EGGE – EC’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment

Assessment of the National Action Plan for Employment 2002 from a Gender Perspective

Italy

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ASSESSMENT OF THE 2002 NAP FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE.

ITALY

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1. The involvement of gender equality bodies in the preparation of the 2002 NAP

The “Introductory note” to the Italian NAP\(^1\) (2002 NAP, p. 6) mentions the Dipartimento di Pari Opportunità among the bodies involved in the preparation of the document. It is simply listed (together with the Ministries of Economics, of Education, University and Research, of Industry, of Environment, as well as the Department of Public Functions and that of Innovation), without specifying how. The information gathered is that the Dipartimento di Pari Opportunità has been asked to draft some pages, to be included in the NAP, but it has not been involved in the planning of the employment strategy. In fact, the 2002 NAP reflects the overall strategy described in the Libro Bianco (Ministero del Lavoro 2001). As pointed out in my previous report (Villa 2002, Section 3), no gender equality body was involved in the drafting of the Libro Bianco.

It has to be recalled that there are three separate national equality bodies in Italy:
- Dipartimento di Pari Opportunità (this is the Office, set up in 1997, to work for the Minister of Equal Opportunities),
- Comitato Nazionale di Pari Opportunità (at the Ministry of Labour): this is the gender equality body set up by law, together with the figure of the Equality Advisor, for the implementation of law on equal opportunities (law n. 125 enacted in 1991).
- Commissione Nazionale di Parità (at the Cabinet).

These two other gender bodies (Comitato and Commissione) are not mentioned in the NAP and, as far as we know, they have not been asked to contribute to the drafting of the Libro Bianco nor to the preparation of the 2002 NAP.

2. Gender gaps and gender developments in the national employment context

In presenting the national employment policy (2002 NAP, Section A, pp. 7-10), the very first paragraph acknowledges that about 2/3 of the total increase in employment (in 2001) is due to the strong expansion of female employment. The remaining pages are devoted to point out the structural problems of the Italian economy and the key actions for their progressive resolution. Three broad areas of action are identified:
- policies to tackle the hidden economy;
- the reform of education and training
- the reform of the labour market.

The general presentation of these three areas of action is framed without considering the gender dimension (as if they were gender neutral). The only reference to gender issues is made towards the end of Section A by saying that: “incentives to favour employment should become more targeted in order to consider the new priorities – particularly with respect to those loosing their job, but also female employment and the aged …” (2002 NAP, p. 10). Despite this announcement about ‘more targeted measures’, it is not

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\(^{1}\) This report is based on the Italian edition of the 2002 NAP (Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale, 2002). All references are made to the original (in Italian). Some sentences are translated into English, where it appears useful to make reference directly to the original document.
possible to find examples of policies explicitly targeted to raise female employment rates throughout the document.

To sum up, Section A – devoted to the presentation of the national employment policy - does not address the specific gender gaps. The implicit assumption is that the progress recorded by women in terms of employment over the last year is excellent, therefore it will be sufficient to tackle the structural problems of the Italian labour market (without the need to introduce specific measures targeted in favour of women) to assure a further expansion of female employment. This interpretation finds support in other parts of the document (as argued here below).

3. The gender dimension in the national action to raise employment rates and improve quality at work

The NAP 2002 acknowledges that:

- the female employment rate is far below both the present and the planned rate for the European Union, notwithstanding the increase recorded since 1995 (+ 5.4 percentage points in 6 years, see table 1);

- the gender gaps in the unemployment rate are still considerable, in spite of the large contraction recorded in the recent years in the female unemployment rate;

- the Italian labour market is characterised by ‘progressive segmentation’ (that is, marked differences among different groups of people in employment). Among the so called ‘structural disequilibria’, the gender gap is listed (together with differences by geographical area, age, investment in human capital and employment conditions).

Table 1 – The female employment rate in Italy compared to EU15 and to the Lisbon target, 1994-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU15 F</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy, F</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yearly change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(percentage points)</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gap Italy – Lisbon target (60%)</td>
<td>-24.3</td>
<td>-24.5</td>
<td>-23.9</td>
<td>-23.5</td>
<td>-22.9</td>
<td>-21.9</td>
<td>-20.7</td>
<td>-19.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat, Istat

Given these assertions, one would expect to find some reference to gender in the discussion about the initiatives undertaken to improve quality at work. Nevertheless, the gender dimension is not explicitly taken into consideration. The only mention of an initiative explicitly targeted to women is found, at page 22, when listing the common features of regional/local employment policies. More precisely, it is pointed out that “policies for the re-entry into active life of aged women, immigrants, disadvantaged groups, disabled, displaced workers” are – together with other six types of initiatives – among the common policies undertaken by regional/local governments.
4. National medium-term targets in employment rates

The 2002 NAP (like the previous NAPs) acknowledges that the female employment rate is far too low in Italy\(^2\); it is re-affirmed that actions to promote the integration of women in the labour market should be activated\(^3\); it is stated that specific measures (targeted to women) should be strengthened\(^4\); finally, it establishes - for the first time - national medium-term targets in terms of employment rates overall, for aged workers (55-64 years old) and for women (see table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ER in 2001</th>
<th>target for 2005</th>
<th>increase (percentage points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>+ 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>+ 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF 55-64</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>+ 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Italy, NAP 2002 (p. 14)

With respect to the medium-term targets set for women, two different considerations have to be made.

