

Chapter 5

Employment and industrial relations under downward pressures in the Italian public sector

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1. Introduction

The Italian public sector has changed significantly over the past two decades. Most of these changes, including processes of decentralisation, privatisation and introduction of market mechanisms, have been inspired by New Public Management (NPM) philosophy and, in the discourse, their aim was to increase the efficiency of services (Bordogna 2008; Bach and Kessler 2011). Overall, it was not a linear process of transformation, often with modest results and some unexpected effects (Bordogna 2016; Dell'Aringa and Della Rocca 2017). In more recent years, the public sector has been one of the main targets of austerity measures (Vaughan-Whitehead 2013; Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Bach and Pedersini 2013; Della Rocca 2013), chosen and implemented in response to the economic crisis, under the pressures of financial markets and the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund). As in other countries, reforms and budget cuts have strongly affected numbers and working conditions of public employees and have impacted on industrial relations (Bach and Pedersini 2013; Bechter and Brandl 2015). Several studies evidence a weakening of existing industrial relations institutions, a less prominent role played by social dialogue in designing reforms, including those concerning employment, a more hierarchical decision-making style and a recentralisation of the main decisions (Zoppoli 2009a; Carrieri and Treu 2013; Mattei and Soli 2016). Reforms have redrawn 'the boundaries between unilateralism and forms of joint regulation' in favour of unilateral regulation (Bordogna 2013: 523). These tendencies have also been made possible thanks to the support of a fierce anti-public sector workers and anti-unionism rhetoric (Zoppoli 2009b; Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Gentile 2016; Braga 2017), cultivated by many policy-makers, opinion-makers, scholars and academics.

This chapter aims to contribute to this scientific and socio-political debate by analysing in greater depth the changes to public sector employment and industrial relations over the last fifteen years and above all since the 2008 financial crisis. Specifically, it focuses on the strategies that social partners, in particular trade unions, have followed in this time period, the specific initiatives they have implemented, their outcomes and developments and factors that have influenced them. With some important exceptions, these issues are scarcely discussed in the Italian debate. The main questions we will try to answer here concern: the effects that reforms and austerity policies have had on the number and quality of jobs and the role of industrial relations actors, in particular trade unions, in shaping the public sector. In other words, with regards to the second question, the analysis will examine thoroughly how and with what results unions have

influenced the design and/or the implementation of reforms and austerity policies and what role collective bargaining and social dialogue have played.

The analysis we will present here is based on the findings of the BARSOP project, which adopted a subsector perspective and has focused on three specific subsectors: primary education, hospitals and municipalities. In the majority of EU countries, these sectors encompass a substantial part of the public sector as a whole, in terms of employment. In Italy, they employ almost 40% of all public workers. Therefore, our analysis is based on the findings of three case studies regarding these parts/functions of the Italian public sector. To carry out case studies we have adopted a multi-method approach; we have drawn on other researchers' publications and reports, statistics from different sources, legislation, collective agreements, official documents, web/social network pages, newsletters and press releases from the social partners in the three public subsectors. As regards statistics, legislation, collective agreements and other official documents, we concentrated on the period from 2000 onwards. In addition, 31 interviews were conducted between April 2016 and March 2017, with experts, trade unions and employers' representatives (mainly at the national level). They involved above all the social partners of the public subsectors, but also representatives of offices and departments of trade union confederations. Interviewees were identified because of their formal representational role and/or particular expertise in the sector. Specifically, we conducted 9 interviews in primary education, 11 in hospitals and 9 in municipalities (see appendix 1); in addition, two other interviews involved experts on the public sector as a whole.

We shall now go on to present an overview of the main developments of the Italian public sector, also in terms of expenditure and levels of employment, and of the characteristics of the social partners, with particular reference to the selected subsectors. Thereafter, for each subsector, we shall examine the most important policies affecting employment and the strategies and initiatives of the actors in industrial relations, above all trade unions, aimed at influencing their design and/or implementation. In this respect, we provide a number of illustrative examples. The final section will present a set of conclusions.

2. The public sector – an overview

Public sector employment relations were profoundly redesigned in the early 1990s. The 1992-1993 reforms (law 421/1992 and legislative decree 29/1993 and the subsequent amendments) abolished the public legal status of the large majority of employees,¹ assigning to collective bargaining a key role in the regulation of employment terms and conditions. The initiative, called the 'first privatisation', marked the superseding of the 'sovereign employer model' (Dell'Aringa and Della Rocca 2007; Bordogna 2016). This process was strengthened by the 1997-1998 wave of reforms, called the

1. The main exceptions were the armed forces and police; other minor groups excluded from privatisation were teaching staff in universities, top-level state managers (until 1998), judiciary, prison, diplomatic and prefecture personnel.

'second privatisation' (Zoppoli 2003; Carinci 2004), again inspired by NPM ideas. It extended the 'contractualisation' to top-level state managers, enlarged the role of collective negotiations, especially at the decentralised level, relaxing centralised controls (Bordogna and Neri 2011; Ongaro 2011). Trade unions were key and proactive actors in the privatisation process (Braga 2017); they saw the chance to improve work organisation, job quality, along with the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration. However, as several studies highlight, the redesigning process caused unexpected and 'perverse' consequences, with wage drift at the decentralised level higher than in the private sector (Dell'Aringa and Della Rocca 2007; Dell'Aringa 2007) and 'encroachment on managerial prerogatives on work organisation and HRM issues by trade unions and workplace representatives' (Bordogna 2016: 92).

