Of sugar and spice, but not everything nice. What women volunteers are made of...
An exploration of gender specificity of organised volunteering in Italy

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Abstract
The Italian National Statistical Institute data on “Unpaid activities to benefit others” which in 2013 inserted a module on volunteering according to the ILO Manual for the measurement of volunteer work (ILO Module) into the yearly household survey “Aspects of everyday life” (AVQ 2013) provide for a rich mine of information on volunteers in Italy. In this paper we present the results an explorative analysis of the characteristics of volunteers active in organisations.

Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and subsequently cluster analysis (CA) techniques were used to analyse the 1 million and 443 thousand women who volunteer in (mostly third sector) organisations. Seven homogeneous groups - profiles of organised women volunteers emerged: 1. Committed caregivers; 2. Religious educators; 3. Women volunteer leaders; 4. Satellites; 5. Investors in culture; 6. Blood donors; 7. Lay sports volunteers.

The paper first presents the differences between women and men as regards the basic dimensions of volunteering. Subsequently, we present and discuss the seven profiles of women-only clusters, as typologies of a “volunteering habitus”. The paper shows data on structural characteristics, volunteer work performed, individual and social determinants, motivations and individual impacts of women volunteering in organisations in Italy.

Volunteering is looked at as a practice embedded in the culture of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 1998). The paper aims to benchmark the empirical basis for studying and critically assessing the potential of volunteering as an arena for women’s empowerment, self-expression and protagonism of women in the public sphere.

The chapter is the result of long-term joint work of the authors. For the purposes of attribution, parr. 1, 4 and 5 are to be assigned to Ksenija Fonović; parr. 2 and 3 to Tania Cappadozzi. Interested readers can contact the authors for further information and collaboration. To contact the authors: ksfonovic@spes.lazio.it
Introduction

1. Standpoint: Theoretical grounding and research questions

This paper is part of a larger research process on volunteering, that empirically insists on the national context of Italy, but looks at the voluntary engagement of citizens in its universal values of human action and therefore seeks potentials for comparability and cross-cultural reflection. On the one hand, the results presented in this paper build on the European Volunteer Measurement Project (Bosioc, Fonovic, Salamon, 2012) and the successive implementation of the new ILO international standard for the measurement of volunteer work in the Italian statistical system. This involved the authors in a coordination role (Fonovic, Guidi and Cappadozzi, 2016a; Guidi, Fonović and Cappadozzi, 2016b) and in the analysis of the Istat ILO module (ILO, 2011) data that provide the initial core of the results presented in this paper (Cappadozzi and Fonović, 2016). On the other hand, the perspective adopted and the discussion of the results presented in this paper are embedded in an ongoing research path enquiring into voluntary action as a sphere of – potential - affirmation of women in the public sphere. We look at volunteering – individual action for general interest exercised in the public sphere - as a “third presence” which complements the “double presence” (Balbo, 1991) of private (family) and (professional) work.

In this paper, the Istat ILO 2013 data “Unpaid activities of benefit to others” are sieved through by the authors in search of specificities and peculiarities of the free-will engagement of Italian women for beneficiaries outside the family and for the activities of general interest. These evidence are discussed from the gender (in)equality standpoint, in order to situate the phenomenon in view of further research work, fix the basic benchmarks for the future statistical surveys and propose to the international academic community the initial empirical references for (hopefully) next-generation comparative studies.

The paper presents what women volunteers were doing in Italy in 2013, a static picture of their relative contribution to society. This part of the analysis insists on the manifested, activated part of the agency of women volunteers. But the core of our interest lies below: who are these women, what the volunteering practices represent in the realm of their life choices, in what ways their capacity of agency is conditioned by their life trajectories, by the immediate social and economic environment and, ultimately, by their being women in a society markedly characterised by gender inequality. What we are looking for here are the women-specific patterns and the geometries underlying the “volunteering habitus”, as we term that particular set of social and individual characteristics that frame the propensity of the person to act, moved by the will to invest her(him)self towards an objective beyond the boundary of personal, or family or corporative, sphere. Our standpoint on volunteering is thus rooted in the theoretical framework elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. The concepts of habitus, capital, field and doxa elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1980) are used here as the basic concepts in the light of which the voluntary action is situated. In this prospective we build on the body of knowledge studied in terms of determinants or antecedents of volunteering.

Gender specific data are sieved to understand the intricate web of circumstances and social barriers that limit at the start the potential of women for full self-expression. Personal and environmental determinants are, we argue, heavier on women then on men and impress additional burdens on the activation of women in the civic sphere. Italy is an exceptionally fertile context for this study. It is highly patriarchal and static, with large gender gaps in all spheres of society. The starting idea of the authors of this paper is that the volunteering habitus, just as other practices and perhaps even more markedly so, is not gender-neutral. This work is rooted in the assumption that being a woman in our society is not simply one of basic demographic characteristics, but a substantive condition of living embedded in, and a product of, a comprehensive patriarchal societal system that weighs down the woman in a subordinate position. Pierre Bourdieu defines it as world of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 1998). The reading into his work, albeit applied to very different social contexts, provides the lens through which to investigate the profoundly underlying and so far
ignored pressures and limitations interiorised by women, that impress an exponential factor on the personal and social determinants of volunteering choices (Bourdieu, 1963; Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990; Mc Nay, 1999). The culture of masculine domination exerts a constant and pervasive symbolic violence, which conditions all our actions and practices.

Our initial reading of the quantitative statistical data on volunteers in Italy sets the starting terrain for studying volunteering as another sphere of society where the conflicting powers of masculine domination and the quest for gender empowerment are exerted. The aim is to put to value the novel mine of statistical evidence provided by the Istat-Ilo volunteering module to ground further reflection and qualitative study.

2. Methodology

The primary source of data taken in exam in this paper is the module «Unpaid activities of benefit to others», part of the yearly Italian multipurpose social survey “Aspects of everyday life” (AVQ) implemented in the year 2013 by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). The module is centred on voluntary activities performed by individuals older than 14 years both inside and outside organisations (organised and individual volunteering). The module represents an innovative national adaptation of the new international statistical standard: the ILO Manual for the measurement of volunteer work (ILO, 2011). The core ILO module was enriched by additional questions on motivations, consequences, duration and multi-belonging.

First, a gendered reading of Istat ILO module date is applied to basic dimensions of the volunteer work.

Second, data on female volunteers were subject to an explorative analysis. This represents a second step in the profiling of volunteers, following the realisation of both gender general profiles previously accomplished by the authors (Cappadozzi and Fonović, 2016). This analysis takes into consideration general AVQ data and the ILO module data on 1 million and 443 thousand women who volunteer in organisations. Data were analysed by the multiple correspondence analysis method (MCA). This typically explorative analysis, that doesn’t start from a pre-constituted model, but tries to identify the existing links among the detected characteristics, was particularly apt to our initial need to verify what general traits characterise people who make the choice to engage for the benefit of others or common good and depict the fundamental variations. The active variables (components) used in the MCA are those related to the characteristics of (organised) volunteering as detected by the core ILO Module. These are: the type of unpaid activity performed (according to the large classification of professions groups, CP2011), the number of volunteering hours performed in the 4 weeks, the type of organisation the person volunteered in, the main field of activity of the organisation. Also, the number of years of activity in the organisation and the multi-belonging (the information on whether a person volunteers also in other organisations, beyond the primary activity described in detail in the questionnaire) were included in the active variables. The illustrative variables used are those related to the demographic and social features, individual or family characteristics identified in literature as relevant for the objectives of the analysis, present in the AVQ social survey. The illustrative variables used were: gender, age, educational level, employment status, geographic distribution, type of municipality, family economic status, presence of children in the family, age of the youngest child in the family, number of components, role in the family, frequency of seeing friends, frequency of watching TV, health, cultural, social and religious participation, indicators of satisfaction and trust. The MCA performed on

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1 “Aspects of daily life” is a sample survey on households, which is a part of the integrated system of yearly social surveys (Multipurpose Surveys). The random sampling design is composite (in part at one stage and in part at two-stage), with stratification of the first stage units (municipalities) according to socio-economic and demographic characteristics. The survey is conducted annually on the theoretical sample of about 24 thousand families and underlines the fundamental information about the daily life of individuals and families. Survey estimates are considered reliable down to the regional level.

