

Official statistics face to the new challenge of gender statistics

Linda Laura Sabbadini
Istat Central Director

Official statistics has the task to produce valid measures, adequately useful from users either citizens or enterprises or researchers or policy makers.

To do that official statistics should guarantee standards and methodologies, consider the transformations in progress in the society and in the globalized economics, set new challenges to measure phenomena more and more difficult to understand with traditional techniques. Everything should be done with rigor and neutrality. This is true also in the field of gender statistics where the request of statistical information is strongly increased in the last years either because in the countries and at international level the attention to the gender policies, in the past very often invisibles, has been higher or because of the role played in this field also by the ONG.

I will try to demonstrate that to take this challenge for the official statistics would allow to increase quality and to improve the entire statistical production.

1. If policies do not consider gender, men and women will benefit of policies' effects unequally

As largely demonstrated by the scientific literature, women and men have different roles in the society and an unequal access to resources, so that they can feel the effect of policies and measures adopted in a different way.

Many phenomena that are crucial from a social and an economic point of view, as unemployment, poverty, economic development, are not neutral when considered by gender. If planning and scheduling are developed without considering gender, men and women will benefit of policies' effects unequally.

The differences make policies that look actually neutral, address differently women and men, and be able to reinforce actual disparities, transforming them in real inequalities. For this reason it's fundamental to collect gender statistics. Gender difference exists in our society, it's a matter of fact, and it is necessary to measure it on the main social and economic life grounds.

Gender statistics not only allow indicators' comparisons by sex, but also they assure that men's and women's involvement in social and economic life and their contribution to society, be correctly measured and evaluated. The rigorous and neutral approach in this field of statistics represents a fundamental basis for the policy makers' action and has a great social value, as they can promote changes, help in eliminating stereotypes, allow

the right understanding of the actual situation of men and women, and above all they provide a solid base to formulate policies and evaluate the taken actions.

Furthermore gender statistics are a basic tool to build gender budgets. Any administration, be it central or local, needs to evaluate the gender impact of its adopted measures and policies and it should know expected outcomes before adopting them. If there won't be adequate gender statistics it would be very difficult to work for these purposes.

2. Official statistics for long time 'gender blind', not very useful as starting point for policy makers

For long time there were "imbalances" in the attention to different thematic areas by the National Institutes of Statistic. **Statistic Institutes were characterised by an "economic-centred" vision for decades.** Elements to know and read society on the whole were not always present so as to affect the completeness of the statistic production (in particular it is not casual that the social statistics production has been penalised). **If Countries consider the economic actions of primary importance and little attention is given to social policies, economic statistics and "economic actors" will become of primary importance. As a consequence at the first place will be subjects belonging to Labour Force, usually adult men and, only late, the need to consider also the others subjects will be evaluated.** Women paid for it, together with children, the older and disabled people, that were not present in official statistics for decades or they were considered only in appendices: **a 'GENDER BLIND POINT OF VIEW' was hegemonic in our Country and in all the other countries for decades.**

The Women conference of Beijing produced the first great thinking over and systematising of gender statistics at an international level on the needs to develop gender policies, underlined in this regard the needs to have gender statistics and gave a great impulse to their development, making the various National Statistic Institutes develop a real gender approach. Since then new thematic areas were investigated, particularly important to make gender inequalities visible. The previous World Conference of Women had begun to face the problem, but yet at a primordial level. The first Women World Conference of 1975 in Mexico City focused on women statistics, the Nairobi one in 1985 started to go over the women's statistic view and speaking about gender statistics. **But the real jump in quality for the request of gender statistics was made by the Women conference of Beijing.** For the first time governments agreed on the need to realise a series of actions to develop gender statistics, fundamental to plan policies and evaluations. During the Conference big importance was given to the bringing out of the book 'The world's women' of UN DESA, presenting an analysis of the women situation through the world. The impact on the National Statistic Institute work and on international organizations' one was great. In those years new publications

appeared, some institutes developed a gender focal point, UNSD promoted the classification of the time use activities, the care work was measured for the first time through the time use surveys, ILO fixed a strategic point in the work schedule of International Conference of Labour Statisticians, the WHO applied itself on violence against women, the FAO on agricultural statistics. The attention to gender statistics increase all over the world and in all international organization.