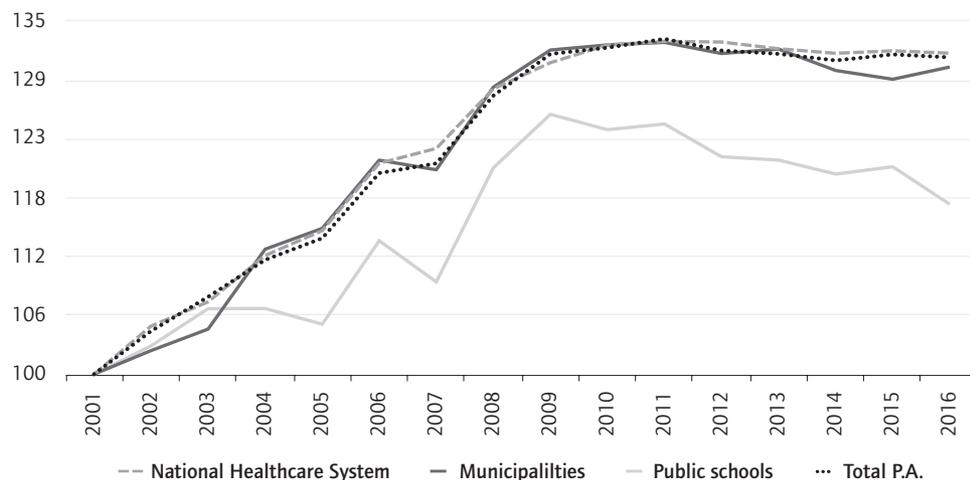
In 2009, the centre-right government intervened again in the regulatory framework of public sector employment relations, mainly with the so-called Brunetta Reform (from the name of the then Minister of Public Administration). NPM ideas provided most of the inspiration for this initiative as well; however, it was also shaped by an anti-public employees and anti-union rhetoric (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Braga 2017), which argues unions are adverse to any changes, constituting an obstacle to innovation of the public administration, and that they defend the interest of privileged groups of workers. The reform reduced the scope of collective bargaining, embedding it within stricter legal rules and constraints and re-juridifying employment relations to some extent, and re-establishing significant differences between the public and private sectors (Bordogna 2016; 2017; Gasparrini and Mastrogiuseppe 2017). It reduced the number of negotiable issues, especially at a decentralised level (for instance, many organisational and HRM issues) and it strengthened the control of the central government and the Court of Accounts over negotiations procedures and outcomes. In addition, the Brunetta Reform introduced more severe controls on absenteeism (notably higher than in the private sector), including economic penalisation in case of sick leave, and cut paid leave for union activities.

The Brunetta Reform worked in tandem with government responses to the economic crisis, largely based on austerity measures. As mentioned above, public sector (employment) has been one of the main targets of these initiatives. We can distinguish: 1) measures targeting wages and 2) measures aimed at reducing employment levels. The former addressed the main factors influencing pay levels: national negotiations were embedded within stricter constraints, in particular with regard to wage increases. Then, with the May 2010 decree, national bargaining machinery was frozen for all public subsectors. Subsequent legislative interventions extended this freeze for several years. However, in 2015 the Constitutional Court declared further extensions to be unconstitutional.² Decentralised negotiations, even if not blocked, were subjected to stricter constraints and controls, de facto weakening them greatly (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Bordogna 2016). Government initiatives limited the possibility of wage increases, with the partial exception of the variable components linked to individual merit or performance. Furthermore, they stopped the increases

2. On 30th November 2016 the government and trade unions signed an agreement in which they promised to re-establish collective bargaining. In Autumn 2017 they began to renew sectoral collective agreements.

linked to seniority and career progression and reduced allowances and benefits, for instance the end-of-service allowance. As shown by figure 1, since 2010 the dynamics of the average wage for public employees was zero or negative (data are aggregated per macro-function), considerably below that of the private sector and trailing behind price increases (ARAN 2016; De Novellis and Signorini 2017).

Figure 1 Variations in annual average wage, 2001-2016 (2001 = 100)



Source: Authors' calculations from data provided by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, State General Accounting Department.

As mentioned above, other measures approved as a response to the economic crisis aimed at reducing employment levels. Among these, we can include the restrictions on replacement of permanent workers, limiting it to 10% of employees retired in the previous year (20% in 2010 and 2011; 50% in the following years) and the reduction of the expenditure for temporary contracts. In addition, cuts to financial transfers from central government to decentralised institutions also strongly affected employment levels (particularly in the case of regional and local authorities). Finally, it is necessary to consider pension reform. The standard retirement age for all employees (public and private) was linked to changes in life expectancy, with an initial adjustment in 2013, rising to at least 67 by January 2021. The value of pensions was reduced by lowering the protection from inflation and by shifting all employees from an earnings-related to a contributions-based system.

As several scholars argue, the reforms and policies of the late 2000s restored unilateralism: the government reaffirmed its power to make unilateral decisions over employment terms and conditions (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Bordogna 2016). Such reforms resulted in cutting the public sector pay bill, but – as we will discuss below – they strongly affected employment levels and relations and deteriorated many dimensions of the quality of work. Considering this impact, the trade union response was often quite weak and moderate. In this regard, it is necessary to also consider the divisions among Italy's major confederations. CGIL strongly opposed the government initiatives, while the other unions, CISL and UIL, took a more conciliatory attitude.

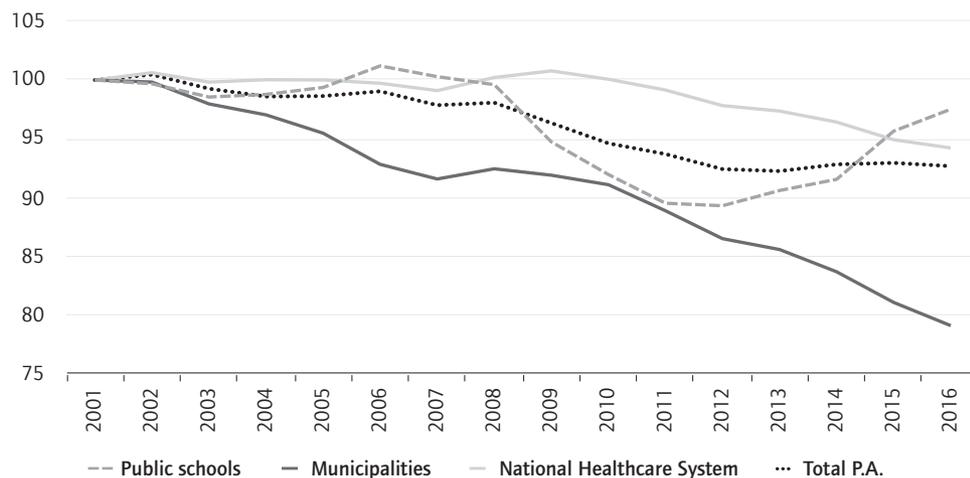
This contributed to reducing their capacity either to ‘threaten’ or ‘seduce’ policy-makers (Culpepper and Regan 2014).

