

Herforshe and Barbershop initiatives

Lastly, attention turned to stressing the importance of involving men in achieving gender equality objectives, by providing a number of recently-promoted initiatives as examples.

In September 2014, the United Nations office in New York provided the venue for a special event to launch the *HeForShe* solidarity campaign in favour of equality, created by the *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* (UN Women), the UN body that works to foster the growth and development of women's condition and their participation in public life. The aim of the campaign was to involve boys and men in the prevention of discrimination against women, based on the idea that gender equality is a question that affects everyone on a social, economic and political level. The campaign aimed to involve men and boys in a movement that was initially conceived as a mission by women for women and that set the target of involving 100,000 men, a target that was met in just 3 days. Former US president Barak Obama and current president Donald Trump are just two of the male personalities that have taken part in the initiative. The promotion of gender equality in the male population has attracted vast media coverage and has led to the launch of other important initiatives such as Barbershop.

Women have driven the gender equality movement for decades and although it is essential that men join in the effort, it is also necessary that this proactive involvement is the result of a profound reflection, in order to promote women's existing commitments and leadership.

In line with this outlook, and based on decades of work dedicated to women's rights, the barbershop

concept was developed jointly by the governments of Iceland and Suriname, in order to involve men and recruit them as partners in the promotion of gender equality.

Why the name *barbershop*? "*Barber's shops are known as a safe place in which men can talk openly and can express their ideas, just like in a gym changing room.*" These were the words of Iceland's foreign minister, Gudlaugur Thor Thordarson, promoter of the first Barbershop conference, held at the United Nations headquarters in January 2015. The event was a success and saw the participation of over 500 people: it was the first time that male representatives of high-level institutions met with the sole purpose of having a sincere discussion regarding gender equality.

However, the progress towards gender equality is hampered by the unequal power relationships between men and women. Overcoming this barrier requires not merely laws and policy, but also a change of attitude and behaviour. The "*barbershop*" concept looks to innovative ways for men to activate and motivate other men to deal with discriminatory stereotypes of masculinity. It identifies the ways on which men talk about gender equality in a safe and comfortable environment and deals with the way in which male leaders can carry this dialogue forward.

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Gender gap: looking to new solutions rather than old ones to close the gap

"When women and girls are not integrated [...] the global community loses out on the skills, ideas and perspectives that are critical for addressing global challenges [...and we have] a critical economic and moral imperative [to close gender gaps]". These were the words used by Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum (WEF), in his preface to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2017* (most recent year available)¹.

The data emerging from the report shows that, after about a decade of slow but steady improvement towards gender equality, there has been a worrying setback for the first time. The ranking presented at the WEF in Davos last year shows the abyss between men and women in all its harsh reality. As is well known, the Report monitors the path towards overcoming the gender gap in 144 countries through four indicators: health, education, economy and politics.

The *Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine* asked Francesca Bettio, Professor of Economic Policy at the University of Siena, internationally known for her commitment to gender issues, to comment on the most relevant aspects of the Report.

Professor Bettio, the gender gap was discussed from different perspectives at the WEF 2018 in Davos. What is the global scenario with regard to this issue emerging from the latest Gender Gap Report?

According to the latest available data, from the year 2017, Italy was 82nd out of 144 countries. It is certainly not a good ranking and is even behind several African countries, such as Burundi, as well as many European countries. If we look at the results for the 144 countries monitored, the top part of the ranking is dominated by Northern Europe, confirming the consolidated trend that traditionally sees this geographical area of the world as being particularly advanced in the process of closing the gender gap. For the ninth



consecutive year we find Iceland in first place, Norway in second place, Finland in third place and Sweden in fifth place. As the survey assesses inequality regardless of general economic conditions, some relatively poor countries, such as Rwanda and Nicaragua, are in fourth and sixth place. The absence among the top ten of some industrialized and advanced countries is particularly striking, with France and Germany respectively in eleventh and twelfth place, the United Kingdom in fifteenth place, and the United States in forty-sixth place. This means that greater economic power in no way guarantees greater equality between men and women. In general, if we look at the 144 countries examined, progress in closing the gender gap is still 68 per cent on average. If we then look at the best results, they are in relation to health and education, while the gap is still considerable when it comes to economic aspects and political representation. If we look back over a decade, since 2006 there has been an upward trend, but this trend is not uniform, nor does it depend on the same factors everywhere.

How does Italy rank in this context?

Out of the 144 countries ranked, Italy scores above average. Nevertheless, it ranks 82nd, with 81 countries ahead of it in which gender equality, as measured by the Global Gender Gap, is greater. Around ten years after the index first came out there has been some improvement, because in 2006 our country was seventy-seventh out of 115 countries, while now it is eighty-second out of 144 countries, so in relative terms something has been gained. We are, however, left asking why a rich and economically advanced country like

Italy continues to be just into the top half of a ranking that includes rich and poor countries, economically advanced and otherwise. There are two reasons for this: one is linked to health indicators, the other to the integration of women in the economy. If we consider education, we are not far from countries where there is full equality; and even when it comes to access to politics, we are better off than a handful of European countries – including Austria, Greece, Luxembourg, Romania and Poland – and much better than Japan and the United States.

