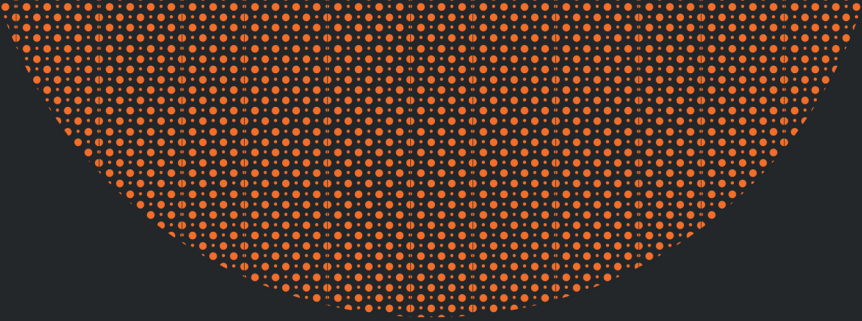




EMERALD POINTS

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH ITALY'S RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN

Innovative Practices in Complex
Organizations

**FILOMENA BUONOCORE
FRANCESCA COLELLA
VALENTINA GRASSI**



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AND RESILIENCE PLAN

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EDITED BY

FILOMENA BUONOCORE

University of Naples "Parthenope," Italy

FRANCESCA COLELLA

University of L'Aquila, Italy

AND

VALENTINA GRASSI

University of Naples "Parthenope," Italy



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION: SHAPING A FUTURE OF EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION*

FILOMENA BUONOCORE^a, FRANCESCA COLELLA^b
AND VALENTINA GRASSI^a

^aUniversity of Naples "Parthenope," Italy

^bUniversity of L'Aquila, Italy

ABSTRACT

This introduction outlines the book's aim to explore gender equality and women's empowerment within Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). It presents theoretical insights and case studies, highlighting how interdisciplinary approaches and inclusive policies can drive transformative change in public and private organizations.

Keywords: Gender equality; empowerment; Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR); inclusion; policy innovation

*In an era defined by rapid socio-economic transformations, the quest for gender equality has never been more urgent. Despite remarkable advances in women's rights and opportunities, enduring obstacles such as systemic biases, stereotypes, and unequal access to resources continue to impede women's full participation in public and private spheres. This book, *Empowering Women Through Italy's Recovery and Resilience Plan*, emerges at a pivotal moment when global efforts to achieve gender parity have converged with national and organizational strategies aimed at fostering a more equitable society.

Italy's PNRR, designed in alignment with the Next Generation EU initiative, provides a strategic framework to rebuild and innovate in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of its central pillars is fostering social cohesion and inclusion, with a strong emphasis on gender equality. Recognizing that sustainable development is unattainable without the active participation and empowerment of women, this plan presents a unique opportunity to drive transformative change in organizations, communities, and society at large. This book leverages the insights and experiences of multidisciplinary scholars to offer an in-depth analysis of women's empowerment through innovative practices. It combines theoretical frameworks with real-world applications, providing policymakers, academics, and practitioners with actionable strategies for advancing gender equality.

The introduction sets the stage by exploring why a comprehensive focus on empowerment is needed today. Across the globe, women continue to face significant challenges in leadership, entrepreneurship, and work-life balance. Cultural and structural barriers persist, shaped by entrenched stereotypes and societal expectations. Yet, alongside these challenges are stories of resilience, innovation, and progress. The Recovery and Resilience Plan offers fertile ground to examine these dynamics and evaluate how targeted policies can amplify the potential of women in various sectors.

The opening chapter, authored by Francesca Colella, examines the overarching framework of the Next Generation EU and the Italian PNRR, with a particular focus on the mission dedicated to social cohesion and inclusion. This analysis delves into the policies aimed at promoting gender equality, identifying how these initiatives intersect with broader European goals for innovation, digital transformation, and sustainable development. By situating gender equality within this policy framework, the chapter highlights both the opportunities and constraints that organizations face as they implement reforms.

In the second chapter, Laura Falci describes the relationship between women's empowerment, gender equality, and social sustainability from a sociological perspective. Empowerment is investigated in its core dimensions as an individual, relational, collective, and institutional transformative process. The importance of socialization to leadership and role modeling emerges as a recurring theme, emphasizing the synergy between female emancipation and social justice for current and future generations.

Filomena Buonocore and her co-authors address the enduring problem of gender stereotypes in the third chapter. This part provides a comprehensive analysis of how stereotypes continue to shape organizational cultures, influencing recruitment, promotion, and decision-making processes. The chapter

examines whether these stereotypes have evolved or persisted in their traditional forms and offers strategies to dismantle them through inclusive policies and education.

The fourth chapter focuses on work–life balance as a critical enabler of women’s empowerment. Filomena Buonocore and colleagues discuss the dual roles that many women navigate between professional responsibilities and personal life. This chapter highlights the importance of policies such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and organizational cultures that support well-being. Case studies illustrate how progressive work–life balance initiatives can enhance both individual performance and organizational effectiveness.

Women’s entrepreneurship is the central theme of the fifth chapter, which explores the challenges and opportunities faced by female entrepreneurs. Through case studies and statistical analysis, the authors reveal the systemic barriers that hinder women’s access to funding, networks, and resources. The chapter also highlights successful initiatives that have empowered women to create and lead businesses, demonstrating the economic and social impact of fostering female entrepreneurship.

The second part of the book shifts to an analysis of good practices, beginning with a methodological overview in the sixth chapter. Francesca Colella and Carola Continenza analyze the process of selection and evaluation of good practices, offering methodological insights into how to identify and measure the effectiveness of a practice in different contexts. The first part examines two selection methodologies, highlighting their applicability criteria based on the required level of control and adaptability. The second part focuses on measuring the impact of good practices, presenting an evaluation system based on key criteria to assess their effectiveness, sustainability, and transferability.

