
Adalberto Rangone · Camilla Costa

Diversity and Inclusion Strategies

Normative Profiles, Corporate Governance
and Value Perspectives



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To the University of Oradea for never making me feel different
Adalberto

To my loved ones, always at my side in facing life's challenges
Camilla

*It is actions that count. Our thoughts, however good they may be, are false pearls until they are converted into shares.
Be the change you want to see in the world.*

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 1913

Les mortels sont égaux. Ce n'est pas leur naissance, c'est la seule vertu qui fait leur différence.

Voltaire, 1732

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C.C.: par. 1.1.4, 1.4, chap. 2 and 4

Introduction

After so many struggles to achieve equality of rights and to give a fair job to the most disadvantaged and discriminated groups, today it seems more natural to contemplate “diversity” and to involve it in everyday life, at the social, economic or political level.

Contrary to what might be thought, even in the most developed countries this principle is not expressed in all its simplicity and coherence but still leads to the acquisition of stereotypes for certain natural or legal persons who are ill-suited to integration and inclusion.

Many public and private entities throughout the world are concerned with raising public awareness of this issue. However, incomprehensible differences persist not only in the social sphere but also in the company sphere, when viewed from the point of view of pay and career progression.

It would therefore seem appropriate to ask: how can these circumstances be explained?

How can we eradicate them from our society? Secondly, can companies play a specific role?

To answer these questions, it is necessary first to understand the scope of the investigation and, secondly, the value that can be created by the achievement of these aims and how it can be achieved.

Equality of opportunity is a legal principle that implies that no individual is prevented from participating in political, economic, and social matters on the grounds of gender, religious orientation, personal beliefs, race, ethnic origin, disability, age, and sexual or political orientation.

This means that everyone can (and has the right) participate freely and equally in the different areas of public life, i.e. in terms of employment, education, and access to goods and services. In this case, discrimination occurs when any person is treated unfavourably and differently from others.

Today, any form of discrimination of this kind is prohibited throughout the European Union which encourages:

1. equality and non-discrimination as two cornerstones of EU legislation and decision-making;
2. a commitment to developing measures to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment in all areas of life for all citizens, irrespective of gender;
3. gender mainstreaming to strengthen equal rights, and combat gender discrimination.

The European Union, therefore, intends to combat not only gender discrimination but also ethnic, religious, age, sexual orientation, or disability discrimination, as well as political intolerance.

As we will see in this work, the policies of the European Union demonstrate a strong and concrete commitment to equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

What the Equal Opportunities Act seeks to protect is the right of everyone to equal treatment, eliminating discrimination, sexual harassment and providing redress to those whose rights have been violated.

Therefore, considering the specific context of the company, as required by the equal opportunity laws, it is illegal to discriminate against employees or job seekers on the grounds mentioned above.

Equal opportunities mean that all people must be treated equally or in a similar way and not be disadvantaged because of prejudice. This means that if a person gets a job or a promotion, the result has been achieved based on qualifications, experience, and knowledge and not based on advantages linked to specific stereotypes.

Through the concept of equal opportunities, reference is made to a principle of *liberal equality* for which every individual and those who start from a “disadvantaged” condition should be guaranteed equal opportunities of access to and enjoyment of goods and rights, thus removing all those barriers that stand in the way.

What has been written so far concerns the area in which the subject of our analysis is expressed (i.e. the fight against stereotypes, the promotion of inclusion, and the reduction of the gender gap) and the reasons for discrimination.

With this in mind, this work seeks to understand how to support the so-called “inclusion process”. Since this is a very broad subject, it has been necessary to review and analyse the many efforts made by international institutions and organisations – together with a study of the literature – to try to understand the most appropriate approach to achieving this objective. The long analytical journey has brought us to a more intimate dimension within the companies.

The role they can play today, which is significant from a social as well as an economic point of view, becomes crucial precisely for their ability to reach individuals and the wider community.

This happens not only through the simple concept of communication itself, but also because the individual and the community are part of the sphere of corporate stakeholders and, therefore, express value. The doctrines of corporate social responsibility and ESG are clear manifestations of this principle.

Thus, on this assumption, the present work shows that – even from the perspective of inclusion of diversity – value assessment is unambiguous (from an exclusive point of view of the firm) but expresses various interconnected perspectives.

If pursued, they can enable companies to fulfill their most important task: “to mediate between individuals and their needs or aspirations”.

Let us think of the role played by a food company that, through the production of specific goods, can satisfy food intolerances such as celiac disease, favism, or lactose intolerance. Intolerances are mainly physical demands, but if they are not treated, they can lead to serious problems of a biological, psychological, and social nature. There is also the support given by public and private companies to disabled people by producing specific goods and raising awareness (i.e. Lego’s campaign).

Companies, therefore, play a strategic role in reducing such physical demands but also in satisfying the various aspirations that each individual may have.

Therefore, by studying how value is exalted both for the company and for the stakeholders, it is possible to understand the fundamental role of the company as an intermediary in this process of inclusion and affirmation of equal opportunities; but above all, to abandon the most unscrupulous forms of hypocrisy.

A famous motto of Mahatma Gandhi, recognized throughout the world as one of the fathers of non-violence and equal rights, reads as follows:

“It is actions that count. Our thoughts, however good they may be, are false pearls until they are converted into shares. Be the change you want to see in the world”.

Rebus sic stantibus, now riding the ideal of social responsibility (CSR), companies cannot shirk their duty towards society and the most disadvantaged communities.

It is no longer acceptable to just “think” about those in need of charity, the different, and the disadvantaged for the sole purpose of promotion and marketing.

The time has come to turn thoughts and words into “actions” so that they are not just “false pearls” but can be transformed into solid realities for all of us. Certainly, some companies have greater responsibilities in this context.

Companies operating in the field of communication and the *sharing economy* will have an even more decisive role as their work and social profiles can reach a wider range of users and stakeholders in a shorter time. However, given this, all companies need to take serious measures and change their prospects.

In this work, we investigate whether there is homogeneity in the company’s management of “diversity”. However, if there are forms of best practice. To describe the current situation, it was considered appropriate to investigate how “diversity” is perceived at the corporate level, by studying the documents made public by companies. Official documents relating to corporate governance (statutes, code of ethics, self-regulation code, financial statements, etc.) are today key tools for describing the company’s philosophy and culture. Above all, by reading them, it is possible to have tangible evidence of a real commitment to the processes of inclusion.

They must therefore demonstrate the implementation of concrete plans for sustainable development; they must demonstrate real social responsibility based on investments made with due regard for environmental protection but also investment in specific human resources (including a diversified human capital structure capable of meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups).

As we will see, by properly integrating “diversity” into the corporate governance framework and by properly managing and evaluating human resources, it is possible to define completely new scenarios and forerunners of great value. A value that spreads both internally – concerning the subjects included – and externally to the company, for communities belonging to the discriminated categories who identify with the persons hired and interact with the company in a media and economic context.

To improve a situation of mistrust driven by stereotypes or, all too often, characterized by a cynical profit motive, it is therefore essential to understand the value of including “diversity”.

For this reason, the intention is to emphasize two distinct but interrelated concepts in this paper. The first consists of the “Diversity Asset”, namely the specific contribution that diversity can make to the company in terms of technical knowledge as well as relationships with external stakeholders. The second is the concept of “Diversity Value”, understood as all the perspectives of value that are created through the processes of inclusion in the company and are released into the system.

As can be seen from this work, the intangible value brought by disadvantaged groups is of key importance for the implementation of a project

of common interest, taking place in a context that goes far beyond the simple business sphere.

If we look at the reality of the company and how it works according to the principle that companies are made by man and to serve man, this logic of approach becomes clear in all its aspects.

As can be seen from these introductory notes, and even more from the following description of the research methodology, the intention was therefore to approach the topic from an interdisciplinary perspective. For this reason, we apologize in advance to readers and colleagues from different fields of science for any omissions. On the contrary, given the importance and breadth of the subject, we hope that this work will be a source of new and enlightening reflections that contribute to the common cause of improvement and progress in D&I.

Structure and research methodology

This work aims to investigate the traits and characteristics of D&I in the company through an interdisciplinary approach. We are convinced that this survey methodology is more innovative than traditional analysis systems that focus only on an application field, but inexorably neglect the multiple variables and dynamics that determine the system (in this case the system in which D&I is realized).

The overall vision is therefore essential for a correct contextualization of the problem, which involves not only business administration issues but also social, cultural, political, and legal issues. We are deeply convinced that, if these aspects were neglected, it would not be possible to fully understand the motivations that have led to and continue to fuel the various gender gaps in the world, both from a social and an income point of view.

Therefore, to achieve this result, in Chapter I we considered it appropriate to begin this work with a preliminary approach to the theme of diversity, attempting to understand the problem in the light of multiple historical-economic, psycho-social and political perspectives, given the dramatic events which continue to characterize the current global news. This awareness fully expresses the urgency of eradicating, once and for all, a problem that has its origins in ancient times and which does not allow us to make real progress towards the realization of a new world order of equality, brotherhood, and freedom. The theme of D&I is, however, dramatically complex and heterogeneous.

As mentioned in the introductory notes, there are many disadvantaged groups within the term “diversity.” For this reason, it would be unthinkable to consider all of them in their specific way, both within companies and in the environment in which they operate, in a single job. Against this background, it was considered essential in Chapter II to focus on the issue of the gender gap – understood as the diversity of rights between men and women – which, although over the years substantial initiatives and efforts in both the public and private spheres were adopted, is still a very critical issue with problems to be solved.

The issue of gender equality has been analysed in light of the normative profiles and critical aspects identified and quantified over time by various international organisations.

Gender mainstreaming is therefore a key issue dealt with in this chapter.

In this context, we have aimed to define guidelines for understanding the complex interplay between policies and international cooperation aimed at achieving gender equality in public decision-making and at all levels of politics.

Particular attention has been paid to the conditions of application, the methods and instruments of analysis, and the results that the international organizations, first and foremost the EIGE, intend to achieve.

Chapter III examines the current situation of gender inequality in employment.

At this stage of the work, therefore, the aim is to understand the motivations behind the *gender gap* in the workplace and the contribution that “diversity” could make to economic development (i.e. a social and economic value not yet achieved).

Particular emphasis is given to the *gender pay gap*, trying to understand if there are links with the size of the firm and in which sectors.

In this chapter, therefore, various approaches have emerged: those of a business nature (relating to the principle of the inclusion of women in the company and at the various decision-making levels), the purely economic (defining the trends in the various countries which attest to the primacy of wages and employment) and the economic policy one by examining the so-called “gender budgeting”.

In this paper we have the opportunity to stress that a careful plan of *gender budgeting* can influence a correct distribution of paid work, leading to substantial and positive effects on women of a social and economic nature together with a more homogeneous distribution of resources within families.

Community policies are thus represented as a very important means of defining new business horizons, more inclusive and sustainable.

Chapter IV focuses on the controversial relationship between inclusion and the STEM field. While the previous chapters have analysed the critical factors related to work through the study of the literature and the initiatives taken by international organisations to eradicate these phenomena, in this central section of the work it has been considered important to define the critical issues which are relevant to the specific STEM field. Technology is making giant strides and is increasingly affecting the way companies approach their operating systems and business models. It, therefore, plays an increasingly decisive role in determining the position of the firm in the economic and social context. At the same time, however, the *gender gap* is

widening, leaving room for stereotypes and discrimination and, above all, for a real brain drain.

In this chapter, the analysis focuses on the relationship between gender diversity and the issues involved in technological progress, with a specific focus on the so-called *leaky pipeline* and artificial intelligence. The analysis of the latter aspect is extremely important because, if not properly managed, technology risks dramatically replacing human resources (particularly women) and could inherit and persecute the gender stereotypes that exist today.

Taking advantage of the preparatory analyses carried out in the previous chapters (in terms of company size and inclusion, the relationship between diversity and C-suite assignments, mandatory reports to be drawn up, salary levels, and company value of female capital in STEM) in Chapter V we get to the heart of the managerial connotation and business administration.

The theme of corporate governance is central to understanding how D&I is controlled in the company today.

More specifically, the analysis in this chapter focuses on regulations, forecasts, and corporate documents adopted and made public to demonstrate the internal level of inclusion.

Through a survey of the regulations that most influence company regulation systems and through a survey of the texts of company statutes, codes of ethics, and sustainability, the aim is to understand whether companies are currently prepared to regulate the inclusion of “diversity”. Obviously, given the specific subject of our discussion, particular attention has been paid to the inclusion of women.

Through the empirical case study of Eni SpA, it was possible to trace high-quality standards in the field of inclusiveness, trying to define a sort of best practice in the field.

Being well aware that corporate governance regulations differ according to geographic macro-areas and legal fields, the Italian regulatory system has been chosen as an example to continue in line with previous analyses regarding the inclusion of “diversity” into the company.

Chapter VI concludes this work on *Diversity and Inclusion* in the company. This chapter has been deliberately placed last as it receives influences and fundamental concepts that have been incorporated through the analyses of the previous chapters.

Being a propositional chapter, we examine the perspectives of the value that “diversity” generates within the company. If the previous chapters take note of the problems that still exist dramatically today and look at the issue of gender equality from an ethical point of view, this chapter gives the reasons why reducing the *gender gap* is beneficial for all. In addition, it demonstrates the crucial role that the company can play as an engine for achieving equality and creating value through D&I.

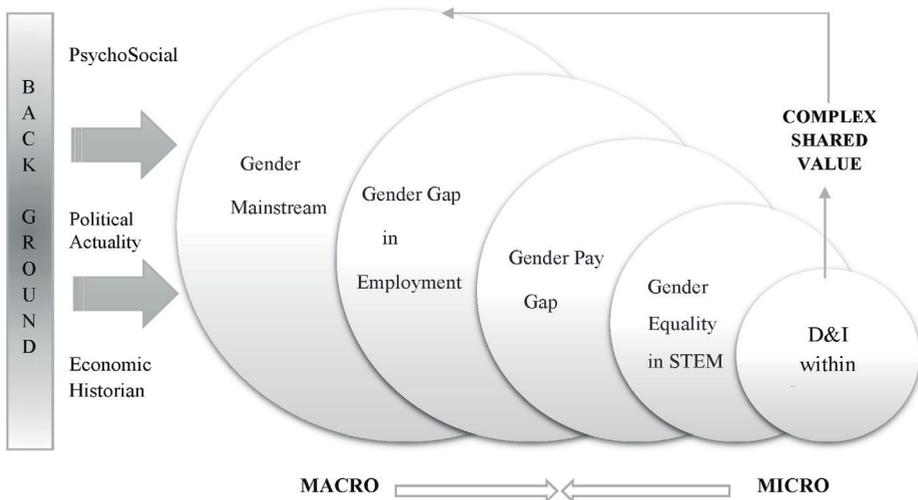
Through an approach to the fundamental notions of shared value and ESG principles, which are now more than ever essential for sustainable business management, it has been possible to determine how D&I generates value for the company. A value which – as can be understood from the reading of this chapter – has an internal dimension to the company (intangible asset and social value for the disadvantaged groups employed) but also external, transferring and sharing a social and economic value “at a complex level” with all the actors of the economic system.

The analytical principle through which this assumption has been made is that of the *system dynamics* thanks to which it has been possible to identify and define the multiple connections between the company and various stakeholders involved in a dense network of relationships.

However, to be fully understood, the intangible value generated by the company’s inclusion of “diversity” needs to be controllable. This chapter, therefore, analyses the main systems for monitoring “diversity”, starting from the assessment and quantification of value.

A real model for understanding the added value brought to the company by “diversity” is therefore proposed. A model that must accompany the company’s development strategy and its management sustainably. Furthermore, it is a model which – although the focus of this work has been on gender equality – is still useful and valid for all categories of “diversity” that are included in the company.

Figure A. Systemic relationship between the themes analysed



Source: authors’ elaboration

To conclude the notes on the analytical methodology adopted in this work (figure A), we can therefore argue that the interdisciplinary approach has provided us with valuable tools for understanding – at the macro level – the critical issues that international institutions have been facing for some time.

Despite countless efforts in the National and Community spheres, there is still a long way to go to achieve the dream of total equality. We are convinced that the solution should then be sought elsewhere. The understanding of the macro dimension considered in the first chapters makes it possible to demonstrate that the solution is placed “at the micro level.” Thus, starting from the comprehension of the differences in the exercise of rights in various areas, this work continues with a focus on equal rights in the workplace to arrive at the exercise of rights within companies. Companies today play a decisive and irreplaceable role in social and economic development. Therefore, they are being asked to pay more and more attention to issues that are extremely important, indeed vitally important, given what is at stake. However, the commitment must not come from regulatory constraints and at high levels, but from the comprehension that new solutions and inclusion strategies can bring real added value to the companies themselves. This value must be controlled internally through internal codes of conduct and must be identifiable by the managerial class in the thin but fundamental network of actors involved.

The contribution that this work intends to make to the reference literature, therefore, consists in the proposal to seek solutions “at the micro level” (the corporate level) to the problems of inclusion of “diversity” – until now mainly dealt with at the macro level thanks to the commitment of international institutions – by defining perspectives linked to the value generated.

1. Preliminary and context analyses on Diversity & Inclusion

Abstract. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, this chapter analyses different approaches. From a psychosocial perspective, studies carried out over the years have shown how the issue is linked to the principle of “positive recognition”, and also to the inability to live together due to predefined social rules. The psychosocial approach has thus shown that the motivations of intolerance and problems related to diversity are mainly dictated by an ideological rather than a biological principle in itself. This leads to a wrong model of conceiving what is considered “different”, the inability to manage relationships, and above all to uproot outdated social rules. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on certain economic history aspects which, more than others, make it possible to obtain correlations within the scope of inclusion. This approach is essential to demonstrate how economic interests have too often been the motivation for discrimination and inclusion. Therefore, this conception leads us to define new models based on the crucial role of the company and the value D&I generates through it.

1.1 Evolutionary aspects and status quaestionis in the world

The study of equal opportunities cannot disregard certain basic premises, which are considered to be of greater significance, not only for the development of gender ideology but also for the protection of human rights more generally.

Looking back over time, it is possible to identify two major stages in the fight against discrimination: *in primis*, the battles against anti-Semitism and then those against the gender gap which, after observing important struggles for the protection of women’s rights, has more recently also affected the protection of the transsexual gender. The reader will be sympathetic if – due to the vastness of the subject and the limitations imposed on this work – all historical cases are not treated exhaustively. Within the whole *corpus* of initiatives to uphold rights as well as to combat discrimination, several significant historical events can be identified. Even today, the events we have

analysed and presented later demonstrate their effects and influences in the field of inclusion.

1.1.1 Civil movements of the 19th century and the motto Black Lives Matter

As far as the fight against racial laws is concerned, progress was made with the recognition of certain rights for black people in America during the 19th century.

At the end of the American Civil War, the African-American Civil Rights Movement (1865-1896) set out to eliminate racial discrimination, improve educational and employment opportunities, and establish civil rights for former slaves and their descendants (Rabinowitz 1978).

The movement was able to bring about an extraordinary change for the Black community following the abolition of slavery in the United States of America. This was certainly the beginning of a long process of moving away from racial stereotypes which, however, would continue for a long time. In the immediate aftermath of the war, one of the most obvious problems in the United States was racial segregation. Blacks and whites remained divided in every day-to-day activity of civil society. The purchase of goods had to be made in supermarkets and separate shops, restaurants and hotels were separate and specific; school attendance also remained distinct for a long time. Until the mid-1960s, laws were still in force in many states of the United States that severely discriminated against Blacks, denying them the most basic civil rights. The struggle of Black Americans for emancipation was one of the great episodes in the history of the 1960s.

“the African-American Civil Rights Movement, which developed in the post-war period in the United States, was an event of great political and social significance, affecting the electoral balance of American society from the 1960s onwards, given that blacks made up over a tenth of the total population, while in the Deep South they exceeded 25%, and in large areas from Louisiana to the United States. South Carolina, known as the Black Belt, still constituted more than half of the population in 1965. In the 1960s, the movement also had repercussions on students and other ethnic minorities, triggering a decade of protests culminating in the pacifist movement against the Vietnam War” (Venturini 2010).¹

¹ Original version: “il movimento afro-americano per i diritti civili, sviluppatosi nel secondo dopoguerra negli Stati Uniti, fu un evento di grande portata politica e sociale, tale da incidere sugli equilibri elettorali della società americana a partire dagli anni Sessanta, in considerazione del fatto che i neri rappresentavano oltre un decimo della popolazione totale, mentre nel Profondo Sud superavano il 25%, ed in larghe zone dalla Louisiana alla

The need to recognise the civil rights of the Black community without discrimination was therefore increasingly felt. It was during these human rights struggles, that figures such as Malcolm X (1925-1965) and Martin Luther King (1929-1968) emerged; they expressed charismatic figures who would first lead the movements (Leader 1993; Carson et al. 1992) and then inspire politicians and religious institutions to fight for these principles, slowly affecting the white community and allowing for an increase in the number of Black university professors, lawyers and judges, athletes, artists, and writers.

Since then, of course, much progress has been made. However, indeed, the racial issue in the United States of America is still a very acute problem and there are still far too many cases that fill the newspaper articles and political debates in which the motto “Black Lives Matter” echoes (Armstrong et al. 2017).

1.1.2 Covid-19 pandemic spread and Asian Hate

The United States of America is one of the world’s greatest powers. For centuries they have been the expression and ideal of democracy (Shapiro 2011; Appleby 2007). By “manifest destiny” (Hine and Bingham 1972) countless territories were expropriated from the rightful native owners and annexed to the newly formed United States of America for a romantic principle of extending the ideal of freedom.

In contemporary times, this ideal has been replaced by an ambiguous interpretation of the original “Monroe Doctrine” according to which the U.S.A. feels the right to intervene in the political and economic affairs of other countries in case the right to freedom should be compromised². However – as

South Carolina, note come Black Belt, ancora nel 1965 costituivano oltre metà della popolazione. Negli anni Sessanta il movimento ebbe ripercussioni anche sui settori studenteschi e sulle altre minoranze etniche, innescando un decennio di proteste culminate nel movimento pacifista contro la guerra in Vietnam” (Venturini 2010).

² In this respect, it has always been very difficult to identify the criterion and the level of risk. A veil of discretion has always characterized U.S.A. interventionist policies in the affairs of other countries. See the Roosevelt Doctrine according to which chronic misconduct on the American continent would require international police intervention by a civilized nation; the Truman doctrine, according to which the United States would treat offensives against its allies as a personal attack (see, in particular, the Korean War); the Eisenhower Doctrine according to which the United States offered its armed aid to any country in the Middle East if it was requested (especially see the Cold War and the Vietnam War); the Johnson and Nixon Doctrines and the intensification of the Vietnam

discussed above – in the U.S.A. not only do profound social lacerations persist due to racial issues still alive, but a pandemic spread was enough to sharpen real racial hatred, contrary to what should happen in developed states in the contemporary era. Beginning with the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, the phenomenon of sinophobia in the United States became more radical in 2021 with serious episodes of violence against fellow Asian citizens (BBC 2021). They would have been considered responsible for the spread of Covid-19 because, according to international information and ongoing verification by the World Health Organisation (WHO 2021), the coronavirus originated in China. In response to such manifestations of racism, the media movement #StopAsianHate was born and then channelled into the organization Stop AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders). According to the Stop AAPI National Report, from 19 March 2020 to 28 February 2021, the number of attacks on Asians in the U.S.A. would have been as many as 3,795 (NBC 2021). This is a very substantial number if we think of the unfounded reasons which demonstrate a purely racial purpose. The wave of protests against these attacks has gathered a lot of support and solidarity from both the political world (New York State 2021) and the entertainment world (ABC7 2021). A substantial number of artists and famous persons (World Stock Market 2021) expressed their position on social media, openly condemning these acts of ferocity. Is it possible, then, that there are additional connections and motives or that these events are not sporadic but unprecedented incidents of racial hatred? To answer this question, which is rhetorical in nature, we must refer to economic history and what it has taught us through clear facts and episodes.

The troubled relationship between the U.S.A. and China has, after all, recent origins. A little over a century and a half has passed since the economic destinies of the two current giants were intertwined through episodes of collaboration and confrontation. On May 6, 1882, Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act, a law for the exclusion of the Chinese community from the national territory. This measure imposed a blockade on Chinese foreign nationals entering the United States and completely denied the right of

War as well as the interventions in the Dominican Republic; the Carter Doctrine and the Soviets' withdrawal from the Persian Gulf; the Reagan Doctrine and the struggle against communists in all parts of the world, the invasion of Grenada and the bombing of Libya; the Bush Senior Doctrine and the Gulf War and Central American operations; the Clinton Doctrine and the military interventions in Somalia, Afghanistan and Sudan and the Kosovo War; The W. Bush Doctrine and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and finally the Obama Doctrine characterized by interventions in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan, although the president was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Leonardi 2020).

citizenship to Chinese residents. This discriminatory act targeted one of the most active communities in the country. In fact, since their first integration in 1840, Chinese communities have been involved in the frenetic machinery of American economic and social development.

As described by Chang (2003), the Chinese were immediately considered useful to work in the mines, in agriculture, but above all to build new infrastructure such as housing, shops, and rail links – all essential elements for the gold rush and even more the commercial traffic. Analyzing the American case in the paper “Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise”, Alfred D. Chandler (1962) has magnificently described the importance of the construction of railway lines, seen as the first large enterprises to appear on the world stage at the end of the 19th century. This would have played an essential and strategic role in redefining the country’s history and, above all its economy. The Chinese, therefore, played a key role in the construction of such infrastructure – especially the Transcontinental railroad³ (Renehan 2007) as they were a large and cheap labour force.

In a historical period that was struggling to close conflicts for the protection of the rights of the Black community, given their docility and tirelessness, the Chinese were employed in those essential and exhausting jobs that gave a vital boost to the fledgling U.S.A economy. However, if initially protection from exploitation and discrimination⁴ was ensured to Chinese nuclei, their continuous growth in American cities and their ability to move economically increased the resentment of indigenous communities towards them. Not only was the Chinese exclusion act enforced, but this was followed by successive restrictions that induced Chinese communities to self-isolate in specific urban areas. Concentrations grew considerably over time, and Chinese communities were joined – often in complete confusion – by citizens from other Asian countries. According to a recent independent study by the Brookings Institution⁵ (2019), Asian communities in the United States make up 5.9% of the total population, followed by the Hispanic community (18.3%) and the Black community (12.5%) (Fig. 1.1).

³ This railway line connected the Atlantic coast with California and the Pacific Ocean.

⁴ Thanks to the Treaty of Burlingame between China and the United States (1868).

⁵ A non-profit research center founded in 1916 with headquarters in Washington.

Figure 1.1 The Concentration of Asian Communities in Metropolitan Areas of the United States of America



Source: Brookings Institution 2019

Not only that but with the powerful evolution that has characterized China’s economic development, today \$1.070 billion of the U.S.A. public debt remains in Beijing’s hands.

In 2011, China held up to 1.3 trillion treasuries, equivalent to more than 11% of the GDP at the time. Since 2015, China has reduced its investments, becoming the second largest investor after Japan (\$1.2 trillion). However, these reports demonstrate their full weight. A weight that is not only financial but also commercial, given that China’s main exports are directed to the United States and absorbed about 429 billion dollars in 2019 (OEC 2021)⁶.

In recent years, especially with the Trump administration, these relations have become more bitter, giving rise to a real economic battle with serious consequences for certain leading companies in their respective

⁶ For a more complete overview of the business context, consider the following destinations: Hong Kong (\$268 billion), Japan (\$152 billion), South Korea (\$108 billion) and Germany (\$96.9 billion) (OEC 2021).

countries. The companies Huawei and Google⁷ – which have suffered trade repercussions as a result of the U.S.A. and China trade war – are more than evident cases.

The imposition of duties is also significant. The most recent expressions of this war began on March 22, 2018, when Trump decided the first tariffs against China accusing it of “economic aggression”. This was followed by long months of tension, which held the global economy and financial markets breathless. Until the five-month truce signed on 1 December 2019 at the G-20 in Argentina (Il Sole 24 Ore 2020). It didn’t last long. The Covid-19 pandemic allowed the reopening of long-standing wounds.

However, in this case – as in many others which will be considered below – it is interesting to note that the discriminatory and racial context involves economic relations, even of extreme importance. Therefore, it is also worth noting and assessing the fact that, depending on historical perspectives and circumstances, the principle of discrimination is often not the result of ideological or religious rancour due to differences, but rather a pretext for concealing more subtle motives.

1.1.3 Universal suffrage and social utility

The issue of universal suffrage has been a critical theme for centuries involving not only social but also economic principles.

In this regard, it is sufficient to think of the studies of Tocqueville and Marx which, by analysing the extension of the right to vote, tried to understand the potential effects on the public economic sphere. Referring to the newly constituted American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that:

“If one were to draw a parallel between a democratic republic and an absolute monarchy, one would find that public expenditure is higher in the former than in the latter” (Tocqueville 1981: 298).

Marx, instead, believed that universal suffrage was an essential prerequisite for socialism. Suffrage was defined as the equivalent of political power for the working class. Furthermore, there were concerns about the model of parliamentary representation which, in any case, would not have departed from elitist models without the right measures (Marx and Engels 1973).

⁷ Considering the pandemic and the U.S.A. ban, Huawei’s global turnover in 2020 amounted to \$136.7 billion, up 3.8% while in 2019 the growth was 19% (Simonetta 2021). Instead, Google had to block some services in China by keeping only hardware manufacturing to the cloud (Kharpal 2019).

However, the modern origins of the movement can be found as early as the 18th century in France (Gouges 1791). Previously, the woman's condition was controlled by the pater familias during unmarried age and, once married, to her husband. She could not own property or have access to education. The French revolutionary movements brought important changes in the way the role of women was considered:

“PREAMBLE. Mothers, daughters, sisters, representatives of the Nation, ask to be constituted in the National Assembly. Considering that ignorance, forgetting or contempt for the rights of women are the only causes of public misfortune and government corruption, have resolved to set out, in a solemn declaration, the natural, unalterable and sacred rights of woman, so that this declaration constantly present to all members of the social body constantly reminds them of their rights and duties, so that the acts of the power of women and those of the power of men, can be at every moment compared with the goal of any political institution are more respected, so that the complaints of female citizens, now based on simple and indisputable principles, always turn to the maintenance of the Constitution, good morals and the happiness of all. Accordingly, the sex superior in beauty as in courage in maternal sufferings recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of women and citizens: I. Woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights. Social distinctions can only be based on common utility” (Gouges 1971: 1 et seq.).⁸

⁸ Original version: “PRÉAMBULE. Les mères, les filles, les sœurs, représentantes de la Nation, demandent à être constituées en Assemblée nationale. Considérant que l’ignorance, l’oubli ou le mépris des droits de la femme sont les seules causes des malheurs publics et de la corruption des gouvernements, ont résolu d’exposer, dans une déclaration solennelle, les droits naturels, inaltérables et sacrés de la femme, afin que cette déclaration constamment présente à tous les membres du corps social leur rappelle sans cesse leurs droits et leurs devoirs, afin que les actes du pouvoir des femmes et ceux du pouvoir des hommes, pouvant être à chaque instant comparés avec le but de toute institution politique en soient plus respectés, afin que les réclamations des citoyennes, fondées désormais sur des principes simples et incontestables, tournent toujours au maintien de la Constitution, des bonnes mœurs et au bonheur de tous. En conséquence, le sexe supérieur en beauté comme en courage dans les souffrances maternelles reconnaît et déclare, en présence et sous les auspices de l’Être suprême, les droits suivants de la femme et de la citoyenne:

The feminist movements were unable to force their right to vote, but they certainly shook public opinion, causing new changes and new struggles. Also, in the 18th century, the right to vote for women was granted by the Corsican Republic. This was followed in 1838 by the Pitcairn Islands, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1849, and New Zealand in 1893.

In the United Kingdom, questions of extending voting rights to women were only considered after the mid-19th century.

In 1866, the politician and economist John Stuart Mill petitioned the House of Commons with over 1,500 signatures collected by the Women's Suffrage Committee. Mill, therefore, tabled an amendment to obtain the right to vote for all families, regardless of sex. However, this initiative did not produce the desired results as the amendment was defeated by 194 votes to 73 (UK Parliament 2021).

Later, in 1869, Mill published an essay entitled "The Subjection of Women". It challenged the European laws then in force and drew attention to equality between men and women (Mill 1869).

"The legal subordination of one sex to another – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power and privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other" (Mill 1869: 1)

With this masterpiece, John Stuart Mill succeeded in demonstrating how discrimination and the subjugation of women did not help the progress of mankind but rather were real obstacles.

The emancipation of women – and thus the right to vote – would have achieved at least two results⁹:

1. an increase of wealth for society; women's work and services would have contributed to the economy and thus to social well-being;
2. individual growth; women's emancipation and cultural improvement would have improved women not only in their domestic relationships but also in their social relationships with a simultaneous improvement of society as a whole.

I. La Femme naît libre et demeure égale à l'homme en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune" (Gouges 1971: 1 et seq.).

⁹As one of the leading exponents of the philosophical current of utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill was able to make valid arguments about the contribution that women's emancipation would bring to the common good.

Despite the initial defeat, John Stuart Mill's proposals and writings unleashed an ongoing political campaign for women's emancipation that not only would inspire movements in Britain¹⁰ and Europe but also beyond the ocean¹¹ (Fig. 1.2).

Numerous emancipationist movements would spread worldwide, distinguishing between dualistic and egalitarian¹². In 1906 Finland became the first European country to grant women the right to vote in general elections (Komulainen and Elomaa 1988; Hulkko et al 1967). After 1914, it also extended to Denmark, Iceland, Russia¹³, Canada, Austria, Germany, Poland, and finally England, while the United States won the vote only in 1920 (Marino 2019).

Italy, on the other hand, followed a stormier path.

¹⁰ See National Society for Women's Suffrage.

¹¹ For a better understanding of feminist movements in the U.S.A., see Marino (2019): Transnational connections initiated by the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement only grew in the following decades. After construction of the first transatlantic telegraph lines in the 1860s, communications, travel, and transnational print culture helped produce the first international organizations for women's rights that drew significantly on US women: the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1884 by US temperance leader Frances Willard; the International Council of Women (ICW), founded in 1888 by Stanton and Anthony; the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA, later renamed the International Alliance of Women), founded in 1904 and presided over by Carrie Chapman Catt (then-president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association); and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded by US social settlement worker Jane Addams in 1915 (Marino 2019).

¹² The dualistic conception wanted to impose the role of women by even supporting the superiority of the female class while the egalitarian movement advocated equality of political and civil rights.

¹³ In Russia, during the revolutionary provisional government in November 1917, elections were held for the Constituent Assembly by universal suffrage. Suffrage was confirmed in the Soviet Constitution of 1918.

Figure 1.2 Cartoon on the cover of the National Woman's Party – 1917



Source: Marino 2019

“Universal suffrage for men was introduced by Law No. 666 of 30 June 1912. The active electorate was extended to all male citizens over the age of 30 without any requirement of registration or education, except for those under the age of 30 the conditions of registration or military service or the possession of previously required educational qualifications. The electorate increased from 3,300,000 to 8,443,205, of which 2,500,000 were illiterate, or 23.2% of the population” (Camera dei Deputati 2021^a).¹⁴

This initiative, although very important, did not concern women but only men.

Fascism blocked any initiative in this regard and, on the contrary, arranged for the creation of a new electoral system that would bring out the

¹⁴ Original version: “Il suffragio universale maschile fu introdotto con la legge del 30 giugno 1912, n. 666. L’elettorato attivo fu esteso a tutti i cittadini maschi di età superiore ai 30 anni senza alcun requisito di censo né di istruzione, restando ferme per i maggiorenni di età inferiore ai 30 anni le condizioni di censo o di prestazione del servizio militare o il possesso di titoli di studio già richiesti in precedenza. Il corpo elettorale passò da 3.300.000 a 8.443.205, di cui 2.500.000 analfabeti, pari al 23,2% della popolazione” (Camera dei Deputati 2021^a).

figure of the head of government and deny popular sovereignty. It was therefore only towards the end of the Second World War that better conditions were created for a real revolution in favour of women's suffrage.

“On 31 January 1945, when the country was divided and the North was under German occupation, the Council of Ministers headed by Ivano Bonomi issued a decree granting women the right to vote (Legislative Decree of 2 February 1945, n. 23). On 2 June 1946 women voted for the Institutional Referendum and for the Constituent Assembly elections, but already in the previous local elections they had voted and were elected in a fair number to the municipal councils” (Camera dei Deputati 2021^b).¹⁵

Internationally, women's suffrage was introduced in 1948 when the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As provided in Article 21:

- “ 1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.
3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government;
4. This will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures” (United Nations 1948: 1).

Subsequently, women's suffrage was explicitly considered a right also under the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, adopted by the United Nations in 1979.

However long the struggle has taken place and the pillars of gender equality have been laid, both politically and civically, as we shall see today, there are still situations in the world that do not allow real equality between the sexes in the workplace, while in some countries freedom to vote and women's rights are still a distant mirage.

This discrimination is far from the utilitarian concepts of John Stuart Mill – who, as we have seen earlier, considered the contribution of women to

¹⁵ Original version: “Il 31 gennaio del 1945 con il Paese diviso ed il nord sottoposto all'occupazione tedesca il Consiglio dei Ministri presieduto da Ivanoe Bonomi emanò un decreto che riconosceva il diritto di voto alle donne (Decreto legislativo luogotenenziale 2 febbraio 1945, n. 23). Il 2 giugno del 1946 le donne votarono per il Referendum istituzionale e per le elezioni della Assemblea costituente ma già nelle elezioni amministrative precedenti avevano votato risultando in numero discreto elette nei consigli comunali” (Camera dei Deputati 2021^b).

be extremely useful not only for political purposes but also for economic and social reasons – as well as those which, as we shall see, are inherent in the value generated for the company and the whole category of stakeholders.

1.1.4 Gender identity and gender equality

The concepts of gender identity and gender equality are relatively more recent.

With the end of the Second World War, humanity – exhausted and destroyed by barbarism – began to seek the “freedom” of which it was deprived for a long time (Reich 2020). This freedom was expressed on all fronts, including sexuality. The “hot years” of the sexual revolution are undoubtedly the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s of the twentieth century. During this period, the foundations were laid for a more complete emancipation of women but also of homosexuals and transgender people (Perrucchetti and Marletta 2020).

These bases have created a phenomenon of pluralization of sexuality (Donati 2018) through a normalization of the continuous change and variation of sexual thought. And if there are signs of change today, the origin of this development began in the period between 1960 and 1980. More specifically, the awareness of gender ideology was born with the study of a psychiatrist and paediatrician, John Money in 1968. With the analyses of Money (1968) and Money and Primrose (1968), there is a new path towards sexual identification: the individual categorization of one’s sexuality and place in society or the so-called gender identity (Verrastro 2011; Gelli 2009):

“Sexuality, in its “act of being” (that is, energy), is a relationship, and precisely by virtue of its intrinsic relationality, it is not static (it is not morphostatic), but it is dynamic and morphogenetic, that is, it can progress or regress over time. The being who is in social phenomena, precisely because it relates to them, admits its own transformation. This is a challenge to the sexual identity of the human person who, in order to continue to exist as *idem* and *ipse*, must meet one condition: that the relationality intrinsic to one’s own nature is respected, otherwise it passes on to other-of-itself. The being of the relationship which confers identity and its becoming are inseparable: the becoming of the relationship is necessarily linked to its being, just as, in parallel, the *idem* and *ipse* of personal identity are linked to each other” (Donati 2018: 32).¹⁶

¹⁶ Original version: “La sessualità, nel suo “atto di essere” (ovvero energie), è relazione, e proprio in forza di questa sua intrinseca relazionalità, non è statica (non è morfostatica), ma è dinamica e morfogenetica, ossia può progredire o regredire nel tempo. L’essere che è nei fenomeni sociali, proprio perché relazionale, ammette la propria trasformazione. Ciò costituisce una sfida alla identità sessuale della persona umana che, per continuare ad

In this sense, by this doctrine, it is acknowledged and accepted that sexuality is proper to each individual and developed over time just as the individual is shaped over time.

The realization of this truth would have led to a greater consideration of gender and sexuality in general, not only in individual countries but also in global organisations which have defined precise criteria to protect their rights.

Therefore, it is quite legitimate to ask the question: Has the matter been resolved? Or rather, what progress has been made about this?

Given the enormous scope of the issue, it is appropriate to start with the approach of international organisations which have in turn identified the standards in the individual acceding countries.

As far as international legislation is concerned, it is clear that several measures have been taken. In 2014, UNICEF supported “genderism” with an official document that served as a compendium of gender ideology in general and aimed to disseminate clear and correct information on gender identity (UNICEF 2014).

The OECD is also committed to this. Starting in 2010, it began a real mission for the pursuit of gender equality. The first data dealt with the study of gender equality in terms of criticalities and obstacles to equal opportunities identified at the school level as well as at the work and business levels.

Subsequently, on 4 October 2017, the OECD published the report “The Pursuit of Gender Equality: an uphill battle” which focused on the theme of gender equality and touched on other fundamental issues such as:

1. *father parental leave* for new fathers. This was aimed at overcoming the stereotype of exclusive leave for mothers and encouraging greater participation of men in the first months of their children;
2. *pay equality initiatives*: the problem of the wage gap persists and significant data were collected by the OECD as early as 2017;
3. development projects to raise awareness among the general public and businesses about sexual violence and abuse against women. One of these, the VAW (Violence Against Women), was a manifesto against gender inequity in modern society;
4. quotas and targets seeking to engage women in leadership roles at the political level and in the private sector (OECD 2017).

esistere come idem e ipse, deve vedere soddisfatta una condizione: che sia rispettata la relazionalità intrinseca alla propria natura, altrimenti passa ad altro-da-sé. L’essere della relazione che conferisce l’identità e il suo divenire non sono disgiungibili: il divenire della relazione è necessariamente legato al suo essere, così come, in parallelo, l’idem e l’ipse dell’identità per-sonale sono connessi fra loro” (Donati 2018: 32).

The report focused on the results obtained from the surveys of Member States over the previous five years and outlined the pros and cons.

This is a long and detailed analysis that would have touched on the “painful keys” of gender equality in OECD countries and the world, referring to the wage gap between men and women and the stereotypes still alive today, the points of development of gender equality trying to designate goals to be achieved before 2030, through challenges and implementations. The focus was then on the development of corporate governance through greater gender awareness, and appropriate gender budgeting systems together with gender mainstream strategies; again, they arrived at the socio-demographic study of gender and the role of equal opportunities and the serious problem of violence against women with new policies and priorities for the Member States.

The OECD report also mentions women and STEM issues, a subject that is making a huge headline today. In addition, specific support is needed to encourage the study and employment of women in technical, scientific, and mathematical subjects through the introduction of flexible working arrangements: all the policies and instruments introduced by various states are proving effective and identify the direction to be taken, although they are not yet fully comprehensive as implementation and developments in this field are still too slow. Given the breadth of the issues addressed, it is clear that gender gaps persist in all aspects of the socio-economic life of the Member States and, in some cases, the size of the gap appears to have been narrowed by little or no means.

More recently, the European Union has also developed several projects. Specific funds have been allocated by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020 through which it has sought to identify different instruments to support countries and authorities in managing and suppressing hate crime incidents:

“in 2019, several EU projects funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020 developed multilingual tools and guidance for policymakers at national, regional and local levels to address hate crime. These include:

- Proximity policing against racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance (Proximity)
- Spanish Observatory for Racism and Xenophobia (Oberaxe), Ministry of Employment and Social Security, with partners in Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom:

* local action plan: addressed to local authorities and proximity police for tackling racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance

- * comparative report on best practices
- * practical tool kit for proximity policing
 - Preventing racism and intolerance
 - Justice Ministry of France, Inter ministerial delegation to the fight against racism, antisemitism, and LGBT hate in France, with partners in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom
 - Good practice guidance for better implementation of criminal provisions to combat racism. For more information, see the Directorate of Criminal Affairs and Pardons (2019), Preventing racism and intolerance:
 - Handbook of practices to better fight against racism and intolerance.
 - Network of Cooperation against Hate (New Chapter)
 - Denmark, Greece, Italy, and the United Kingdom
- * A manual of good practices against hate, with a focus on youth
- * New chapter platform, listing tools to combat hate speech
 - Facing all the facts, with partners in Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom
- * European report – Connecting on hate crime: Recording and data collection – Emerging themes
- * national reports
- * bias indicator courses” (European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights 2020: 69).

As shown in the text, it is a document that contains several good practices and tools to combat racial hatred and xenophobia, misogyny, and homotransphobia; but it is also a tool for the protection of minors and disabilities.

However, the report published in 2020 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights specifies that in 2019, more than 72% of the European population was not even aware of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

One of the key parts of this charter, as a particularly critical issue, is the focus on the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020), especially when it comes to treatment at the working level:

“In 2015, the European Commission presented a list of actions by the Commission to advance LGBTI equality. It addressed policy areas such as non-discrimination, education, employment, health, free movement, asylum, hate speech and hate crime. The second wave of FRA’s EU LGBTI Survey shows that, four years later, LGBTI people continue to experience discrimination. For example, 21 % of survey respondents felt discriminated against at work in the previous year because of being LGBTI, and 37 % felt discriminated against in other areas of life. These rates are highest for trans (59 %) and intersex (55 %) respondents. Meanwhile, in the year before the survey, 38 % of LGBTI respondents experienced harassment. Rates are higher (47 %) for respondents aged 15-17. Trans (48 %) and intersex respondents (42 %) indicate the highest rates. In the EU, 45 % of young respondents (aged 15-17) felt discriminated against at school. Data are publicly available online through a dedicated data explorer tool. The results show significant differences between Member States. As the European Commission’s list of actions covered 2016–2019, several Member States and EU institutions expressed a need to develop a follow up document. In December 2018, a group of 19 Member States presented a joint non-paper on the future of the list of actions. In February 2019, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to adopt a new strategic document to foster equality for LGBTI people. In September, the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission organised a high-level conference on ‘Advancing LGBTI equality in the EU: From 2020 and beyond’. It assessed past actions, re-evaluated the situation of LGBTI people in today’s EU, identified ongoing and new challenges and discussed how to tackle them. On 18 December, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on public discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI people. The resolution takes stock of the current worrying trends throughout the EU. These include “attacks on LGBTI social centres in several Member States, homophobic statements and hate speech targeting LGBTI people, in particular in the context of elections; or legal instruments which might be applied to restrict media, education and other content in a manner that unduly restricts freedom of expression regarding LGBTI issues”. It also denounces the so-called LGBTI free zones in Poland. These result from resolutions passed since the beginning of 2019 in over 80 regions, counties or municipalities, declaring them free from LGBT ideology” (European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights 2020: 45).

Several testimonies from people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community then provided input to ascertain the employment situation in different countries of origin regarding their gender identity.

According to reports, since 2019, many EU Member States have made progress on the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, such as Belgium, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden. In these countries, in particular, rights have been acquired by same-sex couples, especially concerning family life and discrimination and these laws have been extended to cover gender identity or sexual characteristics.

At the same time, countries such as Poland, Latvia, and Romania have taken steps backwards concerning the right to non-discrimination; in particular, for the latter, the government has rejected laws in favour of the recognition of civil unions.

Other Member States have broadened the scope of anti-discrimination laws to ensure greater protection for transgender and intersex people. The Dutch Senate has approved a bill amending General Equal (the law to protect transgender and intersex people from discrimination). Therefore, designations such as “gender characteristics”, “gender identity” and “gender expression” fall within the definitions of gender discrimination. According to the Fundamental Rights Report (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020), Greece has passed a new law promoting gender equality (Law 4604/2019) and opposing gender-based violence and gender identity. This law is based on a mechanism at the national level that protects gender equity and discourages discrimination based on sexual orientation. In Spain too, a new law on equality for people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community has been passed. This law – which first came into force in Valencia – would have among its priorities and objectives the promotion of the visibility of transsexual or intersex persons.

Many EU member states have finally implemented major legislative changes on the issue of the rights of married parents through civil unions and transsexual parents. Finland and Sweden have extended the law by introducing the postille on the same-sex partner who, if adopted, will no longer have to go through the same process to be officially the second parent of the child. In addition, Finland has also amended the Maternity Act to allow both partners to be recognised as mothers at the time of the birth of the child (in contrast to the previous reform where parents would still have to adopt the child to receive the legal status of the parent). In Sweden, as the result of an amendment to the Code on Parental Rights, parents in same-sex couples now have the same rights as heterosexual parents, more particularly as regards assisted fertility abroad. In addition, since January, the Parents’ Code establishes that transsexual persons or persons who have changed their sex have the legal right to request a parental designation (of mother or father) corresponding to their legal identity.

In 2019, Northern Ireland – in line with the United Kingdom – also legalised same-sex marriage and opposite-sex civil partnership. The regulations entered into force at the beginning of 2020.

The period between 2019 and 2020 has also brought with it some developments concerning the recognition of same-sex marriages abroad or in one of the Member States which has not recognised the union. Bulgaria has issued a decision on the recognition of same-sex marriages in another Member State which facilitates the free movement of couples. Bulgaria was one of the first Member States to make explicit the decision to recognise the legal effect of same-sex marriage. The Supreme Court of Estonia has introduced a new section of the law dedicated to foreign nationals: the original law forbade the granting of temporary residence permits to persons of the same sex, even if partners of Estonian nationals. The Court has identified this right as an integral part of the fundamental family law which, to date, also applies to same-sex partners wishing to live in Estonia. The Lithuanian Constitutional Court stated that the Constitution protects sexual orientation, gender identity, and family relations of the same sex: this decision lays the groundwork for the recognition of the rights of same-sex couples in the field of migration and explicitly adds the basis of sexual orientation as an integral part of the constitutional equality clause.

In some Member States, such as the Czech Republic, a change of sexual identity is not recognised unless a definitive change of biological sex has been carried out. This is because, as stated by the Court of the Czech Court of Justice, most Czech society perceives gender as a binary and biologically determined factor, which leaves no room for the self-determination of gender by an individual.

On the contrary, Spain's Constitutional Court has removed the legal restriction on gender self-determination (which required the attainment of at least the age of majority to request a change in the registration of sex on one's ID card) calling it unconstitutional. The Court also declared unconstitutional the legal restriction prohibiting the modification of the self-determination of sex for children because, not yet having an intellectual and "legal" maturity, they are considered to be in a stable situation of transsexuality.

Until 2017 (before the introduction of Articles 8 and 9 of the Constitution), Belgium addressed criticism of the controversial restrictions on blood donation by homosexual or bisexual men: Belgian law provides for a maximum of 12 months to elapse from the last sexual intercourse with another man before blood can be donated.

This practice did not apply to the rest of the Belgian population, however, despite the constitutional improvements in 2017, blood collected from homosexuals and bisexuals was put into "quarantine" to ensure transfusion safety. The justification for this was that such a practice might

somehow reduce pathogens in the blood. It was therefore objective and legitimate. This proved to be an unsuccessful attempt, which the Belgian legislature later noted.

In June 2019, Poland suffered an abrupt termination of the Law on Protection of Access to Goods and Services for the Polish LGBTQIA+ community.

The repeal of Article 138, which prohibited the unjustified refusal to provide publicly available services to any individual, according to the Constitutional Court, violated the principle of the rule of law by interfering with the principle of freedom of thought and freedom of religion respectively.

Moreover, in 2019, some mayors in some Polish cities such as Lublin and Nowy Sącz banned demonstrations in favour of equality, such as Gay Pride. They justified the ban as a form of prevention of violence and disruption of public order (but it was quickly declared unjustified by the Court of Appeal). In 2019, some Member States introduced or amended the different Action Plans to address the rights and related aspects of people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, Lithuania has amended its statute to promote good practices for non-discrimination in the period 2017-2019. These action measures include training to promote non-discrimination, tolerance, equality, and access for all to publicly available services.

The initiative applies to different groups of people such as young people, people working in the integration of foreigners in Lithuania, police officers assigned to hate crimes against LGBTQIA+ people, and also social workers and public justice officers who have to deal with hate crimes properly. Finally, Portugal established a health strategy for LGBTQIA+ people in 2019 through an administrative decree containing measures for non-discrimination against trans people, young people, and intersex children. This decree covers schools at all levels of education and requires schools to ensure that children and young people can exercise their rights to self-determination and gender expression and protect their sexual characteristics.

Therefore, 2019 has brought with it several changes in the conception of rights protecting gender equality and identity in almost all EU countries, and it is envisaged that these protections will be uniform in the future. What about Italy?

In 2016, Italy also took a step towards the acceptance of gender identity with the Cirinnà Law (No. 76, 20 May 2016) which would have guaranteed and regulated civil unions between persons of the same sex. With the Cirinnà Law, important changes have been observed in favour of equal opportunities and gender representation, both at the regulatory level and also in the world of work and entertainment (Pasqualotto 2016).

To date, concerning measures against homotransphobia, D.D.L. Zan, presented on May 2, 2018, and approved in the Chamber of Deputies on

December 4, 2020, proposes to amend articles 604-bis and 604-ter of the Criminal Code, on violence or discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity (Camera dei Deputati 2020). The law would be able to guarantee justice regarding gender violence and injustices, disability, ethnicity, and gender identity (Ippoliti, 2021); in fact, this law provides for sentences of up to four years in prison or socially useful work carried out by associations for the protection of victims, to discourage hate crimes.

Finally,

“The law also foresees funding of EUR 4 million for the Council Presidency’s Equal Opportunities Fund, to finance policies to prevent and combat violence on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity and to support victims” (Santi 2021: 1).¹⁷

However, on October 27, 2021, the D.D.L. Zan was defeated by the Senate.

Thus, Italy still needs rapid measures against homotransphobia (Vari 2020), misogyny (Manne 2018), and ableism (Medeghini 2013), also because comparing the results with the other OECD countries, the data collected do not allow the “Bel Paese” to be counted among the most virtuous in this regard.

If since the Golfo-Mosca Law of 2011¹⁸ the number of women at the top of listed companies has increased significantly, one of the negative aspects being the gender gap.

The female employment rate in Italy continues to record very low values (around 18% lower than that of men) (War 2020; OECD 2017). The main cause is the lack of childcare, especially daycare for children aged 0-2 years. Only a quarter of children are formally placed in such facilities. Moreover, women are still hindered from the responsibilities arising from the management and care of the home as well as families. Statistics show that (in 2016 alone) 78% of women resigned as mothers unable to reconcile work with caring for the home and children (OECD 2017). In addition, women on maternity leave are less likely to return to work than fathers after parental leave. This means that gender stereotypes in Italy are still too deeply rooted at

¹⁷ Original version: “Nella legge è previsto anche un finanziamento di 4 milioni per il Fondo pari opportunità della Presidenza del Consiglio, per finanziare politiche per la prevenzione e il contrasto della violenza per motivi legati all’orientamento sessuale e all’identità di genere e per il sostegno delle vittime” (Santi 2021: 1).

