



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Gender segregation in the labour market and education

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### Comments Paper - Italy



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# Gender segregation in the labour market and education in Italy

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## 1. Introduction and relevant country context

### 1.1. Socio Economic context and gender segregation in the Italian Labour Market

Italy is one of the Southern European Countries where gender structural inequalities are pervasively featuring several spheres of the national socio-economic and political context. It has been ranked 69° in the Global Gender Gap Report, 114° with regard to economic participation, and several studies and reports have highlighted the many hindrances to full gender equality. As far as employment is concerned, the country is strongly hit by the economic and financial crisis of the Eurozone: latest figures<sup>1</sup> show how the gender gap among non-active population (8 %) is one of the highest in Europe<sup>2</sup>: employment rate for women has stuck to 46.8 % in 2014, 12.8 % less than the European average<sup>3</sup>. Horizontal segregation is also featuring the Italian job market: technically qualified jobs, although shrinking during the crisis, have been still mostly taken by men (56 % of the total) from 2004 to 2012, men represent 85 % of workmen and artisans while in clerical jobs within the service sector and commerce the ratio is reversed and 57 % of the employed personnel is made of women<sup>4</sup>.

From available data in the ICT sector, showing a higher degree of resilience to the crisis than other tech-oriented sectors in Italy (Rapporto Osservatorio Competenze Digitali), only 18 % of the employees are women, and their presence is concentrated in software development and web design, with less room for female engagement in systems management and hardware<sup>5</sup>. Available data on employment in the public scientific research institutions emphasise a visible vertical segregation, as women constitute 48 % of early stage researchers while their share lowers down to 39 %

<sup>1</sup> ISTAT (2014). Rapporto annuale 2014. Il mercato del lavoro negli anni della crisi, dinamiche e divari. Roma.

<sup>2</sup> After two years of declining employment, during 2014 a 0.4 % increase was registered raising the employment rate to 55.7 % still far from the situation in 2008 and with a strong geographical cleavage and a still declining ration in Southern Italy regions.

<sup>3</sup> It has to be noticed though that the number female employed has increased as unemployment has hit harder the typically male dominated sectors (industry and building) rather than the third sector, so female employment has been growing during the years 2011 and 2012 and then re-started to decrease in 2013. Still the reasons for female employment to be more stable than male one are due to more women entering the labour market to compensate their partners' unemployment (rise of single income families with a female breadwinner from 9.6 % into 2008 to 12.9 % in 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Sebastiani, M.R. (2014). Crisi economica e segregazione occupazionale in Italia negli anni più recenti. *Statistica & Società*, 3, 1, pp. 5-15.

<sup>5</sup> Modis (2014). Digital Mismatch. Il mercato del lavoro nel settore ICT in Italia.

among tenured researchers and to 24 % among research directors. In technological research disciplines, divides are even stronger as women are 44 % among early stage researchers, 34.6 % among tenured researchers and 22 % of directors. Overall, women's percentage among heads of departments and research institutes is just 17 %<sup>6</sup>. Still, in the last decade an improvement has been registered and on average these figures have been increasing by 10 % since the year 2000.

The Italian gender-segregated labour market is mirrored by a high education sector where gender-biased study and career choices are made by youngsters: according to figures from the Education and Research Ministry, girls made up 79 % of the enrolled students in humanities in 2013/2014, while only 38 % in scientific faculties; figures are less promising for hard sciences, where no increase has been shown in the last decade such as 30 % for physics, 18 % for engineering, and at the bottom of the list Computer Sciences with only 15 % of enrolled students being female.

It is well-known that the workforce in primary education and childcare is predominantly female-dominated in Italy: women amount nearly to the total of employed educators in pre-primary schools, to 95.6 % in primary schools, 76.5 % in lower secondary schools and 60.3 % in upper secondary schools<sup>7</sup>. Some studies have reported an even stronger feminisation of childcare and teaching professions in the recent years<sup>8</sup>. The before mentioned phenomenon is linked to the number of graduated students in Educational and Training Sciences Faculties (Scienze della Formazione): from data available by the Ministry of Education, we learn that along with a more than tripled number of graduations, in the academic year 2013/2014 boys represented 11 % of the overall number of graduated students, while in the year 2003/2004 they constituted 14 % of the total. A degree in Educational and Training Sciences is required to become educators in pre-primary schools (3-6 year old children) as well as teachers at primary schools. Access requisites for working as educators in nurseries and kindergartens (0-3 year old children) can vary at the regional levels but usually foresee a secondary school diploma in socio-pedagogical disciplines (private structures can have more flexible regulations though).

