

## **GENDER EQUALITY AT THE TOP MANAGEMENT OF THE ITALIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** The present study aims to analyze the role of women occupying the top positions at the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). The study opens with an exploration of pertinent national and internal regulations. The text then proceeds to examine the distinctive characteristics that define the managerial role within Istat. These characteristics include both administrative and technical domains. Furthermore, the text provides illustrations of its multifaceted functions and tasks. This study employs internal management data to provide an assessment of the representation of women in senior leadership positions. Utilising the management roles held, the study aims to establish hypotheses concerning the capacity of women to influence the management agenda and the organisation's internal decision-making processes. To summarise, this study is driven by two principal objectives. First, it seeks to enhance comprehension of the manner in which women contribute to the leadership and management of Istat. Secondly, it is designed to assess their representation and their impact on decision-making processes.

### **1. Female Representation in Top Public Administration Management**

Numerous studies have demonstrated that gender diversity enriches organizational culture, fosters innovation, and enhances operational efficiency. Women tend to demonstrate a greater tendency for innovation and introduce a variety of leadership styles that promote creativity and transformative solutions. A prevailing argument in leadership studies suggests that female leaders often cultivate cultures that emphasize inclusivity and collaboration. These cultures have the potential to enhance interpersonal relationships, thereby increasing overall productivity. Furthermore, these factors have been linked to more deliberate decision-making processes and more effective risk management strategies (Kuteesa, 2024).

Nonetheless, gender stereotypes - that is, unconscious biases influencing perceptions, expectations, and evaluations in the workplace - continue to represent a

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<sup>1</sup> This article reflects a joint and equal contribution from all authors. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the official position of Istat.

significant barrier to women's access to top-level positions (Fedi, 2017). Leadership is frequently associated with masculine traits such as competitiveness and assertiveness, while women are more often perceived as collaborative and empathetic. This phenomenon gives rise to various challenges, including difficulties in attaining the initial promotion in comparison to male peers, often referred to as the "broken rung"; limitations in roles within organizations, frequently relegated to peripheral positions, a phenomenon termed the "glass wall"; and the selection for leadership roles in crisis contexts where the probability of success is low, leading to an elevated risk of failure and subsequent attribution of blame to pre-existing issues, often referred to as the "glass cliff."

These barriers are further compounded by the need for women to balance professional and domestic responsibilities, due to the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and household work. According to the recent Istat-Cnel report, in 2024, the number of women who were inactive in the labor market exceeded 7.8 million, constituting 63.5% of all inactive individuals aged 15 to 64. The predominant reasons cited for this phenomenon included family responsibilities, which constituted 33.9% of the sample, and engagement in educational or training activities, which accounted for 28.6%. Conversely, among male respondents, inactivity was primarily attributed to education (45.7%) or other factors (17.7%), with only 2.8% attributing it to family-related issues.

The implementation of work-life balance policies and organizational models based on flexible work arrangements (e.g., remote work, telecommuting, home working), along with strengthened parental support measures, can help alleviate the burden on women and facilitate their access to managerial positions. In contrast, the absence of such support may lead to burnout or to the difficult decision to entirely abandon leadership trajectories, further widening the gender gap in top-level roles.

In Italy, despite legislative and social progress over the past decades, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions. The second Gender Report by the Inps Supervisory Board confirms the male predominance in managerial and manager roles: in 2023, only 21.1% of private sector managers were women, compared to 78.9% men; among mid-level managers, women represented 32.4% versus 67.6% men (Inps, 2025).

In the public sector, by contrast, women are numerically predominant: they make up 60.7% of the 3.6 million public employees in Italy, with particularly high representation in the education (78.4%) and health (69.4%) sectors (Inps, 2025). However, this numerical prevalence does not extend to top positions: in 2023, only one in three senior public managers was a woman. According to the Gender Equality Index (GEI) of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the share of women in top decision-making positions within ministries and other public administrations, though improved over the past decade, remains significantly below

the EU average: 33.1% in Italy versus 45.4% in the EU-27 - almost 8 percentage points lower (Table 1).

