

Being in a managerial position. A matter of...

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Abstract

This paper investigates factors affecting the observed gender differences in the access to managerial positions. The different probabilities of accessing managerial positions are analysed with reference to Italy at national and local levels. Looking at measures of gender differences in the presence in apical positions, Italy is characterized by a severe under representation of women in the class 'Legislators, senior officials and managers'.

Together with a microeconomic analysis on European Community Household Panel data to identify the individual, family, labour demand and institutional factors that may affect the different probability of accessing to managerial positions by gender, results from qualitative surveys (carried out in areas characterized by different level of employment and different presence of factors affecting women's labour supply) have been analysed to reconstruct experiences of discrimination. First evidence from a qualitative survey carried out in Italy shows - despite cultural, social and juridical changes - that many explicit narrations about discrimination's experiences emerged in the interviews. We tried to classify them in three areas: an area of discrimination experiences concerning the dimension of *social roles* (e.g.: father or husband doesn't accepting working daughter or wife); a second area with regard to the context of *power's roles and hierarchies* (e.g.: subordinates, colleagues or others do not accepting/expecting females in high responsibility's roles); a third area in the context of the *competencies' system* (e.g.: women in "male" professions; women's competencies and abilities under-recognized, etc.).

Both levels of analysis are used to disentangle constraints at work and strategies enacted to break what is perceived as a very deep glass ceiling at disadvantage of women in the access to apical positions.

Introduction

Italy is characterized by a high gender gap in the access to paid work and by a high variability of employment rates by gender across regions. Section 1 shows descriptive statistics on the low participation of women in Italy to paid work and to managerial positions and a survey of the literature. Section 2 looks at the policies that can affect the existing gap in the access to managerial and entrepreneurial positions in a direct or indirect way. In Section 3 we try to disentangle what are the factors affecting women's probability to be in a managerial position by using ECHP data on Italy. Section 4 provides a closer look to the difficulties and the factors promoting women's participation in managerial positions by using the results on research carried out in two districts of Italy characterized by lower than average women participation to paid work and a by a lower presence of child care services (a district in Lazio and a district in Calabria).

1. Gender differences in the Italian labour market and in the access to managerial positions

Italy is characterized by a very low participation to paid work activities by women (women's participation rate - for women aged from 15 to 64 - was 48% in 2002) and by a high differential in participation to paid work activities by gender: on average women's activity rates are lower than men's by 26 percentage points, while women's unemployment rates (12,2%) are higher than men's by 5 percentage points (and the gap is even higher amongst the younger).¹ Turning to those who are employed we can see (Tab.1.1) that women's employment rates in Italy are far apart from UE average female employment rate and well below the Lisbon target. The incidence (on total employment) of fixed term and part-time employment is higher for women than for men, while the opposite is true as far as full time and self employment is concerned.

Tab. 1.1– Employment rates and type of contract by gender in Italy

	Men	Women	M-W
Employment rate (% population aged 15-64)	69.1	42.0	27.1
FTE employment rate (% population aged 15-64)	68.4	39.2	29.2
Self-employed (% total employment)	29.0	19.5	9.5
Part-time employment (% total employment)	3.5	16.9	-13.5
Fixed term contracts (% total employment)	8.4	12.0	-3.6

Source: Eurostat Employment in Europe 2003

The female representation ratio of women in managerial position² (OECD, 2002) in Table 1.2 shows that women are highly under represented in these positions. Women are also under represented in jobs with great supervisory role (Table 1.3).

Tab. 1.2 Female representation ratio referred to women in Legislators, senior officials and managerial occupations Italy

Country	110-Legislators and senior officials	120-Corporate Managers	130-General Managers	Total
Italy	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
OECD unw.average	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6

Source: OECD 2002

Tab.2.13 p.95

¹ Data from Eurostat *Employment in Europe 2003*.

² Female representation ratio are computed by dividing the share of women in a given occupational group to the share of women employed. A value of the ratio lower than 1 means that women are under-represented in that occupation, on the other hand a ratio higher than one means over-representation of women in a given class of occupation.

Tab. 1.3 Female representation ratio referred to women with a supervisory role

Country	Jobs with a supervisory role	
	Great supervisory role	Some supervisory role
Italy	0.5	0.9
OECD unw.average	0.6	0.9

Source: OECD 2002

Tab.2.13 p.95

The existing earnings differential by gender can be related also to the persistent difficulty in the access to managerial and entrepreneurial positions experienced by women. Descriptive statistics in Table 1.4 and 1.5 show a low presence of employed women in apical positions.

Tab. 1.4 Employment by type of job and gender - Italy

	Men	Women	Total
self-employed	31.2%	21.2%	27.4%
Entrepreneurs	3.6%	1.6%	2.8%
Professionals	5.9%	3.4%	5.0%
self-employed	17.7%	9.4%	14.6%
cooperative members	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
family help	3.0%	5.9%	4.1%
Employee	68.8%	78.8%	72.6%
Managers	1.9%	0.9%	1.5%
Managerial positions	4.8%	4.6%	4.7%
white collar	24.7%	44.5%	32.2%
blue collar	36.6%	27.7%	33.2%
apprentiships	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%
homeworkers	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source ISTAT (2003)

Tab. 1.5 Individual owned firms by gender in Italy

individual	Men	%	Women	%	Total
Owned firms	2.523.582	74%	866.430	26%	3.390.012

At 31 December 2001

Source: Addabbo, Borghi and Giardino (2003) CCIA data on firms

According to ECHP wave 5 (1998) data in Employment in Europe (2002) the ratio of women's average gross hourly earnings with respect to men's average gross hourly earnings in Italy is 91,4 (90.6 in the Private and 108.1 in the Public Sector). By using Oaxaca decomposition Comitato Nazionale di Parità e Pari Opportunità (2001) shows that in year 1993, mean wage for women was 81% of what it should have been if women's characteristics were remunerated at the same rate of men's. Therefore Italy is at an intermediate position between 66% for UK and 86% in Denmark. By using different sources of data and by taking into account differences in individual and labour market characteristics one can see that a wage differential by 20% against women still persists in Italy (Comitato Nazionale di Parità e Pari Opportunità, 2001). ISTAT (2002) by using national accounts data finds that the gender wage gap tends to increase with education level.

Studies on sample of entrepreneurs that have been carried out at national and at local level by using statistical and administrative data show that women entrepreneurs tend to be younger. On this regards Fondazione Nordest analysis on a sample of 1,100 firms with more than 10 employees in Italy has shown that the percentage of women entrepreneurs on the total number of entrepreneurs in 2002 is 5,7% for entrepreneurs aged more than 60, and 40,6% for entrepreneurs aged less than 40.³ Women entrepreneurs tend to be more educated than men and, with regards to firm's size firms owned by women tend to be smaller in size than on average.⁴ Firms owned by women are more spread in the Service sector (where also most of female employees are concentrated).⁵

According to UNDP (2003) Italy is at the 21st place as far as the Gender-related development index (GDI) is concerned (the same place as the Human development index HDI). However when one takes into account the Gender Empowerment Measure (which considers the seats in parliament held by women, the percentage of women employed as legislators, senior officials and manager; and the percentage of women employed as professional and technical workers, together with the ratio of estimated female to male earned income) one can see that the Italian position in the UNDP list of countries significantly deteriorates passing from 21st in terms of HDI and GDI to 32nd.

The differences observed in the participation to paid employment are related to the observed distribution of unpaid work in Italy that shows a much higher unpaid working load (in terms of housework and care work activities) on women's shoulder than on men, even when women perform also paid activities.⁶

Turning to the two areas (a district in Calabria and a district in Lazio) chosen for the qualitative analysis women's employment rate in Calabria (26,4%) is particularly low and the disadvantage in terms of higher unemployment rates for women is particularly high in Calabria (where women's unemployment rate is 35,9% against 18% for men aged from 15 to 64).

Tab. 1.6.a Employment and Unemployment rates by sex for 15-64 persons and area, Frosinone, Lazio and Italy

	Frosinone		Lazio		Italy	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
unemployed 15-64	7.4%	19.6%	6.6%	11.9%	7.1%	12.3%
employment rate year 2002 (15-64 years old)	66.6%	32.2%	68.9%	41.1%	68.8%	42.0%

Source: ISTAT (2003) Table 4.3

³ Marini (2002).

⁴ OECD (2001a) and Marini (2002). On the total number of entrepreneurs Fondazione Nordest survey shows that amongst men 60,9% is owner of firms with less than 19 employees, while for women entrepreneurs 67,4% own a firm with less than 19 employees.

⁵ Marini (2002) and Uccello (2002). According to Censis data referred to in Uccello (2002) women entrepreneurs are more spread in personal services (59,7% of firms having a woman owner) and in textiles firms (25,7% of firms with a woman owner)

⁶ For an analysis based on Istat Time Budget data on Italy see Addabbo (2003) and Picchio (2003).

