prevailing male norm obliges women to choose between family and career. Women who wish to re-enter the labour market after a period of inactivity have no real chance of being reintegrated into the world of work. Hence very few women decide to leave their jobs temporarily to devote themselves to family responsibilities, preferring instead either to postpone or to forgo maternity, thereby worsening the situation of an ageing population.

The Italian labour market is characterised by a very low employment rate reflected in very high inactivity and unemployment rates for both women and men. This situation is dramatic in the depressed southern areas, where the unemployment and the inactivity rates are more than twice as high than in the North. Women’s inactivity rate is double that of men and is due to major discouragement effects. However, a slight but steady trend towards a higher female employment rate is visible in the younger age groups.

The participation of women in political life is extremely limited, at both the national and local levels, for Italian politics still preserves traditional male norms. In addition, women’s living and working conditions are worsened by the unequal division within families of care responsibilities and by an insufficient provision of childcare services as well as other care facilities. Nevertheless some positive trends in female employment have taken place.

A noteworthy increase in the female employment rate has been brought about by the introduction of atypical jobs. Part-timers are mostly women, who declare themselves satisfied with their working time arrangements. The reduction of the social security
contributions to be paid for persons undertaking care tasks or socially useful work has induced many of previously unregistered working women to ask to be registered, thereby obtaining a minimum level of social protection.

Female entrepreneurship has been constantly favoured by labour market policies in recent years. Moreover, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities has promoted actions to monitor the process and to provide information services to potential female entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, female entrepreneurship still amounts to a low percentage of total entrepreneurship; but a positive trend in the quality and quantity of start-ups by women has been registered by the observatory set up at the Ministry of Equal Opportunities in the recent years.

Italy is privatising public enterprises in many sectors, as recommended by the European Commission. This policy will widen the existing gender gap, since market mechanisms exacerbate labour demand prejudices, whilst career advancement in the private sector seems available only to men.

In order to foster equal values, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities and the local Parity Advisers network are engaged in a campaign to disseminate cultural and more specific information on gender issues. This campaign is carried out almost entirely by the Ministry website and booklets, since the media show little interest in equal opportunities issues.

National statistical data, produced by public institutions, do not yet allow a satisfactory assessment of policies from a gender perspective. In fact, they are still inadequate to monitor ex-post the impact of policies on women’s conditions in the labour market. However, some progress has been made recently. ISTAT has been asked by the Ministry of Equal Opportunities to develop more effective statistical tools to assess the impact of policies from a gender perspective. Moreover, projects financed by the Structural Funds will soon be subjected to ex ante, in interim and ex post evaluation to verify whether they foster equal opportunities between women and men.

The most important recent legislation on equal opportunities between women and men in the labour market (see section 4) consists of the Bill on Parity Advisers’ Rights and Duties, the Act on Part Time Work, the Act on Parental Leave and the Law on Night Work.

*Parity Advisers* will be given financial resources to bring lawsuits to ensure *de facto* equal opportunities in the labour market, and they will be involved in tripartite concertation as members of the Central and local Commissions for employment.

The new law on *Part Time* – was originally drawn with the intention to favour a cyclical working life pattern for either the mother or the father of small children, easing the transition from full time to part time and back again to full time. Despite the original intention, some norms included in the law will probably have a critical impact on women: a new type of *de facto* segregation of women – traditionally regarded as more adequate carers and who make up the larger proportion of part-timers – is to be expected, even if the law ensures no *de jure* segregation.
The Act on *Parental Leave* is extremely innovative in that it incorporates most of the European Commission’s recommendations. Leave periods are granted not only to parents of small children but also to individuals for life-long learning activities. This law extends the City Clock approach to all municipalities as well as favouring the spread of “hours banks”.

The new law on *Night Work* (the receipt of EC directive) grants women the right to work at night like men and gives the mothers and fathers of small children the family-friendly right to refuse night shifts.

Analysis identifies two areas in which the gender gap is particularly wide: (i) the participation of women in politics and decision-making; (ii) the setting up of a network of child-care infrastructures and services, as well as other measures to support women caring for elderly relatives.
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(i) gender impact taken into account in the design  
(ii) aimed at improving the process of gender mainstreaming  
(iii) monitored for gender impact  
(iv) aimed at closing gender gaps  
(v) aimed at improving the reconciliation of work and family life  
(vi) aimed at allowing women and men to return to the labour market
1. Introduction

The 2000 Italian NAP falls short of adopting a gender mainstreaming approach, even if considerable progress has been made in integrating gender issues compared with the 1998 and 1999 NAPs. References to gender issues are made under all pillars in the 2000 NAP, whereas issues regarding equal opportunities between women and men were confined to a few scattered lines in the 1998 NAP and to the text under the fourth pillar in the 1999 NAP (i.e. gender mainstreaming was lacking). This situation is extraordinary for a country in which the term ‘gender mainstreaming’ is incomprehensible, an alien concept not only to ordinary persons but also to policymakers as well as the highly educated.

A notable contribution to this outcome has probably been made by the coordinator of the team which prepared the document, Paolo Leon\(^1\), who not only has accurate knowledge of the gender mainstreaming approach but also shows extraordinary sensitivity to gender issues as well as an objective viewpoint on equal opportunities. However, as stated in the 2000 NAP, the Italian Government has to date fostered equal opportunities in the labour market only piecemeal. Noteworthy is the declared intention to approve a plan for Equal Opportunities which enables transition from an experimental strategy to a large-scale approach (NAP 2000, p. 28).

