

*High-level advocacy and legislation for gender statistics:
the Italian experience*

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Women and their invisibility in statistics

As Harriet Harman, an English woman, has recently said there is a gap of a century between men and women. Women have already entered in the 21st century whilst their partners, their bosses and the governments that determine society's structure have stopped a century behind. This is due to the fact that women have domestic and economic responsibilities and they lead their lives both inside and outside the home. However, the changes that should have followed from this social revolution have not come about. The organisation of the labour market still assume that workers are male. The entry of women into the labour market has not been followed by the entry of men into house and family management and this has created a deep division between sexes. Harriet Harman is right and what she says applies to many governments and national institutes of Statistics, too. No all the Statistical National Institutes can supply information regarding women and men at the same level.

From a social point of view, many crucial phenomena such as unemployment, poverty, and economic development are not neutral.

If gender is not considered during planning and programming, men and women obtain unequal benefits from the effects of policies. For this reason many government policies lead to an inadequate valorisation of women potentiality.

For a long time, National Institutes of Statistics have produced unbalanced statistics in different areas. This is due to the fact that the world of official statistics is too much economic oriented. If governments regard their economic oriented politics as the prominent ones, economic oriented statistics are considered prominent, as well. In this way productive subjects and not the individuals are considered the core of whole community. Official statistical approach to society has given visibility just to what can be considered peculiar for a male-style model. We must overcome this view. For a long time only qualitative information on rewarded work activities (which involve almost only men) has been available, while no official data on household services and cares carried out by women were available. For years in national official statistics some social phenomena, extremely relevant in any woman's life, have never been analyzed. Unpaid work, for example, does not play a relevant role in men life.

Unpaid work is very important for women. For a long time Statistical National Institutes have not measured unpaid work.

For this reasons a number of social subjects, among which we include women, have remained invisible in official statistics for a long time. The problems relating to statistics on women are very similar to the ones relating to children, who have always been regarded as students, minors, sons or daughters, but never as social subjects. One can say the same for elderly people, who have been always regarded as retired workers only. The former group has been discovered because of births decrease, the latter because of ageing of population. Elements for an analysis of society on the whole have not always been available. This has determined a lack of quality in official statistics regarding the completeness of statistics production and the necessity of going from specific information on women and gender to a mainstreaming viewpoint. The construction of gender indicators for every important statistical field and useful for gender policies - from a mainstreaming point of view - should be included in official data production and publication. Statistics will improve with the awareness of its importance and potentiality as a resource for policies. The "gender neutral" or "gender blind" approach must be quitted. This will improve statistics for both men and women.

For years, invisibility of woman has been expressed in different ways:

- lack of statistical information on the condition of women and, above all, on women as subjects;
- inadequate use of existing data (for example, in tables separated by sex, women are often calculated by difference);
- lack of an approach highlighting the gender differences from the planning phase of surveys.

This kind of problem has not only touched National Institutes of Statistics. At European level, gender issues are not given the same importance as compared to the economic ones (Eurostat).

European regulation is mostly concerned with economic statistics, and harmonisation from a gender point of view is still not considered necessary at the same level.

World Conferences on Women: a fundamental reference for gender statistics development

