

## Italy's Women Making History

Judith Harris (December 11, 2015)



[redazioneeffe.jpg](#) [2]

Italian women have come a long way. Back in the autumn of 1973, as a reporter I attended the first meetings of the first non-political party women's movement in Rome. A lot has happened since then, from a successful divorce referendum to women on the soccer field and in major careers. But there is still room for improvement.

ROME - Italian women have come a long way. Back in the autumn of 1973, as a reporter I attended the first meetings in Rome of the first women's movement not connected to a political party. That Dec. 10 the movement had made sufficient progress that it could launch publication of a courageous weekly magazine "effe." The goal, according to the original voluntary reporters, was for the magazine to be a "weekly of women's counter-information."

The 52-year-old movement is celebrated this week in Rome's international women's building

on Via della Lungara with an exhibition and publication of a brand new online version of "effe". The new magazine, first hypothesized by Franco Zeri, offers a digital archive of the content of 83 issues -- photographs as well as articles -- created by graphic designer Cristina Chiappini, who teaches multimedia design at the University La Sapienza in Rome. (See it at [>>](#) [3].)

Working with Chiappini were two of the original editors of Effe, Daniela Colombo, president of AIDOS, and Professor Donata Francescato. "The goal was not only to keep the memory of the heritage of ideas and the struggles of feminism, which many in the younger generation see in a distorted form, but also to supply documentation for scholars and researchers," said journalist Grazia Francescato.

As World War II came to an end, Italian women were able to vote, and an aggressive women's movement linked to the Italian Communist party (PCI) worked hard on behalf of all women. With that movement came the annual celebration in Rome, beginning in 1944, of international women's day March 8, which continues, less politicized, to this day with a parade. The "8 marzo" fete had been, at least in part, inspired by the deaths of 146 men and women in a fire in New York City on March 25, 1911, shirt-makers -- in fact both men and women -- who had been locked into the Triangle Waist Factory.

How far have Italian women come since then? Certainly the feminists in Italy of the Seventies, and those men who supported their cause, brought progress, including the introduction of divorce in 1970 followed in 1974 by a successful national referendum ratifying the bill. In other areas, a women's soccer team won the European championship in 1969. By 1991 the Italian women's soccer team placed in the quarter finals of the world cup. But their participation became official only in 1984.

Employment of women between the ages of 20 and 64 has surged up to 50.9% in the first quarter this year, a figure only rarely encountered in this country, and well above the recession years triggered in 2008. Curiously, the increase has involved mostly women over 55 while youth



unemployment, at over 40%, takes its toll on young women as well as young men. Moreover, according to a spokesman for the official statistics-gathering body ISTAT, in addressing a hearing in Parliament on Oct. 18 this year, the median income for male workers between the ages of 58 and 63 is of 32,102 Euros per year.

By comparison, women with similar academic backgrounds to the men, in the study cited above, are earning considerably less, or around 25,000 Euros a year. Women -- 30% of those with children -- also tend to remain at home more than do the men, rather than continue to work, in order to care for the family. The latest statistics indicate the almost one out of five new mothers leaves her job voluntarily or is fired. By comparison, only 3% of men elect family care over career.

Male employment between 20 and 64 years of age remains far higher, at 70.5%. And whereas women comprise a majority of old-age pensioners, or 53%, they receive only 44% of pension funds. Men's retirement pensions are often three times that women are receiving, according to official statistics.

Violence against women continues to be a problem. Again, citing ISTAT figures of June 2015, in Italy 6,788,000 women have reported having been subject to physical or sexual violence. One out of five has been a victim of physical violence and, again, one out of five, of sexual violence. A total of 652,000 have reported being raped while almost 750,000, attempted rape; of these, 10.6% were under the age of 16. The majority are foreign residents in Italy, particularly from East Europe (Moldavia, Ukrainian, Romanian). On the plus side the situation is slightly improved over five years ago, or 2% fewer than in 2010, presumably because women are less reluctant to quit a violent relationship.

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