2 The 2013 edition of AVQ was carried out in March on the sample of 19 thousand 151 families. 46,315 face-to-face individual interviews were conducted.

3 Multivariate analyses were performed by using the statistical software Spad.

4 The term ‘organisation’ includes organisations of public, private and third sector, declined by the questionnaire in a taxonomy of purpose-built 14 alternatives, proposed according to the Italian legislative framework and general understanding. The options proposed were: voluntary organisation/non-profit/association of social promotion; cultural association; amateur sports association; religious organisation; NGO for international cooperation; other non-profit organization; social enterprise; public administration; committee; movement; trade union or trade association; political party; other informal group; other.
the subgroup of volunteers active in organisations provided the basis for the application of the cluster analysis technique (CA)\(^5\) that allowed us to single out homogeneous groups of individuals. Profiles of volunteers that emerged are based on the characteristics that distinguish one group from the other: because those identifiers are owned by the individuals in that group at a significantly greater extent than the overall average of organised volunteers.

The outcomes of these analyses are presented in the Results section. The presentation of the results takes into consideration other significant evidence. In particular, we recur to both published and unpublished data from the survey, the studies of antecedents and of impacts of volunteering based on the analyses of the Istat-ILO module data (Guidi, Fonović and Cappadozzi, 2016), recently released Istat data and analyses of volunteer work (Istat, 2018; Cappadozzi, 2018) and contextual evidence useful to better situate the volunteering practices of women in the general societal context.

Finally, it is necessary to alert the readers and the critics that the interpretation of the rigorously produced and documented data is not strictly neutral: it is generated within what the authors term practitioner’s standpoint, that complements the study with the reflexion-action dynamics of the experience.

3. Results: Distinctive characteristics of women volunteering in organisations

In this paragraph we present the essential characteristics of volunteering in Italy (Istat-ILO AVQ 2013 data) by comparing the differences between women and men volunteers. Data taken in exam regard 4 million and 144 thousand volunteers active in organisations.

Women volunteer in organisations less than men (7% of all women volunteers compared to 8.8% men). This is valid in all age classes, except for the youngest – aged between 15 and 24. In the absence of family obligations and the burdens of domestic work, the volunteering rate is balanced between the sexes (7.4% women and 7.0% men). Significantly, for women in the next age range (25-34 years), which as a norm coincides with the birth of the first child, the participation rates diminishes (6.5%). It then rises again, to reach its maximum between 55 and 64 years (9.3%), which coincides with grown up children leaving the family (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Organised volunteering rate by gender, class age and roles within the household – Year 2013.

![Organised volunteering rate by class age](image)

![Organised volunteering rate by role in household](image)


The link between volunteering rate and stage of the life cycle is confirmed by the analysis of the volunteering rate against the role in the household of the woman volunteer. In the family situation that presupposes the least of domestic work burdens, that is when the role of the woman volunteer is the living-in daughter in a family with both parents present, the volunteering rate is higher for women than for men. In all other family situations, men are more active than women. A high percentage of elderly among the

\(^5\) The cluster analysis was made with the hierarchical aggregation method of Ward (RECI).
singles explains also the major participation of men also in this family typology. Conversely, scarcer rates of volunteering among elderly women is directly linked to their family obligations: grandmothers taking care of their grandchildren is a widespread and essential component of Italian non-state family-welfare system.

Fig. 2. Organised volunteering rate by gender and educational level – Year 2013

The educational attainment level is one of the most decisive determinants of volunteering (Figure 2). Nevertheless, it does not characterise specifically women volunteers with respect to men. In both sexes, the volunteering rate grows progressively: more education expresses more volunteering, perfectly in line with the existent body of knowledge also in the international perspective (at least for what regards the Western world traditions of modern democracies).

The organised volunteering rate rises progressively with the educational attainment, from 2.7% of women whose formal education stopped at the basic level (8-years elementary school diploma) to 12.7% of women university graduates. The same pattern is followed by men: organised volunteering rate rises evenly with the educational attainment from 3.6% to 14.6%.

Fig. 3. Organised volunteer rate by gender and labour status - Year 2013

The professional condition does not show marked gender differences – except for the condition of housewives, which is declined exclusively in female gender, a macroscopic evidence of the gender differences in the realm of (non) paid work (Figure 3). The highest volunteering rate is registered among students (8.9% for young women and 10.1% for young men). This is followed by regularly employed (8.2% for women and 9.8% for men). This confirms the importance of work places and of schools as important agencies for the socialisation to active civic life and for the activation of voluntary energies. The only inversion of the gender difference as regards the professional condition of volunteers can be observed, again, on the margins of the labour market: among persons in search of a job, women volunteer more than men (12.4% women and 9.4% men).

As regards the economic conditions of the family, the gender differences are accentuated in more well-off families, where men show higher volunteering rates than women (19.2% against 10.8%).

The territorial dimension – the local environment community culture, the economic and civic traditions in which these are embedded, the everyday life dimensions strongly determined by the type and the dimensions of the (non)urban municipality of residence – influence the intensity of the voluntary participation. The volunteering rates are quite close between men and women in large urban metropolitan cities. The major gender differences in the rates of participation can be observed in very small municipalities. This shows quite clearly that voluntary engagement is an expression of women’s emancipation, clearly more advance in urban environments (Figure 4).

On the contrary, it was not necessarily to be expected that the volunteering gender gap be higher in the traditionally considered more advanced and modern Northern regions of Italy. With respect to the North-East of Italy (which expresses the highest general volunteering rates and is considered the historical cradle of volunteering strongly influenced by the Catholic religiosity) and the North-West (dominated by the work-and innovation-intensive metropolitan areas of Milano and Torino), the volunteering gender gap is minor not only in the Central Italian regions correspondent to the secular communal civic culture and the red belt of the progressive socialist political orientation, but also in the Southern Italian regions. In the Isles – Sardinia and Sicily – the volunteering rates of men and women are appear even.

Fig. 4. Organised volunteer rate by gender and territorial dimensions - Year 2013

Besides registering higher volunteering rates, men are more often than women engaged in more than one organisation or group (17.3% men compared to 14.8% women volunteer in multiple organisational settings).
The analysis of the voluntary activities performed indicates marked gender specificities (Figure 5). It reserves few surprises – gender differentiation of voluntary work reflects the traditional gender differentiation in paid work. Women are more present in personal services (+8 percentage points), in secretarial work (+2.2 percentage points) and in unskilled activities (+3.9 percentage points). Men are more present in professions classified as technical (-2.7 percentage points), so specialized work and also as handymen and drivers (-2.7 percentage points). Men are predominant in managerial activities (-5.1 percentage points).

It is worthy of note that in managerial activities, corresponding to the leadership roles, the volunteering gender gap is proportionate to the age and inversely proportionate to the educational attainment. The other field where it is possible to observe a clear advancement of the gender equality is in activities of high specialization, which gathers professional occupations such as social and religious professionals and creative and performing artists. Among the most educated volunteers, volunteering gender gap is almost null.

**Fig. 5. Type of volunteering activity performed (ISCO 08) by organised volunteers by gender - Year 2013**

Sectors of activity are also gender-differentiated (Figure 6). Women are more present than men in the following sectors: Religion (+12.2 percentage points), Culture and recreation (+2.3 percentage points), and also in Education and research (+1.2 percentage points), International cooperation and solidarity (+1.2 percentage points), Protection of rights (+1.1 percentage points), Philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion (+1.0 percentage point) and Social services (+0.8 percentage points). The major gap in favour of men is registered in the sports sector (-11.0 percentage points), but men are more numerous also in the sectors of Health (-5.3 percentage points), Politics (-1.7 percentage points), Environment (-1.0 percentage points) and Business and professional associations, unions (-0.4 percentage points).
Fig. 6. Sector in which the volunteer work is performed (INCPO) by organised volunteers by gender - Year 2013

[Bar chart showing the distribution of volunteer work sectors by gender.]