The importance of gender statistics was recognised in the first World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. Until the early '80s, few people were concerned with this issue. National Institutes of Statistics were not working intensely in this field. In 1982, the co-operation at international level between the statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat and the International Institute of Research and Training for Women (INSTRAW) on a training programme promoting dialogue and comprehension between decision-makers and statisticians laid the grounds for a complete working programme. Progress was clear during the 1985 Nairobi world conference. The Statistics Division calculated 39 key indicators on the condition of women for 172 countries. With 'Women and Men in Sweden', first published in 1984 and 100 thousand copies sold, Sweden is in the forefront. Since Nairobi, further progresses on an international level have been made. The general approach has changed from "women and development" to "gender and development", shifting emphasis from women in isolation to women in relation to men and their relationship. In statistics, this is highlighted by the shift from "statistics on women" to "gender statistics". The new key words are: gender statistics, gender impact and gender policies. The importance of gender in statistics for gender policies and mainstream planning is summarised in three words. Therefore, the problem is more complicated than the simple distinction by sex of the collected statistics and it is gradually explained in international recommendations. First essential question: do surveys of National Institutes of Statistics and the definitions used in the data collection actually consider the differences between men and women? Second essential aspect: do the methodologies used by National Institutes of Statistics in data collection consider gender and cultural factor stereotypes which can alter a gender point of view? Third essential aspect: do the ways in which data are collected and spread by National Institutes of Statistics put men and women on the same level and do they consider the emerging necessities on a political level? Further aspects among the strategic aims were outlined in the Beijing Conference: the H3 strategic aim outlines the necessity to produce and disseminate data and information separately by sex for planning and evaluation. Some strategic areas can be outlined: the development of surveys on the use of time for the evaluation of unpaid work, the construction of sensible indicators for female poverty, the development of a more detailed knowledge of all labour and employment scenarios, unemployment and underemployment phenomenon, the construction of a satellite account allowing the evaluation of unpaid work without influencing the GDP, the development of statistics on all the type of violence on women, including domestic and sexual harassment, finally, the adequate measurement of health conditions with a particular reference to disability. Furthermore, non extemporaneous initiatives on behalf of governments and statistical Institutes are recommended. The requirement for an adequate gender policy planning is to have timely and continuous statistics. An adequate monitoring requires continuity in production and dialogue between the people processing the statistics and the people using them for the development of policies. Otherwise statistics will not fulfil their purpose. It is difficult to determine how much of these recommendations have been implemented in EU countries. They have not been fully integrated in the legislation of EU countries (not through formal acts).

In the last years an increasing demand of statistical information, both at international and at country level has been registered. For instance it is possible to mention the increasing requests of data on phenomena more and more complex to measure by policy makers. Very often the information gaps are related to new and emerging themes, as for instance violence against women, or economic decision making and economic statistics. There is a high demand of this kind of information but official statistics are not able to give an adequate answer.

During recent years however, a sharp decrease in the level of attention towards gender statistics has been shown, also due to difficulties linked to the resources' availability for Official Statistics both at the level of international and national statistical institutes.

There are no recently published recommendations, standards or handbooks on how to plan surveys on gender related issues (if we think about women's violence for instance, the only existing handbook at the moment was produced by WHO¹).

Moreover the publication *World's women*, so much appreciated at Beijing's World Conference, actually changed its nature. It is not anymore a volume analysing trends in gender differences in different countries in the world, but more a volume analysing which countries have a high standard of gender statistics available and which do not. An approach which is of little interest for ONGs, policy makers, researchers, media and citizens in general, but more addressed to official statistics experts.

This is happening in spite of the increasing demand of statistical information, both at international and at country level. For instance we could mention the important work of DAW, which represents the UN focal point for the implementation of the Beijing Platform of action and which carry out research on gender in different areas and a number of other activities to review and monitor countries progress in achieving equality between women and men. We could also mention the increasing requests of data on phenomena more and more complex to measure by policy makers. Very often the information gaps are related to new and emerging themes, as for instance violence against women, or economic decision making and economic statistics. There is a high demand of this kind of information but official statistics are not able to give an adequate answer.

Signs of a renewed attention came from the Inter-Agency and Expert Group Meeting held in New York on December 2006 in which it was underlined the strong need to re-launch gender statistics, to create a Global Gender Statistics Programme that could guarantee assistance, cooperation, sharing and dissemination of various initiatives at international, national and regional level, to set going a High Level Group on Gender Statistics which could guarantee the management of information and the sharing of experiences on gender statistics at international level. Another important step is represented by the Global Forum on Gender Statistics, held in Rome on December 2007, the first of a series of yearly meetings to promote progresses and share best practices in the field of gender statistics. In that occasion it have been launched the Global Gender Statistics Programme and the activity of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics.

Are we able to re-launch gender statistics without a law? The Italian experience

Are the NSI able to guarantee with their own resources gender statistics without a law that prevent them from financial cuts? The Italian experience shows that it's impossible because has become a necessity to have a law that guarantees stability and continuity to a minimum set of gender statistics

¹ Last handbook was published from UNSD in 2004 (Guide to producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work, UN Publication Sales No. E.04.XVII.7).

that should be compulsory. In this way they would not cut in moments of crisis and their life would be the same of economic statistics.