3. A new phase is starting: the consciousness of the gender statistics' importance is increased

It has been understood that gender statistics have a deep meaning, they are not merely statistics on men and on women, but they imply that data are collected and presented to think about men and women contributions to the society, to their different needs and problems. Producing gender statistics implies not only that data are collected by sex, but also that concepts and methods used consider gender problems that are actually present in the society. The production of gender statistics has to affect the whole official statistic system and not only the single unit addressing gender, if there is one. For example the Labour force data are improperly collected if the different contexts, where male and female works act, are not taken into account. It is not enough to estimate irregular work, it is essential to understand if men and women are differently involved in irregular work; again, it is only partial the use of income measures if they are based on a 'neutral' ground of income distribution, it is very different if the income is analysed using a gender point of view within households. It is still partial the image of the national accounting if a gender approach is not adopted and satellite accounts are not calculated, allowing taking into account, for example, for the quantification of the household production. **Finally, if when planning surveys, be them social or economic, the gender approach is taken into the right consideration the whole statistics' production is improved, not only gender statistics.** The gender approach is a method to be adopted in the official statistics' production permanently as it allows improving it. For this reason I believe that gender statistics should be considered a practice that affects the daily work of a National Statistic Institute permanently. It should become a priority to make gender statistics a common practice integrated in the national statistical systems.

What are gender statistics? Very often it's common thought that gender statistics are limited to sex disaggregated data.

As a matter of fact it's necessary to go further and to study that areas in which men and women find bigger inequality. To consider only some aspects superficially without analyzing in depth that aspects that are more relevant under a gender point of view, not only produce a twisted view but also a view limited to the phenomenon we try to measure.

4. Two examples about the importance of gender approach for statistics

I want to share with you two examples that explain the importance of the gender approach's development in the official statistics.

The first example underlines how can be chosen ***an indicator which is not adequate for measuring gender differences and how this indicator can have bad consequences on policies.***

In Italy barriers for female access to the labour market are still strong, the situation is particularly critical in the South (30% female employment rate). The government passed bonus to recruit women in these areas but this is possible only for women living in areas defined at European level as disadvantaged. In particular, as stated in the regulation of the European Commission, it is defined as disadvantaged woman every woman living in a region where the average unemployment rate exceeded the 100% of the EU rate for at least the last 2 years, and where female unemployment exceeded the 150% of the male rate in the area in at least two of the last three years (reg. CE 2204/2002).

What happened after the estimate of these two indicators? A region as Calabria, that is particularly critical in terms of female employment (the female employment rate in 2006 was 31,7%), was not included in this classification of disadvantaged areas and cannot benefit from the bonus.

This is due to the indicator chosen to identify the disadvantaged area and the gender differences.

In fact, in the recent years, in Calabria the unemployment rate decreased reaching its lowest peak, and this happened at the cost of the growth of female inactivity, that is women gave up looking for a job also because discouraged. But the unemployment rate does not take into account the discouragement.

Unemployment rate cannot be considered the most important indicator, it is a particularly weak indicator when considering women situation.

Moreover, it is fundamental, when choosing indicators to monitor the situation, that these decisions are shared also with national statistical institutes.

In the last years, the policy makers became more aware of the importance of using indicators, but it is a mistake to think they can be used and included in laws or recommendations without the involvement of data producers, who know well the consequences of the use of one indicator or another.

The definition of an indicator is not a simple matter, especially when we want to select the most appropriate one to measure the phenomenon under study. It is even harder to build a gender specific indicator.

And now I'll show you the second example that is very important because is referred to the thematic area of gender based violence defined, during the Global Forum on Gender Statistics held last December, a strategic area to work on in the next future.

Gender-based violence is invisible in the most of Countries. Police statistics record only a very little share of it, as women do not report it. The consequences are strong biases of the people thoughts about what is violence against women today. In Italy for example the stereotype of the foreign immigrate, unknown, that rapes the Italian woman is very common, but that is not the main violence against women living in Italy. Considering rapes happened in Italy, 69% are perpetrated by partners, husbands or fiancés, only 6% by strangers. Rather the common image is that of rapes made in the town streets by immigrants. Not considering actual statistics of the Country can cause a wrong orientation and evaluation of priorities and types of policies. **The most of violence suffered by women is domestic, so it is mainly by italian partners, but what is known by mass-media is quite different.** For this reason it is necessary to conduct the gender-based violence survey with suitable methodologies, as it is the only way to know the various form of violence, to know their dynamics and how they associate each other, risk factors, authors. Data based on reports to police would provide estimates very biased. In Italy survey makes us understand the seriousness of events too: 20% of victims of violence by partner say they feared for their life, a very at risk set as domestic murders often happen after an escalation of violence. The survey is important also because it allows us to understand how much severe violent events are considered by victims, independently by events' real seriousness. Only 27.3 % of raped women by partner consider the suffered violence as a crime. This is one of the most serious problem relating to domestic violence, that is when women do not recognise it is a crime. A problem that causes part of the large amount of dark figure of the violence against women, figure that has been considered strategic for communications policies and for fighting violence from all the policy makers in Italy that appreciated the survey for its social usefulness. Without the survey political priorities would have been different because there are no reliable and neutral data as data collected from the official statistics.

