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***Italian leave policies
Between progress and stalemate***

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The topic of Italian leave policies is complex. The present paper, rather than addressing them systematically, attempts to focus on some key points:

- 1. Innovative and progress aspects at a legislative level**
- 2. Employment of women in the labour market**
- 3. Childcare**
- 4. Effects of the economic crisis**

1. Innovative and progress aspects at a legislative level: temporal sequence of the Italian laws and their role in placing Italy in the vanguard when compared with other European countries until 2001.

The subject of “Parental leave” has been systematised by the so-called “*Testo Unico*” act of law, n. 151/**2001** as amended by Act n. 115 of 23 April **2003**: it is an effective juridical tool, that further renovates the new parameters introduced by Act No. 53/**2000**, regarding all the matters ““Maternity and Paternity in the working places””.

The “*Testo Unico*” is the end point of a long list of legislative productions, begun in Italy in **1902**, with Act n. 242 containing the compulsory maternity leave for 30 days after the birth.

Subsequently, Maternity leave was regulated by Act No. 1204/**1971** and Act No. 903/**1977**, whose normative bodies have been significantly integrated and changed by the recent Act No. 53 of 8 March 2000.

Therefore, all the legal provisions concerning maternity and paternity protection, parental rights and absences from the workplace, can be found in one single law.

General comment: in Italy, family policies are not 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.

The provisions regarding maternity leave represent one of the most important and innovative measures aimed at helping mothers to cope with their dual responsibility (family and work).

2. Employment of women in the labour market

The Agenda of Lisbon asked to European countries to increase female employment up to 60% before 2010.

In Italy, in January 2010, the employment rate of women was only 47%, the lowest rate in Europe after Malta; basically, only one woman out of two worked, compared with the 70% of men.

In 2008, the general employment rate, including people between 15 and 64 years old, reached 58%. The percentage of unemployment is not the only data revealing

discrimination of women at work: all conditions being equal, Italian women earn 20% less than male colleagues, even if most of them have higher education levels.

In 2008 the employment rate of population aged 15-64 was:

- 71% in Europe
- 63% in Italy (last but three in the EU 27).

The unemployment rate in Italy was:

- 6.1% in 2007
- 6.7% in 2008 (7.0% in EU 27).

Employment in the last 10 months has decreased and the number of elderly has increased.

However, it should be considered that after some years of stagnant trend, the rate of labour activities of women in Italy started to increase again **thanks to the growing presence of immigrant women** (especially, carers from Eastern countries), *caring for elderly family members and thus allowing women to increase their labour offer.*

Labour: Italy is not a country for women

Equal opportunities:

in the Government, only 5 Ministers out of 23 are women, and they are Ministers without portfolio (they have secondary importance).

Only 9% of women are company CEOs.

Business women:

- 23.4% (EU = 33%)
- North = 20,9%
- South = 25.8%

Only 11% of women become managers – Turkey and Greece are better than Italy. Other percentage are: 37.4% in France; 34.9% in UK; 29.3% in Germany.

85% of school teachers are women.

Everybody (also children and elderly) thinks that jobs involving daycare are for women.

Italy 2020 – Action program for the inclusion of women in the labour market

This action program aimed at favoring the inclusion of women in the labour market, designed by the Ministry for equal opportunities and by the Ministry of Welfare, indicates the lines to follow to increase the rate of female employment, the equality between men and women in the workplace and the conciliation.

Five major lines of action are proposed:

- the strengthening of services for early childhood care services
- the regular distribution of the fundings for conciliation projects in the workplace (according to the “new” art.9 Act No. 53/2000 for the revival of the part-time work and other flexible contracts)
- the promotion of part-time contracts through secondary-level negotiation
- the promotion of “green jobs” also for women (sustainable energies, bio-building trade, biological agriculture, vegetarian catering, eco-tourism, non-conventional drugs, etc.)
- the use of the employment contract for stimulating the employment in the South.

3. Childcare

The lack of services for childhood, especially for early childhood

Presently, Italy is characterised by a very low fertility rate, passed from the “baby boom” in the first half of 60s, where an average of 2.7 children for women was registered, to an all-time low of 1.19 in 1995.

Children are hidden. In the job interviews, one of the usual questions concerns whether the woman wants children...it is better to say no, otherwise being hired is impossible.

Public child daycare centre – some examples

In Bologna (which has 371,000 inhabitants in the city), public child daycare centres are available only to 36% of children.

In the Emilia-Romagna region, 25% of children can take advantage of public child daycare centres.

Bologna and other cities of Emilia-Romagna activated the project “one year in the family”: it is a fund of 360 per month for six months if one of the parents takes the optional parental leave.

There are contexts in the North (Como) where Confindustria (the general confederation of Italian industry) denies part-time work.

In the city of Como(which has 85,000 inhabitants in the city) only 30 children out of 100 go the public child daycare centre, with long waiting lists from September to February

In the Como province there is one public child daycare centre every four municipalities.

In the Province of Como there are 21,400 children for 50 public child daycare centres. The cover is equal to 0.23%.

In Foggia (Puglia region, in the South; the city has 153,000 inhabitants), only 1 child out of 100 goes to a public child daycare centre.

