

**Women and economics:
household, enterprise and decision-making bodies***

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A new reinforced interest in gender statistics, like a supporting instrument to the comprehension and the analysis of the women's world and of its typical phenomena has been shown in the last decades.

A growing informative demand and an ever more grounded needs to discover the current changes is spreading even if the field of economic statistics, as regards to the gender disaggregation, is characterized by the lack of data, standard for surveying, and comparable sources in order to draw up a detailed outline of women's reality and of women's contribution to economics at international level.

Gender statistics and analysis are fundamental tools to mainstream a gender perspective, to identify and interpret the socioeconomic consequences of gender inequalities, differences, and relations for achieving development objectives, such that disparities can be reduced through interventions, policies, and programs. Examines women's and men's access to all types of resources and the differences in decision making power requires sex-disaggregated information, but also a real change of approach in a gender perspective. Gender statistics is conceptually more than just data broken down by sex. Producing statistics that adequately reflect gender issues implies that all statistics are produced taking into consideration the different socio-economic realities women and men face in society.

In this regard particularly significant becomes research about, for instance, women's contribution to the household income, women's participation in enterprises, and women's representation in economic decision-making bodies. Some examples of this kind of analysis approach follow.

Women's contribution to the household income

Investigating women's investments in educational end employment career might not be enough to understand if gender roles are actually converging in western countries. The increasing educational levels and participation to labour force, certainly suggest that women tend to adopt roles progressively more similar to those of man. However, if we do not simply compare women and men, but we look at them jointly, under a couple perspective, we are able to understand which kind of strategies partners adopt to organize their life, and to what extent gender role convergence represents a feasible strategy. Several aspects of partners behaviour might be taken into account, as for instance time allocation to domestic and/or labour market activities. In this study we focus on partner contribution to the couple economic needs. Particularly, we wonder if, and to what extent, the observed increasing women investment in human capital corresponds to a similar increasing women participation to the household economic support. To this purpose, we firstly investigate the distribution of dual-earner couples in EU countries, and try to identify which individual and household characteristics are mostly associated with the adoption of a (i) *man sole provider* model (i.e. the women does not earn anything) or a (ii) *dual-earner* one (if both partners earn at least something¹).

Secondly, we focus on dual-earner couples, distinguishing among three models: (i) *man main provider* (i.e the woman earns less than 40% of the sum of partners earnings); (ii) *equal providers*, (i.e. the woman earns between the 40% and the 60% of the sum of partners earnings (Nock, 2001)); and (iii) *woman main provider* (i.e. the woman earns more than 60% of the sum of partners earnings (Atkinson and Boles, 1984)). We look at the distribution of these models in EU countries and at which individual and household characteristics are more likely to be associated to any of these models.

We use data from the first wave of the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions, carried out in 14 European countries in 2004 (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden). This survey provides information at household and individual level, concerning demographic characteristics, educational and employment careers, and income.

¹ We disregard those couples where the man does not earn anything, for representing an extremely small proportion of the surveyed couples.

Among the possible income features, we prefer to focus on earnings, for representing the component that each partner decides to produce. We select a sub-sample of married and cohabiting couples, composed by partners aged 25-54 years, for representing the age group less likely to be inactive for education or retirement.

We find that the traditional partners specialisation either in domestic or labour market activities, characterised by the husband-breadwinner and the wife devote to domestic work (Becker, 1991), has become less common, leaving room to dual-earner couples. But the diffusion of dual-earner model is strongly heterogeneous among EU countries. Northern European countries are characterized by a very small proportion of man-breadwinner households, while such a proportion is much higher in southern European countries (Pasqua, 2002). Particularly, in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, less than 10% of the selected couples adopt a *man sole provider* model. In contrast, Spain and Greece show more than 40% of couples belonging to this model, followed by Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg where such a percentage is higher than 30. We use logistic regression to investigate the association between some household and individual characteristics and the likelihood to be a *man sole provider* couple instead of a *dual-earner* one. We find that usually the youngest cohorts are less likely to adopt the *man sole provider* model. Woman's educational level is strongly significant in all countries: if compared to women who have achieved a medium level of education (i.e. secondary school), those who have achieved a low level of education (i.e. up to primary school) are more likely to be in a *man sole provider* couple, while those who have achieved a high level of education (i.e. higher than secondary school) are less likely to do so. Thus women's investments in education seem to be strongly related with the adoption of more gender equal economic roles.

Cohabiting couples are significantly less likely to adopt a *man sole provider* model in most of the countries, while the presence of children in a pre-scholar age is always significantly associated with a higher likelihood to be in a *man sole provider* couple. Once the children age is controlled for, we notice that couples having children are less likely to take up a *man sole provider* model, if compared to couples without children. Broadly speaking, the presence of children seems to be positively related with woman's decision of contributing to the couple earnings, possibly for the household need for economic resources.

