



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Parenting in France

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Comments Paper – Italy

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Parenting and reconciling work and private life in Italy

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1. National family policies on childcare-system

In Italy, family policies still do not have an explicit and unitary formulation and it is difficult to establish the extent of their institutionalisation at the national level. In other words, social-policy interventions affecting households show a high degree of fragmentation at different institutional levels. It can also be argued that the family, with its gendered and generational division of responsibility and labour, as well as its asymmetrical structure of interdependencies, can be seen as the "implicit partner" of Italian social policies.

1.1. Childcare services and provisions for the support of maternity and paternity

If we consider the institutional provision of childcare, there are two kinds of public-preschool services in Italy: crèches or day care for children from three months to three years old and kindergartens for children from three to five years old. Crèches differ greatly from kindergartens in terms of their conceptualisation as services to families (the former) or as universal educational rights for the children (the latter), funding status, take-up rate, and extent of provision within the country. At the national level no organic provision and no further developments have taken place on the matter of crèches in the last decade.

1.1.1. Legislative aspects

Within social policies, the existing Italian legislative literature on childcare mainly focuses on crèches, as they represent a crucial service-tool for the life of many Italian families. In this area, there are two acts, which can be referred to as key factors for public intervention.

- Law No. 1044/1971 ("Five-year plan for the establishment of municipal crèches with the support of the State"), subsequently integrated and modified by Law No. 891/1977 ("Norms for the refinancing of the crèches plan and modification of the institutive Law No. 1044/1971"): it introduces crèches for children up to three years old, as a public service run by Municipalities at a local level. In Law No. 1044/1971 crèches are defined as "individual-demand services" and not as universal services, as opposed to school (compulsory) and public kindergartens. Service providers establish fees to be paid on a sliding scale according to the income of parents, in order to cover part of the service costs. The persistence of access-criteria to this service in Italy, which favour some occupational groups, incorporates a strong risk to penalise households, where parents, and especially mothers, carry out atypical and unstable working activities.

- Law No. 285/1997 (“Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for children and adolescents”): this important Law is intended to develop a policy on the behalf of children and represents the first long-term platform in relation to childcare and educational services. It refers to four lines of action: support to the parents-children relationship; innovation and experimentation of social-educational services for young children; recreational services for the spare time; positive actions aimed to promote children’s and adolescents’ rights. The Law 285/1997 puts into place a National fund for children and adolescents intended to finance several projects, especially in urban areas, to be realised at different levels (i.e. local, regional and national). Such projects are aimed to promote “children’s rights, quality of life, development, self-fulfilment and socialization” (art. 1). This Act is important because, in addition to developing policies favouring underage persons, it also aims to enhance the well-being of their families and to support working parents. According Naldini and Saraceno (2008), it represents a framework for work-family reconciliation.
- Law No. 328/2000 (“Framework Law for the implementation of the integrated system of interventions and social services”): the Law No. 285/97 has been subsequently absorbed by the Framework Law 328/2000, designed to ensure an integrated system of interventions and social services to people and families. In paragraph 3, the family’s needs are answered through the prioritisation of strategies ranging from care allowances to policies of reconciliation between work time and care time.
- Law No. 53/2000 (“Provisions for the support of maternity and paternity, for the right of care and education, and for urban time planning”): this Law concerns the State intervention on care-related leave. In fact, reformed maternity and parental leave arrangements ensured a statutory entitlement to unpaid training leave and promoted the negotiation between employees and employers by incentives for adopting arrangements in order to facilitate work-family reconciliation (for more specifications on leave from work in order to care for children and concerning work-family reconciliation for labour market regulation, see, among others, Saraceno, 2003).
- Further legislative measures on parental leave were included in Legislative Decree No. 151/2001 (“Consolidation Act of regulation on the protection of and support to maternity and paternity, in accordance with art. 15 of the Law No. 53 of 8 March 2000”). These two legislative measures transposed the Council Directive 96/34/EC on parental leave. Additionally, the Interministerial Decree of “Introduction, on a trial basis for the years 2013-2015, of the father compulsory and optional leave, besides forms of economic contribution to the mother, to facilitate the re-entry into the labour market at the end of the leave”²² December 2012 (), regulates the procedures for the fruition of the compulsory day leave for the father and of the two days of optional leave to use instead of the mother, as well as the possibility for the working mother - at the end of the period of maternity leave and during the eleven following months - to request, instead of the parental leave, a contribution. This contribution can be used as an alternative to the baby-sitting service or to cope with the costs of the public child care services or of accredited private services.
- . Finally, the Stability Act No. 228/2012 (“Provisions for the formation of the annual and pluriannual budget of the State”), transposing the Council Directive 2010/08, and the art. 32 of the Legislative Decree No 151/2001, relying on the collective bargaining the task of establishing procedures for taking parental leave

even on an hourly basis, with assimilation of a certain number of hours to a day job (paragraph 339).