Tab. 1.6.b Employment and Unemployment rates by sex for 15-64 persons and area Catanzaro, Calabria and Italy

	Catanzaro		Calabria		Italy	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Unemployed	16.5%	32.8%	18.4%	35.9%	7.1%	12.3%
employment rate year 2002 (15-64 years old)	59.6%	29.5%	57.3%	26.4%	68.8%	42.0%

Source: ISTAT (2003) Table 4.3

Tab. 1.7 Gender gap in employment and unemployment rates by area

Gender Gap	Frosinone	Lazio	Catanzaro	Calabria	Italy
	M-W	M-W	M-W	M-W	M-W
Unemployed	-12.2%	-5.3%	-16.3%	-17.5%	-5.2%
employment rate year 2002 (15-64 years old)	34.4%	27.8%	30.1%	30.9%	26.8%

Source: our elaborations from ISTAT (2003) Table 4.3

Looking at the gender gap (Table 1.7) one can see that amongst the areas analysed the highest gap in the employment rate by gender is to be found in the district of Frosinone where men's employment rate is higher than women's by 34 percentage points whereas the highest disadvantage in terms of a higher unemployment rate for women is to be found in Calabria. According to employment sector one can see how female participation to Service Sector is above average in the two regions analysed and particularly high in Lazio (Table 1.8.a).

Tab. 1.8.a Employment by industry and gender

employment by industry and gender	Lazio		Calabria		Italy	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	Agriculture	3.4%	3.3%	11.4%	14.4%	5.2%
Manufacturing	26.5%	9.1%	26.4%	5.8%	36.0%	18.2%
Services	70.1%	87.6%	62.2%	79.8%	58.7%	77.9%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100%

Source Battistoni (2003) from ISTAT RFL 2002

Tab. 1.8.b Employment by type of job and gender – Lazio and Calabria

employment by type of job and gender	Lazio		Calabria	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
managerial positions	9.6%	8.5%	4.9%	6.6%
entrepreneurial or cooperative associate	3.5%	2.1%	4.4%	3.2%
Professional	7.2%	4.5%	4.8%	2.6%
self-employed	14.6%	8.4%	16.9%	9.3%
family	3.0%	5.9%	3.8%	5.2%
white collar	30.0%	49.6%	26.6%	46.1%
Blue collar	32.1%	21.0%	38.6%	27.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source Battistoni (2003) from ISTAT RFL 2002

The literature shows the existence of a glass ceiling effect or of the perception of discrimination as possible causes for women of starting up a business on their own.⁷

The lower presence of women in managerial positions that we show also for Italy can be considered as encouraging women to escape the lack of career in dependent positions by starting a firm on their own.⁸ This behaviour may be rationally enacted by women to avoid male network operating inside the firm, for non-money reasons (this problem has been analysed by Moore and Buttner, 1997) or in order to make better harmonized family time and paid work activities.⁹ As found by OECD (1998) women entrepreneurs tend to accumulate less savings, and this can be related to the observed wage differential and to the limited access of women to managerial positions.

A relevant question for this paper is to detect not only the factors behind the unequal presence by gender in managerial and entrepreneurial positions but also to detect the different factors of discrimination at work in the progression of career. OECD (2002) data seem to show that the presence of children is not the discriminating factor in the probability of acquiring more supervisory power in one's job; descriptive statistics on the career progress over five years (1994-1998) by gender and presence of children for persons aged from 20 to 50 not having supervisory role or having only some supervisory role in the first period show that in Italy 14% of women with children made a progress in their career against 12% of childless women, the percentage is 14% for both groups on average in OECD countries, and 20% and 15% for men with and without children in Italy, and 21% and 17% on average from men in OECD countries. (OECD, 2002, Tab.2.14, p.96).

However one should control for level of education, level of income and area where the family lives since, as other studies on labour supply by gender show the very continuity of the work experience can be reduced by childbirth for lower educated women. And as OECD (2002) suggests commenting these results:

‘The apparent absence of a motherhood effect on the career mobility of women could reflect a more subtle constraint affecting women without family responsibilities, which is that they may nevertheless be seen by their employers as potential mothers and, as a consequence, they are unwilling to invest as much in their future careers.’ (OECD, 2002, p.96).

This made us including in the interviews carried out also questions about the perceived penalisation with regard to a future childbirth or with the regard to responsibility in care work (one should not forget the high care work that women devote to their older relatives).

Moreover as OECD (2002) notes the fact that fathers' career mobility is higher than mobility for childless men can be considered a sign of potential penalisation when mothers are not more mobile than childless women.

We have collected information on the work history of men and women in managerial or entrepreneurial positions by considering the effect on their career of childbirth and the strategies they have enacted to combine family needs and paid work load, by looking also on how these factors may differently affect women and men with different human capital and income endowments. Women with higher level of education and higher career prospects may be less affected in their career by the presence of children if they can afford private child care or are able to

⁷ This has been found amongst others by Cromie and Hayes (1988) according to their analysis some entrepreneurs started their firm wishing to avoid discrimination or given the limit on their career in dependent work. On this see also Mukhtar (2002) and OECD (2001a). Self-employment as a way to reply to gender discrimination in the workplace has been analysed also by Cowling and Taylor (2001). Viganò et al. (2002) find a lower perception of discrimination by women belonging to younger cohorts and without children during their research of self-employed in Como.

⁸ However they often suffer also as entrepreneurs from other forms of discrimination. Traces of discrimination against women entrepreneurs from suppliers, customers or employees have been found for instance by Addabbo, Borghi and Giardino (2003) in the applied research conducted in the district of Modena.

⁹ Devine (1994) and Cowling and Taylor (2001).

share care and domestic responsibilities with their partners but also with the level of responsibility attached to each activities by the partner.

One must also take into account the return in terms of pay for women having access to manager positions as compared to the increase in responsibility and the difficulties to match the new working tasks to family life obligations.

As far as data on increase in wages with career progression is concerned the evidence shown in Employment in Europe is astonishing, progressing in career is less rewarding as far as pay is concerned:

“Hourly earnings are also closely related to job status: those in a supervisory position have on average 18% higher earnings – 17% for women and 19% for men – than those in non-supervisory positions. The pay premium for female managers further amounts to only 13,5% as compared to 23% for men. In particular in Ireland, Greece and the UK, pay premia for managers in supervisory positions are significantly more favourable for men than for women. Women are therefore likely to face lower incentives to work as managers or in supervisory positions, and gender differences in career progression are likely to exacerbate the gender pay gap” (Employment in Europe 2002 p.39)

The analysis of the gender gap in the labour market and in the high responsibilities' positions is usually focussed on a range of data and statistics, as male/female labour market participation, male/female presence in hierarchically different jobs' positions, gender wage gap, etc. Research on female entrepreneurship, in these last years, added some more data, concerning comparisons between female and male management with regard to company's performance, measuring sales, growth or profit of the company themselves.

Even if these data and information are important and significant in order to draw a precise and detailed picture of the problem here inquired, at the same time there is a risk in using them uncritically and without any problematisation. This risk consists in a *naturalization of the origins of the differences* showed by these data: the implicit formula governing much of the research on gender differences in economic activities in general, and in management and entrepreneurship in particular, is that male and female different economic and labour behaviour has to do with 'internal', objective, may be innate essences. In this perspective, the economic and managerial best behaviour is usually drawn by an idealised male economic and organisational actor, and female behaviour and performance are evaluated according to their being close or far from that model. The conclusions of researches within this perspective often point out the (endogenous or exogenous) difficulties of women to a complete adherence to the role expectations, as they are defined by that abstract model mentioned above. In other cases, researches comparing male and female management and entrepreneurship stress there are very few and weak differences in their concrete behaviour but, remaining in the same interpretative perspective, such a result is assumed again as a demonstration of the natural, objective rationality of that model, implicitly considered the 'one best way'.

However other perspectives of research and study are advancing, about the gendered nature of labour and organisations (Fletcher, 1999; Gherardi, 1998, 2000; Wilson, 2004) and the gendered construction of management and entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2002; Bruni et al., 2000; Rees B.A., 2003; Rees B.A., Garnsey, 2003). In a very schematic way, it is possible to summarise main emergent topics of such literature as follows:

- there are no special innate masculine or feminine essences which can explain differences in labour and organisations; gender division of labour is socially constructed through a complex process of transforming social relationships in 'objective realities' via institutionalisation (Berger, Luckmann, 1969);

- the same is true also for the gendered division of labour, the distinction and the hierarchy between productive (market, economically and symbolically recognised activities) and reproductive activities (out of market, economically and symbolically not- or under-recognised);
- this means entrepreneurship's and management's discourses and practices must be de-naturalised (Bourdieu, 1999; Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002), and their character of male gendered constructions should be always taken in count; otherwise, 'female entrepreneurship' becomes soon "another arena for the ongoing reproduction of women's secondary position in society" (Ahl, 2002: 53);
- following this critical perspective about our themes, leads to assume entrepreneurship and management as problematic concepts and practices: it has to be abandoned any 'one best way' interpretation, in favour of adopting plural criteria of evaluation of performances and patterns of management; defining organisations as learning and sense making systems (Gherardi, 2000a; Gherardi, Nicolini, 2004; Weick, 1997) and as communities of practices (Wenger, 1998) appear to be a promising approach in this direction;
- current social organisation of the public/private dichotomy, based on women's assumption of unpaid work, is not a 'natural' data (Fletcher, 1999): problematisation of entrepreneurship and management concepts and practices, if taken seriously, is not a female issue; men as much as women should be asked about problems of balancing between work and family in general, and about improving gender-aware organisational citizenship (Gherardi, 2000);
- definitions of (entrepreneurial) skills and competences must be reconsidered: what is usually perceived as neutral frameworks of generating, evaluating and using skills and competences is in reality strictly associated to the gendered dichotomies previously named – public/private, production/reproduction; due to the centrality of these frameworks in labour and organisational life, this is not an exogenous and technical aspect outside of our questioning, and it has to be involved in the entrepreneurship's theoretical and practical reconfiguration (Rees, 2003; Rees, Garnsey 2003).