**Table 1** – National administrations: Senior administrators all administrative positions.

	2014	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
EU 27	38,2	41,8	41,9	42,7	43,5	44	44,5	45,4
Italy	32,4	30,8	36,2	37,9	37,9	32,1	35,5	33,1

Source: EIGE, *Women and men in decision-making (WMID)*, 2024.

This is an alarming statistic, considering that 40% is generally regarded as the minimum threshold for ensuring a meaningful gender balance. At the European level, this benchmark is exceeded in 29 countries, including Croatia (62%), Slovenia (61%), Greece (58.9%), Finland (54.2%), Portugal (51.3%), Romania (51%), and Sweden (52.5%). Conversely, the lowest rates are found in Denmark (29.6%), Czechia (28.2%), Hungary (18.9%), and Luxembourg (29.7%)<sup>2</sup>.

In Italy, data from the Istat Permanent Census of Public Institutions confirm that gender parity in leadership remains an unachieved objective: in 2021, only 16.3% of institutions were headed by a woman (Istat, 2022). Significant disparities persist across regions: Southern Italy records the lowest share of female leadership (10.9%), while the Northeast reports the highest (20.9%) (Istat, 2022).

The underrepresentation of women in top positions within public administration becomes even more evident when focusing on appointments in ministries or the Prime Minister's Office. An analysis by Openpolis shows that female presence in these roles has sharply declined from 2019 to 2023. At the end of 2019, 41.4% of senior positions were held by women. This share dropped to 35.9% by the end of 2021, then slightly recovered to 37.6% by mid-2022. As of mid-2023, only 37 out of 122 top manager roles (30.3%) were occupied by women—less than one-third. Moreover, in 9 of the 15 ministries and the Prime Minister's Office, female representation decreased during this period.

The public research sector (EPRs) mirrors the structural inequalities observed in broader public administration. Despite women making up nearly half (48.3%) of all staff due to their academic success and capability, their advancement into senior scientific roles remains rare. In 2022, only 4% of all women employed in EPRs held manager positions. Notably, while female employment in the sector increased between 2015 and 2022, the number of female managers declined. Total staff rose from 20.570 in 2015 to 24.092 in 2022. The number of managers (excluding general directors) fell slightly from 107 to 103 - a 3.7% decrease driven entirely by a 10.6%

<sup>2</sup> All data are available at: [https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm\\_adm\\_nat\\_\\_wmid\\_natadmin/datatable](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_adm_nat__wmid_natadmin/datatable)

drop in female managers. Meanwhile, non-manager staff grew by 17.2%, with a 25.2% increase among women (from 9.261 to 11.597). Consequently, the ratio of female managers to non-manager female staff changed from 1:435 in 2015 to 1:571 in 2022.

**Table 2 – Public Research Employees by professional position.**

Position	2015			2022			Var. %		
	M.	W.	T.	M.	W.	T.	M.	W.	T.
Director General	11	2	13	11	4	15			
Level 1 Administrators	13	9	22	11	12	23			
Level 2 Administrators	47	38	85	50	30	80			
<b>Managers</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>1,7</b>	<b>-10,6</b>	<b>-3,7</b>
Researchers/ Technologists	5.828	4.572	10.400	7.258	6.667	13.925			
Other personnel	5.361	4.689	10.050	5.119	4.930	10.049			
<b>No managers</b>	<b>11.189</b>	<b>9.261</b>	<b>20.450</b>	<b>12.377</b>	<b>11.597</b>	<b>23.974</b>	<b>10,6</b>	<b>25,2</b>	<b>17,2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.260</b>	<b>9.310</b>	<b>20.570</b>	<b>12.449</b>	<b>11.643</b>	<b>24.092</b>	<b>10,6</b>	<b>25,1</b>	<b>17,1</b>

Source: Annual Personnel Accounts, IGOP – State General Accounting Office

Promoting gender equality within public research institutions is not only a matter of social justice but also crucial for enhancing the potential, quality, and effectiveness of scientific research. Gender diversity introduces a range of perspectives and approaches that can drive innovation and improve the quality of both research and the policies it informs. Increasing the presence of women also makes the research sector more representative of the society it serves. Women contribute unique ideas and methodologies that enrich the scientific landscape. Furthermore, women in leadership and research positions can serve as role models for younger generations, inspiring more girls to pursue careers in science and technology.