1.1.2. Take-up of maternity, Paternity and Parental leave

Since Italy lacks especially services for early childhood, facilitations taking the form of parental leaves are the only instruments that can effectively support parents (especially, women who are employed) in their role of raising children. The tendency in the last years has been that of gradually extending maternal leaves also for self-employed work.

1.1.2.1. Maternity leave

Maternity leave for employees is compulsory. The length of leave (before and after birth) is twenty weeks (5 months): at least four weeks should be taken before the birth date.

In 2011, according to administrative data of the National Department for Social Welfare, about 380,000 employees used compulsory Maternity leave; 9% were temporary workers and 91% permanent workers. In particular, there has been a decrease of 6.8% of women who benefited from the compulsory maternity leave paid to the employed mother, employee or self-employed, from 2011 to 2012. The decrease has been 5.6% for employees, whereas it has fallen of 17.6% for self-employed workers and of 18.6% for artisans.

1.1.2.2. Paternity leave

The length of leave is one day of compulsory leave. Fathers can take two additional days if the mother agrees to transfer these days from her Maternity leave allocation. Employed fathers, including those who are self-employed and enrolled in “*Gestione separata*” (separate administration), may take a paid leave of three months following childbirth in the following circumstances: mother’s death or severe illness; child being left by the mother; or the child being in the sole care of the father.

Since paternity leave was only introduced in January 2013, there is no information yet on the take-up of this leave.

1.1.2.3 Parental leave

The length of leave (before and after child’s birth) is six months for mothers and six months for fathers, non-transferable, up to a total of 10 months. Fathers taking a three months Parental leave are entitled to one month of additional Parental leave. Leave is an individual entitlement, but the total amount of leave taken by two parents cannot exceed ten months (or 11 months if the father takes at least a parental leave of three months).

In 2011, Parental leave was used by 296,000 employees (6.4% with temporary contracts and 93.6% with permanent contracts); as with Maternity leave, the type of contracts varied regionally. According to the INPS data used for this analysis, 89%

of employees using Parental leave were women and 11% were male. Also, users of parental leave in 2012 decreased by 4.9%, compared with 2012¹.

1.1.2. Changes in policy since April 2012

According to Addabbo & Giovannini (2013), the reform of the labour market implemented in January 2013 has brought in a number of changes. It re-introduced monitoring to avoid '*dimissioni in bianco*' (literally, "resignations in white"), a practice enacted by firms to get rid of mothers at childbirth, by extending from one to three years the period after childbirth during which an employer has to communicate to the Ministry of Labour the dismissal of a parent in order to get it validated (see Consigliera Nazionale Pari Opportunità, 2013a).

As mentioned above, it also introduced a one-day period of compulsory paid Paternity leave, plus the possibility of two more days if the mother agrees to transfer to the father two days of her Maternity leave. This has been introduced on an experimental basis for three years, until the end of 2015 (Consigliera Nazionale Pari Opportunità, 2013b).

To promote female labour supply, the reform included a voucher system to be used for childcare by new mothers, who will have the right to claim these vouchers in place of Parental leave from the end of compulsory Maternity leave up to 11 months after childbirth, i.e. during the period of non-compulsory leave (Consigliera Nazionale Pari Opportunità, 2013c).

2. Reconciliation of work and life time

In Italy, the majority of measures intended to support the conciliation between work and family are the result of public intervention in its various forms. Numerous local governments, and first of all the State itself, have proposed various modalities for conciliating one's life with the work, which were thought as ad-hoc measures for working women.

On the other hand, however, enterprises and societies have delayed their active involvement in the promotion of conciliatory policies. Moreover, also trade unions have difficulties in assuming a perspective based on genders aimed at conciliating family and professional life. In the last decade this situation has changed and research, studies and literature on policies for conciliating work and family within enterprises have observed a relevant development.