In a very short sentence, we could say that researching about female entrepreneurship it has very little to do with photographing, counting and comparing already existing models ("how it can be diffused this model? what obstacles its reproduction?"), and much more with building and institutionalising innovative ways of ruling private and public organisations ("what is competent manager/entrepreneur?") in complex societies (Ceruti, 1993; Borghi 2002): and this is collective, male and female, issue. A line of researching and projecting which should be aware as well that giving attention to local and situational aspects – what means 'local development' and 'local territorial systems' in this line of reasoning? (Donolo, 2003; Borghi, 2003) - might be more fruitful and knowledge productive than insisting in more universal ambitions.

2. Policies to achieve a reduction in the existing gender gap

Institutional factors that can contribute in closing the observed gap in women's participation to paid work and to managerial and entrepreneurial positions are the existing national (Law 215/1992 *Azioni positive per l'imprenditoria femminile*. Implemented by DPR 314/2000) and regional laws promoting women entrepreneurs as well as agreements at local level,¹⁰ National Law promoting

¹⁰ In 2003 an agreement between Frosinone District and BIC Lazio has been achieved to promote women entrepreneurship. Several activities have been promoted at local level in the district of Frosinone by the Consigliera provinciale di Parità Cianfrano (2004) amongst them also the proposal of a project to improve the reconciliation of family and working time by promoting the implementation of Law 53/00, as well as seminars to public institutions and local officers that should spread the knowledge of Law 125/91 and promote its implementation.

equal opportunity,¹¹ the existence of Equal Opportunity Committee at different level and the implementation of Committee promoting the presence of women entrepreneurship.

Given the observed differences in the distribution of total working time with women bearing almost all unpaid working load, one has to consider to what extent public policies exist to improve a more equal distribution of working time by gender. On this regards it is relevant Law 53/2000 ('Disposizioni per il sostegno della maternità e della paternità, per il diritto alla cura e alla formazione e per il coordinamento dei tempi della città' and implementing decree 15 May 2001). The law introduces parental leaves and incentives to enterprises that introduce family friendly policies and can therefore improve the compatibility of family and work life and promote a more equal distribution of care work by gender inside the family.

Another important factor that can contribute to the reduction of the observed gap is how many services are available that can reduce women's time devoted to care. Childcare services for children below 3 years old in Italy are mainly public.¹² From Tab.2.1 we can see that the presence of child care services for children from 0 to 3 years old has quite a great degree of variability across the analysed regions and is on average low in Italy. In fact only 7,4% children aged below 3 years are in childcare services, whereas the coverage of children aged from 3 to 5 is around 95% (OECD, 2001b). OECD (2001c) states that:

'There is a urgent need for the State to take on greater responsibility to meet the needs of children under 3 and their parents. The recent extension of parental leave has been a significant step forward. Further support to municipalities to extend their integrated programmes would help to address the learning and socialisation needs of infants and toddlers, even when being cared for by a parent.' OECD 2001c p.166.

Tab. 2.1 Differences in childcare facilities on 0-3 children

	Lazio	Calabria	Italy
% of children aged 0-3 in public childcare on total 0-3 children living in the area **	8,5%	1,9%	7,4%

Source Del Boca, Vuri and Locatelli (2002) from ISTAT annuario statistico Italiano 1999-2001

Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2002)

I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia

Moreover there is still a very low degree of synchronization of working time (mostly full time) and school time (mostly part-time).¹³

It is also relevant to see how much family friendly policies are spread in firms. According to OECD (2001b) amongst women employees with child under 15 in household 72% can use extra statutory sick child leave, 81% can use extra statutory maternity leave and 69% extra statutory arrangements for parental leave. Employees reporting that they work flexi time are 19% and 11% work part time on a voluntary basis (OECD, 2001b).

¹¹ Decree 196/2000 'Disciplina dell'attività delle Consigliere e dei Consiglieri di Parità'; Law 125/1991 'Azioni positive per la realizzazione della parità uomo-donna nel lavoro'; Law 164/1990 'Istituzione Commissione Nazionale per la parità fra uomo e donna presso la presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri'; Law 903/1977 'Parità di trattamento tra uomini e donne in materia di lavoro'; Law 66/1963 'Legge per l'ammissione della donna a tutti I pubblici uffici inclusa la magistratura'; Law 741/1956 'Ratifica ed esecuzione della Convenzione di Ginevra per l'uguaglianza di remunerazione fra uomini e donne'. See Bortone (2000) for an analysis on law 53/00 and on the decree that reinforced the role of Consigliere di Parità approved in year 2000.

¹² Del Boca, Aaberge, Colombino, Ermisch, Francesconi, Pasqua and Strom (2003) provide a comparison across countries on formal day programmes for young children.

¹³ The difficult synchronization of school time and working time is also stressed for Italy by OECD (2001c).

3. Being a manager...factors affecting the probability of being in a managerial positions

In this section we carry out an analysis of the probability of accessing managerial positions; we formulate a model in order to evaluate the effect of both individual characteristics and family constraints on the probability of being in a managerial position and we proceed to estimate the model employing data from the 8th wave (year 2001) of the European Community Household Panel (ECHP).

We assume that workers seek out the best-paying jobs after taking into consideration their own personal endowments.¹⁴ Therefore, the probability of being in a managerial position is supposed to be a function of the educational level, the degree of experience (both general and firm-specific). However the very structure of social reproduction is going to affect the total work distribution by gender and can result in vertical gender segregation,¹⁵ the number of children, the caring effort of the partner and the availability of other informal or paid caring activities are therefore taken into account in the model.

The model is estimated separately for men and women, assuming the errors to be normally distributed. Regarding the model for female workers, the estimate of the probability of being in a managerial position can be affected by a problem of a non random selection into employment. For that reason we proceed in estimating the probit model on the probability of accessing managerial position together with an equation of selection into employment (Heckman correction) in which we include also the variable “marital status”.¹⁶

Before going through the estimates we present some descriptive statistics of the selected sample, including Italian individuals 21-65 years old and not self-employed.

Table 3.1 summarises the composition of our sample of managers by gender and by educational levels (at least upper-secondary education).

Tab. 3.1 - Sample average number of male and female managers (s.e) by educational level. Men and women 21-65 years old

	ITALY		EUROPE	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Upper-secondary	0.4242 (0.5018)	0.4214 (0.4958)	0.2646 (0.4413)	0.2653 (0.4416)
University	0.3636 (0.4885)	0.2975 (0.4590)	0.3747 (0.4842)	0.3956 (0.4890)

Source: Our elaborations on ECHP data (wave 8)

The Italian sample of female managers is characterised by a higher educational level compared to the average of the European female sample;¹⁷ 78 per cent of Italian female managers own an educational degree higher or equal to an upper-secondary diploma against a European percentage of almost 64%. This different composition is due to the percentage incidence of female managers with upper-secondary diplomas, which in Italy amounts to 16 percentage points higher than in Europe.

¹⁴ This is consistent to human capital theories.

¹⁵ Picchio (1992).

¹⁶ The inclusion in the selection equation of the “marital status” variable allows identifying the coefficients of the probability of being in a managerial job equation.

¹⁷ The European sample includes the following countries: Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg and The United Kingdom.

The Italian overrepresentation of managers with an upper-secondary diploma is confirmed in case of men.

While the educational distribution inside the European group of managers is independent of gender, in Italy we observe a higher representation of females among highly-educated managers; women with a university degree are 36% of female managers, against a male proportion of almost 30%.

Tab. 3.2 - Sample average number of children (s.e.) by age group and occupational position. Men and women 21-65 years old

	ITALY				EUROPE			
	Not working	Women	Working	Men	Not working	Women	Working	Men
		Working	Manager	Manager		Not manager	Manager	Manager
Children's age								
0-14	0.5297 (0.8260)	0.4873 (0.7557)	0.6666 (0.8897)	0.5702 (0.8834)	0.6967 (1.0491)	0.5978 (1.0450)	0.5625 (1.1760)	0.6828 (1.1033)
0-2	0.0968 (-0.307)	0.0867 (-0.2997)	0.0967 (-0.3005)	0.0535 (-0.2261)	0.1222 (0.3557)	0.1054 (0.3360)	0.0832 (.2932)	0.1134 (0.3509)
3-5	0.0958 (-0.311)	0.1103 (-0.3429)	0.1153 (-0.3258)	0.1226 (-0.3573)	0.1400 (0.3835)	0.1106 (0.3435)	0.1023 (0.3290)	0.1371 (0.3856)

Source: Our elaborations on ECHP data (wave 8)

Table 3.2 presents some descriptive statistics on the relation between occupational status and number of children, disaggregated by age-group.¹⁸ Even in this case, the Italian pattern appears to be different from the European one. In general the average number of children is higher in the European Union than in Italy. In particular, the European average number of children younger than 14 years decreases as female occupational status goes from 'not working' to 'working' and finally to 'manager'. In addition to that, the average number of children of male managers is always higher than the female counterpart, independently of the children's age. Surprisingly, the Italian average number of children (aged less than 14 years) for female managers is higher than both the average number of children of other female workers and the average number of children of male managers. One can partially explain this result by the composition of female employment by sector: the percentage of women working in the public sector in Italy (43%) is higher than in Europe (38%). This difference is even higher when one considers only managers: 75% of Italian female managers are working in the public sector against a European 29 percentage. The better protection that the public sector guarantees to their female employees could justify an average fertility of Italian female managers higher than their European colleagues. In support of such hypothesis we observe that the average number of children younger than 14 years old of female managers employed in the private sector is lower in Italy (0.5) than in Europe (0.6). The opposite is true for female managers employed in the public sector; in this case the number of children on average is equal to 0.83 in Italy and to 0.47 in the European area. The descriptive statistics are confirmed and amplified when taking into consideration only the sample of individuals 21-44 years old (Table 3.3).