## 2. Policy Debate

In the last decade, the national public debate has been focusing extensively on gender equality issues<sup>9</sup>, also based on new feminist movements and a revitalised gender-oriented activism across the country. In recent years, institutional policies to address gender segregation of the Italian labour market have been mainly focused on specific measures for achieving equality in retirement age for men and women and improving regulations on parental leaves as well to comply with EU directives and policies. Foreseen gendered impacts of the broad Job Market Reform approved last July (Jobs Act, 2015) are still subject to debate, and a group of knowledgeable

<sup>6</sup> Avveduto, S. & Pisacane, L. (2015) Portrait of a Lady. Women in Science: Participation Issues and Perspectives in a Globalised Research System. Roma: Gangemi Editore.

<sup>7</sup> [www.anagrafe.miur.it](http://www.anagrafe.miur.it)

<sup>8</sup> Mapelli, B., Ulivieri Stiozzi, S. (editors). (2012). Uomini in educazione / a cura di Barbara Mapelli, Rho: Stripes.it

<sup>9</sup> Longo, V. & Sangiuliano, M. (2007). Issues Histories in Italy. Series of Timelines and policy debates. QUING Project/FP6 Programme. IWM-Vienna.

gender experts have proposed several amendments to the law across the legislative process, mostly on parental leave, which have been partly integrated into the final text<sup>10</sup>.

In terms of contrasting horizontal segregation across the economy, no specific measures have been included into the overall revision of regulations on Equal Opportunities (Codice delle Pari Opportunità, 2006), although the issue has come to the fore within so called Riforma Fornero<sup>11</sup> in 2012, foreseeing a 50 % tax reduction to employers for hiring workers from the underrepresented gender in particular sectors where horizontal segregation is higher (art. 8, commi 8-11): complying to the EC Regulation 800/2008, art. 18 –e) the law refers to sectors where the gender gap is overcoming by 25 % the average gender gap across all sectors of the economy.

The National Operation Plan for Schools (PON 2014-2020) is setting gender as a crosscutting issue within the Partnership Agreement and featuring Objective n° 10.8 with the goal of investing in skills and life-long learning with an explicit reference to the need of overcoming gender inequalities in specific disciplines. Initiatives for teachers' training are foreseen, among others, in Collaboration with the National Department for Equal Opportunities. Advancements are expected from the previous programming period when many courses on engendering pedagogy and teaching were organised across the country (beneficiaries of ESF and ERDF are mainly regions in Southern Italy) and a more focused and specialised approach on Gender & STEM could facilitate implementation<sup>12</sup>.

The recently approved Education System Reform is not prioritising the gender and STEM agenda in particular, although it is more broadly encompassing promotion of education to gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination with the goal of informing and raising the awareness of students, teachers and parents<sup>13</sup>. This provision has in the last months ignited strong reactions from religious movements and affiliated parents' associations, as on the verge of debates on same-sex marriages/partnerships and reproductive rights in the last 5 years, issues of gender in education have become extremely hot and controversial in the public debate, in Italy and in several other EU countries<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Documented online by Fondazione Brodolini on line magazine InGenere: <http://www.ingenere.it/articoli/conciliazione-proposte-sul-jobs-act>

<sup>11</sup> LEGGE 28 giugno 2012, n. 92. Disposizioni in materia di riforma del mercato del lavoro in una prospettiva di crescita. (12G0115). (GU n.153 del 3-7-2012 - Suppl. Ordinario n. 136).

<sup>12</sup> Sangiuliano, M. (2008). Generi e politiche educative. Spunti sul contesto Italiano a partire dagli ambiti internazionali, in Educare con differenza. Modelli educativi e pratiche formative. Padoan, I. & Sangiuliano, M. (a cura di), pagg. 65-108. Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier.