Men volunteer with more continuity than women. Women who have been volunteering for the same organisation for less than 2 years or between 3 and 9 years are more numerous than men. In the classes of 10 years and more of duration of the predominant voluntary activity, the predominance of men is notably higher (Figure 7).

Fig. 7. Years of organised volunteering by gender - Year 2013

[Bar chart showing the distribution of volunteering years by gender.]


Quite comparable to what happens in the professional career, women much more often put a halt to the volunteering activity as family engagements grow or start, or start again, in correspondence of the life stages when family engagements diminish.
Fig. 8. Reasons to volunteer of organised volunteers by gender – Year 2013

The motivations that drive Italian volunteers to engage are quite similar between women and men (Figure 8). The only two motivations that characterise women more prominently are apparently of quite opposite nature. The first is the religious—or ideals driven-belief and urgency (+10.5 percentage points). The other is the search for the completion of professional competences or for novel job-related opportunities (+1.9 percentage points). Both attain though to a very personal sphere of individual affirmation, expressions of a quest for a feeling of usefulness in the sphere external to the family. In parallel, women emerge as more self-determined as regards their starting choices in the voluntary engagement: they are less prone than men to follow the advice of friends. The only motivation prevalent for men with respect to women is to follow the example of already engaged volunteering friends (-2.1 percentage points).

The other motivations are chosen as prevalent drivers quite equally by women and men.

Fig. 9. Personal impacts on organised volunteers by gender – Year 2013

Volunteering impacts women more than men (Figure 9). Gender specific dimensions of change are manifest and threefold. The most striking difference (+6.9 percentage points) regards the relationship of the person with the world. Almost one in three of women volunteers (31.8% of women compared to 24.9% of men) states that volunteering “changed their outlook”. It speaks of a profound global re-situation of self that lies at the roots of the activation dynamics. Similar gender difference (+6 percentage points) regards the awareness that volunteering “improved the volunteer’s ability to relate to others”. The relationship with the other is the essence of the sphere of action and women (25.1% compared to 19.1% of men) capitalise more on this, arguably the most versatile, of transversal skills. Finally, women more than men “feel better about themselves” (+3.8 percentage points) as the consequence of their voluntary action. Taken by itself, it testifies of a positive impact on the personal well-being, stronger on others”. The relationship with the other is the essence of the sphere of action and women (25.1% compared to 19.1% of men) capitalise more on this, arguably the most versatile, of transversal skills. Finally, women more than men “feel better about themselves” (+3.8 percentage points) as the consequence of their voluntary action. Taken by itself, it testifies of a positive impact on the personal well-being, stronger on
women and chosen as one of the most important signifiers of volunteering by a good half of volunteers (51.7% of women and 47.9% of men). Taken together, the three relational dimensions of change – with the self, with the other and with the society – build a dynamic construct that can’t remain indifferent also to contributing to a wider cultural progress as regards the position of women.

Further evidence that women are more permeable to change as a consequence of volunteering comes from the marginally perceived negative or missing impacts. There are less women than men that refer that “nothing changed in their lives” (3.1% of women compared to 3.8% of men) and half as much women (0.9%) than men (1.8%) who consider that volunteering generated “more disadvantages than advantages” on their personal lives.

The enlargement of social networks as a consequence of voluntary action is the second most present impact. It is reported in an equal proportion by women (41.1%) and by men (42.1%). It remains to be seen which gender benefits more on the long run from these ties, considering that, in general, women have more limited access to social networking, being more marginal in the strongly networked spheres of the job market and the traditional politics. Also, men benefit more as regards the informational aspect, which is not to be disregarded in terms of the powers of influence. Men score a bit higher than women as regards becoming more informed (-2.4 percentage points) and raising greater civic and political awareness (-1.2 percentage points).

As regards volunteering being pervasive to professional dimensions, the awareness that volunteering valorised previously acquired experiences and skills, the perception of women is quite similar to that of men. But women seem to benefit more in concrete and immediate terms as regards their positioning on the job market. 6.7% of women (compared to only 3.7% of men) have acquired competences useful for their career. Volunteering thus seems to meet the expectations of women job seekers and those under-employed.

4. Results: Profiles of women volunteering in organisations

This synthesis of information collected by the ILO module by Istat in 2013 was performed on the subgroup of women volunteers with the same techniques of multivariate analysis described above for the general analysis of all (men and women) volunteers. The profiles emerging reproduce almost exactly what has emerged from the general analysis. Seven profiles of women volunteers emerge, analogous to the general – including male and female volunteers – profiles (Cappadozzi and Fonović, 2016). Only one significant difference emerges with respect to the general profiles and it regards the leadership function.

The profiles of women volunteers in organisations that emerged from the multivariate analysis are the following:

1. Committed caregivers (566,000 – 29.6%) in the Social support and the Health sectors
2. Religious educators (504,000 – 26.3%) in religious organisations
3. Women volunteer leaders (306,000 – 16.0%)
4. Satellites (210,000 – 11.0%) with loose organisational identification
5. Investors in culture (186,000 – 9.7%) in the Culture sector
6. Blood donors (84,000 – 4.4%)
7. Lay sports volunteers (59,000 – 3.1%) in the Sports sector

In this chapter we first present a synthesis description of the main characteristics of the clusters, from the largest to the smallest one. We point out the similarities and the differences between the structural factors characterising the profiles of women volunteers. The presentation of the results is complemented by discussing the significant differences and discrepancies between the women volunteers profile and the corresponding general profile and the Istat-Ilo data on the sector of activity.
4.1 Committed caregivers

This group remains the largest group identified in the analysis, amounting to 566 thousand volunteers (29.6% of women that volunteer in organisations). Volunteers belonging to this group operate in organisations active in social care and civil protection (44.7%) or in the health sector (29.1%). The organisational type indicated is mainly the voluntary organisation, the non-profit public benefit association, the social promotion association (89.0%). They focus their engagement mainly in a single organisation (90.2%). In fact, they participate actively to the activities (65.2%) and to the meetings (35.7%) of only one group or association. They are committed in time – women caregivers are characterised by high fidelity: 27.3% are active in the same organisation in the range of 5 to 9 years. Activities carried out by women in this group are ascribable to those of qualified personnel in personal care services (55.3%). The commitment of this group is voluminous and constant: 20.6% devote to volunteering between 20 to 39 hours and 18.3% volunteer for 40 hours and more during one month. On average, they perform the activity more than 5 times in a month (5.2) for 4.2 hours each time. The group is characterised by the presence of retired women (20.0%), those living in families without young children (72.5%) and belonging to families of three members (26.4%). They attend religious services only occasionally (28.3% a few times a year) and consider themselves satisfied with their health conditions (74.9%).

Significant differences emerge in comparison with the general profile of Committed caregivers revealing clearly the gender specificity of volunteering. Drivers, the traditionally male occupation, disappear from the characteristic voluntary occupations, leaving care work as the only dominant type of work. The amount of time dedicated by the women caregivers is notably higher: the workaholics aspect of volunteering emerges in the women volunteer caregivers profile. They arrive to dedicate more than 40 hours per month. Among the general profiles, such wholehearted dedication has emerged only in the Workaholics of representation, where men represent the majority. This confirms the popular traditional opinion of volunteering in the social support sector: women work, men sit in high-level meetings. Women volunteer caregivers are by one generation younger from their counterpart general profile of caregivers where the domineering age range is between 65 and 74 years. The most significant age range is between 55 and 64 years (19.7%): characteristically the stage of life when the burdens of the family work diminish, in coincidence with children growing adult.

This depicts the statistically typical female volunteer caregiver. We anticipate though that this bulky profile of women volunteers could be split in further sub-profiles. A first confirmation to this comes by looking into data on women volunteers putting in parallel the two sectors that mostly engage the Committed caregivers women only profile: the Social support (and civil protection) sector (44.2% of the cluster) and the Health sector (29.1%). In fact, women volunteering in the Health sector present a much more dynamic profile than the more socially conservative women volunteers of the Social support sector (unsurprisingly, the traditional stronghold of the Italian Catholic “pure” volunteering movement). This differentiation does not emerge from the clustering because the major driving factors (type of activity/profession, high fidelisation) and some structural characteristics (educational attainment, predominant age range) converge. But at the margins of the life-cycle, we see young girls (ages 14 to 24) much more attracted to the Health sector (16.7% compared to 9.1% in the Social support sector) and old ladies (65 years and more) doubling on the contrary in the Social support sector (20.7% compared to 11.2% in the Health sector).
This major dynamism of the Health sector most clearly emerges from contrasting the professional condition of women volunteers with that in the Social support sector (Figure 10). The presence of working women is significantly higher in Health (41.7% compared to 31.9% in the Social support sector) and students are more than double (13.4%  6.5%).