Since the early 90s, Istat has been developing gender statistics. New areas are surveyed, this is particularly significant from the viewpoint of gender difference. For example, the survey on time use highlights a strong asymmetry of roles in Italian couples. The Istat survey on sexual harassment was the first of this kind in the world. The growing attention to reproductive health, breastfeeding, pregnancy and childbearing which has always been underestimated in official statistics systems; questions on fecundity not only for women but also for men are topics characterised by growing interest, from gender point of view. From an economic point of view it is particularly significant to include certain questions in the intermediate Census of industrial and service enterprises in order to check typology and characteristics of male and female businesses that can have access or not to industrial incentives. Another example of gender statistics is the Istat analysis of gender differences in the division of family work based on findings of a survey on time use which were presented at the International Women Conference in Beijing. We still have some problems with wages and salary differences. In Italy, the qualitative progress in gender statistics is due to the development of a strong interaction between equality bodies and the Equal Opportunities Ministry. Istat cooperates with the Ministry of Equal Opportunities and with the National Equality Commission, in the aim of answering the cognitive necessities in this field. Furthermore, the international work on both a European and UN level allows our country to take part to the international debate and to profit from the more advanced experiences made by other countries. Thus, in very few years great gaps have been covered. Not all the problems have been solved but a great revolution in gender and social statistics has taken place in the past ten years.

A growing demand of gender data and new developed sectors of research have been followed by moments of crisis and financial cuts. A very strong and active work with the Equal Rights Bodies, the women's associations and the trade unions not only prevented gender statistics in Italy from the economic crisis but also assured the support to them with external funding of the competent ministries. Some examples are the violence against women's survey that needed a four years planning, or the survey on immigrants women, or the survey on gender discrimination.

The increasing social climate in favour of the development of gender statistics has been very important. It creates the right conditions to prevent these statistics from any kind of attack and to encourage their growth.

Why is so important to have a law on gender statistics despite in Italy they received a great institutional consensus and support?

The main reason is that many economic statistics are compulsory by law so that they'll always have the priority over gender statistics in case of financial cuts. For this reason it's important to establish an equalization between economic and gender statistics.

Furthermore in Italy gender statistics have been developed, without the law, thanks to the women's associations, the trade unions, the ministries, the Equal Rights bodies and above all thanks to a top management of the National Statistical Institute so sensitive to this topic.

Why a law on gender statistics

In 1995, the Italian Government committed to adjust the survey, production and diffusion of gender statistics in the economic, cultural and social contexts, together with the other countries adherent to the Platform for Action during the UN's World Conference on Women held in Beijing. In order to fulfil such commitment, and drawing its inspiration from the methods and suggestions formulated by the United Nations Institutions and by the European Union, some Bills have been introduced to promote and develop the realisation of such statistics, which, nevertheless, still has not seen its legislative procedure completed.

The bill introduced during the XIII legislature (March 4, 1999) by the President of the Council of Ministers (D'Alema) and by the Minister for Equal Opportunities (Balbo) was the first legal proposal presented on this argument, becoming the source of inspiration to all subsequent bills². The reason for resorting to a legal instrument derives from the need of providing stability to the gender methodological approach, which, in addition to presenting some strong innovative elements, must be delivered from any possible change linked to current events, in order to bind the availability of gender information of considerable public interest to precise periodicities.

Today, despite the increasing needs for higher gender details in the official statistical information, in Italy, just like in other countries, the statistical projects to which priority and assurance of being realised are given are those that derive, either directly or indirectly, from European regulations or directives (generally economic and national accounting statistics) and from national regulations. Consequently, some surveys and analysis studies, in non-covered areas and areas at strong statistical information demand, are still at risk, even though they would be essential for producing and defining gender policies and, more generally, social policies at various management and government levels. In such context, the regulations for gender statistics development must be included in a wider strategy of social statistics development in order to guarantee an informative heritage that would represent a fertile ground to develop a gender methodological approach. In other words, the statistical production must take into account all the conditions that weigh differently on the situation of men and women, especially as regards the division of the roles, the access to material and/or cultural resources and to services and factors of social vulnerability.