This paper analyzes the presence of women in decision-making roles within the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) to examine their career trajectories and assess their influence in redefining the structures governing the production of official statistics and research organization - thus fully harnessing their professional and intellectual potential.

## 2. ISTAT and its top management

Istat is a public research institution responsible for the production of official statistical information and for directing and coordinating the National Statistical

System, pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 322 of 1989. It fulfills its mandate - to serve society - through the production and communication of statistical data, analyses, and forecasts, in accordance with rigorous ethical-professional principles and the highest international standards. ISTAT also bears responsibility for coordinating, at the national level, all activities related to the development, production, and dissemination of European statistics.

The "administrative manager" and the "technical manager" were introduced by the Istat to align with the management rules set in Legislative Decree 165 of March 30, 2001 and Presidential Decree 166 of September 7, 2010. Administrative and technical managers perform management and coordination functions, albeit in different domains. Administrative managers oversee the administrative and organizational management of the Institute, particularly in areas such as budgeting, human resources, procurement, contracts, and legal affairs. They also provide support for technical and scientific activities. Technical managers, by contrast, possess specialized expertise in statistical, economic, IT, or scientific domains and are responsible for coordinating and supervising Istat's technical-scientific statistical production.

As of December 31, 2024, the Institute's organizational structure includes a maximum of 71 manager offices, as outlined in the following breakdown. This is in accordance with Istat's Statute, Presidential Decree No. 166/2010, and the numerical limits on administrative managers set by the D.P.C.M. of January 22, 2013. The 71 managerial offices were:

- a. the General Directorate with three central legal and administrative directorates, classified as first-tier administrative offices;
- b. three departments and twelve central directorates, classified as general technical offices;
- c. eight legal-administrative service units, classified as second-tier administrative offices;
- d. forty-four technical service units, including territorial offices, classified as non-general technical offices (ISTAT, 2024).

Administrative managers are selected from Istat's internal manager personnel or, pursuant to Article 19 of Legislative Decree No. 165/2001, from manager personnel of other public administrations (paragraph 5-bis), external candidates with specific professional, cultural, or scientific expertise (paragraph 6), or from Istat's own researchers and technologists (paragraph 6-quater).

General technical managers are appointed from among research managers, technological managers, managers of other public administrations, or recognized subject-matter experts.

Despite differences in specialization, administrative and technical managers are equivalent with respect to appointment procedures, the public nature of comparative

selection processes, and scope of responsibility - all of which are ultimately determined by Istat's internal organizational decisions.

However, certain legal provisions - such as the right to a manager appointment - apply exclusively to administrative managers and not to technical managers.

When vacancies arise, Istat publicly announces the number and type of manager positions available, along with selection criteria. It then gathers expressions of interest and evaluates the candidates.

In assigning each manager position, consideration is given to the candidate's aptitude and professional abilities, past performance within the administration (and associated evaluations), organizational competencies, and any prior leadership experience - whether gained internationally, in the private sector, or in other public administrations - provided that such experience is relevant to the post in question.