EU has asked for 33% of the demand to be met by 2010. Presently, Italy is at 11.9% (Istat data).

Private child daycare centre increase. The monthly cost for a private child daycare centre is about 600 Euros. According to the National observatory of Federconsumatori (the national confederation of consumers), the cost of maintaining a child during his/her first year in Italy goes from a minimum of 5,828 to a maximum of 12,988 Euros. After the child's first year the costs concerning daycare centre, baby sitter, toys are to be added.

For the first three years of life of a child is thus necessary to earn a salary.

If money is lacking, relatives can help, second-hand goods are bought, clothes are exchanged with other parents.

There is thus a lack of public daycare centres and the family network is used (especially, the grandparents).

In Milano (which has 1,300,000 inhabitants in the city), in the last three years almost 20,000 women with a permanent job resigned. There are no data on women working "at projects" (a special form of fixed-term contract).

The reasons for leaving the workplace can be the following:

- there are not supporting relatives
- public daycare centres were not available
- the part-time in the workplace was not an option.

Art. 9 Act No. 53/2000 – some data and an example

Aim: favoring the participation of women in the labour market (possibility of part-time, flexibility, company crèche). It is a law with a great potential.

Free grants are given to companies. Until two years ago, a maximum of one million of Euro could be asked by each company. The last application, however, dates at one year and some months ago. The law was made 10 years ago and only half of the fundings was used.

Mantova. The city is located in Lombardy (Northern Italy).

In Mantova (which has 46,000 inhabitants in the city) there are 43,000 companies.

Only 26 companies took advantage of the art. 9 Act No. 53/2000 and other 15 used similar forms. It should be noted that the way to obtain the funding is very complex.

In Mantova the sock industry is very important.

It employs 6,000 workers, 70% women.

In one of these companies (the biggest is Golden Lady) less than 3% of employees has got a part-time contract.

Women employees do not protest because they fear cuts to the personnel, redundancy or, worse still, firing.

In Mantova there is also a company producing wedding dresses. It has 147 employees, 140 women. There is the possibility for all to have a flexible working time. 22% uses horizontal and vertical part-time.

There is a recreation centre for children, run by the company and open from 8am to 6pm. Also the baby sitter is paid for by the company when the child is ill. The

absences from work are much lower than the national average. The company obtained 400.000 Euros thanks to Art. 9 Act No. 53/2000.

4. Effects of the the economic crisis

The crisis – an example with same data

The crisis has saved (perhaps) the women of Northern and Central regions, but has greatly affected those of the South.

The crisis has also produced more negative effects on male rather than female unemployment. Indeed, many women have part-time jobs with permanent contracts in sectors that were not affected by the crisis (for instance, the cleaning sector, the sectors of meat processing and catering).

Reggio Emilia (almost 167,000 inhabitants in the city) is a rich province of the Emilia Romagna region, famous for the network of small and medium enterprises, especially in the sectors of accuracy engineering and of the ceramic. And also for Reggio children and the model of early childhood education is known all around the world.

The city has 240,000 employees.

According to CGIL (a syndicate of workers) actually:

- 30,000 use various forms of redundancy payment
- 23,000 have a unemployment grant (in the past the unemployment rate in Reggio Emilia was always around 2-3%)
- 6,000 fixed-term contracts
- 3-4,000 unemployed. They are mainly businessmen of the craft sector and their workers employed in the building trade and services, who lost the job as a consequence of the economic crisis.

Thus 63,000 people, corresponding to 25% of the whole labour force of Reggio Emilia and province, are suffering for difficulties related to the workplace.

Some concluding remarks

- Italy is at the last place in EU 27 for the use of the part-time (OECD) – The problem of part-time and flexibility in the workplace is real.
- There is inequality in childhood services among regions (especially between North and South), though services are lacking also in the rich regions of the North
- There is inequality also in the activated programs to cope with the problems of the lack of public child daycare centres
- There are deep differences between Northern and Southern regions at a cultural level, for the application of laws and for the implementation of actions by policy makers

- The actions used (involving for example condominium child daycare or baby bonus) are ineffective solutions
- The heavy cuts to the fundings to the municipalities led to the hypothesis of giving to the central State the municipality services for the childhood. It is only a threat, but...
- Italy is the second oldest country in Europe after Germany. The relation between young people and elderly was 143 to 100 on the 1st of January 2009. In 2008 the relation young people + elderly and population in active age was above 51%. It is important to think also about elderly daycare, in terms of part-time or flexible working times for the adult children with elderly parents.
- The effects of immigration and cultural differences concerning equal opportunities, women employment, daycare work, role division between parents and in the family, are underestimated.
- The last important intervention was the introduction of the Act n. 53/2000, Act n. 151/2001 (*Testo Unico*). All the following initiatives were: (a) fragmented and without real planning; (b) “fake”, without funding; (c) mere propaganda, because all the political institutions (right- and left-wing) announce the introduction of the “*quoziente familiare*” (family rate) without acting effectively.

These schematic data confirm that, compared to five years ago, the situation concerning the problems of conciliation between work and family life for parents with young children has not changed much and there is still a considerable amount of complex work to be done in order to bring about real, significant change.