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GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ITALIAN SPACE SECTOR: A STUDY CASE OF THE WIA ROME LOCAL GROUP

Abstract

Last decade the gender equality and empowerment of female professionalism have been indicated as a driver for economic growth by the European Union (EU) but also by a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015. In Europe, even though progress towards gender equality have been made, data based on the Gender Equality Index show that the process is rather slow. Each Member State faces obstacles in achieving gender equality and significant improvements are still needed to attain gender equal societies. The participation of women in employment remains much lower than the one of men and labour markets across EU Member States show persistent and significant gender segregation. Governments should support more and encourage the presence of women in STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields, generating new inputs from a diverse workforce. Space sector is a source of inspiration and opportunities for all generations but it is affected by gender discrimination in the work place in terms of equal pay and career progression. In large firms a campaign to have women in the board has been started, although at a very low rate. In the small firms there is still a low presence

of women in high level positions. The situation in the research institutions does not differ consistently from the industrial world: there are only few women in key positions in technological and space research departments, therefore it would be important to find a global approach to sustain the competence and career of women in the space sector. In the time period 2005-2015, among the EU Member States the largest improvement in gender equality occurred in Italy, raising the country from the 26th position to the 14th. However, women still face different kind of barriers which stand in the way of their right to education, jobs, political representation, economic empowerment, etc.. WIA (Women in Aerospace) Europe supports the idea of an inclusive workforce as an invaluable asset to the growth of the European space sector. In particular, the WIA Rome Local Group reflects women's actual participation in the Italian space industries, universities and institutions. This paper is focused on the first results of a gender analysis within the space sector in Italy, conducted by the Local Group, whose aim is to assess the current status and suggest some possible actions that could be made to promote and support a future mindset change.