In more recent years, the centre-left government approved another reform, the so-called Madia Reform, from the name of the Minister of Public Administration. It comprises a group of measures approved in 2014, immediately effective, and a larger set of principles approved in 2015, to be implemented through decrees and other government interventions. Amongst other things, the reform includes measures aimed at progressively relaxing turnover cuts over the 2014–2018 period, to facilitate compulsory and voluntary mobility of personnel from one office, territory, or area of administration to another, to cut the amount of working time off and paid leave for union activities (already reduced by the Brunetta Reform).

According to EUROSTAT data, the total public expenditure in 2016 amounted to about €830 billion; it increased after the economic crisis both in absolute terms and as a percentage of GDP (from 46.8% in 2008 to 49.4% in 2016 with higher figures in the period 2012–14). However, if we disaggregate the data by subsectors, only social protection expenditure has increased in a significant way (because of the measures taken to mitigate the effects of the recession). Public expenditure for hospitals has decreased in absolute and relative terms (3.5% of GDP in 2008, 3% in 2016); a similar dynamic has also affected education and in particular pre-primary and primary education (1.6% of GDP in 2008, 1.5% in 2016). Such decreases were produced to a substantial extent by a reduction in the public sector workers’ payroll.

In late 2016, Italian public administrations employed more than 3.25 million people with permanent contracts and 108 900 with non-standard contracts (fixed-term contract, temporary agency work, trainee contract, ‘socially useful work’). Part-timers represented about 5%. Overall, public employees amounted to 15% of the total labour force and 5.5% of the total population, below the level registered in many EU countries (Bordogna and Bach 2016). Public employees are concentrated in three subsectors, which together comprise a little less than the 70% of permanent public employees: schools (34.1%), the National Healthcare System (NHS) (20%) and regional and local authorities (11%). Permanent employees have progressively declined over the 2000s (-5.5% from 2008 to 2016). Public schools experienced a strong drop in employment levels after the crisis, and then more recently (from 2013) there has been a reversal of that trend, mainly due to pressures from the EU Court of Justice, which ruled against Italy for the (ab)use of temporary contracts. Municipalities have had – and continue to have – a very negative trend (-14.4% from 2008 to 2016), while the NHS lost about 6% of stable positions. The decline has been even stronger, in relative terms, in the case of workers with non-standard forms of employment (-23.4% from 2008 to 2016 across the whole public sector), especially in municipalities (-38.2%).

Figure 2 Variations in permanent employees, 2001-2016 (2001 = 100)



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, State General Accounting Department.

2.1 Representation of workers and employers in the public sectors

Before proceeding with our analysis of the dynamics of the three selected subsectors (primary education, hospitals, municipalities), it is important to highlight some features of the industrial relations system in the Italian public sector. Here union density has always been higher than in the private sectors, around 50% (Visser 2016) and public sector members remain the stronghold of the trade union movement (Carrieri 2011; Bordogna and Pedersini 2013b; Pedersini 2014; Carrieri and Feltrin 2016). However, along with the significantly high union density, Italy's public sector features a great organisational fragmentation due to the presence, as we will discuss below, of 'independent' craft and occupational unions. Finally, the public sector is characterised by the near universal coverage of the workplace-based representational institution, the so-called RSU (Rappresentanza Sindacale Unitaria). This is made up of a variable number of delegates elected by the entire workforce; unions nominate the candidates. RSUs were introduced in the public sector in 1994, with a trilateral agreement, taking inspiration from the model of workplace representation in private companies (see also Focillo 2014), and were partly reformed in 1997.

With regard to the unions' counterpart, i.e. employers, the 1993 Reform established ARAN (Agenzia per la Rappresentanza Negoziabile delle Pubbliche Amministrazioni) for the compulsory and monopolistic representation of all public sector branches in national-level negotiations. The aim was to 'depoliticise' the collective bargaining process and to increase its autonomy and transparency (Bordogna 2016), remedying the intrusion of political parties into the public sector employment relations arena widely experienced in the 1980s. ARAN negotiates with trade unions, following the guidelines of the *Comitati di Settore* (collegial bodies constituted to represent

homogeneous categories of the public sector).³ As in the private sector, collective bargaining takes place at two levels: in addition to national negotiations with ARAN, there are negotiations at the decentralised level, i.e. at the organisational level. As already mentioned, collective bargaining is the main source of labour regulation, even if in recent years its role and scope has been weakened.

The process of collective bargaining has often been preceded by dialogue and negotiations between trade unions and the government regarding general strategies about the delivery and organisation of public services and the extent of financial resources for the various subsectors. These include resources for the renewal of collective agreements (then allocated by the government in the budget). Trade unions try to influence government choices. Most unionists consider this moment to be the most important and even the most effective negotiation phase in the public sector. However, dialogue and negotiations were weakened in the 2000s, and the few agreements (on financial resources for the renewal of collective agreements) have been often signed in the run-up to elections with the aim of increasing consensus (Carrieri and Ricciardi 2006).

A particular feature of the public sector is the regulation of union representativeness and of their entitlement to participate in collective bargaining and sign agreements with general validity (Cella and Treu 2009). The measurement of union representativeness is based on two criteria: the percentage of members in relation to total union membership in the sector and the percentage of votes out of the total number of votes cast in the election for the employees' representation bodies. According to legislation, workers' organisations admitted to negotiations are those which reach a threshold of at least a 5% average between the percentage of their members and the percentage of votes in the RSU election.