<sup>13</sup> Law n° 107/13th July 2015, School System's Reform "La buona scuola", art. 16.

<sup>14</sup> In the last year this debate has been actually focused on schools and gender training in schools, based on criticisms to specific projects on gender discriminations. In a framework of extremely polarised positions, and the rhetorical construction of an homogeneous "gender ideology" supposedly aimed at subverting the natural order and nature of the heterosexual family, implementation of future interventions in schools might present some challenges. See: Paternotte, D. (2014) Christian Trouble: the Catholic Church and the Subversion of Gender, Published on line on CritCom. A forum for Research and Commentary on Europe, Council for European Studies: <http://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/critcom/christian-trouble-the-catholic-church-and-the-subversion-of-gender/>

Another policy initiative which would fit well as a broader framework to incorporate the issue of promoting a more gender-balanced participation to STEM is the National Coalition for Digital Jobs and Growth, launched in 2015 by the AgID, the National Agency for the Digital Agenda, based on the EU-level Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs and Growth. It is a broad multi-stakeholder platform collecting commitments and projects from the main players in the field, although as a soft policy measure it has no funds to invest into specific initiatives at the moment. In any case, whatever policy intervention to be designed and put in place in the years to come can count on the positive baseline built by a multiplicity of mostly self-funded initiatives from the side of civil society: this has made the debate on gender inequalities in scientific research and in the high-tech sector very vivid, although without a substantial impact at the level of national policy measures and in spite of the fact that specific projects with a strong institutional support from Ministries and National Agencies still seem not to be high on the institutional policy agenda.

### 3. Transferability Aspects

The three good practices have in common the implementation of coordinated actions at national level under the framework of centrally set up policy initiatives on the issues at stake and dedicated resources made available for implementations.

#### 3.1. Danish good practice

The Danish good practice's goal of increasing the number of male pedagogues in kindergartens would fit the Italian scenario where most of educators and teachers in those domains are women. The issue of involving men into gender equality policies and practices has come to the fore mostly at the academic level and from gender-feminist communities in civil society as well as by men's NGOs<sup>15</sup>, although not yet tackled in depth by institutional policies and machineries. The lack of men in education professions has also been debated and several arguments were raised by researchers and activists, some of them similar to the ones the Danish good practice has framed<sup>16</sup>. As a positive background element, a new trend explored by sociologists can be mentioned, which is the emerging attention paid by men to traditionally female-dominated professions in care and education sectors, partly due to a long lasting economic crisis<sup>17</sup>.

- Main transferability opportunities:
  - City Councils' involvement would be essential for working with kindergartens and pre-primary schools, due to national institutional arrangements, although the private offer is increasing, often through PPPs. An interesting actor to be involved in a nation-wide initiative would be ANCI (the national association of City Councils).

<sup>15</sup> MaschilePlurale, Il cerchio degli Uomini, The White Ribbon Campaign Platform and others.

<sup>16</sup> Marchesi, A. (2012). Qui ci vuole (ancora) il maschio. Dialogo tra generazioni di educatori, in Mapelli, B. e Ulivieri Stiozzi. Uomini in educazione, pp. 153-177. Rho: Stripes.

<sup>17</sup> Perra, S. & Ruspini, E. (eds.) (2015). Trasformazioni del lavoro nella contemporaneità. Gli uomini nei lavori non maschili. Milano: Franco Angeli.

- At City Council Level, a work with supervising pedagogues as well as with teachers would be needed, as the former usually have a strong influence on educational practices and methods within schools.
  - Parallel joint actions with Universities and Educational Sciences Faculties would be beneficial to attract more boys to these professions, at least at the level of pre-primary education (3-6).
  - Involving more advanced regions in terms of planning urban childcare policies (Emilia Romagna, Trentino Alto Adige, Lombardia, Toscana) would provide better opportunities for a piloting practice which can be considered as very advanced for the national context.
- Foreseen Constraints
    - Educational professions are losing appeal and 'power' according to some scholars: salaries are estimated at low levels, partly compensated by long-term employment opportunities, at least in services run by city councils.