This could also possibly be driven by the presence of some capillary diffused federations of the health sector, as an over-representation of women volunteering in the Health sector in the smallest of municipalities (less than 2.000 inhabitants) of the Central Italy may lead us think. But other individual traits differentiating Social support sector women volunteers from those in the Health field, do corroborate the potential for further sub-segmentation of the Committed caregivers profile of women volunteers. Such as family condition, which we know to be a powerful determining factor in orienting volunteering choices. Social support women volunteers come from richer families: 3% compared to 0.7% of those active in the Health sector declare their economic status to excellent. Maybe so also because they have less family burdens: in the Social support sector there are more women volunteers without children (19% are partners in a couple without children compared to 15.7% in the Health field) and singles (15.7% compared to 11.1% in the Health field).

### 4.2 Religious educators

This is the second group for numbers among those identified in the analysis. 504,000 thousand women belong to this group (26.3% of formal volunteers). The main sector of activity is religion (94.1%) and for the greatest part the members are active in religious organisations (95.2%). Also in this group the most significant activities performed are equivalent to technical profession (57.6%), in occupations such as educators and catechists. This group records a long-term commitment to the organisation: 46.5% of volunteers have been active for over 10 years and 91.8% of volunteers is active in a single organisation. This group does not differentiate from the general average in terms of length of commitment: activity is performed about once a week for three hours. The most represented geographical distributions are the South (21.8%) and the Islands (13.1%); in particular the regions emerging from this group are Sicily (9.9%) and Campania (9.4%). Women of this group are housewives (32.8%). This profile concentrates a significant portion of very old women, aged 75 years and more (7.1%). They are little interested in politics, their educational level and cultural participation is very low. They are not very satisfied with their health, but considered the advanced age, their subjective evaluation of their health situation is not negative: they consider it normal (not good, not bad).

There are two significant aspects altogether missing with respect to their general counterpart: informal groups and students are not present among the characteristics of the women volunteer religious educators. This evidence fossilises the profile of women volunteer religious educators in a static pre-modern dimension. Sicily emerges even stronger than in the general profile. This group is the stronghold of the patriarchal

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**Fig. 10. Women volunteers in Social support and Health field**

- labour status

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tradition. Nevertheless, it is an example of emancipation. In the society of their generation where the opportunity to do something with your life in terms of profession or public influence were reserved only to women with exceptional resources, these women chose to engage and devote their time and values to new generations.

For Sicily in particular we have observed that the total volunteering rates on the regional level show a substantial parity. This would call for further in depth study of women’s volunteering in Sicily. It is just possible that this could unearth an undercover protagonism of women that in voluntary engagement have discovered a field of self-expression and public influence less guarded by the very strong surviving patriarchal culture of masculine domination. Such observation might follow the road of a matriarchal transmission of values but also, odd as it may appear, it could just be possible to see it as an ante litteram civic movement in a totalitarian regime.

The self-reported personal impacts of religious women volunteers show how these women, more markedly than in other profiles, obtain more tools for integration with the society. It is a way to empowerment, rather than an interior path of growth. Guided by their beliefs, they are the least prone to change their way to see the world. Happy with their family, they don’t see volunteering as something that makes them feel better with themselves. Seeing friends often, volunteering is not a way to enlarge their social networks and it certainly does not enhance their (presumably already high) relational competences. In their private, family world, they are the rulers. Volunteering is a way to put to value their experiences and competence, just a bit over the average. What is striking is that volunteering, while not changing their general outlook towards life, much more evidently than in any other profile, strengthens their civic consciousness and makes them more informed. Volunteering keeps open their channel of communication with the outer world. It’s like opening the windows of the glass house.

Or finding water for a fish to swim in: in volunteering they have managed to find what they were looking for. Because the entry motivations of religious women volunteers are highly, more than average, self-centred: to enrich themselves professionally and to gain new opportunities of work, to explore the points of strength and put themselves to test, to put to better use own experiences and capacities. They do it to provide answers to the needs that public service does not cover and not – as would seem obvious – spurred by their religious ethics. The purely religious motivation (to follow one’s beliefs or religious credo) is absolutely marginally present in this profile and the adherence to the cause is also low as motivation. They start because their friends were doing it, but not to be with others. Their principal motivations are oriented to putting to use their points of strength and bettering their professional chances.

Looking at their engagement from the point of view of gender (non)equality, such predominance of self-centred motivations, a trait shared with other women volunteer profiles, does not leave them in the background, but it rather pushes this profile to the forefront of a diffused, as opposed to intellectually elitist-led cultural change. This is of great importance for another reason: the “religion” that determines their field of activity is not given by religious activities as such, but by church affiliated entities which run predominantly educational services: schools, kindergartens, socialisation spaces for youth, cultural and sports activities for children to young adults. They are certainly framed by the religious context but their proactive practical attitudes and public presence most certainly positively influences two important worlds: the Catholic Church institutions and the youth.

4.3 Women volunteer leaders

This group consists of approximately 306 thousand women (16.0% of women who volunteer in organisations). They are active in informal groups (54.7%), in political associations and trade unions, in rights based organisations (23.4%), in promotion of volunteering (19%) and in the environmental field (8.2%). The most prominent occupation is that of leadership (8.3% of women belonging to this group). Much more than in any other profile, Women volunteer leaders are active in more than one association (22.7%). They participate to activities of two different typologies of organisations (21.2%) and to meetings of 3 different typologies of organisations (12.2%). This plurality of interests notwithstanding, their frequency of voluntary action is just a little above the average (5.4 times in 4 weeks). The amount of time is quite high: 3.3 hours per
occasion. Women of this group are above average employed in management and apical positions in their paid profession (8.6%) and are university graduates (30%). Lombardia (the Northern Italian region with the capital Milan) is overrepresented (28.5%). Women volunteer leaders are not religious: 17.3% never attend religious services. Besides here, this trait emerges as a characteristics of the cluster only for lay sports volunteers, both women-only and general. They are characterised by high cultural participation (34.6%) and are solid readers (34.1% reads more than 8 books a year).

Beyond the shared terrain of the leadership function and other similarities, Women volunteer leaders present a markedly gender specific profile. First and foremost, they are not characterised as Stakhanovs of representation, as we have originally termed the general profile of the leaders of volunteering, because from the general analysis the group of leaders emerged as the cluster dedicating the greatest amount of volunteer hours, touching the peak of 40 hours monthly. Women volunteer leaders dedicate less hours to their volunteering functions: 1 in 4 (25.3%) from 5 to 9 hours monthly, less than two hours per week. For almost a third it is a monthly chore: 27.1% dedicate to governing the organisation 2 to 4 hours. Only 14.2% commit more than 40 hours per month.

Also, quite parallel to what we have observed for the Committed caregivers profiles, women volunteer leaders are by one generation younger with respect to the general profile. Almost half of them are in the central productive life stage (23.6% between 35 and 44 years; 23.9% between 45 and 54).

Most of Women volunteer leaders are working women (Figure 11). While the Stakhanovs of representation general profile is characterised by pensioners, almost half of women volunteer leaders are employed (43.4%). In 2013, the occupation rate for women (15-64 years of age) was 46.5% (men 64.3%). They have good jobs (Figure 12): one out of four women volunteer leaders is stably employed at medium to high level positions (25.63%) in private or public sector and one out of ten pursues an independent career (10.15%). One out of five (8.6%) women volunteers who work are in the very top positions in their professional life as chief executives, senior officials or entrepreneurs. No other group among women profiles reaches such high presence of top professionals. It doubles that in gender equality advanced sectors of Culture and Sports, it almost triplicates the relative weight of professional women among the carers.