According to this approach, the purpose of the afore-mentioned bill is to guarantee a more accurate and adequate analysis of the more important social phenomena from a gender point of view, giving particular attention to the need of developing new surveys on the life quality of the citizens. In fact, this measure aims at creating a sort of "virtuous circle" between social statistics and gender statistics, and at ensuring that this strengthening results in an overall improvement of the statistical information. The presentation of the bill, which addresses the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) and all the National Statistical System organisations (SISTAN), stresses how the measure is made possible and opportune also thanks to the work of ISTAT. In its own decision-making context, ISTAT had indeed already boosted the gender statistics. Hence, it stresses the necessity of generalising and consolidating a method that has already been experimented, and of identifying the possibilities for development³.

² The bill (Official records of the Chamber nr 5771) was introduced again, without substantial variations, on parliamentary initiative, during the XIV and the XV legislatures (nr 1573 and nr 226).

³ To give an idea of the climate in which the Bill was conceived, in the same year in which it was introduced, in the enclosure of the Report to the Parliament on the activity carried out by the National Statistical Institute, the Commission for the Statistical Information Guarantee, regarding the sector of social official statistics, praised the intensive activity

The objectives and actions provided for in the bill on gender statistics

The Bill intends on making recognisable the gender difference by following these specific objectives:

- a) Gender desegregation of all the statistical information produced by ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) and by SISTAN (National Statistical System) and the same amount of visibility for both men and women;
- b) Systematisation of data collection in the various areas of public interest, and planning of new surveys on the life quality of foreign population too;
- c) Construction by ISTAT of a method for evaluating the gender impact of important norms;
- d) Development of gender research and analysis; planning of sensitive indicators for highlighting the gender differences.

These objectives involve the following actions:

- a) Desegregation per sex of all statistical information;
- b) Adjustment of the censuses' methods from a gender point of view, not only by desegregating the information gathered per sex but also by surveying data on households structures, both for the Italian population and for the foreign population regularly living in Italy;
- c) Carrying out of annual surveys on the life quality of citizens, of particular interest for the arguments pertaining to the gender difference. ISTAT has already been carrying out these surveys, though with different periodicity. The large areas identified are those of higher interest for studying the social life, such as fertility and mortality, employment and unemployment, poverty;
- d) Carrying out of five-year surveys in sectors of particular importance for the social statistics, which are rather stable. These sectors are those in which the most important changes occur over several years. The large areas of analysis are, for example, the health status, violence and abuse, time use;
- e) Restructuring of archives containing data relative to companies, with identification per sex of employees and owners;
- f) Quantification of the unpaid work by means of various methods, such as the satellite account indicated by the Platform of Beijing.

Moreover, this measure establishes that all the phases of the gender statistics production are to comply with the law on personal data protection⁴. Even though this measure regards the systems and methods of official statistics' programming, survey and diffusion, it is strongly hoped for that subjects and production centres of statistical information conform to the methods used by SISTAN (National Statistical System), and that the system of official statistics becomes a flywheel of deep and generalised innovation at a central and local level.

As we will see more in detail in the next paragraph, this Bill does not only recognise the need of developing gender statistics, but also provides precise indications to the producers of official statistics. It, indeed, identifies the areas of interest, the surveys and their periodicity, so that the statistical production may take into account all the conditions that weigh differently on the situation of men and women.

carried out by ISTAT for providing greater visibility to gender statistics and expressed hope that all the other subjects of SISTAN would develop a similar sensitivity.

⁴ In particular as regards the regulation on sensitive data, as laid down in law nr. 675 of 31st December 1996, and implementation

A. The articles of law

The Bill introduces article I-bis with provisions on gender statistics under article 13 of legislative decree nr 322 of 6 September 1989, containing directives on the National Statistical System and on the re-organisation of the National institute of Statistics.

