

1. INTRODUCTION: THE EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOSTERING THE SOCIAL CHANGE

The article 157 of the Lisbon Treaty² of the European Commission (2008) establishes that “with a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life, the principle of equal treatment shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or adopting measures providing for specific advantages in order to make it easier for the underrepresented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers”. In general terms, the Lisbon Treaty aims at obtaining equal opportunities for men and women caring of both the formal equality and the substantial one. Member States have been gradually forced to pay attention to equally serve subjects, not only on a gender basis, but also considering their age, nationality, ethnic group, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. Moreover, the European regulation does not simply consider equality in the labour market, but also in terms of protection and social safety.

Today, the protection system is not based on the concept of traditional family, where the husband works and earns, while the wife takes care of children and housework (Secretariat Missoc, 2012). Indeed, another variable must be considered, i.e. the woman’s career: in this sense, recent EU policies have been implemented, reconciling “work and family” (Stratigaki, 2004). Even if different social

models have been developed over time, law and social protection have not been completely established yet, particularly concerning the role of women and their valorisation.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union underlines the social and economic relevance of guaranteeing equality of treatments, with particular attention to gender gaps³. For this reason, the European Commission spends many efforts in its Structural and Cohesion Funds, with the aim to promote equality between men and women and, more in general, to smoothen the existent gaps. Member States must implement specific actions and, at the same time, show how general actions (for consolidating the cohesion, improving the social inclusion and the labour market, and renewing the agricultural European system) work in order to reduce gaps and combat discrimination.

Creating an inclusive society and reducing inequalities within subjects is surely one of the most controversial points. In the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Commission established some indicators for evaluating the life quality, underlining gender differences. Bérenger and Verdier-Chouchane (2007) analyse UNDP indexes suggesting changes for better representing gender differences and for highlighting women’s situation. Authors conclude that these indicators are affected by country specificities with particular attention to developing countries (Saith and Harriss-White, 1999; Charmes and Wieringa, 2003; Mora and Ruiz-Castillo, 2003; Martinez Peinado and Cairó Céspedes, 2004). Nevertheless, the majority of authors (Klasen,

² The Lisbon Treaty represents the consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. It is available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&t=PDF&gc=true&sc=false&f=ST%206655%202008%20INIT>

³ For a deeper explanation see <http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/>