Over the past 15 years, union density has remained stable or has decreased slightly and, in the case of schools, it has even increased (table 1). Unfortunately, data provided by ARAN are aggregated by macro-function; however, according to union calculations, the dynamics in the considered subsectors are quite similar. The growth in union members (both in absolute and relative terms) in schools has been driven by two main factors: on the one hand, the capacity of the main sectoral organisations to readjust and innovate in terms of approaches and practices; on the other hand, the increasing perception of insecurity and uncertainty by workers as regards labour protection and conditions (Carrieri and Feltrin 2016). Participation in RSU elections has been stable almost everywhere. A limited increase, in relative terms, was registered in regional and local authorities, mainly because of the changes in the composition of the workforce, with the reduction of temporary workers, who usually participate less.

3. The government nominates the members of the sectoral committees; they always include representatives of the government, more often the Minister of Public Administration and the Minister of the specific sub-sector involved.

Table 1 Union density and participation in RSU election (%)

Sectors	Union density			Participation in RSU election		
	2007	2012	2015	2007	2012	2015
Schools	47.6	54.4	56.1	78.1	77.2	79.5
National Healthcare System	52.9	51.6	52.8	69.3	68.7	68.2
Regional and local authorities	48.3	42.2	42.9	78.6	83.1	84.2

Source: Authors' calculations based on ARAN data.

As mentioned above, across most of the public sector, including the primary education, hospitals and municipalities subsectors, unionism is characterised by a great organisational fragmentation, considerably higher than in the private sector (Bordogna 2013; Carrieri and Feltrin 2016). The phenomenon, which intensified in the mid-1980s, is due to the presence of craft and professional/occupational unions (not affiliated with the largest confederations) (Bordogna 1989; Cella 1991; Carrieri and Tatarelli 1997). These organisations frequently adopt a 'specific interest' logic of action and representation and tend to represent in a radical way the interests of their often small membership and to foment disruptive disputes. They are more widespread among workers with elevated qualifications and among the professional strata. These public employees (such as teachers and doctors) have traditionally been less keen to accept being represented by the major union confederations which also protect the rest of the workforce. However, some scholars have indicated a tendency among 'independent' unions to merge and to become more encompassing; a tendency driven also by changes to the regulation of union representativeness in the public sector (Carrieri and Feltrin 2016). It is worth noting that between 80 and 100 organisations have participated in the last three RSU elections in the school sector and ARAN records at least 700 different organisations in public hospitals and healthcare structures. As shown in table 2, from 2007 to 2015 the distribution of members and RSU votes between unions has shifted somewhat: the sectoral federations of Italy's major confederations recorded some decreases to the benefit of minor organisations; federations affiliated to UIL are an exception.

Table 2 Distribution of union members and RSU votes among the main workers' organisations (%)

Unions	Members			RSU votes		
	2007	2012	2015	2007	2012	2015
	Schools					
FLC CGIL	23.2	23.4	23.3	30.9	33.1	30.3
CISL SCUOLA	29.2	28.2	25.4	24.6	24.7	22.6
CONFSAL SNALS	20.6	18.2	16.5	16.9	14.9	13.0
UIL SCUOLA	12.2	13.2	14.2	14.3	15.4	16.2
GILDA UNAMS	8.0	9.1	9.5	6.4	6.3	7.7
Others	6.9	7.9	11.2	6.9	5.6	10.1
	National Healthcare System					
FP CGIL	28.8	26.6	24.5	28.6	28.8	26.1
FP CISL	28.4	25.7	24.0	27.6	25.4	25.0
FPL UIL	16.8	16.8	17.7	18.7	18.0	18.3
FIALS	7.9	9.5	9.5	7.9	9.0	10.3
FSI	5.3	5.3	5.9	5.3	5.2	6.0
NURSIND		5.3	7.2		4.8	5.8
NURSIND UP			7.0			4.6
Others	13.0	10.8	4.3	11.9	8.8	4.0
	Regional and local authorities					
FP CGIL	35.6	36.5	35.4	35.3	37.8	36.2
FP CISL	28.6	28.4	27.0	29.9	28.8	27.9
FPL UIL	16.2	16.3	16.8	17.6	17.3	17.9
CSA	1.2	6.1	7.2	5.5	5.3	6.5
Others	18.5	12.7	13.7	11.8	10.8	11.5

Source: Authors' calculations based on ARAN data.

3. Primary education

At an aggregate level, public schools employ more than one million people. According to ISTAT data, public primary educational institutions employ about a third of this workforce, including teachers on one-year contracts. School employees are distributed across 15 482 schools, attended by more than 2.6 million students. The large majority of employees in the sector are teachers (80.3% in primary education) (ISTAT 2017). Then we find administrative, technical and auxiliary staff; managers, i.e. school principals, number almost 7 400. About 3% of the whole workforce works part-time (the large majority are women). Women account for almost 80% of all employees. This feminisation extends to all occupational profiles, including school principals (64% of which are women).

The Italian school system has traditionally been quite centralised. Reforms in the 1990s have given some autonomy to schools, however a hierarchical and centralised structure still persists (Ballarino 2015; Pavolini 2015a). Schools are allowed to design their own curricula and study programmes, but they have limited financial autonomy.

Staff are directly paid by the Ministry of Education, which also finances operational goods and services, along with programmes and tools to support children with disabilities and special needs, while the municipalities finance teaching and classroom equipment, construction, renovation and major repairs, sport facilities, textbooks and ancillary services (meals, transportation), also using resources transferred by regional governments, the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Interior (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014).

3.1 The role of industrial relations in shaping the sector

Over the 2000s in Italy, primary education underwent various reforms, promoted and approved by different parliamentary majorities and governments, but with many elements of continuity. The most relevant were the Moratti Reform (law 53/2003) and Gelmini Reform (law 133/2008 and law 169/2008), promoted by centre-right governments. The second strengthened the former, ensuring a wider implementation of its provisions. Both were strongly inspired by New Public Management ideas. They pursued a marketisation of the sector, a significant reduction of the role of the state in the educational system, and the introduction/strengthening of competition between public schools and between them and private schools (Capaldo and Rondarini 2002). In the Gelmini Reform – approved after the onset of the economic crisis – the aim of reducing the role of the state and public expenditure for education became even more dominant. The government tried to bolster it by propagating an anti-school employees rhetoric (including the idea that many teachers were ‘slackers’), presenting the reduction of public spending as a reduction in the waste of taxpayers’ money.