According to the new article 13-bis, the statistical information is to be produced by giving visibility to the gender difference and equal readability of data relative to men and women. In implementing objective 3, point 3.2, of the directive of the President of the Council of Ministers of 27 March 1997, and, as first step towards the generalisation of the evaluation method of gender impact as instrumental for adopting any government action, comma 2 provides that ISTAT prepares the methods for evaluating the impact of the important regulations.

Section 13-ter states that the general population censuses are to ensure the desegregation per gender of the information, with reference to both the Italian population and the foreign one regularly living in Italy, and including the population living in institutes and communities. It indeed intends on providing a first indication of work to adjust the knowledge quality of social phenomena to the new phenomena linked to the cohabitation of various cultures and lifestyles.

Comma 2 also states that the general censuses on agriculture, industry and services are to ensure the desegregation of employees per sex and professional status, in order to allow also identifying the companies mainly run by women.

Article 13-quater identifies the areas in which ISTAT and the other SISTAN organisations must produce statistical information broken down into men and women and at different periods. As regards the areas to be surveyed every year, the directive indicates households structures; fertility; mortality per cause and morbidity; training and cultural fruition; employment, unemployment; poverty; social and political participation; use of public services.

The areas to be surveyed every five year include: health status; disability, health behaviours; citizens' safety; violence and abuse; time use; solidarity networks and care work; social mobility.

In the case of the non-annual surveys, it seemed best to provide for a mechanism that guarantees certain elasticity in identifying the periodicity. As all these surveys are rather complex and very important from a social point of view, the national statistical Programme can decide for a higher or lesser frequency.

As regards the production of current statistical information, the chambers of commerce, industry, craft and agriculture are to structure their archives holding all the data relative to the enterprises, especially the register of companies (as laid down in article 8 of law nr. 580 of 29 December 1993), providing for the desegregation per sex of the total employees and owners.

This represents the first step to adjusting the administrative archives of other organisations and, consequently, of the statistical archives of ISTAT itself. Here too, one of the objectives of the directive is to identify the number of companies mainly run by women. Compared to the same directive on census, the adjustment of the register of companies will enable to evaluate the annual variations that affect the phenomenon.

Comma 5 of article 13-quater holds the prevision relative to unpaid work, which ISTAT will evaluate. It is important to underline that to quantify and to give value to unpaid work – of which the most important part is care work – have long been internationally indicated as the central objective for obtaining the exact social perception of the contribution women give to social life and to the production of wealth. This will also allow quantifying the level of sharing of family responsibilities.

Comma 6 of article 13-quater states that ISTAT and the other SISTAN organisations are to rationalise the modules according to the modalities already set in the legislative decree nr 29 of 1993.

In fact, by diffusing common methods and standards, harmonising the administrative archives, valorising the organised public and private sources (archives, registers, computerised registers, databases), and by modifying the modules already in use or its setting, the existing information offer could already be directly produced with the necessary gender differentiation.

These data could also be collected by means of administrative documents from the administrations' institutional activity or by means of public and private organised sources. As regards the physical persons, the sex and the age of the persons as structural variables of population units are, in almost all the cases, already provided for in the questionnaire or administrative document, and thus, enable a statistical treatment for producing statistics desegregated per gender.

Article 2 of the Bill states that the President of the Council of Ministers or the Ministry for Equal Opportunities must refer every year to the Parliament on the state of implementation of the laws on gender statistics. The innovations deriving from the methods indicated require indeed a careful and constant monitoring, in order to bring any correctives or introduce further new elements if necessary. For this purpose, every year, ISTAT has been preparing special recognitions.

In order to give to the organisations addressee of these directives the time necessary for carrying out the needed adjustment in the methods and equipments, article 3 of the Bill establishes a three-year term for implementing the fulfilments that fall under ISTAT and SISTAN responsibilities.

Unfortunately the Bill has been proposed in the Italian Parliament but never discussed nor approved, this is the reason why the National Council for Employment and Economics introduced a new Bill which contains Directives on gender statistics, on October 25, 2004 and re-introduced it on May 3, 2006. This Bill, which substantially proposes again the previous Bill, is more focused on gender-sensitive indicators and introduced new important elements but is less clear on areas to discover and a law on gender statistics can't forget to define them with accuracy otherwise it's easy to miss the objective.