It is clearly an engagement in addition to and not instead of the job, as confirmed by minor presence of women in search of occupation and of students.

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*The level of cultural participation is calculated by using at baseline the synthetic indicator proposed by Istat for the “Subjective Wellbeing” Report (Istat, 2012). The level of cultural participation is considered high if (in the 12 months preceding the interview) 5 or more among the following activities were performed: go to the cinema at least four times; go at least once to a theatre, a museum and/or an exposition, archeological site, monuments, classical music concerts, opera, other type of music concert; read a newspaper at least three times a week; read at least four books. The level of cultural participation is considered medium if 3 or 4 of the activities above were performed and null if none of these activities were performed or if the frequency is lower than the threshold indicated.*
They are highly educated: one third (30.1%) of women volunteer leaders have a university diploma. This represents another of the heaviest markers of this profile, considering that only one fifth (21.3%) of all women volunteers are university graduates and that in 2013 only 12.9% of women population in Italy held the university degree. They prefer books to newspapers and their ICT usage and competences do not emerge significantly.

Another significant trait of the profile of women volunteer leaders is that two thirds (68.5%) live in a family without children. Not even half have children: one third (36.5%) have a husband/partner and children and one in ten (9.2%) are single parents.

Children apart – which is not insignificant in the realm of this analysis where from different angles family duties and in particular children rearing emerges as an important hindering factor to voluntary engagement – women volunteer leaders are characterised as those who want it all. This profile provides the most advanced terrain for analysing further what we have hypothesised as the “triple presence”. Triple presence sees the engagement in voluntary action as a third complementary realm of self-realisation, in addition to family, as the realm of personal, and work, as the realm of professional.

These women bring to the third sector the riches of their versatile resources, an input of excellency that ought be investigated better in order to harness it as potential for both third sector development in general and the advancement of the culture of gender equality. This can be observed by a comparative analysis of subjective impacts, among women only volunteer profiles. Women volunteer leaders score lower than average on all the aspects that can be seen as personal tools for better presence in the public sphere – both those socially oriented (major civic consciousness; more informed) and those self-oriented (enlarged social networks; better relational competences). They already are in command of their ideas and of the general outlook on the world. Through volunteering, they take their vision to a further level, showing a much greater capacity than any other of the profiles to master the personal transformation. In a degree much higher than other volunteers, women volunteer leaders report that volunteering made them feel better with themselves, put to value their experiences and competences, and changed the way they see the world. Important durable personal impacts that are immediately transferred, through their leadership function, to the wider community. These perceptions indicate refined self-awareness. Even so, this is not the most important impact. The highest value we perceive is not in the personal subjective impact, but in the further waves their voluntary engagement generates in their organisational environment, in their social circles and in the stakeholders of their voluntary activity, including the public institutions. Their action enriches the public sphere with novel role models of the triple presence. Women volunteer leaders therefore exert an important progressive influence on the general culture of gender equality, in particular as regards enlarging the palette of expectations not only of the younger girls, but, equally importantly, of women of their generation with lesser personal resources for engagement and more feeble social embeddedness.

Equally important is the impact Women volunteer leaders potentially can have on the general physiognomy of the third sector. They not only want it all – they also want it done their way. The differences between the salient characteristics of the Women volunteers leaders profile and the general one which expresses the dominant – the typically masculine dominant – ways of leading and managing associations, set the basis for an enquiry into gender specific style(s) of leadership in voluntary organisations. For one, the amount of time dedicated marks the difference. It can’t mean merely half the engagement, but makes envisage a different organisation of work. Perhaps a more collegial management of governance and more
practical coordination. Certainly, an essential element for the conciliation between the requirements of the triple presence. This set of data does not allow for much further analysis but it opens the door to look for techniques and methods to experiment further study of the impacts of the protagonism of women and of gender diversity on the third sector as a whole. Especially in terms of its potential for innovation, or different organisation, of practices and of the representation of interests.

It is extremely interesting that our data show a neat preference of women over men and of women volunteer leaders over the other women-only volunteer profiles, for acting in informal groups, rather than in structured organisations. More than half (54.7% of volunteers clustered as women volunteer leaders) are engaged in a non formally constituted group or movement. In general, women prevail in informal groups (61.6% of volunteers who perform their prevalent activity in an informal group are women). But only one in ten (9.2%) of all volunteers is primarily engaged in an informal group. In other women-only clusters the engagement in informal groups is absolutely marginal to non existent (only Satellites women volunteers reach 4% of the cluster). It can therefore be affirmed without doubt: women volunteer leaders shun the structured third sector organisations. In terms of conquering an equilibrium between men and women in the public sphere this represents a not at all marginal problematic aspect.

4.4 Satellites

This group, made of about 210 thousand women volunteers (11.0% of organisation-based women volunteers), is composed by those who do not fit in the standard definitions of volunteering. 73.1% state that they perform activities in organisations having a different main activity from those defined in the ICNPO classification. 44.5% declare that their group or association has a different organisational manner from the standard ones suggested, while 19.3% belong to “other non-profit” organisation. They mainly perform unskilled activities (24.9%). They have been active for a short time (19.7% for less than a year). Geographically Trentino South-Tyrol emerges significantly. The group is characterised by women with a strong participation in cultural events (34.4%) and, more than in other groups, there is a strong presence of women who do not watch TV (11.8%). With respect to the general both genders profile of Pioneers, the group is not characterised by the presence of students. Also, differently from the general profile, where the amount of volunteering hours devoted is below the average, the time devoted by Satellites women volunteers is in the norm. Most significantly, volunteering in informal groups and in environmental organisations does not emerge in the cluster of Satellites women volunteers. Our interpretation is that this lay activists component merged with women volunteer leaders.

This profile remains open to interpretation, as the indices are not solid enough to confidently define its contours. The only solid marker is that this profile does not fit into the boxes of classification as regards the fields of activity and the organisational form. This has led our first reading of this group as explorers and testers of new forms of civic engagement. But we must not ignore the limits of the standard statistical classification that does not for example make easily transparent activities such as international cooperation for development, social housing, animal welfare, life-style movements or groups of solidary buying. Also, further probes would be needed to check for the alternative positioning with respect to the standard institutional approach to third sector.

An altogether opposed interpretation of this profile would be that it groups women volunteers who are less committed and more detached from the general political and institutional setting. Indices are contradictory, as this profile seems to magnetise the opposites. For example, Satellites women volunteers are above average among those who do not take part in political activities – but the (very small) segment of those who participate to political party meetings once a week double the average of all women volunteers. Satellites women volunteers are less satisfied with their lives than the average woman volunteer (major difference emerges as regards their health condition), but the portion of those who believe that the future will be better is higher than the average.

The parallel reading of the structural characteristics of Satellites women volunteers with the data on average values of all women volunteers shows that they are very: average. They are just, or still, as a very large portion is in their first year of activity (19.7% of Satellites compared to 12.8% active for less than 1 year),
searching for or adapting to the organisational setting. A loose or imperfect identification with the organisation they operate in can explain their not knowing, or not caring much, how to position themselves as regards the sector of activity and the type of the organisation. They are Satellites in the sense of exploring their positioning as persons in that exact voluntary engagement. In support of this interpretation come two discrepancies between the Satellites women and the average women volunteers. First, the number of women Satellites who are engaged also in direct non-organised helping or activist volunteer work is higher (20%) than the average (13.3% average rate for women volunteers doing both organised and informal volunteer work). Second, their motivation is quite idealistic: Satellites women are moved by their belief in the cause and the wish to offer their contribution to the community in higher than average percentages.

Then comes a surprise: in Satellites women volunteers, more socially-oriented motivations generate more self-oriented consequences. Through volunteering in organisations, much more strongly than on average, Satellites women volunteer boost their relational competences, feel better with themselves, enlarge their social networks. These positive side consequences may be more intensely perceived by Satellites women precisely because unexpected, but undoubtedly this helps the progress of fidelisation to the organisational mission.