¹⁸ This law imposed listed companies to reserve at least one third of the seats for governing bodies for the underrepresented gender.

the cultural level and inequality extends to various aspects of economic and social life.

On the other hand, to the considerable appreciation of the OECD, Italy has a very small gender budget gap (compared to other member countries), but only because most working women are usually better educated and therefore have higher pay potential than unemployed women.

Further considerations come from the study of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. According to surveys, Italy is one of the European countries with the highest rate of discrimination (Foderi 2020; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020), which is also affected by the lack of a law regulating hate crimes, which is also present in other well-developed countries of the European Union (see France, Germany, and Spain).

1.2 Psychosocial premises of the study on gender diversity

Although this work is focused on management and business administration, gender issues cannot be dissociated from fundamental concepts related to psychology in the social sphere.

In this regard, in addition to the aspects which, as we shall see, focus on operational principles of an economic and managerial nature in the field of value creation and human resources management in the company, psychosocial considerations must certainly be included which, although they are an expression of their specific nature, are inevitably linked to other economic and legal spheres in a context of sustainable development.

From a psychological point of view, gender issues refer to elements that characterise the evolutionary stages of man: development, change, complexity as well as problems (Di Vita and Miano 2012).

Over the years, the concept of gender has evolved and many approaches have been undertaken. Psychological studies in the field of gender differences have attempted to understand the presence of gaps in cognitive abilities and interpersonal competencies, deepening the biological basis (Solms 2018) through genetic and neurophysiological studies, as opposed to the cultural explanations supported by sociological approaches (Di Nuovo 2004).

The studies have moved from the analysis of gender identity to concepts more specifically related to the psychodynamics of gender differences.

These analyses highlighted the importance of gender-related “dynamicity”.

Since the definition of gender and its approach are changing and complex, the elements of discomfort and difference are taken as connotations of the complexities of interpersonal relationships (Di Vita and Miano 2012).

Originally, the study on gender diversity, at least in the country of Italy, highlighted an approach linked to the elements of discomfort linked to the relationships between men and women.

This context arose from an original gender-based social model.

The starting point for the critical analysis of the social division of labour between women and men in modern society, namely the assignment to the two genders of differentiated roles in the spheres of production, reproduction, and politics, both in the public and private spheres, was precisely this social model, rather than the principle of biological difference of sex (Baratta 2012). In fact, it is not so much gender as the “qualities” that are attributed to gender itself (Smaus 1995).

If this is considered, it becomes easy to understand how it has been possible to build male authority around an “ideological” and not a “biological” criterion, while keeping the role of women subordinate in the economic and social context.

These findings have thus revealed an important fact, namely that the differences between men and women should be reduced by increasing common and gender-neutral training and work experiences, but above all, that differences should be “valued” and used to support the optimal realisation of individual potentialities. In fact, if people are aware and satisfied with their difference, they can build individually – and even more so in groups – a reality based on the integration of diversity.

The critical issue, however, is precisely how to make people proud of their diversity.

Recognition is the tool identified for solving the needs arising from it in people who are discriminated against. Studies have highlighted the importance for every human being to be “socially recognised” as such (O’Brien 2011). This is an issue that certainly plays a central role in establishing civil and democratic coexistence between people. In fact, regardless of race, sex, culture, or religion, every human being rightly feels the need to be recognised as such and to be given dignity. Dignity becomes a pivotal element in the formation of one’s own identity (Possenti 2008; Argiroffi et al 2007). Important studies have been carried out in this area: see those on the impact of negative observations on other subjects (James 1890), the studies of Looking Glass Theory and the importance each man gives to the opinions of others (O’Brien 2011; Cooley 1902), those on the social nature of the Self (Mead 1934) and those on the importance for each person of feeling positively considered by others (Gergen and Wishnov 1965). As Taylor (1992) reported, the identity of each of us is shaped, if only partially, by the recognition of other people. Therefore, it follows that if a person is accepted and recognized, he will be stimulated, whereas, on the contrary, if rejected and disregarded, it will be like suffering real harm or real humiliation for the individual. So then, misrecognition

becomes a painful wound, while recognition becomes a true and proper vital human need (Taylor 1992).

As illuminating as these studies have been, given the still very high level of discrimination in the world, it must be acknowledged that the issue of individual recognition, as well as recognition of other cultures, is more complex than it seems.

The reason for this is that it is not always easy to combine customs and traditions from very different cultures, although they are the source of values that underpin the identity of those who expect recognition.

The negative evidence of the gender factor as a threat to development was more clearly delineated when it became the subject of research, especially with the assertion of gender studies (United Nations 2015; United Nations 2019).

“Society influences and conditions rules, customs and traditions, determines what is right and what is wrong, what is normal and what is abnormal, “problematizing” the experience of the person concerned to the extreme. In this psycho-social perspective, therefore, the problem is still present today in all its preponderance since the conviction remains alive that it is the different who ruin the image of cities, the decorum of nations, who make cities, families and institutions insecure” (Marcasciano 2013: 81).¹⁹

This is why, in such analytical complexity, it is necessary to bring out similar problems and try to address them concretely.

Since integration also concerns a principle of coexistence properly so-called, “positive reciprocity” (Licciardello 2016; Becker 1956) takes on really important connotations. The need to work together, then collaborate, in order to achieve a social coexistence characterized by positive reciprocity, is strategic in order to create optimal cultural conditions, especially of a psycho-socio-relational nature.

In this way, the cohabitation condition would not be the result of discrimination, but a choice freely made on the basis of personal preferences. By using the economic factor as a means of positive reciprocity, we would then be able to transform forced coexistence into a desired coexistence and we

¹⁹ Original version: “La società influenza e condiziona le regole, gli usi e i costumi, stabilisce cosa è giusto e cosa è sbagliato, cosa è normale e cosa è anormale, “problematizzando” fino alle estreme conseguenze l’esperienza stessa della persona in causa. In questa prospettiva psico-sociale, quindi, la problematicità si propone ancora oggi in tutta la sua preponderanza visto che resta viva la convinzione che siano i diversi a rovinare l’immagine delle città, il decoro delle nazioni, a rendere insicure le città, le famiglie e le istituzioni” (Marcasciano 2013: 81).

would still be able to transform the working environment – which has been discriminated against for centuries – into an element of cohesion. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to act on the most important of the available levers: value.

Value, from its many perspectives, can become a fundamental element of union between diversity and companies and could be the place where this extraordinary revolution can take place.

1.3 Historical and economic considerations on the issue of diversity

1.3.1 Diversity and power relations in ancient Rome

The above considerations are only a few of the many psychosocial approaches that have been addressed to the theme of inequality and disparity.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, since this work aims to focus on corporate prospects, the authors find it interesting to point out the potential connections between the many approaches to the subject, thus demonstrating an important interdisciplinary nature. History, and particularly economic history, teaches us that all too often the psychological – and even more so the social – side is nothing more than facets of strictly economic connotations.

How can you not admire what is majestic, rich, and successful?

Power, pomp, and assertion generate admiration and not marginalization.

Generally, those who belong to a modest cultural and socio-economic class try to approach individuals or things that are manifested in all their grandeur in the hope that they may benefit even remotely from such magnificence. This perspective is clearly demonstrated by the historical example of migratory waves over the millennia.

Referring to those who in antiquity were attracted by the splendor of Rome and wanted to be part of it, Seneca recites the following in his work *Consolatio ad Helviam matrem*:

“Take a look at all this large crowd that the houses of this immense city are barely enough for: most of these people are far from their homeland. They converged here from their municipalities, their colonies, from all over the world. Some were driven here by ambition, others by the need for public office, others by the task of an embassy, others by the search for a place suited to their lust and full of vices, others the desire for liberal studies, others in order to attend the shows, some were still attracted by friendship, others by the search for more possibilities to express their talent; someone came to sell their beauty, someone else their eloquence. (3) There is no human race that has not come to this city that pays dearly for virtues as well as vices. Call them

all by name and ask them what country they are from: you will see that most of them are all people who have left their native land and have come to this huge and beautiful city that, in any case, is not theirs” (Seneca 42)²⁰.

In this excerpt, Seneca gives an account of the fact that in imperial Rome the magnificence of the city was such that every part of the civilized world of the time considered the metropolis as a destination to be reached and of which to be a part.

Of course, however significant, this episode is certainly not the only one to provide important information about the migrations in ancient Rome and the motivations or consequences of these waves. The grandeur of Rome was determined not only by the logic of power of military strategies (Kagan 2006) and by the engineering capabilities (Spawforth 2018; Van Middelaar and Waters 2013) but also from the ethnic diversity that came to be created over time and that made up the various social classes. Before the period in which the Latin philosopher’s reflection is contextualized, in fact, the ferocity of the Punic Wars increased the number of slaves diverted to Rome, which contributed significantly to the formation of foreign nuclei in the city (Sanfilippo 2011). By joining the merchant and artisan class, the influx of slaves and immigrants transformed the city, losing its original features and greatly increasing the number of inhabitants (Scheidel 2005). These induced flows were followed by waves of new professional figures and social climbers who saw the eternal city as a place for their economic and social realization (Farney 2007).

According to Sanfilippo (2011), although initially the authorities tried to shape and control the migratory waves, the centralized power of Rome had become irresistible (Morley 1996) as it expressed the largest economic and political center of the entire peninsula (Erdkamp 2008). As seen just before, this explains what Seneca reported to us in the *Consolatio ad Helviam matrem*.

²⁰ Original version: “Aspice aegedum hanc frequentiam, cui vix urbis immensae tecta suffiunt; maxima pars istius turbae patria caret. Ex municipiis et coloniis suis, ex toto denique orbe terrarum confluerunt. Alios adduxit ambitio, alios necessitas officii publici, alios imposita legatio, alios luxuria opportunum et opulentum vitiis locum quaerens, alios liberalium studiorum cupiditas, alios spectacula; quosdam traxit amicitia, quosdam industria laxam ostendendae virtuti nanta materiam; quidam venalem formam attulerunt, quidam venalem eloquentiam— [3] nullum non hominum genus concurrit in urbem et virtutibus et vitiis magna pretia ponentem. lube istos omnes ad nomen citari et “unde domo” quisque sit quaere. Videbis maiorem partem esse, quae relictis sedibus suis venerit in maximam quidem ac pulcherrimam urbem, non tamen suam” (Seneca 42).

However, this coexistence of ethnic groups, customs, and traditions was not a harbinger of particular anti-racial manifestations except when “differences” – particularly religious ones – tried to creep into the chambers of power. This can be explained by the fact that according to the Roman mentality, the way religion was viewed on a personal level was absolutely irrelevant. Each individual’s faith was never questioned by authority except when it became a social issue (Brown 1961).

In this regard, it is worth remembering that the Jewish community in Rome was the oldest in Europe, with evidence of its presence as early as the second century B.C..

With the rebellion of the Jews against the Seleucid yoke (which took place between 168 and 141 BC), an embassy from Israel was sent to Rome to solicit a pact of friendship and protection, which was granted by the Romans. This was the first episode of Roman opening to an Eastern population. This would then be followed by the first Jewish inclusion in the Mediterranean area, with small stable settlements in the city presumably constituted by merchants. This community grew, both because of the interest the Jewish populations had for the city and because of the subsequent deportations due to Pompey’s conquests in Asia with the Mithridatic Wars.

However, the motives behind the first capture of Jerusalem and the related destruction of the temple by Pompey and the subsequent capture of the city with consequent diaspora under Titus were not the result of primitive religious intolerance, but rather the expression of the economic need to control that territory (Sanfilippo 2011) and the nucleus connected to it.

To make clear how emancipated and not vexed the Jewish community was at that time, there is an interesting quotation from the famous orator and politician Marco Tullio Cicero who, during his summation titled *Pro Flacco*²¹, turned to the jurors in a low voice (*submissa voce*) so as not to be heard by the Jewish audience assembled in the court to follow the trial.

The subject of the lawsuit was an edict of Flacco, which forbade the export of gold outside Rome and for which the Roman politician was accused of anti-Semitism and religious interference.

The prohibition not only referred to previously issued regulations²² but aimed to protect an economic and financial condition largely undermined by

²¹ Happened in 59 BC. in defence of Lucio Valerio Flacco. The Roman politician Flacco was accused by D. Lelio, friend of Pompey according to the *Lex Cornelia de repetundis* concerning the government of the province of Asia. Flacco, defended by Cicero and Q. Ortensio Ortalo, was acquitted.

²² Already during the consulate of Cicero it was established in fact that: “exporters aurum not oportere iudicavit”.

the mitridatic wars. Moreover, the constant revenue from Rome to Jerusalem was a loss of revenue for the Urbe's treasury (Marshall 1975).

In fact, the practice of exporting gold was carried out by the Jewish community with the aim of contributing to the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem destroyed during one of the final stages of the Third East War.

According to the defense, the protracted gold export operations by the Jewish community, even in the presence of the edict, led Flacco to seize the illegal shipments.

Cicero was able to demonstrate that the entire value of the seized cargo had been paid to the aerarium and, therefore, there was no intention to discriminate against the Jewish community.

To this day, it is not known with certainty whether the Jewish community extended the shipment of gold by virtue of specific concessions or whether it was unaware of the Roman regulations then in force. It is true, however, that the arguments put forward by the famous orator were worth his client's acquittal and that some authors today refer to economic motives as the basis of what at the time was a real scandal of a discriminatory nature. At that time the Jewish community was in fact free to carry out its activities, although subject to the payment of the tributum to Rome and to the specific laws enacted; moreover, this compelling episode shows how the Jewish minority was also able to assert its rights through lively participation in the political, economic and legal life of ancient Rome.

Further evidence of this, Cohen (2018) argues that Jewish communities in ancient Rome were rarely mentioned in pagan writings, contrary to the literary custom of ridiculing ethnic minorities with satirical compositions. If it is therefore acceptable what has been reported so far, it is also reasonable to say that the difficulties for the Christian community arose when it settled firmly in Rome from the social and political point of view (Marcone 1993). In fact, it emerged from a side of the original Jewish community and it is evidently acknowledged that in ancient Rome there was a concrete form of religious syncretism (Croy 2014).

But ancient Rome was not the only example of how a new and powerful social and economic nucleus was born out of the racial multitude, and that racial persecution and gender discrimination were more than anything else a pretext for concealing economic reasons.

1.3.2 Money and Ghetto: how discrimination on the grounds of economic interests and popular scepticism "evolves"

Although later, further examples can be found in the practice of lending money at interest which has consolidated many prejudices (which are still very much alive today) due to the relationship between money and the Jewish communities; while other fundamental perspectives can be found in the

religious rivalry between Christians and Jews during the dark periods of the Middle Ages characterized by the creation of the so-called “ghettos”.

As we shall see, these two aspects were closely intertwined, creating an almost indissoluble link, until – again for economic reasons – it was deemed appropriate to accept the change.

We have seen how already during the golden periods of ancient Rome the Jewish merchants were an important reality. However, it was during the dark years of the Middle Ages that Jewish communities intensified their presence in the West and had unstable relations with the indigenous peoples of Europe. Jewish communities increased the number of stable units in Europe as early as the 9th-10th century. These were mainly made up of merchants able to provide a kind of connection between the Christians of Western Europe and the Arabs who, at the end of the High Middle Ages, occupied North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula (Adamczyk 2013).

During this period, Jewish communities were established in many areas of the Western Mediterranean, mainly in Spain, southern France, and southern Italy (Esposito 1995).

Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there is evidence of Jewish integration into the social fabric of central-northern Italy, the rest of France, and Germany, although mainly in the economically and socially active areas.

Later, however, between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries in the various regions of Europe the location of the Jewish communities underwent different changes (Baron 1971). In England, France, and the Germanic territories this historical period marked a clear reduction in the Jewish communities due to the substantial expulsions carried out.

On the contrary, in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland, and Hungary the communities remained substantial (Baron 1971) although, as we shall see later, there will be episodes of expulsion and discrimination in targeted areas of Italy.

These differences were due to many aspects. The profoundly negative view that the Christian people had of the Jewish communities certainly played a key role. The hostility was mainly related to religious diversity, heavily influenced by the ideas spread by the Church.

Limited and stereotyped views increased social uncertainty, especially when Europe was shaken by famines and the Black Death during the 14th century (Barbiera et al 2016; Foa 2004).

Religious differences, cultural differences, and the ability of the Jewish community in economic and financial spheres – considered impure by the Church – contributed to the climate of mistrust among the peoples of Europe, to the point that it led to real acts of anti-Jewish violence.

In fact, the Jews were held responsible for bringing divine punishment upon Christendom – because they denied Christ – and, therefore, it was easy

to attribute to them the cause and origin of the Black Plague. Thus, the diversity of religious worship made the Jews excellent scapegoats upon whom the people, distraught and stricken by daily difficulties, could vent their anger and suffering.

However, even more for the purposes of our investigation, another motive is key to understanding these historical facts, namely the economic nature of Christian-Jewish relations. For centuries, Jewish communities received inclusion treatment from feudal monarchs as being beneficial to the economy. A Charter by Frederick Barbarossa dated 1157 clearly testifies that the Jews were put under imperial protection since “ad cameram nostram attineant”²³. In 1236, according to a later definition of Frederick II, the Jews were referred to as “servi nostrae camerae”²⁴.

Around the middle of the thirteenth century, Jews formed a substantial and influential nucleus even in Rome, obtaining the protection of the Pope (Esposito 1995).

Indeed, as reported by Luzzati and Veronese (2016):

“In general, Italian Judaism was not yet specialized in lending activities, so much so that, to give just two examples, Dante does not identify Jews as usurers, and the great preacher Fra Giordano da Rivalto never involves Jews in his attacks against usury. In Italy, the appeal to Jews to take care of financial activities came from the Papacy which, within the framework of the political, administrative and economic reorganization of the territories subject to the Church, gradually induced the Roman Jews, collectors of money made available also by Christians, to settle in various localities, starting from about the last decades of the 13th century” (p. 151).²⁵

²³ Translation: Be attached to our chamber (see Schmitt 2003: 71).

²⁴ Translation: Servants of our chamber (see Schmitt 2003: 71).

²⁵ Original version: “In genere l’ebraismo italiano non era ancora specializzato nelle attività di prestito, tanto che, per fare due soli esempi, Dante non identifica gli ebrei come usurai, e il grande predicatore fra Giordano da Rivalto non coinvolge mai gli ebrei nei suoi attacchi contro l’usura. In Italia la sollecitazione agli ebrei ad occuparsi di attività finanziarie venne in realtà proprio dal Papato che, nel quadro della riorganizzazione politica, amministrativa ed economica dei territori soggetti alla Chiesa, indusse gradualmente gli ebrei romani, collettori di denaro messo a disposizione anche da cristiani, a insediarsi in diverse località, a partire, all’incirca, dagli ultimi decenni del Duecento” (Luzzati and Veronese 2016: 151).

A further urge to practice usury lending came from the fact that – for reasons of economic competition – the Jewish communities, already formerly masters of the art of exchange, were forbidden to trade.

The Lateran Council of 1215 prohibited the Jewish community from practicing the arts and crafts already practiced by Christians, thus stimulating openness to those economic roles considered uncomfortable by religious institutions (Chenaux 2016). Being able to benefit from the enormous liquidity acquired over time, the Jews used it as loan capital, without contravening the rules of the Talmud²⁶ (Foa 2004) and relieving Christians from practicing a profession considered deplorable by the Church.

With similar premises and prerogatives, the Roman Jews specialized in lending at interest extended their field of action beyond the borders of the Church States, and particularly in Tuscany (Toaff 1981).

The economic reason for encouraging the Jewish presence in the financial sphere with consequent spread throughout Italy was, therefore, primarily due to the restrictions imposed by the Church on Christians with regard to lending banks and also to the restrictions imposed on Jews with regard to trade. Initially, every type of money loan was considered equivalent to usury if it was provided for interest.

Christians found themselves in the difficult situation of not being able to practise credit activities freely. Therefore, these activities – indispensable for a society in full economic and mercantile development such as that of Europe at the turn of the 11th and 13th centuries – remained the concern of the Jewish community. An equally obvious case is the one demonstrated by the city of Venice.

In the 13th century, the Serenissima Maritime Republic manifested a prodigious mercantile and economic development. The city underwent an important period of increased investment in commerce, rising rents and investment of profits, the growth of the number and importance of maritime enterprises, the improvement of ship transport and the immigration of skilled labour, as well as the specialisation and social division of labour (Hocquet 1999). However, this incessant process required the use of capital but also of maritime insurance.

With reference to this last financial practice, Stryck (1988) has had the opportunity to demonstrate how only in the 14th and 15th centuries Venice became a real Master greatly expanding its use.

²⁶ In fact, Deuteronomy 23:20 reads as follows: “to a foreigner you may lend on interest; but to your brother you shall not lend on interest” (World English Bible translation).

Thus, in the centuries just before, maritime insurance was among the practices forbidden by the Church and only a few “authorized” could practice it on explicit recommendation²⁷.

In such a context, being considered *deicides* (Foa 2004), Jews were thus *de facto* included among those authorized to carry out financial practices. Under the precept of the religious orders, the Jewish community had “denied” the Christian God in public opinion and thus proved to be perfect for carrying out those functions considered taboo for the rest of the Christian citizens but nevertheless essential to sustain tumultuous economic growth. Like what happened in Rome, the origin of the Jewish presence in the Serenissima Maritime Republic is not particularly problematic. Considering the active role of the Jewish community for the purposes of commerce in the city of Venice, Giambattista Galliccioli reports a census of 1152 according to which the number of Jews living in Venice at that time was already one thousand three hundred (Galliccioli 1795). This denotes the degree of ease with which the Jewish nucleus and the native Venetian nucleus were able to coexist and interact. Moreover, as pointed out by Cecil Roth (1975), one of the leading scholars of Judaism in Venice, there were specific provisions for the Jewish community to deposit their merchandise and trade on the island of Sinalunga. Equally interesting is the edict of 1290 according to which, on all goods imported or exported, the merchants of the Jewish community were subject to a tax of 5%. This well clarifies the ideas about the importance of Jewish merchants at the time, but above all the potential distrust felt by the Venetian government bodies committed to establishing ever closer trade relations with the East. However, in the 14th century, the figure of lenders of Jewish origin emerged noticeably. In this regard, the words of the Jewish community of Venice seem interesting:

“[...] the date 1385 is particularly important. That year the Venetian Senate granted the first licence to a group of Jewish moneylenders of German origin who had been allowed to reside in the lagoon. However, the Serenissima’s decision was no unexpected turn-around: while it was true that all forms of lending at interest had been banned from the city during the previous century, the Venetian authorities had continued to allow Jewish bankers to operate on the mainland (in 1382, the city had signed an agreement with the moneylenders of Mestre, allowing them to charge interest rates of 10 to 12 percent). The licence granted in 1385 laid the basis for the formation of an

²⁷ To make clear the level of prohibitions in this sense, for example, in the 13th century in Genoa it was not possible to carry out the stable activity of insurance of maritime cargoes, however, the Medici family was authorized to insure Genoese ships.

established community – and was later followed by the concession of land on the Lido for use as a cemetery. But the situation was far from stable” (Jewish Community of Venice 2011).²⁸

In fact, the War of Chioggia – fought between 1378 and 1381 against its fierce rival (the Maritime Republic of Genoa) – had imposed very serious conditions on the Venetians: during the war, the taxes demanded had reached 107% of the taxable assets of the recorded in the cadastral survey.

The levy *de facto* depleted the cash reserves of the taxpayers and the whole city began to suffer from “magna denariorum penuria”, partly because of the difficulties that arose in the continuation of trade with the East (Mueller 2021). In response to the tax burden, many turned to loans, even though they were offered at very high rates. If at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Venice many private and *di scritta* banks (Daru 1833) aimed at the valuation of currencies and accepting deposits²⁹ were active, towards the end of the century the war created a shortage of capital by reducing the number of active banking institutions.

The State then resorted to a source of wealth external to the local economic situation and easily controlled: Jewish lenders were invited to move to the city with their families; this was an experiment that lasted for fifteen years, from 1382 to 1397.

In Venice, the situation was therefore peculiar since neither Christians nor Jews were allowed to borrow on a pledge. Previously, loans *cum pacto et convencione* (namely loans that fixed the interest rate in advance) were not allowed, whereas only loans that allowed *colleganza* and therefore provided for a rate to be applied to the market value only at the end of the loan were accepted (Mueller 2021). In 1254 the *Maggior Consiglio* of Venice voted a ban on all forms of usury but when in 1355 the interest rates far exceeded the 20% threshold this credit policy was reviewed, legalizing the loan on a

²⁸ Original version: “[...] un’importanza tutta particolare rivestì l’anno 1385, anno in cui il Senato concesse la prima condotta a un gruppo di prestatori ebrei di origine tedesca, ammessi a risiedere in laguna. Non si trattava, per la Serenissima, di una decisione improvvisa. Pur impedendo, nel secolo precedente, ogni attività feneratizia nel centro storico, Venezia consentiva già a banchieri ebrei il prestito in terraferma; nel 1382 aveva infatti stretto accordi con prestatori mestrini, ai quali era concesso richiedere interessi tra il 10 e il 12 per cento. La condotta del 1385 poneva le basi per la formazione di una colonia stabile; a questa seguì la concessione al Lido di un’area per il cimitero. La situazione non era però definita” (Jewish Community of Venice 2011).

²⁹ The city of Venice proved to be an enormous capital market (see Mueller 1997).

pledge at 10% and on a written bond at 12%. The project was not in force until February 1382 when it was finally accepted (Jewish Community of Venice 2011). The *usury* was accepted in the city even though, as seen, a maximum legal interest ceiling was set “pro evitandis maximis usuris” (Calimani 2016). In 1390 the Jews also gave money to the owners of galleys in Flanders, and some of the money was given as a pledge. However, from February 1397 the Jews were no longer allowed free access to the city, although by lending their 150-200,000 ducats they had helped to restore the economy and put an end to speculation which, as we have seen, required exorbitant rates on loans.

“Only a few years later, on the pretext of some irregularities found in the operation of a pawn shop, the Senate did not renew the policy in 1397, granting lenders limited stays in the city with periodic deadlines. The sign was also imposed on the garments: a yellow circle on the cape, then turned into a yellow cap, finally, from 1500, red” (Jewish Community of Venice 2011)³⁰.

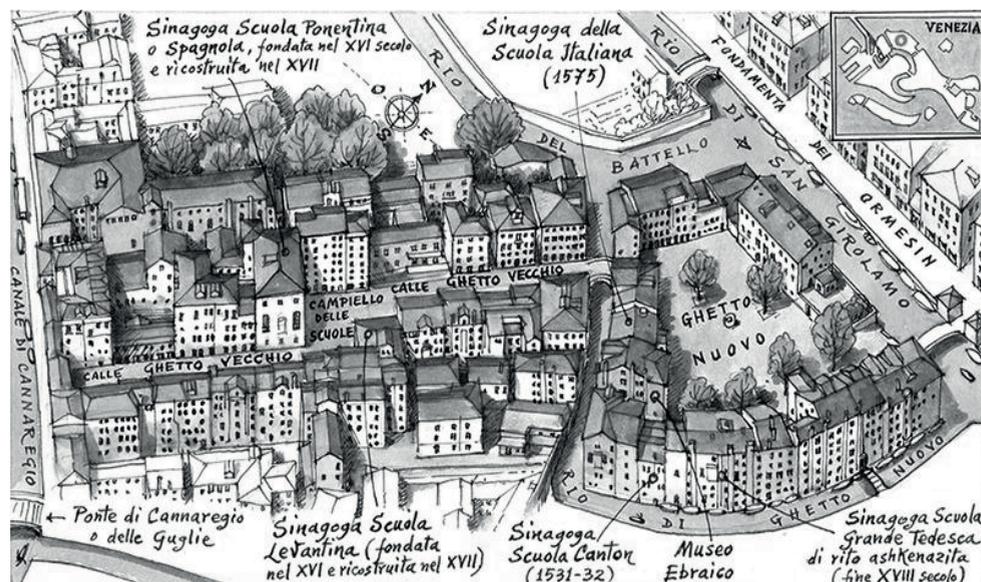
These were the forerunners of what would have been the subsequent territorial confinement that occurred in the 16th century and with which the Serenissima defined for the first time in Italy the racially motivated territorial boundaries: the ghetto (Fig. 1.3).

“All Jews must live united in the Court of Houses, who are in the Ghetto near St. Jerome; so, they cannot go all night round [...]” (Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia 1516).³¹

³⁰ Original version: “Solo pochi anni più tardi, con il pretesto di alcune irregolarità riscontrate nella gestione di un banco di pegni, il Senato non rinnovò nel 1397 la condotta, concedendo ai prestatori soggiorni limitati in città con scadenze periodiche. Fu anche imposto il segno sulle vesti: un cerchio giallo sul mantello, poi trasformato in un berretto prima giallo infine, dal 1500, rosso” (Jewish Community of Venice 2011).

³¹ Original version: “Li Giudei debbano tutti abitar unidi in la Corte de Case, che sono in Ghetto appreso San Girolamo; ed acciocché non vadino tutta la notte attorno [...]” (Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia 1516).

Figure 1.3 Venetian Ghetto



Source: Antonio Monteverdi

The reasons for this act of 1397 and the subsequent creation of the ghetto certainly call for many interpretations. However, it is logical to think (and therefore to give it a high priority) that the choice here too had economic connotations and only secondly socio-cultural connotations.

“The economic activity of the Jews aroused the greatest suspicions: forced to act to cope with the heavy taxes of the Serenissima, because of their induced dynamism they ended up being the object of mistrust and hostile reactions” (Calimani 2016).³²

The Jews were always aware of the exorbitant taxes and the constraints imposed by the Church and, therefore, of the importance of specializing in the money trade. This happened not only in Venice or Italy but in the whole of Europe (Foa 2004):

“Rabbenu Tam, one of the highest rabbinical authorities in France, could thus say that “today we have the habit of lending against interest to non-Jews [...]

³² Original version: “L’attività economica degli ebrei suscitava i maggiori sospetti: costretti ad agire per far fronte alle pesanti tasse della Serenissima, per il loro indotto dinamismo finirono per essere oggetto di diffidenza e di reazioni ostili” (Calimani 2016).

because we have to pay taxes to the king and to non-Jews, and all these things are necessary to support us. We live among the non-Jews and cannot earn a living without trading with them. It is therefore no longer forbidden to lend against interest” (Poliakov 1977:30) [...] If the Torah and its interpretation are better developed in Germany than elsewhere, it depends on the fact that here the Jews are nourished by the trade of money with the Christians and therefore do not need to work [...]” (Poliakov 1977:35).³³

It is clear that this approach, although originally conditioned by the impositions of the Church, was later very uncomfortable. Moreover, it is true that from the 15th century onwards the religious prohibitions for Christians to operate in the credit and financial sphere were less severe private.

The experiences of private banks, promoted by the Venetians (Formentin 2015) and by the Tuscan³⁴ more particularly, demonstrated that the lending system was not necessarily the prerogative of those who had rejected Christ. This imposed a new order in the money lending system. New families of bankers and merchants (Germany 2011; Goldthwaite 1985; Roover 1966; Roover 1948) prepared themselves to carry out work that in previous centuries was considered the prerogative of a few authorized persons or of the Jewish community alone. For this reason, most likely, the Jews began to be considered “inconvenient”.

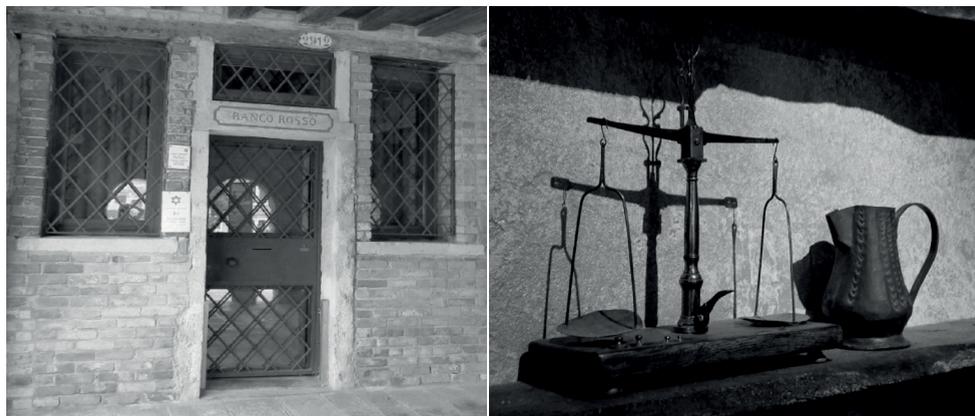
Although in Venice the activity of lending money by the Jewish community was limited by the expulsion regulations, it did not cease. For example, Girolamo Lippomano (1460-1527) was manager of a well-known exchange desk in Venice (Lane 1937) while in 1513 Anselmo del Banco received authorization from the Government of the Serenissima to lend money on interest and, as is known, gave rise to the important family of bankers Warburg (Adler 1937). Nevertheless, in the city of Venice, at the time of the establishment of the ghetto, there were at least three important exchange

³³ Original version: “Rabbenu Tam, una delle più alte autorità rabbiniche francesi, poteva così affermare che “oggi abbiamo l’abitudine di prestare contro interesse ai non ebrei [...] perché dobbiamo pagare le tasse al re e ai non ebrei, e tutte queste cose sono necessarie per sostenerci. Viviamo in mezzo ai non ebrei e non possiamo guadagnarci la vita senza commerciare con loro. Non è più quindi vietato prestare contro interesse” (Poliakov 1977:30) [...] Se la Torah e la sua interpretazione sono meglio sviluppate in Germania che altrove, dipende dal fatto che qui gli ebrei si nutrono grazie al commercio di denaro con i cristiani e che quindi non hanno necessità di lavorare [...]” (Poliakov 1977:35).

³⁴ See in this regard the reality of Medici, Bardi, Peruzzi and Acciaiuoli.

desks: the red, the green, and the black (Milan 1953) so called because of the receipts that were issued to customers (fig. 1.4).

Figure 1.4 The *Banco Rosso* is the only building that is still visitable today in Venice.



Source: Tripadvisor

Contrary to the city of Venice, which never granted permission until the late ages, the Monti di Pietà³⁵ spread in the rest of Italy which completed the new order defined by the Christian bankers (Luzzati, 1996; Angiolini 1994). The motives which led to the creation of these credit institutions were certainly opposed to those of the *montes profani*³⁶ for which the Jewish community became a point of reference in lending money (Muzzarelli, 2001).

On the contrary, it should be pointed out that the credit activity promoted by the Franciscan friars initially arose as a support for the poor who had been worn out by the long periods of famine caused by the plague, thus contrasting with the cash loans offered by the Jews (Todeschini 1996) and for which an average interest rate was expected to be very high.

³⁵ The origin of the Monti di Pietà, together with the Monti Frumentari, can be found in initiatives of a religious and social character of the Franciscans starting from the second half of the 15th century. The first Monte was established in Perugia in 1462 and the first Frumentario in Foligno in 1488.

³⁶ In this regard, we list the common Monti to which the Imprestiti di stato belonged and the Monti of private citizens to which the Mons domicellorum, Mons dotis, Mons mortuorum belonged.

However, if originally the Monti di Pietà were able to pursue their charitable purpose through donations and fundraising, in the 16th century their organization took on a much more serious connotation, charging an interest of 5% of the loans as reimbursement of administrative expenses.

On the one hand, this credit system set up by the Franciscans was able to counteract the high-interest rates applied by Jewish lenders and began to encourage a real “capital market”, although at first it was not well accepted by certain religious orders³⁷. In some cases, the introduction of the Monti di Pietà was precisely the cause of the expulsion of the Jews (Muzzarelli, 2001).

Suffice it to think that in 1480, following the expulsion of the Jews from the castle of Portobuffolè, the Senate of Venice instituted a Monte di Pietà (fig. 1.5), using the property confiscated from this Jewish community (City Council of Portobuffolè 2021: 3).

Figure 1.5 Entry of the Monte di Pietà in Portobuffolè³⁸, Veneto



Source: City Council of Portobuffolè

³⁷ Mainly due to the opposition of the Dominican Order, who returned many and lasting accusations against the functioning of the Monti di Pietà.

³⁸ The case of the expropriation of the Jews from Portobuffolè is symbolic in order to comprehend the link between expulsion and economic interest. In fact, this episode confirms to us that with the property expropriated from the Jews a Mount of Piety was created useful for always borrowing but by Christians.

After forty years the Venetian ghetto was followed by the one in Rome.

On July 12, 1555, with the bull “Cum nimis absurdum”, Pope Paul IV revoked all rights granted to the Roman Jews and ordered the establishment of the ghetto (Berger 1979).

This measure went against all those logical criteria which had defined for centuries the relationship between the Church and the Jewish community.

The Jews were confined, they must be distinguishable by the colours on their clothes, and they were not able to engage in trade other than that of rags. This coercion not to practise free trade forced the Jews to continue specializing in a practice which they were commissioned by the Pope himself in previous centuries and which gave rise to the stereotype which is still difficult to extinguish today.

1.4 Preparatory managerial and business considerations

1.4.1 The management of diversity in the company: a study of literature

Managing diversity in the company is not an easy thing, but above all, it is a potentially penalizing factor for the company if treated in the wrong way.

The approach to diversity in the company has been considered a topic of analysis for some time (Cox 1994) but only in the last decade it has become crucial in the definition of company relations, so much so that the study of the literature has been able to highlight some different application contexts.

In particular, it is possible to extrapolate aspects related to performance management, marketing, and human resources management.

In such a wide context, it is important to identify the contribution these aspects have made to the issue of inclusion in the company and how they have influenced the processes of inclusion in the company context. When it comes to performance management, a study conducted by the Harvard Business Review found that companies including diversity are not only the best but also the most productive. This was achieved by carrying out an analysis of 450 bank branches and focusing on the issue of racial diversity. This report demonstrated already in the early years of the 21st century how the inclusion of diversity, together with a safe and less stressful environment, could lead to the creation of new ideas (Lagace 2004).

The studies have also shown that using the different experiences of their employees, measurable benefits can be achieved in terms of performance:

“In fact, there is nothing undoubted about this link to performance benefits. In the empirical literature, there is very little to support the idea that if you bring a diverse group together you will necessarily get performance benefits from that group” (Lagace 2004).

More recently, a report by Mckinsey (2015) was able to demonstrate that companies ranked first for gender and ethnic-racial diversity are more likely to achieve financial results above the national average in their respective industries. In addition to the financial benefits, there are moral awards for the implementation of their policies of inclusion and Corporate Social Responsibility.

“And diversity is probably a competitive differentiator that shifts market share toward more diverse companies over time. While correlation does not equal causation (greater gender and ethnic diversity in corporate leadership doesn’t automatically translate into more profit), the correlation does indicate that when companies commit themselves to diverse leadership, they are more successful. More diverse companies, we believe, are better able to win top talent and improve their customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision making, and all that leads to a virtuous cycle of increasing returns” (Mckinsey 2015).

This was just the first of three surveys on D&I conducted by Mckinsey. In 2018, the same company proposed a report called *Delivering through Diversity*, which specified the link between diversity and the company’s financial performance and suggested how organizations could create better inclusion strategies for a greater competitive advantage. This analysis took up the issue of the link between diversity and the company’s global *overperformance*, confirming the findings of the 2015 study and expanding the data set available. The consideration of *diversity*, both gender and racial, appears to have increased in the period 2014-2017 in most of the geographical areas considered:

“There’s an opportunity for promoting diversity in senior decision-making roles, and specifically in line roles on executive teams. Although levels of diverse representation in top teams are still highly variable globally – with progress being slow overall – there are practical lessons from successful companies that have made inclusion and diversity work. Creating an effective inclusion and diversity strategy is no small effort and requires strong, sustained, and inclusive leadership” (Mckinsey 2018).

And again in 2020, Mckinsey presented a new report particularly focused on inclusion at the corporate level but always concerning financial results, titled “Diversity wins: How inclusion matters”:

“Our latest report shows not only that the business case remains robust but also that the relationship between diversity on executive teams and the likelihood of financial outperformance has strengthened over time” (Mckinsey 2020).

This recent analysis sought to gather and meet the feelings of employees in the companies interviewed and found that companies should pay much more attention to their human capital, even in an already diversified organisational context.

The 2020 report shows that the slow overall growth of diversity inclusion, which began in 2014, actually masks a kind of polarization: on the one hand, it can be seen that most of the organisations analysed have made little progress or are even regressing; while the remainder of the companies surveyed receives significant incentives in terms of the relationship between diversity inclusion and financial benefits. These “best-in-classes” are adopting systematic plans to promote D&I in the company and are mostly driven by a strong line of business. Furthermore, about inclusion, the McKinsey report highlighted areas where companies should take much bolder steps to create an inclusive culture that will last over time.

The data provided have brought considerable added value to the study and have led to considerable reflection on the subject, i.e. in the current context, particularly concerning the global situation facing a Covid-19 pandemic, inclusion and diversity are more important than ever and must remain a priority as the context is constantly changing.

This view has been further supported by further studies by Fong et al. (2020), Eikhof (2020), and Passantino (2021).

A second aspect that has aroused particular interest in recent years is the relationship between inclusion and communication with clients (Riordan 2014; McKay et al. 2010; Roberson 2006).

With this in mind, *diversity management* doctrines (Ravazzani 2018) have intervened to allow us to “exploit” all the diversity present in the company context.

The literature has focused mainly on the economic return that optimal management of diversity could have had as well as the benefits that could derive from it at the business level (Riccò 2016: 14).

In this context, the following aspects were highlighted:

1. minimize costs by making the most of the personal abilities of its employees;
2. involve employees fully, valuing their strengths and diversity to maximise the productivity of the organization;
3. create greater engagement with the company’s stakeholders along with a targeted satisfaction of customer needs;
4. a mission focused on developing corporate diversity to benefit the company’s reputation.

In support of these statements, quoting for example the Italian context, the non-profit association Diversity has been created.

Its committee is composed of representatives from many illustrious Italian universities and it aims to measure the degree of diversity and inclusion in companies. It uses a specific methodology, developed through an index, to measure the perception of stakeholders, but especially consumers, on the level of Diversity and Inclusion of brands. A customer-based perspective is used for this purpose (Chieng and Goi 2011; Washburn et al. 2004; Valdani and Busacca 1999; Lassar et al. 1995), summarised in two main phases: the first consists of the analysis of a specific cluster representative of the population and the second in the study of the results of this first phase by a Scientific Committee that will identify the targeted initiatives of the brands on the theme of D&I.

The data presented at the *Diversity Brand Summit* regarding the Diversity Brand Index 2019-2020 (Diversity 2020; Diversity 2019) speak clearly: between 2018 and 2020, most of the brands that have shown commitment to the D&I sector grew by 20% in 2019 and by 23% in 2020 compared to brands with little interest in inclusion. It appears that 3 out of 4 consumers make conscious choices about inclusive brands, and the fact that they have made a real commitment to D&I influences their purchasing choices (Mundy 2015; Steele and Derven 2015).

Thus, the focus of companies and brands on inclusion and diversity, both organizationally and socially, determines to some extent the trend of the choices of its already loyal customers and the buying behaviour of “new” customers attracted by the commitment to this strategic area.

All this considered, let us focus attention on the fundamental role of human resources. The literature review has particularly highlighted the key role of HR Management. Human resources management must be able to assess the competencies of each candidate, regardless of their characteristics and connotations and even their differences proper which may be motor, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and even religion (Mazzei and Ravazzani 2012).

The management of search and selection must therefore be “neutral”, selecting potential employees for the *skills* and, even more importantly, *the soft skills* that characterize it (Ravazzani 2016). This term considers those particularities of the candidate who makes a specific additional contribution to the task to be carried out. Thus, diversity is useful to the company because it acts as an intermediary (Feardman and Deane 2014). That specific personality will have more care, more rigour, and more information about a particular nuance that – almost certainly – another candidate would very easily miss. The attention to detail will then attract customers and stakeholders who are in

some way linked to this nuance of diversity, because they are part of it or because they have a sensitivity to it.

In this way, the focus on diversity and *inclusion* brings new clients, more visibility, and more social *commitment* to the company (Ozbilgin 2009).

The literature review, therefore, demonstrates the existence of a close correlation between the attention to D&I and the expression of the potential of each personality and significant positive feedback in the company.

The effect of a company policy that is open to D&I is that of a caring and welcoming workplace for each employee.

In this context, a survey conducted by Glassdoor (a company that set up a website for former employees in 2007 to review former superiors and companies) provides interesting information. It can be seen from the survey that the majority of the sample analysed consider it important to take account of diversity in the search and selection phases:

“According to a Glassdoor Harris Poll survey, three in four employees and job seekers (76%) report that a diverse workforce is an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers. By displaying how different employee demographic groups rate their workplace experiences and pay, job seekers now gain a more personalized understanding of how people feel about working at a company” (Glassdor 2021).

Indeed, the level of diversity and inclusion is one of the first aspects considered by candidates during an interview.

Therefore, companies that aim to attract a diverse pool of candidates with multiple skills will have to overcome obsolete recruitment practices and focus on HR Management strategies that can identify profiles different from those already present in the office.

Of course, companies have been trying for years to move from theory to practice in the field of D&I, and the tools most used to promote organizational plurality are:

1. develop flexibility and smart working solutions;
2. create networking groups to develop the sharing of know-how with other companies;
3. encourage within the company programs of empowerment and mentoring;
4. create specific interventions to support motherhood;
5. for managers, training to raise awareness of D&I issues is certainly useful, encouraging the creation of leadership models by a formal evaluation to verify the achievement of the objective of creating an inclusive environment.

Thanks to the studies carried out, companies are certainly more inclined to the issues of diversity and inclusion today, but the target group is mainly focused on gender inequality. The other key issues still to be properly introduced are initiatives to promote the employment of young people and people with disabilities.

There is also a lack of attention to the “senior” workforce and ethnic discrimination.

When we talk about D&I in the company, we refer first and foremost to *organizational well-being* and *respect* for the different personalities within the work team: an organization that implements leadership strategies focused on respect for each fosters an engaging and reassuring organizational climate.

On the other hand, if the same organization has a dominant group (which tends to define what is acceptable or not within the company) that is not sensitive to D&I issues, then the organizational culture and atmosphere within the organization will be less stimulating and inclusive. As a result, the productivity of the group as a whole will be significantly affected. Body shaming, sexism, and gender, generational and ethnic differences do not allow the creation of a culture of respect in the company and a natural inclination to include diversity. We will see in detail all the consequences of a lack of awareness of D&I dealing with the issues, unfortunately still dramatically topical, of the *gender gap* and the *gender pay gap*.

In this regard, a worrying factor, for which a major resolution is proposed in the decade 2020-2030, is the gender gap involving women and artificial intelligence. We have seen that OECD countries are already sensitive to differences in STEM sectors.

These differences start at the bottom of the pyramid of a career path, namely selection. Such discrimination begins with the search and selection criteria dictated by companies.

Human resources should then be able to select the most suitable and competent candidate, not based on gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, but based on skills and professional characteristics. The role of HR management, whether internal or outsourced for a company, is to select and orient staff without distinction (Panetta and Romita 2009; Avveduto et al. 2015; Avveduto et al. 2019).

Thus, over the years, studies on inclusion in human resources have brought to light important questions relating to:

- a) how much plurality matters in the company and how diverse the workforce is;
- b) if the HR department takes the issue and policies of equal opportunities seriously and is often applied in the recruitment process;
- c) if the same career opportunities are given to each employee.

The main problem with equal opportunities is the rate of implementation of policies in companies. The number of women in leadership roles is indeed increasing globally, but it is still too slow and with this trend estimates that the gender gap will not be closed before 2060 (Grant Thornton 2016). In the 2016 “International Business Report”, Grant Thornton stressed that the gender gap at the corporate level (and particularly in leadership roles) has been at the center of business agendas for many years now, but the “*call-to-action*” is still missing.

“Yet despite overwhelming evidence of the benefits of gender diversity in leadership and promises of action from businesses and governments around the world, we have made little progress. Globally the level of women in senior roles has risen just 3% in the past five years. At this rate it will be 2060 before we achieve gender parity. That’s too long; the challenge is here now” (Grant Thornton 2016).

Companies should make a greater contribution to resolving such deadlock by implementing equal recruitment practices. This should include not only the creation of opportunities for all career and leadership candidates regardless of ethnicity or gender but also the creation of teams that are inclusive of diversity. In fact, according to what has been analysed above through the literature study, inclusion not only allows to establish heterogeneous groups of people to work with, but also favors an increase in business at the company level, opening up new growth opportunities.

In addition, according to insight from Forbes, *Global Diversity and Inclusion: Fostering Innovation Through a Diverse Workforce* (Forbes 2011), having a plurality in the work environment aimed at pursuing the goal of diversity creates a greater chance of entering foreign markets, especially when plurality touches leadership roles:

“The basic formula for diversity is rapidly evolving. It is no longer simply a matter of creating a heterogeneous workforce, but using that workforce to create the innovative products, services, and business practices that can set a company apart and give it a competitive advantage in the marketplace. And as companies compete on a global scale, diversity and inclusion frequently have to shift, as different markets and different cultures have varied definitions of what diversity means” (Forbes 2011).

The study was conducted by collecting the results of surveys of more than 300 senior executives involved in the development, innovation, implementation, and management of strategies related to diversity and inclusion in their companies. In addition to the results, individual interviews were conducted with diversity managers, the board of directors, and the acting executives of large multinational companies and organisations. They not only confirmed the results of the survey but also provided additional very relevant details.

Companies that can bring diversity to the forefront with a diversified workforce are better able to lead the drive for innovation and manage international business practices in a better way.

In addition, the study was able to demonstrate how diversifying the workforce and creating an inclusive environment within the company bring several pros and cons at both the organizational and global levels.

As regards the positive points, the following aspects can be listed:

1. diversity is the lever of innovation and is a key factor for global success.
2. respondents and senior managers who took part in the survey agreed that a diverse team of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds is critical to developing new ideas and projects. The majority of respondents, in fact, agreed on the crucial importance of the correlation between diversity and innovation in the company;
3. a plurality of the corporate team that is also inclusive is essential for companies that want to attract the best profiles;
4. companies need to have plans in place to recruit, develop, upgrade and retain a diverse workforce that can compete globally;
5. growing companies are implementing diversity and inclusion strategies;
6. the interviewees in the report were able to demonstrate that companies have plans and strategies for inclusion, both regionally and globally, that can address regional and cultural needs.

On the other hand, the following negative points can be mentioned:

1. in the coming years, an organization's objectives and priorities regarding diversity will not change significantly;
2. in the interview, 43% of executives mentioned retention and development of talent, 35% are ensuring diversity in the workplace in general, 29% are working to develop a strong line of diversified talent, and 28% are working to manage intergenerational issues (28%);
3. the senior manager is responsible for the success of the company's diversity and inclusion objectives;
4. to make a plan for diversity and inclusion work, the right level of responsibility and supervision must not be lacking. In most of the survey respondents' companies, this supervision is underestimated and placed at low levels of the company pyramid;
5. although significant progress has been made in building and developing a diversified and heterogeneous workforce, there are still obstacles to the efforts of companies;
6. some progress has been made on gender diversity within companies, but there is a lack of certainty regarding disability and age.

Therefore, the report clearly shows that there are many strengths but also many weaknesses still to be discussed.

Globalisation has certainly helped to create a complex, competitive, and diverse working environment. Then, to be competitive, companies must constantly create new products and services. One of the best ways to ensure the development of new innovative ideas is to have a diverse and inclusive team, therefore, a diversified and inclusive workforce that fosters innovation and promotes creativity in the implementation of business strategies.

Multiple voices can create a collective thought outside the screens: this is how new ideas, new services, and new products are developed. Today, a significant number of companies no longer separate diversity and inclusion efforts from business practices and recognise a diverse workforce as a potential characteristic for differentiating themselves from the competition.

In most cases, this attracts the best talent and at the same time helps to acquire new clients.

However, although diversity and inclusion solutions are a key part of corporate commitment, the literature shows that there are still barriers, both exogenous and endogenous to organizations, as well as multiple challenges in implementing these policies:

- concerning internal difficulties, companies are still struggling against negative attitudes towards diversity among colleagues;
- as regards external challenges, since the 2008 crisis³⁹ companies also face a “senior” workforce and a decline in skilled profiles aligned with the challenges of a multi-generational workforce.

Multi-generational and multicultural work environments allow employees to show their identity and they will be able to develop the productivity of the company through their *soft skills*.

Therefore, according to the analyses considered, one of the keys to the success of companies is to give everyone an opportunity, without discrimination and despite diversity. Anyone applying for a particular role in the company must be allowed to demonstrate his competence and showcase his skills and qualities, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age or sexual orientation. The positive aspects will soon come.

Therefore, since the literature review shows that diversity takes many forms, and each requires special attention, especially in the context of the company’s environment, the measures taken so far are not sufficient.

³⁹ The 2008 crisis has seriously hampered the recruitment efforts of companies around the world.

The idea of providing an opportunity is no longer enough to speed up the integration process. It is important to implement genuine “corporate models” that define sustainable development models and do not pursue mere utilitarian aspects aimed primarily at profit-seeking and only secondarily at inclusion.

As we will see later through the different approaches to the subject, *we are convinced that diversity in the company must be considered as a factor that creates multiple aspects and perspectives of value.*

Therefore, together with management, human resources must be able to discover and harness the potential of this enormous source of endogenous and exogenous value. Diversity and inclusion are key issues on which to focus a business development strategy; they are issues that generate consensus and participation among internal and external stakeholders and exert leverage on the company’s reputation.

In companies, such as film companies, television, and radio broadcasters, this consideration of inclusion and diversity on a broad spectrum is essential for constructive and *politically correct* information. On the other hand, not only entertainment companies, but also brands in general, will have an essential role to play in changing society as a whole and will have a decisive impact on their stakeholders if they can best serve the cause of diversity and inclusion.

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2. Gender Equality: normative profiles and critical aspects

Abstract In this chapter the analysis focuses on the understanding of the critical issues faced by International Institutions and Organizations regarding Gender Equality. This section of the work, therefore, allows us to approach the main areas of concern. Particular emphasis is placed on the pivotal role of the EIGE, the measures it has taken and the tools it has identified to eradicate gender diversity. In this context, the parameters of the Gender Equality Index and the Gender Mainstream Cycle are analysed in depth to understand the milestones that are to be achieved through the issuance of international regulations aimed at guiding the policies of the Member States. The aim is therefore the comprehension of the *status quaestionis* through the policies and the initiatives taken at the “macro” level.