Looking at the Bill, article 3 provides for the institution of a consultative Committee⁵ for gender statistics at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – department for Equal Opportunities –and whose task will be to

- a). Formulate proposals for harmonising the gender-sensitive indicators and methods with those used by the international organisations;
- b). Favour and promote the realisation and diffusion of gender statistics, even through the census of all researches and publications of interest for the official statistical information relative to the National Statistical Programme, realised even by subjects not part of the National Statistical System;
- c). Carry out recognitions of the law in force aimed at surveying any obstacles in producing gender statistics, proposing the necessary modifications;
- d). Formulate suggestions and proposals in order to identify new informative needs, emerging topics and analyses, researches and methods of particular interest from a gender point of view;
- e). Prepare every year a report on the activities carried out and on the activities to be carried out the next year.

At last, article 4 deals with the integration of the Relation on actions supporting economic and productive activities and the relative surveys enclosed to the economic-financial programming document, with illustrated statistical appendixes of the impact analysis of the facility directives on beneficiary subjects broken down into men and women and per age.

Here too, as in the 1999 Bill, the law gathers among its articles the evaluation of gender impact as element indispensable for elaborating and adopting government actions. The development of statistical surveys desegregated per gender and surveys that allow highlighting problems linked to gender difference are recognised as instrumental for the impact evaluation, and thus, for the elaboration of explicit policies aimed at equal opportunities.

⁵ The Committee is made up of a representative of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department for Equal Opportunities – which presides it, by two representatives nominated by the National Council for Employment and Economics (CNEL), indicated by the Social Parties, by two representatives of ISTAT and by two experts.

Why countries need a law on gender statistics

Although progresses have been made in various countries, not all problems have been solved. There are informative gaps, insufficiently developed areas (violence, abuses, life conditions of foreigners...), difficulty in obtaining information on employees by sex and professional position, when the survey unit is the enterprise, the need for a different structure of enterprise archives not currently distinguished by sex, the more frequent information on certain areas, the adoption of a gender approach in choosing the survey variables highlighting the gender differences in all the most important sectors. International difficulties are to be summed up to the national ones. Not all statistics are comparable since they have not been previously harmonised. Not all the information is available in all countries. An ex ante or ex post harmonisation, which would improve the situation, has not been developed at a central level. As a consequence, harmonisation cannot take place spontaneously. Since gender statistics does not only mean spreading information by sex, the scenario is more complex than it seems. Apart from the single countries, a new central initiative is required. Gender statistics cannot be developed only by the countries and the national statistics systems. Responsibility on a political level must be taken. In order to plan mainstreaming policies and developments, the social utility of gender statistics must be recognised.

For this reason, it is time to propose at a global level the law on gender statistics as, for example, the one proposed in Italy.

The known methodology must be generalised and consolidated and further developments for all countries must be analysed.

Regulating gender statistics means take a step towards a better quality. It means that by making them compulsory, countries recognise the social value of gender approach within public statistics; it means asserting that gender difference exists and it is necessary to assess it on the main fields of social and economic life. Above all, it means creating a reference point for other sectors.

All official statistics must be made from a gender point of view, in this way budget cuts will no longer affect gender statistics. For example at a European level, Eurostat excellently harmonised a fundamental survey from a gender statistic point of view and consequently, of gender policies: the survey on the use of time, crucial for the evaluation of unpaid work and of role divisions in couples and fundamental for the planning of policies reconciling work and family burden. Due to the lack of funds, the project reached only the pilot survey phase; then Eurostat is playing a role in defining a common methodology for the different member states, but cannot concretely help the countries in conducting the survey. This means that at European level, the planning and implementation of a strategic survey from a point of view concerning gender is of a secondary importance and only the few countries with funds, or those which were already doing it in the past, will be able to carry it out. Precise regulations are required to guarantee the harmonised development of gender statistics (as economic statistics). The scarce statistical information on issues concerning gender differences is a severe obstacle for the adoption of mainstreaming and empowerment policies in the whole world. Therefore, we propose, just as done in Italy, to seriously follow the suggestions from the Beijing world women conference: the obligations taken by the Governments in Beijing should be converted in regulations.