Another structural characteristics of this profile provides, perhaps, an additional partial clue on the reasons of their marginality in the organisational life. In the typically well-off world of volunteers, the weaker economic condition of Satellites women stands out. A good third (36.5%) lives on scarce economic resources and 6.2% deem the financial situation of their family absolutely insufficient. Good economic condition, propedeutic to the feeling of relative safety for the family and prodromous to committing to an engagement that has no economic benefits and perspectives, is known to have a favourable effect to socialisation to volunteering and associational life. This raises an issue on the capacities of organisations to invest in all of their women volunteers, by compensating for the inequalities in their original cultural and economic resources.

Inequalities pulling in both directions make this profile rugged in various aspects: it also totals a relatively high quota (1.5%) of women who deem their economic status as excellent. For this reason, much more strongly than other, all more socially uniform profiles of women volunteers, satellite women impose that the reflection on the potential of volunteering as a field of women empowerment take an intersectional approach that completes the basic character of gender with the social class and the degree of access to opportunities.

### 4.5 Investors in culture

This group is made of about 186 thousand women volunteers (9.7% of formal volunteers), who perform their activity in organisations involved in recreational and cultural activities (94.6%). They are engaged in cultural associations (73.4%) and their activity is mainly highly specialised (31.9%). Women volunteers in leading roles also emerge significantly (9.4%). They perform their voluntary activity in more than one association (25.3%) and they are characterised by a continuous commitment: 21.7% devotes from 10 to 14 hours in the 4 weeks considered. On average, they perform the volunteering activity more than once a week (5.2 times in the four weeks) for about 3 hours. Geographically, the distribution most characterising the group is the North East (24.9%). They are graduates (34.8%), with financial resources of the family perceived as adequate (70.3%). Their cultural attendance is high (37.2%). They are characterised by high trust in local institutions (26.2% versus 20.1% of the total of organised volunteers).

This highly homogeneous profile is strongly characterised by the sector of activity. The cultural field includes the variety of activities centred on arts, heritage, tourism, media, recreation and intercultural work. These are typically organised through a non-profit organisation in the field of cultural and recreational activities, where 7.3% of all women volunteers are engaged, in a situation of perfect gender parity. Given the nature of the activities, it is not surprising that almost one third of all volunteer work done by women volunteers Investors in culture (31.9%) is highly professional intellectual work. On these grounds it may be said that this very specific profile aggregates an élite in terms of socio-cultural resources. It is a characteristic
minority in the volunteering world, as only 7.5% of all women volunteers perform an intellectual profession as their voluntary work.

Quite obviously, women volunteer *Investors in culture* are well educated and their index of cultural participation stands out among the profiles as very high. They are avid readers and digitally highly versatile. They travel for work, which no other women volunteers do. They read the newspapers every day and are active politically. They seem to be seizing all opportunities for taking part in the public life. Yet, their attitude is much more critical in comparison with other women volunteers. In comparison, they are less satisfied with their health, their family, even their free time. They are more than average satisfied with the quality of their friendship relationships, although they tend to meet with their friends only unfrequently. Their opinion about the future is polarised – what sets them apart from other women volunteer profiles is that relatively few answer not to know. These women have very clear ideas on life and emerge as strongly embedded in the society.

This emerges clearly from their motivations for volunteering. Strongly above the average, they engage in order to pursue their own beliefs and moved by the urgency to provide answers to the needs of the community, left uncared for by the public institutions. And, for women *Investors in culture*, volunteering as self-realisation path seems to work very well: 65.5% declare that one of the major personal benefits generated by their voluntary activity is the augmented feeling of well-being and personal satisfaction. (To put the value in the right perspective: The median value of other women volunteers profiles is 37.8%.)

An explanation for this could be the successful mix of self-determination, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit, which renders this profile a fertile terrain for further analysis of the triple presence. It would be interesting to delve deeper into analysing for this profile the interrelations between professional occupation and status, education and interests, and the volunteering activity. Almost half of women *Investors in culture* work (46% compared to 38.5% average of all women volunteers). Also the presence of women in search of occupation is consistent (10.5%; 9.2% on average).

But even as it appears so modern and dynamic, open towards the *quasi*-professional dimension and care-free as regards considering gender a hindering factor in affirming individual’s action in the public sphere, two heavy shades loom over it. And both come back to the necessity to consider women volunteers not merely as individuals, but as members of their family.

First, the economic condition. Even more than other profiles, women *Investors in culture* are from economically well-situated families. 70.3% as compared to 57.8% among all women volunteers deem the financial means of their family as adequate and there are only 1.7% (compared to 5.7% average of all women volunteers) who live on means considered absolutely insufficient. A consistent portion of women *Investors in culture* still live with the family of origin (24.3% compared to 20.3% average of all women volunteers), so this clearly classifies the profile for well-off family status.

Second, family obligations. The age composition of women investors in culture differs significantly from the average of all volunteers. In a situation of apparent perfect parity of gender characteristics of volunteers for culture, also in terms of socio-cultural and socio-economic resources and the division of work, the comparison of volunteering rates, by gender, of volunteers in cultural associations shows clearly – peculiar or rather typical? – volunteering life-cycle evidently biased by gender. In two age ranges women outnumber men: in youth, until the age of 24 (+3.4 percentage points) and then again, even more, during the full maturity, between 45 and 64 years of age (+5.3 percentage points). During the two central decades of adulthood (ages 25 to 44), women volunteer in culture less than men do (-1.7 percentage points). This is the child-rearing age, the period of life when the priorities shift and the huge inequality in the division of domestic labour puts heavy constraints on time management for women (Figure 13).

This is even more evident in the very big gender gap (-7 percentage points) in the older age. Demographically, there should be no reason for this: women live longer and healthier lives than men. But women do not go in pension as mothers and as daughters. On the one hand, grandmothers are the biggest resource of the Italian familistic welfare system. Taking care of the grandchildren is a social and emotional expectation that can’t be easily avoided. Also, after 65 years of age present day women in Italy are likely to have another caring duty: their fourth-age parents are entirely dependent on family care.
More significantly than any other profile, women volunteers *Investors in culture* characterise volunteering as, essentially, a luxury that few women can afford to undertake. This represents a challenge that ought be presented to public policy—in terms of gender parity, education and infrastructures for citizens’ engagement.

### 4.6 Blood donors

This group comprises about 84 thousand women volunteers (4.4% women volunteering in organisations) who perform a voluntary activity in associations of the Health sector (93.9%). The common denominator of this cluster is that their main activity does not have an equivalent profession codified in the ICNPO: in fact, they are almost all blood donors (94.9%). The organisation they donate blood with is a voluntary organisation, non-profit social benefit organisation or social promotion association (91.8%). Their hourly commitment in the four weeks considered is, obviously, very limited: 57.0% devoted to it only one hour and 19.7% between 2 and 4 hours. The frequency of the activity is only 1.5 in the 4 weeks, versus the 4 times of the average of organisation-based volunteers, for an average duration of 1.7 hours. In this group the geographical distribution emerging is the one of Central Italy, where 30.4% of volunteers live. Their individual and family characteristics correspond to average characteristics of the women volunteers. Women blood donors are no great readers (36.1% never read books) and their participation to cultural events tends to be scarce or nil. They are not much interested in politics and do not participate to political or associational meetings (67.9%).

Blood donation thus emerges as an expression of civic culture and life-style, corroborated by a very strong sense of belonging: 79.4% of women blood donors (compared to 65.2% women volunteers average) declare their affiliation to an association. This is connected also to the ease of access to the infrastructures for donation and to the communal civic culture. In large cities women donate less also because urban rhythms are more demanding and blood donation associations have less immediate visibility then in smaller environments. In fact, the peaks of participation to blood donation are registered in towns between 10 and 50 thousand inhabitants (37% of women blood donors) and in very small villages and towns (14.1% of women blood donors live in settlements with less than 2000 inhabitants.