In order to provide a measure of the economical levels of the couples, we compute the quintiles of the household equivalised income distribution (household income includes all income components, and the quintiles are computed on the whole sample distribution). We notice that, if compared with the couples belonging to the richest quintile, the two lowest quintiles are much more likely to be associated with a *man sole provider* model of couple; in contrast couples belonging to the fourth quintile are less likely to adopt a *man sole provider* model. Roughly speaking, the traditional *man sole provider* model is more commonly adopted by the "poorest" and the "richest" couples.

When we focus on dual-earner couples, we notice that the distribution of the three models we defined (i.e. *man main provider*, *equal providers* and *woman main provider*) is not much heterogeneous among countries. Women's contribution to the couple income is mostly secondary to that of their partner (Moen and Sweet, 2003): *man main provider* is adopted by a higher percentages of couples in all countries but Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, where the *equal providers* model appears slightly more frequent. The *woman main provider* model, instead, represents less than 16% of the selected sub-sample of couples in all countries.

We use multinomial logistic regression to contrast (i) *woman main provider* against *equal providers* couples, and (ii) *man main provider* against *equal providers* couples.

(i) The *woman main provider* model is hardly associated with woman's cohort. Highly educated woman are more likely to be the main provider, and low educated woman are less likely to do so. Cohabiting couples are more likely to belong to the *woman main provider* model only in a few countries, while they do not usually behave differently from married couples. The presence of children in pre-scholar age, instead, is not significant in any country. If compared with the couples belonging to

the richest quintile, those belonging to the poorest two are more likely to adopt the *woman main provider* model: possibly women play the role of the main provider when the partner has not achieved a good economic position. The third and fourth quintiles, instead are less likely to adopt a *woman main provider* model instead of an *equal providers* one.

(ii) As far as the *man main provider* model is concerned, this is usually not associated with the woman's age. Also woman's educational level is hardly significant, but in a few countries women highly educated are less likely to belong to a *man main provider* couple. The relative level of education, instead, has a stronger effect, showing that women more educated than their partner are less likely to be associated to this model in most of the countries. Cohabiting couples usually do not significantly differ from married couples in most of the countries. The number of children is hardly significant, while the presence of children in pre-scholar age is associated with a higher likelihood to be in a *man main provider* couple in half of the countries. Possibly young children might induce women to reduce working hours and the contribution to the couples earnings. As far as the economical level of the couples is concerned, it is hard to find a common pattern in the countries under study. Generally, the intermediate quintiles seem to be less likely to be associated with a *man main provider* model.

Summarising, the *dual-earner* model is definitely preferred by EU couples, although important differences north-south exist in the percentage of couples who adopt this model. But, when considering the association between household and individual characteristics and the two models of couple, than north-south differences disappear: in all countries, indeed, the *dual-earner* model is more likely to be associated with highly educated women, especially if more educated than their partners, with cohabiting couples, without children in pre-scholar age, and with medium high levels of household income.

When focusing on different models of *dual-earner* couples, the association with the household and individual characteristics taken into account is less clear. Important country differences hold, but defining homogeneous groups is not feasible. However, the *woman main provider* model, if compared with the *equal providers* one, is commonly associated with highly educated women, and usually more educated than their partners, but also with the poorest quintiles of the income distribution. Thus, for a woman, becoming the main provider is not only the result of high investments in human capital, but also of the need for supporting the partner when the household faces economic difficulties. The *man main provider* model, when compared with the *equal providers* one, appears to be commonly associated with low educated women, usually less educated than their partners, and also with the presence of children, especially if in pre-scholar age. Thus, the more traditional model of *dual-earner* couples, seems to be more convenient when the woman has not invested much in human capital, and the allocation of her time to domestic activities becomes extremely important for the presence of young children.

Women's participation in enterprises

A study by ISTAT on women entrepreneurs has been carried out in 2001 by using different data sources according to an integrated approach.

Data from the Industry and Services Census carried out in 1997, from the Labour Force survey and the Multipurpose survey on Everyday Life were analyzed in order to have a picture of women entrepreneurs and self-employed, of how they manage to reconcile their work with family life and how they manage the everyday life on the whole. This kind of analysis shows how an appropriate combination of results from different data sources may provide evidence of relevant gender dynamics. Summarizing:

1. only a quarter of enterprises were managed by women and these enterprises run by women were generally smaller (between one and four employees) than those managed by men;

2. the only sector where most of the companies are run by women is that related to services to families; public activities follow together with trade;
3. women-run enterprises were less integrated into the market: they made fewer agreements, received and requested fewer orders, with the exception of the textile sector;
4. for what concerns the company income, it has to be noted that women-run firms, besides having lower average yields, had also smaller sales-costs ratios if compared to companies managed by men.
5. data coming from the Multipurpose Survey show that 53,3% of entrepreneur or self-employed women worked more than 60 hours per week, when considering work both within and outside the family; the same percentage for men was 26% (on average, men and women work respectively 54 and 64 hours). At the same time, it came out the smaller proportion of time devoted to the enterprise by women, in spite of a higher total number of hours worked (58.5% of male entrepreneurs work 46 hours and more per week, while only the 40.6% of female entrepreneurs do so). In other words, the activities inside and outside home lead to double burden, and the overload of work prevents female entrepreneurs from dedicating appropriately to their enterprises.