¹⁸ The results refer to tests on the differences in the observed means.

Tab. 3.3 - Sample average children (s.e) by age group and occupational activity. Men and women 21-44 years old

	ITALY				EUROPE			
	Not working	Women	Working	Men	Not working	Women	Working	Men
		No manager	Manager	Manager		No manager	Manager	Manager
Children age								
0-14	0.9382 (0.9346)	0.6587 (0.8276)	0.9411 (0.9663)	0.9111 (1.0185)	1.322 (1.1608)	0.8547 (0.1456)	0.8256 (1.1288)	1.0907 (1.1950)
0-2	0.1831 (-0.4060)	0.1333 (-0.3646)	0.2307 (-0.4385)	0.1282 (-0.3386)	0.2533 (0.4791)	0.1695 (0.4131)	0.1504 (0.3778)	0.2266 (0.4661)
3-5	0.1890 (-0.4199)	0.1757 (-0.4197)	0.3 (-0.4830)	0.2162 (-0.4793)	0.3069 (0.5230)	0.1803 (0.4223)	0.1847 (0.4227)	0.2655 (0.5086)

Source: Our elaborations on ECHP data (wave 8)

The ECHP contains interesting information on hours spent looking after their children by any adult and on different forms of regular caring activity¹⁹.

This information allowed us to construct three different variables that capture the influence on the employability and on the access to managerial positions of both partners' care activity and the availability of informal/free and formal/paid caring activities. The first variable is measured by the average number of weekly hours the partner spends in caring activities; the second variable is a dummy variable that takes the value of one if the caring activity is informal and/or unpaid. The last variable captures the incidence of paid/formal caring activities (at home or outside home).

Some interesting results emerged from testing the difference between average values reported in Table 3.4.²⁰ A first interesting result is about gender differences in caring time spent by the partner of an employee, manager or not. Gender differences in the partner's caring effort are quite high, both in Italy and in Europe. The average number of hours of caring time dedicated by the husband of a female worker is significantly lower than the average number of hours spent on average by wives of male workers. This result is independent of the occupational status.²¹ In addition to that, for not-manager, the average time spent by the partner in caring activities is significantly higher in Italy than in Europe; this result could confirm the strongest constraint Italian families have to face because of a lower availability of child caring services with respect to the other European countries or could point out a different Italian model of parents commitment.²²

Tests on the average number of children looked after on an informal and/or free basis confirm that unpaid caring activity external to the couple is significantly higher for women than for men, both in Italy and in Europe.²³ This result is confirmed in Italy – and not in the rest of Europe – when considering only managers; moreover, Italian female managers resort to informal/unpaid caring activity more frequently than female employees not in managerial positions.²⁴ This is not the case in the other European countries, where informal-free caring activities are more frequently used

¹⁹ The ECHP questionnaire contains the following question: “ Are any of the children in this household looked after on a regular basis by someone other than their parent or guardian, whether at home or outside such as at a creche or kindergarten?”. In case of an affirmative answer the following question is asked: “Does your household have to pay for any of the children to be looked after on a regular basis?”. From the answers to these two questions we constructed two variables. A first variable assumes value one if the household makes use of informal-free caring activities; an other variable assumes value one if the household pays for caring activity.

²⁰ We are testing the null hypothesis that the average values are identical between two subsamples (men vs women, managers vs non-managers, Italian vs European, ...). We assume that variances can be different in the two subsamples.

²¹ The test on the difference between sample averages is significant at 1% for both occupational status and for the Italian and European samples.

²² Oecd (2001 b).

²³ Significant difference at a 1% level.

²⁴ Significant difference at a 10% level.

by women employed in not-managerial positions.²⁵ In addition to that, we found that European female managers use paid caring services on average more frequently than the other female employees.²⁶ This is not found for Italian female managers.

These results confirm the positive effect on employability and on the access to managerial positions in Italy of the availability of informal caring activities and of formal but free children care services. The availability of paid caring services seems less relevant in accessing managerial positions.

Tab. 3.4 - Sample average of variables on caring responsibility. Working men and women 21-65 years old

	ITALY				EUROPE			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	Not manager	Manager	Not manager	Manager	Not manager	Manager	Not manager	Manager
Partner hours of care	2.476 (8.2420)	2.4545 (7.8545)	10.9956 (20.3809)	10.8595 (19.2736)	1.8401 (8.1871)	1.658385 (7.4104)	8.5558 (20.9808)	8.2510 (20.6707)
Children looked after on a regular basis –informal and free access children services	0.0571 (0.2322)	0.1875 (0.4031)	0.0401 (0.1962)	0.0461 (0.2114)	0.0581 (0.2339)	0.0411 (0.1987)	0.0526 (0.2234)	0.0433 (0.2036)
Paying for child looked after	0.0969 (0.2959)	0.1515 (0.3641)	0.0644 (0.2456)	0.074 (0.2634)	0.0972 (0.2962)	0.0967 (0.2957)	0.0705 (0.2561)	0.0830 (0.2760)

Source: Our elaborations on ECHP data (wave 8)

In the following Tables we present the results of the estimates of a model measuring the probability of accessing to managerial positions. The model is estimated for 21-65 years old men and women, with correction for selection into employment in the model estimated on the sample of women.³¹

²⁵ Significant difference at a 1% level.

²⁶ Significant difference at a 5% level.

³¹ The probability of accessing managerial positions is estimated separately for men and women supposing the normal distribution of the error terms. The estimated model is a probit model, with selection into employment (Heckman, 1979) in the female specification. Identification of female coefficients is obtained through the exclusion of some variables. We exclude the variables ‘age’ and ‘civil status’ from the second stage equation and the variables ‘experience’, ‘tenure’ and ‘firm size’ from the first stage equation.

The probability of accessing managerial positions is estimated supposing a normal distribution of the error terms.

Table 3.5 presents the results of the estimates for women. The Table is divided in two parts; probit estimates of women employees accessing managerial positions are shown in part a) of the Table while in par b) we show the results of the equation of selection of women into employment.³² Table 3.6 presents the results for male workers.

The explanatory variables included in the model aim at capturing the effect on the access to managerial positions of both individual characteristics and family constraints. Among the individual characteristics, we control for different human capital variables, such as the number of years of general past work experience, the number of years of firm-specific experience (tenure) and the achieved educational diploma. The variable “experience” was included in quadratic expression in order to capture the decreasing nature of the returns. We split the variable “tenure” in different dummies (the reference category is a tenure lower or equal to 5 years) due to the limited information available in the ECHP.³³

We believe that the probability of working and of accessing managerial positions is strongly affected by the different roles that males and females play in the social reproduction.³⁴ Therefore we include in the estimates also the number of children by different age groups, the occupational category of the partner (manager or not), the partner average caring activity and the resort to formal-paid and informal-unpaid caring activities.

The number of children has been distinguished by different age groups; children younger than 2 years, children between 3 and 5 years old (attending kindergartens) and children older than 5 and younger than 13 (attending compulsory school).

As previously seen, women can be less affected in their career by the presence of children if they can afford private child care or are able to share care responsibilities with their parents or with other relatives. For catching the effect of the availability of informal/free-access and paid caring activities, we include among the right hand side variables both the amount of hours the partner dedicates to caring activities during the week and the use to either formal/paid or informal/free-access regular child caring help.

Estimates for the sample of women (Tables 3.5a and 3.5b) show, as expected, a positive effect of human capital variables both on the probability of working and on the probability of accessing managerial positions. In the former case, an educational level equal or higher than upper-secondary diploma positively affects the probability of working. In the latter case only a university degree is statistically significant in predicting access to managerial positions.

General working experience is statistically significant in the probability of being in a managerial job equation with decreasing returns. Specific experience accumulated inside the firm (variable ‘tenure’) has a significant and positive effect³⁵ only if the period of permanence in the firm is higher than 15 years.

The presence of children has a different impact on the two stages of the model. The probability of working is negatively and significantly affected by the number of children more than two years old. Being in a managerial job is affected by the number of children between 3 and 5 years old, period in

³² Coefficients of both equations are identified through the exclusion of some variables. In the model of selection into employment we included marital status condition and age, not included in the model of accession to managerial positions. In the equation of managerial accession we included variables “experience”, “tenure” and “firm size”, not included in the selection model.