5. The Global Forum on Gender Statistics re-launched new strategic perspectives

If it's true that the Beijing Conference has strongly supported the development of gender statistics, it's also true that many goals proposed by the Conference with the agreement of UNSD are still not reached. Since then steps on were made, but more and more is to be done. This message passed in many countries, but after an early phase of growth, in

many of them, programs about gender statistics were cut off, often because of a growing lack of resources too. The Global Forum on Gender Statistics, that Italy hosted in December 2007, organized by UNSD has been attended by participants from more than 50 countries and from all the international organizations. Thanks to the launch of the Global Programme on Gender Statistics the Forum represented a fundamental moment for the re-launching of gender statistics at international level, either for the National Statistical Institutes or for the international agencies.

The Global Forum underlined a first fundamental aspect: in order to promote advancement in gender statistics at the global, regional and national levels it's very important to establish a strong collaboration among stakeholders.

Gender statistics should be subjected to an institutionalization's process inside the National Statistical Institutes. Gender statistics can't be a pioneering work of someone that promote them among many difficulties, they should become an integral part of the statistical culture in each country. For this reason is particularly clear the need to promote gender statistics training to give directives and to disseminate gender statistics into countries. Gender statistics programmes are often confined in a Unit. It's important the commitment of top managers in the National Statistical Institutes.

A further requirement came out: developing a gender approach in data collection programmes above all for household surveys (improve the measurement of work and informal sector, access to assets and resources, health indicators, poverty indicators, continuing the work on time use surveys), and population census as a source of gender statistics (improve the measurement of women's work, maternal mortality, etc.).

Conventional measurements of monetary poverty have been generally based on levels of income or consumption of households and the analysis of poverty from a gender perspective has always been limited by the lack of data on income/consumption at individual level. Studies on intra-household distribution and use of resources show that individuals within the household may have different preferences and may not pool their income.

The traditional focus on labour statistics has mainly been on employment and unemployment but there is now a growing awareness that this is insufficient to look at the gender disparities in the work environment. The simple participation of women and men in the labour force measured as employment and unemployment does not tell anything about the nature and quality of employment where the inequalities may be higher.

We have to study more about inactivity and informal sector. The International Conference of Labour Statisticians has stressed the importance of the gender approach to improve labour statistics.

Furthermore it's important to identify some areas in which is fundamental to remove the existing gaps. Some key areas should be focused such as gender-based violence, economic statistics, time use.

An example is the creation of standards and methodology to measure gender based violence and this is the moment to realize that because few countries carry out the survey. The problem is referred also to the measurement of women's contribution to economics. The situation of economic statistics appears particularly critical. At the moment, just to give you some examples, there is neither the analysis of the difference between enterprises run by men and women-run enterprises, that is fundamental for the development policies, nor the analysis of the income distribution, not yet developed at intrahousehold level, to measure the contribution of men and women to the household income. Only few countries produce satellite account on household production.

In the economic fields these are three aspects to consider carefully to promote advancement.

Finally, the Global Forum recommended to improve data dissemination and access to information on gender statistics and other information through continuous and regular updating of the gender statistics and indicators database, the creation of a website on gender statistics and other information, including the database, the development of a portal, the production of the World's Women 2010 to regain the tradition of the volumes already planned for the Beijing Conference (Statistics and trend). We have to improve the dialogue between users and producers. Gender statistics are useful if they're converted into usable and actionable information for policy decisions.

To realize all this measures it's necessary to promote two actions: ensure that capacity building programmes and initiatives to improve the financing for the development of statistics also include a gender perspective and develop standards and guidelines through the formal intergovernmental process (UN Statistical Commission) to ensure full involvement and commitment by national statistical systems and full mainstreaming of gender in the production and use of statistics.

The Global Forum on Gender Statistics has been an important new starting point. If official statistics will take this challenge I believe that the quality of the entire statistical production will improve.