Although the 2000 Italian NAP cannot be evaluated positively from a gender mainstreaming point of view, it should be acknowledged that considerable progress has been made since 1997. Awareness of gender issues is spreading thanks to the Commission’s recommendations, but the low starting point still affects the present conditions of Italian women in the labour market. The most innovative measures regarding equal opportunities are the transposition into Italian law of either European Commission recommendations or directives, i.e. the Act on Parental Leave which includes life-long learning as a means to facilitate labour-market re-entry by women (or men) after a period of absence to raise their children. However, the Italian political institutions are endeavouring to tackle women’s specific labour market problems while taking account of Italy’s distinctive features, in order to promote equal opportunities in the concrete national context.

2. The characteristics of the Italian labour market

2.1 Trends in female employment

The Italian labour market displays a very high inactivity rate of both women and men in the working age population, especially when compared with the EU average. In addition, the female inactivity rate is not only the highest of all Member Countries (EU 12) but it is, by and large, double that of males (55.5% vs. 26.3%). The high female inactivity rate is reflected in a low employment rate (37.1% vs. 66.7% of men), although one observes a significant increase in female employment over the last six years, which has been partly to the detriment of male employment, and a substantial

\(^1\) See the paper prepared by professor Paolo Leon for the Forum organised, in January 2000, by the ministry of E.O. on gender mainstreaming (Leon, 2000).
stability in female unemployment. A steady, though weak, trend towards a reduction in the female inactivity rate over the period in question is highlighted by national data panels. This seems to be the result of women’s higher educational attainments which, in most cases, retain women in the labour market or enhance their persistence in active job seeking.

Italy appears to have joined the other member-countries in moving out of the recession of the early 1990s only in 1998 and 1999. Slow economic growth is in fact associated with net job creation (0.6% per year) in the services sector, which is considerably undersized in comparison with most member-countries. Employment in the industrial sector is still stagnant, due to the extensive use of labour-saving technologies and overtime, but this is not likely to affect women’s employment opportunities significantly, given that this sector is traditionally male dominated.

These positive developments have weakened the discouragement effects on many inactive women, thereby triggering increases in both the female employment and unemployment rates. The female unemployment rate (defined as the ratio between unemployed persons and the declared available labour force) exceeds the male rate by 80% in the period considered.

The increase in women’s labour-market participation has been facilitated by the new legislation on atypical jobs. The share of part-time jobs on total employment is half the EU average, but it has been increasing since 1992. This form of employment has mainly attracted women, who make up 70% of the part-time workforce and declare themselves satisfied with their working time arrangements in more than 60% of cases. Regarding other atypical jobs (largely temporary jobs and work on fixed-term contracts), these are more equally distributed between women and men and their share on total employment is again below the EU average. Workers on a temporary basis declare themselves dissatisfied with their working situations because of the high level of job insecurity. On the whole, the government is achieving a transition from a very rigid to a more flexible labour market, which should foster employment opportunities, while endeavouring to preserve workers’ protection.

Expanding areas belong all to the tertiary sector, which is generally considered favourable to young women’s educational attainments. To be noted is the expected growth in the cultural and environmental resources sector, in services to small and medium-sized enterprises, and in social services. An increase in women’s employment even in some of these areas would require entrepreneurial initiatives.

A positive trend is to be noted regarding freelance workers, where the female rate has considerably increased over the last years, although the gender gap is still wide. This type of work is characterised by high flexibility, which may help women reconcile their work and family duties.
In order to enable women to organise and use their time more efficiently, several proposals have been put forward by local authorities to promote *telework*: that is, the transfer of office work to the home.

Special attention is to be paid to the southern regions, where the local labour markets are the cause of major concern to politicians because of their structural problems. In the depressed areas, the female unemployment rate is more than double the national rate. Scant prospects of finding and holding a job trap southern women in inactivity, thereby determining an above-national average inactivity rate.

The new highly educated generations closely correspond to the final gender equality target: “equal opportunities based on sameness, with a new norm for both men and women” (Rubery), not only in their new conception of family life, but, as shown by statistical panels, also and mainly in the labour market. This view is also shared by Mr. Zuliani (Head of ISTAT - National Statistics Service):

> “The female condition in the labour market is currently improving and gender differentials are reducing; this is easily observable among young people. The behaviour of highly educated women in the age group from 25 to 34 years is very similar to that of men in the corresponding age group.” [Zuliani A., 2000]

### 2.2 The prevailing male norm

In the Italian labour market, no changes have taken place in recent years in the dominating male norm. Young women entering the labour market adapt their lives to this uncontested pattern, which attaches great importance to the effective working hours spent in the workplace. In most cases, women are obliged to make a choice between a serene family life and their career aspirations. Maternity is often hindered, as highlighted by the decreasing fertility rate. Full time jobs are the norm (92% in 1999), leave periods for care-taking are short, and many women decide not to take up all the opportunities granted by law (therefore reducing leave periods to the minimum) for fear of being discriminated against in the workplace. Women who want to re-enter the labour market after a long period of inactivity – that is, when their children require less commitment in terms of time and care – have no real chance of being reintegrated into the world of work. As to be expected, the younger cohorts are better trained and learn more easily. At present there are no effective programmes to update women returners’ skills. Consequently, aware of these difficulties, they do not even try to find a job. No woman with a satisfying job which matches her educational attainment is likely to consider the possibility of leaving it in order to devote herself to raising her small children for a number of years. That is why single-child families are the norm in Italy, which worsens the situation of the ageing population. The difficulties are numerous, even with just one small child, in the absence of efficient childcare services and long leave periods, since care-taking requires long hours and flexibility to cope with the frequent illnesses of small children.
2.3 A new trend towards flexibility