The aforementioned reforms provided for various modifications of primary education, including: the reduction of school hours (from 30 hours per week to 27 or 24) and of full-time classes; the reduction of teaching posts (along with the progressive elimination of the three teachers per class model, introduced in the previous decade and widely used in primary schools); the raising of the maximum class size (up to 30 children); the closure/merger of smaller schools; the reduction of investments in educational experimentation and innovation projects; the reduction of non-teaching staff. In addition, these reforms reinforced the school performance evaluation system and set up the national institute INVALSI (Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Educativo di Istruzione e di Formazione), with the task of periodically measuring the knowledge and skills of children as well as the overall performance of the educational institutions.

Sectoral trade unions opposed these reforms of the centre-right governments, designed with no (or little) dialogue with workers’ organisations. In that period, another central issue in union debate was accountability and the performance evaluations of institutions and employees of the public education system. Italy’s major sectoral organisations accepted these principles, but they fiercely contested the use of performance evaluations to increase the marketisation of the service and the competition between schools (FLC CGIL 2010; 2014a; UIL SCUOLA 2016; CISL SCUOLA 2017). This ‘dangerous degeneration’, as defined by an interviewed trade unionist, intersected with

gradual cuts to public investment in primary education. Moreover, it was implemented without a wide and effective involvement of the main school stakeholders (managers, workers and their organisations, families, etc.) (Barbacci 2016). Increasingly, unions put on the table the issue of service quality, emphasising the risk of a deterioration of the performance of the educational system and an increase of social and territorial inequalities. With regard to this issue, workers' organisations have often found alliances with other actors, such as parents' movements/associations. The opposition to centre-right government reforms involved not only the major sectoral trade unions, but also many independent organisations, representing specific professions/occupations, in particular teachers.

In that period, social partners' relations deteriorated significantly. They became very conflictive, above all at the national level. In this regard it is worth recalling that the above-mentioned reforms intersected with the Brunetta Reform and austerity measures: i.e. with the freezing of sectoral collective bargaining and the weakening of negotiations at a decentralised level. Union strategies and initiatives first of all took the form of pressuring the government (and parliament) for dialogue, and discussion of policies. These initiatives were accompanied by a number of mobilisations, both at the national and local level, often with the participation of civil society organisations, in particular parents' movements/associations. However, in several cases the main unions acted separately, demonstrating barely co-operative (or unco-operative) relationships, as was also confirmed by their official documents (FLC CGIL 2010; CISL SCUOLA 2013). Moreover, they were not able to consolidate alliances with other actors. All this, in the long run, weakened mobilisation.

As a whole, union initiatives had a very limited influence on the design of the public policies, which did not undergo significant changes. However, unions obtained some positive results in influencing their implementation, partially smoothing the effects of some interventions. For instance, they pressured the regional offices of the Ministry of Education and regional and local governments into evidencing the non-sustainability of cuts, reductions of teaching posts, closures of schools, etc. considering the needs of the local population. And some regional offices (for instance in Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont) appealed to the ministry (and the national government) obtaining a partial revision of the spending cuts and/or of the other interventions into the territorial primary school system. However, these were often temporary solutions.

Initiatives at the school level were more significant; here unions targeted the school principal and the board of teachers, often together with parents' movements/associations, so as to discourage the reduction of school hours (and teaching posts). Sometimes community assemblies, media campaigns and other kinds of information-spreading activity accompanied these initiatives. By using such instruments, the unions obtained positive results. For instance, only a small percentage of primary schools opted for shorter school hours (24 hours per week) as promoted by the reforms. According to the findings of a survey carried out some years after the Gelmini Reform (IRVAPP 2013), in 2012 only 0.5% of primary schools adopted shorter hours. Pressured (also) by unions, schools decided to discard this possibility.

In 2015, the centre-left government (with Prime Minister Matteo Renzi) promoted the Buona Scuola Reform (law 107/2015). It had many elements of continuity with the previous reforms, was inspired by similar principles and had similar aims. This reform too was designed without entering into dialogue (or with poor dialogue) with workers' organisations. All the main sectoral unions strongly criticised this decision-making approach, i.e. a reform 'dropped from above', without a wide discussion involving all the main school stakeholders (CISL SCUOLA 2014). Moreover, the unions considered – and continue to consider – it a further step towards the marketisation of the educational system and the increase of competition between schools (FLC CGIL 2017). The evaluation system, strengthened by the reform, appears unable to effectively improve the quality of education. As an interviewee said: 'it consolidates in a creeping but steady manner a precise idea or ideology: the one whereby school must be progressively immersed in a market mechanism, where families-customers choose the best product' (FLC CGIL representative).

At the same time, this reform provides greater autonomy for school principals in managing human, technological and financial resources. With regard to HRM issues, among other things, the government initiative gives the school principal the possibility of directly hiring a teacher for the different kinds of school activities; the school principal enjoys a large degree of freedom to define requirements and criteria for appointment. The government initiative also introduces a merit-based component for teachers' salaries, leaving a large degree of decision-making power to the school principal in this respect as well. All the sectoral unions oppose this reform; so much so that one can say that the reform has certainly had an (unexpected) effect: stronger co-operation among unions. They contest the weakening of social dialogue, enhanced managerial unilateralism and the lack of general rules and criteria defined by law or collective bargaining (CISL SCUOLA 2015; 2016).

Relations between social partners therefore remained very conflictive, above all at the national level. While at a decentralised level, relations were – and continue to be – very heterogeneous, with cases where co-operation continued and cases of harsh conflict. In any case, the increasing managerial unilateralism, and the reduction of the scope of school-level negotiations in a context of stricter constraints and poorer resources, had and continue to have a strong negative impact on social dialogue and collective bargaining. The above-mentioned trends often interrupted good practices which had led to positive results (and some innovations), beneficial for both school workers and users (Carrieri and Ricciardi 2003). In recent years, 'ritualistic' negotiations often prevailed, without producing any significant change. The most negotiated issue at a decentralised level was the distribution of the increasingly limited school funds (ARAN 2015; 2017).