The situation does not seem to show signs of important improvements in last years. The results from the Labour Cost Survey (LCS) carried out in 2004², that for the first time collected information on the sex of the entrepreneur, still show deep differences between the enterprises that are run by men compared to women-run enterprises.

This survey collects information on the enterprises, with 10 employees at least, that act in the private sector of industry and services. These are only a part of the enterprises considered by the 1997 Census but their main features allow to design a picture similar to that in 1997. In 2004, among the enterprises with these characteristics, the women-run enterprises are only 4,8% and 69% of them have 10-19 employees. Once more, we find that the enterprises with bigger dimension involve mainly the men. The women-run enterprises are situated in the most developed areas of the country (North-East: 41,2%; North-Western: 23.9%) and are concentrated, above all, in the manufacture of textiles and footwear (21.1%); services to companies (14.6%); hotels and restaurants (14,6); public activities and wholesale trade (5.2%) and in health and social work (4,9%). Men are more often involved in trade (16,7%), constructions (13.7%), steel and mechanical industries (9.6%) and services to company (9,1%).

The compensation of employees coming from the work of the employees put in evidence a lower level of yields for the women-run enterprises, without important differences according to their dimension or territorial location. It represents, in average, the 77,3% of that coming from the men-run enterprises.

This indicator confirms that the women-run enterprises play a role that is still secondary respect to the men's ones and the workload inside home continues to have a big relevance in explaining this evidence. Results from the time budget survey show a persistent asymmetry between the commitment of women and men in terms of familiar work even if we can observe that participation of men to the domestic work is slowly increasing.

Policy makers should take this analysis approach into consideration in order to make possible that women take large steps forward in this domain. To be an entrepreneur in everyday life is different for women and men and successful policies cannot ignore the different socio-economic realities that they both face in society.

Women's representation in economic decision-making bodies

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action emphasized that equality in decision-making is essential to the empowerment of women and that *"Women's equal participation in decision making is not only a*

² This survey is carried out each two years according to the European Union Regulation 530/1999. The release of structural earning survey 2006 data is scheduled on June 2008.

demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account" (para. 181). In this context, the participation of women in high level economic decision-making is a fundamental requirement in order to give women and men an equal share of power and influence in policy making processes.

Economic decision makers are those who occupy institutional positions in decision-making bodies, they are actively involved in the deliberation and determination of economic policies and they are responsible for implementing them on behalf of the State or the institution they represent. Economic decisions, made by either private or public actors, determine both present and future economic performance and assets, with obvious implications for everyone's daily life. *"Since it is often within the framework of such policies that individual men and women make their decisions, inter alia, on how to divide their time between remunerated and unremunerated work, the actual development of these economic structures and policies has a direct impact on women's and men's access to economic resources, their economic power and consequently the extent of equality between them at the individual and family levels as well as in society as a whole"* (para. 150). Equal participation in the shaping of economic decisions implies that women are integral parts of the processes and institutions involved in defining economic decisions and exercising economic power.

Although some progress has been made, economic decision-making has traditionally been a male-dominated sphere, as has political decision-making. The last twenty years have seen a huge increase in the number of women participating in the labour force almost everywhere and in all sectors. In more recent years, the women studying economics to post-graduate level and pursuing careers as economists in the academia, private sector, government, etc. has also increased significantly. However, the women's representation at a decision-making level is much lower than men's in major institutions that are responsible for conceiving and formulating ideas, determining strategies and implementing fiscal, monetary and economic policies. The effective participation of women in economic and financial decision-making is not only very low, but also the gender dimension has been absent from macroeconomic policies and decisions regarding resource distribution, wealth creation and exchange.

In order to achieve the strategic objective of the Platform, it is necessary to adopt adequate measures on the basis of the most appropriate monitoring indicators. Policy concerns are the driving force of indicators. Clear and well-defined policy concerns, specific goals and targets are the key parameters to define adequate indicators as well as to understand the relevance and the limits of the indicators in relation to the goals. In this area the goals and the policy concerns have been expressed in a rather generic form. The difficulties in identifying the exact features of the policy concerns prevent national capacity from being oriented towards the production of indicators relevant for political decisions.