### *2.1. Administrative managers*

Administrative managers play a critical role in ensuring the effective functioning of the Institute. They are responsible for the optimal management of human, financial, and material resources and for supporting technical and operational activities. Their efforts help create the conditions necessary for the timely and reliable production of statistics. Their main duties include:

- Human resources management, with particular attention to workforce planning, personnel policies, training, performance evaluation, and skills development;
- Financial administration, including budget preparation and monitoring, cash flow management, and the effective use of economic resources;
- Logistical and infrastructure support, including oversight of the tools and technologies used throughout the Institute;
- Legal and contractual supervision, encompassing public contract management, procurement, and compliance with administrative regulations;
- Transparency and anti-corruption oversight, with a focus on implementing policies to promote transparency, integrity, and anti-corruption compliance;
- Collaboration with technical managers and institutional leadership in defining the Institute's strategic direction.

Administrative managers must possess a wide range of technical, managerial, and interpersonal skills. Key qualifications include appropriate academic credentials, supplemented by specialized courses or master's degrees; in-depth knowledge of administrative law, public budgeting procedures, and public procurement regulations; and expertise in strategic planning, leadership, and the coordination of multidisciplinary teams. Additionally, they must demonstrate strong problem-

solving abilities and the capacity to propose innovative solutions to improve institutional processes.

## 2.2. *Technical managers*

The role of technical manager at Istat requires a highly qualified professional profile, characterized by a solid academic background, experience in scientific and technological fields, the ability to coordinate interdisciplinary teams and manage complex projects, and familiarity with national and international regulations governing statistical production.

The core functions of technical managers include:

- The development of statistical methodologies, through the design and implementation of advanced data processing and analysis techniques;
- Management of information and communication technologies, using advanced ICT infrastructure to collect, process, and disseminate data securely and efficiently;
- Data quality assurance, by monitoring data collection and analysis processes to ensure statistical accuracy and reliability;
- Support for strategic projects, in collaboration with national and international institutions, aimed at developing new indicators and statistical tools;
- Data quality monitoring, through the assessment of statistical accuracy, consistency, and reliability in accordance with international standards;
- Technological innovation, by promoting the use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics to enhance Istat's analytical capabilities.

## 3. Analysis of executive appointments in the decade 2015-2024

In a context marked by an ever-increasing demand for statistical information from stakeholders, growing attention to data protection and cybersecurity, and persistent budgetary constraints, gender balance in leadership positions is an issue of rising significance.

This section analyzes general and non-general manager appointments conferred over the 2015–2024 decade, with a focus on their gender distribution. As previously noted, the position of Director General is classified as a first-level administrative manager position, in accordance with the D.P.C.M. of January 22, 2013, which outlines three such roles at Istat and equates the Director General's appointment to this level.

It is worth noting that the total number of manager structures was 73 from January 1, 2015, to November 30, 2019, but decreased to 71 starting from December 1, 2019, following a reorganization that eliminated two technical manager roles - one general, one non-general.

An analysis of the appointments made during the decade reveals that gender distribution in leadership roles at Istat varies by position. The feminization rate of each role - defined as the percentage of women in that position - indicates that women are predominantly concentrated in lower-tier managerial roles, particularly as heads of service units, where they significantly outnumber their male counterparts.

Specifically, throughout the decade, the role of Director General has been held exclusively by men. In the Institute's near-centennial history, a woman has served in this role only once, between 2012 and 2015<sup>3</sup>. The 2019 reorganization marked the historical low point of female representation in Istat's administrative leadership: only 1 in 4 administrative managers was a woman. From 2020 onward, the share of women has gradually increased, reaching 8 out of 12 administrative managers in 2024. However, this growth primarily reflects an increase in women appointed to second-level administrative positions (i.e., heads of service units) rather than to central director roles (see Table 3).