2.1 Gender Equality and EU provisions: the pivotal role of EIGE

“Gender equality is one of the fundamental values of the European Union, and it is also widely recognised as an important driver of economic growth. “Gender mainstreaming” means actively promoting equality between men and women at all stages and in all areas of policy making and implementation. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides the basis for gender mainstreaming as it establishes the EU’s obligation to promote equality between men and women in all its activities” (European Union 2021)⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Original version: “La parità di genere è uno dei valori fondamentali dell’Unione europea, ed è anche ampiamente riconosciuta come importante fattore trainante della crescita economica. “Integrare la dimensione di genere” significa promuovere attivamente la parità tra uomo e donna in tutte le fasi e in tutti i settori dell’elaborazione e dell’attuazione delle politiche. Il trattato sul funzionamento dell’Unione europea costituisce la base per l’integrazione della dimensione di genere in quanto sancisce l’obbligo per l’UE di promuovere la parità tra uomini e donne in tutte le sue attività” (European Union 2021).

Over the years gender equality, enshrined in Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on European Union (1992), has taken on increasingly important and fundamental features for proper economic and social development within the Member States. This refers to the basic principle of equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities between women and men. In defining what gender equality should be, the European Union has developed the need to include within it a group of experts to evaluate and regulate everything related to this important area.

In 2010, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) came into play. It represents an agency promoted by the European Union focused on developing and consolidating gender equality within and outside the EU. The main aim of this autonomous body is to become the reference center for knowledge on gender equality at the European level, encouraging the development of research and the constant collection of relevant material, experience, and expertise. In its articles of association, the Parliament and the European Council assigned the following general objectives to the EIGE (European Union 2006):

- support and strengthen the promotion of gender equality and *gender mainstreaming* in all Community and national policies;
- to reduce and eliminate discrimination on grounds of sex;
- to raise public awareness by providing technical assistance to Community institutions.

This reflects the fact that, although equality between women and men was one of the key principles of the original EU Treaty, there is still a gender gap and a democratic deficit that refers to the involvement of women in the EU's political decision-making process, together with respect for their rights.

The European Union is called upon to take stronger action against incidents of discrimination which could lead to a higher level of gender equality. A significant improvement was attempted in 2009 with the objectives set out in the Lisbon Treaty to promote measures and actions aimed at ensuring the full participation of women in public life (Treaty of Lisbon 2009). However, these forecasts have not yet been implemented by all Member States. As a result, even today a very high percentage of women – despite a high level of training – give up their permanent jobs because of a lack of *work-life balance* (Delecta 2011; Crompton and Lyonette 2006) between work and family life. New challenges are affecting the European Union today and are impacting men and women differently: immigration, population enlargement, and economic recession are widening the gender gap. Therefore, the estimates made do not foresee a recovery in this respect before 60 years (European Union 2021).

On this basis, the task of the EIGE is, therefore, to develop and make available to the EU Member States real *toolkits*, consisting of *modus operandi* and best practice, thus making it possible to develop directives and policies aimed at implementing progress on gender equality in the shortest possible time. Its knowledge is provided by a committee of experts from the Member States who, with their well-established knowledge, carry out research aimed at providing all citizens with guidance and an objective point of reference. Specifically, the EIGE implements the EU's objectives based on the tasks entrusted to it by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. This autonomous body also supports the Presidency of the Council of the European Union by reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Member States (European Parliament 2021).

This review is based on an analysis of the achievement of objectives in twelve critical areas identified by the Beijing Platform for Action since its inception in 1995 and updated annually. The 12 macro areas have been identified as critical areas where greater gender equity needs to be ensured, while at the same time defining tools and modalities to achieve this change (UNWomen 2021):

1. *AREA A* – Women and Poverty; when women live in a context of extreme poverty, their rights are not protected and “double discrimination” is triggered. The Beijing Platform aims to promote programmes to support life skills training to increase women's economic freedom and to provide targeted subsidies;
2. *AREA B* – Education and Training of Women; education is understood as the keystone for all young women to transform them into leaders of change. Gender equality at the socio-occupational level contributes to the creation of sound economies and work-life balance while helping to overcome harmful gender stereotypes;
3. *AREA C* – Women and Health; the possibility of proper nutrition and a proper policy of protection of sexual and maternity rights, together with stable mental health and freedom from violence are key factors for the flourishing growth of civilizations increasing their potential. In today's society, there are still practices that seriously endanger the health and lives of women and girls. These include, by way of example, child brides and early marriages, infibulation, dietary restrictions;
4. *AREA D* – Violence against Women; this area focuses on domestic violence affecting millions of women around the world. The Beijing Platform and UNWomen have drawn up a project to expand programmes on security, health, justice, and other basic social services and their access to women who have suffered violence. The action aims

- to stimulate and guide policy directives aimed at stepping up investment in prevention and eradicating its causes;
5. *AREA E* – Women and Armed Conflict; area concerned with sexual violence against women linked to armed conflict. It aims to develop forces of peace, promoting institutional reforms that safeguard justice and women’s security and guaranteeing proper public services;
 6. *AREA F* – Women and the economy; it provides support for gender equality at the working level to promote women, their inclusion in important positions, and their economic emancipation. This is because women play a major role in economic development and growth;
 7. *AREA G* – Women and Decision-Making Power; the number of women in leadership roles, in civil service, and in academic and elective positions appears limited. The female figure is under-represented in positions of power compared to the male figure. The Beijing Platform is therefore committed to ensuring equal opportunities for access to these positions through leadership and participation programmes that can foster skills development and informed and gender-sensitive civil education;
 8. *AREA H* – Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women; this area concerns collaboration with governments and United Nations agencies to build action plans that can develop institutional awareness and ensure gender balance;
 9. *AREA I* – Women’s Human Rights; it aims to encourage States to create laws, policy directives, and national plans that address women’s rights, to support and protect them from violence. With the international treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), pressure is being created to ensure the proper adoption of laws, implementing awareness of the issue among government bodies;
 10. *AREA J* – Women and Media; this is an area that aims to use the key role of the media as a “social equalizer” to develop a stronger representation of women in the media, raise public awareness, and create new models and guidelines in the consideration of women. In addition to collaborating with the media, the Beijing Platform is committed to developing research on the representation of women in the entertainment industry;
 11. *AREA K* – Women and Environment; aims to involve women in environmental decision-making. This is done by integrating data to assess the impact of women on development and environmental policies;
 12. *AREA L* – The girl child; this specific area is aimed at helping young women and girls to get out of critical contexts, supporting them in their studies and pursuing their own path addressing discrimination at the forefront, preventing violence of all kinds, especially physical violence

(UNWoman develops programs with educators, parents and religious leaders to raise awareness of these issues).

In 1995, an innovative global strategy for gender equality was developed: the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace (BPfA). This strategy to strengthen the representation of women reaffirms the fundamental principle of the rights of women and girls, which are an integral part of universal human rights. Since 2011, EIGE, in collaboration with the Beijing Platform, has been monitoring the implementation of BPfA in the European Union. In this respect, since 2011, EIGE has produced eight reports and a research study on the Platform's areas of interest, including them in the policy-making process within the objectives of EPSCO (European Council for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Protection):

1. violence against women: support for victims;
2. gender disparity in pensions;
3. part-time work and self-employment;
4. reconciliation of work and family life;
5. women and decision-making processes;
6. effectiveness of institutional mechanisms;
7. decision-making processes in media organisations;
8. climate change.

One example is the report on *gender equality and women in decision-making roles in media organisations* requested by Ireland during the 2013 EU Council Presidency to verify Area J above. This specific area refers to the relationship of women and media and analyses the *distribution and presence of women and men in the decision-making processes of organisations in the media sector* (EIGE, 2013: 18-21).

At the European level, the need for greater and more balanced gender participation in the media sector has been stressed. A sort of encouragement comes from the European Parliament's resolution and from the Beijing Platform itself, which called for initiatives to attract and integrate new female journalists. Finally, the first important proposal was made in 2012 by the European Commission. This is a European directive aimed at encouraging gender representation on the boards of companies listed on stock exchanges and which should have had a significant impact on the media sector:

“The proposed Directive sets a target of 40% of the under-represented sex among non-executive directors of listed companies. Companies that do not meet the 40% threshold for non-executive directors will be required to make appointments to such posts on the basis of a comparative analysis of the qualifications of each candidate, applying clear, unambiguous and gender-

neutral criteria. With equal qualifications, priority should be given to the under-represented sex. The target of at least 40% of the under-represented sex in non-executive positions must be achieved by 2020, but public undertakings, over which Member States exercise a dominant influence, will have two years less until 2018” (European Commission 2012)⁴¹.

This initiative would then have been further impacted by the following year’s EIGE report on the media sector, which provided usable and comparable data for all Member States. It focused on increasing the presence of women in decision-making processes in the media sector and in the fields of new technologies.

Thus, within the study conducted, the EIGE introduces three indicators to measure progress in gender equality in the area of *Women and Media*:

- *Indicator 1*, measures the proportion of women and men in decision-making roles in media organisations at the European level;
- *Indicator 2*, measures the proportion of women and men on the boards of companies belonging to the media sector at the European level;
- *Indicator 3*, measures the presence of innovative policies to promote gender balance within media organisations, also at the European level.

The latter had considered the percentage of women’s participation and their ability to express themselves and to access decision-making processes in both public and private sector organisations, with particular reference to the composition of Boards and the actual existence of internal gender policies in these organisations.

However, despite efforts at the European level, both within the legal and political frameworks, gender balance in the media sector is late in coming. In this sector, the predominance of men persists, hindering the presence of

⁴¹ Original version: “La direttiva proposta stabilisce un obiettivo del 40% di persone del sesso sotto-rappresentato tra gli amministratori senza incarichi esecutivi delle società quotate in Borsa. Le aziende che non presentano questa soglia del 40% tra gli amministratori non esecutivi saranno tenute a procedere alle nomine per tali posti sulla base di un’analisi comparativa delle qualifiche di ciascun candidato, applicando criteri chiari, univoci e formulati in modo neutro dal punto di vista del genere. A parità di qualifiche, si dovrà dare la priorità al sesso sotto-rappresentato. L’obiettivo di raggiungere almeno il 40% di esponenti del sesso sotto-rappresentato per gli incarichi non esecutivi dev’essere raggiunto entro il 2020, ma le imprese pubbliche, sulle quali gli Stati membri esercitano un’influenza dominante, avranno a disposizione due anni di meno, fino al 2018” (European Commission 2012).

women (who account for 70% of graduates in journalism and related subjects) in the media and widening the gender pay gap. Again, the gender gap is such as creating substantial differences both in the prestige of the roles and in the level of technical skills (only 40% of women reach leading positions in national newspapers and TV, and only 30% in decision-making positions). This low representation and consideration of women is also the cause of the loss of talent and highly qualified resources in the sector.

In 2018, the European Parliament resumed its analysis of the sector after the 2012 Directive of the European Commission, adopting the resolution called for by MEPs of the EU and Member States to promote greater gender equality in the media (European Parliament 2018).

“This report deals with gender equality in the media sector in the European Union. The media are the fourth power and have a profound influence on politics and society. Due care must therefore be taken to ensure that they function properly and in a balanced way. This certainly includes the existence of a balance in terms of equality between women and men. The media, both public and private, must be at the service of society as a whole, so it is desirable that they reflect, in their form and functioning, the fact that half of society is made up of women. The report focuses mainly on the position of women in the media as journalists and commentators, but also draws attention to their low participation in decision-making. In particular, with regard to the latter, the situation is rather unsatisfactory: in the EU, only 30-40% of management positions in the media are held by women, yet the majority of media-related graduates are women. This lack of proportion can not only affect the creation and design of media content, but also contribute negatively to the gender pay and pension gap. Women also face many obstacles in the professions of journalist and broadcaster. They are under greater pressure from the point of view of their outward appearance and their power to attract the public, and are rarely entrusted with important political or economic issues. Moreover, the situation of women is often more complex because of the greater need to reconcile their family role, i.e., maternity, and their professional role. In this respect, we must help them as much as possible” (European Parliament 2018)⁴².

⁴² Original version: “La presente relazione tratta della parità di genere nel settore dei media nell’Unione europea. I media sono il quarto potere e influenzano profondamente la politica e la società. Pertanto, occorre prestare la dovuta attenzione affinché funzionino in modo corretto ed equilibrato. Ciò comprende sicuramente anche l’esistenza di un equilibrio dal punto di vista della parità tra donne e uomini. I media, sia pubblici che privati, devono essere al servizio di tutta la società, pertanto è auspicabile che essi

The quotation is very specific: the media represent the so-called fourth power, therefore, exerting a great influence on socio-political issues, the European Parliament calls for national and European institutions to implement the 2012 Gender Equality Directive, urging regulatory bodies to monitor the presence of women in the media, through the development of monetary incentives, including quotas, creation of quotas, etc. by ensuring equal representation of men and women in decision-making positions and by updating codes of ethics.

However, despite the efforts made, internal media policies are still weakly inclined towards gender equality:

“In several countries, women substantially outnumber men in journalism training and enter the profession in (slightly) greater numbers, but relatively few rises to senior jobs, and the pay gap between male and female journalists remains wide (Franks, 2013). A 2015 global survey of the International Women’s Media Foundation found that women represent only a third of the full-time journalism workforce in the 522 companies surveyed. Research from the European Institute for Gender Equality found that women are under-represented in decision-making roles in European media industries, and also that gender inequality was significantly worse in the private sector than in the public sector” (European Parliament 2018).

and at the European level more and stronger stimuli are needed to bring about change.

rispecchino, nella loro forma e nel loro funzionamento, il fatto che la società è costituita per metà da donne. La relazione si concentra principalmente sulla posizione delle donne nei media in qualità di giornaliste e commentatrici, ma richiama anche l’attenzione sulla loro scarsa presenza a livello decisionale. In particolare, per quanto concerne quest’ultimo aspetto, la situazione è piuttosto insoddisfacente: nell’UE, appena il 30-40 % delle posizioni dirigenziali nei media è ricoperto da donne, eppure la maggior parte dei laureati in materie legate ai media sono donne. Tale sproporzione non solo può ripercuotersi sulla creazione e sull’impostazione dei contenuti dei media, ma anche contribuire negativamente al divario retributivo e pensionistico di genere. Le donne affrontano inoltre numerosi ostacoli nelle professioni di giornalista e conduttrice. Sono sottoposte a maggiori pressioni dal punto di vista dell’aspetto esteriore e del loro potere di attrarre il pubblico e raramente sono loro affidati importanti temi politici o economici. La situazione delle donne, inoltre, è spesso più complessa a causa della maggiore necessità di conciliare il loro ruolo familiare, ovvero la maternità, e quello professionale. Da tale punto di vista occorre aiutarle il più possibile” (European Parliament 2018).

2.2 The Gender Equality Index: measuring equality to create a “fixed rate”

In 2013, the first EIGE report was presented with data on the number of women at the top of the main media organisations in the 27 countries of the European Union and Croatia. This has been made possible by the fact that the EIGE considers the *Gender Equality Index* as a tool that can “schematically” measure gender equality (EIGE 2013).

“This document shows that despite the increasing use of women in media professions, particularly as journalists, the supportive organisational culture remains predominantly male and women are still underrepresented at all decision-making levels, partly due to the lack of policy and organisational practices aimed at inclusion. While in some European countries the number of women at decision-making levels is higher (in Bulgaria and Latvia they are even higher than men; in Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden the percentages of women are between 40% and 50%), in others (Ireland, Greece, Italy and Malta) the percentages of women are well below the European average (30). In particular, in our country, only 11% of women are at the top of the four organisations monitored (Rai, Mediaset, Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica). In the conclusion drawn up by the Council of the European Union (20-21 June 2013) on the advancement of women to decision-making levels in the media, all EU Member States, their institutions, media companies and organisations of media professionals are called upon to respect the strategic objectives set out in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action” (Rivetti e D’Oro 2012: 32-33)⁴³.

⁴³ Original version: “Tale documento dimostra che, nonostante il crescente impiego delle donne nelle professioni dei media, in particolare come giornaliste, la cultura organizzativa di supporto rimane prevalentemente maschile e le donne sono ancora sottorappresentate a tutti i livelli decisionali, anche a causa dell’assenza di interventi normativi e pratiche organizzative finalizzate all’inclusione. Mentre in alcuni paesi europei il numero di donne ai livelli decisionali sono più alti (in Bulgaria e in Lettonia sono addirittura superiori agli uomini; in Estonia, Lituania, Romania, Slovenia, Finlandia e Svezia le percentuali di donne oscillano tra il 40% e il 50%), in altri (Irlanda, Grecia, Italia e Malta) le percentuali di donne risultano essere di molto al di sotto della media europea (30%). In particolare, nel nostro paese, le donne ai vertici delle quattro organizzazioni monitorate (Rai, Mediaset, Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica) sono soltanto l’11%. Nella conclusione elaborata dal Consiglio dell’Unione Europea (20-21 giugno 2013) circa l’avanzamento delle donne ai livelli decisionali nei media, si richiamano tutti gli Stati membri dell’Unione, le loro istituzioni, le aziende che operano nel settore dei media e le organizzazioni di professionisti e

As seen in previous chapters considering the “new” laws that protect equal opportunities at the European level, gender equality between women and men is a key factor of the European Union; for this reason, it is therefore defined in detail in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CDFEU 2007).

Originally, the need to “create” an *index* defining gender equality was a priority of the European Commission; subsequently, it was included as one of the strategic priorities of the 2010-2015 Gender Equality Programme. Specifically, it is a composite (or synthetic) indicator, i.e., the *result of an aggregation of variables indicating the different parts of a multidimensional concept* (in this case *gender equality*) (ISTAT 2021), able to analyse the multifaceted reality of gender equality and targeted at the EU policy context. Following three years of activity and extensive consultations between organisations and stakeholders, the “final” indicator was presented to the public for the first time in Brussels on 13 June 2013.

But what exactly does this index measure? And what values does this last consider?

The indicator measures the distance/proximity of each EU Member State to achieving full gender equality and will be updated every two years.

What are the objectives of this indicator?

- to provide a synthetic measure of gender equality that is easy to understand and communicate;
- provide a composite indicator specifically designed to measure gender equality at the EU level and in the Member States;
- to provide a tool to support decision-makers in assessing the distance, or proximity, of a given Member State to achieving gender equality;
- allow meaningful comparisons between different areas of gender equality;
- measure achievements in the field of gender equality over time.

The Gender Equality Index (figure 2.1) is a tool that can combine different perspectives and definitions of gender equality and provide added value to other measures in this area. It is focused on a gender-based approach measuring the discrepancies between the two sexes and has a broader scope than other indices, including relevant areas not previously covered. It is based on a comprehensive conceptual framework, which reflects the critical areas of gender equality and, more importantly, is not constrained by the availability of data.

professioniste dei media al rispetto degli obiettivi strategici fissati dalla Piattaforma di azione di Pechino del 1995” (Rivetti and D’Oro 2012: 32-33).

This feature makes it possible to identify and highlight any data gaps. It is also adapted to the EU context and is based on EU policy priorities, unlike other available indicators which may adopt indicators less relevant to the EU context, such as forms of discrimination related to the male child (son preference) and literacy rates (EIGE 2013: 3).

The Index gives a specific score, between 1 and 100, to the Member States under review:

- 1 – denotes total inequality;
- 100 – indicates perfect equality between the sexes.

Figure 2.1 Formula of the Gender Equality Index

$$I_i^* = \prod_{d=1}^6 \left\{ \prod_{s=1}^{12} \left(\sum_{v=1}^{27} w_v \Gamma(X_{idsv}) \right)^{w_s} \right\}^{w_d}$$

$i = 1, \dots, 27$

$d = 1, \dots, 6$

$s = 1, \dots, 12$

$v = 1, \dots, 27$

$w_v, w_s, w_d \in [0,1]$

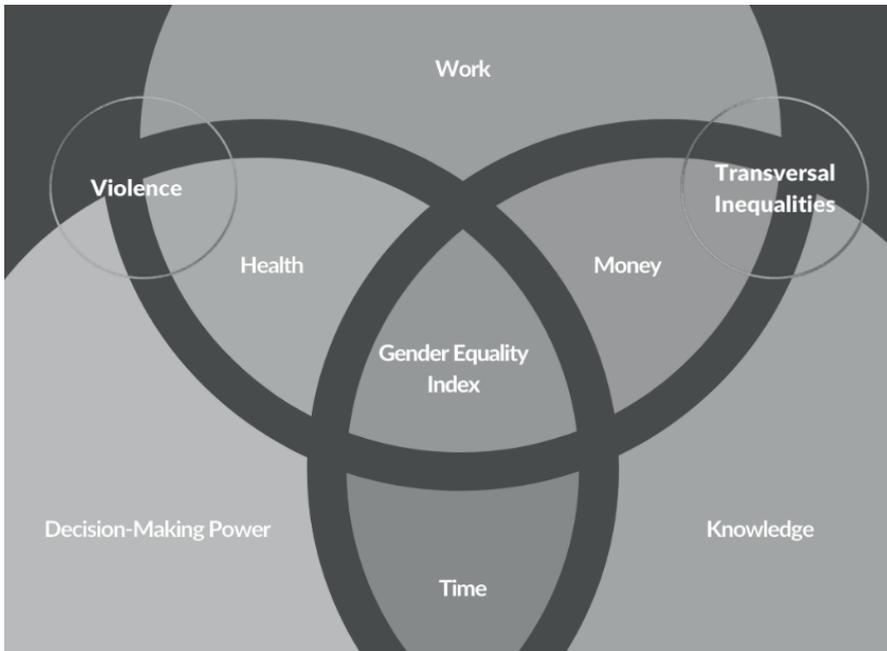
$\sum w = 1$

Source: EIGE 2013

This does not mean that 1 is a disastrous situation in terms of gender equality, just as 100 is not a utopian situation, but, more simply, a high score reflects a very positive situation for men and women.

In this sense, the definition of gender equality is seen in two ways: equal location and availability of assets and resources, and equal dignity and integrity of both sexes.

This index is based on different reference categories: work, money, power, knowledge, time, health, intersectional inequalities and violence (the latter are part of those analyses based on phenomena of specific population groups). Each of these categories has within its sub-categories which identify the range of the index (figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Parameters of the Gender Equality Index in the years 2019-2020

Source: authors' elaboration

Focusing on the first of these categories, *work*, it can easily be seen that in today's way the work experience of men and women is significantly different: women are less likely to participate in the fulltime labour market but instead they have part-time jobs "easier" as well as they are employed fulltime in child-rearing and family affection control – which is a part of that "hidden" or parallel sector of the economy called the *informal economy* (Mingione 2009; Bellanca et al. 2008; Bagnasco 1981).

In addition, as we shall see in the continuation of our work, there is also the question of the unequal distribution of women and men according to areas of application: the positioning of the two genders tends to vary markedly, showing an over-representation of women in fields such as education and health (Colombo 2003) and very little or no consideration of women in science, engineering and technology (STEM) where, on the contrary, the male figure prevails (Avveduto 2019). When it comes to working in relation to gender equality, attention is also paid to the labour market and to the issue of quality of work for women and men: women are disproportionately involved in informal and/or part-time work (which results in a high level of insecurity) and have fewer opportunities for training and promotion and which, in addition, offer fewer opportunities for training and career advancement,

fostering further segregation of the labor market (European Commission 2008). Closing the gender gap related to employment is one of the objectives of the Lisbon Treaty (2007) which, in Article 2 (the “equality between women and men” principle), provides for a commitment to support Member States in achieving gender equality in terms of professional opportunities and equal treatment at work. This commitment emphasises the need to create new jobs in order to increase women’s employment while at the same time improving jobs. This action should have reduced the segregation of the labour market.

Moving on to the second category, money, women generally tend to have fewer financial resources than men (Cannata 2014: 101-104). Another factor that cannot be ignored when assessing the economic situation is the income density of women and men from the wealthy and the poorer classes. This is directly linked to the principle of equal pay for men and women for the same job/equal value of the job, and is enshrined in Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union:

“1. Each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for men and women for equal work or work of equal value is applied.

2. For the purposes of this Article, “pay” means the normal basic or minimum wage or salary and any other benefit, whether in cash or in kind, paid directly or indirectly by the hirer to the employee by reason of his occupation.

Equal pay, without discrimination on grounds of sex, entails:

(a) pay for the same piecework shall be determined on the basis of the same unit of measurement;

(b) pay for time-paid work is equal for the same job.

3. The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, shall adopt measures to ensure the application of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, including the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.

4. In order to ensure full and effective equality between men and women in working life, the principle of equal treatment shall not preclude a Member State from maintaining or adopting measures providing for specific advantages designed to make it easier for the underrepresented sex to pursue a

professional activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers” (European Union 2012)⁴⁴.

This approach to the pay gap between men and women and the subsequent implementation of plans to close the gap is reflected in several “strategic” documents adopted by the EU over the years:

- the 2010 Women’s Charter, referring to the UN Conference in Beijing in the same year. This document reaffirms the EU’s commitment to gender equality in the Member States and the rest of the world: it also proposes five specific areas of action: equal pay, representation of women in decision-making and power, and equal dignity and gender non-violence (European Commission 2010);

⁴⁴ Original version: “1. Ciascuno Stato membro assicura l’applicazione del principio della parità di retribuzione tra lavoratori di sesso maschile e quelli di sesso femminile per uno stesso lavoro o per un lavoro di pari valore.

2. Per retribuzione si intende, a norma del presente articolo, il salario o trattamento normale di base o minimo e tutti gli altri vantaggi pagati direttamente o indirettamente, in contanti o in natura, dal datore di lavoro al lavoratore in ragione dell’impiego di quest’ultimo. La parità di retribuzione, senza discriminazione fondata sul sesso, implica:

(a) che la retribuzione corrisposta per uno stesso lavoro pagato a cottimo sia fissata in base a una stessa unità di misura;

(b) che la retribuzione corrisposta per un lavoro pagato a tempo sia uguale per uno stesso posto di lavoro.

3. Il Parlamento europeo e il Consiglio, deliberando secondo la procedura legislativa ordinaria e previa consultazione del Comitato economico e sociale, adottano misure che assicurino l’applicazione del principio delle pari opportunità e della parità di trattamento tra uomini e donne in materia di occupazione e impiego, ivi compreso il principio della parità delle retribuzioni per uno stesso lavoro o per un lavoro di pari valore.

4. Allo scopo di assicurare l’effettiva e completa parità tra uomini e donne nella vita lavorativa, il principio della parità di trattamento non osta a che uno Stato membro mantenga o adotti misure che prevedano vantaggi specifici diretti a facilitare l’esercizio di un’attività professionale da parte del sesso sottorappresentato ovvero a evitare o compensare svantaggi nelle carriere professionali” (European Union 2012).

- strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015: this strategy follows from the EU's 2006-2010 Gender Equality Programme and the aforementioned Women's Charter. The topics covered relate to the latter, in particular equal pay, the presence of women in decision-making and power roles, dignity, and non-violence. External and "cross-cutting" issues are added here, such as improving gender equality in the candidate countries for EU accession and good practice in the field of equal opportunities in youth education and the role of men in promoting gender equality (European Commission 2011);
- the European Pact for Gender Equality for the period 2011-2020, which reaffirms the importance of gender equality between Member States and the intention to draw up this pact given the Europe 2020 strategy to take the necessary measures to combat all forms of discrimination against women. This pact therefore fully enshrines the new integrated gender strategy to promote equality between men and women (Council of the European Union 2011);
- the Europe 2020 Strategy, which identifies, in line with previous provisions of the European Pact for Gender Equality of 7 March 2011, the need for EU Member States to foster smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. Five "leading" objectives have been defined: employment, research and development, climate change and energy sustainability, education, and the fight against poverty and social exclusion (European Commission 2017);
- a final mention goes to the strategy to support Goal 5 Agenda 2030, which is trying to implement a five-year roadmap (by 2025) where it will try to promote gender equality in all sectors of the European Union. All this is to overcome definitively all the gender stereotypes that remain firm, despite the progress made by the member states (European Union 2020).

This second point brings us back to the third factor, namely *power*. In this case, power is considered in its sense of "decision-making power" in important roles and at the political level.

Aiming for a fair system of participation of women and men in political activity is a key step in achieving strong effectiveness and efficiency in democracy and governance. Greater consideration of women in political decision-making has many positive effects on society, as well as on the democracy that will emerge from it, which can help to improve gender coexistence. A fair society and inclusive governance policies, a higher standard of living, a positive development of education and youth education, together with health, and a reduction in political corruption, are the benefits that can be brought about by a more inclusive and equal culture. The Council of the

European Union, at the end of the 2011-2015 mandate on the gender equality strategy, had thus “drawn up” the data collected:

- Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the Treaties and one of the objectives and tasks of the European Union, and the integration of the principle of equality between women and men in all its activities is a specific task of the Union.
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that “equality between women and men must be ensured in all fields, including employment, occupation and pay” and that “the principle of equality shall not preclude the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages for the underrepresented sex”.
- In its Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, the European Commission identified equality in decision-making as one of its priority areas for action.
- In the European Pact for Gender Equality, the Council stressed the need for “measures to close the gender gap and combat gender segregation in the labour market”, including the promotion of “equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels and in all sectors in order to make full use of all talents”.
- These conclusions build on previous work and political commitments expressed by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and other stakeholders in this field, including the documents listed in Annex II.
- There is a continuing need to achieve effective gender equality in the EU and this requires a multi-pronged approach including legislation, awareness raising to promote attitudinal change and affirmative action programmes.
- In the EU, women make up more than half of the population and electorate and are highly educated, yet they continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels. Equal participation of women and men in decision-making is a matter of justice, respect for human rights and good governance. Equality between women and men in decision-making is necessary to better reflect the composition of society and to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. It could also contribute to EU economic growth and competitiveness.
- At an informal meeting organised by the Luxembourg Presidency on 16-17 July 2015, the Ministers for Equal Opportunities and Labour discussed the theme “Changes in the labour market: a challenge for women and men”. Their exchanges focused on changing the roles of women and men, on leave and

flexible working arrangements for women and men, and on promoting change in corporate culture. Making workplaces and reconciliation policies more equal and encouraging a more equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men can also contribute to greater equality in decision-making.

- The Council has already stressed the need to increase the representation of women in decision-making bodies, not only in the economic and political fields, but also in areas such as science and research, media and sport. The Member States and the Commission have taken a number of measures. There are clear signs of improvement in the overall situation in several Member States. However, it is clear that women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions in all areas. The issue of gender balance in decision-making therefore still requires particular attention from policy-makers and researchers.

- One of the critical areas identified by the Beijing Platform for Action is “Women in power and decision-making” (Sector G), which includes two strategic objectives, namely to take measures to ensure equal access and full participation of women in power structures and decision-making processes (G1) and increasing women’s ability to participate in decision-making and accountability (G2). This critical area was reviewed by the Council in 1999, 2003 and 2008. On the basis of an independent monitoring report by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) entitled “Beijing + 20” (“Beijing 20 years after”) in 2014, the Council adopted conclusions committing to address remaining challenges in the field of gender equality, including gender gaps in decision-making. In 2015, the European Union and its Member States renewed their commitment to intensify actions and measures to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” (Council of the European Union 2015).

Following this evidence, the Council then acted on the 2015 EIGE data and on the proposal for three new indicators to monitor the inclusion of women in decision-making at the European level. These indicators are:

1. *Indicator 7*: refers to the proportion of women and men among the secretaries and deputy secretaries of the main political parties in the Member States;
2. *Indicator 19*: refers to the percentage and number of women and men among the executive and non-executive members of the two highest decision-making bodies of the main companies registered at the national level and listed on the national stock exchange;
3. *Indicator 20*: refers to policies aimed at promoting balanced participation of women and men in economic decision-making.

With the introduction of these indicators, the EU has invited the Member States, together with the European Commission, to take steps to:

- improve the collection and analysis of continuously updated data on gender equality at the decision-making level within the EU, drawing on the statistical offices of the European Union and relying on research carried out by the EIGE. This always strives to pay attention to data that show a certain lack of harmonisation, particularly in the fields of research, the media and sport;
- promote effective measures to discourage the gender gap in decision-making, particularly in the above-mentioned fields of research, media and sport, but also in the social and voluntary sectors, such as charitable associations, by comparing data collected by the EIGE;
- periodically review progress in critical areas, analysing results against indicators developed by the Beijing Platform and comparing them with the European Commission's Annual Progress Report on Gender Equality, and, if deemed necessary, develop indicators for the critical areas analysed, to which a set of specific indicators has not yet been assigned, using the work of the EIGE, together with that of Eurostat (the European Statistical System, the European Union's office responsible for the statistical study of data supplied by the Member States, whose task is to ensure a harmonised methodology for analysis);
- promote equal representation of women in decision-making processes, using a two-pronged approach combining *gender mainstreaming* and specific actions;
- increase and intensify measures to increase the number of women in political and economic decision-making, but also in academia and science, as well as in research institutes, the media and sport;
- improve the gender balance in decision-making bodies in all areas through a wide range of measures: legislative and/or non-legislative, voluntary or binding, and also through the exchange of good practice;
- eliminate gender stereotypes within policy areas, through awareness-raising campaigns, but also through education and, where necessary, through positive action, encouraging media professionals not to pass on preconceived ideas about gender roles, including managerial positions and family and care responsibilities;
- take, where necessary, policy measures to remove the personal, social and occupational barriers to women which lead to women being rejected in leading political positions or discourage women from pursuing the highest decision-making positions in companies and other public and private organisations;

- take appropriate measures to encourage equal family and caring responsibilities between women and men. Accelerating progress in improving the work-life balance between work, family and private life. This is also intended to enable women and men to participate on equal terms in the labour market, in politics and in other areas of activity, and also to ensure that career breaks due to caring responsibilities do not prevent women and men with dependants, including children, the elderly and disabled, from advancing upwards. As regards care, it is also necessary and essential to ensure that child care and care services for dependants are available which are accessible, affordable and of high quality;
- encourage public debate that promotes gender balance in decision-making, which not only strengthens capacity-building measures, such as mentoring and sponsorship, training and media awareness but also encourages the exchange of best practices between private individuals and companies;
- ensure equal opportunities for women and men to advance in decision-making positions at all institutional levels by promoting organisational and cultural change in enterprises and public and private organisations;
- support gender equality programmes initiated by NGOs to improve gender balance in decision-making processes (European Commission 2015).

In this context, Member States are also invited to recognise and promote the benefits of achieving equal and equitable representation of women and men in political decision-making; encourage the setting of “ambitious” targets in accordance with the current national system, and respect the role of political parties. The European Commission, governments, political parties, the European Parliament, and national parliaments are also invited to promote equal and equitable representation of women and men in political life, paying particular attention to the position of women on party lists.

While fully respecting their autonomy, governments and social partners, as well as public and private sector companies, are then encouraged to introduce equal opportunities policies, thereby setting targets and deadlines for the development and implementation of effective measures (such as training, mentoring and sponsorship systems) to ensure equal representation of women and men in decision-making and management. Companies, both public and private, as well as other organisations, will also need to work towards a more gender-friendly corporate culture, introducing flexible working arrangements and greater transparency and clarity in recruitment and promotion procedures, and encouraging the involvement of senior management in these efforts.

Another factor influencing the dominance of equal opportunities is the knowledge that highlights the substantial differences between women and men in terms of education and training (Ferri 2018; Mencarini and Solera 2011; Saraceno 2008; Dei 1998). Moreover, today, more and more young women are reaching upper secondary education and more women are reaching the degree objective than men. However, a mindset linked to so-called patterns of segregation persists (Martucci 2011; Barone 2010; Rosti 2006): this is because, although the female figure is gaining ground in areas traditionally dominated by the male figure, it is not possible to separate from the awareness of a society linked to models that are still “archaic”. In general, the most obvious forms of segregation in the world of work today are in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics: the so-called STEM subjects. It is also necessary to broaden the range of skills and competencies through the establishment of a lifelong learning model (European Parliament 2006) which provides a general and equitable preparation and which is at the same time in line with the rapid technological development of our millennium. Indeed, at a political level, the Europe 2020 strategy on education and training of young people has set itself a number of objectives such as a 5% return from the current rate of early school leaving and an increase in the number of young people aged 30-34 who have completed university education. Alongside these, there is also the ambitious goal of the European Pact for Gender Equality, which for the period 2011-2020 aims to end segregation within education, disciplines, and professions. Towards full employment is Europe’s “motto” for the 2020 Agenda: investing in education, training, and learning to develop so-called lifelong skills that can contribute to a smart development of society:

“The framework outlines eight key competences:

- 1) communication in the mother tongue;
- 2) communication in foreign languages;
- 3) mathematical competence and basic skills in science and technology;
- 4) e-skills;
- 5) learn to learn;
- 6) social and civic competences;
- 7) initiative and entrepreneurship;
- 8) cultural awareness and expression.

Key competences are considered equally important, as each of them can contribute to a positive life in the knowledge society. Many of the competences overlap and are interrelated: essential aspects in one area favour competence in another. Competence

in basic language, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technologies (ICT) is a cornerstone of learning, and learning to learn is relevant to all learning activities” (European Parliament and European Council 2006: 13)⁴⁵.

An initiative that can lead to an equitable level of knowledge in society so as to provide equal knowledge in line with the needs of a changing and fast-moving reality.

The fourth domain, *time*, is centered on the balance of the so-called *work-life balance*, that is, managing to channel the presence of work and the first activity into the daily life of any individual. Since 1970 there has been a considerable increase in the number of women in the labour force, but this has not improved the time available for care work. Equality between men and women in this field is faltering as there are fewer and fewer opportunities to devote time to other aspects of everyday life (social, cultural or civic). However, the European Union has expressed its concern about the issue of *work-life balance* in the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, in the *2010 Women’s Charter* and also in the *European Pact for Gender Equality* (for the period 2011-2020) where the need to achieve the objective of work-life balance is stressed (European Union 2019). These documents focus on the promotion of permanent changes in parental responsibilities, family structures, institutional practices and the organisation of work and time, with changes affecting society as a whole.

⁴⁵ Original version: “Il quadro di riferimento delinea otto competenze chiave:

- 1) comunicazione nella madrelingua;
- 2) comunicazione nelle lingue straniere;
- 3) competenza matematica e competenze di base in scienza e tecnologia;
- 4) competenza digitale;
- 5) imparare a imparare;
- 6) competenze sociali e civiche;
- 7) spirito di iniziativa e imprenditorialità;
- 8) consapevolezza ed espressione culturale.

Le competenze chiave sono considerate ugualmente importanti, poiché ciascuna di esse può contribuire a una vita positiva nella società della conoscenza. Molte delle competenze si sovrappongono e sono correlate tra loro: aspetti essenziali a un ambito favoriscono la competenza in un altro. La competenza nelle abilità fondamentali del linguaggio, della lettura, della scrittura e del calcolo e nelle tecnologie dell’informazione e della comunicazione (TIC) è una pietra angolare per l’apprendimento, e il fatto di imparare a imparare è utile per tutte le attività di apprendimento” (European Parliament and European Council 2006: 13).

The need for society to adapt to a “more equal” distribution of the roles of women and men is also highlighted. There are inequalities in the right to family leave (Lasio and Nadia 2010; Saraceno 2003), such as paternity leave (Cannito 2018; Bosconi 2011; Martino 2008) and care leave (Pistore 2018; De Simone 2009). The latter should be able to support the availability of care and a quality of life, private and non-private, equal for both women and men, without undermining economic opportunity and career prospects.

The last indicator relates to *health* and focuses on differences between women and men concerning the biological health status, human behaviour and gender differences, and access to health facilities (Facchini and Ruspini 2001).

We can distinguish three distinguishing factors between women and men:

1. *biologically speaking*, women live longer, although they have fewer years of healthy life;
2. the second factor concerns *human behaviour*. Men are more at risk of excesses which could be the cause of the development of diseases;
3. *women have greater access to health facilities*, mainly because of their role in society, linked to reproductive needs. However, this “stereotypical” position within the family may deprive them of this privilege, as they may not be financially independent.

This issue has recently been addressed, at the political level, by the Europe 2020 strategy, which stresses the need to reduce these inequalities in the social and health field by ensuring better access to health care.

Other official documents, such as the Women’s Charter 2010 and the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, also recognise the importance of eliminating gender inequalities in access to health care and the need to analyse risks and diseases specific to women’s and men’s health; finally, on the management of gender inequalities in healthcare in the long term and the associated results.

Intersectional inequalities, on the other hand, are those because women and men cannot be considered homogeneous groups, and consider other characteristics that can influence gender equality and equality (Bacciola et al. 2021; Sarallo 2017).

The term intersectionality in sociology and jurisprudence is intended to describe the intersection of different social identities, together with their particular discriminations, oppressions, or dominations resulting from them. The latter concept considers different categories of biological, social, and cultural identities (gender, ethnicity, social class, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age) which interact at multiple (sometimes simultaneous) levels. In these terms, the framework we are going to outline is therefore useful to

understand how systematic injustice (Madaro 2019) and social inequality (Dubet 2010; Beck 2008) have a multidimensional shape: every trait of every individual is indivisible from the others, forming a framework in which all the characteristic elements of a person are the key to his/her identity.

Intersectionality is a very important concept in both the human and academic spheres, and the spectrum of justice expands in this sense. Anti-discrimination of intersectional inequalities has been one of the fundamental principles enshrined in the EU Treaties over the years. One of the most significant advances was made by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), in which discrimination moved away from considering only the two areas of nationality and sex to including race and ethnic origin, religion, political orientation, age, ability, and sexual orientation as key aspects. Subsequently, Articles 10 and 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union also enshrined the EU's intention to combat intersectional discrimination (Bernardini 2018; Bello 2015; European Union 2012). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union also moves towards a different horizon, including new types of discrimination (e.g., those based on genetic characteristics, language, membership of a national ethnic minority, property, and birth). Such discrimination should no longer exist at the European level. The Strategy for Equality between Women and Men at the European level (2011-2020) also addressed intersectional discrimination at the level of migrant populations.

Violence is the last domain the EU touches. In particular, the report examines violence from a gender perspective, emphasising violence against women which is developed by behaviours, norms and stereotypes. This discrimination is rooted in a lack of progress in gender equality. However, the domain lacks basic data to be developed within official documents: although specifically, violence is a key factor for gender equality.

We now need a reminder, a wake-up call, about the need to fill the gaps in data collection on gender-based violence, to draw up strategies for the future that will be decisive in eliminating discrimination.

Several studies show that, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the episodes of domestic violence have increased markedly (Pellizzone 2021). The European Union, therefore, affirms its determination to combat and eliminate all forms of domestic violence; the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020 and the 2010 Women's Charter, together with the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, explicitly refer to the need to combat all forms of violence against women, as well as any stereotyped references, degrading and offensive to represent them (EIGE 2013: 4 et seq.). Forms of discrimination at the social and television levels are therefore a strong representative factor at the European level. Many of the documents listed above have taken on board the need to eliminate such discrimination at all levels.

However, the objective of full inclusion, without differences or discrimination, is far from being fully achieved.

2.3 The Gender Mainstream: horizons, features and approaches

To understand what is meant by the term *gender mainstream* and to fully identify its characteristics, it is considered appropriate to approach the issue by analysing the definition. This term refers to the process that allows a better understanding of the causes of inequality between women and men within society, identifying the most appropriate strategies to combat them (Yanty and Dharma 2020; Bo-hong 2009). It defines a genuinely strategic approach that considers social and company policies, integrating a gender perspective, to achieve equal opportunities between women and men in all areas of society. This is achieved by changing the policy-making process, from implementation to the drafting of rules, spending decisions, evaluation, and final monitoring.

The equal participation of women and men in society is an essential step in ensuring the development of democracy on the subject of equal opportunities. The European Union has been trying to make progress on gender equality for a long time and 40 years of efforts have made good progress; however, there is still strong friction which does not fully address the *gender gap*, both at the European and international level (Stratigaki 2005; Walby 2005).

2.3.1 GM and work

When analysing the different aspects of social life and the differences between the sexes, the starting point is always work performance: the labour market is still saturated with men, which inhibits the full and satisfactory integration of women outside the family unit.

The man is the centre of the family, the provider of the finances necessary for the maintenance and the head of the workplace. Women are therefore favoured in the labour market over men and this encourages the growth of gender stereotypes and polarisation of society. Another key concept when it comes to employment is that of work-life balance: this balance, which is very often precarious, is a need that manifests itself bilaterally by both sexes, men and women, mothers and fathers (McDowall and Kingman 2021; Kossek et al. 2010). This has prompted a re-examination of social and business policies, which have responded to the call to improve the relationship between the two sexes and to improve the impact of equal opportunity policies. To eliminate the root causes of gender inequality, the approach was revolutionised by using a specific tool, namely the gender mainstream. As a wide-ranging gender dimension, the mainstream, having been accepted internationally, has made it possible to define strategies to ensure that gender

balance becomes a reality and is no longer an abstract and unattainable concept.

The process of mainstreaming this strategy has thus involved combining the concept of gender equality with the process of preparing, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, but also with the same regulatory measures and budgetary programmes that aim to end all discrimination and inequality between men and women (Deery and Jago 2015).

2.3.2 Policy and legal framework in the context of the GM

The process of gender mainstreaming also influences the quality of political activity and the regulatory framework: this means having a greater impact on society with relevant policy interventions, which become more inclined to meet the needs of citizens at all levels of gender (D'Andrea 2016).

On the other hand, a vision centred on the gender dimension of equality avoids the perpetration of possible inequalities in every area of social and civic life and ensures that public interventions are properly carried out, making them more effective. From the point of view of equal opportunities.

One of the tools available at the European level to ensure that this strategy is adopted is to implement Regulatory plans through the EU institutions, while the individual governments of the Member States will be responsible for developing the *gender mainstream* at the national level (Saracina 2010; Crespi 2008). In this regard, the effectiveness of the *gender mainstreaming* process must be promulgated, not through individuals in specific areas, but through public institutions themselves and their staff, creating their specific structures with specific responsibilities. Combining institutional support and political commitment to equal opportunities with a legal framework that supports social needs creates the conditions for developing an efficient and effective *gender mainstreaming* strategy (Carletti and Pagliuca 2020: 112-113; Fisichella 2012):

“In the continental European regional system, gender issues are addressed by enhancing the network of vertical relations between the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Member States to provide assistance and strengthen national and local capacities on gender issues, in line with existing international standards for the protection and promotion of women’s rights. In other words, the *gender mainstreaming* approach is ensured in defining the political and programmatic priorities of the OSCE to strengthen the role of women, in particular in conflict prevention and

management, in rebuilding peace and in ensuring effective democratic and secure conditions in society” (Carletti and Pagliuca 2020: 112-113)⁴⁶.

The goals of the *gender mainstreaming* strategy can therefore be seen, but to implement it a well-defined and clear action plan is needed, considering the context, the starting conditions and those to be met, and the interested parts. This plan should use well-defined tools to ensure that concrete data are collected and that the objectives set are achieved within the expected timeframe. Two integrations are thus developed:

- a gender perspective on the content of the various policies;
- a perspective on the question of the equal distribution of women and men in a given policy area.

This is because both dimensions must be considered and included in the policy-making process at all levels, i.e., the representation of both sexes in socio-political life and the workplace.

The EU has thus increased the representation of women in its policies on an equal footing with men, to improve its reach on gender issues in all areas.

The issue of gender representation in decision-making and political processes varies according to the sector and the functions considered: planning and decision-making processes on policy actions that are not homogeneous from the point of view of gender representation may be penalised in terms of results and the involvement generated between men and women. As in any area of social life, but also of work, greater diversification and inclusion within decision-making groups can bring a substantial benefit to the decision-making process itself and thus improve the results expected.

⁴⁶ Original version: “Nel sistema regionale europeo continentale i temi di genere sono affrontati valorizzando la rete di relazioni verticali tra L’Organizzazione per la sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa e gli Stati Membri allo scopo di fornire assistenza e di potenziare le capacità nazionali e locali sui temi di genere, in linea con gli standard vigenti sul piano internazionale per la protezione e la promozione dei diritti delle donne. In altre parole il *gender mainstream approach* viene assicurato nella definizione delle priorità politiche e programmatiche dell’OSCE con l’obiettivo di rafforzare il ruolo femminile, in particolare per la prevenzione e la gestione dei conflitti, per la ricostruzione della pace e la garanzia di condizioni effettivamente democratiche e sicure della società” (Carletti and Pagliuca 2020: 112-113).

2.3.3 *Institutions and organisational structures according to the GM's approach*

This approach to the gender dimension is not limited to political life, but also refers to how organisations work. The work carried out by institutions in terms of equal opportunities is considered from a gender perspective, analysing their organizational structures and working procedures (Moschini 2020; Sangiuliano 2012)

Institutions have always been regarded as gender neutral since public policy “should” benefit its citizens without inequality. There is a substantial difference between thought and reality, and gender inequality is deeply rooted in social life; men and women are considered equal in terms of regulation, yet women still do not have equal access to and access to goods (Magna et al. 2005). On the other hand, policies indeed consider the gender dimension, but they do not consider the fact that the gender dimension has a substantially different impact on women and men. This prerogative brings policy to the agender line.

There is a solution: the different needs and interests of women and men must be identified, including inequalities in access to goods and resources, taking into consideration the presence of gender stereotypes in all respects to eradicate them and ensure gender equality.

2.3.4 *The process of planning and evaluation of the Gender Mainstreaming strategy*

Providing for effective implementation of *gender mainstreaming* strategies means planning and organising the different stages in the process (EIGE 2021).

Moreover, a proper gender impact assessment is the first step towards creating truly inclusive policies: this “check” analyses in all aspects the introduction of new policies, regulations and programmes which will serve to make progress on equal opportunities, while at the same time anticipating the obstacles and implications which may arise once they are implemented.

So, we have to ask ourselves: what are the elements needed to be considered in the process of creating a *gender mainstream* plan?

- *elaboration of the different steps*: defining the stages, organizing the tasks and responsibilities, are the basis of every strategic plan;
- *evaluation of financial resources*: initial financial and human resources reporting is required. Successful policy integration requires financial resources and time;
- *definition of key stakeholders*: the involvement of all stakeholders is essential to verify step by step the concerns, expectations, and opinions of target groups;

- *monitoring feedback*: periodic reports that can analyse progress and feedback;
- *data sampling*: to increase knowledge about gender equality by analysing and collecting data and information on indicators to facilitate the process of retrieval of information;
- *recruitment of know-how (internal and external)*: an in-house specialistic knowledge of the issues favours immediate feedback and precise guidelines. If this knowledge is lacking internally, it is advisable to consider external assistance by consulting experts in the field (EIGE 2021).

To create a general principle of equality between men and women at all levels, there is therefore a need for substantial *gender mainstreaming* in policies, so that decision-making bodies take account of all stakeholders in all decisions and at all stages of policy-making.

2.3.5 The Gender Mainstream Cycle

As mentioned previously, the *gender mainstreaming* process is a real multi-stage plan involving definition, planning, implementation, and final monitoring together with evaluation.

These stages of the process are, in most cases, a cycle of successive steps as progress and changes occur. This cycle can also be retraced, starting from scratch, in cases where a reprogramming and revision of the phases are needed (EIGE 2021).

We can thus define it as a cycle of the gender mainstream (fig. 2.3) and it is a graphic representation of what happens in gender mainstreaming programmes. The cycle consists of four key steps: definition of instruments, planning tools, action tools, and finally verification tools.

Each step is divided into toolkits and methods specific to each stage of the cycle:

1. Define the tools:

When considering the mainstream cycle, it is necessary to start from this point, which defines the policy needs, specific to each sector, for public intervention. The first step is to gather data and information for each sex, which will then be used to analyse the situation of men and women in the policy area under consideration. To define the tools, it is possible to use specific methods such as:

“Gender analysis and gender impact assessment: the first is to provide the data and information needed to mainstream a gender perspective in policies, programs and projects (...) as a starting point for *gender mainstreaming*, it identifies the differences between women and men in their relative position in

society and the distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints and power in a gender perspective in a defined context” (EIGE 2021)⁴⁷.

While:

“The second is the policy tool for analysing a given policy proposal, aimed at identifying and assessing its differential impact or effects on women and men, so that these imbalances can be corrected before the proposal is adopted” (EIGE 2021)⁴⁸.

An advantage of this first step is identified in the presence of people with know-how on gender issues and previous experience in drafting reports, analysis, programmes, and policy assessments. Data and information will contribute to a better understanding of the study and the reality being faced, by implementing a policy line or programme that is fair and non-retaliatory for one of the two genders, in fact, able to redress existing inequalities.

The opinion of gender experts in the field will also be useful in validating the results achieved and the policy proposal; it will also enhance the trust of the relevant stakeholders in the proposed programme by improving the quality and perception of the work carried out.

Some obligatory steps in defining the policy agenda should be:

- act on the results of the analysis;
- set results-oriented and gender-sensitive targets;
- include the objective of gender equality;
- assess gender differences between professionals in the main institutions in the sector in terms of pay and decision-making power;
- identify women in local and national power roles in the field of reference;
- analyse the governance of each institution in light of the overall vision of gender policies. For example, the criteria for evaluating the search and

⁴⁷ Original version: “l’analisi di genere e la valutazione dell’impatto di genere: la prima serve a fornire i dati e le informazioni necessari per integrare la prospettiva di genere nelle politiche, nei programmi e nei progetti (...) quale punto di partenza per l’integrazione della dimensione di genere, individua le differenze tra le donne e gli uomini per quanto riguarda la loro posizione relativa nella società e la distribuzione delle risorse, delle opportunità, dei vincoli e del potere in un dato contesto” (EIGE 2021).

⁴⁸ Original version: “la seconda rappresenta lo strumento politico per l’analisi di una determinata proposta politica, volto a individuare e valutare il suo diverso impatto o i suoi diversi effetti sulle donne e sugli uomini, in modo da ovviare a tali squilibri prima dell’approvazione della proposta stessa” (EIGE 2021).

selecting staff, or the hierarchy and the process of promotion of posts, identifying possible gender stereotypes.

2. Planning tools:

Planning of instruments when implementing new programmes is at the heart of the *gender mainstreaming action plan*, identifying the key links of gender policy together with the interventions and the most appropriate methodology to achieve them.

This is the planning of specific actions capable of achieving specific objectives defined in the first stage of the process. In this second stage, it is essential to analyse the gender balance sheets available, since the data on so-called gender budgeting can easily be used to identify trends in gender equality. Gender budgeting is an excellent source of finding out how much public money goes to men and women, and from this to develop a strategy for a fair distribution of money between the two sexes.