The current proposal concerns National Institutes of Statistics and all public statistics producers, it could be the starting point for other subjects to conform to: thus, the official statistics system can start a generalised and deep innovation. The use of the legislative instrument is motivated by the need to

fix both a highly innovative methodology and approach. Possible short term fluctuations should be avoided by binding to exact intervals the availability of gender information of public interest. On the other hand, this project must become part of a social statistics development and consolidation strategy, traditionally residual in national statistical systems.

Will the law be enough?

The law sets the grounds but it will not be enough if a "gender approach" is not adopted by Statistical Institutes, Public Administration and companies. Therefore, the regulation might never be applied. There is a strong cultural obstacle. Here are some examples. From the point of view of economic aggregates, it is unthinkable, when measuring the use of the services, that users are distinguished by sex. Under an economic point of view users are the demand, not men and women using the services with different accesses, and therefore, intervention might be required in order to re-establish equal opportunity.

This is a first step in "humanising" data, relating them more to their object, in other words to people and their problems. Likewise for employees, which, from an economic point of view, are part of the labour cost. In this case, as well, the importance of the distinction by sex and position of the employees is not easy to understand. If data indicate a growth in women managers, it is fundamental, in developing equity policies, to understand the type of companies managed by women, in which sector, with what profitability and technological innovation capacity as compared to companies managed by men. Training will be fundamental to reach this aim.

Although female potentiality faces many obstacles, the life of women is rapidly changing in all countries all over the world. The consciousness that all these aspects must be measured to better understand them is increasing. Laws are sometimes a starting point and sometimes a point of arrival of changes.

The law on gender statistics can be considered a point of arrival in the commitments undertaken by the single countries, but it is also an important starting point since it will greatly increase quality, (from recommendations to regulation), placing countries in the forefront in implementing international recommendations. The law will set the grounds for further developments like mainstreaming and empowerment. The law will be a fundamental starting point in consolidating, systematising, rationalising... and why not, in giving a more human face to statistics, and consequently to policies.

Together with a cultural changing it's important to have, like in Italy, a top management so convinced of the importance of gender statistics to be able to define the most useful strategies. The existing gender focal point/units in national statistical offices do not very often have an impact in the overall production and dissemination of statistics. The successful of gender statistics programmes are also often linked to single personalities existing in national statistical offices who are strongly committed to the relevance of gender-sensitive data. The Italian experience at this regard shows that when the responsible for gender statistics is a director is very high the possibility to determine successful strategies. A sustainable gender statistics programme should be institutionalized and supported with regular resources. The commitment of the high level managers is a key to its success in the long run.

Furthermore some research areas have been traditionally perceived as not gender-relevant such as economic statistics, business statistics, transport, and agriculture. Little is still known about the different role of women and men in these areas and in particular in the economy and in the economic

decision-making, where the few data available show that women are greatly disadvantaged. In order to assure that gender-sensitive data are produced and disseminated in all possible areas, it is important that statisticians working in all thematic areas are exposed and trained to the benefits of producing more gender-sensitive data, which ultimately improve the overall quality of the statistics. In the past, great efforts were placed in training national statisticians who were responsible for gender statistics programmes. These efforts were successful in establishing and strengthening the role of gender focal points and gender units in national statistical offices. However, the majority of the gender focal points/units are still confined in the social and demographic areas and have little impact in other areas such as business and economic statistics. New efforts should be addressed to sensitize subject-matter statisticians who do not specifically work on gender on the benefits of producing better statistics by improving their gender-relevance.

In conclusion it's necessary that gender statistics will take again a central place at high-level in the strategies of the official statistics and of the policy makers.

For a real and lasting development of gender statistics should be satisfied three important conditions: a cultural changing to support the importance of gender statistics with the help of women's organizations, trade unions, committee, equal rights bodies and ministries in order to increase the institutional demand of gender statistics;

a law for gender statistics in each country for an equalization between economic and gender statistics;

a top management in the NSI conscious of the role of gender statistics in the production of official statistics.

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