**Table 3** – *Administrative Management position by type and gender rate. Years 2015-2024.*

Year	Director General	Level 1 Administrators			Level 2 Administrators			All Administrative Positions		
	M.	W.	M.	a.v	W.	M.	a.v	W.	M.	a.v
2015	100	33,3	66,7	3	57,1	42,9	7	45,5	54,5	11
2016	100	50,0	50,0	2	66,7	33,3	6	55,6	44,4	9
2017	100	50,0	50,0	2	62,5	37,5	8	54,5	45,5	11
2018	100	50,0	50,0	2	50,0	50,0	8	45,5	54,5	11
2019	100	33,3	66,7	3	25,0	75,0	8	25,0	75,0	12
2020	100	33,3	66,7	3	62,5	37,5	8	50,0	50,0	12
2021	100	50,0	50,0	2	62,5	37,5	8	54,5	45,5	11
2022	100	66,7	33,3	3	62,5	37,5	8	58,3	41,7	12
2023	100	100,0	0,0	2	62,5	37,5	8	63,6	36,4	11
2024	100	66,7	33,3	3	75,0	25,0	8	66,7	33,3	12

*Source: authors' elaborations based on Istat administrative data*

A more balanced gender representation is evident in the technical directorate: since 2019, the feminization rate has exceeded 54%. Within the technical sector, women are more prevalent among service heads (6 out of 10) than among central directors (4 out of 10). Notably, since the 2019 reorganization, the position of

<sup>3</sup> Notably, the position of President has never been occupied by a woman.

Department Director has been evenly split between men and women, with the sole exception of 2022, when both posts were held by women.

**Table 4** – *Technical Management position by type and gender rate. Years 2015-2024.*

Year	General Technical Director			Non General Technical Administrators			All Technical Positions		
	W.	M.	a.v.	W.	M.	a.v.	W.	M.	a.v.
2015	28,6	71,4	14	47,7	52,3	44	43,1	56,9	58
2016	16,7	83,3	12	43,9	56,1	41	37,7	62,3	53
2017	16,7	83,3	12	51,2	48,8	43	43,6	56,4	55
2018	16,7	83,3	12	55,8	44,2	43	47,3	52,7	55
2019	40,0	60,0	15	61,4	38,6	44	55,9	44,1	59
2020	40,0	60,0	15	59,1	40,9	44	54,2	45,8	59
2021	40,0	60,0	15	63,6	36,4	44	57,6	42,4	59
2022	40,0	60,0	15	63,4	36,6	41	57,1	42,9	56
2023	46,7	53,3	15	63,6	36,4	44	59,3	40,7	59
2024	46,7	53,3	15	63,6	36,4	44	59,3	40,7	59

*Source: authors' elaborations based on Istat administrative data*

Between 2019 and 2024 - years in which the number of manager positions remained fixed at 71- women have approached the glass ceiling, though without breaking through it. Representation rose by 9 percentage points among second-level administrative managers and by 2 points among first-level administrators, while declining by nearly 7 points among technical service directors (see Table 5).

**Table 5** – *Management position by type and gender at 31 December (percentage composition).*

Positions	2019		2024		W. Var %
	W.	M.	W.	M.	
Director General	0,0	2,9	0,0	3,3	0,0
Level 1 Administrators	2,8	5,7	4,9	3,3	2,1
Level 2 Administrators	5,6	17,1	14,6	6,7	9,1
General Technical Director	16,7	25,7	17,1	26,7	0,4
Non General Technical Administrators	75,0	48,6	68,3	53,3	-6,7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

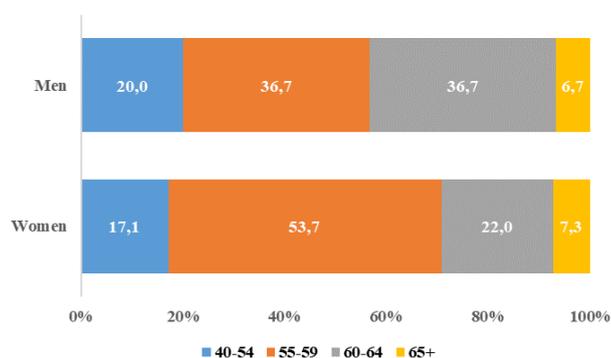
*Source: authors' elaborations based on Istat administrative data*

Finally, the difficulty of women in advancing in organizational hierarchies is also highlighted by their age. In 2024, the Institute's leadership class is far from young (only 1 of 71 executives is under 44 years of age) but women are older than men.