³³ In the original data information on total working period spent in the firm is represented by a continuous variable indicating the actual number of years only for periods of time lower or equal to fifteen years. Longer periods of permanence in the firm are not exactly determined.

³⁴ Picchio (1992). Addabbo (2003) and Picchio (2003) for an analysis of the sex distribution of unpaid work in Italy.

³⁵ Significant at 10%.

between maternal leave and children schooling time. The number of children seems to principally affect the decision to enter the labour market instead of the probability of being in a managerial position.

All different forms of caring activities and husband's hours of caring time positively affect the decision to work; caring activities external to the couple appear to be particularly significant. Caring activity carried out by other family components or external people without being paid, is important in determining both the probability of being employed and the probability of being in a managerial position. This confirms a result we previously found in the descriptive analysis.

Tab. 3.5a - Probit estimates of probability of being a manager. Women 21-65 years old.

	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p-value	95% confidential interval	
Upper-secondary						
Diploma	.0818350	.4172240	0.20	0.884	-.7359090	.8995790
University degree	.8102035	.4582902	1.77	0.077	-.0880289	1.708436
Experience (years)	.1521006	.0807187	1.88	0.060	.0061051	.3103064
Experience ²	-.0036337	.0015607	-2.33	0.020	-.0066927	-.0005747
Tenure (years)						
0-5 base category						
6-10	.0593881	.4424555	0.13	0.893	-.8078088	.9265849
11-15	.3708441	.4446692	0.83	0.404	-.5006916	1.24238
more than 15	.9259211	.5627737	1.65	0.100	-.1770951	2.028937
children						
0-2 years old	.4291152	.2850582	1.51	0.132	-.1295886	.987819
3-5 years old	-.3962368	.2401501	-1.65	0.100	-.8661842	.0751868
6-13 years old	.2001624	.1618667	1.24	0.216	-.1170906	.5174154
Husband manager	-.1473109	.3019735	-0.49	0.626	-.7391682	.4445463
Weekly hours of husband care	-.0100262	.0112552	-0.89	0.373	-.032086	.0120336
Informal/unpaid caring activity	.7287527	.3270476	2.23	0.026	.0877513	1.369754
Paid caring activity	.1792891	.3166426	0.57	0.571	-.4413189	.7998972
Firm size						
<50 base category						
50-99	.1200559	.2839178	0.42	0.672	-.4364127	.6765245
100-499	-.2059289	.3847492	-0.54	0.592	-.9600235	.5481657
more than 500	.3749207	.3173193	1.18	0.237	-.2470137	.9968552
Public sector	.4869264	.4478389	1.09	0.277	-.3908217	1.364675
Constant	-5.209175	.9375476	-5.56	0.000	-7.046735	-3.371615
Probit model with sample selection. Robust standard errors						
Wald test of independent equations:		chi2(1) = 4.71	Prob > chi2 = 0.0301			
Number of obs: 2816						
Wald chi2(16): 128.59						
Log pseudo-likelihood: -1656.227		Prob > chi2 = 0.0000				

Summarising, the model we specified for Italian women confirms the significant and positive role of human capital in favouring both the decision of working and the probability of being in high responsibility positions. The presence of children is still a constraint that limits employability of mothers after the period of maternity leave, but the availability of formal (paid or unpaid) and

informal caring activities helps in favouring the decision to work. All the different forms of caring activities are particularly significant in the first step of the model (the employment probability model). Once the woman is employed, the probability she is in a managerial position is positively affected by informal help or free-access childcare services.

Tab. 3.5b – Model of selection into employment. Women 21-65 years old.

	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p-value	95% confidential interval	
living in couple	-.4695075	.0722403	-6.50	0.000	-.6110959	-.3279191
age	.1941654	.0194377	9.99	0.000	.1560683	.2322625
age square	-.0023522	.0002267	-10.38	0.000	-.0027966	-.0019079
Upper-secondary Education	.9221229	.0572352	16.11	0.000	.8099439	1.034302
University	1.223201	.0803970	15.21	0.000	1.065626	1.380776
children						
0-2 years old	.1575096	.1220349	1.29	0.197	-.0816744	.3966936
3-5 years old	-.3392938	.0840064	-4.04	0.000	-.5039433	-.1746443
6-13 years old	-.3209158	.0493896	-6.50	0.000	-.4177176	-.2241139
Husband manager	-.0124728	.0682514	-0.18	0.855	-.1462431	.1212975
Weekly hours of husband care	.0085707	.0039583	2.17	0.030	.0008125	.0163288
Informal/unpaid caring activity	.9313937	.1328293	7.01	0.000	.6710531	1.191734
Paid caring activity	1.158553	.1015582	11.41	0.000	.9595022	1.357603
Constant	-4.056004	.3832083	-10.58	0.000	-4.807079	-3.30493

Concerning the sample of men (Table 3.6), the number of children, the wife's caring time, informal and formal (paid or not) childcare services and human capital accumulated in the labour market do not affect the access to managerial positions. The only variables significantly affecting their probability of being in a managerial position are those related to education.

Several differences emerge between female and male samples.

The educational level significantly and positively affects the access of women to managerial positions only if it is very high (university degree); on the other hand, accessing high responsibility occupations, is positively affected for men also by upper-secondary diploma. In addition to that, the university degree has a higher value for male workers than for female ones. This is recognised in the existing literature, where female women are usually overqualified with respect to men in high responsibility positions.

The other human capital variables –experience and tenure- are significant only in the female sample. The relevance of general working experience in predicting a higher access of women to managerial positions can be associated to a signal for the employer, who usually assumes that women have a higher probability of interrupting their working experience. The insignificant coefficient of variable 'tenure' in the men's sample suggests the existence of two different models of career between by gender; men having a direct access to managerial functions.

Finally, familiar characteristics such as the number of children and the types of caring activities do not represent a constraint in the probability of being in managerial positions for men. This seems to confirm the different role that men and women have in social reproduction.

The estimates also show that the hypothesis of *assortative mating* by type of job is not verified.

Tab. 3.6 – Probit estimates of probability of being a manager. Men 21-65 years old.

	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p-value	95% confidential interval	
Upper-secondary Education	.785480	.2754544	2.85	.004	.2455992	1.325361
University	1.589791	.3381089	4.70	.000	.9271098	2.252472
Experience (years)	.022255	.0251288	.89	.376	-.0269965	.0715065
Experience2	-.0001351	.0004901	-.28	.783	-.0010956	.0008254
Tenure						
6-10 years	-.2217456	.2887178	-.77	.442	-.7876221	.3441309
11-15	.1015495	.2416618	.42	.674	-.3720988	.5751979
more than 15	.0133903	.269286	.05	.960	-.5144006	.5411812
Children						
0-2 years old	-.0103451	.3262772	-.03	.975	-.6498366	.6291465
3-5 years old	-.3011971	.241307	-1.25	.212	-.7741502	.1717561
6-13 years old	.1402423	.128111	1.09	.274	-.1108507	.3913353
Wife manager	-.5350213	.448889	-1.19	.233	-1.414827	.3447849
Weekly hours of wife care	.0005144	.0040403	.13	.899	-.0074045	.0084333
Informal/unpaid caring activity	.1350824	.3564984	.38	.705	-.5636416	.8338064
Paid caring activity	-.3156901	.3424549	-.92	.357	-.9868893	.3555092
Firm size						
<50 (base category)						
50-99	.2470802	.2025293	1.22	.222	-.1498699	.6440303
100-499	-.150481	.2106505	-.71	.475	-.5633484	.2623864
more than 500	-0.0402408	-.0397185	.2308892	-.17	.863	-.4922531
Public sector	-0.2836377	-.2785545	.1933085	-1.44	.150	-.6574323
Constant	-2.900127	.4172344	-6.95	.000	-3.717891	-2.082362

Probit model with sample selection. Robust standard errors

Number of obs: 1532

Wald chi2(16): 59.197

Log pseudo-likelihood: -197.43

Prob > chi2 = 0.0000

As we have seen in Section 1 and 2 Italy is characterized on average by a lower participation of women in paid work and by a lower presence of childcare services than in other countries. To see how institutional factors can affect the probability of being in a managerial position we plan to carry out estimates of the model across countries characterized by different presence of public child care services and by different public policies affecting paid work activity by gender. Here we start with a comparison of the results obtained on Italy with an estimate of the same model on a sample of French women aged 21-65 given the different institutional factors at work in the latter country. Table 3.7 contains the first results for the second stage equation estimation.³⁶

These first estimates show interesting differences with respect to the Italian female sample. First of all we had to exclude from the explanatory variables the ‘informal/unpaid child care activity’ variable since it exactly predicted failure in accessing to managerial positions. Secondly, the model for French women seems to approximate the model we found for Italian men with regards to a set of variables. Both levels of education are significant and positively affect the dependent variable; general working experience does not play any role while firm specific experience positively affects the access to managerial positions only for periods not too long. As in the model for Italian men, but differently from the model estimated on Italian women, the number of children of whatever age does not affect the probability of being in a managerial position.