After the Buona Scuola Reform there has been a high and growing level of protest at the national and decentralised level, involving almost all the sectoral unions.⁴ As an

4. According to the findings of a survey commissioned by the sectoral union GILDA (GILDA-SWG 2016), 77% of teachers considered the Buona Scuola Reform to have little or no positive effect on their working conditions; 81% considered it to have little or no positive effect on the quality of education.

example, one of the most relevant (and successful) cases of mobilisation occurred in May 2015, and was organised by the main sectoral unions (FLC CGIL, CISL SCUOLA, UIL SCUOLA, GILDA, SNALS). 65% of public school workers participated in the strike called by the unions. Other protests have also occurred, some organised by the same unions, others only by the smaller organisations. Also worth noting is a certain innovation in union action, with the growing practice of campaigns carried out by an increasing use of new communication tools. An interesting example is the FLC CGIL campaign *Fai la scuola giusta* (Make School Fair), launched in September 2014. It used different communication instruments (a website, blog, an online game, an online survey on union proposals, a YouTube video explaining the reform and union positions), together with flash mobs, demonstrations and information points at the local level. FLC CGIL also promoted an abrogative referendum. However, this initiative failed because the union was unable to collect the required 500 000 signatures (of citizens).⁵

Despite this, unions did not succeed in influencing the design of the reform, nor the other policies of the government regarding the education budget. The government (as the main counterpart) showed a total unwillingness to listen to workers' organisations, their demands, proposals and pressures; it reaffirmed its power to decide (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Bordogna 2016), or in other words its self-sufficiency, repudiating above all the function of industrial relations (Mattei and Soli 2016; Gentile 2016). A positive result (for workers) was the recruitment on a permanent basis of approximately 90 000 teachers, who were employed on short-term contracts. Such a stabilisation addressed a long-standing problem that has always been a key concern of trade unions. However, rather than union pressures, the government initiative was due mainly to the EU Court of Justice ruling, which reprimanded Italy for the prolonged and repeated use of temporary contracts.⁶

Unions have achieved some (limited) results at the school level, for those cases in which they found a counterpart willing to negotiate. For instance, in some schools they and the school principal have agreed on criteria for the distribution of the merit-based component for teachers' salaries or for the recruitment of new teachers. These initiatives have avoided the deterioration of social partners' relations within the schools. As an interviewee says: 'in some schools we have continued practices of good dialogue on various aspects, finding solutions beneficial for everyone' (UIL SCUOLA representative). However, similar experiences are not widespread, have a patchy distribution, despite the investment of unions. Instead, in a number of schools, managerial (school principal) unilateralism has been dominant, producing a growth of litigations, including complaints of anti-union behaviour in the Labour Courts.

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5. According to trade unionists, this was due on the one hand, to the timescale of the initiative, which was too narrow, in a period already saturated with initiatives around the implementation of the reform; on the other hand, it can be seen as a sign of falling participation in protests.
 6. It is worth noting that the procedure for the new recruits (based on an algorithm) produced a number of mistakes and discrepancies, multiplying an 'unnecessary and often illogical territorial mobility of the teachers involved' (UIL SCUOLA representative). This is one of the reasons behind the growing number of litigations and legal recourses.

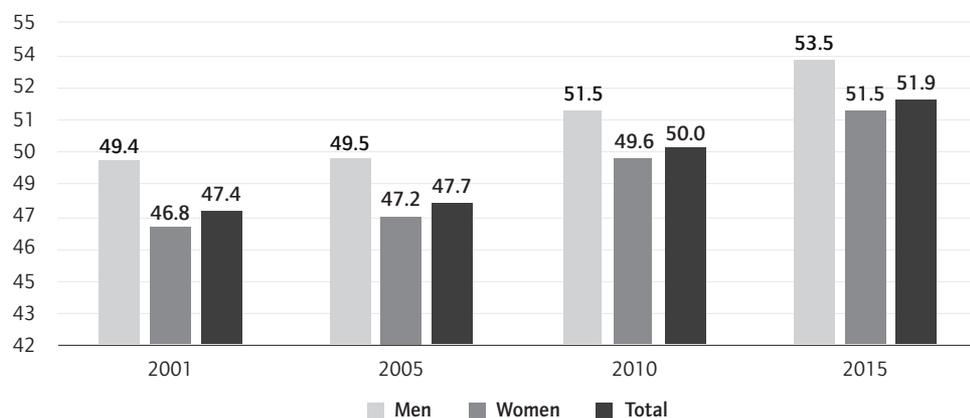
In late 2016, there was a change in national government and the new centre-left government featured a different policy-making approach with more attention to dialogue with workers' organisations, as also recognised by unions (see for instance FLC CGIL 2016). Examples were the agreements on new recruitments and on territorial mobility of public school employees that solved some of the major criticisms of the previous government initiatives, incorporating many union proposals. However, in 2018 the national government changed again.

3.2 Job number and quality dynamics

Our case study findings highlight a progressive decline in the number and quality of jobs in the primary education sector. With regards to the quantity of work, as discussed in the previous pages, in less than a decade, from 2006 to 2014, public schools have lost more than 100 000 jobs. The biggest negative changes were recorded in the years after the Gelmini Reform and the austerity measures. These tendencies affected all the segments of the educational system, but primary education was impacted more intensely. In recent years, the number of jobs has once again been on the rise, because of the stabilisation of teachers with discontinuous employment relations. Nevertheless, our case study findings show that many schools are still in a situation of (sometimes serious) understaffing, with a lack of teachers and – very frequently – auxiliary staff.

A strictly linked tendency is the progressive ageing of school employees. This is a long-term trend, which has been accentuated by the economic crisis and government responses, in particular the restriction of turnover. At an aggregate level, the average age of public school employees has grown from 47.4 years in 2001 to 51.9 years in 2015 (figure 3); in primary education in 2015 it was 49 (ISTAT 2017). According to EUROSTAT data, available only for the period 2013-2015, in primary education the incidence of teachers aged 50 years or over increased from 51.4% to 54.6% of the workforce, while the share of teachers under 40 years of age decreased to 7.9%.

