

On July 21 of this year the Fondazione Pubblicità Progresso launched the second phase of its gender equality campaign focusing on the pay gap between men and women which in Italy can sometimes be as high as 30%, while one in three women abandon work after delivering their first child. The campaign with its attractive and appealing title: ["Punto su di te"](#) - *I'm counting on you* is undoubtedly a very commendable attempt to help raise awareness about this problem in Italy and encourage cultural growth. Some individuals, however, have quietly and unpretentiously dedicated their whole life to trying to change the status quo. Franca Bagni Cipriani is one such individual. One of those women who have "delusions of grandeur" - one of the most ironic phrases (but is it really ironic?) reported in the interview with Primo Piano Scala c. A person who, almost unconsciously, when talking about the need for women to input

"their inalienable contribution to jumpstart growth in this country," is indirectly talking about herself. In fact, we are aware of HER enormous, inalienable contribution to try and change Italian society and affirm women's rights (and obligations). Her own invaluable experience started in 1978; since then her passion and commitment have always been devoted to helping women who are discriminated as well as improving equal opportunity labour legislation. But how? Simple. Doing exactly what she has been appointed to do just over a month ago by the Labour Minister, Mr. Poletti: as [National Councillor for Equality](#).

As National Councillor (her offices are located in Via Fornovo, right next door to the Ministry of Labour) she will bring to bear her extensive practical experience in the field during this extremely crucial moment for the world of work: the entry into force of the implementation measures

associated with the Jobs Act. All eyes are focused on the results it will produce. This is one of the issues Franca Cipriani discussed with Primo Piano Scala c. She went straight to the heart of the matter and told us that if certain measures envisaged in the legislation are implemented, then real change is possible. However the devil is in the details. Potential danger lies the improper implementation of the measures, or attempts to cleverly misinterpret them, especially as regards female employment. A word of warning. From now on Franca will be watching, and checking. And she's a woman not to be trifled with.

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CIPRIANI

KARST PHENOMENON. THAT'S EQUALITY IN ITALY

“Well, fifty-five percent of women still resign when they have their first child and then often remain unemployed, especially nowadays.”

Telos: In June 2015 you became the new National Councillor for Equality. An important post after many years always in the front line of feminist movements starting from the *Unione Donne in Italia* (U.D.I.) and the magazine *Noi Donne*. What challenges do you think you'll have to tackle in your new position?

Franca Cipriani: Often women are gripped by a delusion of grandeur, so I expect this job will help me do something for women. Hopefully, a little more than what I've been able to do so far. I think we need to reflect on the enormous changes that have taken place in the last forty years; the world has changed and so have the methods and language women use. It's rather disappointing, but we haven't solved most of the problems that have stopped women from reaching top posts in the world of politics, institutions, the economy or society; those problems still exist and so does a phenomenon we call the "karst phenomenon": It is something that most people don't see and that surfaces from time to time in a different form and with new communication methods. Delusion of grandeur, because I don't want my work to be just the institutional tasks I'll have to do at my Ministry, the Ministry of Labour, even though those tasks are extremely important and crucial for the expectations of so many women. I consider the difficult times we're going through in Italy as a golden opportunity to finally make a difference for women. I want to intercept the new forms of language and organisation women are using today. I think this is the right time to emphasise the extraordinary potential of women's skills, their invaluable contribution to jumpstart growth in Italy. I want to take full advantage of the message and innovative measures in the Jobs Act now being discussed and implemented.

So one of the things you're going to tackle in the near future are the effects of the Jobs Act: monitoring the implementation of these new labour provisions and taking care that new employees are not discriminated. Is discrimination still widespread?

Of course any change has a dark and sometimes completely unexpected side; monitoring and keeping a close eye on the implementation of the Jobs Act is important to ensure that the measures are not incorrectly applied and make things worse rather than simplifying and improving the labour market system. Regarding the discrimination of new employees, our statistics refer more in general to new forms of labour contracts; we still haven't got the nitty-gritty data. So when I say we have to carefully monitor the implementation of these norms it's because I think we should pre-empt the problem by communicating and providing information about the reform in general. It's much more complicated, as well as painful for everyone, if we have to correct any inaccurate interpretations