In Italy, all the policies introduced over the last decade to increase working time flexibility have provided employers with incentives to use more flexible forms of work and contractual arrangements, thereby favouring a flexible demand for labour. This tendency has not met the need for flexible working time schedules on the part of the labour supply. However, during the 1990s there was increasing awareness that workers with family responsibilities need more flexible work arrangements. This resulted in the introduction of new solutions in terms of working time – put forward in collective agreements – in order to facilitate the reconciliation of paid work and family life.

As pointed out in the 2000 NAP, the tendency towards more flexibility in working time schedules will impact positively on women’s lives where these arrangements are effectively implemented. The introduction of new shift schedules, the reduction of effective working time and overtime will allow both women and men to reconcile family responsibilities with work duties and will permit them to organise the use of time according to their needs, thus improving the quality of their lives as well as those of their children. With a view to promoting family-friendly flexibility in the public administration, an agreement to introduce “telework” has been signed on an experimental basis.

2.4 A more privatised economy

Italy is implementing a policy of reducing public intervention in the economy according to the subsidiarity principle, as recommended by the European Commission. However this process is not likely to foster equal opportunities between women and men in the labour market. A recent survey coordinated by the Equal Opportunities Ministry has shown striking vertical gender segregation in the private sector. In the Public Administration, the share of women managers increased from 19.7% in 1994 to 22.4% in 1999 while in the private sector the share was estimated at 5% in middle-sized enterprises, decreasing to 3% in large companies. Consequently, the transition to a more privatised economy should be constantly monitored and evaluated, whereas the excellent information campaign on gender issues mounted by the Ministry and the local Parity Advisers should be strengthened in order to focus attention on women’s skills also as managers.

2.5 Private institutions in labour force recruitment

Employment services in Italy have traditionally been a public monopoly. In very recent years there has been a move towards the liberalisation of recruitment services (opening up the possibility of job placement by private institutions) and the modernisation of the public employment offices. These institutional changes have produced some positive as well as negative effects.

As highlighted in the 2000 NAP, market mechanisms tend to exacerbate the prejudices of labour demand. Accordingly, the granting of access by private institutions to labour-force recruitment services will probably impact negatively on the integration or re-integration of female labour supply in the labour market. The new public employment
services will therefore have to strengthen their positive action to support women endeavouring to enter or re-enter the labour market, in order to off-set the negative effects on gender gaps brought about by private institutions. However, we do not see how the EIS (Employment Information System) will be able to perform this difficult task, since it has already fallen short of this objective.

It is evident from table 2 of the 2000 NAP that active policies favour a widening of the gender gap: the number of women engaged in active job seeking exceeds the number of men, but the unemployed who benefit from active employment policies are, in every category, for the most part men. This seems inconsistent with the declared intention stated throughout the NAP of ensuring the equal treatment of women and men. This problematic outcome has not even been highlighted in the NAP, nor has a solution to this unanticipated difficulty been envisaged or proposed.

2.6 Female entrepreneurship

It is well known that small firms play an important role in Italy. Therefore, among other measures to promote female employment, initiatives have been undertaken to foster female entrepreneurship. Italy was one of the first countries to introduce a specific law on female entrepreneurship (L. 215/1992). From the outset it was acknowledged that female entrepreneurship has specific features and may face specific problems. In order to gain better knowledge of the phenomenon (and to overcome existing difficulties) the outcomes of this law have been constantly monitored and assessed by the observatory set up at the Ministry of Equal Opportunities. The aims were (i) to determine the elements that hinder the development of women’s enterprises and (ii) to provide services for female applicants in order to remove obstacles and increase the success rate.

This commitment was renewed in the 2000 NAP, with a view to favouring job creation in southern Italy, where the female unemployment rate is extremely high and probably causes major discouragement effects. In fact, many of the southern women interviewed preferred to declare themselves inactive rather than unemployed in order not to admit that they had failed to find a regular job. This can be inferred from the fact that the same woman, interviewed repeatedly over short periods of time, stated that she was unemployed on some occasions and unwilling to work on others.

In order to develop entrepreneurship as a source of employment, funds have been allocated to the financing of individual projects under the ‘honour loan’ scheme (a zero interest rate loan by the state). The number of women applicants (only 28% of applications were made by women) is significantly less than that of men, but a positive trend in the quality and quantity of women’s applications has been noted by the observatory on female entrepreneurship.

2.7 Territorial Pacts

Territorial pacts provide for the adjustment of wages (that is, wages lower than standard ones) to local market conditions through collective bargaining based on the tripartite
The measure is intended to expand employment by lowering labour costs and thereby make it profitable for employers to take on additional workers. The outcomes of this policy in terms of employment creation are still unpredictable, but its impact on family earnings can be quite easily foreseen, with the possibility of a negative impact on the local market. It should be pointed out, in fact, that a policy of reducing wage costs by cutting back earnings seemingly conflicts with EC recommendations. In fact, a decrease in real wages gives rise to reduced purchasing power. It constrains local demand for goods and services and thus prevents local markets from achieving further economic growth. Moreover, a likely effect will be a reduction in the monetary and real wages of southern women which will further increase the gender gap. Territorial pacts also provide for wage reductions in sectors faced by the more severe difficulties. If the measure is applied to female-dominated sectors like the textiles industry, the living conditions of already disadvantaged southern women might worsen even further. An analysis of the impact of wage reductions from a gender perspective is not likely to be carried out, since women are greatly under-represented in all the three decision-making centres (local authorities, trade unions and employers’ associations).