Two other main differences emerge between French and Italian women; French households seem to fit the hypothesis of assortative mating, given the positive and significant coefficient of the dummy capturing the husband’s managerial occupation. Moreover, the use of paid child care services positively affects the probability of being in a managerial positions for French women.³⁷

³⁶ We did not include the dummies on firm size, because of collinearity problems.

³⁷ This result could be questioned because of a likely endogeneity problem; for a first test of endogeneity we have estimated a model for the variable ‘paid child care activity’ with the variable on the occupational status ‘manager’ amongst the other right hand side variables that turned out to be not significant.

Tab. 3.7 - Probit estimates of probability of being a manager. French women 21-65 years old.

	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p-value	95% confidential interval	
Upper secondary						
Diploma	1.046664	.2819117	3.71	0.000	.494127	.494127
University degree	1.096034	.2537322	4.32	0.000	.5987277	1.59334
Experience (years)	-.001349	.0229125	-0.06	0.953	-.0462567	.0435587
Experience ²	.0003627	.0005060	0.72	0.473	-.000629	.0013545
Tenure (years)						
0-5 base category						
6-10	.3330248	.2075466	1.60	0.109	-.073759	.7398087
11-15	-.0973714	.2891659	-0.34	0.736	-.6641261	.4693833
more than 15	.1100895	.2832341	0.39	0.698	-.4450391	.6652181
children						
0-2 years old	-.1806834	.2706491	-0.67	0.504	-.7111458	.3497791
3-5 years old	.0895042	.2193472	0.41	0.683	-.3404083	.5194167
6-13 years old	-.2302072	.1652154	-1.39	0.164	-.5540234	.093609
Husband manager	.6296957	.2131430	2.95	0.003	.2119431	1.047448
Weekly hours of husband care	-.0394029	.0282980	-1.39	0.164	-.094866	.0160602
Paid caring activity	.6384250	.2520312	2.53	0.011	.1444529	1.132397
Public sector	-.6569432	.2456468	-2.67	0.007	-1.138402	-.1754844
Constant	-2.870203	.3026952	--9.48	0.000	-3.463474	-2.276931
Probit model with sample selection. Robust standard errors						
Wald test of independent equations:		chi2(1) = 4.19	Prob > chi2 = 0.0406			
Number of obs: 1828						
Wald chi2(16): 54.47						
Log pseudo-likelihood: -1229.818		Prob > chi2	= 0.0000			

4. Gender differences in the access to managerial and entrepreneurial positions: results from qualitative survey

The survey has been carried out in two areas of Italy (Catanzaro and Frosinone) whose peculiarities within the Italian context have been stressed in Section 1.³⁸

The interviews carried out in Italy as far as the workers are concerned were 85 (40 in Frosinone and 45 in Catanzaro) women have been oversampled as chosen in the sample design.

Table 4.1 Sample Structure by sex and job

Frosinone and Catanzaro	Women		Men		Total	
	abs.value	%	abs.value	%	abs.value	%
Entrepreneurs	17	29.31	9	33.33	26	30.59
Self-employed	10	17.24	4	14.81	14	16.47
Managers	13	22.41	7	25.93	20	23.53
High responsibility white collar	18	31.03	7	25.93	25	29.41
Total	58	100	27	100	85	100.00

Together with entrepreneurs, managers and high responsibility white collars, ten representatives of institutions have been interviewed: local government representatives, representatives of trade unions and entrepreneurial associations, members of equal opportunity commissions, representatives of insurance and credit sector.

Women in the sample are younger than men (the difference is statistically significant for self-employed and managers).

Human capital acquired by formal education does not significantly differ by sex as far as years of education are concerned. However if one looks at the type of education received (though a relevant number of people interviewed did not state the area of their higher level of education probably this is connected with the highest level of education not being university), men tend to be more concentrated than women in Law (19% against 9% of women) whereas 17% of women interviewed have invested in Humanities (none of the 27 men interviewed was in this area of education).

Looking at the employment conditions of the parents of the interviewed people one can see how on average more women than men in entrepreneurial or managerial position had a father entrepreneur (of those women in these positions interviewed 43% had their father entrepreneur, on the other hand 19% of men in these positions had their mother working as self-employed).

On average women entrepreneurs had more work experience in their firm than men, men's tenure is higher than women in managerial and self employment positions, while women have more tenure in high responsibility white collar positions. Looking at total past work experience this is on average higher for men than for women in entrepreneurial, self-employed and managerial positions.

Only 24% of women and 11% of men entrepreneurs have been involved in the birth of their firms.

Data on the source of seed capital for entrepreneurs show a higher presence of partner's support for women than men, higher support from other family members for men than for women, more help from financial institutions for women (10%) and more help from state bodies for men. Significantly more capital comes from individual's capital for men than for women.

The paths found towards managerial or entrepreneurial positions is rather heterogeneous. Direct (inherited firm) or indirect (firm created in the same sector of the father) link with entrepreneur's parents do often emerge from interviews together with a path following an interruption of one's work profile connected to the birth of children. The latter case emerges for a woman who shared the

³⁸ The surveys on a local basis have been carried out in the project coordinated by Fondazione Brodolini "Gender Differences in the Access to Managerial and Entrepreneurial Positions" (Gendmap) VS/2003/0558 funded by the European Commission DG Employment and Social Affairs.

decision of entering with entrepreneurial role in a firm having shared the decision with the whole family when her children have grown up. Running one's firm is also seen as a solution to reach a better work life balance.

The mean number of children in the families of people who have been interviewed is lower in the families of women in managerial and entrepreneurial positions than it is for men in these positions correspondingly more men than women in these positions live in families where there are children, 77% of men live in couples with children against 53% of women, on the other hand more women than men live in couples without children and the percentage of those living alone is similar, amongst children there are very few children in preschool age.

The survey allows one to reconstruct the time allocation over a representative working week of interviewed individuals. Women entrepreneurs worked on average more than men (64 hours for women and 53 for men).

For self employed and high responsibility white collars the average number of hours devoted by women to unpaid work is higher than for men, whereas men entrepreneurs state they are doing on average in unpaid work more hours than women entrepreneurs, this can be connected to the higher presence of preschool children for men than for women entrepreneurs.

Hours spent on social activities are significantly higher for women than for men, whereas hours in leisure time are on average higher for men than for women. Women devote more hours on average than men to personal care.

In presence of children the mean number of hours in paid work and in social activities decreases particularly for women and hours spent in unpaid work increase whereas hours in leisure time are on average higher for men than for women.

Very often the low engagement of men in housework and care is justified by their wives in managerial or entrepreneurial positions making reference to their husbands' employment position that women consider very time demanding also in terms of lack of flexibility and with lots of travelling. Women in managerial and entrepreneurial positions are more likely than men in the same position that have been interviewed in Italy, to be married to men in high responsibility positions. On the other hand the figure of a partner who supports men in entrepreneurial or managerial positions is more frequently found with reference to the interviewed men.

Even if there are a few cases of a more equal sharing of unpaid work tasks inside the couple, we can say that in most cases women are the main carer and provider (directly and by managing or coordinating external help) of social reproduction inside the family.

A central place in care and housework is also played by other relatives or by private family helper workers this result from the qualitative analysis is consistent with what has been found in the previous Section by analysing a wider sample of managers by gender in Italy. While answering about the organization of care-work, women often complain about the lack of public services or about their timing. Moreover one can see how an increasing share (actual or perceived for the future) of unpaid work is devoted to the elderly care.

Participation to the labour market, if not sustained by an effective network of services to families and schemes of flexible exiting/re-entering the labour market, can influence negatively life's strategies, career's choices and family's decisions. These limits emerge in various dimensions and aspects according to the experiences of the interviewees as the qualitative part of the survey shows:

- limits to the number of children (less children than desired), due to different factors: i) difficulties regarding the compatibility between working time and caring duties; ii) work's responsibilities too demanding on the emotive and psychological side; iii) job instability and professional risk;

- self-exploitation (e.g. self-reduction of the maternity protected period, due to economic necessity of avoiding strong wage's reduction);
- heavy increasing of duties and activities, adding paid and not-paid work (stress from requests of 'double excellence');³⁹
- career's (self)renounces and (self)limitations, in order to realise family projects.

The increasing blurring of the borders between work and social and private life presents ambiguous effects: it can result in a higher level of job and personal satisfaction (but it is almost always a male experience) or in negative evaluations and feelings about one's own professional and personal path (and this is mostly probable in the female experience).

Whereas the experience of difference between actual and desired size of the family emerges in male discourses, it is explicitly interpreted (that means, indirectly, blamed) as a choice of the wife.

Amongst younger women the qualitative part of interviews shows a decreasing attention and consciousness about gender gap issues that could be 'paid' when those women will personally experience gender disadvantages.

Turning to the current position the number of weeks worked by women are on average 95% of those worked by men.

On average yearly net earnings are much lower for women than for men in each of the analysed positions, if we compute the ratio of women's earnings in each position to men's earnings in the same position we can see that women's earnings amount at around 43% of men's earnings, the difference being higher for entrepreneurial and white-collar positions. This while on average women entrepreneurs perform more weekly hours of paid work than men in the same positions (only self-employed women perform on average less hours than men in the same position) and the number of weeks worked by women in these positions are about 95% of those worked by men in the same positions. On average women's share of family income is similar to men in self-employment (both contribute on average to 40% of family income) and high responsibility white collar (around 55%) lower in entrepreneurial positions (44% for women and 54% for men entrepreneurs) and twenty points percentage lower for managers.