It is useful to establish indicators to monitor the objectives set. They will be used to monitor and compare the gender impact of the programme over the implementation period.

In implementing the plan, it is also advisable to plan possible proposals for funding, in particular for the use of contractors for policy support services, which must, however, comply with the requirements of the gender mainstreaming programme:

- equal participation of men and women in the group following the project;
- a grant application that takes account of gender representation in the area concerned;
- to set specific gender objectives in line with the results of the programme;
- the definition of the means of achieving these objectives;
- use participatory methodologies in support of equal opportunities, involving men and women equally in the process and considering how areas and contexts of a particular policy area are affected by gender inequality.

These aspects must support the evaluation criteria of each funding proposal and must continue to be observed during the implementation of the project.

As in the previous step, the presence of experts in the field within the decision-making groups is a great advantage and is useful to the specifications of the programme. If the group's know-how is strong, the gender mainstreaming proposal will also be strong and clear.

Finally, transparency is considered: making public the data on the planning process and the monitoring reports together with the indicators will help to build engagement with the groups concerned, giving confidence in the work carried out.

3. Instruments for action:

When it comes to programme implementation, good gender awareness and information within the group of key stakeholders is crucial. On the contrary, information workshops and capacity-building initiatives (Wang et al. 2020; Eade 2007; Potter and Brough 2004) are needed to fill gaps and staff requirements.

In these cases, training on specific topics greatly increases the ability to integrate correctly the gender dimension into the reference programme and will be needed by all collaborators: such as researchers, proposal evaluators, experts in the field, and scientific and monitoring officials.

Another key function at this stage of implementation is support, namely a series of measures designed to overcome difficulties in guidance. These measures can be expressed in various forms, such as:

- *coaching programs* with experts in the field;
- establish a gender reference line for the staff of the research group;
- ongoing sharing of training experiences and information on gender issues in the field of reference;
- assemble a working group to support the issue of gender equity in the policy area to guide the research focal point;
- create a *helpdesk* to link interested groups with experts in the field to whom they can ask questions and ask for information on gender issues.

Also important is the visibility of the gender issues addressed within the programme through publications, communications, and press releases (while avoiding forms of sexist language and the use of discriminatory images).

Finally – in the planning and implementation process of the plan – the cultures, practices, processes, and procedures in the field of reference need to be carefully examined; internal barriers to gender mainstreaming need to be removed, dimensioning the organisation's routine and adapting it to the gender dimension.

4. Verification instruments:

The last stage, the verification stage, is used to monitor the results achieved, highlighting the progress and difficulties encountered during the process. Of course, in the intermediate stage, there is constant planning of the monitoring activity through specific indicators (defined in the planning stage), which will be used to gather data and information to verify whether the objectives set initially have been achieved.

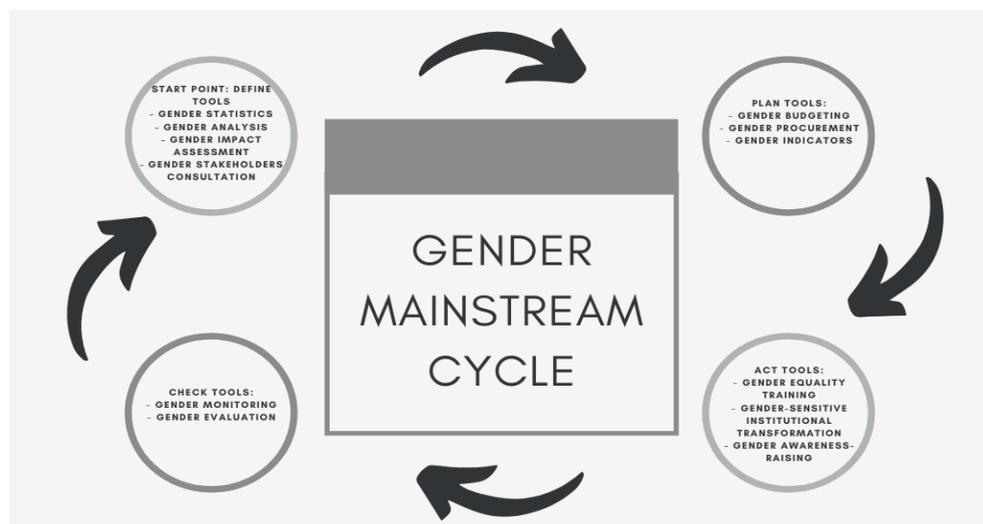
Particularly when it comes to monitoring linked to a sensitive issue, such as gender equality, this activity is of great importance in identifying difficulties and gaps in the programming process, with the task of closing them in a very short time.

The monitoring phase, therefore, takes place on the disaggregated gender dimension data available: the monitoring is therefore focused on the approach to implementing gender equality policies, within a set timeframe and able to provide key feedback for the implementation of the programme, while ensuring the success of all previous phases.

Another step in this phase of the *cycle* is reporting on activities related to *gender mainstreaming* concerning the results of the monitoring process. It contributes to learning what works and what should be eliminated. A table of sanctions or reminders from those responsible for implementation would also be useful to speed up the process and avoid possible obstacles. During the process (or at the end of all activities) an assessment is carried out which should consider all the data and information gathered during the previous stages. This stage is called “sensitive assessment” and refers to the progress made on gender issues during the research. It is carried out based on pre-established evaluation systems or by expert figures.

It will also be necessary to make the results of the evaluation publicly available (as for the implementation phase), which can potentially be strategic in promoting gender learning. The results and experiences reported, together with the evaluations, will be useful in redesigning other policies and programmes, stimulating the work of other socio-political sectors.

Figure 2.3 Gender Mainstream Cycle



Source: authors' elaboration

To use the words of the EIGE, it must be borne in mind that:

“Gender mainstreaming is not a political objective in itself, but a means to achieve gender equality. The EU recognises equality between women and men as a fundamental right, a common value of the EU and a prerequisite for achieving the EU’s objectives of growth, jobs and social cohesion” (EIGE 2021)⁴⁹.

2.4 Social media as a social equalizer

Social media accounts for the largest percentage of data traffic used by people today. Their attractiveness and commitment to their “followers” are undisputed. We are talking about a real loyalty that pushes billions of people every day to share these means of communication in every aspect of their days and lives: work, leisure, entertainment, socialization. There are several social networks nowadays, but these are the big names of digitization: first of all, Facebook, followed by Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, Twitter, and finally LinkedIn.

In today’s era we can thus speak of social media as a sort of “social equalizer” (Argentin et al. 2014). Their function as a connection between people is undeniable: social networks shorten distances and make themselves usable in every field such as the political one.

Social media has changed the so-called political communication (Copernich and Novelli 2018; Pira 2012; Marinelli and Cioni 2010) between parties, candidates, and voters. This “digital” approach not only succeeds in gaining voter loyalty but also promotes greater representation for women who want to enter politics, giving them a high profile. Although the World Economic Forum publishes the data of the Global Gender Gap Report every year, we are still far from closing the gap between men and women in terms of equal economic and employment opportunities, education and access to schooling, health, and political representation. Unfortunately, forms of sexism are still strongly linked to the retrograde mentality of today’s society and the language used on social media also underlines this trend in the form of verbal and written attacks defined as real hate speech (Kulkarni et al. 2018; Abbondante 2017). Through social media, this form of discrimination is

⁴⁹ Original version: “Il mainstreaming della dimensione di genere non è un obiettivo politico in sé, ma un mezzo per raggiungere l’uguaglianza di genere. L’UE riconosce la parità tra donne e uomini come un diritto fondamentale, un valore comune dell’UE e una condizione necessaria per il raggiungimento degli obiettivi dell’UE in materia di crescita, occupazione e coesione sociale” (EIGE 2021).

difficult to address and restrain: big companies, such as Google, Facebook, and Instagram, entrust specific groups with the task of reporting and eliminating hate messages, while YouTube prohibits offensive, aggressive and discriminatory language.

In practice, this “insurmountable” gap is thus also widely reflected on the Internet. For women, people with disabilities or of different ethnic groups, and people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, the experience on social networks is not always pleasant: episodes of women being bullied, victims of catcalling (Walton and Pedersen 2019; Saunders et al. 2017; Tran 2015) and verbal violence, homophobic or racial cyberbullying today are the cause of fear and discomfort among the above-mentioned categories. With the technological upgrade these forms of bullying and discrimination have greatly increased: thinking about the Covid period, several surveys have shown that gender-based violence has peaked and that the victims of such violence have been young women on social networks (Tortono 2021; Maglia 2020).

This phenomenon is growing especially among young people: the constant experience of online bullying and violence is developing behaviour in new generations that is creating serious problems in virtual interaction (Barone 2016; Tinelli 2013). Another worrying aspect of the virtual experience is the gender polarization of hate phenomena. Men are much more inclined to material promoting racism, misogyny, and religious extremism than young women; while more and more girls (underage) report being harassed via social media, especially concerning the sharing of images without consent, or through unpleasant and immoral content.

The toxic behaviour of online abuse also affects spheres outside of virtual life, radically changing the behaviour of young people at the level of social and political participation (Mascheroni 2011; Raffini 2008; Fici 2002); those who are abused or witness cyberbullying are reluctant to engage in conversations and debates on social media as a way out of negative comments and as a preventive strategy for violent criticism. It is a real “self-limitation” of the expression of their thoughts: young people, frightened by online retaliation, limit their opinions but also the most spontaneous expressions of sociality such as photos and expressions of interest. In particular, the female gender, who compulsively conducts self-monitoring of their social profiles, is the one most at risk of criticism and body shaming. This develops obsessive behaviors about their physical appearance and often self-censorship of their opinions (Gam et al. 2020; Lestari 2019). The issue of violence is not just about women. The male is also a victim. It is often thought that young people tend to ignore negative social criticism, when in fact such behaviour is essentially an involuntary psychological removal of the abuse they suffer. This can make it difficult to interpret the signals of children who have been subjected to virtual abuse.

On the whole, it can be said that social media exerts equal pressure on both women and men, but in different ways: we are talking about unrealistic beauty canons, gender stereotypes taken to extremes, and standards of living that do not reflect the majority of the population. Compared to their male counterparts, girls are more often under pressure about their physical appearance and are therefore dissatisfied with their face, dress, and body. This is a serious situation according to the World Health Organisation (World Health Organisation 2020), which has noted the dangerous trend that has developed among 15-year-olds: almost one girl in two says she is too fat and tries dangerously to lose weight through restrictive diets. This is because the stereotype of perfection awaits from the female gender, which, if not satisfied, brings social retaliation and severe online and offline criticism. It does not help the perception of the masculine gender, which, being bombarded by unrealistic representations created on a virtual level, sees women as formable objects and becomes a disseminator of aggression and discrimination on social media. The EIGE (2013) has encouraged several discussion groups that have brought these issues to the fore in the virtual world. Moreover, as some of these groups have pointed out, even boys do not have an easy life online, constantly having to conform to today's masculine ideal and being pressured and criticized if they do not reflect these standards.

Digitization thus defines the interactions between the two genders, creating clear distinctions between the ways men and women approach online. The sexualization of the female figure is especially felt now in the ranks of social media posts harshly condemning girls who express their sexual needs and opinions. The evaluation of language between genders is unbalanced in favour of masculinity which is increasingly embedded in society.

2.4.1 EU digitization: is there a need for digital gender education?

Based on the findings of the EIGE discussion groups, it was therefore thought at the European level to create a guide to digitalisation and online education. This is because, even though the European Union continues to perpetrate the strategic goal of gender equality, today's young people seem to go against the tide, conforming to the culture of hatred that has developed through social media.

Digital spaces should be places of socialisation and exchange of ideas, ideals and information, a virtual bubble where young people can build relationships. However, boys and girls actively use social media, but for purposes other than sociality and especially in different ways. Women appear to be more likely to create exclusive content such as photos, posts, and videos, while men are more likely to post comments on online articles or follow debates via social networks. The number of girls who post opinions on social and political issues online, or take part in online voting, is significantly lower

than their male counterparts because the latter tend to self-censorship, considering the arrival of possible negative criticism:

“Young men and women in the European Union are at the same level of digital skills and access to the Internet, but their online behaviour is different. Nine out of ten young people (92% of girls and 93% of boys) use the Internet every day. In the EU, this generation of 15–24-year-olds has the highest digital skills: 56% of girls and 58% of boys have above average digital skills. Although skills and access are similar, boys have more confidence in their digital skills than girls. For example, 73% of males aged 15-16 install software on their own without difficulty, compared to 49% of females. Music, email and social networking are equally popular online activities for boys and girls, but in other areas there are strong differences. For example, 67% of boys play video games, compared to 45% of girls, while 59% of girls search online for health information, compared to just 44% of boys” (EIGE 2016)⁵⁰.

Proper online gender education is another key issue, as gender equality is a key factor in the EU’s future digital policy strategies for younger generations, to widen the opportunities offered by digitalisation.

An example of Europe’s commitment to the relationship between digital and young people is the Digital Agenda for Europe and the associated Safer Internet programme, the action plan for safer online browsing promoting digital education (European Commission 2015).

To develop the ambitious objectives of the European Digital Agenda, it is therefore essential to gather data and evidence on which to base evidence on the evaluation and effectiveness of policy measures.

⁵⁰ Original version: “Nell’Unione europea i giovani di entrambi i sessi si trovano al medesimo livello di competenze digitali e accesso a Internet, ma il loro comportamento online è differente. Nove giovani su dieci (il 92 % delle ragazze e il 93 % dei ragazzi) usano Internet ogni giorno. Nell’ambito dell’UE questa generazione, composta dalle persone di età compresa tra i 15 e i 24 anni, può vantare le competenze digitali più elevate: il 56 % delle ragazze e il 58 % dei ragazzi possiede in questo campo competenze superiori alla media. Benché le competenze e l’accesso siano analoghi, i ragazzi hanno una maggiore fiducia nelle proprie competenze digitali rispetto alle ragazze. Per esempio, il 73 % dei maschi di 15-16 anni di età installa software da solo senza difficoltà, rispetto al 49 % delle femmine. Musica, posta elettronica e social network sono attività online ugualmente popolari tra ragazzi e ragazze, ma in altri settori emergono forti differenze. Per esempio, il 67 % dei ragazzi gioca con i video game, rispetto al 45 % delle ragazze, mentre il 59 % delle femmine cerca online informazioni in materia di salute, contro il 44 % appena dei maschi” (EIGE 2016).

Virtual violence is real gender discrimination which should be included in a specific category from the European Union to reformulate and integrate ad hoc legal instruments. This is essential to prevent gender-based violence on a virtual level with the possibility of prosecuting those responsible for such hateful acts. If a good prevention programme is to succeed, there must always be an awareness campaign and stricter legislation to show the legal consequences for offenders. There is also a need for support for young people, to make them increasingly aware of the risks they face online, to provide them with a guide to informed internet surfing, by introducing workshops with gender inequality experts who can introduce them to the multiple gender aspects of digitalisation, and also with a focus on the consequences of gender-based violence.

Digital spaces highlight anomalous behaviours on gender issues, and this affects how young people participate online. Promoting safe and respectful use of the Internet means tackling the root causes of gender stereotypes online and offline.

Given the important role that the new generations can play at the social and relational level, this aspect related to gender education in the digital environment is a key tool not only for clearly ethical and social purposes but also to facilitate the correct inclusion of diversity in the company given the intangible value that it can unleash.

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3. Gender Employment and Gender Pay Gap

Abstract. Before analysing the issues that specifically concern the corporate sphere, understanding must pass through the financial instruments that international policies try to provide to the economic system and also through the specific problems that today determine the gender gap in the workplace. This chapter examines the concept of *Gender Budgeting* and its role in determining budgeting strategies correctly and inclusively. The analysis of women's inclusion in the labour market is crucial in this context. It aims to understand the social and economic value that women can express and the problems which today place women on the fringes of the world of work and possible solutions. The chapter continues with the analysis of the Gender Pay Gap, a very important topic as it is closely linked to the next approach to D&I in the company, to the issues of corporate governance and value creation. The specific survey on the gender gap in Italy provides empirical evidence of the relationship between critical issues related to gender and the corporate sphere.

3.1 Gender budgeting: analysis of the status quaestionis

3.1.1 *The pivotal role of Gender Budgeting*

After analyzing the features characterizing *gender mainstreaming* with which it is possible to outline the general profiles of policies aimed at remedying the criticalities related to D&I, it is appropriate to understand the subsequent levels according to a specific matryoshka path, as we have better considered in the research methodology. One of the tools available for *gender mainstreaming* is the so-called “Gender Budgeting” or “Gender Budget Analysis”.

Gender mainstreaming in public budgeting is not new, as it was formulated internationally as early as the mid-1990s, although specific pioneering applications can be found in Australia in 1984 (Bettio et al. 2002). After the United Nations World Conference on Women (1995), participating governments committed themselves to “promoting women's economic independence through changes in economic structures” and to “restructure and redefine public spending to promote women's economic opportunities and

access to productive resources” (Bruno and Sarti 2009). In 1999, gender budgeting was adopted by the European Commission as the main tool for gender orientation of policies to be adopted. A more specific call for the Commission and Member States to develop gender budget models came later from the European Parliament with a specific report in 2003 and has been evolving ever since (European Parliament 2003).

What exactly defines the term gender budgeting? Gender budget analysis can be seen as an alternative to the traditional way of drawing up the public budget in a neutral way.

This must be achieved first and foremost through a prior assessment of the gender impact of budgetary policies and the subsequent integration of women at the various levels of the budgetary procedure (Council of Europe 2005). It, therefore, sets out a real strategy for achieving gender equality objectives in the medium to long term through efficient use of public resources.

Under this principle, from the time it came into force, any initiative should have assessed the effects of gender budgets, particularly women’s budgets, to promote concrete change through cooperation between governmental and non-governmental institutions.

International institutions, therefore, believe that the specific contribution to gender equality objectives made by the gender budgeting tool can be made concrete in the following actions (EIGE 2019):

- improved accountability and transparency in tax planning;
- *gender mainstreaming* in the preparation of the budget.

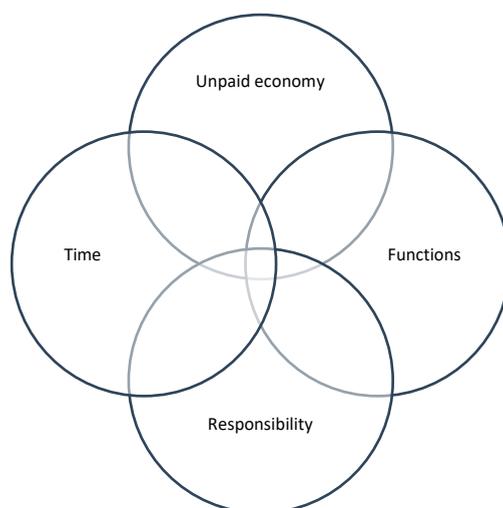
As obvious as these principles may seem, it is only in recent decades that gender perspectives and needs have begun to be considered in the budget through a more specific understanding of how policy-driven revenue and expenditure can affect women and men differently.

For example, as demonstrated by the reference literature (O’Hagan and Klatzer 2018; Bargawi et al. 2017; Karamessini and Rubery 2014; Bettio et al. 2013), European austerity policies have had a significantly greater impact on women than men in terms of benefits, job opportunities and unpaid work. The commitment made with gender budgeting is, therefore, to solve a critical reality linked to the drafting of “non-inclusive budgets”. In particular, special attention should be paid to the economic effects of the unequal gender distribution of work, but also the direct social as well as economic effects on women and families.

Gender budget analysis is a strategy aimed at introducing greater equity and transparency in public policies. Governments and public administrations must address this challenge considering that men and women play different roles in society and the economy. As a result, policies and investments made

have a different impact on them. Traditionally, public budgets are drawn up without considering of differences between men and women. Disregarding gender roles and responsibilities, it follows that the indicators and data used represent a neutral situation. Moreover, the budget affects the distribution of financial and material resources as well as intangible resources, such as time. For example, increased funding for children and childcare facilities will enable mothers to manage their time more effectively by reconciling their work and family care.

Figure 3.1 Key elements of Gender Budget Analysis compared to traditional budgeting models



Source: authors' elaboration with EIGE 2019 data

When defining total revenue and expenditure, the budgetary authorities should then (figure 3.1) also consider the unpaid economy (domestic work), the impact on different roles and responsibilities, and the time constraints of women and men (EIGE 2019).

The result is that a more homogeneous consideration of gender in public budget forecasts leads to a more equitable distribution of tangible and intangible resources, to ensure equal access to the various economic, political, and social spheres. Public expenditure must help to promote development and exploit the potential of all sectors of society.

Understandably, however, there are difficulties in carrying out such a project. These relate to the choice of the most appropriate indicators and the direct and indirect outcome measures of public policies; but even more to the ability to translate abstract policy orientations into well-defined objectives

concerning the different budget items (OECD 2020). These objectives must be identified and given priority, and efforts must be made to coordinate action between the different levels of government (municipal, provincial, regional, and state).

This means that the strengthening, modernization, and reorganization of public intervention (and hence of budgetary policies) must be reflected in genuine social development. There is therefore an urgent need for intangible investment in capacity, empowerment, and opportunity so that economies can become more dynamic and competitive based on knowledge. This is an investment in knowledge by gender which, as we will see later in this work, can be studied and quantified to understand its impact on the workplace (The World Bank 2021). At the level of the European Union, the Parliament is responsible for the EU budget and the Directorate-General for the Budget of the European Commission for its implementation. However, the parliaments and public administrations of the EU Member States are responsible for their national and sub-national budget cycles (EIGE 2019).

This leads to a degree of independence in the adoption of specific measures and suggests that different nations will be free to assume different results depending on the extent to which the principle of gender budgeting is applied.

Is it possible then to speak of a common model?

As we shall see below, the initiatives taken and the results achieved today by individual States are multiple; however, the continuous development of international doctrine makes it possible to define common guidelines and methodologies for introducing and supporting gender budgeting.

3.1.2 The implementation of Gender Budgeting: models and tools

The responsibility of international public authorities is to set general guidelines and make clear public policy choices.

Despite the lack of a genuine *gender budgeting policy*, the EU applies a *mainstreaming* approach to funding programmes and operations addressed to the Member States and the Community as a whole (EIGE 2019). Significant examples of horizontal integration of equal opportunities policy in the use of EU resources are:

- in the programmes and resources of the Structural Funds,
- the European Employment Strategy;
- in the field of external action.

Therefore, as regards, in particular, the budget of the European Union, the gender perspective has so far been integrated through measures affecting

specific budget lines and the inclusion of the objective of gender equality in the various comments (EIGE 2019).

However, as regards the guidelines given to the various Member States, several main initiatives may be mentioned:

- a. achieving political will and involving political leadership;
- b. high-level engagement of public administrative institutions;
- c. improving the technical capacity of civil servants;
- d. involvement of civil society;
- e. obtaining and evaluating sex-disaggregated data.

This approach is based on the principle that effective implementation of the gender budget requires political commitment combined with substantial technical capacity.

To quote directly from the guidelines issued, the following is mentioned:

“a. Political will and political leadership, demonstrated through an active political commitment to promote gender equality, is the most important enabling factor. To achieve real progress, *gender budgeting* must be backed by a responsive and accountable central government. Political will can be demonstrated by raising awareness among key actors, such as national parliaments, political parties, regional and local assemblies, and their consultative bodies. It can also be evidenced by voicing support for gender-responsive budgets in public or adopting clear political guidance for *gender budgeting* work. Legislators can also make it mandatory to include gender perspectives in the budget and related policies.

b. The high-level commitment of public administrative institutions is an important enabling factor. By issuing clear instructions for implementation and follow-up, civil servants can contribute to meeting the government’s gender equality commitments.

c. The improved technical capacity of civil servants to implement policy and budget guidance for *gender budgeting* must be coupled with the public administration’s political will and commitment to gender equality to ensure that ambitions and abilities are matched.

d. Civil society has an important role to play in ensuring that governments are held accountable for meeting international and national gender equality commitments. It can also play a crucial role in linking government to society and promoting participatory budgetary processes.

e. Sex-disaggregated data is an enabling factor in conducting gender analyses of budgets. Therefore, national statistics and management information

systems in ministries, public agencies, and research institutes play a crucial role. It is also important to collect information on topics such as the distribution of unpaid work between women and men. This data is required to formulate evidence-based gender equality targets and objectives and to systematically monitor progress. The process of implementing *gender budgeting* will often also improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics” (EIGE 2019: 5).

Table 3.1 Areas of intervention for the correct implementation of the gender budgeting model formulated by the EIGE

PROCESSES	RELATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS	DATA PROCESSING
Connection of the EU funds with the EU’s regulatory framework on gender equality	Defining partnerships and multi-level governance	Analysis of gender inequalities and gender needs at the national and sub-national levels
Make operational gender equality in policy objectives and specific objectives/measures	Mainstreaming gender equality in project design	Tracking resource allocations for gender equality in the EU Funds
Coordination between the EU funds to advance work-life balance		Developing quantitative and qualitative indicators for advancing gender equality
Defining gender-sensitive project selection criteria		
Integrating a gender perspective in monitoring and evaluation processes		
Reporting on resource spending for gender equality in the EU funds		

Source: authors’ elaboration with EIGE 2019 data

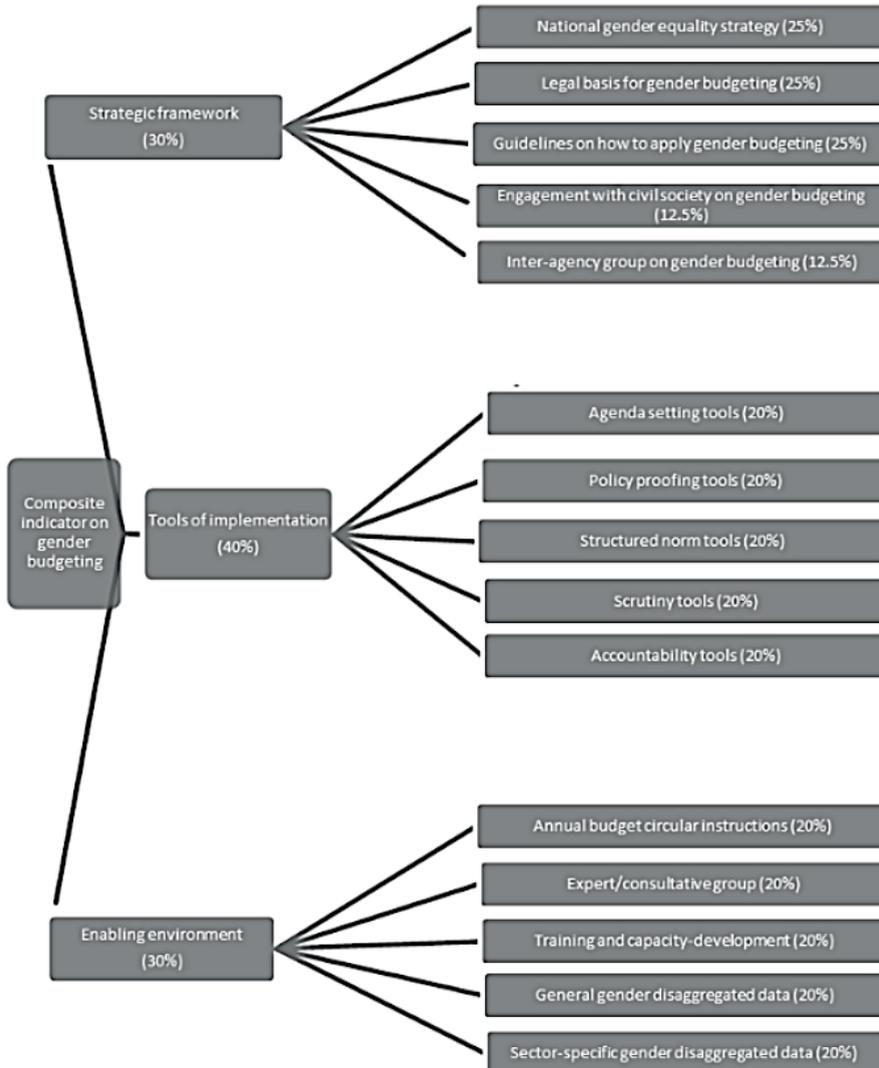
Therefore, this model not only identifies specific procedural formulations useful for achieving the objectives but also defines specific guidelines on the relationships to be established with stakeholders and on the systems for obtaining and analysing data. Table 3.1 graphically summarizes what the European Union has planned.

However, the European Union is not the only international institution committed to the search for best practices.

By analysing the various applications and measures for gender equality in various countries, the OECD proposes a specific model (Figure 3.2) focusing on the following three points (OECD 2020):

1. definition of a strategic framework
2. identification of means of implementation
3. creating an enabling environment

Figure 3.2 Variables and weights in OECD's gender budgeting model



Source: OECD 2020

More specifically, the OECD proposes the following:

“1. Gender budgeting requires political commitment, strong leadership, and clarity of roles and responsibilities of different actors across government so that a whole-of-government approach is in place. This approach is also most effective where actions are guided by a national gender equality strategy that outlines overarching gender goals. Goals may also be linked to an indicator framework that helps track progress.

2. To successfully implement gender budgeting, countries should select an approach that builds on existing elements of their budgeting system. A more advanced approach to gender budgeting benefits from the incorporation of gender perspectives at all of the different stages of the budget process. Tools employed across OECD countries include:

- Gender impact assessments: Analysis of the gender impact of existing and/or new budget measures (both ex-ante and ex-post).
- Gender dimension in performance setting: Identifying gender equality indicators and objectives as part of the performance budgeting framework.
- Gender budget statement: A summary of how budget measures are intended to support gender equality priorities.
- Gender budget tagging: Tracking how programmes and activities support gender equality objectives, helping to quantify financial flows.
- Gender perspective in evaluation and performance audit: Identifying whether gender goals relating to different policies and programmes were achieved.
- Gender perspective in spending review: Ensuring spending reprioritisation has a positive impact on gender equality goals.

The introduction of these tools is not an end in itself. Information gathered through their implementation can support analysis and more informed budget decisions, helping governments ensure the coherence of budget decisions with strategic priorities.

3. Gender budgeting will be most effective where there is a supportive enabling environment. This includes a systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data, training, and capacity development for government staff. Engaging and consulting citizens and experts, for example, through structured engagement with civil society or setting up an expert/consultative group to advise on gender budgeting, can become important to inform ongoing gender budgeting efforts and ensure it remains open to a broad range of inputs and

viewpoints, especially critical viewpoints. Equally important is for gender budgeting to be subject to oversight by accountability institutions such as parliament and the supreme audit institutions so that the government is held to account publically for its implementation” (OECD 2020).

The result is a broad model of implementation and direction to ensure that *gender mainstreaming* processes also take place in budget planning systems.

However, as we explained earlier, *gender budgeting* can be applied to any budgetary system and all levels of government at the discretion of the Member States.

Bettio et al. (2002) have shown that successive JAG initiatives in different countries over the years have been undertaken at different levels of government and have followed a variety of pathways related mainly to the role of institutions and civil society. It was thus possible to identify the following different models:

- inside the institutions
- external to the institutions
- mixed or collaborative
- participatory or “bottom-up”
- sponsored

However, Bettio et al. (2002) have shown that most GBA activities worldwide have been undertaken outside governments and by non-governmental agencies.

NGOs and other organisations can contribute by gathering information, promoting research, raising public awareness, publishing materials on GBA, coordinating with other associations working in the field, and training and disseminating knowledge (Bettio et al. 2002).

Although these initiatives have been instrumental in encouraging inclusion processes, it is no longer acceptable that the *gender budgeting* mechanism is not supported or promoted by public bodies.

It is only with governments’ proximity to people’s daily lives – through regional and local realities – that change and proper inclusion can be achieved.

Despite the existence of many guidelines defined by the most important institutions and international organisations, there are still profound differences in the adoption of measures to implement the *gender budgeting* system at the national level.

An OECD estimate (2018) revealed that only 17 countries have adopted measures and implemented specific actions, 2 countries were evaluating, while 15 countries did not implement any measures.

This different and critical approach to the issue of *gender budgeting* is certainly influenced by a policy that is not uniform and not very effective at

the international level but, in our opinion, it is still mainly and dramatically linked to cultural and social problems of individual countries.

3.2 The Gender Gap in Employment

3.2.1 *The social and economic costs of gender disparity*

In the previous paragraph, we discussed the issue of *gender budgeting* and how it can have an impact on women's private lives (in terms of time and organisation) and in economic and work terms (in terms of job opportunities, wages and, consequently, the distribution of family income).

Gender inequality is not only an ethical and social issue, it also defines typical economic horizons. Women must be able to reach their full economic potential so that the global economy itself can reap the benefits. Looking back at the gender mainstream and gender budgeting initiatives, we were able to see that many initiatives have been adopted and, in particular, the international system has provided valuable insights and models for a clear stance. However, the gender gap in employment is still substantial with important economic as well as social repercussions. The main responsibilities, therefore, lie with the governments of the individual states but also with the companies themselves, since the identification of the workforce or the allocation of positions in leadership positions has hitherto been conditioned by choices made in the light of specific economic situations but, in particular, by cultural preconceptions.

Before analysing in detail, the degree of criticality in the workplace and the company related to pay and type of job, it is considered appropriate to try to understand the social and economic costs of gender disparities.

A 2015 report sponsored by Mckinsey explores the economic potential available if the global gender gap were closed. Research notes that, in a full-potential scenario where women play the same role in labor markets as men, up to \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, could be added to the global annual GDP in 2025 (Mckinsey Global Institute 2015). In the 95 countries analysed by the study, women can generate 37% of global GDP despite representing 50% of the world's working-age population. However, the overall average contribution to GDP is not homogeneous and varies widely between regions. In India the share of production generated by women is only 17%, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) it is 18%, while in South Asia it is 24% (excluding India). In North America and Oceania, China, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the share ranges from 40% to 41% (Mckinsey Global Institute 2015: 2).

This situation is also in conflict with the representation of women in unpaid work.

Seventy-five percent of the world's total unpaid care is taken by women, including the vital tasks that keep families functioning, such as childcare, care

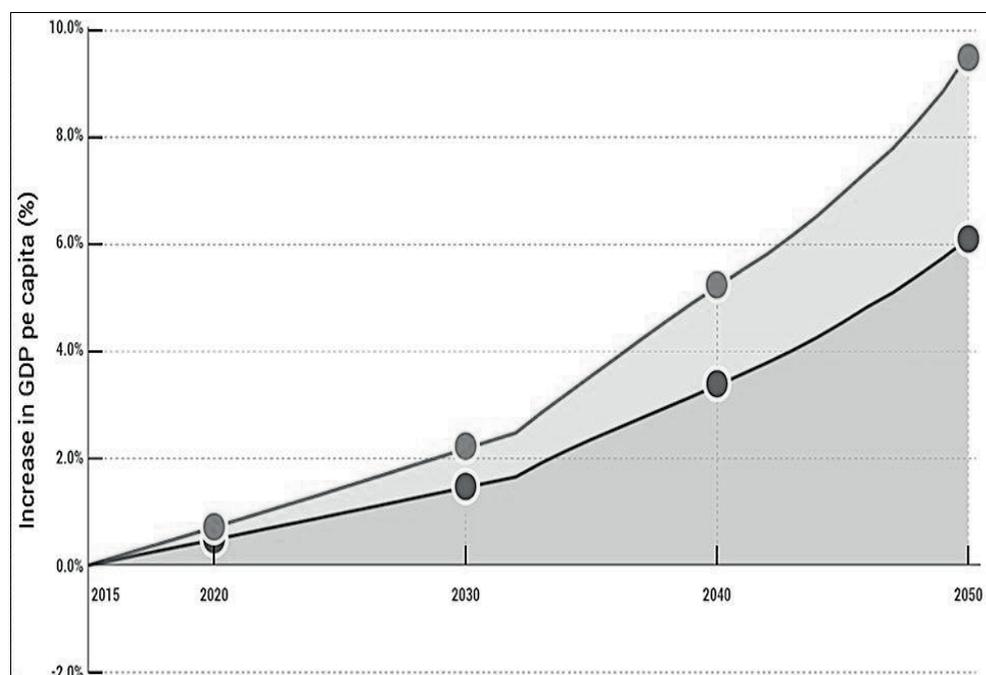
for the elderly, cooking and cleaning. However, this contribution is not included in traditional GDP measures. The study projects that women's unpaid work amounts to about \$10 trillion in production per year, roughly equivalent to 13% of global GDP (Mckinsey Global Institute 2015: 2).

The Mckinsey estimates aren't the only ones. The European Institute for Gender Equality has also analysed the costs to the EU economy of a gender gap in the workplace.

Analyses estimate that gender equality has a strong and growing impact on GDP per capita over time (Figure 3.3).

Improving gender equality would lead to an increase in EU GDP per capita of 6.1% to 9.6% by 2050, amounting to €1.95 trillion to €3.15 trillion (EIGE 2017).

Figure 3.3 Comparison of perspectives with the slow and fast effect of gender equality on GDP per capita



Source: EIGE 2021

If gender equality policies are likely to have a strong impact on GDP, the pay gap itself must be considered a high-impact variable to be managed.

The effects on GDP would be much smaller if the gender pay gap were closed, with a 0-0.2% increase in GDP per capita in the period 2030-2050 (EIGE 2021).

Moreover, closing the pay gap would also have other positive effects by reducing poverty rates among women and reducing the gender gap in old-age pensions.

But then we have to ask ourselves: why do women's wages still differ significantly from those of men and the companies' investments in terms of the inclusion of diversity (this is the case of women) remain marginal? As we shall see below, the causes are to be identified as a sum of factors of the environmental nature of work (sector and type of job), private and social (domestic duties of women), and governance (company size and governance structure).

If we proceed in an orderly fashion, a specific analysis of women's employment conditions and the *gender pay gap* can help us to understand this criticality.

3.2.2 Gender and occupation: critical issues still to be solved

It must be acknowledged that women throughout the world find it more difficult to find a job than men. Moreover, the question of quantity of work merges with the question of quality of employment, since women tend to work in low-quality jobs and often in precarious conditions.

It is not possible to argue that women alone face the problem of vulnerable jobs. By definition, the term refers to unfavourable working conditions such as limited contractual, social security and insurance protections, discrimination, violence, insecurity and poor representation of workers' interests at the union level (Burgess and Connell 2015). Throughout the world, dramatic cases of child labour (Dhakal et al. 2018) and exploitation of older men (Turchick Hakak and Al Ariss 2013) persist.

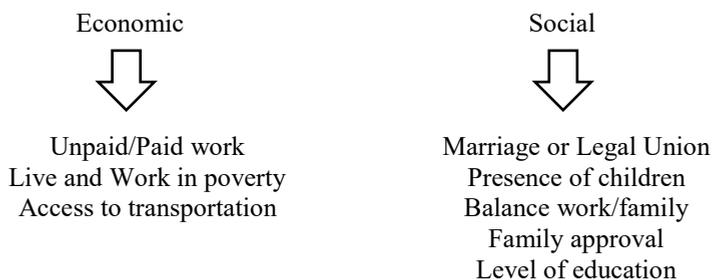
However, women tend to be more represented in certain types of vulnerable jobs. Literature studies have assessed the extent to which this aspect is anchored in obsolete cultural legacies according to which the figure and role of women continue to be closely linked to preconceptions.

The work of Köbrich Leon (2013), for example, has provided statistically significant results on the association between cultural aspects, norms and labour market behaviour of women. Further literature studies (Ballerini 2016; Dodescu and Pop-Cohut 2015; Dodescu et al. 2012; Hafeez and Ahmad 2002) and reports by the International Labour Organisation (2017) show that a woman's personal preference in the workplace is also strongly influenced by socio-economic constraints and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Ballerini (2016), in particular, argues that among the influencing factors should be considered:

1. *Patriarchal society and care for the family.* Women have always been and continue to be the center of the home organization. A woman spends most of her time taking care of the house and children, unlike her companion. This leads to less opportunity for participation in work activities.
2. *Less stability.* When it comes to women and work, it is easy to see that the monetary compensation is much lower than that of a man with the same working and performance conditions. This aspect must be added to the trend of precarious employment for women, and the lack of certainty once they enter maternity.
3. *Childcare.* A state disruption of nurseries and schools causes early abandonment or a lack of incentive to start a new career path for most mothers.
4. *Gender gap and stereotypes.* Gender stereotypes persist in our society, creating a sense of inadequacy in women, especially when it comes to positions of prestige. This inevitably fuels the gender gap that still characterises the world of work today.

So, to sum up, cultural factors are added to socio-economic factors.

Table 3.2 Main impact factors on women labour force



Source: authors' elaboration with International Labour Organisation data (2017)

In the context of Table 3.2, gender roles and the pressures to comply with these roles vary by geographical area, as well as by religion and family. Women who have a spouse or partner are therefore less likely to be employed in paid work or to actively seek one.

Men's income and having children to look after can further strengthen gender roles, oppressing women both in the private and in the workplace.

In general, both women and men report that the biggest obstacle for women in paid work is the struggle to balance it with family responsibilities (International Labour Organisation 2017). Another area of action is the balance between work and family. Inequality in hours spent in domestic chores

is inevitably reflected in an increase in women's part-time work, but also a higher proportion of women taking career breaks. This has to be done not only in the context of the development of stable and lasting work for women in the company, but also in the quality of the positions assigned to them, a fact that determines important connections with the theme of corporate governance.

From an economic point of view, in developing and emerging countries, the lack of safe and accessible transport is the most important factor in ensuring a homogeneous distribution of work.

All too often, women are at risk of being harassed and even sexually assaulted on their daily journeys.

Globally, the lack of affordable care for children or family members is also a barrier to women, both job seekers and those in paid work.

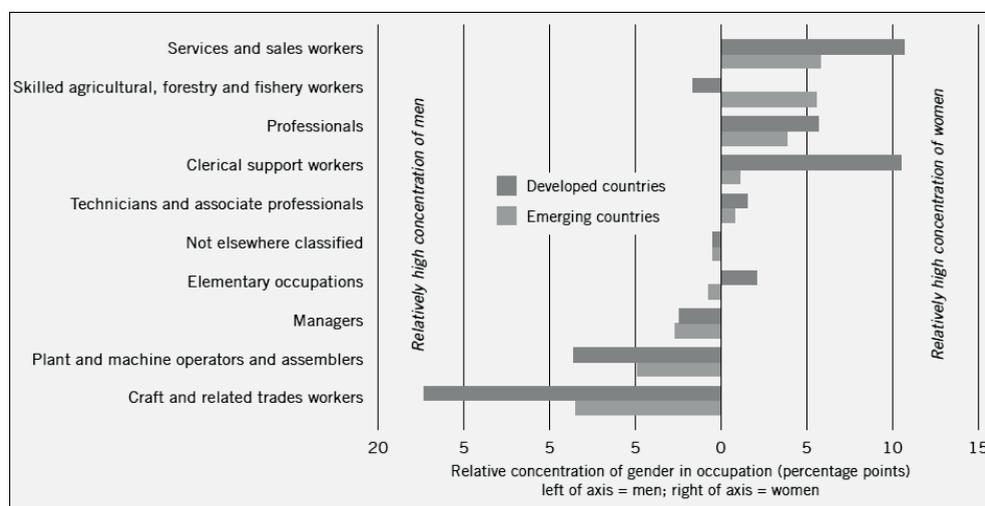
This factor reduces a woman's chances of participation by almost 5 percentage points in developing countries and 4 percentage points in developed countries (International Labour Organisation 2017). In light of the impact factors, it is possible to identify specific areas of action where international organisations (International Labour Organisation 2017; European Network of Experts on Gender Equality 2016) consider it useful to act to reduce this harmful employment gap:

- reduction of occupational segregation (horizontal and vertical);
- promotion of a better work-family balance;
- equal pay.

The principle of segregation means that women are concentrated in certain sectors, areas and levels of work.

More specifically, horizontal segregation determines whether women are grouped into low-wage occupations or sectors while vertical segregation indicates the under-representation of women in job positions in terms of income, prestige and job stability (Meulders et al. 2010; Bettio and Verashchagina 2009).

Figure 3.4 Relative concentration of gender in occupation, by income group



Source: International Labour Organisation 2017

Statistics from the International Labour Organisation show that total occupational segregation in developed countries amounted to 30.4 percentage points in 2017, almost twice as high as in emerging countries (17.0 percentage points).

As shown in Figure 3.4, patterns of segregation are relatively similar between emerging and developed countries, albeit to different degrees. In both national income groups, men are more concentrated in the following occupational groups: craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers and managers (International Labour Organisation 2017).

On the contrary, in both groups of countries, women are more concentrated in service groups, sales, and professionals. In developed countries, women are also relatively more concentrated among support workers and, to some extent, in basic occupations. While men tend to be relatively more concentrated among skilled workers in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries in developed countries, women are relatively concentrated in these occupations in emerging countries (International Labour Force 2017).

Therefore, different lines of action are desirable. A first formulation must come from national policies aimed at establishing greater recognition of women's unpaid family and domestic work, together with a system of recognition of paternity. As regards the private sector, as has already been implemented by several large-calibre companies (Joje 2021), in addition to the

numerous measures that must be applied in the area of corporate governance, it is desirable to recognise work from home in a smart way so that private commitments coexist with women's work commitments, and not overlap.

The last area of intervention is the pay gap which, given its importance and the many connections with other typical business aspects, we will analyse in the rest of this work.

3.2.3 *The Gender Pay Gap: key aspects and studies progress*

The *gender pay gap* (GPG) is the difference in pay between women and men.

The assessment focuses on salaries paid directly to employees before the deduction of income tax and social security contributions.

From this definition, studies have further distinguished the forms of GPG by identifying two specific parameters. The first is the so-called “non-adjusted pay gap”, while the second is the “adjusted pay gap”. The *non-adjusted pay gap* refers to the gap based on gross hourly earnings alone (Eurostat 2021), while the *adjusted pay gap* refers to the overall gap, which also includes the female employment rate, the level of education of male and female workers, the sector of employment and the roles of women in the workplace.

To identify the causes of the gender pay gap, it is essential to consider the unevenness of employment levels. However, this is not enough, as educational attainment and work experience become more important. The pay gap should not be considered a separate factor. It reflects a general disadvantage compared with other workers, a restriction on opportunities for participation in life and company choices, and ultimately a restriction on access to career development mechanisms.

The European Parliament's definition of the scale of this phenomenon is illuminating:

“Reducing the gender pay gap creates greater gender equality while reducing poverty and stimulating the economy. The gender pay gap is widening with age - along the career and alongside increasing family demands, while it is rather low when women enter the labour market. With less money to save and invest, these gaps accumulate and women are consequently at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion at an older age. The gender pension gap was about 29% in the EU in 2019. Equal pay is not just a matter of justice, but would also boost the economy as women would get more to spend more. This would increase the tax base and would relieve some of the burden on welfare systems. Assessments show that reducing the gender pay gap by one percentage point would increase the gross domestic product by 0.1%” (European Parliament 2020).

As a result, the value of the *gender pay gap* has an important impact both socially and economically.

However, to fully understand the key aspects of criticality, it is considered essential to review the reference literature which has facilitated the identification and study of this phenomenon.

Since this concept is not new but has dragged on dramatically over time, many formulations have tried to break down value to understand its causes better.

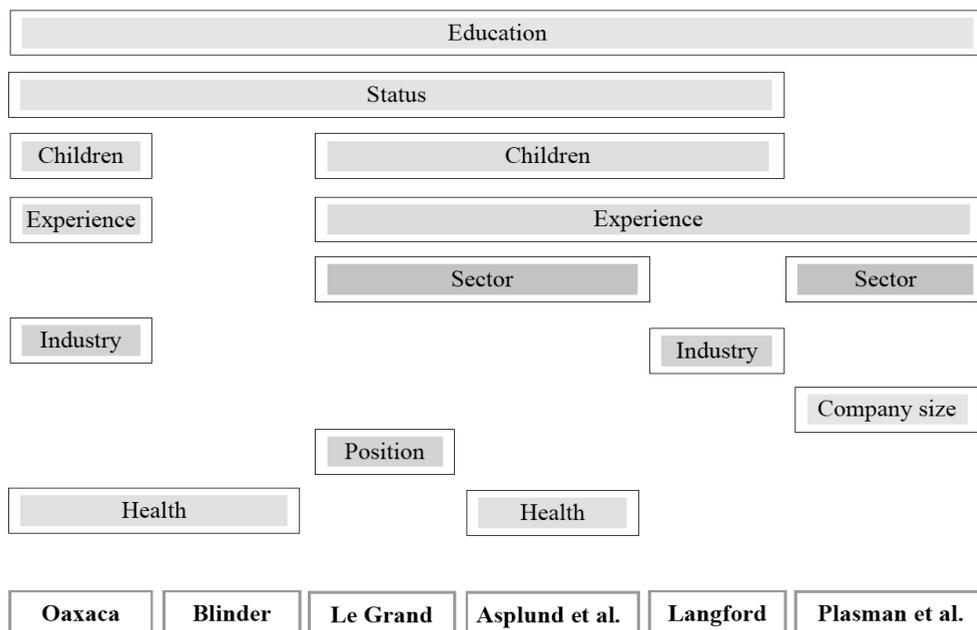
Grimshaw and Rubery (2002) have done enlightening work on the study of literature that would shape subsequent studies within the GPG.

The authors have identified the different approaches followed by the work of Oaxaca (1973), together with those of Blinder (1973), followed by Le Grand (1991), Asplund et al. (1993), Langford (1995) and Plasman et al. (2001).

It is certainly not in our interest to go into these analyses in detail, as such work has already been done by Grimshaw and Rubery and then would be dated by now.

However, it is considered interesting to extrapolate from these studies the common denominators or key elements of understanding. They provide optimal tools for understanding the foundations of the gender pay gap, but not only.

Figure 3.5 Control variables and Common denominators in the literature on GPG



Source: adapted from Grimshaw e Rubery (2002)

The qualitative representation of the control variables and common denominators defined in the literature (figure 3.5) clearly shows that the factors influencing the GPG are largely the same as those analysed previously concerning the *gender employment gap*.

They express social, economic, and governance aspects. This is why a specific improvement in the GPG issues, together with a reduction in occupational segregation (horizontal and vertical) and a better balance between work and family, can have a real impact on gender issues in the workplace. Of course, they are not the only authors to have expressed theories about the pay gap. One need only think of important doctrines focused on the specific relationship between pay and employment, such as those of Bergmann (1974), Treiman and Hartmann (1981), Calmfors and Driffil (1988), and the most recent of Geiler and Renneboog (2015).

Over time, the reference literature has certainly received further contributions aimed at providing valid interpretations of the causes of GPG. Larson and Morris (2014), for example, identified additional factors such as:

- occupational attainment;
- personal work-related characteristics and behavior;
- differences among industries and firms;
- differences in union membership;
- discrimination.

Murphy and Oesch (2015) have tried to demonstrate that equal education does not do much to counteract pay diversity.

Although more recently, it is believed that these studies do not deviate from the analytical fields of the previous literature, but rather receive the important influences. The problem of the global wage gap is still dramatically evident, not only in developing countries (Seguino 2010; Jamali et al. 2008) but also in developed countries (Terada-Hagiwara et al. 2018).

As we will see, in sectors such as science, technology, and engineering the proportion of male employees is very high and the gender gap is dramatically higher than in other sectors (World Economic Forum 2021). This fact is also evident in the varieties considered above and analysed in the literature. Education and training – especially in the field of technology – will be increasingly sought-after tools by companies to meet the impressive demand for innovation on the market.

It is not possible to act only at the level of education. Women continue to occupy a smaller number of management positions with all that this entails to define strategic business lines in D&I. In the EU area, less than 10% of CEOs of major companies are women. Female managers earn between 23% (European Parliament 2020) and 26% (Keller et al. 2020) less per hour than

male managers. This criticality certainly involves aspects of investigation related to the economic and social field but, given the application context, it urgently requires specific analyses and measures within the company on the subject of corporate governance.

3.2.4 *Company size, inclusion and compensation in C-Suite roles*

In the analysis of the variables that condition and must be controlled for a reduction of the gender pay gap, we also highlighted typical business aspects. Just as social and economic factors tend to vary considerably from country to country, so too the relationship between enterprise size and inclusion tends to be uneven and, even more, expresses many facets concerning women's leadership roles.

The literature on the correlation between firm size and wage increases shows that large firms pay substantially higher wages than smaller firms (Plasman et al. 2002; Troske 1999; Oi and Idson 1999). These studies, which can be considered the beginnings of the GPG analysis, have focused more on employee characteristics, as we have seen earlier. More recently, further studies have tried to shift the focus towards the importance of size, emphasizing the role of company characteristics.

While confirming the principle of wage increases in large companies, works such as that of Jones and Kaya (2019) try to show that, however, the gender pay gap is wider in large companies. Looking at the picture of UK private sector companies, this study shows that the gender pay gap in large companies is 11.2% compared to a gap of 5.9% in small companies, even after checking productivity characteristics. In addition, the analysis reveals that over 68% of the observed gender pay gap between large and small firms is due to differences in the returns of characteristics by firm size (Jones and Kaya 2019). Given the variety of job types, the number of opportunities, and the operating margins large companies can provide, this may be difficult to understand. However, the British example is not the only one but, as we shall see later, it is also repeated in the Italian case.

Another important aspect is the relationship between the company size and gender representation on boards and at the top levels of the company. Another important aspect is the relationship between the company size and gender representation on boards and at the top levels of the company. In the report *Women in the Workplace* produced by Mckinsey (2021), together with Lean In⁵¹, it is clear that women are trying to gain a foothold in top management positions.

⁵¹ Organisation aimed to promote gender equality in private and professional life, supporting women's identity in the process of organisational development.

The report tries to show how women managers can contribute to the company by building teams that are inclusive of diversity and still aimed at pursuing equity in the company workforce. Compared to men, they are also more likely to form alliances and build support groups. However, despite the efforts of women in management and organisational roles, companies do not fully recognise the key work they do, which is not sufficiently rewarded and, in most cases, even underestimated. As we will analyse later, this lack of recognition of women leaders has big implications for companies that risk losing valuable resources.

There is also a worrying connection with the situation that has impacted our society over the last year and a half, namely the Covid-19 pandemic. Companies cannot afford to lose key personnel because of lack of consideration, but at the same time, they do not clearly define the position of women in leadership roles (*C-Suite*). For this reason, the so-called *glass door* should hamper women's work in organisations (Picardi 2019; Andriolo and Viassone 2016; Fornengo and Guadagnini 1999) and should determine their impossibility to emerge on male colleagues during their working careers. Over the years, a funnel has formed that filters and makes it difficult for women to move forward in their careers. It is considered a gap of about 15% where, for every 100 men promoted to the role of manager, only 86 women manage to reach this step.

