

Celebrating International Woman's Day Italian Style

Judith Harris (March 06, 2017)



It's the newest rage -- the all-female rugby teams, down to and including players between six and twelve years of age. Growing up, these girls have fueled the 100 women's rugby teams playing throughout Italy. Captain of the top national team is Sara Barattin, 30. Special attention to Italy's hard-fighting female rugby players is being paid in Italy this March 8, when International Women's Day is being celebrated.

Rugby is not the only battle being promoted for March 8. The Culture Ministry offers women free entry to all Italian state museums on that day. In addition, a poetry competition whose first prize is E 1,500 is announced this week and dedicated to "Work insecurity: reflections in the eyes of women." Its focus is, not women managers and other professionals, but the often rough experiences of

caregivers, babysitters and others who have held less upmarket jobs. The all-female jury, made up of journalists, poets and a delegate from the Labor Ministry's law office, is co-sponsored by the Anmil Women's Group. For details, see [>>>](#) [2]

Migrant women workers here are particularly vulnerable. Magdalena Jarczak, then 20, came from Poland in 2001. An accountant but just then jobless, she and her sister, 19, were promised by a recruiter that, working just three months on a nice farm in Italy, they would earn enough to live an entire year at home, and enjoy benefits: a regular contract, free accommodation, travel expenses reimbursed. In this way they found themselves working on a farm ten-hour days for "months of hell, without a break -- and the bosses who'd taken away our passports pocketed the money," she told an interviewer [>>>](#) [3]

Jarczak took special care, despite the long days of heavy field work, to learn Italian. In this way she overheard the bosses saying that she and her sister were about to be put into prostitution. In the dead of night the two fled. Knocking on the door of a house, they found an elderly couple, who, despite being obviously frightened, kindly took them in, hid and helped them. Jarczak now is provincial secretary for the CGIL union group which protects agricultural workers at Rignano Garganico near Foggia, close to where she herself had worked at 20. Today she is married and has three children. "The battle for rights is still difficult," she says. On occasion she takes her two eldest youngsters with her to visit farm workers. "They have to know that bad things exist in the world but I want them to have a brighter future."

Over all, men in Italy still earn 1.8% more than do women, and female start-ups are only 13% of the total so far this year. Italian women riding the crest of the wave are not in short supply, of course. Lucia Annunziata, 67, journalist and author, continues as among Italy's most authoritative talk show hosts for her RaiTV3 heavily political broadcast "In Mezz'Ora" (In half an hour). She also writes a political comment for La Stampa. In the deep past she was in the US as correspondent and also served for a time as president of Rai and then director of Tg3.

Another success story is Federica Zanon, a chef who won a top slot in last year's National Federation of Chefs culinary championship. Her entry in the section Artistic Culinary Art was a painting in fragrant herbs, which she called "The Divinity of Flowers." Actress Carolina Crescentini, 37, a graduate of Rome's Centro Sperimentale, has appeared in fourteen films and was nominated for a David di Donatello Best Supporting Actress in 2008 for her role in *Parlami d'Amore* (Speak to Me of Love) directed by Silvio Muccino.

For most Italian women, however, statistics show that finding a job as a manual worker has become more difficult than in the past as deindustrialization has taken its toll. Experts acknowledge that Italy has been slower than other European countries to shift women into the workplace where higher skills are requested. To quote Sonia Bertolini, sociologist with the University of Turin, non-qualified service jobs still prevail. We need to develop soft skills, she told an interviewer with La Repubblica. "We are convinced that we can do it alone and that our individual relational skills will suffice. Instead we have to learn to privilege group output -- skills that are not yet being taught."

On the other hand, says Francesca Contardi, head of EasyHunters agency and a former teacher at University Lius of Castellanza, near Varese: "For women, the reduction of manual labor jobs with limited added value, and the consequent increase in activities with higher intellectual and relational quality, are an opportunity to acquire a greater presence in the work place."



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Links

- [1] <http://test.casaitaliananyu.org/files/internationalwomendaycelebratinginternationalwomandayitalianstyle.jpg>
- [2] <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2017/03/03/un-concorso-di-poesia-su-lavoro-e-sicurezza-al-femminile/142659>
- [3] <http://www.donnamoderna.com/news/italia/braccianti-agricoli-caporalato-magdalena-jarczak>