The review of the national case studies demonstrate that investigation and documentation on this issue is relatively new, often country-specific and widely dispersed. Indicators and procedures for the collection of data in the area of economic decision-making at the national level are still in a development stage. In other words, monitoring women's participation in economic decision-making poses a new challenge for statistical systems.

Most of the relevant data are held by decision-making institutions which do not usually compile and collect the information and that are not formally required to report it. In the face of resource constraints, countries need to maximize the use of existing data sources. In particular, administrative statistics based on data collected outside the national statistics offices, by government agencies and major economic institutions. To expand the use of administrative data for monitoring and planning in the area of economic decision-making, formal requirements to collect and provide data by sex should be institutionalized. In any case, in order to ensure the quality of data, the National Statistical Institutes should be responsible for pretesting and revising the data collection instruments, designing and supervising the data collection process as well as the data validation and analysis.

The study and data collection on female representation in economic decision-making centres started in 2003 by the Greek Presidency of the European Union and continued by the Italian Presidency

represents a particularly interesting project that has permit to define and recommend a set of appropriate indicators in this important area of gender equality. Institutions selected for the study were institutional bodies/organizations which may be either directly responsible for the formulation of macroeconomic policy, or exert considerable indirect influence on the outcome of the decision-making process in the member states, as well as analogous EU institutions. Questionnaires were sent to the Central Bank and the hard-core economic ministries, as the bodies formally responsible for macroeconomic policies in each member state of the European Union, but also to other economic ministries considered to exert an indirect impact. In addition, Labour and Employer Confederations were included, as they influence policy through their deliberation and bargaining process with government authorities. Macroeconomic policy making, given that is confined to the public sector, is clearly delineated in terms of center of decision-making, as well as the actors involved, so, the focus on macroeconomic decisionmaking reduced the difficulties that would have been otherwise encountered in the data collection. The questionnaire included questions on the gender composition of decision-making bodies, highest position levels, advisory committees, selection committees³. Finally, member states were also asked to provide information on the gender composition of the executive boards of the 50 top firms quoted in their national stock exchange.

The Italian Presidency of the EU has developed a series of nine quantitative indicators, reliable in terms of data comparison, devoted to the measurement of the representation of women and men in economic decision-making centres. They have been selected for their relevance to describe the situation of gender equality in this area, also taking into account the availability of comparable data. The indicators of the study are the following:

The proportion and the number of women and men among:

1. governors and deputy/vice-governors of the Central Banks
2. members of the decision- making bodies of the Central Banks
3. ministers and deputy ministers/vice- ministers of the Economic Ministries
4. presidents and vice-presidents of the Labour Confederations
5. total governing bodies of the Labour Confederations
6. presidents and vice-presidents of the Employer Confederations
7. members of total governing bodies of the Employer Confederations
8. chiefs of executive boards of the 50 top firms publicly on the national stock exchange
9. members of executive boards of the 50 top firms quoted on the national stock exchange.

These indicators are an essential basis for the systematic recording and monitoring of the existing level of gender equality in macro-economic centers of decision-making. That is the starting point for implementing this kind of gender statistics and guarantee a significant contribution to our knowledge of women in decision-making.

Conclusions and recommendations

³ The data were supplemented by information on actions undertaken by the specific institutional bodies/organizations in order to increase women's representation. However, because of the complexity of this issue and the high level of heterogeneity of the situation in different countries, the data collection has been difficult and the results were incomplete and not comparable

The profile just drawn shows that women are disadvantaged than men in each of the realities analyzed. Data confirm that women's contribution to the couple income is mostly secondary to that of their partner. The enterprises managed by women are generally smaller than those managed by men, are less integrated into the market and have lower average yields.

In major economic institutions women are less represented than men at a decision-making level and the gender dimension has been absent from policies and decision referring to important sectors.

For these reasons new challenges are emerging for gender statistics at international level:

- (i) look at the available data in a gender perspective: an appropriate analysis of EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions)⁴, based on a "couple perspective", allows for understanding the interrelationship between partners and the balance between gender roles;
- (ii) enrich existing data sources with pertinent variables: as far as the enterprises are concerned, countries should collect sex disaggregated data about the entrepreneurs, collect information that allow to highlight critical aspects women have to face;
- (iii) integrate different data sources: to measure the contribution of women work in the household, by attributing an economic value to the familiar work;
- (iv) carry out new surveys: referring to the economic decision-making bodies, it would be very important that National Statistical Institutes guarantee the collection of data, adopting a set of indicators able to measure the representation of women and men in this domain.

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⁴ EU-SILC provides standardised and comparable information for EU level: in 2004 EU-SILC has been carried out in 14 countries, but since 2005 it allows for comparable statistics in the 25 EU countries

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