“Women continue to face a “broken rung” at the first step up to manager: for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 86 women are promoted. [...] The broken rung likely explains why the representation of women at the senior manager, director, and VP levels has improved more slowly than the pipeline overall” (Mckinsey 2021: 12).

The remaining 15% of women remain blocked by a sort of obstacle that relegates them to the lowest positions. This is a worrying fact for gender equality in the company, but especially for decision-making roles where, according to the study, the situation has been at a standstill in inclusivity for several years now:

“[...] There are also persistent gaps in the pipeline: promotions at the first step up to manager are not equitable, and women of color lose ground in representation at every level.

“[...] Women of color continue to lose ground at every step in the pipeline—between the entry level and the C-suite, the representation of women of color drops off by more than 75 percent.

[...] Women's representation has increased across the pipeline since 2016. However, women - especially women of color - remain significantly underrepresented in leadership" (McKinsey 2021: 7-8).

Moreover, the difference is not only between men and women but the percentage of women entering management roles also differs between white and black women: 20% of white women and 4% of black women hold *C-Suite* positions within companies.

On the other hand, this issue is considered superficially: in the 329 companies considered by the study, *Human Directors* identified a lower level of sponsorship as the cause of the gender gap. According to most of the HR managers of the 329 large companies analysed, the gender gap is mainly due to the lower sponsorship of women within the company hierarchy. Women are trapped in this bottleneck which pushes men forward, preventing qualified women workers from advancing their careers. These figures are further supported by international statistics.

According to EIGE's Gender Statistics Database (2021), as of April 2019, the share of women among the board members of the largest listed companies in the EU Member States was 28%.

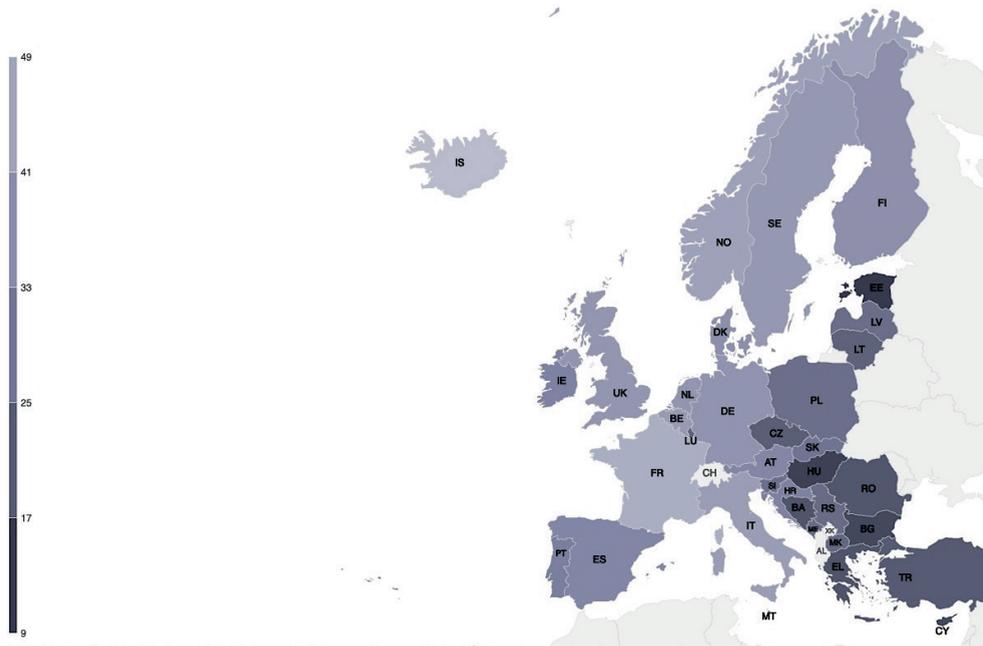
As shown in Figure 3.6, the values of this ratio are very different between the Member States of the European Union.

Despite the progress made in recent years, the under-representation of women on boards and management positions remains a major challenge for EU Member States. Statistics show that the potential for highly qualified and needed human resources remains untapped.

From this perspective, the critical discrepancy between the high number of female graduates and their number in high-level positions remains clear. Women still face many obstacles on the road to achieving leadership positions.

France proves to be the only EU Member State with at least 40% of each gender on the boards. Women in countries such as Italy, Sweden, Finland, and Germany account for at least one-third of members as a result of the binding rules imposed. However, European boards continue to be predominantly occupied by men.

Figure 3.6 Female inclusion within the boards of largest listed companies – EU 28 countries



Source: EIGE's Gender Statistics Database 2021

According to the EIGE (2021), improvements in the representation of women on the boards of listed companies have been most significant in countries that have imposed mandatory quotas. However, not all countries have binding systems. Some (Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) have introduced legislative measures limited to state-owned companies. Others have preferred to encourage companies to self-regulate. The number of countries without any measures is still high. As a result, the gap is large both in terms of measures taken and in terms of the type of measures (soft or more specific). Therefore, the marked stagnation in the number of women on boards is related to low levels of action. Understandably, strong and decisive action comes from public institutions, but we wonder whether it is right to entrust the future to that alone. The public gear is often very slow and the times to achieve change are very long. Why, then, not make companies themselves understand the value that diversity brings?

Why not promote the conditions for change from within? McKinsey is one of the first steps in this direction, which argues that:

“To drive change, companies need to invest deeply in all aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This starts with taking bold steps to ensure that women of diverse identities are well represented, but the diversity of numbers isn’t enough on its own. Companies also need to create a culture that fully leverages the benefits of diversity—one in which women, and all employees, feel comfortable bringing their unique ideas, perspectives, and experiences to the table. When women are respected and their contributions are valued, they are more likely to be happy in their jobs and to feel connected to their coworkers [...] Although there are no quick fixes to these challenges, there are steps companies can take. First, they should ensure they are applying the same best practices, with the same level of rigor, across both hiring and performance reviews. [...] Second, companies need to more fully track representation, as well as hiring and promotion outcomes. Companies need to treat diversity as they would any business priority, and that includes tying progress toward goals to advancement and compensation” (Mckinsey 2021: 37 et seq).

3.3 The Italian approach to gender employment and the Gender Pay Gap

3.3.1 The situation before and after Covid-19: between legacies and she-cession

It is considered interesting to propose in the analysis of gender employment and the gender gap the Italian case because it presents several aspects that more than others manage to define how decisive the taking of a company’s position, more than the European regulatory measures, can be in reducing the various gender gaps. Even in Italy, gender inclusion in the workplace is still a mission to be completed. This is a problem that is dragging on and that we could say has increased in the last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis induced by lockdowns and preventive measures has had asymmetric effects on the labour market, destroying more women’s jobs than men’s. This effect has even been called “she-cession” (Il Sole 24 Ore 2021; Querzè 2020). Thus, the combination of old problems with new difficulties translates into the situation of women in Italy getting worse.

To understand the situation, it is necessary to review the situation of female employment in the period before the spread of Covid-19. According to the Istat report (2021), the average paid hours in Italy, obtained as the sum of ordinary hours and hours of overtime, amounted to 1,716. The composition is different in the various geographical areas: in the North-West 1,749, in the North-East 1,734, in the Centre 1,740, in the South 1,624 and 1,605 in the Islands.

There was a difference of -15.7% between men and women in the number of hours paid in one year. According to Istat statistics, this difference is due to a different spread of contractual forms. In enterprises with 10 or more employees, the proportion of women part-time workers in the total workforce is more than twice that of men.

In the South and the Islands, women's paid hours are 19.4% and 17% lower than men's, respectively (Istat 2021). However, the proportion of women employed on part-time contracts is low compared to the national level. In the South, the number of women working part-time exceeds that of men by 4.5% while in the islands the difference is 6.1%.

In the services sector, average paid hours are around 300 fewer than in industry and the part-time component among women is much higher (19.2% compared to 6.9% among men).

Table 3.3 Labor force in Italy

Annual average estimates	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Labour force, thousands										
All persons	24 583	24 660	25 257	25 259	25 515	25 498	25 770	25 930	25 970	25 941
Males	14 459	14 425	14 628	14 589	14 687	14 754	14 850	14 889	14 899	14 837
Females	10 124	10 235	10 629	10 670	10 828	10 744	10 920	11 041	11 072	11 105
Unemployed, thousands										
All persons	2 056	2 061	2 691	3 069	3 236	3 033	3 012	2 907	2 755	2 582
Males	1 084	1 084	1 434	1 674	1 742	1 669	1 617	1 539	1 452	1 349
Females	972	977	1 257	1 394	1 494	1 364	1 395	1 368	1 304	1 232
Employment, thousands										
All persons	22 527	22 598	22 566	22 191	22 279	22 465	22 758	23 023	23 215	23 360
Males	13 375	13 340	13 194	12 914	12 945	13 085	13 233	13 349	13 447	13 488
Females	9 152	9 258	9 372	9 276	9 334	9 380	9 525	9 674	9 768	9 872
Employment (%)										
Males	59.4	59.0	58.5	58.2	58.1	58.2	58.1	58.0	57.9	57.7
Females	40.6	41.0	41.5	41.8	41.9	41.8	41.9	42.0	42.1	42.3
Unemployment rate (% of labour force)										
All persons	8.4	8.4	10.7	12.1	12.7	11.9	11.7	11.2	10.6	10.0
Males	7.5	7.5	9.8	11.5	11.9	11.3	10.9	10.3	9.7	9.1
Females	9.6	9.5	11.8	13.1	13.8	12.7	12.8	12.4	11.8	11.1
EMPLOYMENT - PROFESSIONAL STATUS, thousands										
All activities	22 527	22 598	22 566	22 191	22 279	22 465	22 758	23 023	23 215	23 360
Employers	16 829	16 936	16 942	16 679	16 777	16 983	17 305	17 676	17 890	18 043
Employers and persons working on own account	5 329	5 301	5 294	5 192	5 189	5 170	5 138	5 048	5 040	5 013
Unpaid family workers	366	357	327	316	309	307	310	294	280	299
Employees as % of employment	74.7	74.9	75.1	75.2	75.3	75.6	76.0	76.8	77.1	77.2
Part-time employment (%)										
Part-time as % of employment	16.4	16.7	17.8	18.5	18.8	18.7	18.6	18.5	18.0	18.0
Male share of part time employment	22.9	23.1	24.7	25.9	26.6	26.5	26.5	26.0	25.2	25.1
Female share of part time employment	77.1	76.9	75.3	74.1	73.4	73.5	73.5	74.0	74.8	74.9
Male part-time as % of male employment	6.3	6.5	7.5	8.3	8.6	8.5	8.5	8.3	7.8	7.9
Female part-time as % of female employment	31.0	31.2	32.2	32.8	32.9	32.8	32.6	32.4	31.9	31.8
Duration of unemployment (% of total unemployment)										
Less than one month	6.9	6.4	5.3	4.8	4.4	5.6	6.3	6.0	5.7	6.0
More than 1 month and less than 3 months	13.2	11.6	11.8	10.8	10.0	10.3	10.8	10.9	10.7	11.5
More than 3 months and less than 6 months	15.3	15.1	14.2	13.0	11.9	11.9	11.9	11.8	12.1	12.3
More than 6 months and less than 1 year	16.1	15.0	15.6	14.5	12.4	13.3	12.7	12.6	12.6	13.2
More than 1 year	48.5	52.0	53.2	56.9	61.4	58.9	58.3	58.8	59.0	57.0

Source: OECD metadata 2021

Data on the weight of part-time contracts for women have not only been analysed by Istat but as you can see in figure 3.7 are also confirmed by OECD international statistics for 2019.

The number of hours paid per year can also be seen to increase with increasing age. Depending on the macroeconomic sectors to which they

belong, the gap varies between 6% and 16.2% for women and between 9.5% and 17.3% for men (Istat 2021). Significant differences are also observed at the territorial level: the hours paid to workers under 30 are lower than those over 50 by between 4.8% (in the North-East) and 15.5% (in the South) for women and between 10.2% (in the North-East) and 19.6% (in the Islands) for men (Istat 2021).

This is the situation described by Istat in the pre-Covid period regarding employment between men and women. The differences, however, are not only evident in the number of jobs and the type of contract, but also in pay, which means, as we have repeatedly stated, the *gender pay gap*.

According to 2018 estimates, women earned less than men.

In terms of hourly earnings, the average (€15.8) was lower for women (€15.2), who earn €1 less per hour than men (Istat 2021).

Average gross compensation per employee amounted to 35,062 euros, rises to 36,610 euros in the industry sector, and reaches a minimum value of 31,967 euros in the Construction sector. Female employees earn about €6,500 less than male employees.

The gender pay gap in 2018 was thus 6.2%, reaching 14.2% in Industry and 15.9% in Services (Istat 2021).

However, among the data available for understanding the gender pay gap, it is interesting to consider that relating to the graduate sector.

As we have seen from the literature, even in Italy the average annual wage rises with the increase of the worker's educational qualifications, in all sectors of economic activity, for men and women alike.

However, the pay increase associated with qualifications differs between men and women, especially for employees with tertiary education. While women with secondary education earn on average 20.9% more than women with primary education, the gap among women with tertiary education rises to 49.3% and is just over half that for men at 80.5%. In addition, the gender pay differential was higher between executives (27.3%) and graduates (18%) (Istat 2021). In our view, these figures prompt us to pay particular attention to why companies do not encourage culturally high female work in a context where knowledge is a key added value for achieving competitiveness in the market.

We will have the opportunity to analyse this in further work. However, Istat data for 2018 are not the only ones to define a criticality still to be addressed.

According to the *Global Gender Gap Index* of the World Economic Forum (2021), Italy ranks 63rd out of 153 countries analysed.

The data and areas that have helped to define the "country scorecard" are certainly diverse and relate to economic participation, education, health, and political commitment.

We are not going to go into all the areas, as we would go beyond the scope of this work. Rather, it is useful to point out that, even according to this indicator on an international comparison, particular criticisms are evident in the field of “legislators, senior official and managers” [score 0.385 – rank 98], “estimated earned income” [0.572 – 96], “wage equality for similar work” [0.533 – 127] and “labour force participation rate” [0.752 – 98].

As we argued at the outset, this situation has not remained unchanged but has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

ENI Datalab (2021) argues that while the SARS-CoV-2 virus has affected the whole of society, some groups have been more affected than others. Women in particular have been exposed on many fronts, such as economic, family, and health.

The Eurispes Report Italy also states that the category most penalized in Italy by the impact of the Covid-19 health emergency is women. According to Istat data, in fact, after the first ten months of the pandemic 444 thousand jobs were lost, 312 thousand of which are women, and 132 thousand men (AdnKronos 2021).

The causes of this discomfort are certainly to be found in social profiles, today also for singular and extraordinary reasons, but, as we shall see, the wage situation in Italy is also and above all associated with the size of the company and the corporate governance issues. Therefore, new approaches are possible to try to find valid solutions to the current problem.

3.3.2 The Gender Gap in Italian companies: regulatory measures and governance aspects

In the course of this work, we have repeatedly argued that gender issues should be approached in an interdisciplinary way.

There is no single vision, but attention must be focused on the important social, legal, political, and economic links involved in the problem.

So far, the issue has been addressed mainly by international organisations and, as seen above, also by non-governmental bodies. Models and recommendations have been issued, but a certain amount of fundamental freedom has been left to the various Member States. This has meant that in the international context, the prospects are homogeneous but the approaches of the various countries have been dictated by independent political lines. The policies dictated by international bodies have certainly had an impact at the public level (e.g., *gender budgeting*), but it should be pointed out that equally important measures have also been taken in the private sector.

In Iceland, companies with more than 25 employees are called upon to demonstrate that women earn as much as their male colleagues.

Every two years in Belgium, companies with more than 50 employees must draw up a report on the gender pay gap and draw up an action plan to reduce the disparities.

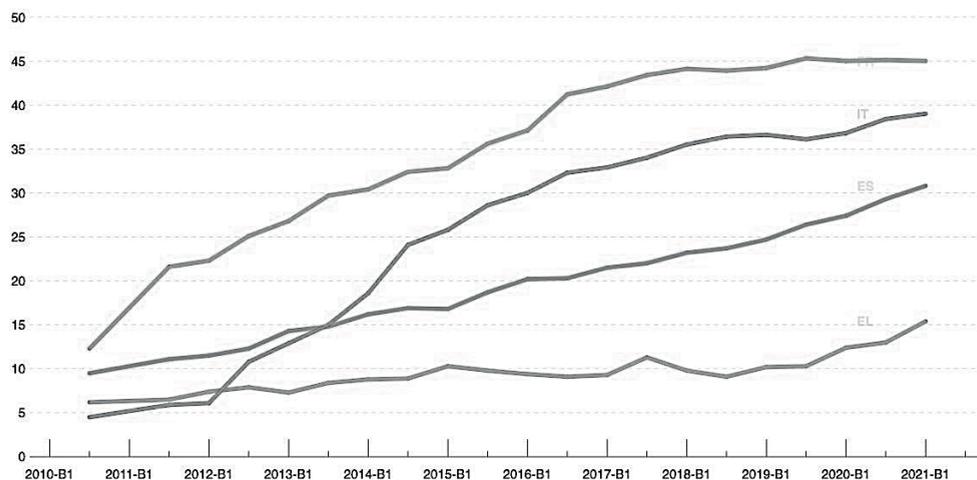
In Germany, companies with more than 200 employees are obliged to disclose how much their employees are paid for the same tasks. In the United Kingdom, companies with more than 250 employees are required to make payroll data publicly available.

The examples given above may illustrate how different domestic policies have been in this respect. From an interdisciplinary point of view, however, it is understandable that after many years of struggles to promote an inclusive social culture, we have come to understand how crucial it can be to bring back to the company level a fundamental part of the solution to this problem. Transparency in this area is increasingly left to the sensitivity of individual companies. This action is therefore based on the principle that the ability to combine work, culture and family should be promoted within the company itself. Whether or not the company should take on the private problems of individual employees is an open and widely discussed issue (Stewart et al. 2018).

However, we believe that the company should be aware that employees may have specific needs. Therefore, it must be prepared to properly manage the employment relationship with all that it entails and not avoid the most at-risk categories because outside of their specific needs, they will still be able to bring considerable value to the company. What about Italy? What are the prospects for better managing the issues related to *gender employment* and the *gender pay gap*?

Over and above prejudices and clichés, small and medium-sized Italian companies are the ones to apply a more equal wage treatment between men and women. In the *gender pay gap*, small businesses are less sexist (CNA 2021). According to the National Confederation of Crafts and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (Women's Enterprise Section), equal pay for men and women is almost a reality in small enterprises. In detail, in enterprises with up to nine employees the gap is 1.6%, even lower than in the public sector. The range widens, reaching 5.6% in companies with up to 49 employees, and then widens considerably in those with up to 249 employees (12.7%) and from 250 onwards (18.5%) (CNA 2021). These figures are both a testimony to the importance of the relational aspect in small companies, where it is possible to consider the real value of individuals without leaving any room for influence from all kinds of prejudices (CNA 2021) but also how important the governance structure is and should be a centre of analysis for understanding the problems.

Figure 3.7 Largest listed companies: board members (selected countries - all sectors)



Source: authors' elaboration on data from the EIGE's Gender Statistic database (2021)

The EIGE data (figure 3.7) show that, over a decade, substantial progress has been made in the inclusion of women at the top of large companies.

However, the data reported by the CNA are useful to understand that one account is the practice of inclusion for purely ethical purposes while another account is the possibility of creating a truly inclusive business culture. As we will see in more detail in the chapters on corporate governance and value creation, the processes of inclusion in the company should not be cynical marketing principles nor should they be traceable to mere ethical measures induced by coercive policies (although they were very useful in the early stages). As in Iceland, Belgium, and Germany, even in Italy similar measures have also been requested by the public authorities at the corporate level. To date, only companies listed on the stock exchange or with more than 100 employees are required to disclose their gender equality measures in the company through a non-financial report, which is included in the annual financial statements. In Italy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies has established the need to present a periodic report on the situation of men and women employees (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2021).

Under art. 46 of Legislative Decree No. 198 of 11 April 2006, "Code of Equal Opportunities between Men and Women" (according to the provisions of art. 9 of Law No. 125/1991 "Positive Action for the Achievement of Equality between Men and Women at Work") public and private companies employing more than 100 employees are required to draw up, every two years, a report on the situation of male and female staff. The deadline for

transmission was 30 April of the year following the end of each two years. The document must contain information relating to each of the professions, the status of recruitment, training, professional promotion, levels, changes in category or qualification, other mobility phenomena, the intervention of the CIG, dismissals, early retirement and retirement, and the remuneration actually paid (art. 46 of Legislative Decree 11 April 2006) (Figures 3.8 and 3.8bis). From 2016-2017 onwards, the report must be transmitted electronically through the appropriate procedure provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (d.m. 3 May 2018).

Figure 3.8 Example of information on total employment of men and women provided by a company on the public RaPP application

Step 1 Step 2 Step 3 Step 4 Step 5 Step 6

Id: 5

Codice Comunicazione: 20190315093122553

Ultima modifica: Nome Cognome - 20/03/2018 09:01:27

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Sezione 2 - Informazioni generali sul numero complessivo occupati (a)

Tabella 2.1 - Occupazione totale al 31/12/2017 (secondo anno del biennio)

1. Occupati alle dipendenze al 31/12/2016 (I anno del biennio) e al 31/12/2017 (secondo anno del biennio): (b)

	DIRIGENTI		QUADRI		IMPIEGATI		OPERAI		TOTALE		di cui DISABILI e CAT. PROTETTE	
	MF*	F*	MF*	F*	MF*	F*	MF*	F*	MF*	F*	MF*	F*
Occupati alle dipendenze al 31/12/2016 (I anno del biennio)	25	25	25	25	125	25	25	25	200	100	25	25
Entrate (c)	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	40	40	10	10
Uscite (d)	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	8	8	2	2
Occupati alle dipendenze al 31/12/2017 (II anno del biennio)	33	33	33	33	133	33	33	33	232	132	33	33

2. Lavoratori a domicilio che risultano nel registro dell'impresa al 31/12/2017 (II anno del biennio)

MF* 10 F* 10

Source: Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2020

Figure 3.8 bis Employment, promotion, and recruitment by gender and category on the public application RaPP

1. Occupati alle dipendenze al 31/12/2017 (secondo anno del biennio) per categoria professionale; promozioni nell'anno e assunzioni nell'anno

	OCCUPAZIONE al 31/12/2017 (a)		PROMOZIONI (b)		ASSUNZIONI (c)	
	MF*	F*	MF*	F*	MF*	F*
Dirigenti (d)	4	4	4	4	4	4
Quadri (d)	10	10	10	10	10	10
Impiegati (d)	11	11	11	11	11	11
C.c.n.l. per i dipendenti dalle imprese artigiane del settore *	4	4	4	4	4	4
C.c.n.l. per i dipendenti dalle imprese artigiane del settore *	7	7	7	7	7	7
Operai (d)	17	27	27	227	27	27
C.c.n.l. per i dipendenti dalle imprese artigiane del settore *	15	25	25	225	25	25
C.c.n.l. per i dipendenti dalle imprese artigiane del settore *	2	2	2	2	2	2
Apprendisti (d)	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALE	42	52	52	252	52	52
di cui Disabili e Cat. Protette (d)	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali 2020

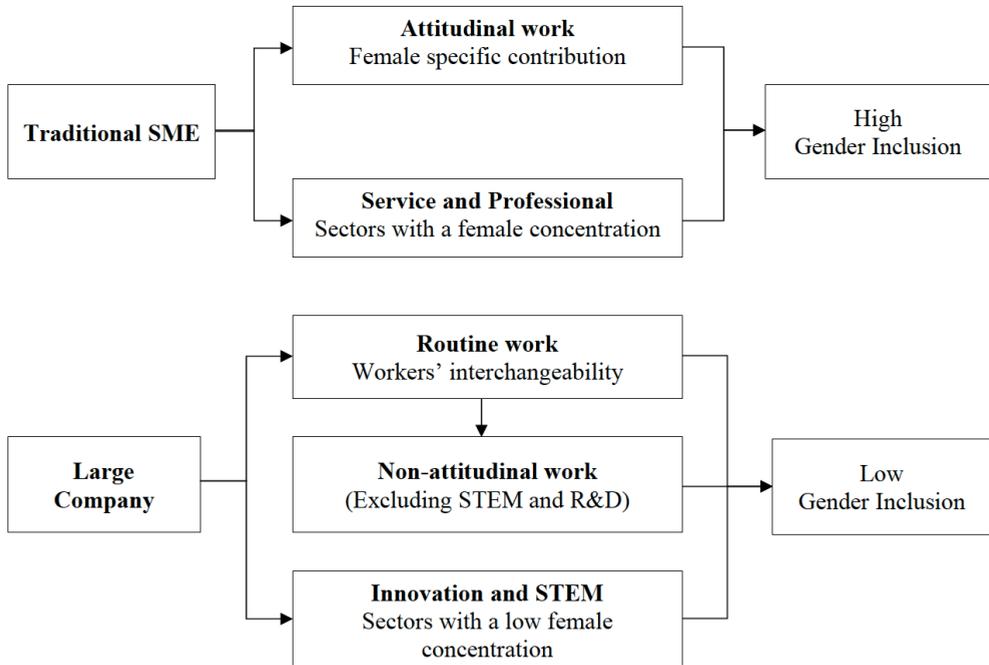
Failure to transmit – even after the competent IIL has requested regularization – entails the application of the sanctions provided for in Article 11 of Decree No. 520 of the President of the Republic of 19 March 1955, and, in the most serious cases, the suspension for one year of any contribution benefits enjoyed by the company may be ordered.

In light of the above considerations, it is possible to understand why the need to send the inclusion report mainly affects companies with more than 100 employees and those listed on the stock exchange. This is where the main challenges in terms of inclusion are found, thus confirming the studies previously considered by Jones and Kaya (2019) on the relationship between size and gender gap. As we have analysed in previous studies (Rangone 2018; Rangone 2017), small companies, especially Italian ones, remain anchored to a traditional reality (traditional means “craftsmen” and even companies that have not adopted digital or innovative systems). They have a very limited governance structure and do not fit well with expansion strategies involving changes in control structures or shared management (Rangone 2021). Moreover, according to data from Unioncamere and OECD (Truenumbers 2021), services and professions are among the most developed sectors in Italy. These aspects involve two considerations which are particularly important for understanding the reasons for greater inclusion of diversity in small firms: traditional jobs preclude a high degree of interchangeability between men and women. It is difficult to assign a task requiring specific skills to other workers. Yet, as we have analysed previously using data from the International Labour Organisation (2017), the service and professional sectors in developed countries are an area where women are able to be more present.

In contrast, large companies are more likely to pursue innovative development projects (Wagner and Hansen 2005). Innovation makes tasks routine and facilitates the introduction into the company of tasks and solutions that perform well but are not related to personal aptitudes and abilities (figure 3.9). As we will analyse in the chapter on STEM and D&I, women in technological skills are underestimated and are less involved than men.

Thus, innovation processes can certainly give companies a competitive edge, but they are ill-suited to diversity inclusion plans. In our view, therefore, the reduction of tasks based on specific knowledge or aptitude skills makes it more difficult for disadvantaged groups to approach work. Companies will prefer to hire interchangeable individuals who do not pose problems related to specific private needs.

Figure 3.9 Comparison of prospects for inclusion in SMEs and large companies



Source: authors' elaboration

In conclusion, the entrepreneurial concept underlying employment and pay inequalities is, of course, cynical and unprejudiced and, as we shall see later, does not even allow the full potential of human capital to be exploited by adding value to the company.

Moreover, the analysis of the relationship between the size of the company and the gender gap, not only internationally but also specifically in Italy, leads us to understand whether the current systems of governance and related corporate documents meet the requirements to be able to speak of true D&I and not of a simple initiative of an ethical nature.

This is the starting point for the continuation of our work.

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4. Diversity and Corporate Technology. Analysis of the current context and challenges

Abstract. In the previous chapters we have analysed the critical factors of gender difference that have been found in the historical, historical-economic, psycho-social, and employment spheres. However, as already extensively analysed with the doctrines of *gender mainstream* this issue has also shaken politics. The institutions of the European Union and the OECD have been working for some time to close the gender gap in various areas. Criticalities related to the inclusion of diversity have also been noted at the corporate level. In particular, clear gaps can be found today in the field of technological innovations. Technology is making giant strides and progressing very rapidly, but at the same time, the gender gap is widening, leaving room for stereotypes and discrimination and, above all, for a real brain drain. This chapter focuses on the relationship between gender diversity and STEM. A particular section is reserved for the *leaky pipeline* and artificial intelligence, which could irreversibly replace occupations and especially women's occupations in many companies.

4.1 Women in STEM: analysis of the critical issues and scenarios

Gender differences in skills and the use of digital devices are a real problem. In particular, reference is made to the almost complete lack of gender diversity within the technology implementation, design and diffusion groups.

“Technology can be perceived as gendered in many ways, for example if the relationship between gender and technology is viewed as mutually constitutive: technological change is shaped and structured according to societal norms and relations, which are in turn influenced by technological transformations” (EIGE 2020).

This is because the gap mainly develops in the gender composition of people with STEM skills and qualifications and in the R&D sector.

Today, in the age of automation, with artificial intelligence on the starting blocks, the inclusion of diversity in the company is more complicated,

while creating new job opportunities and reinventing “old” jobs and projecting them towards progress. Women continue to face new barriers due to inequalities in leadership roles (Mckinsey 2021) and job opportunities. Regarding the latter aspect, the literature (Ford and Vegetti 2017; Saltari and Travaglini 2008) demonstrates the need for flexibility of human capital at the same time as the development of new technological applications in companies. In addition, regarding the difficulty of integration into the specific field of research, a Mckinsey report entitled *The future of women at work: transitions in the age of automation* (2019) attempted to show a perspective on the future women will face in digital work transitions:

“Globally, 40 million to 160 million women may need to transition between occupations by 2030, often into higher-skilled roles. If they make these transitions, women could find more productive, better paid work; if they don’t, they could face a growing wage gap or leaving the labor market. Men and women need to be skilled, mobile, and tech-savvy in the automation age, but women face pervasive barriers. Concerted and creative new solutions are needed to enable women to move forward” (Mckinsey 2019: 8).

This is a key transition of the era from automation which will lead women to explore different employment scenarios by 2030:

1. traditional jobs replaced by technological implementation;
2. jobs created through economic growth and technological innovation;
3. traditional workplaces which have been upgraded and where tasks and requirements change according to the demands of the automation market.

This creates new barriers and challenges for the world of women’s work, which still occupies marginal roles in STEM, as women are the most committed to maintaining the work-life balance (Sabir and Gani 2020; Oyewoby et al. 2019). However, organisational policies can help remove barriers by supporting the transition of women’s role in the digitalised world:

“They have less time to reskill or search for employment because they spend much more time than men on unpaid care work; are less mobile due to physical safety, infrastructure, and legal challenges; and have lower access to digital technology and participation in STEM fields than men. [...] High priorities include more investment in training and transitional support; more provision of childcare and safe and affordable transportation; addressing stereotypes about occupations; boosting women’s access to mobile internet and digital skills in emerging economies; and supporting women in STEM professions and entrepreneurship” (Mckinsey 2019: 8).

Another factor of friction for women in the automation market is the level of education. The importance of education in the workplace has already been extensively discussed in the literature (Grimshaw and Rubery 2002; Blinder 1973; Le Grand 1991; Asplund et al. 1993; Langford 1995; Plasman et al. 2001).

However, even in the specific STEM field, women are required to have higher qualifications and much more complex and up-to-date skills:

“Globally, men are 33 percent more likely than women to have access to the internet; that gap worsens when focusing on women in poor, urban communities. Women also lag behind men in developing technical skills. Around the world, women account for only 35 percent of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) students in higher education. [...] Only 1.4 percent of female workers in OECD countries have jobs developing, maintaining, or operating information and communications (ICT) systems, compared with 5.5 percent of male workers” (Mckinsey 2019: 35).

Since this is a very critical and incisive aspect in terms of reducing the gender gap in STEM, it is considered essential that a specific in-depth study be carried out below.

4.2 STEM education: actions and guidelines in a gendered view

The “separation” of STEM knowledge between men and women originates in education. Only a small percentage of women who enter science studies are successful in this field.

“While women outnumber men among tertiary education students (54 % compared with 46 %), they tend to be unequally represented across study fields, a phenomenon referred to as gender segregation. In 2018, only 17 % of female students had opted to enroll in STEM studies, compared with 42 % of male students. [...] As a result, STEM studies are largely dominated by male students (68 % versus 32 % of female students) [2]. Stark levels of gender segregation among STEM students and graduates lay the ground for future gender segregation in labour markets and subsequent gender disparity in the development of digital products, for example. [...] Although some STEM fields, such as natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, are quite gender-balanced, ICT is characterised by a high degree of gender segregation, with 82 % of students being male. In 2018, 9 % of male students chose to study ICT, compared with only 1.6 % of female students in the EU. This level of under-representation of women among ICT students is hardly surprising, given the small number of young girls aspiring to become ICT professionals. [...] Women represent only 20 % of graduates in ICT-related fields, or 1.3 % of all women

graduates from tertiary education, compared with 7 % of men graduates” (EIGE 2020).

With the impressive growth of digital technology and rapid technological progress in the company, many professionals will be almost obsolete by 2021 and easily replaced by automated systems.

As a result, low-skilled or low-skilled workers in the digital sector are being discarded and replaced by educated profiles and experiences based on new technologies. This can easily be associated with society’s demand for a greater effort to grow “digital” education in tandem with technological development (Selwyn 2012; Means and Olson 1997). This opens up a crossroads to search for specifically skilled workers in STEM matters or to demand an evolution of the profiles already present in the company (expert figures who need an *upskill* and reskill) (Germain 2020).

However, these solutions are not self-evident, at least for companies. It has been found that technological progress has brought with it a wave of inequality (and we are not only talking about women but also about age and education gaps) which has transformed the composition of the workforce within organisations and has even changed the concept of certain jobs which, to date, are considered “useless” or “replaceable” (Corò and Pejčić 2018; Franzini 2018).

The National Academy of Science together with the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine (2011) has long advocated the importance of introducing knowledge of STEM subjects from compulsory school. Minorities in science and technology today are the result of several key factors stemming from family background, studies and attitudes towards these disciplines.

There is therefore a perfect mix of actions to create a proper learning process towards STEM subjects and there are five (National Academy of Science, National Academy of Engineering and Institute of Medicine 2011):

1. *correct path of learning knowledge, skills and modus operandi*. This refers to what was explained above, i.e., to bring STEM knowledge within schools and according to some theories (National Research Council 2007) from kindergarten. Children are much more open to learning and able to turn what they have learned into strong skills and knowledge of the sector by continuing with their studies;
2. *training period and practice of acquired skills*. Experimenting and putting into practice what you have learned during your years of study is essential, not only to establish what you have learned, but also to develop a certain confidence in your own abilities;
3. *develop confidence in the skills acquired and continue to progress*. This point is very important for educators who notice STEM skills in

students who do not believe in their own potential. It is therefore a good idea to create interest in subjects by trying to enhance the “inborn” abilities of the students;

4. *show motivation and aptitude for the field of study.* STEMs are an ever-growing field and require constant updating and effort from researchers. Motivation must never be lacking and there must be a constant push towards progress and improvement;
5. *keep informed about the different steps to follow and the skills to perfect according to the different scenarios and opportunities.* Students wishing to pursue a career in science and technology should be able to be constantly informed of developments in this field and be aware of the efforts needed to advance their career path. They should be aware of the opportunities through a communication and awareness-raising network in STEM matters. Coaching and mentoring programs are also very helpful in guiding students on the right path.

These elements can certainly be found at every stage of the educational pathway and require special attention in STEM areas. However, for the inclusion process to be properly homogeneous, it is also essential that the type of work be integrated with the lifestyle of each individual in terms of pay and the combination of private and working life.

4.2.1 Graduates in STEM on the gulf of the Gender Gap: empirical evidence from Italy

In the previous chapter we analysed the situation of women’s employment in Italy and the important evidence that emerges in terms of inclusion in small and large enterprises. As regards the situation of women in STEM, it is also possible to identify several key aspects for the correct interpretation of the problem and the overall picture.

In Italy, the situation of women in STEM is critical: only 18.9% of graduates chose a scientific path in 2021, even though girls have the best results in this field. However, at the beginning of a career, the gender gap appears once again, favouring men, who in STEM disciplines are paid about 20% more than women (AlmaLaurea 2020).

“The Graduate Profile Survey highlights the different gender composition of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) graduates: in fact, the male component is higher, reaching 59.8%, compared to 40.2% of female graduates, especially among engineering, scientific and political-social groups where the male presence is higher than the two-thirds.

There are fewer women, but they are better than men: they are characterised by a higher average graduation score (103.7 out of 110 compared to 102.0 for men) and a better success in terms of regularity in studies (51.3% of women completed their studies on time compared to 47.7% of men). It is true that despite better university performance, women are still penalised in the world of work. The Employment Survey shows that five years after the second level qualification, the overall employment rate is 90.3%: 92.9% for men and 86.9% for women. At the age of five, STEM graduates claim to receive a net monthly salary of EUR 1,642, but the gender gap remains high in favour of STEM graduates: EUR 1,760 for men compared to EUR 1,472 for women. If the STEM graduates are more appropriately isolated from those who have started their current job after graduation and are working fulltime, the pay gap tends to narrow, although it remains high and still favours men in all disciplines: overall +15.7%, corresponding to a pay of €1780 among men and €1,538 among women” (AlmaLaurea 2020: 6)⁵².

⁵² Original version: “L’Indagine sul Profilo dei laureati mette in evidenza la diversa composizione per genere tra i laureati STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics): è più elevata infatti la componente maschile, che raggiunge il 59,8%, rispetto al 40,2% di quella femminile, in particolare tra i gruppi ingegneria, scientifico e politico-sociale dove la presenza maschile supera i due terzi.

Le donne sono in numero minore, ma sono più brave degli uomini: sono infatti caratterizzate da un voto medio di laurea più alto (103,7 su 110, rispetto al 102,0 degli uomini) e da una migliore riuscita in termini di regolarità negli studi (tra le donne il 51,3% ha concluso gli studi nei tempi previsti rispetto al 47,7% degli uomini). Resta vero che nonostante performance universitarie migliori, le donne restano penalizzate nel mondo del lavoro. L’Indagine sulla Condizione occupazionale mostra che a cinque anni dal conseguimento del titolo di secondo livello il tasso di occupazione è complessivamente pari al 90,3%: il 92,9% per gli uomini e l’86,9% per le donne. A cinque anni i laureati STEM dichiarano di percepire una retribuzione mensile netta pari a 1.642 euro, ma il divario uomini-donne permane elevato a favore dei primi: 1.760 euro percepiti dagli uomini rispetto ai 1.472 euro delle donne. Isolando, più opportunamente, tra i laureati STEM, coloro che hanno iniziato l’attuale attività lavorativa dopo la laurea e lavorano a tempo pieno, il differenziale retributivo tende a diminuire, sebbene permanga elevato e sempre a favore degli uomini in tutti i percorsi disciplinari: nel complesso pari a +15,7%, corrisponde a una

Data from the 2020 survey of the Italian University's Consortium and the one conducted by the association of companies for the promotion of women's work, ValoreD, show that the employment rate for women in the field of technology and innovation is worrying. It should also be borne in mind that it is much more difficult for women to pursue a career in the same workplace.

In June 2021 ValoreD conducted a targeted survey of 7,481 women in 61 organizations from 11 different sectors in the context of STEM subjects. (ValoreD 2021):

- banking and insurance sector;
- fashion industry;
- energy and oil & gas sector;
- food sector;
- transport sector;
- chemical and pharmaceutical sector;
- digital and IT sector;
- telecommunications sector;
- industrial sector of packaging and production;
- professional and advisory services.

The survey aimed to re-establish young women's interest in science subjects, while at the same time promoting work to upgrade to high-potential professional profiles in the field of technological innovation and seeking to reduce and prevent the "brain drain" of promising women in STEM. The study was conducted through the analysis of several identifiable macro-areas within the issue of women and STEM subjects:

- *Profile analysis.* The many interviewees were divided into four main categories: women who have consciously studied STEM subjects and are currently working within the sector, those who have graduated from STEM but have not pursued a career in science and technology, and those who have obtained a degree in science and technology. Finally, STEM graduates who had a role in the field for a period of time but who have now retired for family or other reasons. The profiles analysed were also divided by age groups, work and family situation and role and tasks performed.
- *Education.* The sample group was then divided according to the degree obtained: high school, technical-vocational institute or bachelor's/magistral degree.

retribuzione di 1.780 euro tra gli uomini e 1.538 euro tra le donne" (Alma Laurea 2020: 6).

- *Future prospects and careers for women in STEM subjects.* The analytical mind appears from the very first school experiences: most of the interviewee's report that they have always been attracted to STEM subjects, but that, nevertheless, they preferred to pursue different careers for fear of being de-professionalized. Only 35.1% trust the higher employment rate produced by the STEM sector.
- *Women and careers in innovation and science.* Most of the women who participated in the survey started their career in STEM-related roles (80%), but the prospects for improvement at the managerial level are disappointing, despite the large responsibilities.
- *Frictions and turns.* It seems that over 48% of the sample analysed are satisfied with their education and career choices, but 14.5% have second thoughts and a worrying 20% are uncertain.
- *The value of competent profiles for STEM companies.* From the reference sample it seems clear that more than half of the women interviewed do not feel fully valued by their company. Women in STEM appear to be blocked by an insurmountable gender gap on the other side of the river, resulting in a de-professionalized compared to their male colleagues.
- *The brain drain* from the STEM sector is a phenomenon that has been affecting Italy for years in the scientific field and currently affects the profiles of women competent in STEM. Most of the interviewees said that they had tried to pursue a career in the sector, but subsequently, for reasons of various kinds, preferred to pursue different paths.
- *STEM reference models.* Those who have decided to focus their future in the field of technological innovation say that they have been inspired by great women scientists: around 63% of the respondents see Rita Levi di Montalcini, Margherita Hack as the one who created that interest in a STEM career.
- *Perception of the innovation sector in today's digital world.* Having a clear picture of S & T expectations is the key to successful development: the reference sample has great confidence in STEM subjects, especially in terms of technological innovation and the environment. However, it remains concerned that the media, the institutions and the younger generation do not give much importance to the sector.
- *Bias that discriminate against STEM women.* The study focused on the so-called unconscious bias, that is, unconscious cognitive mechanisms that negatively influence critical thinking and create unconscious stereotypes in dealing with a given situation. In fact, in some cases, women censor themselves in certain areas of their careers (value of professional partnerships, leadership skills, stereotypes linked to school background and which put women and men at opposite poles when it comes to science, the role of the family, the possibility of reconciling their private life with work,

the difference of remuneration between women and men, and the issue of “employment precedence”).

The survey highlighted the main problems of gender stereotypes that persist and continue to be created on the subject of women in science and technology:

“While STEM disciplines are at the heart of future work, it is clear how urgent it is to close the gender gap that still exists in this area. We investigated the motivations of STEM workers to remove barriers and overcome stereotypes that underlie persistent inequalities.

[...] Recently, WEF highlighted the top skills needed on the job for the next 5 years: STEM skills emerge, but also important soft skills such as analytical thinking, innovation, leadership and social influence. Another study finds that 33% of the skills needed three years ago are no longer relevant. [...] Developing the skills that organizations will need in the near future of their work requires identifying and developing the resources with potential already present in the company, so that they can grow and emerge together with the new generations of STEM women who are entering the company’s contexts with ever-growing numbers” (ValoreD 2021: 43)⁵³.

From the analysis of these data and the reality that involves women in STEM in Italy, it can be argued that science graduates are on the brink of a precipice and need targeted interventions.

The studies presented above should be a stimulus and inspiration for organisations that wish to make a significant change in the role of women in science, breaking down stereotypes and enhancing the internal resources of institutions and companies.

⁵³ Original version: “Se le discipline STEM sono al centro dei lavori del futuro, è chiaro quanto sia urgente colmare il gender gap che ancora caratterizza questo ambito. Abbiamo indagato le motivazioni delle lavoratrici STEM per poter rimuovere gli ostacoli e superare gli stereotipi alla base delle disparità che persistono. [...] Di recente il WEF ha evidenziato le top skills necessarie sul lavoro per i prossimi 5 anni: emergono le competenze STEM, ma anche importanti soft skills come il pensiero analitico, l’innovazione, la leadership e la capacità di influenza sociale. Un altro studio rileva che il 33% delle competenze necessarie tre anni fa oggi non sono più rilevanti. [...] Sviluppare le competenze di cui le organizzazioni avranno bisogno nel futuro prossimo del lavoro richiede di identificare e sviluppare ora le risorse con potenziale già presenti in azienda, per farle crescere ed emergere insieme alle nuove generazioni di donne STEM che si stanno inserendo nei contesti aziendali con numeri in continua crescita” (ValoreD 2021: 43).

4.2.2 *The Leaky Pipeline*

The above analyses allow us to consider a further critical aspect related to gender inclusion in STEM. It is the metaphor of the “gas pipeline” or *Leaky pipeline* (Cannady et al. 2014): this term attempts to explain the critical situation of the loss of talented women in scientific and technological research (Griffin 2017; Resmini 2016; Mueller 2015). In fact, many of the women entering science careers, as we have seen, feel underrated and under-qualified, creating an ever-increasing flow of women leaving their profession or university studies (Petray et al. 2019; Metcalf 2010; Blickenstaff 2006).

There is thus a progressive reduction in the number of women in science and technology courses and careers. The number of women who start a university course in STEM is higher at the stage of enrolment in courses up to graduation. As the path progresses, e.g., in research doctoral studies, the influx of women decreases and decreases progressively, until it decreases dramatically among regular professors in the faculties of natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics. Thus, in the STEM sector, over the years, there has been a smaller number of women than men and their representation is low, especially among high-level figures (Krivkovich et al. 2016). At the height of this situation, there is a social and cultural issue: doctoral students, researchers, and PhDs do not have a suitable economic return on their own. At this critical stage of academic careers, it is possible that women in a couple are sacrificing their careers rather than their partners. Once again, gender stereotypes are the result of a deeply rooted patriarchal society and mentality. This dynamic has a well-defined name, the phenomenon of the two-body problem (Jorgenson 2016; Yakaboski 2016; Wolf-Wendel et al. 2004; McNeil and Sher 1999). It is a real dilemma that takes couples or spouses into account in relation to the academic world. More concretely, the emergence of difficulties in establishing themselves in the academic world in both partners creates a criticality that, if the couple wants to continue to be together, one of the two parties must be willing to give up the academic career. Otherwise, the relationship could suffer friction due to the continuous separation of the spouses. This dilemma shows the possible consequences of the decisions and compromises made by the couple in terms of gender inequality.

Thus, in addition to this situation of moral inequality, it must be considered the resistance of a cultural system that is still strongly masculine and penalizes women through discrimination at work.

These affect career progression and affect life choices. For example, we can mention the disparity in the level of hiring in the field of technology and science and the substantial pay gap (Kijima et al. 2021). This trend seems to have become more pronounced over the last decade and seems likely to worsen before 2030 as technologies progressively increase. Innovation, mainly related

to STEM subjects, is “highlighting” the gender divide in these areas (Herschberg and Berger 2015).

The situation of women in the STEM sector is therefore still very precarious and shaken by deep-rooted gender stereotypes which obscure the capacities of young researchers and women who are making their way into science.

This leaking “pipeline” must necessarily be corrected to prevent the loss of promising resources within the scientific and technological field.

For this reason, it is important to try to review the main stages of the initiatives taken at the institutional level to reduce this technology gap, both internationally and nationally, using the Italian example.

4.3 European Union: perspectives in Horizon 2020 and Project STAGES

If we approach the subject of prospects, we can see that at the European level, we are trying to achieve both the creation of homogeneous groups in research institutions and the removal of any obstacles to gender equality in science. Specialised teams from the European Union are moving into the STEM sector to guarantee a career for young researchers.

It is called Project STAGES (Structural Transformation to Achieve Gender Equality in Science) and is the EU’s action plan to bring about a definitive change within the field of technological research for equitable resource management (EIGE 2015).

The consortium responsible for the STAGES Project has therefore implemented several lines of action starting from seven different actors from the Member States. We are talking about research institutes together with the universities of Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Romania:

1. *Italy*: Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, ASDO and University of Milan;
2. *Germany*: Fraunhofer – Society for the Promotion of Applied Research in Germany;
3. *Denmark*: Aarhus University;
4. *Romania*: Alexandru Ioan Cuza University;
5. *Netherlands*: Radboud University

The plan was developed to create a research environment that respects equal opportunities and promotes leadership roles for women in science.

This project marked an important milestone in overcoming the problem of gender inequality in science, with the implementation of action plans for the promotion and development of the concept of gender equality, also at the institutional level and in the organizational culture.

The programme has been developed in great detail and based on three different study approaches:

The “STAGES project was designed on the basis of three general approaches, which informed the way the Action Plans were built and the kind of measures which were included. The first approach involves integrating different strategies comprehensively aimed at inducing structural change processes, i.e.:

- making research institutions an enabling environment for women’s progress and working lives (including support to work-life balance and early-career phases);
- promoting the sex and gender dimensions in the image of science, in science education and in the very process of research and innovation;
- promoting women in different kinds of scientific leadership positions.

The second approach concerns negotiating with internal stakeholders, each time addressing the most relevant (different leaderships, administrative staff, researchers, students, the public at large). The actions considered were aimed at negotiating change at four levels:

- the interpretive level (i.e., raising awareness of gender arrangements within the organisation and of the relevance of the issue, so as to negotiate a common understanding of the problems to be addressed);
- the symbolic level (i.e., redressing the masculine symbolism of science, so as to support women scientists’ visibility and remove stereotyped images of women scientists and science itself);
- the institutional level (i.e., negotiating change in the “rules of the game”, so as to modify the overt or hidden structures of women’s discrimination);
- the operational level (i.e., negotiating to translate good will, declarations or decisions into actual actions in a reasonable time).

The third approach focuses on the dynamics of change and it entails the design of inclusive implementation teams and the identification of actual or potential “transformational players” within and outside the organisation to act as catalysts for change. From this perspective, the teams would engage a growing number of relevant stakeholders and to build alliances with other active groups so to take advantage of their supportive attitudes” (EIGE 2015: 6).

In the planning of the main activities, however, constant communication is developed between the selected research institutes to promote the exchange of knowledge, data, and experience. In addition, the project action plan involved

stakeholders with courses on gender equality, gender quotas on councils, and establishing a national day for women researchers.

The organisations which took part in the programme have also integrated a sustainability plan which guarantees the continuity of the actions undertaken during the STAGES project. Some of them have already incorporated them into their current practices, while others have been used to reinforce existing plans on gender equality and diversity. In addition, the seven main actors supporting the project have worked to make clearer and more understandable the analysis as well as the monitoring and evaluation phases of the processes activated which support the programme in each of the organisations where this has been implemented.

As a result, guidelines have been included (each of which is related to a specific field) for the proper integration of STAGES research institutions:

1. the starting point is the collection/monitoring of gender equality data;
2. then the involvement of managers;
3. consequently, the decision-making and institutionalization process is identified;
4. there will also be a need to disseminate information through the network on women's involvement in education and research;
5. after the initial stages, there is a real gender mainstreaming in education and research;
6. to keep the results of the project constant it will then be necessary to implement a communication plan;
7. the verification of the visibility of the collected information concludes the process.

For the proper implementation of the STAGES project, these last points are essential to highlight the work done and to facilitate the exchange of information useful to other projects. Another activity that can promote the disclosure of data is the use of a newsletter to promote refresher conferences.

The efforts of the organisations involved in the project are helping to implement the structural change needed to advance gender equality in science and research institutions at the European level. This will benefit women by increasing their professional participation in research while contributing to better quality, more inclusive, and diversified research in Europe (Cordis 2017).

Another important step in the field of gender equality and science is the European Union's plan that has been implemented in 2022: it is called the GEP (Gender Equality Plan) project and is part of Horizon2020, the funding programme for research and innovation promulgated by the European Commission, which has earmarked a research fund of 95.5 billion euros for the

period 2022-2028. GEPs will be established as a mandatory requirement for access to Horizon 2020 research competitions: these were created to make concrete use of the work and contribution of women in scientific research. The GEP programme is the result of years of implementation by the European Commission itself, in collaboration with women scientists' associations, of policies and instruments for gender equality in research institutions. It is therefore the result of a long process that began in 1999 with the establishment of the Helsinki Group on gender in research and innovation (APRE 2021).

“The Helsinki Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (hereafter the HG) welcomes the progress made to implement gender equality and gender mainstreaming under the H2020 as a cross-cutting issue and the concrete provisions adopted to achieve the three specific objectives. The HG underlines that the three gender equality objectives in H2020 are crucial for Research and Innovation (R&I) excellence in the ERA, stimulating both the quality of R&I outputs and their relevance to society:

- **Encouraging gender balance in research teams** is a basic principle for pursuing excellence because it increases the participation of talented researchers from diverse backgrounds.
- **Ensuring gender balance in decision making** is more than a matter of a basic right to equal participation. It also contributes to better grounded decisions and enriches the R&I agenda setting, facilitating the inclusion of all gender specific needs and interests.
- **Integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation** content increases the overall quality and relevance of R&I by avoiding biased studies based on gender stereotypes and on the male default model. It fosters responsible research for sustainable future by improving R&I methods and outputs that take into account the needs and interests of the whole population” (APRE 2021: 1).

Londa Schiebinger, Professor of History of Science in the Department of History at Stanford University, author of the book *Nature's Body: Gender In The Making Of Modern Science*, and coordinator of the Gendered Innovations project between the United States and Europe, outlined the goals of the Horizon2020 strategy that were subsequently integrated into the GEP project. This is a specific approach to tackle discrimination in STEM disciplines by making ad hoc “remedies” in the following areas:

1. *Fixing the numbers of women*: monitor and increase the total participation of women in STEM disciplines, increasing their representation;

2. *Fixing the institutions*: re-shape the internal organisation of the institutions by encouraging and promoting gender equality through structural changes (such as in the staff selection system and career development) within research organisations;
3. *Fixing the knowledge*: define the importance of a gender vision in innovation that can raise levels of scientific excellence.