In the seventh chapter, the book examines diversity management from a gender perspective within the private sector. Through case studies of both multinational corporations from two different countries, the authors analyze the strategies that organizations have employed to promote gender diversity and inclusion. The selected case studies, regarded as exemplary, are the Italian company TIM and the Swedish multinational IKEA. By examining how their initiatives are communicated, the authors investigate strategies aimed at fostering gender equality both within the organization and in the broader societal context. TIM, with its commitment to gender equality, and IKEA, with its democratic and environmental values as social sustainability values, represent two cases that, despite belonging to different national traditions, distinguish themselves for their strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

The findings underscore the significance of leadership commitment, employee training, and accountability measures in creating sustainable change.

The eighth chapter extends this analysis to the public sector, where gender diversity initiatives face distinct challenges and opportunities. Drawing comparisons between public-sector practices, this chapter explores how public administrations have implemented policies to enhance inclusion and equity. The case studies illustrate the diverse approaches taken by different public organizations, shedding light on best practices and areas for improvement.

Valentina Grassi and Luisa Nardi discuss the role of Italy's Single Guarantee Committees for Equal Gender Opportunities in the ninth chapter. These committees serve as institutional mechanisms for addressing gender disparities within public organizations. The chapter evaluates their effectiveness, highlighting both achievements and limitations in promoting structural change.

The final chapter, authored by Dariush Rahiminia, focuses on the certification of the Department of Equal Opportunities as a tool for promoting and measuring gender equality. This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the certification process, including the criteria used to assess organizational practices and the incentives for achieving certification.

The book concludes with a synthesis of key insights, emphasizing the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to women's empowerment. The concluding remarks offer reflections on future directions for research, policy, and practice, urging readers to continue the work of dismantling barriers and building inclusive environments. Through its combination of theory, evidence, and practical guidance, this book aims to inspire action and foster a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between gender, empowerment, and organizational change.

This introduction invites readers to embark on a journey through the rich and varied landscape of gender equality initiatives. It underscores that empowerment is both a personal and collective pursuit, requiring collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and communities. By bridging theory and practice, the book provides a roadmap for those seeking to create a more just and equitable world.

NOTE

1. This book is part of the research activities carried out within the PRIN 2022 PNRR project titled: “Women’s empowerment: the use of Mentoring and Diversity Management in private sector and public administration as tools for equal opportunities and innovation according to the 5 priorities of the NRRP strategy (work, income, competences, time, power).” Principal Investigator: Francesca Colella (University of L’Aquila); Local Coordinator: Valentina Grassi (University of Naples “Parthenope”). Funded by the European Union – Next generation EU, Mission 4 Component 1. CUP E53D23021110001.

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RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE: THE ROLE OF NRRP IN ITALY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF NEXT GENERATION EU BETWEEN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND GENDER INEQUALITIES

FRANCESCA COLELLA

University of L'Aquila, Italy

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) within the Next Generation European Union (EU) framework, highlighting its potential to address social justice and gender inequalities. It critically assesses its strategic priorities, implementation challenges, and the risk of missed opportunities in promoting inclusive, sustainable development.

Keywords: NRRP; gender equality; social justice; Next Generation EU; sustainable development

1.1. INTRODUCTION

With the Next Generation EU program, the EU has embarked on an unprecedented path, aiming to redefine growth strategies in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis that began in 2019. As we know, the pandemic has severely tested

the welfare systems of member states, exposing structural weaknesses and amplifying social inequalities: the halt in production activities, the slowdown in trade, and the rise in unemployment have required a strong and coordinated response from the EU, which decided to adopt a recovery strategy based on investments and structural reforms (Colella et al., 2023). European countries faced a very complex and unprecedented situation, further complicated by the economic recession and the dramatic global context of multiple war scenarios.

The NRRP represents an epoch-making challenge in societies marked by a constant increase in social inequalities.

In Italy, the NRRP was approved by the Italian government in April 2021 and by the European Council in July of the same year, aiming to address multiple critical issues that characterize our society. It is the largest investment plan since the Second World War, involving all the countries of the EU.

It is important to note that the NRRP has undergone several modifications over time and will, of course, continue to evolve in the future. This is a historic opportunity for Italy, which may represent a real change of pace concerning the past when attempts at recalibration repeatedly failed, both due to the weight of internal resistance and the many external constraints at the European level (see Ciarini & Mariano, 2020, p. 215).

With the start of the 2021–2027 multiannual programming and the targeted reinforcement of the EU's long-term budget, the focus is on the aforementioned *Next Generation EU*: a EUR 750 billion temporary instrument designed to stimulate a sustainable, uniform, inclusive, and equitable recovery, aimed at ensuring that unforeseen needs can be met. It is therefore the largest economic stimulus package ever funded by the EU.

The entire initiative of the European Commission is structured on three pillars: (1) supporting member states for investments and reforms; (2) boosting the EU economy by stimulating private investment; and (3) learning from the crisis.

As mentioned above, the amount of resources put in place to boost growth, investments, and reforms amounts to EUR 750 billion, more than half of which (EUR 390 billion) are subsidies. The Italian strategy outlines investment projects divided into 16 components, which are grouped into six key areas of intervention, or pillars, on which the NRRPs focus, these are: (1) Green transition; (2) digital transformation; (3) smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth; (4) social and territorial cohesion; (5) health and economic, social, and institutional resilience; and (6) policies for the new generations, childhood, and youth.

In addition to the six missions we discussed, a seventh mission has been introduced: “RepoweEU.” Its goal is to enhance infrastructure and strategies