Franca Cipriani, was appointed National Councillor for Equality on June 15. In the past she played a leading role in feminist movements and has accrued long years of experience working with women and their needs. Her nomination comes after ten years as the provincial councillor for equality in an area (Rome) with a big, composite female workforce. For many years she was also President of the Regional Women's Council for equal opportunities in Lazio. Francesca Bagni Cipriani (her full name) was born in the town of Spoleto in Umbria, a land of saints and heroes. She identifies with three of her land of origin characteristics that start with the letter "A": 1) austerity; 2) alacrity; 3) autonomy. In short: "Don't waste time on things that are useless; go for it". Cipriani is a militant activist in important women's associations (since 1978 she has been a member of the U.D.I. - *Union of women in Italy*). Amongst other things she is also: founding member of Network Eurodonne Italia (since 1994); founding member and President of the Atelier association (since 1995) and ALFA association (since 1999); founder and board member of the Emily association of Rome since 1996 (one of its main objectives is political training for women); and President of EUDIF since 2003. Cipriani is closely involved with the monthly magazine **Noi Donne** established in 1944. Franca has two sons, is an excellent cook, and loves gardening and cats.

that may occur in the future. Our priority is to ensure these new norms are not twisted or incorrectly interpreted, especially where women are involved. Generally speaking, very few people are aware of this discrimination and it's often underestimated by the human resources department. Communication/information is provided, and has been for quite some time, not only to operators, but especially to female workers; it's provided in nearly all the positive action plans drawn up by public and private companies. Which shows just how much ignorance there is about these provisions. Nevertheless, after examining recent reports submitted by the regional equality councillors I've come to the conclusion that discrimination is still very widespread, especially as concerns domestic care work. In fact, most women have to bear the burden of this work and solve all problems it brings with it: the picture painted by the reports proves that women have to look after their children as well as their parents.

Female electricians are hard to come by. Is the fact that women don't do certain jobs a question of stereotypes, or does it depend on something else?

Not just female electricians, but female pilots, surgeons, deans, train drivers... it's a long list. The list reflects the answers given by students to questionnaires distributed in schools in Rome and the province at the end of a morning info and discussion session (the questionnaire was distributed in 24 high schools for 8 years running). Despite the commitment made by schools, local authorities or even trade unions, efforts to remove gender stereotypes are only moderately successful. These efforts haven't stopped the horizontal and vertical segregation of employed women, especially those who do more menial jobs.

The work done in schools in the province of Rome, but also elsewhere in Tuscany or Calabria, shows that the North/South stereotype is an issue we must mitigate: unfortunately there's absolutely no discrepancy between North or South when it comes to the role of women at home and in the workplace. Although more women than men pass out from university, and get better grades than men, women find it harder to get a job and are paid less for work of equal value. So if you cross reference this data with the difference in services in the North or South (a situation that still persists), and above all the possibility of finding a job, what you get are disastrous levels of female employment in the South compared to their counterparts in the North. This means that in the South of Italy we do not exploit the resources we have as regards skilled female workers. This is the daunting challenge we have to tackle and win.

We often hear about the difficult role of working mothers (or mothers who would like to work), but we don't hear much about working fathers. You are very familiar with the Annual Report on the validation procedure for resigning and consensual resolution of working mothers and working fathers. You must have a lot to say about this issue.

Every year the Annual Report drafted by the inspection service on the "validation procedure for resigning and consensual resolution of working mothers and working fathers" is presented by the Director General Danilo Papa in the presence of the National Councillor and the Network of Councillors. The Report provides data regarding resignations submitted for reasons of maternity or paternity; it also analyses why this decision was made by the persons in question. This year we've changed the format of the questionnaire; we wanted to gather data regarding working fathers and consensual resolution. Statistically speaking this means it's more difficult to compare data with data from previous years.

Nevertheless, if we focus on the differences between mothers and fathers, 85% of resignations involve working mothers. This proves that family responsibilities and parenting is still a woman's job and affects women's active participation in the labour market. Let's take some figures to illustrate the current trend: the percentage of working fathers who resign has gone up 49%, even if the overall figure is still very low (from 2384 to 3545). Is there light at the end of the tunnel? Well, fifty-five percent of women still resign when they have their first child and then often remain unemployed, especially nowadays. There are many competent, skilled female professionals who deserve better. In short the Country is loosing out because it neither uses or makes the most of these resources.