3. Proposals by the Ministry of Equal Opportunities

Unlike other member-states, the Nordic countries for example, Italy is a nation in which there has never been significant awareness of gender issues from a cultural, social and economic viewpoint. The Ministry of Equal Opportunities is consequently endeavouring to promote parity consciousness in the labour market as well as in society. Because of the country’s low starting point the Ministry applies the positive action principle which aims to promote equal opportunities piecemeal, but undertaking constantly monitored, and therefore effective, actions, while also disseminating the concepts of gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment.

3.1 Initiatives for the diffusion of a gender consciousness

The Ministry of Equal Opportunities has longed pursued a campaign to enhance gender consciousness in society and to spread cultural and more specific information on gender issues. Unfortunately, this high quality campaign has never been supported by the media and it has been carried out essentially by the Ministry website and by information booklets. Nevertheless Italy has a network of local Parity Advisers engaged in supporting the Ministry’s information campaign amongst other things by publishing booklets on local difficulties and results.

Another proposal put forward by the Ministry of Equal Opportunities is to promote clear awareness and sensitivity to gender issues in all sections of Italian society. In

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2 The social partners involved in the negotiations are local authorities, trade unions and employers’ associations.
3 By the term ‘positive actions’ is meant all initiatives intended to eliminate obstacles to labour-market entry by women (disparities with respect to men in educational and vocational attainments) and which therefore aim to achieve de facto equality between women and men in the labour market (website: www.infowoman.it).
pursuit of this new approach the Ministry of Equal Opportunities collaborates with the Ministry of Education and the National Council of Universities, the final goal being to introduce a gender perspective in secondary schools and set up university courses on gender issues. This proposal has been much criticised in the press, and also by some well-known feminist thinkers, like the philosopher Muraro (2000), since it has been seen as a further way to use gender studies and differences to create forms of segregation. In our opinion, acknowledging changes in the labour market as well as in society, and considering new solutions for them in order to improve the quality of life of women, men and children, can only lead to positive outcomes. A low fertility rate and an ageing population are long-run societal, national and economic problems. Accelerating societal changes, so that they can keep pace with economic changes, means shifting society to a new equilibrium, reducing the negative effects taking place in disequilibrium periods. Similar cultural projects have already been undertaken in the Nordic countries where the gender gap is generally considered to be the lowest in the Union.

3.2 A tool for preventing sex discrimination in public administrations

As already pointed out in this report women are excluded de facto from responsibility positions in both the private and public sectors. Women experience considerable difficulties in entering the political arena as well, despite their having educational attainments on average higher than those of men. In order to ensure equal opportunities between women and men and to prevent sex discrimination, minister Laura Balbo has put forward various proposals.

The Ministry of Equal Opportunities has created a database containing the CVs of highly educated women well-known in their branch of activity like university professors. It is proposed that this database of women experts should be consulted by the Prime Minister whenever s/he has to choose ministers, other staff members, as well as when new appointments for responsibility positions have to be made.

Another interesting proposal by former minister, professor Laura Balbo, is to oblige the public administration to adopt a proactive gender perspective by giving active support to women candidates. In every open competition and in every internal competition for career advancement in the public sector, before a man is appointed it should be demonstrated that there are no suitable women candidates available for that position. This should also apply to such prestigious and powerful positions as, for example, the chairperson of a board of directors, who is usually appointed by a committee which selects among well-known candidates on the basis of their CVs. The Ministry should check the assessments against the candidates’ CVs. According to this proposal, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities should assemble a database including the CVs of potential women candidate in different fields.

The proposal put forward by minister Laura Balbo in 1999 was the implementation of the principle stated in the 1997 Directive. Italy’s first Minister of Equal Opportunities, Ms. Anna Finocchiaro, had already requested all other ministers to act according to this principle.

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Some kind of control is urgently required by the present situation: in 1999, of 110 appointments made by the government only 7 women were chosen and for minor positions. A study by the Ministry has shown that public decision-making centres are composed almost entirely by men. Former prime minister, Mr. D’Alema, committed himself formally to conform (for future appointments) to the minister of equal opportunities’ proposal. We do not know neither if the present minister of equal opportunities, Ms. Katia Belillo (who succeeded to professor Laura Balbo), is still pursuing the original goal, nor if Mr. Amato (the present prime minister) has committed himself to conform to the original proposal. The little information available is not encouraging. In particular, the present government (headed by Mr. Amato) has not shown good practice from a gender perspective by lowering the share of women ministers.

3.3 Present and planned monitoring tools

A precondition for *de facto* equal opportunities in the labour market between women and men is the continuous monitoring of the situation through statistical data broken down by gender and possibly cross-checked with other variables such as age and productive sector.