Analysis by age group shows that 83% of women are over 55 years old, compared with 80% of men (see Figure 1).

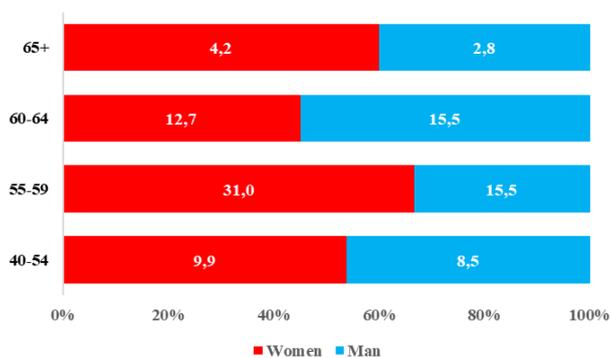
The distribution of the 71 management positions by age group and gender reveals that 31% are held by women aged 55 to 59, 18% by men over the age of 60 and 17% by women over the age of 60 (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1** – Istat Managers by age group and gender. Year 2024 (percentage value).



Source: authors' elaborations based on Istat administrative data

**Figure 2** – Istat Managerial position by age group and gender. Year 2024 (percentage value).



Source: authors' elaborations based on Istat administrative data

Finally, greater seniority does not necessarily translate into higher pay. According to the 2023 report by Istat's Unified Guarantee Committee (CUG), gender-based pay differences persist. Female managers earned a slightly lower average net salary than men (€ 74.832 vs. € 75.561) amounting to a gap of -0.97%. Conversely, among non-

general managers, women earned on average € 52.096,40 compared to € 50.051,10 for men - a positive wage differential of 3.93% in favor of women<sup>4</sup>.

However, it should be noted that the remuneration of first and second level administrators and that of technical directors is determined by the Institute's Council in accordance with the provisions of the current national collective labor agreement for the "Education and Research" management area, in relation to the organizational complexity and functions assigned to each management structure. This determination is made through a system of weighing the functions of each structure, at the end of which an economic value is assigned to the various management positions. It is important to note that these decisions are typically made in conjunction with the institution's reorganization processes. The determination of remuneration is an independent process from the need to fill a vacant management position. Conversely, is determined by the aggregate sum of the salary scale stipulated in the national collective labor agreement for personnel in the "Education and Research" sector. This calculation incorporates the level and profile of the position and is complemented by the allowance stipulated in Article 22 of Presidential Decree No. 171/1991<sup>5</sup>.

In practice, therefore, there is no gender gap at the regulatory level. This disparity manifests in subsequent discretionary choices, as evidenced by data demonstrating that the most lucrative positions are assigned with greater frequency to male managers.

#### 4. Conclusion

Istat stands out as a virtuous example for having maintained a significant female presence in managerial roles over time and for exhibiting a gender pay gap lower than the national average. Nonetheless, in order to increase the level of responsibility and decision-making power assigned to women, concrete measures are needed to mitigate the cultural and family-based conditions that still fuel these inequalities.

In this regard, the adoption of agile work models, diversity and inclusion training programs, and mentoring initiatives at Istat are highly relevant. Although these measures were initially designed to enhance the overall well-being of the workforce, they may, in the near future, prove to be particularly beneficial for women in

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<sup>4</sup>A review of data from all branches of the public sector reveals a consistent pattern: male employees consistently receive higher average daily incomes than their female counterparts. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in academic institutions, where men often receive salaries that are more than 20 percent higher than those of their female counterparts (Inps, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Salary details for managerial positions are published on Istat website under "Transparent Administration - Holders of Management Positions".

leadership roles. Indeed, for women, agile work—which is characterized by high flexibility in time management—can facilitate a better balance between professional and personal responsibilities, thus making leadership roles more accessible. At the same time, targeted training can support women in developing the skills needed and in building support networks that foster their advancement into leadership positions.

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