Being a blood donor is an important identity trait: they are very conscious of the impacts it has on their persons. Which are not only higher than average, for both socially-oriented and self-oriented personal consequences, but register for almost all the highest peak amidst all women volunteer profiles. This clearly

![Fig. 13. Volunteering gender gap: Cultural and recreational field –age range (years)](image-url)
shows that it is not the amount of time dedicated that makes a significant influence on the subjective meanings that persons attach to their voluntary action. Blood donors dedicate only about one hour in month – and only about two times a year. It is the quality of the experience that makes the difference, as well as the values attached to it. Odd as it may sound, the only impact very little reported, is that their volunteering makes them feel better with themselves. They cherish more their volunteering action as access to information and to relations. This is very important, women volunteer Blood donors being the only socially marginal profile in terms of socio-cultural and socio-economic resources.

The weight of age ranges of women blood donors is very specific, which in good part is due to the health condition, which must be excellent in order to donate blood, so it starts to diminish after 45. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that even the youngest show higher than average rate of participation (13.8% of women blood donors are younger than 24, compared to 12.3% volunteering rate of women 14 to 24). This is not so insignificant considering that it is possible to start with the donation only at the age of 18. It further grows in the age range 25 to 34 (16.8%) so it represents an important terrain for socialising young women to volunteering and pro-social behaviour, in addition to contributing to prevention and promotion of healthy life styles. This is especially important as the practice of blood donation is the most socially inclusive and pervasive profile of volunteering. It intersects widely the social strata and circles, as demonstrated by the fact that almost half of the women Blood donors has only the basic schooling (43.3% of women Blood donors have stopped with their formal education at the 8 years school diploma, compared to 24.4% women volunteers with the same characteristics).

4.7 Lay sports volunteers

Only 58 thousand women are placed in this group (3.1% of women who volunteer in organisations): all perform their main activity in an amateur sports organisation. In the organisation, they perform mainly activities ascribable to technical professions (56.8%), in prevalence coaches. The prototypical women Lay sports volunteer is aged between 35 and 44 (34.3%), is in stable relationship, with small children. They are mainly in employment (54.67%) with an above average share of self-employed workers (18.6% of volunteers in the group versus 4.4% of total women who volunteer). Lastly, they are mainly lay people: in this group, indeed, 30.3% of volunteers do not attend places of worship. They have an optimistic vision of the future.

Women are clearly a minority in sports volunteering, considering that 8.9% of all volunteers are clustered in the general Lay sports volunteers profile. As of today – but we envisage that also in this field an advancement is under way in terms of women conquering new terrains to gender equality. There are no comparable data about the volunteers for the past period and till now, or anyhow till very recently, in Italy, the engagement in the sports sector has lived a completely separate life from volunteering in other sectors, also in terms of data and research, so a specific strand of research would be needed. Nevertheless, this profiling can set a benchmark for keeping an eye on the evolution of women’s presence and impact in sports volunteering.

A first important marker to this end is that, quite peculiarly with respect to the other profiles, this group is not characterised by an over-representation of a certain region or geographical area. It may not be massive, but it is a national phenomenon, an indicator of a structural advancement of a less gender-biased culture. Testimony to it is the capillary diffusion of women sports volunteering. It grows from the grass-roots, it is not urban-élites driven as it may be argued from a certain point of view for the advancement of some other forms of volunteering of women. From this point of view, it represents the exact opposite of the women volunteers Investors in culture profile. Only 6.4% of women Lay sports volunteers live in the centre of the metropolitan area, compared to the average of all women volunteers of 17.2% and 20.5% of Women volunteer leaders. 77% of women Lay sports volunteers live in the middle ground of “normal” families: 28.3% in small towns (between 2 and 10 thousands of inhabitants), 26.9% in small cities (between 10 and 50 thousands of inhabitants) and 21.7% in the satellite towns of the metropolitan cities.

Second, this profile crosses economic and social strata, which provides for major impetus and dynamism as regards role modelling and access to opportunities, than other profiles of women volunteering. Women sports volunteers who deem the economic resources of their families adequate or scarce are rather in
proportion with the general data on women volunteers. To our interpretation it is significant that both the peaks and the hollows of the economic status are much more present than on average. 1.77% of women sports volunteers consider their economic status as excellent – which is high, considering that the average for all women volunteers is 1% and that there are statistically none among Women volunteer leaders and only 0.1% among women Investors in culture. At the same time, the economic condition of 11.2% women Lay sports volunteers is absolutely insufficient, almost double than the average (5.7%). This shows the high potential of the sports for all sector not only for the promotion of the equality of women, but also for the integration in general and in particular for providing an equal playing field for the children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, in an otherwise extremely static and corporativist society of today’s Italy.

Because volunteering in sports is very much a family business: possibly the major spin to women’s engagement as volunteers in the sports sector is directly connected their children. The majority of women Lay sports volunteers are mothers: 51.6% in couple with children (37.6% the average of all female volunteers) and 4% single parents. Except for the women Blood donors, women Lay sports volunteers register the highest proportion of women volunteers who live in a family with children (43.4%). Underage dependents of women Lay sports volunteers are equally distributed between children (ages 3 to 13, 22.5%) and adolescents (ages 14 to 17, 18.6%). There are more women Lay sports volunteers with children in ages 6 to 10 (14.3%) and 14 to 17 (18.6%) than average (respectively 8.6% and 11.7% of all women volunteers).

But quite on the opposite side of women Blood donors, who dedicate to the activity just over 1 hour of time in one month, women Lay sports volunteers generate extremely big amounts of volunteering hours (Figure 14). Half of them dedicate more than 10 volunteering hours in one month (49.1%), one in five more than 40 hours monthly (20.3% compared to 13.9% average of all women volunteers). This is the highest proportion of volunteer-holics among all women volunteer profiles. Half of them again (49.1%) – remains to be seen whether it is the same half that commits long hours – has been active, with the same organisation, in the same prevalent activity, for longer than 10 years. So there must be more in women sports volunteering than just complementary care for the interests and the well-being of their children. Personal, family and community traditions presumably play as important factors, as well as the strongly socialising atmosphere of volunteering in sports. In fact, women Lay sports volunteers are happy socialising creatures: indicators on the life satisfaction of women sports volunteers are higher than average. Notably as regards their health, which was to be expected (27.5% very satisfied compared to 18% average). The enjoyment of free time scores high: 22.1% are very and 63% quite satisfied (compared to 17.1% and 53.6% respectively on average). The satisfaction with the relationships with friends is higher than average (39.5% compared to 33.3% average are very satisfied), which logically completes the profile. Many meet their friends every day (22.7% compared to 17.2% average) and yet, they also read more than average (37.3% read more than 8 books a year, compared to 26.1% average for all women volunteers). Perhaps these elements, combined with the never-give-up sports philosophy, may be inherently connected with women sports volunteers being the optimistic peak of Italy: more than half (55.4%) believe that the future will be better than the present, compared to one third of women volunteers on average (29.3%).

But, the surprise that comes also in support of the claim that family is an important dimension in the sports volunteering of women, is that the satisfaction of women sports volunteers with their family relationships is unusually high. They are almost all happy with their families (51.5% quite a lot and 46.8% very much). No other women volunteers profile scores this happy on family: not even the Committed caregivers
and not even the *Religious educators*, as a more traditional monolithic view of both the family and of the volunteering may have oriented us to think uncritically in the past.

The profile of women *Lay sports volunteers* is also open to the professionalising dimension: the presence of women in search of occupation (12.9%) is higher than average and more than one in ten (10.9%) are students. In this respect, volunteering meets their expectations: above the average, but not outstandingly, they declare to have acquired professionally useful competences and are also more informed. But this is not the most important thing: it is the sports volunteers that score the highest of all profiles in socially-oriented impacts as perceived by volunteers. In particular, women sports volunteers are the top profile as regards the most profound personal transformation process indicated among the options: 80.4% (compared to 68.2% of all women volunteers) refer that volunteering has changed their view of the world. It is a permanent change of outlook and approach. It would be interesting to understand better how this relates to the culture of gender equality, given their role as informal educators and role models both in the family and in the association.