Figure 3 Average age of employees in public schools



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, State General Accounting Department.

With regards to the quality of work, as previously mentioned, one dimension under strong pressure is that of wages. Wages in Italian public education have always been at modest levels, lower than those of many OECD countries. And teachers' salaries are lower than the earnings of other workers with tertiary education (European Commission 2012; OECD 2016). Several surveys carried out in the 2000s recorded the low satisfaction of public school employees, above all primary school teachers, with their salaries (Cavalli and Argentin 2010). A survey carried out on a large sample of Italian workers evidenced the higher dissatisfaction of teachers in comparison with other occupational groups, in relation to three key dimensions: pay, career prospects and recognition of their professional status (Pedaci 2010). The policies of recent years have further deteriorated the economic dimension. In nominal terms, wages remained – and continue to be – frozen, and in some cases have even dropped. This, as previously suggested, is the consequence of the suspension of the national collective bargaining machinery and of the weakening of negotiations at the decentralised level. In real terms wages have declined, falling below (since 2011) the increase of prices (ARAN 2014; 2016; De Novellis and Signorini 2017). According to a FLC CGIL study (2014b), from 2010 to 2014 teachers recorded an average loss of purchasing power of €8 814: €135 per month.

However, other dimensions of the quality of work have also deteriorated – and are still deteriorating – as a consequence of the policies of recent years. One negative trend concerns working hours, in particular for teachers. Case study findings demonstrate a progressive extension of teachers' working hours, due above all to the increase of compulsory non-teaching activities, such as co-ordination and meetings with colleagues, administrative tasks, production of documents, etc. This phenomenon has a significant impact on the time available for actual teaching; as an interviewee says: 'it is detrimental to the quality of teaching in a context demanding more and more attention and innovation for the preparation of lessons and the assessment of children's skills' (SNALS representative).

Together with the extension of working time, case study findings also suggest an increase in workload. Therefore, we can speak about a process of 'work extensification' (Jarvis and Pratt 2006), a phenomenon that requires more in-depth analysis. The increase of work pressure encompasses all the different profiles of primary school employees, from teachers to auxiliary staff. It is due, on the one hand, to frequent situations of understaffing, and on the other hand, to the aforementioned increase in compulsory activities, above all for teachers. The increasing workload is a key concern for trade unions, together with the huge deterioration of the economic dimension. Indeed, avoiding the corrosion of employment terms and conditions has become the main issue of union strategies and initiatives, sometimes – as an interviewee says – 'at the expense of other issues: one cannot talk about assessing schools' performance if teachers' salaries are completely inadequate' (UIL SCUOLA representative).

To an ever greater extent, a key argument of trade unions is the negative impact which the decline of the number and quality of jobs has on service quality. And this issue continues to be paramount in union campaigns, mobilisations, political pressure, etc. The unions insist on the deleterious consequences of understaffing situations,

increases in average class sizes, persistent (and often worsening) lack of hours for students with special needs and growing workloads. Moreover, unions emphasise the low (and decreasing) level of satisfaction with remuneration and recognition that produces demotivation, demoralisation, decline in commitment, attitudinal rigidities and a decreasing attractiveness of public schools as employers. As an interviewee says: 'how to get involvement, commitment, creativity, innovation from teachers with such poor conditions; this should be the most important challenge for education policies' (FLC CGIL representative). Such trends are confirmed by several studies (Cavalli and Argentin 2010; Bertola and Checchi 2010; Abbiati 2014; Gerosa 2014) and comparative analysis (OECD 2016; Mullis *et al.* 2016; 2017). In addition, against this backdrop, it is necessary to consider the growing territorial inequalities as regards the performance of primary education (Barone *et al.* 2017).

4. Hospitals

In Italy there are more than 600 public hospitals, with different kinds of structures. The majority are large organisations with more than 120 beds (68%). The number of employees in hospitals amounts to more than 520 000 employees (around 640 000 employees in the NHS as a whole). About 56% are nurses, a quarter are doctors and the remaining share are assistants, technical and administrative staff. According to Ministry of Health data, workers with temporary contracts amount to 5% of the total workforce.⁷ Part-time work involves 8% of all workers, mostly women, and is usually voluntary. Women represent about 63% of the total workforce, with a steady increase over the past 15 years; such a tendency is no longer limited to nursing professions, but is beginning to affect all professional profiles and areas of specialisation.

The sector is structured according to different levels of responsibility and management. The central level (Ministry of Health) is responsible for national health planning, including general objectives and annual financial resources, monitoring and taking measures to improve the health status of the population. It defines the *Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza* (Essential Levels of Care), which represent the set of services and provisions that the national healthcare system must provide to all citizens (Ministero della Salute 2016), free of charge or with co-payment. Regional governments are responsible for pursuing the national objectives, i.e. guaranteeing essential care levels, also using regional financial resources. They operate through a network of local health agencies and hospitals. Specifically, regions provide care either directly, through their own facilities (directly-managed hospitals and territorial services), or by paying for the services delivered by accredited providers, such as independent public and private structures.

7. However, the incidence of atypical contracts varies in a significant way from one hospital to another (depending on its geographical position, size, specialisations, resources, etc.), and, within the hospital, from one department to another. According to sectoral unions, in some departments the share of workers with non-standard forms of employment (excluding part-time work) has reached and often exceeds 30%.

4.1 The role of industrial relations in shaping the sector

For several years, especially after the economic crisis, within the constraints and under the pressures of the Troika, the public healthcare sector has been one of the main targets of cutback policies, spending reviews, etc. Against this backdrop, several initiatives, approved by different parliamentary coalitions and governments, have promoted a reduction of employment levels, both permanent and temporary. Furthermore, starting from the end of the 1990s, the sector has undergone concomitant processes of decentralisation (specifically regionalisation), corporatisation and – less prominently – marketisation and managerialisation (Neri 2006; 2009; Pavolini 2015b). An important driver of these restructuring processes has been the pressure to reduce public spending. On that matter, it is worth noting that Italy's national health expenditure has always been lower than in the major OECD countries (Longo *et al.* 2013; OECD 2015). The outcomes of these processes in terms of efficiency have been ambiguous (Vicarelli 2005; Maino and Neri 2006; Maino 2009).