ISTAT (the National Statistics Service), as well as EUROSTAT, provides statistical data disaggregated by gender which serve as a basis for more detailed analysis of gender gaps. However, these statistical data are not sufficient for a thorough gender analysis, as some key areas are not covered or the disaggregation available is unsatisfactory. In particular, data on vertical segregation in the labour market are not available (except for those from specific survey financed by the Ministry of Equal Opportunities), and educational attainments by gender and age are not systematically cross-referenced by productive sector or by area of study. Hence, on the basis of fragmented information, one may expect segregation even in the educational system, with girls choosing social and literary subjects and boys opting for science and new technologies.

However, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities states in the 1997 Directive that financing more specific statistics is not a present priority, since there are enough data in national and local research centres as well as universities. The problem is to make these data easily available. In the meantime, the ministry has requested ISTAT to prepare an effective programme for monitoring gender issues on a more wide and accurate basis. The programme itself will start in the future, when the more urgent problems have been dealt with, and it will provide data for a much more wide-ranging information campaign.

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5 Moreover, it was reported in the press that President Ciampi had to insist with the Prime Minister Amato for the inclusion in his government of some women ministers.

6 This is well documented by Zuliani (2000) who argues: “We need to bear in mind that women prefer educational courses (literary disciplines in 32.5% of cases and law studies in 18.7% of cases) which offer limited job opportunities in the labour market”.

7 Draft directive of the Ministry of Equal Opportunities for the implementation of the 1997 Directive.
3.4 Ex ante, in interim and ex post evaluation of active employment policies

Evaluation supported by statistical data of planned and implemented programmes for bridging the gap is required. A policy may in fact deliver unanticipated effects and fall short of its goals or even exacerbate the gap which it intends to close.

With respect to the question of monitoring, the Ministry has been concerned primarily with projects submitted for the financing of Structural Funds, choosing to concentrated on monitoring projects funded. In order to finance the most effective projects (according to the positive actions principle), an evaluation table, which assess the whole process, has been prepared. To sum up, all projects financed by Structural Funds will be subjected to ex ante and ex post evaluation from a gender perspective. In addition, to avert the risk that strategic choices made in operational plans will not implement equal opportunities measures, a minimum share of 10% assigned to this target on total estimated financial resources has been set. Should this minimum requirement not be fulfilled, the proposed project will not be taken into account for financing. A twin-track strategy will be used: gender mainstreaming policies will be associated with actions specifically devoted to women in order to bridge the gap; actions will be promoted to help women entering or re-entering the labour market after a period of absence and to foster their career advancement. However, the percentage of the fund devoted to equal opportunities is, in our opinion, too low to close the wide gender gap characteristic of the Italian labour market and highly visible in the female inactivity rate.

4. New Legislation

The most important legislation regarding the issue of equal opportunities between women and men in the labour market comprises the Bill on Parity Advisers’s Rights and Duties, the Act on Part Time, the Act on Parental Leave and the Act on Night Work. Some of these Acts are mere transpositions of EC directives, while others further favour equal opportunities in the labour market with respect to these directives or even arise from a strong national commitment to de facto parity between women and men.

4.1 Parity Advisers

Law 125/1991 established a network of Parity Advisers to promote equal opportunities. The implementation of this law was evaluated and harshly criticised by the Parliamentary Commission Smuraglia, which called for some adjustments in the law in order to remove the obstacles preventing its full implementation. Parity Advisers had very few powers and lacked financial resources. Their ability to act according to the targets established was extremely limited. The new bill will remove many of these obstacles, thus enabling Parity Advisers to fulfil their duties.

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9 See footnote 3 (as well as website: www.infowoman.it).
The bill soon to be enacted on Parity Advisers\(^{10}\) will impact positively on equal opportunities between women and men by removing the obstacles to *de facto* equality in the labour market. Parity Advisers acting at both the national and local levels will have not only the right (which they already had) but also the financial resources to start legal cases when gender discrimination issues arise. Before choosing to bring cases to court, the Advisers will be able to request a plan for removal of the discrimination.

The bill assigns the following tasks to the national and local Parity Advisers: the promotion of positive actions, the evaluation of active labour policy from a gender perspective, verification of the coherence of policies for local territorial development. Moreover, the bill states that Advisers are, by law, members of the Central Commission for Employment and of the local tripartite Commissions. They also take part in local concertation and local inspection committees.

This important result, which should strengthen the role of Parity Advisers, has been achieved through collaboration among the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities, the Committee of Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Social Solidarity. These joint initiatives are of great importance to solve problems globally and bring about better outcomes.

### 4.2 Part time

Part-timers are mostly women. The recently enacted legislation bringing Italian rules in line with the EC directive on part time is a means both to enhance the competitiveness of the productive system and improve the quality of life. The law ensures that part-time workers do not suffer *de jure* segregation in pay, social security provisions and benefits and career advancement. However, in a labour market where a long-hours culture has always predominated, a new type of *de facto* gender segregation is easily predictable. The notes annexed to the Act state the intention of monitoring the effects of the new provisions on child-care activities: that is, whether the law impacts positively in promoting a cyclical working life pattern for either the mother or the father of small children, or whether it is instead used as a chance to find a second job, for instance by starting up as a freelancer while getting by on a steady, albeit low, income. We offer a different analysis: part-timers are mainly women because they are traditionally regarded as more suited to care activities. On this view, to be expected is segregation if not in pay then assuredly in career advancement, in the quality of the work assigned and in the vocational training or learning activities financed by employers, especially in the private sector where vertical segregation is particularly marked. At present there are neither proposals nor efficient measures to promote such complicated and expensive evaluations. A less rigid separation between the status of part-timer and full-timer might have eased the problems linked to segregation and reintegration into full-time work after a period devoted to family responsibilities. On the whole, our assessment is that the law is very positive for women workers, but a higher level of flexibility between the two statuses should have been envisaged.