First, the yearly average increase set for the next four years is relatively high (+1.25 percentage points per year, for 2001-2005) compared to the average increase recorded over the last four years (+1.1 percentage points per year, for 1998-2001). Thus, it is assumed a slight acceleration in the integration of women in employment.

Second, even though the goal of increasing the employment rate of women is explicitly considered (2002 NAP, Section B, pp. 15-16), a real strategy toward this goal is not envisaged. On the one hand, it is stated that what has already be done – with respect to part-time work and reconciliation between paid and unpaid work – should assure the persistence over time of the positive trend recorded in female employment rate in recent years\(^5\). On the other hand, the initiatives mentioned (2002 NAP, p. 15) appear at best marginal. Three key measures are listed in order to foster female employment:

1. a further reform of part-time work (as announced in the *Libro Bianco*) in order to strengthen incentives for employers to employ this type of contract;

2. a bill on childcare services (for children 3 months – 3 years old); this bill is supposed to provide a general framework within which local governments will promote initiatives to expand childcare services; nothing is said about timing and targets;

\(^2\) See p. 11.
\(^3\) See p. 13.
\(^4\) See p. 10.
3. a bill (presented by the Government to the Parliament) to modify the Italian Constitutional law (art. 51) in order to encourage the participation of women in public institutions and political life (through elections).

These three provisions are announced as key actions for the medium term, but they are not yet in action. The possible timing for their approval and implementation is likely to be quite different. Out of these three measures, only that on part-time work is expected to be enacted soon and to produce some effects in the medium term.

Other provisions dealing with gender equality issues are considered throughout the NAP, besides these three ‘key actions’. Some measures are recalled repeatedly. In order to give an overview, for each measure a short description is presented in a summary table (p. 7, here below).

5. Response to recommendations

Five recommendations were made to Italy for the 2002 NAP. Recommendations 1 and 4 are concerned with gender issues.

Recommendation 1 is concerned with the reforms aiming to raise employment rates, in particular for women and aged workers. Recommendation 4 is concerned with the efficacy of active policies and with specific provisions aiming at reducing gender gaps.

The overall quality of the response appears inadequate with respect to the ambitious goal set out in the 2002 NAP for women.

- It is assumed that some general actions (in particular, the reform of EPS\(^6\) and the reform of education, training and life-long learning) will definitely favour the employment of women.

- Part-time work is presented as the universal remedy for the low female employment rate; it is assumed that the present regulation is insufficiently flexible for employers, this is way part-time work is not yet widely spread in Italy. At the same time, it is assumed that the best way for favouring the employment of women is through part-time work (as the natural solution to reconciliation). The possible negative effects of part-time employment are ignored. Moreover, the inadequacy of this tool for facing the very low female employment rate (and the very high unemployment rate) in Mezzogiorno is not considered.

- No specific action (active policies) to favour the employment rate of southern women is considered.

- No specific measure aiming at reducing gender gaps (in employment, unemployment) is announced.

- One new action is announced on childcare services (a bill which is supposed to plan the national framework within which local councils will provide for childcare services), but no national targets are set.

\(^6\) Employment Public Service (Servizi Pubblici per l’Impiego)
On the positive side, one has to signal four outcomes/initiatives:

- the general improvement in the monitoring of labour market policies (increasingly providing indicators by gender);
- the step forwards for the implementation of the law on Equality Advisors (see Summary Table);
- the step forwards for the implementation of the provision on positive actions favouring reconciliation at the workplace (see Summary Table);
- spreading and strengthening of gender mainstreaming at the local level (see here below).

6. Gender mainstreaming

The 2002 NAP does not refer of any significant improvement in gender mainstreaming at the national level. However, some progress has been made in monitoring labour market policies (providing an increasing number of statistical information by gender).

Notwithstanding the lack of attention to gender mainstreaming at the national level, some progress is to be acknowledged at the local level (regions). This is due to these initiatives undertaken in the past by the Dipartimento delle Pari Opportunità (the Office of the Minister of Equal Opportunities):

- the setting up of a methodology for the ex-ante, in interim and ex-post evaluation of all projects financed by the ESF (structural funds) (the so called VISPO document);
- the planning and monitoring of the ESF contribution to support equal opportunity objective (and establishing a 10% threshold of overall resources).

7. IV Pillar

The weaknesses of the 2002 NAP in terms of promoting gender equality are evident in Pillar IV (devoted to equal opportunities).

- It is badly organised, as if separate contributions were assembled without specifying a common strategy.
- Four measures are discussed. Two relates to the implementation of provisions approved in 2000 but not yet fully implemented: the legislative decree on Equality Advisors\(^7\) and the provision included in the law on parental leave aiming at favouring reconciliation (by establishing a special fund for enterprises adopting a flexible organisation of working time aimed at improving the reconciliation of work and family life). A third measure relates to two nation wide surveys (recently commissioned by the office of the Minister of EO to Istat. The fourth measure relates to the Bill on childcare, recently presented by the Government to the Parliament (see Summary Table, p. 7).