The EIGE considers the GEPs to be an important strategic tool to support the implementation of *gender mainstreaming* policies in research institutions, through continuous impact assessments on practice reference groups to identify gender discrimination, identifying and implementing innovative strategies to address any obstacles and setting specific indicators for monitoring objectives. (EIGE 2021):

“A Gender Equality Plan can be broken up in different steps or phases, each requiring specific types of interventions:

An *analysis phase*, in which sex-disaggregated data is collected; procedures, processes and practices are critically assessed with a view to detect gender inequalities and gender bias;

A *planning phase*, in which objectives are defined, targets are set, actions and measures to remedy the identified problems are decided, resources and responsibilities are attributed and timelines are agreed upon;

An *implementation phase*, in which activities are implemented and outreach efforts are undertaken so as to gradually expand the network of stakeholders;

A *monitoring phase*, in which the process and the progress are regularly followed through and assessed. Findings from the monitoring exercise(s) allow to adjust and to improve interventions, so that their results can be optimized” (EIGE 2021”).

The above steps are necessary for a GEP to be properly developed. A plan must consider the many variables involved, such as the type of organisation, the institutional context, the disciplines addressed, the obstacles identified, and the gender inequalities identified during the analysis.

A tool made available by the EIGE, the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR), can also be used to design a GEP. It provides an advisory service to organisations, research organisations and universities to follow the guidelines at all stages of the development of a *gender equality plan* and provides the tools for a proper impact assessment within reference groups.

Each plan will have to allocate specific resources for its implementation: hire a *gender equality officer* or transform some internal resources so that they can cover such positions; it will also have to provide mechanisms to gather

information and monitor the sex and gender division, including precise indicators in the analysis.

Therefore, those who want to be part of the *Horizon2020* project will present their plan for gender equality publicly, with the signature of the top manager and their GEP as a public document so that it can be consulted on the organisation's website and known to the resources themselves, and signed by the top management. However, the work of the organisations wishing to participate in the project will not extinguish their tasks with the presentation of the PSG: annual reports will have to be drawn up, concerning the defined indicators, for constant monitoring of the impact of the gender plan. In addition, internal know-how on gender equality will have to be increased through training and capacity building.

The structure of a GEP thus foresees the definition of specific areas (also suggested by the TARGET plans of the *Horizon 2020* programme) which refer to specific objectives for the promotion of gender equality in education and research institutions:

- to promote work-life balance and an organizational culture that is inclusive and differentiated;
- encouraging gender balance in leadership and decision-making;
- to ensure gender equality in recruitment processes and career development;
- encourage the introduction of gender mainstream strategies in research and academic and training content;
- promote measures against gender-based violence within organisations, such as mobbing and sexual harassment.

Concrete help for the correct drafting of GEPs is provided by the European Commission, which suggests drawing on the previous experience of research organisations that have experimented with GEPs by publishing documents and guidelines. The European Commission, already in the Seventh Framework Programme, in the period 2007-2013 began to take the first steps towards innovation and excellence in research, development, and technology with the introduction of four programmes: Cooperation, Ideas, People and Capacities (Cordis 2007). As a result of FP7, some institutions started to renew their methodologies, starting with the tools and criteria for finding and selecting staff and testing prototypes for creating gender equality plans.

Two types of indicators can be found in the GEPs: quantitative and qualitative. The former measure the level of improvement of the status of women in the organisation about the initial analysis. Several factors can be considered, such as:

- the presence of women in managerial positions;

- representation of women in leadership positions;
- the differences between women and men in terms of access to the organisation's strategic resources;
- the percentage of women and men who adhere to the activities set out in the plan.

At the same time, qualitative indicators monitor and evaluate the strategic changes of the organisation from a gender perspective: mission, vision, and purpose of the organisation integrated with gender mainstream perspectives; but also, long-term initiatives for the promotion of gender equality (such as coaching programmes on women leadership) and the establishment of committees to monitor gender equality standards within the organisation.

The adoption of the GEPs by research institutions in 2022 thus provides a strong impetus to help achieve the key objectives identified by Horizon 2020 on gender equality and D&I in innovation:

- greater involvement of women in research and innovation programmes;
- integrated research and innovation projects with a gender perspective, aiming at reducing disparities between men and women;
- integration of the policies of research institutions and innovation with different biases within equal opportunities, such as ethnicity, disability, and religion;
- greater participation by Member States in initiatives dedicated to gender inclusiveness and equality in research and innovation projects (EIGE 2017).

As shown, the gender equality plans have, to date, a great deal of scope for innovation and impact on gender equity initiatives in research, especially because they place their action within a systemic framework, putting into practice the efforts made in previous years. To date, the main obstacle for the European Commission and the organisations that will join the programme is to implement and maintain the adoption of the GEPs to consolidate the ambitious objectives of the plan and Horizon2020.

To make this happen, we need to build on previous experience and available information. The aim is to build up knowledge and skills on gender policies and organisational change, relying on adequate and prepared resources for the activities foreseen in the plan. Even in scientific institutions, there can be no change without a lot of work behind them. However, this initial investment of forces will pay off with greater consideration for more diverse and inclusive resources and organisations.

4.4 Gender Gap and AI: bias and stereotypes

Several scenarios could arise in the future with the implementation of virtual reality and the increasing introduction of Artificial Intelligence. When we talk about globalisation and digitalisation, we cannot forget all those technologies that will change jobs and the economy over the next 10 years.

The introduction and implementation of AI are expected to generate a flow of about 4 trillion dollars by 2022; while, by 2030, the global economic gains of AI will account for 70% of the economic impact, developing particularly in China and North America (Suman 2021). Unfortunately, only a few will benefit from the real gain generated by AI, as research on AI development is concentrated more in high-income countries. This will create an insurmountable gap with developing countries, which will not be able to benefit from the new technologies (Suman 2021). These “smart” technologies will become part of everyday life and become the real protagonists of the business revolution. They will affect the use of labour and the specific resources of companies, which will be “pushed” towards “smart” structural change. This process has been underway for a long time and aims to turn all areas of operation into digital since the complete digitization of the areas allows full control of the innumerable functions previously performed by man. In such a context, a kind of “smart” change can be observed which makes the tasks be performed more efficiently and effectively.

As an example, we can consider the structure of the production companies which, over the years, have implemented a full integration in *Smart Key* through the implementation of AI (Rangone 2020). The latter makes it possible to avoid human intervention in the production processes and the control phase of the processes themselves.

In the field of operations, digitalization makes the company “smart” through the adoption of *big data* concerning *process mining*, optimization of inventories, purchases, and asset tracking. Yet, in the exquisitely managerial field, the technology used makes it possible to solve with greater simplicity the innumerable functions traditionally performed by a man concerning the identification of market risks, the monitoring of the company’s reputation, the same recruitment phase and the relationship with customers (Rangone 2020).

In the “smart” context, therefore, artificial intelligence (AI) plays and will play an increasingly crucial role, certainly influencing the operation of many professions. Within the company, AI will certainly play a key role in improving productivity and efficiency. However, if not properly managed and included, the increased use of these technologies could have a serious impact on the workforce. In this regard, the first aspect to be negatively affected will be the gender gap which, according to recent statistics (McKinsey 2019), will increase, worsening the representation of women in the world of work. Using recent statistics, we have previously analysed the under-representation of

women in occupations requiring technical and scientific training in STEM subjects.

In 2018, the World Economic Forum (WE Forum 2018) report included an analysis in partnership with LinkedIn aimed at showing the *gender gap* that is being created in professions requiring AI management skills. The report shows that women occupy only 22% of the workforce in AI implementation and that this gap is three times larger than in other industrial sectors. Moreover, the gap is also evident in terms of governance, where women are rarely present in senior positions, while the number of women in analytical and research roles is much higher.

As the future looks increasingly towards an AI industry in every sector, there is a risk that the gender gap will widen every year and widen dramatically in other segments of the STEM industry, such as manufacturing, hardware, networking, software, IT services, healthcare, and education.

The issue of the gender gap is therefore also widely debated in this specific sector of industry, as AI is strongly shifting the focus of the economy of all countries and shaping existing professions, and creating new ones. This will have an impact on gender as “22% of AI professionals globally are women, compared to 78% who are male, in Italy the percentage is higher than 28%” (Devescovi 2018).

A report by UNESCO (2017) entitled *Cracking the code: girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)* gathered analyses and studies from 70 countries. This work focuses on the gender gap and barriers for women in STEM education. Since 2017, the situation has not changed, but the gap in research continues. In these countries, 70% of the human capital corresponds to men employed in science and technology, compared with 30% of women (UNESCO 2020). This is a rather critical figure which marks a significant peak in the representation of women in this field of study, which is now clearly growing. However, gender stereotypes and prejudices could be further accentuated by the fact that most algorithms are programmed by men. “*We cannot therefore envisage a future of fairness if Artificial Intelligences are the first to follow the stereotypes of the past*” (UNESCO 2020).

A lifeline for gender equality can only be found if AI is used as a sort of battering ram against the wall of stereotypes, guaranteeing women an active role in AI design.

A recent OECD report also highlighted the particular criticalities related to gender inequalities in AI, outlining a challenging future for women in the workplace (OECD 2019).

Not only that. The literature on the subject tries to explain that *biases* – or “prejudices” typical of the man – could shortly also be transmitted to new technologies if most algorithms are developed by men (Fasano 2021; Wiggers

2020; Quintarelli et al. 2019). Therefore, if the algorithms underlying applications, social media, and websites continue to be created by the male gender, which carries with it the stereotypes of a patriarchal society, they risk widening a gender gap that, by now, should already be resolved. These alarming prospects, therefore, give rise to many concerns, as gender stereotypes are gaining ground not only in business and politics but also within the network.

The danger we could run is therefore linked to the possibility of inculcating *biases* within the algorithms, conditioning them towards “sexist” positions (Garcia 2017). A Columbia University study confirmed these concerns, reporting data that the algorithms of the most popular social networks “reward” posts posted more by male accounts. This translates into a greater number of views, likes, reactions, visibility, and, of course, popularity.

“Algorithmic bias isn’t new. In the 1970s and 1980s, St. George’s Hospital Medical School in the United Kingdom used a computer program to do initial screening of applicants. The program, which mimicked the choices admission staff had made in the past, denied interviews to as many as 60 applicants because they were women or had non-European sounding names. The code wasn’t the work of some nefarious programmer; instead, the bias was already embedded in the admissions process. The computer program exacerbated the problem and gave it a sheen of objectivity. The U.K.’s Commission for Racial Equality found St. George’s Medical School guilty of practicing racial and sexual discrimination in its admissions process in 1988.

That was several lifetimes ago in the information age, but naiveté about the harms of discriminatory algorithms is even more dangerous now. Algorithms are a set of instructions for your computer to get from Problem A to Solution B, and they’re fundamental to nearly everything we do with technology. They tell your computer how to compress files, how to encrypt data, how to select a person to tag in a photograph, or what Siri says when you ask her a question. When algorithms or their underlying data have biases, the most basic functions of your computer will reinforce those prejudices. The results can range from such inconsequential mistakes as seeing the wrong weather in an app to the serious error of identifying African Americans as more likely to commit a crime” (Garcia 2017).

The conference *Women Leading in Artificial Intelligence* (2019), held at the London School of Economics, addressed the issue of discrimination created by artificial intelligence. The latter is intended to explain that the problem is not only the algorithms but the culture and society in which we live. A radical change is needed to change approaches and views on gender because today

artificial intelligence plays a key role in everyday life and is also one of the smallest actions we do daily.

“Our ten recommendations are:

Introduce a regulatory approach governing the deployment of AI which mirrors that used for the pharmaceutical sector;

Establish an AI regulatory function working alongside the Information Commissioner’s Office and Centre for Data Ethics – to audit algorithms, investigate complaints by individuals, issue notices and fines for breaches of GDPR and equality and human rights law, give wider guidance, spread best practice and ensure algorithms must be fully explained to users and open to public scrutiny;

Introduce a new ‘Certificate of Fairness for AI systems’ alongside a ‘kite mark’ type scheme to display criteria to be defined at industry level, similarly to food labelling regulations;

Introduce mandatory AIAs (Algorithm Impact Assessments) for organisations employing AI systems that have a significant effect on individuals;

Introduce a mandatory requirement for public sector organisations using AI for particular purposes to inform citizens that decisions are made by machines, explain how the decision is reached and what would need to change for individuals to get a different outcome;

Introduce a ‘reduced liability’ incentive for companies that have obtained a Certificate of Fairness to foster innovation and competitiveness;

To compel companies and other organisations to bring their workforce with them – by publishing the impact of AI on their workforce and offering retraining programmes for employees whose jobs are being automated;

Where no redeployment is possible, to compel companies to make a contribution towards a digital skills fund for those employees;

To carry out a skills audit to identify the wide range of skills required to embrace the AI revolution;

To establish an education and training programme to meet the needs identified by the skills audit, including content on data ethics and social responsibility. As part of that, we recommend the set up of a solid, courageous and rigorous programme to encourage young women and other underrepresented groups into technology” (Women Leading in Artificial Intelligence 2019).

Along with multiple benefits, AI can also bring risks, serious consequences, and profound challenges from the misuse and unconscious use of technology that maintains gender stereotypes and even widens the gap.

The new technologies bring about just as many needs linked to the regulation and discipline of their use in companies. To this day, there are still considerable legislative gaps that should define the values and rules to be applied so that artificial intelligence can operate properly. Although there are many guidelines, there is no uniformity at the global level. What is needed now is an international regulatory framework, coupled with national policies to ensure a level playing field based on these emerging technologies and to benefit the population.

It is necessary to create artificial intelligence that knows how to consider the needs and needs of man and also has as its ultimate aim the well-being of people. That is why it is urgent to create a global instrument to regulate their use. A first approach to this theory is the work carried out by UNESCO, which has proposed the development of a global standard-setting tool capable of providing AI with a solid set of data for the creation of an ethical basis. This will not only protect human rights but will also promote the protection of human dignity in the future landscape of technological development (UNESCO 2020).

“Respect, protection and promotion of human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms

The dignity of every human person constitutes a foundation for the indivisible system of human rights and fundamental freedoms and is essential throughout the life cycle of AI systems. Human dignity relates to the recognition of the intrinsic worth of each individual human being and thus dignity is not tied to sex, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, indigenous or social origin, sexual orientation and gender identity, property, birth, disability, age or other status;

No human being should be harmed physically, economically, socially, politically, or mentally during any phase of the life cycle of AI systems. Throughout the life cycle of AI systems the quality of life of every human being should be enhanced, while the definition of “quality of life” should be left open to individuals or groups, as long as there is no violation or abuse of human rights, or the dignity of humans in terms of this definition.

Persons may interact with AI systems throughout their life cycle and receive assistance from them such as care for vulnerable people, including but not limited to children, older persons, persons with disabilities or the ill. Within such interactions, persons should never be objectified, nor should their dignity be undermined, or human rights violated or abused.

16. Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be respected, protected, and promoted throughout the life cycle of AI systems. Governments, private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical communities, and academia must respect human rights instruments and frameworks in their interventions in the processes surrounding the life cycle of AI systems. New technologies need to provide new means to advocate, defend and exercise human rights and not to infringe them” (UNESCO 2020: 7).

This approach is the starting point for a normative foundation for digital ethics that will enhance the rule of law on artificial intelligence.

The implementation of the instrument followed several phases that followed one another in the period 2019-2021.

- a) The project was launched during the fortieth session of UNESCO in November 2019 through a two-year process aimed at developing a global recommendation;
- b) The process continued in 2020 with a focus on preparing the draft Recommendation relying on the assistance of a group of industry experts, who led key consultations on the draft text making it as multidisciplinary as possible.

10 areas of competence are identified as follows:

1. Ethical Impact Assessment;
2. Ethical Governance and Stewardship;
3. Data Policy;
4. Development And International Cooperation;
5. Environment And Ecosystems;
- 6. Gender;**
7. Culture;
8. Education And Research;
9. Economy And Labour;
10. Health And Social Well-Being.

The draft also considered another important factor, namely inclusiveness. More specifically, in point 6 of the areas considered we find the gender:

“89. Member States should ensure that digital technologies and artificial intelligence fully contribute to achieve gender equality; and that the rights and fundamental freedoms of girls and women, including their safety and integrity are not violated at any stage of the AI system life cycle. Moreover, Ethical Impact Assessments should include a transversal gender perspective.

90. Member States should have dedicated funds from the public budgets linked to financing gender-related schemes, ensure that national digital policies include a gender action plan, and develop specific policies, e.g. on labour education, targeted at supporting girls and women to make sure girls and women are not left out of the digital economy powered by AI. Special investment in providing targeted programmes and gender-specific language, to increase the opportunities of participation of girls and women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), including information and communication technologies (ICT) disciplines, preparedness, employability, career development and professional growth of girls and women should be considered and implemented.

91. Member States should ensure that the potential of AI systems to improve gender equality is realized. They should guarantee that these technologies do not contribute to exacerbating the already wide gender gaps existing in several fields in the analogue world. This includes the gender wage gap; the representation in certain professions and activities gap; the lack of representation at the top management positions, boards of directors, or research teams in the AI field; the education gap; digital/AI access, adoption, usage and affordability gap; the unequal distribution of unpaid work and of the caring responsibilities in our societies.

92. Member States should ensure that gender stereotyping, and discriminatory biases are not translated into the AI systems. Efforts are necessary to avoid the compounding negative effect of technological divides in achieving gender equality and avoiding violence against girls and women, and all other types of gender identities.

93. Member States should encourage female entrepreneurship, participation and engagement in all stages of an AI system life cycle by offering and promoting economic, regulatory incentives, among other incentives and support schemes, as well as policies that aim at a balanced gender participation in AI research in academia, gender representation on digital/AI companies top management positions, board of directors, or research teams. Governments should ensure public funds (on innovation, research and technologies) are channeled to inclusive programmes and companies, with clear gender representation, and that private funds are encouraged through affirmative action principles. Moreover, policies on harassment-free environments should be developed and enforced together with the encouragement of the transfer of best practices on how to promote diversity throughout the AI system life cycle.

94. UNESCO can help form a repository of best practices for incentivizing the participation of women and under-represented groups on all stages of the AI life cycle” (UNESCO 2020: 17-18).

c) At the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, the project focused on the intergovernmental process, starting negotiations on the final draft text of the Recommendation. The document aims to be adopted during the UNESCO General Conference at the end of 2021 for its 41st session.

Once adopted by the member countries, the Recommendation will be followed by a continuous monitoring phase carried out by UNESCO concerning each country and about:

“a) developing a globally accepted methodology for Ethical Impact Assessment (EIA) of AI technologies, including guidance for its implementation in all stages of the AI system life cycle, based on rigorous scientific research;

(b) developing a readiness methodology to assist Member States in identifying their status at specific moments of their readiness trajectory along a continuum of dimensions;

(c) developing a globally accepted methodology to evaluate ex ante and ex post the effectiveness and efficiency of the policies for AI ethics and incentives against defined objectives;

(d) strengthening the research- and evidence-based analysis of and reporting on policies regarding AI ethics, including the publication of a comparative index;

(e) collecting and disseminating progress, innovations, research reports, scientific publications, data and statistics regarding policies for AI ethics, to support sharing best practices and mutual learning, and to advance the implementation of this Recommendation” (UNESCO 2020: 22).

The UNESCO project was carried out through the Preliminary Study on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence carried out by the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST 2021). This interesting report, therefore, highlights a disconcerting fact that no global instrument used by Member States is today able to meet the minimum ethical criteria guiding the development and application of human-centred AI (UNESCO 2021).

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5. Corporate governance and the impact on Inclusion

Abstract. In this chapter the research focuses on the process of inclusion in the context of corporate governance. We investigate whether good practices exist in the company regulations for equal opportunities, whether the statutes are proactive in this respect or whether there are only ethical boundaries. To answer these questions, the regulatory provisions governing listed companies were analysed, as they are generally more binding to communicate corporate information to stakeholders. The analysis carried out shows that today there is a real lack of specific internal regulations in terms of official D&I discipline, leaving the choice of implementing inclusion plans to the free initiatives of the managerial class. Finally, this chapter presents empirical evidence aimed to provide a benchmark as well as tools for understanding the level of application of these governance criteria.

5.1 The regulations concerning the Inclusion process: defining the context of the application

The process of regulating corporate inclusion of diversity and equal rights at work involves a highly heterogeneous context.

Therefore, it cannot be analysed in its specificity. It relates to different corporate areas but above all, it receives a particular influence from the procedures and regulations of corporate governance. Therefore, for a proper understanding of the status quaestionis, it is advisable to consider what corporate governance provides today and the subtle point where these two aspects intersect. We have already considered the process of general international awareness-raising and regulation in the previous chapters. Therefore, the attention here will be focused on the Italian context as, on certain Corporate Governance aspects, even the European Union has appreciated its initiatives.

Concerning initiatives on inclusion within the company, we have already examined the provisions of Article 46 of Legislative Decree no. 11 April 2006, No 198. According to the Code of Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (by Article 9 of Law No 125/1991 “Positive Action for the Achievement of

Equality between Men and Women at Work”), public and private companies employing more than 100 employees are required to draw up a report on the situation of men and women every two years. It is now necessary to seek a better understanding of the situation in decision-making and governance bodies. It should be recalled that Italy introduced the principle of gender quotas on the boards of listed companies with the introduction of Law 120/2011 (better known as the Gulf-Moscow Law). More specifically, Law 120/2011 introduced the obligation to allocate directors’ posts in the light of a gender balance criterion. This measure was later also subject to the requirement of gender balance in respect of the members of the Board of Statutory Auditors.

Although characterized by essential and certainly not exhaustive features, this legislative approach would have sanctioned the introduction of legislation in the field of corporate gender equality, considering companies without such a system of election of office “non-compliant”. As regards this aspect, it should be pointed out that following this legislation, the inclusion process was further supported by CONSOB’s monitoring and control work aimed at sanctioning companies found to be non-compliant. If the company was deemed unsuitable (non-compliant), CONSOB would issue a warning against it and subsequently, if it still remained non-compliant, would impose a sanction on the administrative and supervisory bodies.

The Gulf-Moscow Law was extended by Law 160/2019 (Budget Law 2020) receiving an amendment that would have provided for an increase in the number of posts allocated to disadvantaged groups from 30% to 40%. This was certainly a remarkable approach that finds similar applications in percentage terms only in very few other countries such as Norway. Another important provision on corporate gender equality was later included in Legislative Decree 254/2016. It introduced an obligation for large companies to issue non-financial disclosure which also includes the measures put in place to ensure gender parity in the management information. It is therefore possible to argue that the regulatory requirements on corporate diversity management are particularly relevant and mandatory.

These regulations have introduced important points of reference to spread the culture of diversity. However, although such measures are positive, it also follows the possibility that the decision to introduce diversity into the company could transform into a compliance requirement and not an ethical and free choice. As analysed so far, the legislation has been concerned with regulating the method of composition of the company’s administrative and supervisory bodies as well as the recruitment policies, and thus the relationship with the stakeholders. This intervention therefore clearly attempted to define approaches to corporate governance. All this being said, it is essential to consider what is the meeting point between the regulatory requirements

discussed above and the specific internal regulations on corporate governance. For several years now, in the most developed countries, the regulatory system in the company has focused on various topics aimed at satisfying proper communication with stakeholders and following best practices in the operational field.

Practices and rules are specifically dictated in the context of large listed companies, as the potential pool of stakeholders involved is greater than for small and medium-sized companies and the problems that may arise from mismanagement could have enormous repercussions (Rashid 2020; Bhaskar and Flower 2019; Petrick and Scherer 2003). Although there are many similarities and common denominators, different approaches are taken in the governance systems such as bank-based systems and market-based systems (Li and Zhao 2018). For example, in the United States, listed companies must adopt and demonstrate a code of conduct and ethical management for directors, officers, and employees (US Security and Exchange Commission 2016). The code shall contain information to address potential critical issues related to:

- a) conflict of interest;
- b) opportunity for the enterprise;
- c) confidentiality;
- d) fair dealing;
- e) protection and proper use of corporate assets;
- f) harmony with corporate laws in force;
- g) communication of prohibited or illegal behaviors.

This need has prompted several institutions to conduct regular analyses of corporate governance. Among the many sources, mention should be made of:

- Council of Institutional Investors (2021);
- Business Roundtable (2021);
- National Association of Corporate Directors (2021);
- American Law Institute (2021).

The United States, however, is not the only example.

Other very important global organisations have been able to make an extraordinary contribution in the field of internal regulation on conduct, but also in relation to stakeholders.

Concerning the OECD, the Principles (2015) have been an important point of reference over the years. As far as the European Union is concerned, the Green Paper (European Commission 2011) has been created as a valid tool and compendium to follow best practices in the sector (Rangone 2017).

Both studies – which periodically benefit from contributions from scholars and professionals in the field – have demonstrated the importance of solving issues related to the exercise of leadership and operational criteria according to general rules and codes of conduct (Rangone 2017).

Of course, membership in international organisations such as the OECD has further encouraged member countries to adopt or refine their internal codes of self-discipline.

In the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, the regulatory system in the field of corporate governance and financial reporting is particularly applied in the “Comply or Explain” principle (Rose 2016; Key 2013; Arcot et al. 2010; MacNeil and Li 2006), which was subsequently introduced into the same Community framework by Directive 2006/46/EC.

However, when viewed in its application alone and separated from other legal requirements, this system is weak, with all that it may entail. That is why the Directive required the Member States with listed companies to draw up a declaration containing, *inter alia*, a “reference to the adopted corporate governance code”. This is due both in cases where the company is required by law but also in cases where the company has voluntarily decided to apply it (Alvaro et al. 2013).

In Italy, on the other hand, the Preda Code of self-regulation (first edition in 1999 and revised in 2011) was a first and fundamental tool, particularly useful in ensuring that the principles and guidelines contained in the recommendations of the European Commission were transposed. According to CONSOB, it has made it possible in practice to provide benefits to the overall regulatory framework of Italian listed companies. In particular, two factors have given a specific impetus. Firstly, the self-regulation code has served as a “laboratory for experimentation and innovation”. Secondly, it was an important point of reference for the subsequent provisions of the Civil Code, particularly regarding internal controls and the functioning of the administrative body (CONSOB 2021).

However, this did not create any particular constraints for those companies which did not wish to join. It is in their interest to demonstrate compliance with ethical standards and practices. Therefore, controls and related remedies to problems remain essentially a private enforcement and control mechanisms remain primarily those linked to the compliance principles described above (CONSOB 2021).

These are the regulations that are valid for communicating with stakeholders and for establishing governance systems that are as ethical as possible.

In addition to the references to legislation, do they also contain any basic guidance or precepts on how inclusion should be managed within the company?

To answer this question, it is necessary to analyse in detail what aspects are considered in the statutory provisions, the ethical code, and the self-regulation code.

5.2 The Statutory provisions: does a model exist?

The statute is the act that governs the life and operation of the company. This document is therefore essential for the start-up of a company and must be drafted in strict compliance with the provisions of the Civil Code. As a general rule, the statute may be attached to the instrument of incorporation. However, if it is separate from the latter, it affects its decisions in the event of disagreement or conflict between the clauses.

Since it is a document aimed at defining the operational horizons of the company, it must be approved by all members.

In particular, it must disclose certain aspects which define the *modus operandi* of the company and thus regulate its internal activities:

- the purpose of the company
- the object of the activity
- the duration of the activity
- the discipline and structure of governance.

These are aspects that characterise the basic model of a statute. To express empirical evidence, when information is to be acquired about a company in Italy, whether it is a potential partner or a supplier, the statutes contain official data essential for research and preliminary assessment.

Table 5.1 Statute model published in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic

Index:
1. Name
2. Headquarters
3. Object
4. Duration
5. Registered capital
6. Capital increase
7. [optional] Debt securities and financial instruments
8. Participation shares
9. Transfer of participation shares
10. [optional] Share of the deceased member

11. Resignation of member
12. [optional] Exclusion of the member
13. Decisions of members
14. Way the decisions of the members are taken are at the expense of the company.
15. Convening of the General Meeting
16. Chairmanship of the General Meeting
17. Decisions of members – Quorum
18. General Meeting – Minutes
19. Administration of the company
20. Administration entrusted jointly or separately
21. Board of Directors’ Meetings
22. Transcription of directors’ decisions
23. Board of Directors’ Powers
24. Social representation
25. Appointment of the supervisory body or the auditor
26. Allocation of profits
27. Dissolution of the company
28. Communications

Source: Official Gazette of the Italian Republic 2016

Given the importance and evolution of corporate social responsibility doctrine, it is not possible to argue that essential guidance on D&I is included in the statute.

Any other aspect of particular importance to the corporate structure can – or rather should – be included in the articles of the statute to give a public and immediate account of this.

Above all, however, this should be done so that this internal regulation can make “binding” aspects on which it is no longer possible to procrastinate.

To date, in Italy, there are no specific statute models or specific requirements defining the insertion of clauses related to D&I.

From the evaluation of a model provided by the Official Gazette of the Italian Republic (2016), we can see that there is no connection with issues related to the inclusion of diversity in the company or gender equality. Therefore, it is freely left to the individual initiative of the company.

As shown in table 5.1, traditional corporate governance issues predominate.

Particular emphasis is placed on the *modus operandi* of shareholders in terms of quorum, decisions, and transfer of securities and financial

instruments. Directors are also given several titles defining operational criteria and the exercise of managerial powers.

Practices relating to the control system, the allocation of profits, and social representation are still rightly included.

However, some interrelated issues emerge from the model.

1. In defining the composition of the board of directors, the model statutes shall not define any criteria for the equitable distribution of seats or the inclusion of diversity. This choice is left to the full discretion of the company. As we will see, this specific indication may be part of the ethical code or specific documents provided for by Legislative Decree 254/2016, which, however, “do not have a binding function” but refer exclusively to a principle of image related to the company’s reputation.
2. In the section “Resignation of member”, the principles according to which a member can exercise his right to leave the company in question are indicated. The reasons for this choice include:
 - a) change in the object of the company or the type of company;
 - b) the merger or demergers of the company;
 - c) lifting of the state of liquidation;
 - d) the transfer of the head office abroad;
 - e) the elimination of one or more grounds for resignation provided for in the instrument of incorporation;
 - f) the completion of transactions involving a substantial modification of the objects of the company as defined in the instrument of incorporation;
 - g) the significant modification of the rights granted to members according to art. 2468, paragraph 3, of the Civil Code;
 - h) all other cases provided for by law and by-laws.

As shown from the list above, the protection of human rights, equal treatment within the company, or inclusion are not covered.

This raises the question: how the problems can be solved between members if human rights are not respected or protected?

As better demonstrated in the work *On the Relationship of Liability Action and Reputational risk: An Empirical Analysis* (Rangone 2021), the social criticalities arising from bad reputation have a significant impact on the corporate governance structure.

If the company is not in compliance with the most recent and up-to-date human rights and inclusion criteria, members may legitimately wish to resign from the company using the right of resignation or may exercise liability actions against directors for mismanagement or incompetence.

In our view, these issues should therefore be considered a decisive factor. About points (g) or (h), specific provisions should be included for the resignation of the members, where the protection of those rights is lost or the protection of those rights is neglected. They should therefore be explicitly mentioned in the statutes, as a binding document on the relationship between the parties involved in the conduct of the business.

A somewhat related aspect is the “partner exclusion” discipline. This very important section is considered “optional” and provides the following reasons:

- ban, incapacitation, the bankruptcy of the member;
- carrying on concurrent business with that of the company;
- cancellation from the professional register, if such registration is functional to the conduct of the company’s business;
- impossibility to perform a work or services for which the member is obliged under article 2464 of the Civil Code.

The motives are clearly economic. What about protecting the rights of disadvantaged groups? Let us think of the situation where the partner took the blame for having opposed the application of best practices related to D&I in the company; let us think again of the situation where the partner had issued communications to that effect damaging the company’s reputation. How can this be regulated? Of course, there is a great deal of legal discipline in such situations. Therefore, a very important observation is why the statute does not include clear clauses that can regulate these critical issues ab initio to avoid subsequent liability actions, potentially damaging to the company because of media redundancy (Rangone 2021).

All these considerations clearly show that the D&I discipline within the statutory provisions is certainly not accurate. In Italy, at least, it is not treated according to criteria that are acceptable today, given the intentions.

It would therefore be desirable for serious measures to be taken to improve the model of the statutory regulation, as the first and fundamental code for the discipline of all parties involved in the exercise of the activity, but above all as a “binding” document and not just a honey trap intended to demonstrate compliance which, in the end, turns out to be marginal.

5.3 Ethical code and self-regulation code: appearance or concrete commitment?

We have seen how important criteria and guidelines for corporate governance have been defined for some time to enable companies, especially listed companies, to achieve ethical governance structures that respect all stakeholders. Even the so-called ethical code, although with different character lines, contributes to the realization of this goal.

The intention is not only social but also to avoid potential problems related to corporate responsibility for *modus operandi* that do not comply with national or international regulatory standards. After years of development and application, the Ethical Code is now understood as a true Constitutional Charter of the company, or rather, as it should be considered (Castellani 2016).

It is not possible to answer whether there are predetermined formats of codes of ethics in Italy and the world. To date, there are only a few guidelines promoted by international organisations (European Union 2015; ONU 1999) or general points or examples of multinational companies that have defined their horizons.

Topics covered include:

- the protection of human rights;
- equality;
- honesty;
- diligence and transparency;
- confidentiality;
- protection of the environment.

Since it is a document that publicly defines the moral and ethical profile with which its business is approached and carried out, every company considers it appropriate to develop a model that is most suited to its policies.

As a result of the most modern doctrines on stakeholder protection (Atti et al. 2019; Foss and Klein 2018; Bourne and Walker 2006) and the numerous cases of corporate bankruptcy (Petrick and Scherer 2003), in the USA there has been an initial diffusion of ethical codes since the 1970s. However, a real momentum can be seen since the 1990s, when the US government issued some specific regulations (see the Federal Sentencing Commission Guidelines for Organizations) on corporate criminal actions (Sacconi 2000).

In Europe, ethical codes were introduced late (Castellani 2016) and are still not widely used except for large companies.

How then can we increase the introduction of this valuable tool for the disclosure of business intentions?

The adoption of the ethical code is a prerogative of the managerial class and, as such, must be developed and drafted by senior managers in consultation with the units directly involved in the respective operational areas. Therefore, the regulation or documents relating to governance issues must be called into question to better define the criteria for applying this instrument. This is because the issues of the relationship with employees (in our specific case the inclusion of diversity in the company), environmental protection, and reputation are inevitably inherent in corporate governance.

Therefore, the dissemination and improvement of an ethical code are only realized if it is placed in line with the entire company structure. If this were not the case, its role would be lost (Piconi 2006).

In light of these considerations, it is considered essential to mix ethical codes with corporate governance codes. The issues of human rights protection and inclusion must be also introduced into the latter.

As a quick example that can make the connection between Corporate Governance and D&I easily comprehensible, we consider the reality of the Poste Italiane SpA. On the website, it is possible to view documents relating to the management of diversity in the company.

These documents shall be made public in succession as follows:

Governance \Rightarrow Governance System \Rightarrow Diversity and Inclusion Policy

This is because, as stated by the Poste Italiane Spa:

“The Poste Italiane Group is committed to supporting the values of diversity and inclusion through the adoption of corporate, organisational and managerial mechanisms based on respect for the rights and freedom of individuals” (Poste Italiane 2021)⁵⁴.

As we will see later, Poste Italiane is not the only company to follow this approach.

If the implementation of an ethical code is still a discretionary practice of top management, we ask ourselves if an important incentive can come from the code of discipline and self-regulation which, as we have seen above, are more binding and widespread. If approached internationally, the doctrine would be too broad. For this reason, we will consider the example of Italy because it is known for its code of self-regulation. In 2020, the Italian Corporate Governance Committee revised the self-regulation framework, previously issued through the 2018 Code. We, therefore, think it appropriate to ask ourselves if there have really been any good instruments for change in terms of inclusion and equal opportunities; or again if there are any ideas that might be useful for the adoption of ethical criteria or in connection with the ethical code.

The 2018 self-regulation code clearly calls for and invites societies to have a gender-sensitive governance structure, advocating for equality and equal rights.

⁵⁴ Original version: “Il Gruppo Poste Italiane è impegnato nel sostegno dei valori della diversità e dell’inclusione attraverso l’adozione di meccanismi societari, organizzativi e gestionali improntati al rispetto dei diritti e della libertà delle persone” (Poste Italiane 2021).

Specifically, the Commentary to Art. 2 focused on the *composition of the Board of Directors* states the following:

“Principle 2.P.1. identifies the competence and professionalism of directors as the basic requirements for adequate board composition.

The objectives relating to diversity in the composition of the Board – about aspects such as gender, managerial and professional skills, including those of an international nature, the presence of different age groups, and seniority of office – shall be pursued taking into account the overriding competence and professionalism required of all directors.

With particular regard to gender diversity, Law 120 of 2011 introduced a framework to facilitate equal access to the administrative (and supervisory) bodies of the issuer company. This has led to a significant increase in the representation of women in these bodies and has helped to raise awareness among issuers and their shareholders of gender diversity as a value to be promoted and protected to ensure that these bodies function more effectively. However, the provisions of Law 120 of 2011 have a limited temporal effect. The Committee, therefore, considers that at least one-third of the Board should be made up of directors of the under-represented gender, both at the time of appointment and during the term of office. The issuer company shall apply the instrument deemed most appropriate to achieve this objective, also having regard to its ownership structure by adopting statutory clauses and/or diversity policies and/or shareholder guidelines and/or the list submitted by the outgoing board, and shall require the person submitting a list for appointment to the Board of directors to provide appropriate information in the documentation whether the list meets or not the gender diversity objective identified by the issuer company.

The Committee also calls for Issuers to take measures to promote gender equality and equal opportunities throughout the company’s organisation and to monitor its practical implementation” (Comitato per la Corporate Governance 2018: 12 e 13)⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Original version: “Il principio 2.P.1. individua nella competenza e nella professionalità degli amministratori i requisiti fondamentali per una adeguata composizione del consiglio. Gli obiettivi concernenti la diversità di composizione del consiglio stesso – relativamente ad aspetti quali il genere, le competenze manageriali e professionali, anche di carattere internazionale, la presenza di diverse fasce di età e di anzianità di carica – sono perseguiti tenendo conto dei sovraordinati requisiti di competenza e professionalità di cui devono disporre tutti gli amministratori. Con particolare riguardo alla diversità di genere, la Legge

Therefore, carrying out its regular monitoring functions, the Board of Directors must assess at least once a year the functioning of the Board and its committees, including about the criteria adopted for the inclusion of diversity.

It should also reflect this practice in its corporate governance report, providing information on the objectives, implementation arrangements and results of applying the diversity criteria recommended in Articles 2 and 8.

In addition, to Art. 8 on the composition and duties of statutory auditors, the principles state the following:

“8.P.2. The Issuer applies diversity criteria, including gender, with regard to the composition of the Board of Statutory Auditors. [...] According to the considerations made in the Commentary to art. The Committee considers that at least one third of the Board of Statutory Auditors should be made up of auditors of the under-represented gender, both at the time of appointment and during the term of office. The Issuer, also taking into account its ownership structure, applies the instrument deemed most appropriate to achieve this objective, adopting specific articles of association and/or diversity policies and/or shareholder guidelines, and requires those who submit a list for appointment to the board of statutory auditors to provide appropriate information in the documentation submitted for the filing of the list, whether

n. 120 del 2011 ha introdotto una disciplina intesa ad agevolare la parità di accesso agli organi di amministrazione (e di controllo) degli emittenti. Tale disciplina ha consentito di conseguire un significativo incremento della rappresentanza femminile in tali organi e ha contribuito a sensibilizzare gli emittenti ed i relativi azionisti riguardo alla “gender diversity” come valore da promuovere e tutelare per assicurare un più efficace funzionamento degli organi medesimi. Tuttavia, le disposizioni della Legge n. 120 del 2011 hanno una efficacia temporale circoscritta. Il Comitato ritiene quindi opportuno che il consiglio di amministrazione sia costituito per almeno un terzo da amministratori del genere meno rappresentato, tanto al momento della nomina quanto nel corso del mandato. L'emittente, anche tenuto conto dei propri assetti proprietari, applica lo strumento ritenuto più idoneo a perseguire tale obiettivo, adottando clausole statutarie e/o politiche di diversità e/o orientamenti agli azionisti e/o la lista presentata dal consiglio uscente, e richiede a chi presenta una lista per la nomina del consiglio di amministrazione di fornire adeguata informativa, nella documentazione presentata per il deposito della lista, circa la rispondenza o meno della lista stessa all'obiettivo di diversità di genere individuato dall'emittente. Il Comitato auspica, inoltre, che gli emittenti adottino misure per promuovere la parità di trattamento e di opportunità tra i generi all'interno dell'intera organizzazione aziendale, monitorandone la concreta attuazione” (Comitato per la Corporate Governance 2018: 12 e 13).

the list itself meets or not the gender diversity objective identified by the issuer company” (Comitato per la Corporate Governance 2018: 39)⁵⁶.

As it can be seen from the analysis, the self-regulation code is certainly proactive in meeting the criteria for inclusion in the company.

Figure 5.1 Weaknesses highlighted in the Italian D&I self-regulation code

<p>Remuneration system for disadvantaged groups</p> <p>Type of remuneration Related incentive schemes</p>	<p>International normative references</p> <p>Best practices Guide Lines</p>
<p>Adoption of a Diversity Management Committee</p> <p>Strategy Compliance</p>	<p>Reference to the Ethical Code</p> <p>Compliance with its forecasts Reference to issues of inclusion and respect for human rights</p>

Source: authors' elaboration

⁵⁶ Original version: “8.P.2. L’emittente applica criteri di diversità, anche di genere, per quanto riguarda la composizione del collegio sindacale. [...] In base alle considerazioni svolte nel Commento all’art. 2, il Comitato ritiene opportuno che il collegio sindacale sia costituito per almeno un terzo da sindaci del genere meno rappresentato, tanto al momento della nomina quanto nel corso del mandato. L’emittente, anche tenuto conto dei propri assetti proprietari, applica lo strumento ritenuto più idoneo a perseguire tale obiettivo, adottando apposite clausole statutarie e/o politiche di diversità e/o orientamenti agli azionisti, e richiede a chi presenta una lista per la nomina del collegio sindacale di fornire adeguata informativa, nella documentazione presentata per il deposito della lista, circa la rispondenza o meno della lista stessa all’obiettivo di diversità di genere individuato dall’emittente attuazione” (Comitato per la Corporate Governance 2018: 39).

However, in the 2020 version, no particular changes were made on the subject and, given the many issues that still slow down the process of inclusion and equality in companies, the guidelines outlined in the code still seem too weak and not very incisive. Furthermore, the self-regulation code indicates that the provisions of D&I must be indicated in documents such as the statute. However, as previously analysed, the statute model does not contemplate these key points at all – in short – defining a real procedural lack.

This decision stems from some considerations:

- although it is desirable to respect a percentage of internal inclusion on the Board of directors and the Board of auditors, criteria are not suggested for the application of remuneration systems suitable to overcome the problems of inclusion and allow respect for diversity in the company. As we shall see, one of the major problems encountered for D&I is precisely the difference in the level of economic treatment promoted on the farm;
- the reference to legislation is made exclusively to a regulation – Law n. 120 of 2011 – without considering the numerous regulations and recommendations promoted by institutions and international organizations that can act as a stimulus for an increase in the potential for inclusion in Italian companies. As we will see, companies are free to draw inspiration from international best practices, but this largely depends on their ability to identify them; a company with a weak governance structure will hardly be able to identify optimal guidelines to comply with the best international standards. It will be even more difficult to apply these guidelines within medium-small or very-small entities such as those in Italy;
- lack of precepts and guidelines defining the establishment of an internal committee responsible for managing diversity in the company or at least part of a sustainability committee. As we shall see, if companies do not understand that diversity can create value, it will be impossible to comply with the best principles of inclusion and will not benefit from its influences;
- the absence of a specific reference to the code of ethics. In the self-regulation code, reference is made to the importance of the statute and its rules, but no reference is made to the ethical code. If the role of ethical codes is then to express a real beacon that can illuminate a context that is still dark, misunderstood, and often characterized by disinterest on the part of the figures who manage the company, we consider it essential to establish precise criteria for their preparation and already expressed in the self-regulation code. This would provide a huge incentive for the adoption of concrete ethical criteria better defined by a specific code, namely the “ethical code”.

This suggests that, by the free application of the rules, the self-regulation code gives too much freedom to companies, thus referring only to specific statutory

provisions. Freedom that, however, too often translates into less concrete and very vague initiatives, leading many companies to neglect the drafting of an ethical code and the practices of inclusion it contemplates.

Having identified the weaknesses (figure 5.1) that characterize the most important regulation codes in Italy, we consider it meaningful to analyse the benchmark provided by the Italian case of ENI Spa.

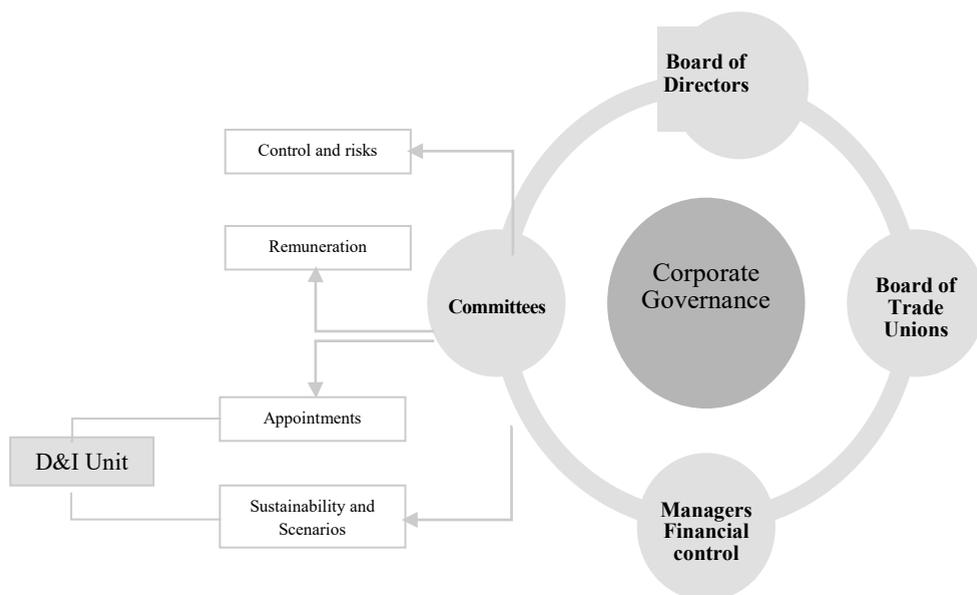
5.3.1 Best practices and D&I: the approach of ENI Spa

The Italian ENI Spa is certainly one of the most complex and performing companies not only in Italy but also in the world.

This is evidenced by the performance that the Italian company has recorded in 68 countries operating in the field of exploration, development, and extraction of oil and natural gas, production and sale of fuels, biofuels, wholesale lubricants, or through distribution networks.

Concerning the structure of corporate governance, the following bodies can be highlighted:

Figure 5.2 Governance structure of ENI Spa related to D&I



Source: authors' elaboration

The study of the governance structure (figure 5.2) shows that there is a specific *Sustainability and Scenarios Committee* which is responsible for studying the most innovative trends and scenarios in the field of sustainability.

The Committee advises the Board of Directors on processes, initiatives, and activities aimed at overseeing the Company's commitment to sustainable development along the value chain. Therefore, particular attention is paid to the health, well-being and safety of individuals and communities, respect and protection of human rights, local development, access to energy, energy sustainability and climate change, environment and resource efficiency, integrity and transparency, and innovation. Considering the advisory functions towards the Board of Directors, the Committee:

- a) examines the scenarios for the preparation of the strategic plan, expressing an opinion to the Board of Directors;
- b) examines and evaluates the sustainability policy aimed at ensuring the creation of value over time for shareholders and all other stakeholders in compliance with the principles of sustainable development, as well as regarding the sustainability guidelines and objectives and the sustainability report submitted annually to the Board of Directors;
- c) examines the implementation of the sustainability policy in business initiatives, based on the recommendations of the Board of Directors;
- d) monitors the positioning of the Company concerning the financial markets on sustainability issues, with particular reference to the Company's participation in the main sustainability indexes;
- e) monitors international sustainability initiatives in the context of global governance processes and the participation in them of the Company, aimed at consolidating the company's reputation on the international front;
- f) examines and evaluates the sustainability initiatives, also concerning individual projects, provided for in the agreements with producer countries, submitted by the CEO for presentation to the Board;
- g) examines the company's non-profit strategy and its implementation, also concerning individual projects, through the non-profit plan submitted annually to the Board, as well as the non-profit initiatives submitted to the Board;
- h) delivers, at the request of the Board, an opinion on other sustainability issues;
- i) reports to the first appropriate Board of Directors, through the Chairman of the Committee, on the most important issues discussed by the Committee during its meetings; also reports to the Board, at least half-yearly, not later than the deadline for the approval of the annual and half-yearly financial report, on the activities carried out, at the Board meeting indicated by the Chairman of the Board of Directors (ENI 2021).

These functions are certainly an expression of particular attention to ESG criteria, but it is only with the adoption of a specific operational unit in the D&I field that ENI Spa has been able to achieve excellent results in compliance with the best practices currently in force.

The analysis of the governance documents of ENI Spa allows for highlighting many aspects related not only to the principle of sustainability but also to the principle of inclusion and management of diversity understood as a real value. In light of this organisational approach, ENI's stakeholder value creation objectives for 2020 were thus focused on the pursuit of "operational excellence".

It has developed through many key indicators:

- Health, Safety and Environment;
- Human Rights & Integrity;
- Resilience and Diversification;
- Financial Discipline.

Concerning the objectives related to diversity management, the commitment emerges first and foremost in the substantial and specific corpus of regulations and corporate governance composed of:

- Ethical Code;
- Policy "Our People";
- Declaration of Respect for Human Rights;
- Framework Agreement on Industrial Relations;
- Report on Remuneration.

and which deals with this issue in depth.

Above all, the efforts made are evident in the numbers and results achieved in 2020:

- +2.3 percentage points increase in the number of women employed in the company;
- ranked first among the approximately 200 companies evaluated by the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark (CHRB) (ENI 2021).

These results are not necessarily exclusive to large companies. All companies could achieve them if a clear and correct policy for managing inclusion were put in place. According to ENI:

"the D&I Government expects each process/service line to ensure, within its direct responsibilities, the implementation of activities and objectives with an inclusive approach and operational modalities. Overall coordination is also

ensured by the Diversity & Inclusion unit under the Director Human Capital & Procurement Coordination, reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer; this unit has the objective of developing the company's D&I strategy, developing the portfolio of initiatives, carrying out the related benchmarking and reporting analyses, as well as promoting management accountability on these issues. These activities are carried out in close collaboration with the Human Resources area, whose reference D&I is assigned to the Human Resources Development function, consistent with the objective of promoting the growth of an inclusive culture and awareness through the management and development processes of each person of Eni (guidance, evaluation, training, etc.), and with the Sustainability area, consistent with the commitments made in the terms of promoting equal opportunities and sustainable development" (ENI 2021)⁵⁷.

Contrary to what is generally stated in the Italian Code of Corporate Governance for listed companies, the ENI Group has a specific unit focused on the pursuit of *good practices* in the D&I field, which collaborates closely with the Human Resources section.

In addition, to avoid potential causes of discrimination, ENI urges all employees and third parties to report any violations of the principles of the Code of Ethics, using one of the Reporting Channels, in line with the provisions of the relevant regulatory instruments (ENI 2021: 38). This suggests the importance and role that the code of ethics, before others, can and should play in defining good practice to achieve the objectives of inclusion.

⁵⁷ Original version: "il governo della D&I prevede che ogni linea di processo / servizio assicuri, nell'ambito delle proprie dirette responsabilità, la realizzazione delle attività e obiettivi con approccio e modalità operative inclusivi. Il coordinamento complessivo è altresì assicurato dall'unità Diversity & Inclusion posta alle dipendenze del Director Human Capital & Procurement Coordination, riporto diretto dell'Amministratore Delegato; tale unità ha l'obiettivo di sviluppare la strategia aziendale in materia di D&I, di elaborare il portfolio di iniziative, effettuare le relative analisi di benchmarking e di reporting, nonché favorire l'accountability del management su questi temi. Tali attività vengono svolte in stretta collaborazione con l'area Risorse Umane, il cui riferimento D&I è allocato nella funzione Sviluppo Risorse Umane, coerentemente con l'obiettivo di promuovere la crescita di una cultura e sensibilità inclusiva attraverso i processi di gestione e sviluppo di ogni persona di Eni (orientamento, valutazione, formazione, ecc.), e con l'area Sostenibilità, coerentemente con gli impegni in termini di promozione di pari opportunità e sviluppo sostenibile" (ENI 2021).

Table 5.2 Titles of the Ethical Code of the ENI Group

INTRODUCTION
WE RECOGNIZE AND SERVE THE VALUE OF ALL OUR PEOPLE We promote the health and safety of our people We support the creation of an ethical working environment We recognize the role of diversity fostering the culture of plurality We value the professionalism of our people
WE ESTABLISH RESPONSIBLE RELATIONS WITH OUR STAKEHOLDERS
WE COMMITTEE TO CONTRAST CLIMATE CHANGES AND THEIR EFFECTS
WE OPERATE WITH INTEGRITY
WE RESPECT AND PROTECT THE RESOURCES OF OUR COMPANY
IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

Source: authors' adaptation from ENI 2020

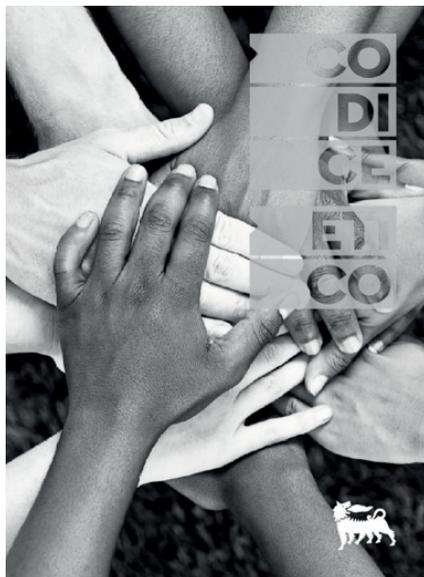
As shown in table 5.2, the Ethical Code adopted by the ENI Group was inspired by the most current models of sustainability and respect for human rights.

It covers not only aspects and issues of a legal and economic nature (integrity, protection of resources, enforcement mechanisms) but also issues of importance to the principle of equal rights.