2.1 Public spending in favour of work-life balance

As shown by recent data (9° Osservatorio Confartigianato Donne Impresa, October 2013), Italy is not a country for working mothers, independently from whether they are employees or self-employed. Indeed, the public spending intended to help women to give birth and raise children is 20.3 billions of Euros, corresponding to 1.3% of GNP (gross national product) and 39.3% lower than the average of the 27

¹ More updated information on maternity, paternity and parental leave (e.g., payment and funding, flexibility, variation in leave due to family reasons, etc.) can be found in Addabbo and Giovannini, 2013. See also: 9° Osservatorio Confartigianato, Donne impresa, October 2013.

European countries. In particular, in Italy, the public spending for favouring births is 3.1 billions, 26.6% lower than the average in Europe; that for favouring children's growth is 2.8 billions, 51.2% lower than the average EU, and that for young people under 18 years old is 6.6 billions, 51.5% lower than the average EU.

The economic crisis, the possibility to use public childcare services and the gap Italy-EU concerning investments in the familiar welfare influence the birth rate. Together with the decrease of birth rates, as mentioned above, the use of some welfare instruments supporting maternity and conciliation work-family is decreasing: paid maternity compulsory leave and parental leave, maternity allowance of the State and Municipalities (4% less). Between 2011 and 2012 we observe a negative sign also for the family checks (0.9% less). The municipal services for children, such as crèches, micro-crèches or additional and innovative services are only used by 14% of children under three years.

Italy however is still leader in Europe for the higher number of entrepreneurs and self-employed workers: 1,524,600, corresponding to 16.3% of women employed in our country, compared with an average in EU of 10.3%.

2.2. Work, occupation and levels of satisfaction

The Istat Report (2013) underlines the importance of the following aspects reported in Paragraphs 2.2.1. and 2.2.2.:

2.2.1. Work and conciliation with the activities of familiar care

- The women's employment rate in Italy does not arrive to 50%, that is, 12 percentage points lower than the average of the 27 EU countries. In the South of Italy, the employment rate is 21 percentage points lower than the EU average;
- Despite the fact that the economic crisis has mainly concerned the male occupations in the construction and manufacturing domains, gender difference in Italy is among the highest in Europe;
- With respect to the labour market, with the economic crisis the differences between genders decrease, but the territorial and generational differences increase;
- In Italy, the probability of women with small young children to find a job is 30% lower than that of women without children. This difficulty is greater for younger women, who are more likely to have children younger than three years old, for whom the availability of public day care is scarce;
- Those with children between 3 and 5 years old are more likely to find kindergartens, especially in Central-Northern regions. In the South, the availability of nurseries and kindergartens is lower and the familiar environment of "grandmothers" cannot compensate this low availability of public structures for child care.

2.2.2. Work and conciliation with the activities of familiar care

- A working activity adequately paid and stable strongly contributes to a person's well-being, whereas the lack of a "good occupation" has a negative impact on the level of well-being. Works that do not allow to conciliate work with social and familiar life have a similar negative impact;
- If the gain is a motive of satisfaction for men, women are more satisfied by relational aspects, work timetable and home-work distance;
- The quality of the occupation, for women, cannot obscure the difficulty in conciliating work and life times;
- Even if there is a slow reduction in the asymmetry of familiar work, the percentage of women with a work overload (paid and not paid) does not decrease;
- Division of labour within the household: the traditional asymmetry of roles between partners is gradually decreasing. The imbalance concerning the familiar work within the couple slowly decreases. In the South the asymmetry in the family workload is greater, but it also decreases more rapidly, due to the increase in the percentage of women with higher educational levels;
- The imbalances in the distribution of family work and the lack of services detract time for the self (personal care and relational activities) among working women.

As highlighted in the 2006 Eurispes Italy Report, Italian women constitute a great potential that is not yet fully appreciated, they are like acrobats who are continuously involved in the effort to maintain themselves in balance between work, family and society. The cause should be attributed to the fact that, thirty years after the beginning of the feminisation process of the labour market, a culture that struggles to recognise that the role of women within the family and society has changed still remains in Italy. This is one of the main causes that explain why Italy is still far from providing concrete support to the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities.