\(^7\) See the discussion presented in Villa (2002, section 2) and Villa (2001, p. 22).
- The considerable delay in the full implementation of these two provisions (that on Equality Advisors and that on flexible working time arrangements) could be interpreted as a signal of the lack of concern about gender issues at the national level. The recent approval of the decrees required (by law) for their effective implementation is a due act, more than the manifestation of a true concern about the issues involved.

- Progress made in implementing previously announced measures are not reported (only scanty and general information is produced).

- Fiche 17 (tackling gender gaps) presents only a very all-inclusive discussion about women in lifelong learning, education and professional training. Very general (non-specific) reference to regional experience is made.

- Fiche 18 (on reconciliation) refers that the legislative decree required for the implementation of the provision (included in the law on parental leave) providing incentives for enterprises innovating work organisation to favour reconciliation was recently approved. No quantitative information on the potential impact of this measure is specified. But it is said that it is still at a very initial stage (not being well known among enterprises). General reference is also made to the bill on childcare services for children 0-3 (Piano nazionale sugli asili nido).
### SUMMARY TABLE – Summary of measures related to female employment in the 2002 NAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>DATE OF MEASURE</th>
<th>REFERENCE IN 2002 NAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A further reform of part-time work (as announced in the Libro Bianco) in order to strengthen incentives for employers to employ this type of contract. The underlying idea is that the re-regulation of part-time work passed in 2000 and 2001 (D.Lgs. 61/2000 and D.Lgs. 100/2001) has to be modified, some provisions do not allow the required organisational elasticity of the enterprise.</td>
<td>announcement: measure announced in the “Libro Bianco” and in the 2002 NAP.</td>
<td>National Action (p. 15) Recommendation 1 (p. 27) Recommendation 4 (p. 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bill on childcare services for small children (3 months - 3 years old) has been submitted to Parliament (Piano nazionale sugli asili nido). No national medium-term targets are established (in terms of share of children); it is stressed that facilities for single parents of small children should be provided for; but, it is not made clear why only single parents are explicitly mentioned. The fact of considering the urgent need of single parents is certainly positive, but it does not solve the problem of working mothers at large. In fact, the share of single parents is low in Italy, compared to other European countries.</td>
<td>announcement: measure announced in the 2002 NAP.</td>
<td>National Action (p. 15) Recommendation 1 (p. 27) Recommendation 4 (p. 34) IV Pillar (pp. 103-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bill presented by the Government to the Parliament to modify the Italian Constitutional law (art. 51) in order to encourage the participation of women in institutional bodies and to favour gender equality in “cariche elettive”. Apart from the difficulties that such a proposal is going to meet, therefore the very low probability of its approval, the possible positive impact of such a measure on the position of women in the labour market is very indirect (with no impact in the medium term).</td>
<td>announcement: measure announced in the 2002 NAP.</td>
<td>National Action (p. 15) Recommendation 1 (p. 28) Recommendation 4 (p. 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of the decree (on the 24th of January 2002) concerning the subdivision among Regions of the special fund provided for the activity of Equality Advisors (at the national, regional and provincial level). Law on Equality Advisors, announced in 1999 and passed in 2000, has strengthened the role of Equality Advisors; the law states that they should be given the financial resources needed to tackle discrimination cases (also by bringing lawsuits).</td>
<td>still in progress: implementation of the provision passed in May 2000 (Enclosure to 2000 Finance Act and D.Lgs 196/2000, art. 7, point 5) (two years delay)</td>
<td>Recommendation 4 (p. 34) IV Pillar (pp. 98-99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of the decree (on the 15th of May 2001) for the financing of the provision concerning flexibility in working time (positive actions favouring reconciliation at the workplace). This provision is included in the law on parental leave, enacted in January 2000; the main goal is to promote the experimentation of new flexible arrangements at the enterprise level (by establishing a special fund for enterprises adopting a flexible organisation of working time aimed at improving the reconciliation of work and family life).</td>
<td>still in progress: implementation of the provision passed in January 2000 (art. 9, section III, law 53/2000) (two years delay)</td>
<td>Recommendation 4 (p. 34) IV Pillar (pp. 103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstreaming: gender monitoring (on the participation of women in actions financed through ESF) is widely carried out at the regional level (implementation of the VISPO guidelines).</td>
<td>almost fully implemented</td>
<td>Recommendation 1 (p. 27) IV Pillar (pp. 99-100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two nation wide surveys have been recently commissioned by the Diparimento di Pari Opportunità (the office of the Minister of EO) to ISTAT to better understand gender differences (focusing on regional disparities): one project is focused on the process of integration of women in the labour market, the other project is focused on reconciliation.</td>
<td>new measure passed: these two surveys should be completed by 2006.</td>
<td>IV Pillar (pp. 99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