One of the cornerstones of the Code of Ethics is to work with respect for human dignity and human rights, requiring the same commitment from all partners. This is to ensure an inclusive work environment that values uniqueness and diversity as fundamental resources for human development (ENI 2020: 5).

In the context of identifying best practice, it is remarkable to note how this approach can be deduced not only from the criteria chosen but also from the front page: the logo “codice etico” fits wisely against a background of hands of people of different ethnicities and genres (figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3 Front page of the ENI's Ethical Code



Source: ENI 2020

The ethical code, therefore, recognises the value and role of diversity, encouraging a culture of plurality.

In the inclusion model, ENI states:

“We adopt behaviours that convey and reinforce the values of diversity, avoiding and censoring any form of discrimination, we support organisational models that enhance cooperation between people from different cultures, perspectives and experiences, we adopt measures (training, communication, behavioural and operational) that contribute to the evolution of the internal culture towards extensive models of inclusion of all diversity” (ENI 2020: 16)⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ Original version: “assumiamo comportamenti che veicolano e rafforzano i valori della diversità, evitando e censurando qualsiasi forma di discriminazione, sosteniamo modelli organizzativi che valorizzino la cooperazione tra persone provenienti da culture, prospettive ed esperienze differenti, adottiamo misure (formative, comunicative, comportamentali e operative) che contribuiscano a far evolvere la cultura interna verso modelli estensivi di inclusione attiva di tutte le diversità” (ENI 2020: 16).

As seen from the analysis of the self-regulation code, also from the point of view of recruitment and remuneration, a specific provision must be introduced to protect diversity within the company and promote inclusion.

In this regard, ENI's Ethical Code states:

“We pay our employees a remuneration commensurate to the responsibilities acquired and the contribution made, in compliance with the applicable legal and contractual references and in line with the remuneration levels of the relevant markets: fairness, meritocracy, personal care and non-discrimination are the cornerstones of our compensation & benefits systems” (ENI 2020: 17)59.

The alignment between men's and women's pays over the three years 2018-2020 shows absolute homogeneity (table 5.3):

Table 5.3 Gender alignment in the remuneration system of ENI Spa, 2018-2020 (%)

	2018	2019	2020
Total pay ratio (women vs men)	98	98	99
Senior manager (women vs men)	97	97	98
Middle managers and senior staff (women vs men)	99	97	97
Employees	98	100	100
Workers	98	96	96

Source: ENI 2021

During 2020 ENI also carried out some specific initiatives on the subject (table 5.4).

⁵⁹ Original version: “riconosciamo alle nostre persone una remunerazione congrua alle responsabilità acquisite e al contributo fornito, nel rispetto dei riferimenti normativi e contrattuali applicabili e in linea con i livelli retributivi dei mercati di riferimento: equità, meritocrazia, cura della persona e non discriminazione sono gli elementi fondamentali dei nostri sistemi di compensation & benefits” (ENI 2020: 17).

This has been possible by introducing a culture of “zero tolerance” towards discrimination in the company together with a deep interest in inclusion issues.

A commitment that was born from interaction and comparison with their *peers* both nationally and internationally. In this sense, the collaboration took place by supporting associations and participating in initiatives and inter-company benchmarks for the sharing of best practices and the identification of common actions in the field of Diversity & Inclusion (e.g., VALORE D, ERT – European Round Table, WEF – World Economic Forum, Industrial ALL Global Unions, Fondazione Mondo Digitale, UN Global Compact). This has therefore pursued a common logic of growth and progress and not only of the individual company (ENI 2021).

Table 5.4 Initiatives promoted by ENI in the field of D&I

Strategy	Involvement of all staff in training plans
	Increase in the proportion of female entrants
	Individual growth through listening and guidance projects
Projects	Female role modelling
	Mentoring and enhancement of intergenerationality
	Inclusion of parenthood
	International reskilling projects
	D&I communication initiatives

Source: adapted from ENI 2021

To conclude the analysis of the initiatives promoted by ENI in order to promote inclusion in the companies of the Group, it should be pointed out that certain references and indications are also made in the articles of the Statute.

In Title V, Article 17, concerning the composition and appointment of the Board of Directors, the Statute reads as follows:

“Under current gender balance legislation, at least two-fifths of the Board shall be made up of directors of the under-represented gender, rounded up to the nearest whole, except where the number of members of the Board is three, in which case rounded down to the nearest whole.

Lists with a number of candidates of three or more must include candidates of a different gender. Lists competing for the appointment of a majority of the members of the Council, consisting of more than three candidates, must reserve two-fifths for the under-represented gender, rounded up to the nearest whole number” (ENI 2020: 10)⁶⁰

and again, with reference to the auditors:

“Under current gender balance legislation, two statutory auditors belong to the under-represented gender” (ENI 2020: 15)⁶¹.

What emerges from the examination of the Statute is absolutely in line with the standard laid down in the self-regulation code.

It should be emphasised that this information is neither exhaustive nor particularly proactive and should, in our humble opinion, be binding in order to increase the incentive to achieve best practice. Obviously, our intention is not to make uncomfortable comments to the Eni Group, also because, as noted above, it has devoted itself largely to following substantial inclusion projects and has made public many other documents designed to define sustainability and equal opportunities policies. Furthermore, as noted at the beginning of this analysis, there is a unit specifically dedicated to the management of D&I. This means that the Group is not only focused on the implementation of inclusion projects, but is also prepared to realize the full benefits which, as we will see below, derive from the creation of a shared value related to D&I in the company. Rather, these observations serve to further underline the fact that self-regulation code and Statute – key documents for governance purposes – are still not particularly comprehensive on the subject and in line with the highest standards, leaving the protection of sustainability

⁶⁰ Original version: “Ai sensi della normativa vigente in materia di equilibrio tra i generi, almeno due quinti del Consiglio è costituito da amministratori del genere meno rappresentato, con arrotondamento all’intero superiore, salvo il caso in cui il numero dei componenti del Consiglio sia pari a tre, nel qual caso l’arrotondamento è all’intero inferiore. Le liste che presentano un numero di candidati pari o superiore a tre devono includere candidati di genere diverso. Le liste che concorrono per la nomina della maggioranza dei componenti del Consiglio, composte da più di tre candidati, devono riservare una quota dei due quinti al genere meno rappresentato, con arrotondamento all’intero superiore” (ENI 2020: 10).

⁶¹ Original version: “Ai sensi della normativa vigente in materia di equilibrio tra i generi, due sindaci effettivi appartengono al genere meno rappresentato” (ENI 2020: 15).

and inclusion (too often neglected if not provided for by regulations considered by the law) to the discretion of companies.

Only companies with a complex workforce and a managerial structure will have trouble drawing up reports and publishing documents aimed at specifying their D&I policies, while medium-sized and small companies will be led to follow the guidelines contained in the Statute, which are too often outlined by general and limited guidelines.

5.4 Corporate equality index: polices and evaluation criteria in the “new age” of inclusion

To be defined as such, a proper policy of inclusion cannot be limited to the achievement of mere gender equality between males and females but must extend to all the cases of “diversity” mentioned in the introductory notes. Therefore, it is not possible to exclude from the analysis a well-known scoreboard of equality in the workplace.

As we will see from the examination of the criteria provided for in it, this index is closely linked to the values that must be reflected in the Code of Ethics and the Code of Conduct, namely in corporate governance documents. Moreover, in this context, we will demonstrate that it also becomes an expression of the perspectives of the various companies analysed on the value generated by managing diversity.

The Corporate Equality Index is a report published by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation that evaluates companies’ treatment of employees, consumers, and investors belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. Since 2002, the index has been published annually and is expressed through a business comparison indicator, which identifies companies for classification and evaluation on a scale from 0 to 100 (table 5.5). The criteria have been established in the light of the principle that policies and equitable benefits are key to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the workforce, but alone they are not enough to support a truly inclusive culture in the workplace. Employers recognise the need for further planning and education. In its first year of operation, the Corporate Equality Index gave its highest score to 13 companies, and every year more and more companies get excellent scores. Of course, the assessment criteria continue to undergo constant changes in light of the needs felt by the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, since 2006 the index has changed since its first publication, as issues related to transgender rights have become more pressing than before. As a result, the index began to include more up-to-date criteria regarding the benefits of partnership and inclusion of the transgender community. From 2004 to 2005, 92% of companies evaluated included procedures to protect transgender people from discrimination, and many companies were forced to change policies because of bad press.

Table 5.5 2022 CEI criteria

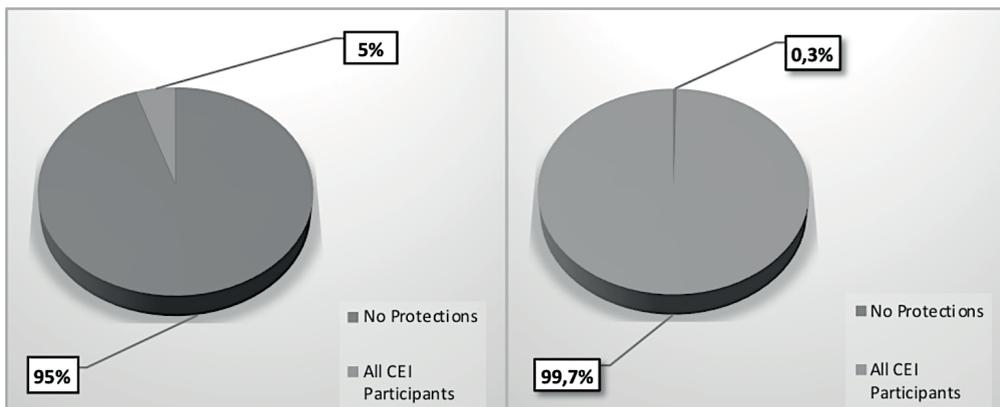
Workforce Protections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy includes sexual orientation for all operations - Policy includes gender identity or expression for all operations 	30 points
Inclusive Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equivalency in same- and different-sex spousal medical and soft benefits - Equivalency in same- and different-sex domestic partner medical and soft benefits - Equal health coverage for transgender individuals without exclusion for medically necessary care 	30 points
Supporting an Inclusive Culture & Corporate Social Responsibility	<p>a) Three LGBTQIA+ Internal Training and Education Best Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New hire training clearly states that the nondiscrimination policy includes gender identity and sexual orientation and provides definitions or scenarios illustrating the policy for each - Supervisors undergo training that includes gender identity and sexual orientation as discrete topics, and provides definitions or scenarios illustrating the policy for each - Integration in professional development, skills-based or other leadership training that includes elements of diversity and/or cultural competency - Gender transition guidelines with supportive restroom, dress code and documentation guidance - Anonymous employee engagement or climate surveys conducted on an annual or biennial basis allow employees the option to identify as LGBTQIA+ - Data collection forms that include employee race, ethnicity, gender, military and disability status - typically recorded as part of employee records - include optional questions on sexual orientation and gender identity - Senior management/executive performance measures include LGBTQIA+ diversity metrics 	10 points

	b) Employee Group - OR - Diversity Council	10 points
	c) Three Distinct Efforts of Extension or Engagement to Broader LGBTQIA+ Community – LGBTQIA+ employee recruitment efforts with demonstrated reach of LGBTQIA+ applicants – Supplier diversity program with demonstrated effort to include certified LGBTQIA+ suppliers – Marketing or advertising to LGBTQIA+ consumers – Philanthropic support of at least one LGBTQIA+ organization or event – Demonstrated public support for LGBTQIA+ equality under the law through local, state or federal legislation or initiatives	15 points
	d) LGBTQIA+ Corporate Social Responsibility	5 points

Source: HCR Foundation 2021

This has led to a kind of competition between companies to keep up to date with the latest inclusive policies (figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 Comparison of companies participating in the IEC assessment, years: 2002 and 2021



Source: Authors' processing of HRC Foundations 2021 data

It must be reiterated that in the age of *sharing economy* (Wang et al. 2020; Plewnia and Guenther 2018) a mistake made at the ends of the world in this area can undermine a company's reputation, and if the latter was listed on the stock exchange, the shares would be heavily influenced (Rangone 2021).

Just think of the negligent campaign launched in China by Dolce & Gabbana to promote its Shanghai runway show in 2018. The repercussions of that marketing campaign have been dramatic: a 97% reduction in brand circulation on the most important Chinese social media Weibo and continuous offenses on the fashion house's personal social media. So, very high media repercussions. Evaluating possible solutions to recapture the Chinese market, Carlos Torelli of the University of Illinois argued:

“Change your management practices to hire people who bring that diversity – that really deep understanding of culture that you cannot gain through a briefing” (Wharton University 2018).

Conditioning the public image of the companies, the CEI has started to have financial effects on the companies included in its rating system.

A 2007 human rights campaign introduced a mobile consumer system that would allow anyone to check a company's rating. This prompted consumers to make a preliminary assessment of the company to decide whether to do business with it, simply by sending an SMS with the name of the company and receiving a shortcode of the indexes in response. This is not the only reason for the adjustment.

The Corporate Equality Index sends a very strong message to employees, potential candidates, and the community at large, thus to corporate stakeholders by providing an additional motivation to collaborate or work in a company that is duly valued for its commitment to the management of personnel and human resources.

All these notions, however, must make us reflect in depth on an aspect considered crucial, namely if it is a question of real interest in a principle of equality or – as too often happens – it is a principle of mere compliance with the current trends for business purposes.

As reported by HRC Foundations (2021):

“One thing is quite clear: equality is good business. Being an inclusive LGBTQIA+ employer is good for recruitment, retention, engagement and ultimately profits. What began as largely US and European efforts to create inclusive workplaces for LGBTQ people is now a much broader conversation

among international stakeholders. In a global market, equality knows no boundaries”⁶².

The very fact of being excluded from a ranking or being at the bottom and not among the most virtuous is a factor that pushes companies, even those initially less inclined, to act in support of equal rights and inclusion.

Although this principle can facilitate the inclusion of diversity, we are convinced that it will never be an effective *modus operandi* to achieve the goal. The cynical pursuit of a goal of homogenization and adjustment is not the key to confining anti-semitic, homophobic, and discriminatory cultures. The role of the company is fundamental to progress in this perspective; therefore, as we will see in the continuation of the work, only through an enlightened awareness of the value given off by diversity we can finally speak of inclusion.

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⁶² Original version: “Una cosa è palesemente chiara: l’uguaglianza è un buon affare. Essere un datore di lavoro LGBTQ inclusivo è positivo per il reclutamento, la fidelizzazione, il coinvolgimento e, in definitiva, i profitti. Quello che è iniziato come sforzi in gran parte statunitensi ed europei per creare luoghi di lavoro inclusivi per le persone LGBTQ è ora una conversazione molto più ampia tra le parti interessate internazionali. In un mercato globale, l’uguaglianza non conosce confine (HRC Foundations 2021).

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6. Diversity Management and Value Creation: new trends and approaches

Abstract. In this sixth chapter the work focuses on the perspectives of value generated by diversity and inclusion in the company. This last section aims to demonstrate that internal policies and processes of inclusion within the company must be carried out not for exclusively ethical purposes but for the awareness that human capital, regardless of its expressions and if properly included, can make an essential contribution to the company's progress. The following topics are therefore addressed: the model of inclusion and management of diversity at the various corporate, strategic, operating, and control levels, considering the many levers available and the action points. Particular emphasis is then given to the theme of the intangible value created by the inclusion of diversity and, consequently, to the principle of shared value in its "simple" and "complex" forms, providing further insights into corporate social responsibility. The result is a specific and singular contribution aimed at making people understand how a D&I strategy can bring added value to the company and the whole community if properly managed and controlled.

6.1 Diversity Management: action areas and processes for a new strategic model

Dedicating oneself to the management of diversity in the company is not a simple and immediate process.

This statement assumes that this context involves crucial areas of dissent and ambivalence dictated by the "dimensionality" of diversity (Köllen 2019). Another critical aspect is that D&I should not be confused with a simple way of being kind to those who are different. It is therefore not a charity practice, nor can D&I be reduced to the mere pursuit of ethical practice. If so, it would certainly be a good result from a moral point of view but it would not enhance the important potential that inclusion brings with it in terms of common value. D&I needs to be looked at and analysed from new perspectives, trying to understand how it can be an integral part of the business world. To this end, we need to think about how people can work together in a new way, experimenting with new approaches in the light of new perspectives. To achieve value-creating inclusion, it is important to learn how to relate to others

differently, so that collaborations can be activated through new operating and business models, primarily through upgrades to traditional leadership models (Langford et al. 2017; Manning and Robertson 2016; Yammarino et al. 2015).

To identify some key areas in the management of D&I in the company, it is possible to consider:

- an intervention at the **corporate level**
- an intervention at the **strategic level**
- an intervention at the **operating level**
- an intervention at the **control level**

Although, as discussed above, large companies can receive the most important effects by achieving best practices in D&I, the impact of a non-inclusive environment is stronger on small companies. This is because, in a small environment, human relationships and interactions are stronger. Thus, as observed through the Italian example, it is easier to find inclusive realities in SMEs rather than in large companies. When human relations are closer, the “differences” emerge more quickly and are felt day after day, with all that it entails, if they are not well included. For this reason, the analysis requires deeper attention to the large company in which many different instruments can be used to collect this information and regulate it (table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Summary diagram of the phases/areas of intervention in the field of D&I Management

Areas of intervention	Levers of action	Action points	Expected Results
CORPORATE	Regulation and policies	Cultural transformation of leaders and new values of inclusion	Awareness of management and governing bodies
	Internal communication	Inclusion of “disadvantaged” individuals in leadership positions	
	Organizational and governance systems	Creating an agenda with plans for inclusion and diversity management	Creating a proactive governance structure for D&I

		Creation of <i>ad hoc</i> committees or teams	
STRATEGIC	Internal data	Listening to issues	Achievement of effective action plans based on best practices in the field of D&I
	Trends	Surveys	
	Benchmark	Comparisons with the best-in-class	
OPERATING	Events and Social network	Collaboration plans with stakeholders	Correct application of the strategic guidelines
	Webinar and Training	Regular dialogue and interaction	Understanding and resolution of the employees and collaborators problems
	HR system	Tailored assignments	Alignment of business objectives with inclusion best practices
CONTROL	D&I tracker	Evaluation of the satisfaction of human resources	Increasing HR availability and efficiency
	Systems of performance assessment	Evaluation of implemented projects	Increase in company performance
		Evaluation of the satisfaction of external stakeholders	Increasing the company's reputation

Source: authors' elaboration

As far as *corporate intervention* is concerned, the most obvious problem that emerges in this context is that companies and their managers are too often focused on themselves, on their business objectives (Lin et al. 2015), on the profits to be perceived (Rangone 2017; Ellig 2014; Hendry et al. 2007) and are

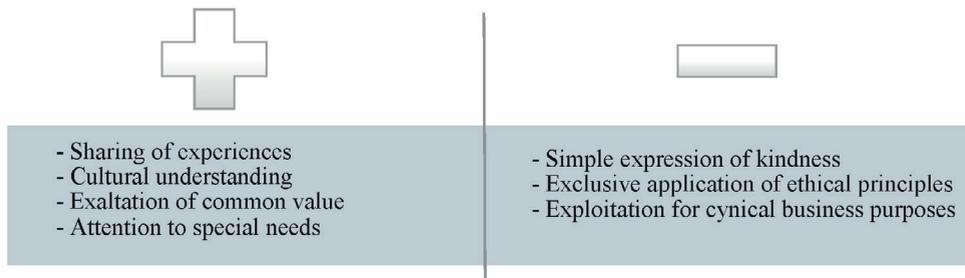
still heavily influenced by the usages and customs of reality where they work (Daft 2015), forgetting that those around us or entering the company:

- belong to a specific culture;
- have specific experience;
- have received a more or less comprehensive education;
- have values;
- have abilities.

The change of logic in leadership can be promoted initially through a real cultural transformation aimed at integrating into the company the staff who can work in a serene and respectful working environment.

This transformation must take place through the enhancement of people’s unique characteristics and by spreading a climate of mutual respect to create a spirit of cooperation. This is certainly not a matter of simply integrating staff into the company (figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Business D&I management needs



Source: authors' elaboration

It is therefore important to involve leadership at this stage. This objective can also be achieved by applying plans to include diversity in the top levels of corporate governance, together with the cultural transformation described above.

We have analysed the extent to which legislation and ethical codes focus on this aspect. However, it is essential that the managerial class not only include disadvantaged groups but also build a relationship with the specialist divisions in the development and implementation of plans for strengthening D&I in the company.

In this regard, we refer to the establishment of committees in large companies or teams in smaller companies dedicated to D&I.

Furthermore, interaction with specific stakeholder figures, including HR managers and external collaborators, is important.

They can come up with ideas, try to influence the business and even try to guide people in the business. As we will see below, the HR management function also becomes crucial in the operational phase. They can certainly advise leadership based on the information found on the market, to define wisely, as well as correct inclusion plans on the agenda.

The results that the company expects from the adoption of such measures, therefore, are not only a greater awareness of the management class and the governing bodies of the D&I issue and its management but also the creation of a proactive governance structure.

The strategic area is closely linked to the corporate action plan. This area of application can count on specific levers of action such as the retrieval of internal data, the understanding of the trends of inclusion in the world and the preparation of benchmark analyses to understand the company's position in the relevant segment. In this area, therefore, the company must aim to obtain as much information as possible to determine its strengths and weaknesses, thus defining the temporal and physical horizons of its objectives.

The expected results are the achievement of effective action plans based on best practices in D&I. To achieve such results, the company must first identify the needs of individuals who may be included. A real listening phase must therefore be activated. This allows the company to understand what are the objectives to be achieved in the short, medium, and long term and how these objectives can be tailored to the individual.

At this stage, it is important to study and define a strategy that can be perfectly balanced with the needs of people and the needs of the company, activating a constant dialogue, stimulating the formulation of new questions and, above all, establishing important collaborations.

Thus, the company has to reply to essential questions. These include: do we have a diversity of profiles among corporate resources? Do we have people with different backgrounds who bring different experiences and perspectives? The use of surveys is very useful.

These may be submitted periodically to:

- monitor the situation of the company;
- understand the mood of employees and collaborators on the subject and in general;
- know how much employees consider the company in compliance with D&I values;
- understand how they relate to colleagues.

When specific weaknesses are identified, the company will need to monitor more closely, trying to identify the root causes of the problems.

The first essential step, therefore, is to get informed and study the results of the research to begin to understand the issue and how it can be a factor of competitive advantage for the company.

In the *operating* phase, it is advisable to activate the operational forces in the HR field. They must carefully evaluate employees and collaborators and their requirements.

The starting point can coincide with the identification of the subjects involved in the processes and operations of the company in light of age or gender, proceeding by aggregation according to more complex and differentiated requirements.

Once this step has been taken, the company can first check whether it has a multiplicity of human resources within it to express the differences.

If the answer to the question is no, then it would be interesting to ask why.

Does the company not have heterogeneous characteristics among its staff because it is applying prejudices when selecting employees or collaborators?

After a preliminary assessment of the characteristics of the staff, the next step that deserves attention is the analysis of staff turnover by area and section.

This allows the company to understand if there is a more common type of people who decide to leave the job and in which areas.

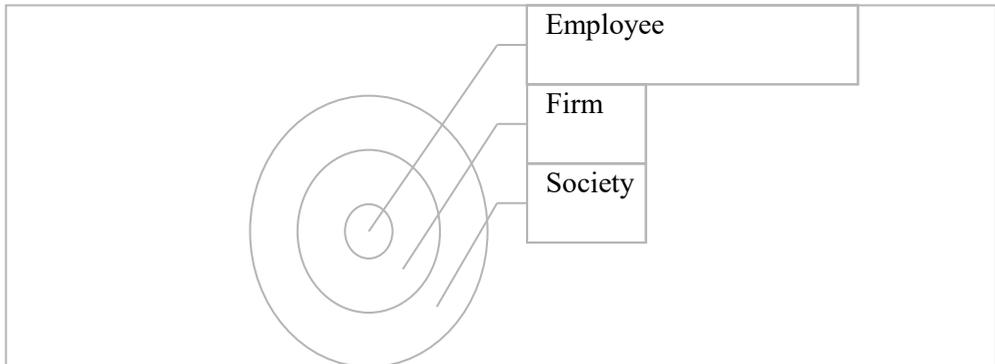
The verification of this indicator, therefore, expresses potential manifestations of discrimination (or in any case problematic) towards human resources belonging to specific disadvantaged groups or even elements of criticality in this regard in specific operating sections of the company, thus allowing more specific and timely intervention.

The analysis, therefore, aims to investigate whether there is an open workplace where employees or collaborators, regardless of their differences, feel themselves.

Once this is achieved, managers will be able to identify areas where human resources will be most willing to work and can reach their full potential.

It is in this context that HR managers will be able to define policies for assignments and tasks. They must be tailored to the aptitudes of individual employees to achieve alignment of business objectives with *best practices* of inclusion. Only when people feel valued and are free to feel themselves can they reach their full potential. An essential step in this process is the alignment of diversity objectives to the corporate mission (figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Relationships between objectives in the definition of tailor-made tasks



Source: authors' elaboration

First and foremost, the company must respect the individual characteristics of each employee and collaborator, understanding their aptitudes and promoting the correct inclusion of the person in the company.

Therefore, the main mission of the company is to put at the centre not an employee but a person; a real human resource that possesses characteristics and skills, but also demonstrates a very special approach to activities and problems and therefore, is the bringer of a real value that derives from diversity.

Secondly, the company must try to maximize the potential of its human resources by aligning them with the company's mission so that it can "release value" for itself and the company. Tailored assignment means a better understanding of the individual employee's ability to work:

- in groups or individually to enhance their skills;
- work with specific characteristics;
- projects aimed at specific target groups of consumers.

Finally, by achieving these two objectives, the company will be able to fulfill its most important task in terms of social responsibility. A responsibility that begins with respect for employees and ends with the guarantee for the whole of society that there is no discrimination at all in the selection, employment, and termination of employment relationships.

All this, however, coincides with a specific, though essential, step in defining the relationship between the company and the employee.

The company should also be able to regulate, with rigor and prudent wisdom, relations between employees and between the various human resources working within and with the company.

A further and fundamental area of action in the operational phase is therefore the constant interaction with employees and the dissemination of information.

To spread a culture of inclusion, it is important for the company to periodically organise workshops, webinars, and open discussion sessions to address the issue transparently and openly, involving people directly in the process of inclusion.

In this context, the well-known onboarding phase (Jeske and Olson 2021; Harpelund 2019) shows how important it is for new employees to understand and get in touch with an inclusive corporate climate and culture. The operational phase must therefore include training, mentoring and information campaigns focused on various topics of inclusion, as well as always open connections with international networks through which the company's human resources can find points of comparison and share personal experiences. Not only that. In addition to web portals and e-learning platforms, social media can also play a key role in enabling employees to post experiences and give testimonials.

All this, however, must be articulated in the best possible way. The world of diversity and inclusion is complex and multi-faceted. The research and solutions adopted by the company to implement inclusion plans cannot be carried out with sufficient approximation. It is not possible to think that a company has implemented inclusion plans well just because it has put several women on the board of directors or because has set up a Facebook page showing the number of people included from disadvantaged groups.

Each division must have a team of consultants specialized in the world of diversity, who know how to respond to the countless problems that the company may encounter in terms of inclusion, for example:

- foreigners with different languages, customs, and habits;
- disabled people with specific cognitive and/or motor needs;
- women with a history of discrimination;
- members of the LGBTQIA+ community with specific personal and family situations, etc.

To carry out their task in the best possible way, advisors should then constantly liaise with a D&I Management Committee set up and operating within the governance area, as discussed above.

The operating phase is then followed by the assessment and control phase. This stage is delicate and must occur continuously.

It defines the efficiency parameters which should constitute the input for new governance arrangements and for the definition of further strategic lines to be implemented in the future.

In this context, the company must start with an investigation to understand the situation in which it operates. The analysis should provide an overview of the potential limitations, and the obstacles to be overcome (such as teams for the integration of people with disabilities), but also to understand the company's needs and the performance achieved over time.

Therefore, starting from a survey of the prevailing climate in the company, the managers should arrive at an understanding of whether the strategy of inclusion and diversity management in the company has produced results or not.

To this end, D&I trackers should be set up in the company as measurers able to quantify numerically the progress of the company in terms of D&I at all levels previously observed (at corporate, strategic, and operating levels).

Thanks to the D&I tracker, the company can understand if its policies and initiatives taken over time are balanced against the levels and objectives set. This system can provide assessments of the composition of the teams, their leadership, the impact of the inclusion policies on the objectives and programmes on the agenda, and which projects should be strengthened and improved.

Then, once the internal assessment has been completed, it is always essential to check the market situation.

Given that information on initiatives promoted by companies is practically public, today more than ever given the use of public tools such as social media, web portals, and communication media, it is advisable to monitor the progress of the company in relation to the strategies defined following the benchmark analyses carried out previously. These controls allow the company to understand if the relationship between strengths and weaknesses has changed over time and if its performance is increasing along with the perception of the stakeholders.

6.2 Diversity and stakeholders: analysis of a perspective still to be followed

6.2.1 People Strategy and Employer Branding as tools for equal opportunities

The internal stakeholders of the company are one of the key figures on which – in our opinion – an analysis of D&I should concentrate its attention. In this regard, two specific “solutions” are used to increase the involvement and the role of employees within an organizational context: we are talking about *People Strategy* and *Employer Branding*. To fully understand the strategic value of these two approaches, it is important to start with their definition:

- *People Strategy* means a business strategy that aims for the well-being and the satisfaction of human resources through the valorization of their skills, while at the same time promoting the sustainability of the business in the long term;
- *Employer Branding*, on the other hand, means the set of recruiting marketing strategies aimed at building a company reputation consistent with the identity of the company, identifying it as the ideal place to work, attracting new candidates, and at the same time retaining talented employees.

A *people strategy* is particularly important for creating an innovative approach to human resource management (Becker et al. 2001). It must become even more intuitive and effective, focusing on a new objective: the employees. The goal is not only to develop the business activities of the companies but to improve their strategies and HR plans, creating a synergy that will serve to forge a new strategic value.

This will enable the company to be more successful among its competitors by putting in place new figures and organizational skills (Kaplan 2007; Gratton and Truss 2003). The search for more human capital-centered approaches is not new. However, on the contrary, the vision of the key role of employees has indeed been strengthened in the last decade through the implementation of innovative and more “humancentric” corporate policies (Ambrosini 1996).

So, it is important to understand how to realize a people strategy.

We can highlight the process by articulating it in the following stages:

1. *Design centered on people*. Rather than asking people what they need or simply assuming they know, there is a tendency today for organizations to pay more attention to how people behave. Thanks to neuroscience technologies (Balconi et al. 2017) and the discoveries concerning behavioral economics (Santori 2019), business leaders are much more aware of the need for people-centered approaches and empathetic behaviors;
2. *Employee experience*. The main result of this trend in many organizations has been to benefit from and contribute specifically to the experience, particularly through the use of characters;
3. *The digital workplace*. The growing importance of the digital workplace should be one of the main areas of interest for most HR teams. Since the creation of the so-called *Digital Workspace* is still almost entirely discretionary today, HR managers must be encouraged to design the smart work system carefully and possibly in collaboration

with HR to enable higher levels of performance. This aspect connects with the next principle of *agility*;

4. *Design of the workplace.* Although recent needs are leading companies to consider smart work systems, the “physical” workplace in the company remains very important. It is therefore essential to ensure that people have a place of reference where they can connect and collaborate. To do this effectively requires the understanding and involvement of people;
5. *Community management.* Human resources may perform individual services, but they should focus also on group performance. This can only be achieved effectively if it is done in unison among colleagues, to bring people together, cultivate deep and meaningful relationships and priorities sharing, learning and co-creation;
6. *Agility.* Today, people work more extensively in horizontal and inter-functional teams, especially through the rapid adoption of smart working modes. The latter requires people to take responsibility for their work and to manage it completely independently.

Many companies that have adopted agile working arrangements are still trying to figure out how to extend this approach to the whole organization;

7. *Self-organization.* Self-organization also exists outside of agile work (or *smart working*) as a trend in itself. Partly thanks to the availability of AI-based self-coaching tools, it is now easier for teams and entire organizations to manage their performance. Human resources managers should be seriously interested in these opportunities;
8. *Purpose and Meaning.* Business leaders are generally much more aware of the importance of meaning, purpose, values, and corporate culture. Human resources have a huge opportunity to educate their colleagues on how to develop the corporate culture to help shape the way organizations work;
9. *Commitment to multiple stakeholders.* The US Business Roundtable (2019) redefined the company’s role in serving the needs of multiple stakeholders. This recent commitment provides a new entry point to initiate important reflections on the role of people in business. Similar opportunities exist in the UK in meeting the Financial Reporting Council’s requirements on organizational culture assessment;
10. *Humanocracy.* This term refers to the objective of helping organizations move away from traditional bureaucratic management and instead develop environments suitable for the people in which to carry out their work (Hamel and Zanini 2020).

Individual people strategies, however, are not enough.

The company needs a combined implementation of multiple strategies that can highlight the pivotal role of human resources and exploit the value they create: we're talking about *employer branding*, which since 2019 has been the trend for many of the companies that have sought significant change at a strategic level (Ahmad et al 2020; Mishra and Kumar 2019; Tikhonov 2019). According to a recent study by Universum – the world's leading employer branding company – branding will become the cornerstone of organizations, which will focus primarily on this (Universum 2019).

The ability of companies to tell their stories is increasingly important, especially to attract the best talent who, in the most competitive sectors, have many options from which to choose. Creating interest in candidates of value for the company is easier if exists effective corporate branding and clear and inclusive communication (Francini 2020).

To develop a good *employer branding strategy*, the literature shows that it is necessary to follow some basic steps (Moroko and Uncles 2008):

- *Know the mission, vision and purpose of the company.* First of all, it is important to focus on these aspects of the corporate culture to clearly define the needs and to understand which candidates to seek in order to achieve the objectives set;
- *Check the strength of the brand.* Companies are not always fully aware of their reputation among job seekers or among their employees. It is necessary to conduct internal surveys, social media research to establish a company's reputation among potential candidates and among employees and ex-employees. This will serve to discover the strengths of the corporate culture, in order to highlight them even more and then work on the weak points;
- *Create the employee value proposition.* This term (EVP) describes a report of the work experience perceived by employees of the company and potential candidates. It is evaluated according to the characteristics of the company, its brand identity, the company culture and the relationship it has with the human resources of the company;
- *Allow space for the opinions of employees.* Potential candidates will probably want more information about the company and will mainly address the human resources already employed. A good practice would be to share employees' views with the public via the company's website;
- *Take care of the onboarding process.* The term "onboarding" refers to the process following the hiring, which defines the insertion of the newly hired employee within the company. At this stage, the new employee should acquire all the knowledge, skills and behaviors to become an integral part of the company, both organizationally and culturally; therefore, it is essential to provide an initial company image as positive as possible. In order to

- ensure an efficient and effective working relationship in the long term, it is essential to involve people and make them enthusiastic about their roles from the outset by providing them with the necessary instructions and tools;
- *Provide employees with good training and growth opportunities.* The main reason why people leave their jobs is not money, but lack of incentives. The solution is to offer employees the opportunity to attend training courses to acquire the skills needed for the new roles. This will demonstrate how important it is for the company to train and continuously improve its employees and will improve their loyalty.

All these aspects, which are essential for the creation of an optimal employment branding strategy, must, however, coexist with a clear policy of diversity and inclusion. They can make the inclusion process more effective to create value in the company. Creating heterogeneous teams can bring benefits to the company and even more innovative and competitive ideas, as well as express a stronger corporate culture and improved customer service.

An ad hoc employer branding strategy, connected to D&I programmes, improves the company's reputation, encouraging the acquisition and retention of potential candidates and reducing the costs of hiring and integrating new employees (Chhabra and Sharma 2014; Wilden et al. 2010).

A recent study entitled 360-degree feedback: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly by the World Economic Forum (2015) on Employer Branding in Singapore found that companies are investing their efforts to create a better brand through recruitment sites, strategic social media presence, and a more cohesive corporate culture (Bolza 2015).

This last point is now essential if, in addition to a good strategy, a company desires to create a solid commitment among key stakeholders: employer branding and D&I are two sides of the same coin (Pichon 2021). Therefore, Diversity must be considered when engaging resources by creating an inclusive working environment. Creating a corporate background that considers the uniqueness of each employee means creating an organization in which the workforce is fully reflected. Studies on the importance of this approach have shown how diversified and inclusive strategies realize better results for companies. Particularly relevant is the study by McKinsey entitled Diversity wins: How inclusion matters (2020), in which the famous company analysed the effects of D&I policies and their effect on employees and the reputation of the companies that have adopted them.

“[...] the greater the representation, the higher the likelihood of outperformance. Companies with more than 30 percent women executives were more likely to outperform companies where this percentage ranged from 10 to 30, and in turn these companies were more likely to outperform those with even fewer women executives, or none at all. A substantial differential

likelihood of outperformance—48 percent—separates the most from the least gender-diverse companies.

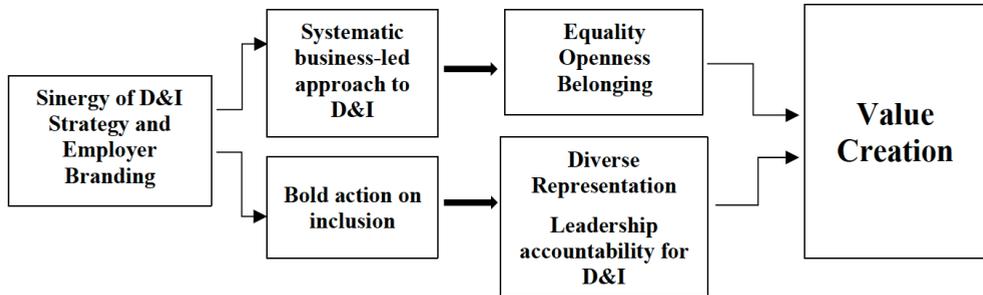
In the case of ethnic and cultural diversity, our business-case findings are equally compelling: in 2019, top-quartile companies outperformed those in the fourth one by 36 percent in profitability, slightly up from 33 percent in 2017 and 35 percent in 2014. As we have previously found, the likelihood of outperformance continues to be higher for diversity in ethnicity than for gender” (Mckinsey 2020).

In this report, the attention is focused on all aspects of diversity. Not only women but also people of different ethnicity, religion, or gender are considered in the integration of company policies. The same study constructed the latest analysis on the subject by comparing the data collected in 2014 with those collected in the period 2019-2020, which showed disconcerting results. Although there has been no particular progress on diversity and inclusion, the incomes of companies that had embraced a D&I strategy in 2014 saw an overperformance in 2019.

Thus, employer branding and D&I merge, in these terms, in the creation of value: the greater the workforce, the greater the diversity within the company; the greater the diversity within the company, the greater the effort in terms of inclusion; the greater the effort, the greater the final benefit (figure 6.3). Finally, the study highlighted two critical factors in the development of inclusive hiring strategies: the creation of a systematic approach to D&I that also involves business and the adoption of courageous and concrete initiatives on inclusion. Based on this, the research used 5 key indicators to define the level of diversification within companies:

- the representation of diversity at every organizational level and the responsibility of leadership in creating D&I strategies (referring to the first critical factor);
- equality, openness, and belonging to the corporate culture (which are the main components of good inclusion and refer to the second critical factor).

Figure 6.3 McKinsey 2020: how employer branding works in synergy with D&I strategies to create value in the companies



Source: authors' elaboration

The results show that diversity in the company is well represented, not only through innovative policies but also by considering the basic components of inclusion. This is because, even the most diversified organizations find themselves having to overcome obstacles in the process of implementing inclusion, trying to create work environments engaging and culturally open (McCausland 2021).

In conclusion, we can argue that *employer branding* is now a decisive factor in inclusion strategies. However, this technique – together with the *people strategy* – can only achieve its objective in the context of a policy of inclusion of diversity.

“Ethnic and cultural diversity’s correlation with outperformance on profitability was also statistically significant at board level. We found that companies with the most ethnically/culturally diverse boards worldwide are 43% more likely to experience higher profits. We also found a positive correlation between ethnic/cultural diversity and value creation at both the executive team and board levels, though the relationship is not statistically significant. It may be the case that overall, the picture on top-team diversity globally is more complex due to significant geographic differences in the cultural contexts in which the companies we studied operate. Overall, our findings that ethnic and cultural diversity on executive teams continues to correlate strongly with company financial performance support the argument that there is value in promoting ethnic/cultural diversity in company top teams around the world. We hypothesize that, for companies, addressing the challenge of building an inclusive company culture across cultural differences could significantly strengthen organizational effectiveness. Further, ethnic/cultural diversity at the highest levels of company leadership could serve as a signal to employees and other stakeholders that the organization

truly understands and values the community and customers that they serve” (Hunt et al. 2018: 13).

This synergy can be determined and concretely quantified by studying metrics and tangible results in terms of:

1. loyalty levels of major stakeholders;
2. best performance;
3. highest customer satisfaction.

Referring to these tangible results, it is worth noting that greater inclusiveness of diversities within the company’s policies will help guide the company in creating value. A value that D&I can exalt through a preliminary hiring phase and the following relations with the employed human resources:

- *“Win the war for talent.* Strengthening human capital for their organizations remains one of the top challenges for CEOs globally, and it continues to be seen as a key source of competitive advantage. A diverse and inclusive workplace is central to a company’s ability to attract, develop, and retain the talent it needs to compete. The effects of major trends – globalization, technology, and demographics – create new growth opportunities for companies, while disrupting traditional business models and organizational structures. More diverse organizations have broader talent pools from which to source capability to compete in this changing world;
- *Improve the quality of decision making.* Published research from academia, corporations, and other organizations supports that diverse and inclusive groups make better quality decisions, often faster, and in a more fact-based manner, with less cognitive bias or groupthink. Further studies show a positive correlation between better decision making and business performance;
- *Increase innovation and customer insight.* Similarly, research supports that diverse and inclusive teams tend to be more creative and innovative than homogenous groups. Diverse teams bring different experiences, perspectives, and approaches to bear on solving complex, non-routine problems. Diverse teams are also better able to target and distinctively serve diverse customer markets, such as women, ethnic minority, and LGBTQ+ communities which command an increasing share of consumer wealth and which could represent untapped markets for some companies;
- *Increase employee satisfaction.* I&D management improves employee satisfaction and also reduces conflict between groups, improving collaboration

and loyalty. This can create an environment that is more attractive to high performers;

- *Improve a company's global image and license to operate.* Even before the current climate raised the stakes on I&D, companies who were leaders in this space benefitted from an enhanced reputation extending beyond their employees to their customers, supply chain, local communities, and wider society. Recent highly publicized issues with gender and racial discrimination highlight that, for many companies, this is also a matter of license to operate" (Hunt et al. 2018: 23-24).

The economic implications of integrating D&I policies are documented internationally and in every business sector. Companies should continue to develop D&I, as the more diversified they are, the more they will be able to attract new and better talent, and also improve their response to customer demands. At the same time, the internal situation will also be more stable: with a clearer and more diversified decision-making process, employees' satisfaction will also improve by increasing their commitment to the company.

6.2.2 *The ESG's new frontiers in terms of Inclusion and Diversity*

We have seen above how attention to careful management of the employee class is crucial to creating balanced and high-performing jobs, giving and receiving value from all internal stakeholders. The role of the company today is no longer limited to the allocation of capital and to the use of production factors to achieve a given economic objective, but also to the capacity to meet the needs and demands of the population of the stakeholders, whose expectations and value judgments constitute the level of integration in a given space (Pellegrini et al. 2020).

Thus, the way and the level in which the company management meets the needs of the stakeholders become a real intangible remuneration, although very tangible to them, and at the same time an investment that returns in the appreciation of the company itself, rewarding the population of the shareholders (Pellegrini et al. 2020). This approach requires much more sensitivity and attention from the managerial class because it must relate to a system in which the reputation and image of the company are of decisive importance (Rangone 2021). This principle then defines the new role of the company and its position in the context in which it operates.

The company can no longer be a separate entity from society, with its rules and profit targets. Through the principles of *corporate social responsibility* (Rendtorff 2019; Carroll and Brown 2018; Scott 2007; Lantos 2001; Kilcullen and Kooistra 1999) and *corporate citizenship* (Camilleri 2017; Wang 2014; Morgan et al. 2009; Birch 2008; Maignan and Ferrell 2001) it has

long been argued that companies create value when they can optimize their activities to address opportunities, objectives, and problems of the operating environment in the economic, social and business governance areas. This is where the concept of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) originates; it is an area that tries to evaluate the company's performance and respect concerning these respective domains.

As reported by the Center for Corporate Citizenship:

“strong corporate social and environmental performance is no longer simply a “nice to have” element of a company's overall strategy. In today's global economy, corporate responsibility is a business imperative. When companies create comprehensive CSR platforms that optimize their core competencies and work to address operating context issues, opportunities, and goals, they deliver measurable business value” (Center for Corporate Citizenship 2021).

However, the implementation of corporate responsibility projects cannot be achieved independently by companies. As we will see later through the definition of the *complex shared value*, the interaction between the company and the stakeholders must take place as an echo that spreads through multiple nodes of the chain, to involve the company itself (governance), the whole community (social) and the environment. All this not for a simple improvement of the company image but so that the generated value can create:

- improved working and living conditions (welfare);
- an improvement in the environmental status (reduction of pollution and efficiency of available resources);
- a renewed business model with new job opportunities.

Hence the need to evaluate the performance of companies in these three ESG areas so that they can increasingly comply with international standards already dictated by the Global Reporting Initiative (Alan Willis 2003), the UN Global Compact (2021), and the Principles for Responsible Investment (Häßler and Jung 2015).

To carry out an evaluation it is possible to use several database providers. These include Thomson Reuters ESG Scores, Bloomberg ESG Data Service, Corporate Knights Global 100, Sustain Analytics ESG Risk Ratings, Dow Jones Sustainability Index Family, and RepRisk.

To gain a general understanding of their function, which is, however, diversified in terms of analytical approach and specific topics covered, the following can be reported:

“Thomson Reuters captures and calculates over 400 company level ESG measures, of which we have carefully selected a subset of 178 most relevant data points to power the overall company assessment and scoring process. The

underlying measures are based on considerations around materiality, data availability, and industry relevance” (Thomson Reuters 2017).

The pillars are made up of the following macro-areas:

- environmental: in terms of resource use, emissions and innovation;
- social: in terms of workforce, human rights, community, and product responsibility;
- governance: in terms of management, shareholder treatment, and CSR strategy.

More than 400 data points provide access to about 70 key performance indicators related to these aspects, which will outline the ESG profile of each company, both public and private.

The sources are annual reports and websites of companies and NGOs, stock market trends, but also information from the media and social media. This amount of information allows us to obtain a *score range* of evaluation as shown in table 6.2:

Table 6.2 ESGC Score Range and Grade

Score Range	Grade
$0.0 \leq \text{score} \leq 0.083333$	D -
$0.083333 < \text{score} \leq 0.166666$	D
$0.166666 < \text{score} \leq 0.250000$	D +
$0.250000 < \text{score} \leq 0.333333$	C -
$0.333333 < \text{score} \leq 0.416666$	C
$0.416666 < \text{score} \leq 0.500000$	C +
$0.500000 < \text{score} \leq 0.583333$	B -
$0.583333 < \text{score} \leq 0.666666$	B
$0.666666 < \text{score} \leq 0.750000$	B +
$0.750000 < \text{score} \leq 0.833333$	A -
$0.833333 < \text{score} \leq 0.916666$	A
$0.916666 < \text{score} \leq 1$	A +

Source: Thomson Reuters 2017

Bloomberg’s Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG Data) dataset provides ESG metrics and disclosure scores for over 11,500 companies in at least 80 countries. The product includes data as reported and ratios derivate, as well as industry- and country-specific data points. In addition to the

extensive current data coverage, it provides historical data dating back to 2006 (Bloomberg 2021).

The areas of investigation are as follows:

- Air Quality
- Climate Change Water & Energy Management
- Materials & Waste
- Health & Safety
- Audit Risk & Oversight
- Compensation
- Diversity
- Board Independence, Structure & Tenure
- Shareholders' Rights (Bloomberg 2021).

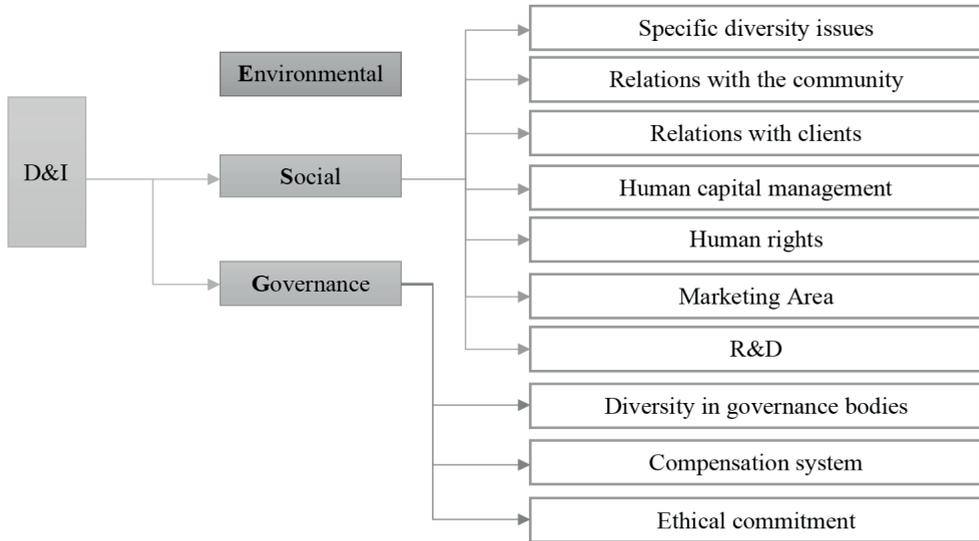
The ESG rating system is therefore an extraordinary system for defining the reputation profile and performance of companies, especially those listed on the stock exchange (Nakajima et al. 2021).

ESG data are essential during the assessment of companies before the investment process. It becomes an opportunity to provide transparent and comprehensive scoring methodologies to support investors and financial operators in making decisions that are as safe as possible (Jemel-Fornetty et al. 2011). As reported by Bloomberg (2021), this data helps investors decode raw data that is otherwise difficult to compare across companies. While for the companies themselves, these scores provide a valuable, quantitative and standardized benchmark that can easily highlight their ESG performance (Bloomberg 2021).

As shown from the list, the macro area of Diversity is also included. This is therefore the first indication of how crucial the process of including diversity in the company in terms of added value is today. Furthermore, this indicates that companies can, or rather should, use these or related services to understand their level of inclusion in the company and determine the degree of the gap with other companies.

This process thus expresses a crucial element for the determination of benchmarks aimed at directing the company towards new directions. Regardless of the various database providers, diversity management is mainly expressed in the “Social” area for issues dealing specifically with the inclusion of diversity. However, as we will see more clearly with the description of the complex shared value, the “social” area defined by D&I in the company is enhanced by the value chains it can generate. In addition, as described concerning the questions relating to internal codes, it also permeates the “governance” context in light of the composition of management bodies and the related remuneration systems.

Figure 6.4 Direct and indirect relationships between D&I and ESG survey areas



Source: authors' elaboration

The considerations outlined above and summarized in figure 6.4 make it clear that the scope of D&I in the company is much wider than one might think.

Thanks to the performance assessment system defined by the identification of qualitative variables provided by the ESG analytical criteria, a real intangible contribution emerges which must be first identified, then analysed and enhanced to improve relations with internal and external stakeholders.

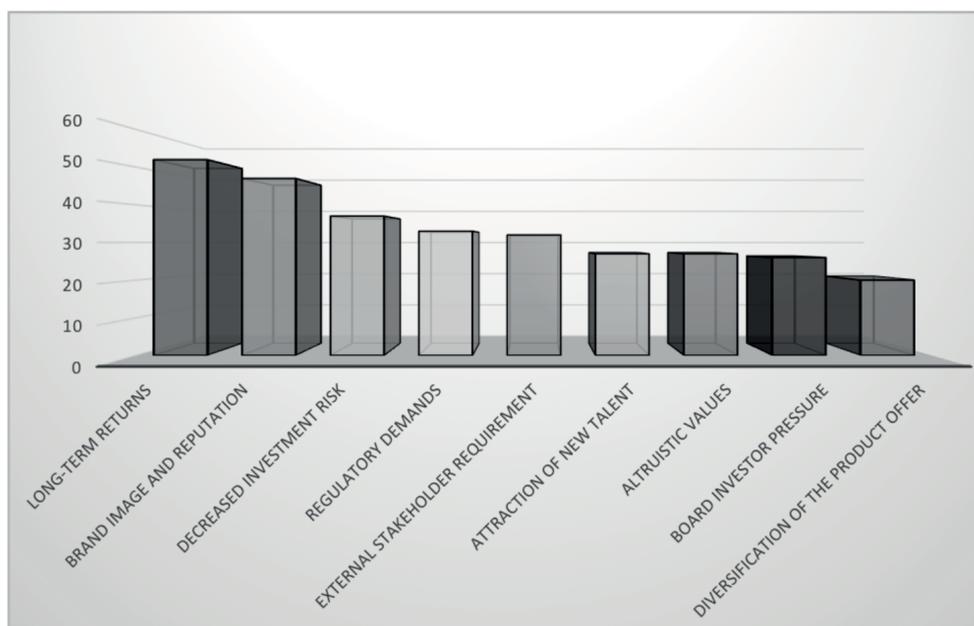
This is because the presence of different points of view is a driver of innovation which, in turn, generates value.

In terms of strategies, therefore, adapting to the new ESG frontiers can affect both internal performances – as a D&I-minded company tends to attract talent – and corporate repositioning, as it can qualify the organisation in terms of ratings and attractiveness in the eyes of investors. Today, companies with an ESG rating account for 78% of total global capitalisation, 95% of the United States, and 89% of the European Union (Boffo and Patalano 2020).

As shown in the chart (figure 6.5), according to a 2019 survey conducted by BNP, more than 50% of the investments made by institutional investors and asset managers were made in companies with an ESG index for reasons related to potential medium-long-term returns. This would suggest that the traditional investment principle linked to financial performance may be

exclusive and dominant. In the second place, however, we can look at the image, the solidity of the brand, and the company's reputation. As we will see later in our analysis, these elements are strongly influenced by the inclusion of diversity in the company.

Figure 6.5 Motivation of investments in ESG-rated companies – Values %



Source: adapted from BNP survey (2019)

This criterion even goes beyond the risk element of the investment.

