

**Work Session on Gender Statistics  
(Orvieto, Italy, 11-13 October 2000)**

**MAKING GENDER MAINSTREAMING A NATIONAL PRIORITY**

**Paper submitted by Italy<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

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.

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;
- lack of an approach highlighting the gender differences from the planning phase of surveys.

Since Nairobi 1985 World Conference 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.

Since the early 90s, Istat (Statistical National Institute) has been developing gender statistics. New areas are surveyed, this is particularly significant from the viewpoint of gender difference. Istat co-operates with the Ministry of Equal Opportunities and with the National Equality Commission, in the aim of answering the cognitive necessities in this field. Together with the Equal Opportunities Ministry, Istat wants to regulate the gender statistics production and begin the gender equality impact evaluation of all the planned policies.

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.

Clear gender difference in official statistics will be the aim of the law. The necessary steps to reach this aim are:

- Gender distinction of all official statistics information and equal supply of data concerning men and women.
- The whole production process, from planning to conducting surveys and data dissemination should consider the gender point of view.
- Arrangement of the collected data in the various areas of public interest, planning new surveys on the quality of life of the whole population, including foreigners.
- Construction of a methodology for evaluating the gender impact of basic regulations.
- Development of research and gender analysis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Linda Laura Sabadini, Chief Researcher, ISTAT.

## **Introduction**

### **1. Why have women always been invisible in statistics?**

As an English woman, Harriet Harman, 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.

## **2. Women World Conferences: 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 Peking 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).

### **3. The case of Italy**

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 Peking. 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. The project began in 1993 with the National Equality Commission and it has been developed by the Equal Opportunities Minister Anna Finocchiaro, and more recently by Minister Laura Balbo. 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. Together with the Equal Opportunities Ministry, Istat wants to regulate the gender statistics production and begin the gender equality impact evaluation of all the planned policies. This draft legislation has been approved by the Government and it is waiting to be approved by the Parliament as a law. Its approval will mean a great step forward. Italy has also started to face the problems of gender impact evaluation of policies through a project of Ministry of Equal Opportunities on "VISPO" model. This experience is still at the starting phase and therefore it cannot be deeply afforded and described.

#### **4. Europe requires a qualitative step forward: 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, including Eurostat. 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, I proposed in Italy a law on gender statistics and I think it is time to do the same at European level.

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, Europe recognises 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. 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 in all European countries (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, I propose, just as I have done in my country, to seriously follow the suggestions from the Peking world women conference, the obligations taken

by the Governments of the different European countries in Peking 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 statistic systems.

## **5. Aims and tools**

Clear gender difference in official statistics will be the aim of the law. The necessary steps to reach this aim are:

Gender distinction of all official statistics information and equal supply of data concerning men and women (often in official publications, the data of one sex is obtained by difference from the other sex).

The whole production process, from planning to conducting surveys and data dissemination should consider the gender point of view. Gender statistics are not statistics on women. A set of sensible and suitable indicators highlighting the gender differences in the various fields considered will be fundamental.

Arrangement of the collected data in the various areas of public interest, planning new surveys on the quality of life of the whole population, including foreigners.

This is a crucial point because the interval in which the gender statistics must be produced is determined by the selected areas of significant public interest. For example, every year information is required on household types, births, death by cause and morbidity, culture and cultural services, employment and unemployment, poverty, political and social participation, use of public services. Phenomena in which the most significant changes take place in a greater time span can be considered at different intervals: health conditions, disability, health behaviours, citizen security, violence, abuse, use of time, solidarity networks, social services and social mobility. Attention to specific areas will be fundamental: for this reason a greater importance to unpaid work statistics should be given. If possible it should be quantified as recommended on an international level (i.e. without influencing the GDP), but in this way the different contribution of men and women to paid and unpaid work would be clearer.

Construction of a methodology for evaluating the gender impact of basic regulations.

The method for evaluating gender equality impact is necessary in processing and adopting government policies, from a gender point of view and it is fundamental in order to adopt useful

policies. The first condition is the distinction of the statistic information by sex, the second condition is that Eurostat acquire an appropriate methodology, that could be proposed to all countries.

Development of research and gender analysis.

## **6. 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. 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 European countries. 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 Europe 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.

I would like to conclude with an intriguing quotation from the 1995 UNDP Report on human development: 'the four crucial elements of the human development concept – productivity, equality, supportability, and power attribution- requires the gender issue to become a central one for both development and human rights'.

This is the central problem: gender approach in producing statistics for gender approach in planning policies.

**Bibliography**

- Bimbi F. (1998) Statistiche di genere: un'esigenza di qualità, Istat, Roma
- Sabbadini L.L. (1995) La condizione di parità nelle statistiche in Sviluppo e popolazione nella prospettiva di un nuovo Umanesimo Demografia Grande Enciclopedia Epistemologica Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, Roma
- Sabbadini L.L. , Palomba R. (1994) Tempi diversi. L'uso del tempo di uomini e donne nell'Italia di oggi. Commissione Nazionale Parità, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Roma
- Sabbadini L.L. (1998) Molestie e violenze sessuali Istat, Roma
- Sabbadini L.L. (1999) Statistiche di genere: un percorso, una proposta, Istat, Roma
- UN (1995) The world's women. UN New York
- UNDP (1995) Lo sviluppo umano. La parte delle donne, Rosenberg&Sellier, Torino
- UNDP (1999) Lo sviluppo umano. I consumi diseguali, Rosenberg&Sellier, Torino