2.3. Companies and family-friendly policies in reconciling work and private life

Research conducted in the last years, especially within enterprises located in Northern Italy, focused on welfare sets realised as a dimension internal to corporate social responsibility, by following a multi-stakeholders policy. The aim is to analyse the culture of the enterprise and to understand the mechanisms that allow the measures of welfare enacted within the enterprises to generate and promote well-being at the employee's personal, familiar and working levels.

In general, the analyses and studies conducted show that both managers and employees have a clear idea of the importance of the welfare sets and instruments for reconciling family and work implemented by enterprises. The enterprises that are active in promoting welfare policies underline the fact that investments in conciliation services remain on the territory and create economic value, but also social value

(see, among others, Addabbo, Facchinetti & Mastroleo, 2009; Mazzucchelli, 2011; Macchioni, 2012).

The risk of “traps of reconciliation”, that is, creating additional barriers to families for whom working and familiar responsibilities should be reconciled, must be avoided. Indeed, a mother who works and decides to come back to work by using part-time contracts in order to personally provide child care will be among the last in the ranking for having access to the public day-care. Thus, she would be forced to work full time or to leave her job.

3. Transferability of the good practices from France to Italy

In comparative and cross-national research, France has always belonged to the cluster of countries with policies providing extensive support for maternal employment. The support for dual breadwinner families is more generous in France than in most European countries. In France there is a strong tradition of policies allowing to combining paid work and family responsibilities. Because of a serious shortage of childcare facilities, a policy of investments in childcare service has been developed over the last four decades. In this process we have to consider the important role of departmental family allowance funds (Caisse d'Allocations Familiales, CAF) and of their national organisation (CNAF, National Fund for Family allocation), the branch of the Social Security system responsible for family policy (Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini, Hojgaard, & Clark, 2004)

What are the best practices of the French model that can be exported to Italy? Before answering this question, a clarification is necessary: the good practices that obtained significant results in a specific context/country do not necessarily “work” elsewhere for many understandable reasons. The choices to be made should therefore avoid the risk of merely “copying,” hoping in this way that easily solving the existing problems about the childcare policy and reconciling work and family life is possible.

First of all, the priorities to be achieved for the specific target-country (e.g., increasing the amount of fertility rate and/or women labour market participation rates, and/or increasing and diversify childcare supply) should be considered. Other variables to be considered in priorities/choices to be made concern the type of childcare (e.g., home-based or collective childcare). Finally, it is important to remember that the basis of a process aimed at improving the policies on parenting and reconciliation of work and private life lies on legislative choices made by central governments and applications of standards at regional and municipal level. Such choices cannot ignore the importance attributed to the three pillars of reference: taxation, infrastructure and legislation on working time (in other words: money, services and time). Italy was at the avant-garde in Europe for the model of public childcare services in some regions (Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Liguria), but it has recently made steps back because legislative measures followed a logic similar to the German practice in 80s / 90s.

That said, there is no doubt that the flexibility of the “French model” has succeeded to develop a diversified childcare supply, helping to reconcile high fertility rates and high women's employment rates. There are good French practices that can be directly implemented in Italy (e.g. mon-enfant) and others that require a careful

analysis of the existing situation and of the effects of exporting the model in Italy (childminders, childminder facilities and Childminding Team).

- The site “www.mon-enfant.fr”: the creation of a website such as "mon-enfant" is critical to inform families as well as early childhood and youth professionals about the different facilities available throughout Italy. It could be structured so as to be used by companies which often are not informed on how they can access funding, nor on the various good practices adopted by other companies or on the results of studies.
- Childminders, childminder facilities and Childminding Teams: since 40% of children are followed by childminders in France, also considering that these childcare solutions have already been used in Italy (e.g., in the province of Bolzano, in the Trentino-Alto Adige Region), it is necessary to better reflect on why such experiences have remained limited and have not been implemented at the national level. Public childcare services should be supported and expanded, but this is not the only available solution, and childminders or home-based childcare can also participate to the development of childcare.

However, the role that the Regions have in Italy in accordance with the proxies that the law has established must be kept in mind. In fact, the child-care projects and services are realised at local, regional and not mainly at national centralised level. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise the need to invest in child services and in education, to avoid creating disincentive conditions to enter or to remain in the labour market, and also to create the conditions for a greater involvement of fathers in childcare. Obviously, it is also crucial to adopt supportive policies that can reduce the gap existing between North and South of Italy concerning the childcare services and the good practices on gender equality.

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