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\(^{10}\) The bill on Parity Advisers has been finally approved in July 2000 (D. Lgs. 196, July 2000).
4.3 Parental Leave

The recent Act on Parental Leave (L. 53, March 2000) goes far beyond simple transposition of the EC directive. It is highly innovative in its expected effects on the Italian labour market because it includes most of the principles recommended by the European Commission as regards employment policies. Not only does it revise the legislation on parental leave but it deals with life-long learning allowances, working time flexibility issues and the extension of the typically Italian good practices of hours banks and the City Clock approach to all local municipalities.

The revision of parental leave is gender mainstreamed, since it induces fathers to take up their part of allowance by raising the total leave period attributed to the household when it is distributed on a more equal basis between husband and wife. Allowances are granted to both parents during the first eight years of the child’s life. The Act has not attributed a leave period as an individual right to mother and father as in other member-countries in view of the low Italian starting point on this issue. We fully agree with this choice, for the above mentioned alternative would have been felt to be an unjustified and incomprehensible interference in family life.

Life-long learning is favoured by granting employees the right to take unpaid (divided or continuous) leave for up to one year during their working lives, provided that the applicant has already worked for a period of at least five years. Persons taking unpaid leave may ask for payments in advance out of their public or private retirement insurance and are entitled to reintegrate their pension income by protracting their working life beyond the compulsory age limit. This provision aims to foster life-long learning in order to endow the economy with a more productive labour force and to update the skills of parents who have taken up parental allowances (for the most part women), thereby lowering the risk of de facto vertical segregation. Family-friendly and life-long learning flexibility is promoted by granting financial incentives to employers who sign contracts aimed at these two targets.

Municipalities are due to prepare a plan to coordinate the timetables of shops, public services, suburban public administration offices and to promote the use of time for social solidarity targets. The plan should be drawn up by the mayor or by an expert appointed to the task in large municipalities, and it should be discussed through collective bargaining involving the social partners in accordance with the concertation system.

Overall, the draft of the plan is highly complicated, and the financial resources appropriated by the government are very limited. Consequently, only the best plans will be funded. If not revised, we expect this part of the act to have very minor quantitative effects without any significant impact on women’s lives. By contrast, hours banks have already proved to facilitate working women duties, so that a positive effect is more easily predictable.

As highlighted in the report by the Parliamentary Commission presenting the bill, working time cannot prevail over the time of life, as the time devoted to child and family care has a social value which should be recognised.

Every five years ISTAT will issue statistical information broken down by age and gender on the use of time. The Ministry of Social Solidarity is engaged in spreading
information and in supporting families and individuals with explanations on how to enjoy their rights by means of a website and a free phone call service.

4.4 Night Work

Transposition of the EC directive gives women, too, the right to work at night but adds a family-friendly provision for the parents of small children.

The recent Act on Night Work\(^{11}\) ensures the protection of the mothers and fathers of small children, favouring not only equal opportunities between women and men in the labour market but also the equal sharing of childcare responsibilities at home. In fact it gives to mothers and fathers of small children (aged up to three years) the right to refuse night shifts.

4.5 Social and fiscal benefits

In 1999 the Government defined new goals and guidelines to foster equity and solidarity. A set of instruments to support personal and family income, as well as measures to provide them with services, were included in the budget law. The programme is financed by an amount of 983 billion lire for the year 2000 and managed by the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

The maternity benefit for mothers on very low incomes and enjoying no other social security benefits has been raised from 200,000 to 300,000 lire per month (equivalent to 150 euros) for a period of five months. Although this sum of money is small, one should bear in mind its symbolical value and the government’s financial constraints due to an intractable public debt. The maternity benefit for those already receiving other types of benefit has been raised to a minimum of 3,000,000 lire (equivalent to 1,500 euros) per year.

Other noteworthy provisions (also included in the budget law) are reduced taxation on payments to separated or divorced spouses, which has improved the living conditions of divorced women and their children, and lower taxation on households with children or on low incomes.

To be noted is the legislation on social services: the social contributions paid on persons appointed to either care tasks or socially useful work have been reduced to a very low rate. Social cooperatives helping the elderly, the disabled or other categories, as well as private families in need of care-takers, may take an advantage of these facilities. In addition, these provisions have the positive effect of inducing unregistered workers to ask to be registered and thus receive a minimum level of social protection. Needless to say, these unregistered workers are for the most part women.

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\(^{11}\) See L. 25/1999, art. 17, for the transposition of the EC directive on night work; see D. Lgs. 532, November 1999 for its implementation.
4.6 A more family-friendly system

As pointed out in many publications, there is an unequal division of care responsibilities within Italian families. The social and economic value of care-taking activities by women is far from being fully recognised and supported. In Italy crèches and kindergartens are sorely lacking, waiting lists are very long (from 6 up to 18 months) and there are no flexibility arrangements. Crèches at workplaces are rare exceptions. Worsening the situation further is the fact that care services for the elderly are markedly inadequate, particularly as regards non self-reliant persons, which creates difficulties for their working daughters.