Not least because the analysis of the motivations of women *Lay sports volunteers* in comparison with other profiles of women volunteers would present us with a surprise, were the authors not reflexive practitioners and observant women volunteers themselves. Contrary to the expectations arising from the traditional analyses of organisational entities of the third sector, which consider the sports sector contiguous to recreation and dominated by self-interest and pleasure dynamics, women *Lay sports volunteers* are strongly pro-socially motivated. They express the highest values among all profiles for the set of socially-oriented motivations (and the lowest for the set of self-oriented motivations). In particular, the motivation “to pursue one’s own beliefs or religious credo” is the highest among all women-only profiles and startlingly higher than the average (27.9 percentage points with respect to the average of all volunteers). In this, women *Lay sports volunteers* present the exact opposite to women volunteer *Religious educators*, which on this motivation, originally in the course of our work on the data and traditionally in literature termed “religious” motivation, score in parallel on the negative side of the average: -36.9 percentage points. Volunteers in the religious field are characterised by their practice of being observant Catholics, sports women volunteers by the predominance of those who never (30.3%) or only a few times a year (24.1%) attend religious services. Only a very residual quota of 4.4% of women sports volunteers attend religious functions every day, while this holds true for 15.1% of women *Religious educators*. This in addition to the fact that 71% attends once a week, which corresponds to the regulars of the Sunday mass of the Catholic Church. On this basis we can affirm that the primary motivational driver of the women *Lay sports volunteers* is of idealistic nature. Their volunteering is lived in the spirit of service. Above the average, they are motivated by the need to provide services in answer to the needs and by the will to offer their personal contribution to the community (+12.6 percentage points).

Sports volunteering thus emerges as an interesting terrain for further investigation of its potential for promoting the gender equality. With an intersectional approach, as gender is but one of the aspects of equal opportunities of access to full social integration and interaction of diversities.

### 5. Conclusions: Highlights and surprises

In this conclusive chapter we outline succinctly the most important outcomes of the explorative analysis on the specificities of the voluntary action of women in Italy on the basis of the Istat-ILO 2013 data, with the aim to prepare the terrain for further reflection and studies.

In comparison with other spheres of society volunteering appears as a field of substantial gender parity. Organised volunteering gender gap registers −1.8 percentage points. Compared to the enormous dis-
equilibrium on the job market\footnote[7]{In 2013 in Italy only 46.5% women worked, compared to 64.8% men (data Istat 2013, median occupation rates ages 15 to 64); the occupation rate of women in the Southern regions of Italy being as slow as 30.6%. The occupation rate of young women 15-24 was 8.9\%}, in domestic work\footnote[8]{Women dedicate to unpaid household work 4 hours 41 minutes and men 1 hour 45 minutes (data Istat 2014).} or in politics\footnote[9]{The most recent Italian government (2018) counts 5 women among 18 Ministers and 6 women out of 45 deputy ministers.}, this may be considered sufficient and even taken as a proof that volunteering is a realm of open opportunities equally accessible to all. Which is not nearly close to the truth. Because, differently from the other spheres mentioned, that consider the entirety of adult population, it must be kept in mind at all times that volunteering is an elite phenomenon – in numbers and in structural characteristics. First, the organised volunteering rate is 7\% women and 8.8\% men. Second, it is predominantly the domain of well-educated and economically well-off families. In this, socially central core, a more progressive understanding and practice of gender parity is part of high socio-economic and socio-cultural resources.

Yet, women volunteer in organisations less than men do. Because family obligations – children rearing, care duties, domestic work – impress time constraints and raise barriers to voluntary activation of women, and not of men. In the first parenthood age (25 to 34 years), women’s volunteering rate plunges to 6.5\%. In mature productive age (45-54 years) that moves the most conspicuous volunteering resources, the volunteering gender gap is maximum, -2.9 percentage points.

This impresses a double lid on the potential of volunteering to act as a promotional factor for women empowerment. First, if this hindrance effect of the family obligations is so strong on women with high socio-economic and socio-cultural resources already socialised to voluntary engagement in organisations, it means that it takes exceptional talents, resources, opportunities, will and motivations for a woman to volunteer. It therefore means that an average woman in an average environment has very little chances of trying herself out through volunteering. This should constitute a problem in the eyes of both policy makers and of women’s equality activists. Because, second, our data have shown that the transformative power of the voluntary action impacts women more strongly than men, in particular as regards a global change of outlook and the relational capacities, essential aspects for the continuity of activation.

In the prism of gender equality, this aspect qualifies volunteering as the self-realisation path, which intersects with the private sphere of women volunteers.

The second important aspect that determines on a general footing the specificity of women’s volunteering is a quasi-professional dimension. In the long-term condition of an aberrantly static and family-unfriendly job market, women turn to volunteering as a complementary sphere of acquisition and usage of potentially professional competences and as an arena of social interconnectedness. 5.4\% of all volunteers are homemakers – or, to translate more honestly the exact condition, which has no male counterpart, housewives. Among volunteers, job seekers are more numerous than students and women outnumber men. As well, women more than men seek in volunteering an arena for professional development. Together with family, (non)work represents the second most important factor to intersect with gender in analysing volunteering.

In the prism of gender equality, this aspect qualifies volunteering as the professional affirmation path, which intersects with the community sphere of women volunteers.

The third characteristics differentiating women volunteers regards the domain of leadership and of the apical functions in the management and in the governance of associations. In this, and only in this, the general both-genders and the women-only profiles of volunteers differ significantly. On the one hand, this raises issues about the permeability of third sector organisations and of the mechanisms of representation of interests of citizens to gender parity. On the other hand, while showing different practices of leadership and organisation, it prefigures a gender-specific vision of the quality of presence and of the public voice of third sector organisations.

In the prism of gender equality, this aspect qualifies volunteering as the political path, which intersects with the public sphere of women volunteers.
The multivariate analysis applied on the subpopulation of only women volunteers confirmed that volunteering is not a gender-segregated sphere of individual action, by confirming seven large groupings. Five are dominantly characterised by the sector of activity: **Committed caregivers** of the Social sector; **Religious educators** engaged in the sector of Religious organisations; **Investors in culture**; **Blood donors**; and **Lay sports volunteers**. Two of these are significantly gender-unbalanced. The volunteering gender gap in the field of Religion is +12.2 percentage points and in the field of Sports is -11.1 percentage points. The corresponding women volunteer profiles mark unexpected gender specificities, of the opposing sign. Women **Religious educators** are characterised by the aspects of the professional affirmation path. Women **Lay sports volunteers** emerge as the most pro-socially oriented. The interplay of factors driving women’s volunteering is complex and shows undercover dynamics so far little researched.

Two women-only profiles stand out as transversal to mission oriented engagement as determined by sectors of general interest. One is that of **Women volunteer leaders**, the innovative core spearheading the most visible aspect of the emergence of women in the public sphere to volunteering. The other is women **Satellites** at the margins of organised volunteering.

All profiles offer particular insights towards new analyses of volunteering as a domain of what we have termed the *third presence*. By this we consider volunteering as a sphere of individual action that conquers space for the protagonism and self-expression of women in the public sphere. It complements, in perennial tension of priorities, the *double* presence of women in the domains of family and of work. It can therefore be seen as an every-woman’s alternative to active political engagement.

The analysis of the women volunteers’ profiles pinpointed evidence of how the culture of masculine domination raises barriers for women’s voluntary action. Just as it was observed for the professional labour market, the children rearing responsibility emerged as a dominant negative determinant as to the possibility for women to express themselves in the public sphere to volunteering. Our profiling of women volunteers exposed also the internal differentiation of the volunteering world as to the class-based structures of participation. High socio-cultural and socio-economic resources are determinant for engaging as **Women volunteer leaders** and as **Investors in culture**. The profiles that show most open spaces for engaging women with less economic and cultural resources and of more marginal social status are the least numerous, **Blood donors** and **Lay sports volunteers**. The triple presence of two thirds of all women volunteers, grouped in the most typical profiles of **Committed caregivers** and of **Religious educators** is strongly framed by their high exposure to family obligations and limiting options of the professional sphere.

Definitely not *everything nice* in women volunteering, yet another confirmation of the unequal position of women in present day Italy. Nevertheless, enough *sugar* – in terms of numbers and of subjective impacts, and enough *spice* – in terms of novel spaces and modalities for self-realisation, to command closer studies as to how the voluntary engagement of women acts as a progressive lever towards the advancement of gender parity.

**References**