Most women and men interviewed in managerial and high responsibility white-collar positions do not have particular types of fringe benefits.

Looking at the current working positions amongst managers more women than men are employed in full-time permanent jobs (100% of women employed in managerial positions and 71% of men in managerial positions). On the whole amongst those who are employees around 80% are employed in full-time positions.

Entrepreneurs interviewed in Italy are mostly concentrated in limited responsibility firms (63% of women entrepreneurs and 56% of men), most men than women are in capital societies or in other types of firms. A significant part of women entrepreneurs are in individual firms with employees.

As far as years of firms' activity is concerned this is similar for men and women (slightly higher for women's firms whose years of age are on average 25 against 22 for men's firms).

On average yearly budget in 2003 was higher in men entrepreneurs' firms, they have also a higher percentage of exports on average on total revenue (16% for men entrepreneurs' firms against 4% for women entrepreneurs' firms), whereas the share of debt on total activities is similar. The size of women entrepreneurs' firms measured by number of employees show that they are smaller with respect to men's, whereas women are more likely than men to be managers in our sample in larger

³⁹ This can be considered at the origin of a higher dissatisfaction about the high working load found amongst women than amongst men in apical positions by Addabbo, Neri and Riccò (2005) by using qualitative data on a sample of 100 employees in cooperatives located in Emilia Romagna.

firms (115 employees on average for women in managerial positions against 33 for men in managerial positions), the dimension of the firm is lower instead for women in high responsibility white collar than for men in the same type of position (on average 44 employees for women and 66 for men).

Women entrepreneurs' firms in our sample are more present in construction (29% of total of interviewed firms).

Women in managerial positions are more present in health and social work sector.

Self-employed women are concentrated in other community, social and personal service activities firms (43% of women in self employment interviewed), 29% are in financial intermediation sector.

High responsibility white collar are concentrated in Public administration (38%) in Health and social work (25% of them work in this sector).

In women entrepreneurs' firms the share of women on people employed on the whole is around 20% (a similar percentage in men entrepreneurs' firms). The share of women in white-collar positions is higher in firms where women in managerial jobs interviewed work than for men in the same positions.

There does not seem to be a higher presence of work life balance policies in firms with women entrepreneurs, on the other hand in firms with women entrepreneurs there are on average more women in the board of directors (around 39% on average) than in men entrepreneurs' firms (where on average the share of women in board of directors is 21%).

Experiences of Discrimination

Analysing interviewees' direct experiences with regard to the discrimination's issue has to be realized taking into account a more general underlying aspect. In abstract words, we have to consider that gender is a 'social institution' (Martin, 2004), that means it is an opaque, silent and gluey "formative context" (Unger, 1987), through which people learns socially legitimate models of behaviour.

Making it explicit, the point is that the mechanism of discrimination is already, intrinsically, inside the codes governing individual choices and strategies of action. Such a mechanism is working, firstly, at the very general level of definitions and categorizations of work, in which the distinction skilled/unskilled jobs contributes to subordinating women "both in the in the wider context of the labour force, and at a more micro level in the way in which organizations structure their jobs at senior management level. The myth that occupations concerned with 'reproduction' are inherently 'unskilled' is systematically perpetuated through the separation of home from work, thus creating the assumption that actions that are more explicitly concerned with 'reproduction' do not contribute to the perpetuation of the capitalist ideal" (Rees, 2003: 18; Fletcher, 1999). Then, this mechanism is acting at a specific level as well, treating male social construction of management's concepts as universal neutral ideas and structuring in this way the premises to any social discourse about management: "The story of management has been largely told in gender-free accounts that ignore the realities of organisational life by assuming a universal worker" (Rees, 2003: 18). The immediate consequence of a gender-free concept of worker or manager is the ignorance of the primary connections between work and social life and of its cyclical phases:

"woman has unfortunately these phases (...) of the family, but they are only some phases. That is, if a woman at the beginning has a problem due to a child, etc., then this condition will change (...), but man look at her always as... in the double role of family and employment. So, when he has to choose, obviously woman is penalized, he doesn't think she can organize herself"

P2-Frosinone;

whereas, in some cases, it could be rather simple taking organizationally into account of these 'phases':

"for instance, when the agency organizes that few training courses for us engineers, they should

respect places, timetables and periods that would be available to working mothers; because, strangely, these courses are attended only by male colleagues, and we can go there only if it is really possible or damaging the whole family organization”

P31-Catanzaro

So, even if in some cases did not emerge any direct experience of discrimination, it doesn't mean necessarily that conditions of equal opportunity are fulfilled and substantially enacted; on the contrary, this can result from an implicit assumption (from women as well) of the gender premises to social action. Whereas decisions and action's strategies are informed from these premises and these latter are taken for granted, as natural rules, it's probable that there is no experiences and feelings of discrimination. Socially institutionalized, these premises structure the gender division of social labour (according to which women are charged of most part of caring duties and responsibilities, being them on the labour market or not), the gender division of competencies (some studying and professional careers are more female than others) and the gender division of social hierarchical roles (higher positions being usually 'naturally' associated with men), in that way all of us clearly knows.

Despite this naturalization of gender gap was rather expected in the socio-cultural context of Southern Italy, in which part of our research was conducted, many experiences of discrimination are explicitly cited from the interviewees anyway.

Even if each experience is particular, they can be schematically summarized as follows:

- I. An area of discrimination experiences emerged concerning the dimension of *social roles* (e.g.: father or husband doesn't accepting working daughter or wife):

“I think there are [discrimination experiences], I heard of it also in my firm. Some women who are working here and are married have always had many problems, due to the fact their husbands do not want they work so much; also a youth woman (...)has worked here for fifteen days against her father's, a typical case of father-master. Once evening she prolonged her working time from nine to half past nine and that caused a 'tragedy', her mother got strong pressures and since that day she hasn't come back to work and she is closed into her house”

P1-Catanzaro

“my ex-husband, I'm separated, didn't accept this my role, he felt himself inferior to me, and he was always casting this fact that I was working in my teeth every time”

P17-Catanzaro.

- II. A second area of experiences of discrimination is pointed out with regard to the context of *power's roles and hierarchies* (e.g.: subordinates, colleagues or others do not accepting/expecting females in high responsibility's roles):

“We can say man is usually thought in a managerial role better than... for instance, I have a collaborator who is older than me, and clearly has more seniority and even if he fully respect me he has anyway an attitude to treat me as a young girl; if I was a woman he would had consider me differently”

P9-Frosinone

P32 cat: Researcher: “Credit system did help you?”. Interviewee: *“It didn't, absolutely. We had also many struggles to combat there, because when we were meeting banks, the fact of meeting a woman willing to do business it was seen from them a really extemporary situation; and I had to work year per year in order to gain a reputation, and I did it through my behaviour”*

P32-Catanzaro

“Having male subordinates caused some problems, because they didn’t feel... comfortable being ‘ordered’ by a woman”

P7-Frosinone

“Yes, on the job you are always seen more as a secretary than a professional, to which they can always give a suggestion (...). In some situations (...), especially if you are close to a man, they use to ask you ‘Excuse me, could you please do a copy of it?’ or ‘Can I have a coffee?’ ...”

P26-Frosinone

These situations are so common and so embedded in organisational and economic life, that they are already considered not removable:

“I have always tried to solve the problem... going around the obstacle. That means: if they want proposals to be advanced by a man, then I did it in a way that my proposals were advanced by a man, I had to do this”

P10-Frosinone

III. A third area of discrimination is in the context of the *competencies’ system* (e.g.: women in “male” professions; women’s competencies and abilities under-recognized, etc.).

“At the beginning, obtaining the recognition of professional competencies is easier for a man, it is more taken for granted”

P17-Frosinone

“At the beginning there was a sort of discrimination against me; currently they take into consideration as well my serious and entrepreneurial dimensions, but not at the beginning: ‘You are a woman, you cannot understand matters of building’, there was this kind of attitude, because obviously they were familiar with male collaborators...”

P20-Frosinone

“My colleague also thinks women cannot understand of transports, machines, trucks for international transports and so he considers it is... a typically male job”

P7-Frosinone

Direct experiences of discrimination have been perceived by women when re-entering the job after maternity leaves and this is consistent with the literature on discrimination that considers this as a critical phase of women’s working profile.

As far as men are concerned, in general they appear to be scarcely aware of these problems (with few exceptions), confirming once again what other studies already pointed out: “Within organizations, many men do not seem to recognize their actions as expressions of men power and male identity. Where men see humor, teasing, camaraderie and strength, for example, women often perceive crude, specifically masculine aggression, competition, harassment, intimidation and misogyny. Men in organizations often seem extraordinarily unaware of, ignorant about, and even antagonistic to any critical appraisal of the gendered nature of their actions and their consequences” (Collinson, Hearn, 1994).