To solve these urgent problems parliament is currently discussing a law to set up a family-friendly system which should provide services and care facilities for the elderly and disabled, as well as information services, while a bill on childcare supporting provisions has already been enacted. The predictable impact of these measures on easing women’s care duties is positive, although it is impossible to state when this policy will be implemented and whether or not it will be far-reaching.

5. The priority accorded to Gender Equality

The Italian labour market has one feature that has informed the drawing up of all Italian NAPs: the persistent, slightly increasing and considerable differentials in economic performance between northern and southern regions which cause much concern among politicians and economists. In fact, the unemployment rate is so high for men, but even higher for women, that many young people move from the depressed areas to the North, where they accept fixed-term contracts or even internships in order to find a job. This theme is addressed by all the pillars in all the three NAPs considered, which evidences the particular attention paid to this national problem. Due to Italian macroeconomic constraints (a high and intractable public debt, a slightly increasing inflation rate, and the commitment to monetary stability), it is difficult to envisage far-reaching action, but great efforts are being made to address the employment emergency in the depressed areas according to the European Commission recommendations.

In this light, gender mainstreaming appears a secondary problem, not only compared with the difficulties of depressed areas but also with the other pillars. However, significant progress has been made: the 1998 NAP was drawn up by very few experts of the Ministry of Labour and references to equal opportunities issues were lacking, while the 1999 NAP and the 2000 NAP show a significant interest in gender issues. This outcome has achieved by the recommendations of the European Commission, which have induced the Italian policy-makers to reconsider their conception of societal and economic policies.

To understand the difficulties met by gender equality policies, one has to consider the weaknesses characterising – in general – employment policies in Italy. Passive employment policies use to be the norm, and the evaluation of both planned and implemented policies are rarely considered and consequently carried out. These
assessments should be based on continuous monitoring using adequate statistical tools, although these have not yet been prepared. In addition, the different difficulties faced by women and men in the labour market on account of their gender difference use not to be taken into account.

The Commission has triggered the renewal of policy thinking and acting: there is a slow but steady shift from passive employment measures to active policies; public job centres now perform an active role in job placement, providing the unemployed with a wide range of services. Information and guidance are flanked by traineeship schemes as well as internships and other programmes likely to facilitate the labour-market integration of the unemployed.

Gender awareness is arising from the EC recommendations and it was highly visible in the drawing up of the 1999 and 2000 NAPs. In 1999, minister of labour Bassolino appointed professor Viesti to be coordinator of the team charged with drafting the document. The team included, among others, an expert on gender issues, professor Paola Villa, appointed by the minister of equal opportunities and the National Adviser on Equal Opportunities, professor Marzia Barbera. A similar procedure was followed for the drafting of the 2000 NAP: some experts on gender issues (either staff members of Ministries, or external experts) were asked to work for the drawing of the 2000 NAP. This wide-ranging collaboration has produced a NAP which is more likely to tackle employment problems effectively\textsuperscript{12} insofar as it arises from a more global perspective.

Moreover, in the very recent years, successful collaboration has taken place between the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Equal Opportunities. The minister of social solidarity, Ms. Livia Turco, and the former minister of equal opportunities, professor Laura Balbo, have taken several initiatives in order to favour equality between women and men. The most important outcome of these initiatives has been the Act on Parental Leave, which is revolutionary with respect to the previous legislation as far as gender issues are concerned.

As already pointed out, further progress has been made in the drawing up of the 2000 NAP. The mutual collaboration among ministries, committees and groups of experts has produced new ways to consider societal and economic problems as well as innovative ways to conceive solutions. As a result, the 2000 NAP shows a much greater sensitivity to gender issues in the labour market. Hence, even if little has been achieved, we dare say that Italy is on the way to gender mainstreaming its future policies.

\textsuperscript{12} It is important to point out that the NAP is a document which should show the actions taken at the national level to tackle the employment question, according to the guidelines agreed in Brussels. It is not a document putting forward new proposals of labour market policies.
6. Priority areas for future actions

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, we believe that two main priority areas can be identified:

**BOX 1 - Tagesmutter**

Child care infrastructures in Italy fall far short of demand: in the municipality of Trento in 2000, 40% of children were excluded from public crèches, which created severe problems for their working parents. Difficulties arise even for the parents of the children accepted because of the rigidity of timetables. To solve these pressing problems a social co-operative has been set up by a nurse, Ms Caterina Masé, who wanted to work with children but could not cope with both her job and caring for her own children. The initiative was developed according to advice provided by similar co-operatives in the province of Alto Adige, where they are known as “Tagesmutter”. The members of this co-operative (named “Casa Bimbo–Tagesmutter”) have organised and attended vocational courses for home and complementary assistants for children. “Mothers by day” look after no more than five children at the same time, their own children included, and the service is available 24 hours a day, also at weekends. The ‘day mothers’ take care of the children mainly in their own houses, but they occasionally offer their services in the children’s homes. Every child is cared for by the same person, who agrees with the parents on the pedagogic method to be followed, games, meals and sleeping hours. The average request of assistance amounts to between 3 and 5 hours per day, whereas the hourly costs vary from 10,000 to 12,000 lire, which is low compared with similar services. The involvement of local public authorities might reduce the cost supported by the families. Many municipalities are seriously considering supporting this initiative financially while awaiting four provincial bills to be discussed and passed. In Alto Adige the system has already begun and receives public funding. The local public authorities estimate that maintaining a child in a crèche costs 1,800,000 lire per month, while a “Tagesmutter” costs only 810,000 lire.