### 3.2. Netherlands' good practice

The Netherlands' good practice is an interesting case of a comprehensive intervention covering the whole educational chain and all involved stakeholders with a unified methodology and a centralised coordination. The Italian scenario is featuring a policy framework like the National Operational Plan for Schools which includes a gender mainstreaming approach with a focus on educational segregation and which could represent a good starting point for funding similar actions based on the previous programming period results.

- Main transferability opportunities
  - The vivid policy debate at civil society and academic level on gender in research and gender in ICT provides a good ground for involving schools and their personnel, as well as new and more mature gender expertise on the topics.
  - Combining the raising interest towards STEM careers with entrepreneurial perspectives and start-up opportunities might provide better integration of the topic in the existing policies prioritising entrepreneurship education.
  - A centralised approach similar to the one used in the Netherlands would ensure that schools do not have to bear the organisational and administrative burdens which might prevent them from applying for funds. On the other end, subcontracting to one single entity could prove to be more difficult to implement in Italy due to a totally different geographic and demographic context and might therefore require a stronger coordination role from governmental or national agencies level or subcontracting to more than one organisation.

- Possible constraints
  - Limitations of the good practice in terms of difficulties in getting involved professional women role models, and having support from the private sector ensured would most likely apply to the Italian scenario as well.
  - As mentioned, gender issues at school have become quite a sensitive and contested issue in recent times and this might to some extent hinder the replication, although the very concrete scope and goals of inspiring and guiding girls toward a career in STEM might counterbalance and help to overcome resistances.

### 3.3. Northern Irish good practice

An active role from the private sector and STEM-ICT focused businesses is clearly the main feature of the Northern Irish good practice, so the main question related to transferability is whether there is already a degree of activation and sensitivity of the industry players in Italy which would make possible to replicate such an initiative.

- Apart from the presence of national branches of big corporations, the Italian market is featured by a prevailing presence of SMEs and several employers' associations: their involvement would help preventing fragmentation.
- As horizontal segregation is high, an awareness-raising initiative based on informative workshops to involve companies to commit to equality would suit the Italian context well.
- It is at the same time possible to foresee that the gap between formally endorsing equality and internally implementing it would be difficult to close and require more time and further policy initiatives.

## 4. Recommendations for action

- EU level

As the issues are strictly interrelated and crosscutting several policy areas (research, employment, ICT and innovation policies, education and life-long learning, entrepreneurship), crosscutting cooperation across DGs would increase policy effectiveness. Furthermore, the following goals might be relevant to be considered for narrowing gender gaps and segregation in the labour market and education:

  - Continued gender mainstreaming efforts into all EU programmes and funds relevant to the issues of gender segregation (Erasmus+, H2020, COSME, INTERREG) to be complemented with compulsory gender training to external evaluators and policy officers.
  - Careful monitoring of the gender impact of the abovementioned programmes against specifically designed qualitative and quantitative indicators.



- Strengthening the gender dimension of EU communication campaigns and soft policy measures like EU Code Week, Robotics Week, e-skills for Jobs etc. also through dedicated funded actions.
- Continued and possibly increased investment into funding specific initiatives to promote gender equality into research institutions through measures such as H2020 GERI calls for proposals.
- Prioritising gender and STEM issues as well as gender & innovation into EIGE's action plans
- Supporting EU level networks from the civil society active in the field.
- National Level
  - Gender-disaggregated data collection would be strongly needed on the issues of horizontal and vertical segregation in STEM sectors with a focus on the private one which is currently less covered. Current annual studies and reports on the workforce from ICT employers' organisations and the Union of the Chambers of Commerce do not include gender as an indicator.
  - Including gender-oriented actions into eligibility criteria within calls for proposals for ERDF/ESF funds as well as national research funds.
  - Gender mainstreaming into existing policy frameworks should be implemented prioritising concrete actions and funding national projects to overcome gender segregation in employment and STEM/ICT in particular.
  - More consistently integrate and align national initiatives with EU level policies, initiatives and campaigns (Science it's a Girls Thing, E-skills for Jobs, Robotics and Code Week, Grand Coalition for Digital Jobs etc.).