Policies to reduce the observed gap

Representations emerging from the interviews with men and women in managerial or apical positions, and with significant representatives (coming from public and private organizations) give us a picture in which there are some general characteristics commonly pointed out. First of all, it clearly emerges - despite cultural, social and juridical changes - the widespread persistence of discriminations' phenomena. These latter happen in a direct and explicit way, in some cases (e.g. refusing of accepting women doing some 'male' tasks or jobs), or often take the forms of mobbing behaviours. The disadvantageous condition is reinforced by still scarce attention about these issues not only from firms and other economic organizations (e.g. credit system), but also from trade unions. Another quoted significant element contributing to the process of reproduction of the gender gap, is about the permanent need of being socially conscious of it. With regard to this point, signals of under-estimation by youth generations of women of the gender gap and of the obstacles to female employment (and re-employment, after having child), and consequently under-estimation of a necessary civil engagement (outside of the strict borders of one own employment situation) and socio cultural struggles for equal opportunity are cited with worry from interviewees.

In such a context, the effectiveness of formal measures cannot be taken as self-evident. On the contrary, laws and formal institutional devices (Equal Opportunity Commissions, for instance) tend to have few and weak effects; cases of ambiguous and counterproductive consequences (false female owned firms), and (self)-ghettoization effects are cited (instead of producing awareness of their structural nature, equal opportunity and work-life balance measures and institutions are interpreted as "women's matters"; see the totally female composition of the E.O. Commissions).

Of course, no 'ready-made' prescriptions or simple solutions with regard to so complex issues are pointed out from interviewees. Instead, a plurality of strategies and directions of action are advanced. Some of them are more strictly linked to economic, organizational or labour market aspects:

- many interviewees stressed the importance of possible supports coming from the credit system, e.g. making easier the access to it (against risks of addressing usurers) and reducing bank interest rates. Other external devices, such as "firm's incubator" or professional/administrative advice, are considered helpful for promoting entrepreneurship;
- more administrative efficiency (cases in which two years old requests of being inserted in the list of the financially sustained female entrepreneurship still waiting for evaluation are cited) is often claimed; particularly for young firms, reducing duties and times to this regard, e.g. through the institution of a single desk for fulfilling all bureaucratic requirements, could be significantly helpful;
- the lack of high-skilled and professional features in different sectors, in these regional areas, and the need of a Centre for improving and enriching professional competences and abilities of already employed persons are pointed out (especially from interviewees coming from Catanzaro's area)

Some other are more linked to broader cultural and social issues:

- a cultural action, in order to promote and support women's motivations to accept an enlargement of their professional responsibilities, that sometimes appear to be avoided by women themselves as well as not strongly promoted by males;
- but this statement is usually immediately associated to the recognition that such female behaviour (avoiding higher responsibilities) is obviously due to the gender division of social work and time structure, according to which women are implicitly, practically and psychologically, overcharged by adding care and family not paid activities to paid employment; so, services to families and networking of local actors and agencies in order to sustain female

participation to economic activities are strongly requested. On this regard policies to achieve a better work-life balance in the Italian sample are mainly informal and somebody states also discretionary (they depend on the willingness of the employer to adopt them). To achieve a better work life balance interviewees show a preference towards flexible time of entry at work. One experience observed in the public sector shows that a more flexible entry time when implemented comes at the advantage not only of the employee using it but can result in an advantage for the public and can produce a more efficient organization of the workplace.⁴⁰ However this experience shows also how difficulties in implementing it can arise from elder colleagues' initial opposition to its implementation.

- at the same time, other indirect policies are considered useful in order to reduce unequal opportunity's conditions; these are measures more broadly aiming to enhance the quality of urban and territorial socio-economic life. On one hand, the emphasis on a more indirect approach to the gender economic gaps leads to give more attention to the urban social policies (transports, times policies, services for families, children and elderly persons, etc.), assuming that a more friendly and socially effective city organization is virtually associated with a specific gender evaluation of policies and services; on the other hand, a stronger development of infrastructures (in particular, Information and Communication Technologies) is stated as a conditional premise for any economic and organizational advancement.

Finally, a further argument is raised, as far as reducing the gender gap is concerned. Particularly relevant (both for its symbolic and concrete consequences) is considered the presence of women in the decision-making spaces and moments, in the political structures, in which problems are defined, agenda is set and collective decisions are taken.

Conclusions

Not only women's employment rates in Italy are lower than UE average but the gender gap in participation to paid employment is wide. The analysis in terms of gender gap in employment and unemployment rates with reference to the districts which have been analysed more in depth by means of a qualitative survey shows that the highest gap in the employment rate by gender is to be found in the district of Frosinone where men's employment rate is higher than women's by 34 percentage points whereas the highest disadvantage in terms of a higher unemployment rate for women is to be found in Calabria.

The differences observed in the access to paid employment and to apical positions are reflected in a greater burden of unpaid work (housework and care work) that women show with respect to men and that brings women total work to be higher on average than men's in all the regions analysed as well as at national level.

By taking into account differences in access to managerial positions and wage differential as well as the participation of women to Parliament the Gender empowerment measure ranks Italy at the 32nd place (a lower rank with respect to the measure of Human development and to the Gender-related index to human development that give Italy the 21st place).

The observed differences in paid and unpaid employment distribution can be related to the type of welfare state that characterizes Italy and that is centred on the family providing (with respect to other countries) less services and therefore contributing less than in other countries to the participation in paid employment (given that women tend to be over represented in Service sector) and affecting the higher than average participation of women to unpaid work in the family.

⁴⁰ Another advantage of adopting work life balance policies has also been recognized in an increase in the motivations of employees consistently with what has been found in other empirical studies on the subject.

The survey of the literature shows the existence of difficulties in the access to credit market experienced in starting up a firm but also traces of discrimination experienced by women entrepreneurs.

Institutional factors that can contribute in closing the observed gap in women's participation to paid work and to managerial and entrepreneurial positions are the existing national and regional laws promoting women entrepreneurs, the existence of Equal Opportunity Committee at different level and the implementation of Committee promoting the presence of women entrepreneurship as well as Law 53/2000 which can improve the compatibility of family and work life and promote a more equal distribution of care work by gender inside the family. However difficulties in the application of the laws and in the full diffusion and implementation of Equal Opportunity Committee (also inside the firms that should have implemented them) may prevent this process to be completed.

The sample of entrepreneurs, self-employed and employees in managerial positions in Italy oversamples women and amongst managers public sector employees.

The path followed to entrepreneurial positions shows heterogeneity. Gender differences emerges with respect to the presence only for women of the aim of reaching a better work life balance or of working after their children are grown up and their unpaid work is less time demanding. Training is found to be very effective on the side of managerial employment.

Though the sample dimension prevents a thorough analysis of income differentials by gender a gross income differential is found at the disadvantage of women who earn on average 43% of men in the same position. On average women are underrepresented in the board of directors of the analysed firms and are more present in firms whose entrepreneur is a woman.

Inside the firms where the interviewed people are working informal and often discretionary work-life balance policies are enacted. In a public sector firm a formal decision to introduce flexitime has been subscribed not without elder employees initial disagreement but, when implemented, this policy has shown to be beneficial to the whole work environment and to customers leading to a better organization of the work place according to the interviewed people's experience. Some entrepreneurs interviewed are aware of the positive effect on workers' productivity of work life balance policies.

The districts analysed still suffer from a relatively low diffusion of public services and this is found to make even harder the task of balancing work and family time needs for women given that on their shoulders still rests the main responsibility and share of unpaid care work.

With respect to public policies this research calls for a higher diffusion and a better timing of public services for care of children and elderly and for a higher use of work life balance policies inside the firms to overcome the limits that have been found in this paper:

- the number of children (less children than desired), due to different factors: i) difficulties regarding the compatibility between working time and caring duties; ii) work's responsibilities too demanding on the emotive and psychological side; iii) job instability and professional risk;
- self-exploitation (e.g. self-reduction of the maternity protected period, due to economic necessity of avoiding strong wage's reduction);
- heavy increasing of duties and activities, adding paid and not-paid work (stress from requests of 'double excellence');

- career's (self)renounces and (self)limitations, in order to realise family projects.

More in general, the research pointed out gender discrimination is a social and cognitive mechanism, a socio-culturally grounded institution through which people learns socially legitimate models of behaviour. Many explicit narrations about discrimination's experiences emerged in the interviewees, and we tried to classify them in three areas: an area of discrimination experiences concerning the dimension of *social roles* (e.g.: father or husband doesn't accepting working daughter or wife); a second area with regard to the context of *power's roles and hierarchies* (e.g.: subordinates, colleagues or others do not accepting/expecting females in high responsibility's roles); a third area in the context of the *competencies' system* (e.g.: women in "male" professions; women's competencies and abilities under-recognized, etc.).

The experiences of discrimination shown in the research results, and more generally the 'institutional', indirect, character of gender discrimination legitimate some policy evaluations expressed by many interviewees, whereas they stressed the important role - besides all the specific measures and normative devices, and the services directly concerning family care – of actions aiming at enhancing the quality of urban life, and at empowering women's presence in the public sphere, that is in all the social spaces where problems are defined, agenda is set, decisions are taken. These latter actions, apart from their direct importance, could have long-lasting effects as well, in order to de-construct that silent but always present institutional character of social discrimination.

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