Source: Gozzer M. (2000)

i) helping working women by means of a well-organised network of childcare infrastructures and services as well as other forms of support in the care of elderly relatives; ii) heightening gender awareness in society, so that both women and men recognise women’s values and rights.

The best practices chosen (presented in boxes 1, 2 and 3) intend to show possible solutions (“from below”) with respect to the priority areas identified.

A major problem for women is their double role as workers and care takers. The public institutions should endeavour to facilitate the conciliation of working and family life by providing suitable child-care infrastructures, services and other provisions. Only if relieved of this excessive burden will women be able to keep up with men in the labour
market and in public roles, without being obliged to forgo maternity and thus worsen the ageing population problem.

**BOX 2 - The School of Politics for North-eastern Women**

In Italy few women participate in politics compared with men for two main reasons: (i) mechanisms of exclusion used by the political parties, which are traditionally male dominated; (ii) difficulties faced by women in integrating themselves within political organisations and institutions as well as in sharing the very priorities of political action.

As a consequence “The School of Politics for North-eastern Women” was founded in 1996; an initiative which saw the presence of the minister of equal opportunities Ms. Anna Finocchiaro and 350 women at the opening meeting. The school arose from the necessity to endow women with adequate means to overcome the disparity between the social, cultural and economic wealth they produce and their scant importance in institutional decision-making centres.

The declared objective of the school is to define a cultural space for women in which to debate political issues in the country and propose plans for their solutions. The school aims neither to deliver information on the political system nor to teach political techniques. The school is intended to be a public centre of collective debate and mutual learning. The target is to experiment with novel forms of policy-making, for women as political actors are new to the entire society (and should be innovative, as well). A gender perspective that considers women’s historical and daily experience should finally be introduced into politics.

The School was set up at the municipality of Venice and included in the European project “Political Participation of Women and Empowerment in Public Administrations”. Data on enrolments (more than 200 women in 1998/99) and on course attendance confirm that the initiative has responded to a real demand among women. The School has also achieved notable results in the political arena: some women who have attended courses have been elected to public institutions as mayors or local councillors.

Source: Del Re A. (2000)

The political system still adheres to the traditional male norm which systematically exclude women from decision-making centres. This result is very apparent in the low proportion of women politicians and even in the election lists of political parties. Considerable achievements by women in the labour market and in care activities are not matched by entitlement to participate in decision-making on their lives and jobs.

Promoting equal opportunities in society and in the labour market also means promoting an equal share in decision-making, which cannot be achieved without breaking down the dominant male norm.
BOX 3 - The Summer School in Women’s History and Cultures

The Italian Society of Women Historians - whose members are not only historians but also researchers, librarians, archivists and teachers - works to incorporate a gender perspective in history (revising conventional historical categories, developing new ones, improving the transmission of knowledge) by supporting research projects at universities and debates in women’s cultural centres. In 1990 the Society, in co-operation with the University of Siena, founded “The Summer School in Women’s History and Cultures”. In spring 1997 the co-operation between the Society and the University of Siena was strengthened, including also the possibility to have some Ph.D. students (for research in history of female writing).

The Summer School (set up by the Italian Society of Women Historians) has certainly been a successful project. The aim of the initiative is to renew research methods and the teaching of history by assuming female identity as the basis of knowledge. The course programme of the Summer School is drawn up by the Italian Society of Women Historians.

The Summer School is a unique initiative in Italy on account of its interdisciplinary approach and of its innovative teaching techniques. Every summer, a thematic area – interesting from a gender perspective – is proposed and developed through lectures, seminars and working groups. The speakers are invited to develop the theme chosen according to their own approach, integrating lectures with students’ active participation; they are asked to interact not only with students, but with other speakers as well. The modality of this active participation depends on the subject chosen as well as on the methodology proposed by speakers. The approach put forward by the Summer School encourages, in particular, the presentation of new areas in women’s studies, taking into account the ideas put forward by women’s cultural and political movements. The School provides women attending the courses (graduate students, Ph.D. students, school teachers, trade-unionists, and other interested persons) with high quality teaching in thematic areas not usually covered by regular university lectures. The purpose is to expand women’s knowledge, as well as to update it, on the basis the most recent research results.

Source: [http://dsll.let.uniroma1.it](http://dsll.let.uniroma1.it)

The predominant male norm in the labour market and the low percentage of successful women politicians also depend on a lack of gender consciousness in Italian society. The political arena is an alien world to women’s patterns of thought and conceptions of life. Many women do not even dare defy the traditional established male norm, whilst others think that it is fundamentally right and unchangeable. Young women tend to compete with young men in the male norm context because they do not want to be judged as unfair competitors on the basis of their sexual identity. Consequently, their starting points in the labour market and in institutional and political life will always be lower than men’s. To ensure *de facto* equal starting points for women and men entails recognition of gender differences and establishment of a new norm halfway between the male and the female. This type of argument is unknown to the majority of Italians.
In our opinion, no legislative measure or policy can achieve the results desired if it is not understood and shared by citizens, men and women. We therefore believe it of great importance to heighten sensitivity towards gender issues in society in general. Initiatives like “The Summer School on the History and Culture of Women” and “The School of Politics for North-eastern Women” are very important to acknowledge women’s values and their potential constructive role in society at large (including their active role in political life). These projects should be supplemented by appropriate initiatives in the schooling system, as well as by suitable actions through the media (press, television, radio).

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