It is therefore possible to conclude that in recent years particular attention has been paid to ESG criteria and investments in companies with such valuation. The reasons for this trend are identifiable in several factors. Firstly, investments in companies with an ESG rating can help to improve risk management for the many facets analysed and which define new horizons of transparency in the analysis of company profiles. This gives rise to the possibility of achieving better returns. A second perspective stems precisely from the growing attention of companies to the risks of climate change, the benefits deriving from responsible business conduct, and the need to include more and more diversity in the workplace and on boards of directors. This suggests that social values will increasingly influence investors, and consumer choices can have an increasing impact on business performance.

A third reason – understood as a sum of the preceding ones – is then identified in the ever-increasing tendency of companies and financial

institutions to move away from short-term yield prospects. This approach not only reduces the high risk of investments that can undermine stakeholder confidence but also better reflects long-term sustainability in investment performance while enhancing social values.

However, although these practices are now widely used in the operational context of the stock exchange and increasingly characterize the *modus operandi* of listed companies, it is much more difficult to apply them in non-listed companies for which image and brand reputation are more difficult to emerge and the contribution they can make in the social sphere is more diluted in the *mare magnum* of the economic and market context in which they operate.

This is certainly something that needs clear and swift action.

6.3 The intangible value of discriminated categories

To understand the relationship between the value generated by discriminated categories and intangible value for the company, first of all, it is essential to understand the meaning of the term “intangible value”. Today, the concept of *intangible assets* is becoming increasingly important, although it still gives rise to some misunderstandings and needs the support of copious reference literature. The important role that knowledge plays in the development of innovative techniques and new business models in the context of 4.0 is a clear example.

However, this point has been reached after a long journey of comparisons, although important anticipations can already be seen in the classic authors of Italian *business administration*. At the beginning of the 20th century, in Italy (considered the birthplace of accounting and business administration) wide visibility and attention were given to the concept of corporate assets (Zappa 1939; Besta 1880) and the tangible, concrete elements attributed to the *balance sheet*.

Table 6.3 Example of a company’s balance sheet as of 31 December 1914

ASSETS	LIABILITIES
Factory	Debts
Products and Raw materials	
Other stocks	
Cash and Securities	
Credits	
Costs of first installation	REGISTERED CAPITAL
Branches	RESERVE FUND
Deposits	NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR

Source: Zappa 1939

At that time, it was very difficult to identify and give weight to intangible elements such as know-how, professionalism, or specific individual skills (table 6.3). Thus, there was a broad and ill-defined boundary for the term “fixed assets” (Zappa 1939).

Only “goodwill” was a well-defined element in terms of importance and function.

However, the father of Italian business administration, Gino Zappa, said in his description of intangible fixed assets:

“They, like other fixed costs, must be subject to depreciation, to depreciation which, however, apart from the usual use, must be adapted to the general profitability of the operation. We also know that these intangible assets, which are transferred to other fixed assets, often contribute to the compilation of summary accounts and summary balance sheet items. It is understood that in order to be deferred to the formation of future incomes, even intangible assets must be judged not to be exhausted in their usefulness. But the efficiency of a cost, although distinctly measured by particular numerical outputs certain or assimilated, is not easily discernible; [...] But the class of intangible values which more than any other lends itself to alter determinations of convenience, is that given, as is often desired, by the goodwill, by the customers, by the firm, by the trademarks, by the trade secrets and by other similar “goods” (Zappa 1939: 677)⁶³.

As can be clearly understood from Zappa’s words, the importance of customers and the company’s image as well as the strength of the brand could already be glimpsed at the beginning of the 20th century.

These elements, as we will have the opportunity to explore later, are now closely related to the human resources employed in the company.

⁶³ Original version: “Essi, a somiglianza di altri costi immobilizzati, vanno soggetti ad ammortamento, ad un ammortamento però che oltre l’usato suole essere adattato al generale andamento lucrativo della gestione. Sappiamo pure che gli accennati valori immateriali, commisti ad altre immobilizzazioni, concorrono spesso alla formazione dei conti sintetici e di sintetiche voci di bilancio. Si intende che per essere differiti alla formazione di redditi venturi, anche i valori immateriali debbono giudicarsi non esausti nella loro utilità. Ma la capacità di rendimento di un costo, pur distintamente misurato da particolari uscite numerarie certe od assimilate, non è facilmente discernibile; [...] Ma la classe di valori immateriali che più di ogni altra si presta ad alterare determinazioni di comodo, è quella data, secondo frequentemente si vuole, dall’avviamento, dalla clientela, dalla ditta, dai marchi di fabbrica, dai segreti di fabbricazione e da altri simili “beni” (Zappa 1939: 677).

However, it should be pointed out that the generation of value through the use of intangible assets has its roots much more recently.

It was only since the 1960s that it was possible to find a way to identify intangibles according to a specific classification. Marketing and the need to measure investment in advertising campaigns have certainly played a key role (Bounfour 2002; Rushton and Carson 1985).

Subsequently, in the 1970s, given the increasingly emerging technological advances, the category of intangible assets began to include all investments more specifically related to technology, thus leading to the need for new methods for their identification and income value (Visconti 2020; Demers 2002; Hertog et al. 1997). It is from this premise that in the 1980s a clearer distinction between tangible and intangible goods became necessary, recognising the value and importance of the latter, although they were goods devoid of physicality. Their value is initially derived from characteristics such as transferability and measurability (Brugger 1989).

However, this approach was gradually abandoned, as it excluded important fundamental resources such as managerial skills, corporate image, introduction into distribution channels, and relations with the financial community (Guatri 2005: 142).

To understand this step, it is therefore essential to analyse the role attributed to “information” in the company.

6.3.1 The information system generated by D&I

The information system is today as then a category that includes endogenous subsystems (relating to communication and data collected internally by the company) and exogenous subsystems (information and data relating to the environment in which the company operates and with which it is in continuous contact) (Mancini 2011).

The exogenous subsystem is an expression of the knowledge that the company perceives from the outside and tries to attract directly from the market. It is, for example, an expression of technological know-how or information on current or future trends.

Unlike the exogenous sub-system, the endogenous sub-system is an expression of the company itself and its *modus operandi*.

This is because, starting from governance and going through the composition and management strategies, it involves all the business units and the entire body of human resources. The information system held within the company thus defines its essence and culture. This inexorably determines its image and reputation.

Here we have reached the crucial point that allows us to understand the link between the use of diversity in the company and the value produced by intangible assets.

The corporate information system produces two types of intangible resources: knowledge and trust, both internal (i.e. employees towards the company) and external (i.e. consumers/clients towards the company) (Mancini 2011).

Knowledge and trust are two essential elements for value formation in an ethical and sustainable market environment, increasingly aimed at achieving high reputational standards. Thanks to technological evolution, the company has been able to become a real community specialized in the management of processes of knowledge creation and transfer (Ganzaroli 2002: 58).

Trust also becomes a key factor for reputation and is inherent in both internal relationships (in terms of human and managerial skills) and external relationships (in meeting desired requirements).

Table 6.4 The role of information system in the process of D&I valorisation

	EXPERTISE AND SATISFACTION	VALUES
<i>Information System</i>	Knowledge (Know-how)	ECONOMIC
	Trust (Relations and Image)	SOCIAL

Source: authors' elaboration

Knowledge and trust, therefore, come from the human factor, both in the form of individual and collective competencies, if related to the *modus operandi* of the whole organisation. Therefore, they must necessarily be allocated to productive resources of high value, which in turn must be properly valued and researched.

Trust (that which is established with external stakeholders) more specifically becomes a resource when it is an expression of good consideration by stakeholders.

That perception comes – as previously said – from the business *modus operandi* and the way resources are used.

We are well aware of the extent to which the category of resources and factors of production includes both physical assets and the know-how of human resources (Mella 2021).

It follows from this that the approach to human resources (in this case, those included in the disadvantaged groups) and the way they are integrated into the company and applied in the various sectors of the company, can achieve a twofold result:

1. there will be value generated by the knowledge they possess, through the products and services offered;
2. it will gain the trust of the various categories of stakeholders, which will make it possible to obtain value from the reputation acquired (table 6.4).

The first case can be realised because every human resource employed in the company has specific skills, which can be applied in various sectors. People belonging to disadvantaged groups have their training and experience, but above all, they have an awareness of what may be of interest to or necessary for their customers or clients.

This allows them to design new products or services aimed at a target clientele that the company would hardly be able to satisfy without them.

Figure 6.6 Value creation in the company through D&I at various levels of the company



Source: authors' elaboration

This value is mainly released through an intervention in the upper section of the company hierarchy, and thus in the corporate governance structure (figure 6.6). Previously we spoke of “corporate level” intervention. This potential is manifested precisely by achieving an optimal level of integration of diversity in corporate control centres, changing philosophy, and defining medium to long-term guidelines to meet new market segments and specific categories of customers.

In the second case, we have a connection between the interventions at the *strategy* and *operating* level analysed above and the trust of the customer/consumer towards the company.

Inclusion processes create value if the company can achieve a homogeneous working environment and if the happiness of working in the company of disadvantaged groups is visible to the outside.

Only in this way will the company be able to gain the image of a serious organization and be proactive to social change. Only in this way will it be able to win the respect of all categories of consumers and enhance its reputation.

A positive image and a strong market position also constitute a strong and competitive brand. Thus, a high corporate reputation and a strong brand are both intangible assets that allow the company to achieve two forms of value: the social one and the more typically economic one.

The social value is what spreads both among the human resources included in the company and among the external company stakeholders. At the same time, the economic value of the company is what meets the objectives and the shareholders (distribution of profits) or can be reinserted into the company circuit for new projects and investments (self-financing).

It follows from this that both internal and external relations with disadvantaged groups will be the bringers of a social and economic value to be included not only in the traditional balance sheet but also in the so-called “social balance sheet” (Verde 2017; Mion and Melchiori 2011).

However, it is important to point out that the so-called *drivers* – that we will better analyse later in this work – need to work in synchronisation to get the maximum value for the company.

6.3.2 *The control system of the value generated by D&I within the company*

Having come to these considerations, we present the following question: is it possible to monitor the value generated by the inclusion of diversity?

To answer this question, which is, for obvious reasons, linked to the principle of the functioning of intangibles, it is essential to refer to:

1. the most recent studies on the subject that clarify the elements for identifying intangibles;

2. control systems in the light of a systemic approach;
3. evaluation systems based on qualitative criteria and human relationships.

So far, we have analysed the breakdown of the information system into knowledge and trust. We then defined how these two important “resources” in turn determine the operating context and, again how they are interconnected and promote the creation of both economic and social value. In literature, intangible assets are much more numerous (Ciampaglia 2021; Zambon and Marzo 2016; Guatri 2002; Lev 2000; Anson 1996; Parr 199) and define the various aspects that affect the technical production and relational functions of the company.

As shown in table 6.5 the intangibles can be divided by macro area:

Table 6.5 Specific categories of intangible with which D&I is directly connected

Marketing	Clients	Technology
Company logo	Clients (customer list)	Patents
Trade mark	Order book	Software
Signs	Contractual relations with clients	Databases
Advertising ideas	Non-contractual relationships with clients	Production secrets
Marketing strategies		
Graphics		
Internet domains		

Source: authors' elaboration on data from Anson 1996, Guatri 2002 and IASB

The classifications are different. However, not all of them are directly linked to D&I's involvement in the company.

That is why it was in our interest to try to summarize them to get a more complete picture of the situation. Of course, internationally, criteria generally adopted and expressed by IAS (IFRS 2021) have been defined. However, they not only do not cover items such as advertising ideas but also include categories such as contract-based or art-related intangibles which, in our view, are poorly related to D&I or can benefit from it to a much lesser extent.

The inclusion of diversity in the company includes many aspects. For this reason, it can generate value thanks to the interconnection of multiple “drivers” that induce the exaltation of various intangible assets.

Take the brand, for example. It certainly involves legal aspects (its management is subject to constraints and protections) as well as marketing

aspects. However, it also involves interpersonal relationships because the value generated by a solid brand is determined by relational and customer management aspects as well as technological efficiency for a high-quality product that meets the desires and needs of customers.

After lengthy studies and debates, the various doctrines which have had to clash on the subject of intangibles have given way to generally accepted international criteria. We are talking about the International Accounting Standards of the IASB 21 and, in particular, IAS 3822. The first description has undergone several changes over the years before arriving at the latest version which reads as follows:

“An intangible asset is an identifiable non-monetary asset without physical substance. An asset is a resource that is controlled by the entity as a result of past events (for example, purchase or self-creation) and from which future economic benefits (inflows of cash or other assets) are expected [IAS 38.8]” (Deloitte 2021).

According to the doctrine, an intangible asset must have specific characteristics:

- identifiability;
- control (power to obtain benefits from the asset);
- future economic benefits (such as reduced future revenues or costs) (Deloitte 2021).

The company, therefore, can “control” an intangible asset only if it will be able to obtain future benefits from it and if it will be able to exercise power over that asset. If from a technical and marketing point of view (patents, trademarks, trade dress, newspapers, internet domains) it is easy to distinguish the causal link, precisely because of the immediate identifiability and control that can be exercised over the products, it is much more difficult to understand the value generated by diversity from a relational and customer point of view.

We have extensively described how the information system generated by company diversity can generate fundamental customer trust. And we also looked at the impact that trust can have on companies in terms of the image to create value, not only corporate but also social. However, even though these are intangible values, the trust and loyalty that the client places in the company cannot be directly controlled from a mathematical point of view, as they are constantly subject to countless external influences.

As a result, instruments and models for monitoring and valuing intangibles based on (Guatri and Bini 2007) are traditionally used:

- cost criteria (historical, residual, reproduction);

- criteria of differential results (premium price);
- comparative criteria (comparable transactions, royalty rates, implicit multiples, empirical multiples) from which a cold economic and financial assessment emerges.

They risk losing a large portion of the value of human and interpersonal relationships along the path of evaluation. Therefore, as is widely deduced from the literature (Busacca 2000; Renoldi 1992), they risk having multiple limitations.

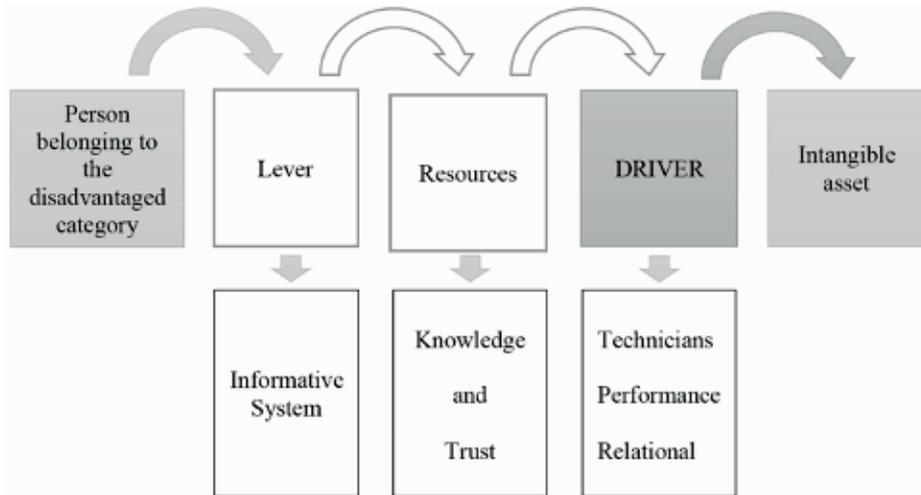
It is therefore crucial to understand how to transform diversity into a controllable intangible. To simplify how to understand the subtle link between included diversity and known intangibles. To achieve such an objective, a logical system of understanding causal links comes to our aid: system thinking. It is no longer acceptable to believe that the processes that characterize our daily life are disconnected from each other. For years scientific doctrines have been focusing their attention on the dynamics that characterize the interconnection between the elements in an attempt to understand the ways to control the countless processes in place. System thinking, known to most thanks to the famous book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* by Peter Senge, has become the most prestigious instrument (Senge 1991; Senge 1990, 2006). System thinking consists of the ability to solve problems in a complex system. This *modus cogitandi* is based on Systems Theory (Wasson 2006). According to this principle, the system is an entity whose parts are interconnected and interdependent; therefore, the modification of a part of the system or of the variables that constitute it can influence the other parts and therefore the whole system. System thinking is dedicated to discovering the dynamics and how they develop in time and space. However, to carry out this task, it is necessary to pay attention to five important rules (Mella 2012). We must:

1. focus attention also on the single units that make up a specific system. The ability to zoom from the whole to the parts allows for a better understanding of the reality being analysed, thereby avoiding unprovided generalizations that do not permit an objective evaluation;
2. research the dynamism of the processes, avoiding focusing attention on what remains constant in time and space. This is achieved by identifying both variables and their variations;
3. identify the causal links of the variables to be surveyed. To understand the causes of the variations, it is, in fact, necessary to identify both the processes that are the source of dynamism of the variables as well as the causes (input) and the effects (output);

4. move from causal relationships to systemic interactions. This is necessary because, regardless of the type of variable being analysed, they are all interconnected by reinforcement and balancing loops;
5. identify the limits of the systems under analysis to avoid considering these as infinitely large and, therefore, impossible to understand objectively. If we consider the principle that everything varies and every variable is interconnected, we cannot overlook the important effects that can arise from a variable even if it is infinitely small and, therefore, apparently harmless. How a change occurs in one or more variables that characterize a given system may thus have cumulative effects over time on the other variables, with repercussions on the system itself.

Having said that, in the specific case of D&I, it is important to try to channel the energies applied and the resources employed towards the creation of an intangible “product”, through the use of specific *drivers*.

Figure 6.7 Chain of control of intangible assets promoted by D&I in the company



Source: authors' elaboration

The person belonging to a disadvantaged category and included in the company, alone or as a group, uses the levers provided by the internal and external information system. These are expressed through the knowledge they possess and the trust that individuals can gain individually, with digital tools, or collectively, through projects.

However, it is with the help of specific drivers that it is possible to quantify the extent to which this trust and applied knowledge is involved. As shown in figure 6.7, the information system, better described above, determines the resources deriving from the processes of inclusion in the company. These are complemented by the use of “drivers”. Drivers are, therefore, parameters that concern the different aspects of business operations and allow us to translate in an empirical way the connection between information dictated by the diversity included and the intangible assets clearly defined by the law. The drivers are multiple and distinct from each other by type. They can be, for example, technical (new product), relational (number and heterogeneity of customers), and organisational (internal and external ratings on staff satisfaction) (table 6.6).

However, although each driver makes its specific contribution to the creation of value expressed by the intangible, it is only by careful and simultaneous joint action that they can amplify this value.

Table 6.6 Example of drivers in defining intangible control processes

LEVER	RESOURCES	DRIVERS		VALUES	
<i>Informative System</i>	Knowledge	New products	Diversity of customers	Brand	ECONOMIC
		New horizons	Distinction on the market		
	Trust	Satisfaction of HR	Enhancing performance	Reputation	SOCIAL
		Inclusive organisation	Positive image		
			INTANGIBLE ASSETS		

Source: authors' elaboration

New products, which are distinguished from competitors by the technical quality and functional requirements, do not individually determine the strength of a brand, although they can provide a rapid competitive advantage for the company. Other *drivers* must intervene such as public awareness and the market share held by the company. These parameters must then act together to define a solid brand. To better understand this position, let's make an example by comparing two models of value control, the one defined as more traditional and the one which considers a specific role of D&I. The example focuses on a company operating in the fashion sector whose production is aimed at supplying clothing.

The process of assessing the brand according to a traditional model involves the analysis of specific parameters:

- the costs to be incurred in connection with advertising and promotion;
- the degree of public awareness that the firm is able to achieve;
- the market share held.

The traditional model (Guatri 2005), which is primarily designed to define a financial dimension, is commonly designed to identify investments supported in the following three phases:

1. Launch;
2. Divulcation;
3. Consolidation during the project timeframe and then updated.

We are convinced that, in a system in which the company is increasingly acting as a social actor, this can no longer be enough.

At every stage, D&I can now play an extraordinary role which must be considered. The economic investment has a crucial importance at the start-up stage but, without identifying the type of product most suitable to sponsor, without identifying the target market segment in which to enter, and the relationships that allow the right sponsorship, any investment will fail without creating value.

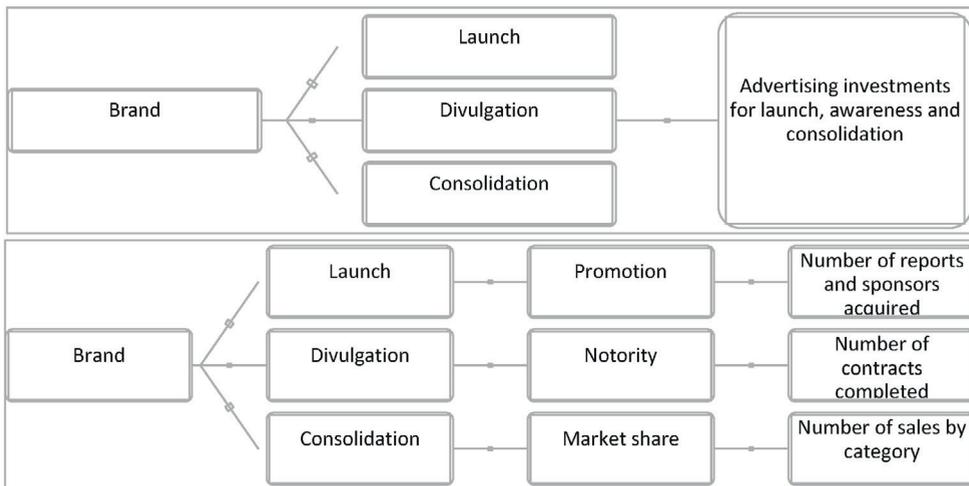
The company can also achieve a good level of awareness if consumers easily associate an advertisement with a brand. This indicator is obtained through market surveys. Who better than a properly "included" person or group of employees can play an effective role in achieving such a result? It is often assumed that it is the volume of advertising investment that affects the high level of awareness. We are convinced that it is the quality of the resources invested in the advertising project and the message itself that will achieve this result.

Then there is market share. In this context, the extraordinary market results are not considered, but only those that the brand manages to achieve.

While the first two points pertain to the initial and growth phases, this last aspect rather defines the consolidation of the company’s position. Advertising investment is also crucial at this stage, but it is also important, if not more important, to identify a specific market share and its sales in that segment.

Here too, the traditional and the progressive vision are confronted on the subject of quantity and quality. While the traditional view is that the value of an intangible can only be controlled by identifying the financial values associated with the *drivers*, here we consider fundamental the influence that the flow of information from D&I can have on the composition of the drivers that affect the value of the intangible (figure 6.8).

Figure 6.8 Traditional Brand Value Control Model and D&I Value Control Model



Source: authors’ elaboration

It is good to invest, but today more than ever it is essential to understand how to invest.

Human resources, the ones that bring added value for experiences and heterogeneity of vision, are the ones that can make the difference, affecting the performance of the related *drivers*.

From a direct comparison, it is clear that the center of gravity of the analysis is no longer focused on the mere economic-financial quantification but on the value created by human relationships.

In this respect, several control formulations have emerged over time which can clarify this point and to which the principle of D&I can be applied as a factor promoting shared value.

Today, in addition to the more traditional formulations, there are some specific assessment methods based on market research. In terms of *modus operandi*, variables are identified in search results and then linked to drivers previously described.

One of the models is provided by Interbrand (Vasileva 2016). This consulting company has been operating in the world of brands for over 40 years. Its philosophy can be summarized as follows:

“Business today is incredibly dynamic, challenging some of the most widely accepted constructs in branding. Our approach combines the three fundamental and dynamic elements in any market – people, businesses, and their interactions. With this intelligence as our basis, we are able to set an ambition for a business and build in flexibility, meaning you can stay true to your direction while responding to the market” (Interbrand 2021).

As shown in table 6.7, the model formulated by Interbrand identifies 7 drivers.

They are given an overall weight about the maximum score (100) and, within this maximum rating, the specific score is then identified based on the estimates made. An example can be the following:

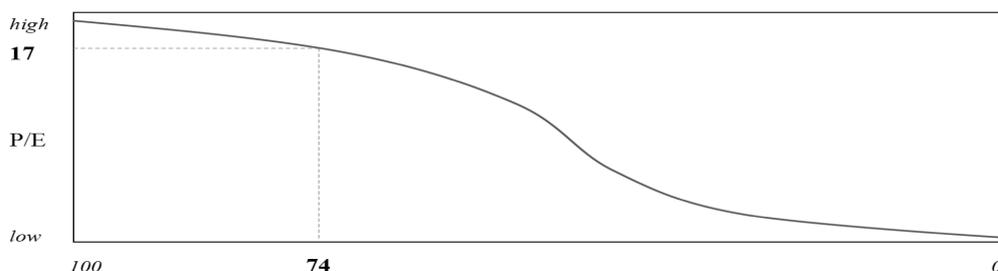
Table 6.7 Quality assessment of a brand according to Interbrand

Driver	Max rating	Brand rating
Leadership	25	19
Stability	15	10
Market	10	6
Internationality	25	20
Trend	10	6
Support	10	8
Protection	5	5
Total brand strength	100	74

Source: Guatri 2005

The score must then be converted into a multiple based on the price/earnings ratio defined by the market according to the segment in which the company operates. This procedure is expressed by a graph showing an “S” conformation typical of Interbrand (figure 6.9).

Figure 6.9 Correlation between the score obtained and the multiplier



Source: Guatri 2005

The model then provides for the application of the multiplier to the performance achieved and identified in the net differential profit calculated for the last three years. Table 6.8 shows the simplified formulation for one year:

Table 6.8 Calculation of net differential profit – values in millions of euros

EBIT (brand A)	150
EBIT (brand B)	58
Δ EBIT	92
Inflation Coefficient	1.05
Δ EBIT adjusted	96.6
Δ EBIT medium	98.6
Remuneration on capital	45
Brand differential profit (before tax)	53.6
Taxes (40%)	21.4
Net differential profit	32.2

Source: Guatri 2005

It follows from this that:

- from a qualitative point of view the brand achieved a score of 74/100;
- the multiple has been identified = 17/18;
- the net differential profit has been quantified at 32.2 million euros;
- **the value of the brand is estimated at 547.4 million euros.**

As this is an evaluation model that has both qualitative and quantitative characteristics, the company has the leeway to define specific criteria for linking the use of diversity in the company and the drivers used for the analysis.

The drivers of leadership, stability, market, and trend, more specifically, are influenced by the knowledge and trust that the included human resources can generate among stakeholders.

Table 6.9 Example of criteria to be considered for scoring

Driver	Evaluation aspect to be checked	Points
<i>Leadership</i>	Number of branches with an inclusive model	...
	Rate of inclusion in boards	...
	Projects carried out by coordinated initiatives of disadvantaged groups	...
<i>Stability</i>	From relations between disadvantaged groups	...
	Weight of inclusion policy	...
<i>Market</i>	Market share managed by teams with/from disadvantaged categories	...
	Performance of inclusive branches versus non-inclusive branches	...
<i>Trend</i>	Sales volumes related to products promoted by disadvantaged groups	...
	Number and category of followers who usually follow the company on social media	...

Source: authors' elaboration

Therefore, if we want to exploit this system, we need to create a model of the relationship between them (table 6.9), in light of the principle of systemic intelligence previously described.

However, this is not the only method.

In this work, we have repeatedly argued that the included human resources determine an exclusive flow of relationships with partners and clients.

From the point of view of strategic marketing, it is recalled that, for twenty years now, an analysis proposal has been presented to determine the *value of relationships with customers* (Busacca 2000; Bertoli and Busacca 2000; Vicari et al. 2000).

The basic assumption is that, from an economic point of view, the value of the brand is attributed to the value of the relationships with the customers it can generate and that the latter is defined by the sum of the value of stability and the value of the increasing of these relationships (Bertoli and Busacca 2000: 10).

Therefore, it is possible to describe this correlation analytically as follows:

$$BV = V_{CR} + V_{NR}$$

where:

BV = brand value induced by customer relationships;

V_{CR} = value obtained from the relations that the company has at a given time;

V_{NR} = value of new relationships.

Starting from this assumption, the model formulated by Vicari, Bertoli and Busacca (2000) then deduces that:

$$BV = M_{CR} \times a_n]_i + M_{NR} \times a_m]_j$$

where:

BV = brand value induced by customer relationships;

M_{CR} = expected margin from current relations;

M_{NR} = margin expected from new relations;

i, j = discount rates;

n = number of years corresponding to the prospective average longevity of current relationships;

m = number of years corresponding to the estimated duration of the new relations.

According to this model, however, many factors affect the value obtained from the relationships that the company has at a given time (stability) and the value of the new relationships (reproducibility). V_{CR} would depend on:

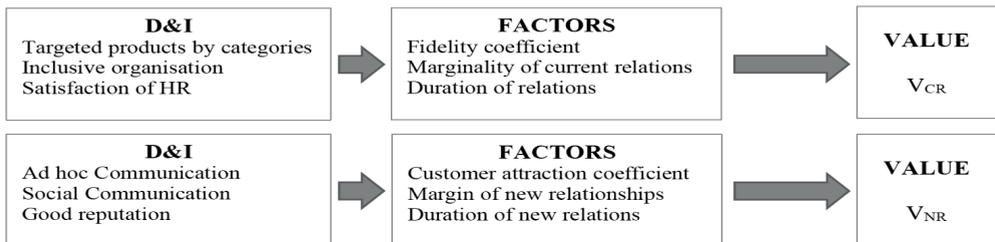
- the loyalty ratio expressed as the percentage of customers who, by a specific act of will, continue to maintain relations with the company during the considered period;
- the consequent prospective longevity of current relationships, or their expected duration as a function of the abovementioned coefficient of fidelity;
- the margin expected from current relations, net of the costs associated with the management and development of those relations;
- the discount rate (Bertoli and Busacca 2000: 11).

While V_{NR} would be influenced by:

- the attractiveness of new customers, which expresses the company's ability to expand its network of market relations;
- the duration of the new relationships, depending on the expected attractiveness factor;
- the margin generated by new customers, net of acquisition costs;
- the discount rate (Bertoli and Busacca 2000: 11).

Using this analytical approach, it follows that D&I can be related to the influencing factors (according to the name of the model examined) that affect the creation of the present and future value of the relationships (figure 6.10).

Figure 6.10 D&I and determining influencing factors in value creation according to the value model of relationships with customers



Source: authors' elaboration

In understanding how effective and value-creating inclusion programmes can be, projects and initiatives involving disadvantaged categories of employees should be related to the ratios and margins associated with the company's current and future relationships.

As shown from the analyses carried out, we do not intend to present in this work an extraordinary new model of the valuation of intangibles. To achieve such a result, a powerful *ad hoc* study would have to be carried out, which the limitations and aims of this work do not allow us to carry out. In a pure perspective of corporate strategy and business administration, we instead set out to demonstrate how inclusion processes should be valued within the company structure and corporate governance, not only to achieve an internal value within the company but also, as we shall see later, to unleash a *complex shared value*.

The model proposed in this section of the work is therefore a logical model of control, defined using the tools provided by the system intelligence together with the evaluation methods already covered in the literature and functional in certain business situations. Methods that, we would like to reiterate, still need further and more up-to-date guidance to establish a close connection between the value identified in generally accepted intangibles and the inclusion of diversity.

However, it will be our keen interest to continue the study in this regard, so that we can obtain shortly additional tools for an accurate assessment of D&I as an intangible asset through application solutions of a strictly mathematical nature.

6.4 The Inclusion of Diversity between simple shared value and complex shared value creation

Over time, the business world has been the backdrop to numerous financial, economic, and political scandals, as well as problems related to the inability to create a proper link between business, the environment, and human resources. This dramatic legacy is now more than ever demonstrating its side effects in many ways:

- widespread poverty in several countries of the world and difficult to eradicate;
- global economic and financial bubbles;
- a real deterioration of the climate in terms of pollution and global warming.

All this has helped to highlight the need for a better understanding of the social nature of the market and of the companies operating there, as they are

seen as the main players on whom lies much of the responsibility for the current problems.

In this regard, an article written by Porter and Kramer, entitled “Big Idea: Creating Shared Value” (2011) and published in the Harvard Business Review, has been able to draw enormous attention to the issue. Deepening the concept of creating shared value, already anticipated in the paper entitled “Strategy and Society: the link between competitive advantage and corporate social responsibility” (2006), the work of Porter and Kramer provided a further and fundamental contribution to the debate on corporate social responsibility related to management actions. The proposed model supports the principle that it is essential to link the internal processes governing economic activity to the value chain of each company. This is why social innovation invests in a company when it creates something new, taking existing ways of doing things and creatively transforming them into more effective solutions to meet social needs. In such a perspective, therefore, a better and more judicious combination of assets and knowledge allows companies to save unnecessary expenses and achieve value output.

Therefore, according to a more complete and broader vision, products and services must not only be able to meet the needs of a specific consumer for an immediate economic-financial return but also social needs by creating new relationships, and new social synergies aimed at lowering the social costs in favor of more economical management for all stakeholders. If the ultimate objective of the company is to create “shared” value, the processes must be sustainable, i.e. durable over time as they can involve and reward the various stakeholders.

The creation of shared value, therefore, focuses on identifying and expanding the connections between economic and social progress.

In defining the “shared value chain”, Porter and Kramer identify some areas where efforts need to be concentrated and the new approach tested:

- energy and logistics;
- use of resources;
- purchases and relationships with suppliers;
- localization;
- productivity and employee welfare.

It follows, then, that a decent wage, job security, well-being, continuous training, greater respect for the privacy of the resources employed, and, of course, the inclusion and proper management of diversity, can also play a key role in creating shared value.

The company requires a concrete transformation in the relationships of companies with all stakeholders as an integral part of its business model, to

produce a leverage effect aimed at generating a more prudent social cohesion. The model must start from the examination of the entire production-consumption chain, studying all the upstream stages: suppliers of goods and services, logistics, and distribution up to the final consumer.

Today, more and more companies have started to use this term by applying it to their corporate strategies and stating it in their governance documents. However, the opportunities for creating shared value can be manifold and the result and size of impact differ from approach to approach.

Therefore, we believe that there are different levels of value sharing.

If the company is committed to offering a good on the market that is as ecological as possible and that preserves the health of the consumer, using renewable sources and quality products, it is certainly a shared value as it is aimed at the community and the environment. However, it is an end in itself. It is a *simple* chain that exhausts its link in one or two knots at most.

In an interconnected system such as the present one, it is good for shared value to be expressed through a multiplicity of connections. As if it were an echo, with its work and its business model the company must be able to offer services and goods to third parties who, in turn, can create value. Hence the definition of shared value is “complex” because it is more articulated. It is precisely from this perspective that the inclusion of diversity in the company can play an extraordinary role. However, also in this case, it is how human resources are included that determines the final result. For a clearer understanding of these concepts, we would like to give some examples.

In 1888, Johnson & Johnson created the first disposable absorbents designed exclusively for women. This invention and promotion on the market can certainly be attributed to men since women still enjoyed very few rights in the 19th century. Since then, however, the finished product – as we know it today – has undergone countless transformations, mainly aimed at meeting the needs of women.

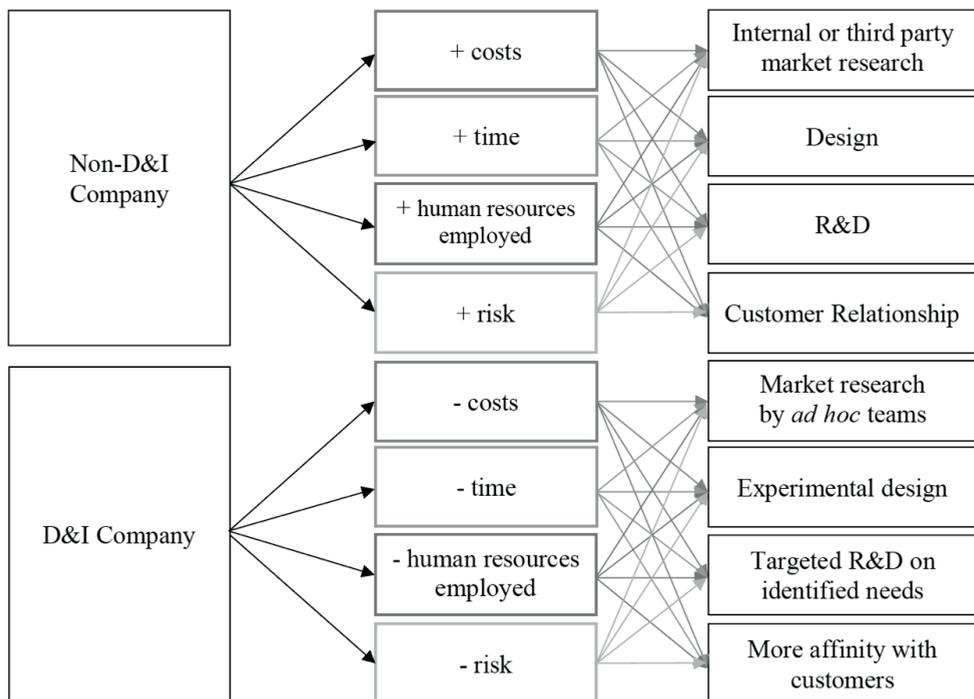
It would be out of all logic to say that women have changed their intimate needs over time.

On the contrary, management skills, insights, technical know-how, and direct relationships with women have changed. All these factors have allowed companies involved in the sector to offer a product that is as close as possible to the needs of their customers. However, how many years have passed before these women’s needs were best met? How long has the company spent on research? How much money has been spent on R&D and market research? What risks did the company run for poorly managed or incomplete investigations? If companies had correctly and wisely managed D&I in their governance framework, in the company workforce as well as in R&D, they would certainly have achieved time savings aimed at meeting the needs of

women earlier. They would have saved time to design new products with a simultaneous increase in market performance and competitiveness and still would have cut costs considerably by optimising the use of their economic and human resources (figure 6.11). The main materials used for the production of absorbents were sphagnum and polyacrylate, elements derived from petroleum. However, this is a source of irritation for some women.

Who better than a woman or a direct consumer can understand the specific needs?

Figure 6.11 Efficiency ratio in D&I and non-D&I companies in the case of production of female-specific products



Source: authors' elaboration

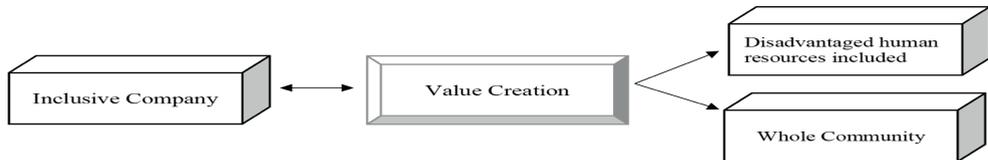
In this specific case, the **value produced** is **simply shared** for several reasons:

1. the company has saved costs, has used its human resources better, and can benefit from a competitive advantage with increased profits as a result of higher sales;
2. the company has included diversity;

3. the company has best served the women's community with targeted and superior quality products compared to competing companies

and the connection is the following (figure 6.12):

Figure 6.12 "Simple" shared value chain



Source: authors' elaboration

However, this is not the only solution and the only benefit that inclusion can bring.

A further example can help to understand other application contexts (figure 6.13).

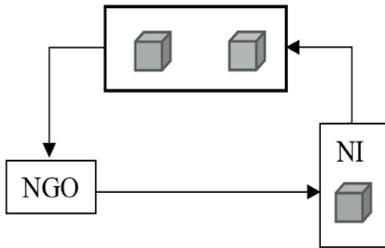
Precisely by virtue of their social purpose and related intentions, the companies operating in the non-profit sector, together with those that support them by providing specific products or services, need to optimize costs, maximize the production capacity and the technical efficiency of the goods, always trying to increase at the same time the number of goods supplied to the community.

Let us think of the case of an organization that works in the non-profit field of humanitarian relief (called NGO) and has to provide different food products specific to the different cultures of the countries in which it operates (there is the dramatic current case of Syria, Africa, and Haiti, affected by wars, famines, and earthquakes, but all with different cultural and religious needs).

Figure 6.13 Different supply relationships and relative value creation

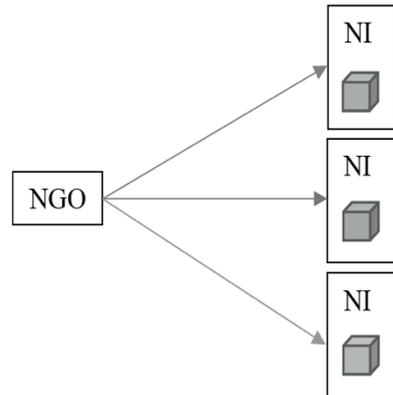
1st case with 1 NI

- + Production conversion costs
- + Creation of limited value
- + Technical risks
- + Time for little specialization



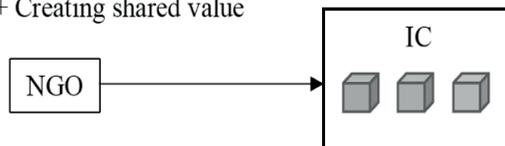
2nd case with several NIs

- + Creation of limited value
- + Bureaucratic costs and risks
- + Costs for reduced orders
- + Legal risks
- + Technical risks
- + Time for supply organization



3rd case with 1 CI

- Costs for the big order
- Bureaucratic costs
- Time for supply organization
- Technical risks due to specialisation
- Legal risks
- + Creating shared value



Source: authors' elaboration

The choice of supply can certainly fall on a non-inclusive company (also called N.I.) that produces non-diversified products but is willing to convert part of the production for the specific order; or the NGO can contact several N.I.

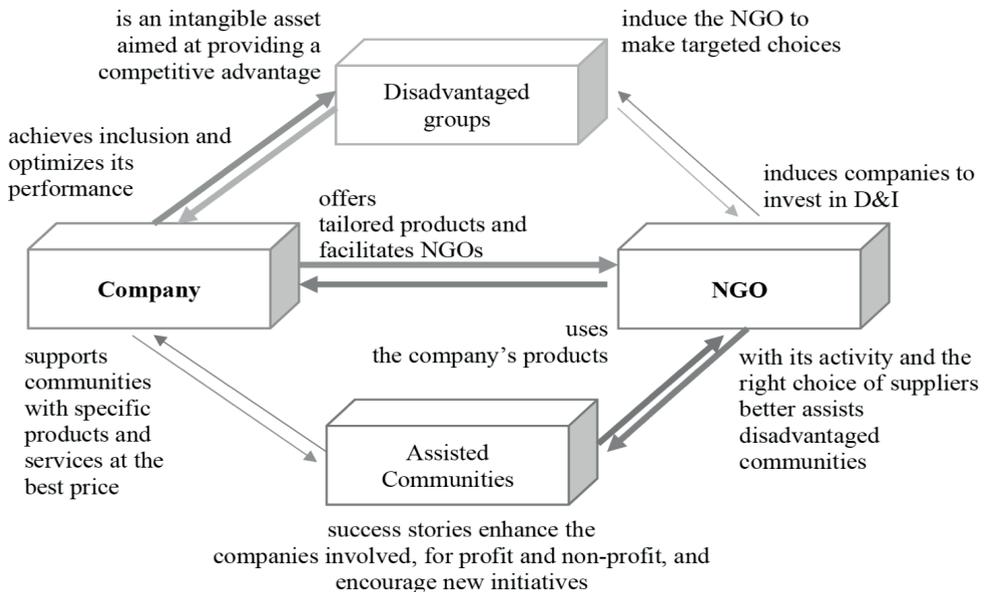
companies operating in different countries and therefore already operating in the production of specific goods.

These solutions allow the NGO to supply needy communities with specific products, but at what cost? How many contracts will it have to make? How many transactions will it have to account for? In the first case, orders on demand are not part of the usual processes and therefore often involve the conversion of production requiring an increase in costs which, in turn, affects the final selling price. In the second case, the NGO is forced to support a substantial bureaucratic structure, it must run a greater number of risks related to the technical-accounting arrangements relating to the various companies and also to the potential legal and supply problems.

Ergo, the NGO succeeds in carrying out its aims, but all this hugely restricts the fulfillment of subsequent humanitarian objectives. At the same time, N.I. creates value but only for itself. It does not support the hiring of disadvantaged groups because it does not provide for processes of inclusion in the company and does not create value for the community because it does not implicitly facilitate the NGO's humanitarian work.

The relationship between NGOs and the inclusive society (also called I.C.) is different (figure 6.14).

Figure 6.14 “Complex” shared value chain



Source: authors' elaboration

I.C. provides for inclusion processes that allow offering specific food products for different cultures. It, therefore, has a diversified and streamlined activity both in terms of organisation and in terms of product offerings. This setup allows I.C. to provide multiple goods at no additional cost.

In this case, the NGO can obtain supplies from the same I.C. company for its many humanitarian needs. An increased order to a single supplier allows the NGO to reduce supply costs, bureaucratic costs, time to organize the supply and the risks associated with the operations. Overall, therefore, this choice may allow the NGO to support a larger number of humanitarian initiatives and reduce the associated risks. The result is that the value generated is certainly shared between the company and the community. However, unlike “simple value sharing”, here we are dealing with a much more articulated level of shared value that we then call “complex”.

In fact, the company not only realizes value for itself and for the human resources included, but also facilitates the *NGO* which, in turn, increases the humanitarian missions that produce value for communities in difficulty.

However, this process does not end here. It continues with countless other chains of shared value among all the actors involved in the process.

The knowledge brought by disadvantaged groups in the company can thus express an enormous potential which, together with the company’s capacity for innovation and the relationship with all stakeholders, can activate the levers of a shared value. Everything then depends on the precise formulation of interrelationships put in place by the company thanks to the inclusion of diversity.

Referring to important scientific bases on competitive advantage in relation to intangible characteristics (Grant 1991) it can be argued that the domains and contexts of an intangible asset involve legal, cultural, relational and functional aspects.

From this point of view, we can clearly distinguish the very important role that company diversity can play by creating close correlations between them. Some specific considerations can be made in the light of the above analysis:

- from a *legal* point of view:
 - they contribute to the brand by strengthening its solidity;
 - they can affect the reduction of legal costs provided for in cases of supply to numerous companies;
 - as they are closer to the communities of reference, they have a greater chance of finding technical solutions – i.e., patents – that are more suited to the needs studied;

- from a *cultural* point of view, by expressing a “culture of inclusion”, diversity brings positive elements to the company which not only affects the ability of human resources to relate to each other but also improves the performance of the whole organization;
- from a *relational* point of view: the image of an inclusive company is certainly more positive than one that is focused solely on maximizing profits without taking care of its human resources and its role in the social context. The company’s adherence to a principle of social responsibility is largely reflected in the process of inclusion of diversity, giving it a bright, attractive image. Moreover, through the use of social media, this specific corporate commitment is now amplified by giving media redundancy. The result is an increase in the company’s image and reputation, which translates into an increase in sales and market shares compared to competitors;
- from a *technical* point of view, diversity provides perhaps the most obvious contribution. As we have discussed above, the ability to create different products in house with a staff of people from the various disadvantaged groups allows the company to offer goods and services that are difficult to find on the market. Each individual has the opportunity to observe reality and approach the problems from his own perspective; if the comparison is then made from different perspectives or from people who experience first-hand the needs that the company wants to solve, the contribution is optimized. A workforce of disadvantaged groups can help reduce transaction costs, reduce transaction risk problems and provide a personalized service.

Therefore, it follows from these considerations that, the more the company is able to expand the composition of the human resources employed through a heterogeneous inclusion plan, the more it will be able to relate the potential resources they express and activate the right drivers that enhance the value, not only for the company but also for the community.

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i+e+istituzioni+sociali

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Conclusions

Following an interdisciplinary approach aimed at determining the dense network of connections between the innumerable initiatives promoted over the years at the public and private levels, this work has defined a path of investigation focused on the management of “diversity”, particularly in the corporate context.

The analyses carried out highlighted several key points for understanding the remaining critical issues and, above all, for defining new perspectives aimed to promote conditions capable of increasingly reducing the problem of discrimination in the workplace.

Starting from the consideration of the current critical factors – further increased by the pandemic spread of Covid-19 – through the examination of the ongoing events (which have highlighted the need for further studies on this subject) and also of the psycho-social aspects, in the initial part of this work the attention has been focused on facts and aspects of a historical-economic nature that demonstrate how the concept of “diversity” has been exploited to achieve particular ends. Throughout history, man’s cruelty has led to countless recourse to categories considered “different” for political, economic, and social reasons, while keeping them marginalized. The episodes analysed in this work have allowed us to highlight a real *forma mentis*, absolutely cynical and ruthless, which has characterized social evolution up to the present day.

This approach to interaction with diversity has been prompted by the search for a unidirectional value, aimed at making a “benefit” only for the predatory and exploiting party.

The historical episode of the use of the Jewish community for financial purposes and the creation of ghettos is a well-known example of this.

This *forma mentis* has survived up to the present day and we could argue that it is more lucid than ever given the innumerable problems that characterize today’s economic and social system.

Referring to a real “dark side” of globalisation, there is evidence of constant discrimination in underdeveloped countries where big companies exploit local labour, regardless of gender or ethnicity.

The same applies to the cases of discrimination analysed in this work which involve women in terms of job opportunities and even the *pay gap*.

This principle, which, as mentioned above, draws its lifeblood in a unidirectional approach to value, although still present in the world, is no longer tolerable for many reasons. Without wishing to detract from the numerous studies on the subject, we can draw attention to two aspects that are certainly key.

First of all, there is a cultural reason. Education, which is becoming increasingly widespread among the population, enables new generations to approach the world of “diversity” in a completely new and barrier-free way. Of course, as we have been able to point out in this paper, there are still many cultural legacies, but we are convinced that they will become less and less substantial in a multi-ethnic society such as the one that will emerge in the coming decades.

In the second line, there is a political motivation. International institutions and organisations are laying down new rules, which are increasingly stringent and designed to regulate rigorously how companies and public institutions deal with disadvantaged groups.

Both of these factors, however, take time.

In light of this awareness, and taking note of current trends, this work has sought to outline “alternative paths”, faster and, above all, less drastic.

The measures that the international institutions are pursuing and defining day after day are certainly fundamental and welcome. However, the degree of independence and autonomy accorded to individual States and companies is still very high. This means that the negative effects, in terms of abuse, exploitation, and violence, will continue. Above all, coercive use often translates into cynical measures aimed at achieving a sort of compliance with the regulations, resulting in goals far from the desired objectives.

Moreover, the analysis of the policies implemented at the European level and consequently, the national regulations, shows how much effort is being made to bring the action plan back to the “micro” level to solve the problems.

In particular, by studying the regulatory measures adopted by Italy (following the important examples of Iceland, Germany, and Belgium) concerning the mandatory report on the composition of employees for large companies, it was possible to highlight the vital importance of the company in resolving diversity issues.

This is justified in the reference literature, which provides valuable tools for understanding how the approach to D&I has evolved and defined new objectives. Objectives that are recalled within a specific corporate context.

However, our work has found a kind of “gap” due to the lack of “perspectives”.

If the company is to play a major role in this evolutionary phase, the managerial class must understand value perspectives. Alternatively, the focus on mere economic and financial control will always lead to the so-called unidirectional mindset described above.

Hence the need to describe the value of “diversity”, or rather the innumerable value prospects entailed.

Inclusion is not just an ethical fact, but a driver to achieve value. It is a tool to unleash a value shared by all.

In this work, therefore, we see concrete possibilities of closing the *gender gap* only if we allow companies to understand the true meaning of the term inclusion: *not charity but union!*

Through the study of the current internal codifications in the field of corporate governance, it was possible to understand that there are still many actions to be carried out to clearly define the process of inclusion. Although guidelines exist, they are currently limited and require further analysis. In particular, the limitations in the drafting of the code of ethics, the statute and the self-regulation code were highlighted. To achieve concrete and definitive results, inclusion must permeate the entire company system, starting from the corporate culture that emerges from the documents related to corporate governance.

The underlying objective of value creation must therefore emerge from them, and not merely an adaptation to regulatory standards. However, this is only possible by assuming a precise strategic model of inclusion of “diversity” that – starting from the top – involves the whole base of the company pyramid.

Starting from a good inclusive practice at the corporate level, it is possible to shape the directions that the company will follow in terms of management, organization, and relationships with stakeholders. This area is crucial to define the company’s position in the market context as well as the key role of the “diversity” included in the company from which a real shared value will emerge.

Inclusion strategies must therefore be defined in light of the company’s objectives to allocate tasks tailored to the human resources employed.

In conclusion, the strategic model of inclusion of “diversity” must be able to monitor the results achieved.

This last stage involves many aspects of investigation which are inherent in the fundamental principles of corporate control of intangible value and corporate social responsibility.

This work aims to demonstrate that the contribution made by “diversity” in the company must be quantified as a real intangible value. Alternatively, inclusion will be understood as a simple means of employing human resources without any realisation of the implied potential.

The study of value sharing, which in this work is broken down into “simple” and “complex”, thus allows to establish new approaches to managing the human capital expressed by “diversity”. Moreover, it allows us to understand and define new scenarios of economic-social interaction.

Today, by implementing D&I plans, companies can certainly create a shared value. However, it is the different inclusion strategies that can broaden the extent to which value is disseminated in a “complex” way throughout the system.

As long as this does not happen, companies will certainly be “economic and social intermediaries”, but only to a limited extent, and there will still be a need for “macro” measures by international institutions to correct fictitious integration processes.

Only by understanding and searching for a complex shared value, companies will be able to fulfill their highest-sounding task towards the community.

Boundaries of the analysis

The theme of Diversity is of course very varied and multifaced, for this reason, we tried to investigate just an aspect that however is very wide and complex.

This is an important starting point useful for the next studies concerning Diversity and Inclusion in the corporate context.

Diversity & Inclusion is the subject of this work. It is an increasingly discussed and relevant topic in both the academic and professional fields. Starting from an analysis of the concept of *diversity* in a broad sense through some of its historical and current manifestations, the work focuses on a specific D&I aspect connected to gender gap for not diluting too much the analysis. It represents, therefore, a starting point for subsequent publications on the remaining areas. The work aims to investigate the traits and characteristics of D&I within the firms by using an interdisciplinary approach. The authors followed this methodology to enhance the multiple variables and dynamics that determine the system in which D&I is manifested. Today, in fact, firms play a decisive and irreplaceable role in social and economic development. Therefore, they are required to pay ever greater attention to issues of such major importance as D&I.

Differently from the reference literature, a real model is therefore proposed in this work for understanding the added value brought to the company by *diversity*. This model is able to support the company development strategy and its sustainable management. And again, it is a model which - although attention has been mainly focused on gender equality - remains useful and valid for all diversity categories that are included within the firms.

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