In health, two indicators are considered. The first is that of life expectancy in good health, in respect of which Italian women – as is the case in most economically advanced countries – have a higher life expectancy than men. The other is an indicator that heavily penalizes Italy (but that has also been much disputed) and that is the relationship between males and females at birth, whereby biologically males tend to prevail, although this prevalence varies from country to country. In some cases, this prevalence originates from very strong gender discrimination (for example, in China and India), while in advanced countries the presence of this discrimination is very rare, especially with births being at their lowest historical levels. For this and other more purely statistical reasons, authoritative scholars such as Professor Mara Gasbarrone and Professor Alberto Zuliani have suggested that this indicator be removed from the Global Gender Gap, which would significantly improve Italy's position².

The situation is different with regards to participation in the economy and the relative opportunities

for men and women, where Italy ranks in the lower-middle section of the ranking. Two indicators are shifting the ranking of our country downwards: the difference in salary received for similar work and the difference in income actually received from work, aspects for which we slip respectively to one hundred and twenty-sixth and one hundred and third place. The first indicator is based on perceived disparities, while the second has clear evidence from other sources. I would point out that less than half of women of working age are in employment and that, in addition, a good third of women currently work only part-time. Therefore, if we consider the total earned income that women 'produce' at the end of the year, we find ourselves with a considerably lower value than men. This is certified by EUROSTAT – the statistical office of the European Community – which calculates the so-called 'Gender Overall Earnings Gap'³. In other words, all women and men of working age are considered, the incomes that women and men respectively produce are added up and an average difference is obtained: the result for Italy is still impressive, since at the end of the year a woman takes home on average 44% less than a man. The position of women in the economy has always been Italy's Achilles' heel in international gender equality rankings. This is also confirmed by the third from last place that Italy obtains in Europe according to an equality index that I consider to be much more reliable and reasonable than the one discussed in Davos. The index is produced for European countries only and is distributed by the European Institute for Gender Equality⁴.



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In general, then, quite a complex national scenario that is unfavorable for women. In which areas are the results better and worse?

If we discard health, for the reasons I mentioned before, the worst results are in the economic sphere. The best ones are in the field of education, because young Italian girls have surpassed their male peers in terms of qualifications. This has been the case for several years and is part of a process common to many countries around the world, especially wealthier countries and in particular those in Europe. Italy also ranks relatively well at international level with regard to the presence of women in top positions, in politics, on company boards or in local government. The Davos Index merely records the situation in the political sphere, calculating the proportion of women in parliaments, ministerial positions or heads of government. Overall, Italy is not doing badly according to the latter indicators, ranking 46th (out of 144), but the picture is even better if we also look at top positions outside the political arena (for example, on the boards of directors of companies listed on the stock exchange or in other government positions). This is confirmed by the aforementioned index of the European Union, according to which Italy remains fourteenth in the general classification of the 28 countries in the Union – and many points behind Sweden – but has gone up in the ranking in recent years thanks mainly to the presence of women in top positions.

Evidence indicates a trend towards widening the gender gap worldwide. Which strategies/interventions should be implemented at least in Italy to counter this gap and promote gender equality?

I would not focus too much on the worsening trend, as it depends on the period you consider, but there is no doubt that improvement, where it exists, is slow. Given the complexity of the problem, there are many interventions to consider for our country, because you cannot promote gender equity with a single policy. Education should be the starting point.

It is true that there are more female graduates than male, but women are still in the minority in disciplines or sub-disciplines that lead to well-paid jobs: I refer in particular to scientific disciplines such as mathematics, computer science or engineering, or those concerning economic-financial education. School is still the ideal place to break down gender stereotypes about women's and men's jobs, although this can go hand-in-hand with initiatives involving new media. There has also always been the problem of providing greater support to those who want to have children and work at the same time. We can learn from France, closer to us than the Nordic countries, where a wide range of measures are designed to help parents combine work and family without running the risk of finding themselves poor in money or time, as is the case with many of our young couples. Then there is the issue of caring for the disabled and the elderly. In general, care is a very female sector and with the ageing population more and more employment opportunities are being created. In our country, this sector has grown almost entirely in the hands of immigrant women, with economic policy limited to distributing economic aid to families so that they can hire so-called 'carers'. In reality there is another possible vision on the policy of care, one that does not leave this task solely to family welfare. It is a policy that emphasizes the development of so-called social infrastructures such as schools, research, culture but also, and above all, care, and that is why it is able to offer more job opportunities to women. There is much talk of a new industrial policy with the so-called 4.0 plan at its center to support innovation in businesses, while there is no mention of a possible strategy focused on innovation in social infrastructure and, in particular, in the care sector. In the area of care for the elderly, for example, there is a lack of a strategic vision of home care activities that combine manual care with technology, from home automation to information technology and robotics. In this sector, the risk of job losses in favor of 'machines' is low, but

the use of complex medical equipment or intelligent robots at home would facilitate the autonomy of the elderly, attracting at the same time a more qualified, better paid and therefore also local and not only foreign workforce. Italy could truly become a leader in this sector as it not only has a potential pool of female labor to draw from – women who are not currently working – but also possesses the necessary knowledge and skills (think of biomedical districts such as those in Mirandola or the Institute of BioRobotics at the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna). A policy to revitalize the long-term care sector that focuses on innovation at home is a fantastic opportunity, which would benefit not only the quantity and quality of female employment, but also the well-being of the country as a whole.

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