Since the mid-2000s, governments have set up different tools to promote an increase of efficiency in the hospital sector (and in the NHS as a whole) and to tackle budget problems, in some regions in particular. One of the most important of these tools is a solvency scheme, the so-called *Piano di Rientro* (Recovery Plan). Its main targets were/are regions that have accumulated financial deficits for healthcare. It is an agreement between the central government and a regional government. The former undertakes to cover part of the regional debt in exchange for a sustainable plan, proposed by the regional government, aimed at reorganising the territorial healthcare system.⁸ Recovery plans frequently include cuts in hospitalisation rates, freezing the hiring of new staff, stricter controls on expenditure, a series of automatic increases in the regional taxation system, as well as new or more expensive forms of citizens' co-payment for healthcare services and provisions (Pavolini and Vicarelli 2012; Pavolini 2015b).

After that, law 68/2011 introduced the *Costo Standard* (Standard Cost). This tool is based on the idea that the financing of the regional healthcare systems has to be defined by using a benchmark mechanism. A group of 'virtuous' regions, with no deficit and good quality healthcare system, are taken as the reference point for defining the amount of resources for the other regions. In addition, law 149/2011 has introduced measures aimed at improving the accountability of local governments by using a mix of incentives and sanctions. Among the incentives there are additional financing for regions able to keep their healthcare expenditure equal to or below the national average. Sanctions are directed above all at managers.⁹ After the onset of the economic crisis, governments have increasingly intervened, firstly stopping the hiring of new staff and reducing employment levels, and, on the other hand, increasing revenues through a more extensive use of co-payment (by citizens) for pharmaceutical goods and healthcare services.

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8. At the end of 2016 eight of the twenty one Italian regions were under this imposed solvency scheme, including almost all the Southern regions.
 9. For instance, the law establishes that local health structure managers have to be removed if their organisation does not comply with the recovery plan or continues to run up large deficits.

Most of these initiatives were designed without dialogue (or with inadequate dialogue) with workers' organisations. Sectoral trade unions have opposed government policies, because, in their opinion, they produce an 'illogical disinvestment' in the hospital sector. As an interviewed trade unionist says: 'government policies have not considered the real and specific situation of the different territories, hospitals, services, provisions' (FPL UIL representative). Unions have always emphasised that the hospital sector suffers from dramatic deficits of (financial and human) resources and many structures have difficulties in ensuring a sufficient (or even essential) level of services. They have fiercely contested the 'indiscriminate cuts', or 'linear cuts', regardless of the specific characteristics and needs of hospitals. In that period, social partners' relations deteriorated, becoming very conflictive, at the national level as well as in several regions and organisations. Union pressure and lobbying initiatives towards government, parliament and political parties, have been accompanied by different kinds of mobilisation and media campaigns. The former have been frequently agreed and participated in by all sectoral unions, including those of a professional/occupational nature. They have taken different forms, such as strikes, marches, sit-downs, blockades, occupations, with a lot of exposure and a great deal of attention from the mass media. However, as a whole, these initiatives have obtained rather limited results in changing national policies on available budget, financing, etc.

During these years a central concern of the trade unions has been – and continues to be – together with the reduction of the number of jobs, the increasing job insecurity of the large number of hospital workers with non-standard forms of employment (Pedaci 2015). A positive result was obtained in 2006-2007, when the centre-left government made an agreement with the major trade unions to stabilise a segment of the fixed-term workers (those with at least 3 years seniority out of the last five) and a partial re-regulation of the use of atypical contracts aimed at limiting their abuse. These initiatives were scrapped by the subsequent centre-right government and the stabilisation process was interrupted.

Unions have disseminated, through different kinds of campaigns, a discourse on the importance of the quality of work in hospitals, insisting on the link between 'good work' and 'good service quality' (which amounts to citizens' right to health). One of the most recent and relevant examples is the campaign promoted by FP CGIL in 2014, *Salviamo la salute* (Save Health), which lasted until 2016. This initiative encompassed most of the Italian regions, with conferences, information points, events, etc.; its main argument was (investment in) 'welfare as a strategic choice for economic and social recovery'; it claimed the need to give up austerity policies and public expenditure cutbacks, to promote new investments in the healthcare system, new employment and improvements to working conditions. Other examples are the recently launched campaigns *La salute non è in vendita* (Health is Not for Sale) and *Una sanità pubblica forte, di qualità, per tutti* (A Strong and Quality Public Healthcare for All), with the involvement of all the major sectoral unions and a number of civil society organisations. The latter initiative led to participation in the European campaign *#health4all*. The main arguments were once again: austerity policies are destroying public healthcare, i.e. a crucial welfare state provision, increasing inequalities and vulnerability.

Sectoral trade unions have achieved some (positive) results in influencing the implementation of reforms at a decentralised level, above all at the regional level. Lack of financial resources and budget constraints greatly limited the scope of collective bargaining at an organisational level; only in a few cases did unions succeed in negotiating measures which safeguard or improve employment terms and conditions. Meanwhile negotiations at the regional level have become more and more important as a consequence of the decentralisation process, as evidenced by many studies (Carrieri 2009; Alessi 2009; Galetto *et al.* 2012; Pavolini and Vicarelli 2012). Regional governments are responsible for the healthcare system, i.e. for its functioning, but also in terms of number of public/private providers and employment levels, and are an important source of funding; for these reasons unions increasingly considered them as important ‘counterparts’. However, there are varied approaches and outcomes of negotiations at the regional level, depending on the economic performance of the region. As highlighted by other studies, sometimes these negotiations have become substitutes for the organisational ones, on other occasions they have entailed an occasional and on-demand shift from two-tier to three-tier bargaining arrangements (Galetto 2017). In several cases social partners have agreed to the revision of budget cuts or even additional funding, stabilisation of temporary workers (for instance in Marche region), increases in average salaries or incentives for overtime and unsocial hours/shifts and the experimentations of new models of work organisation (for instance in Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia). Successful experiences in the regions under recovery plans have been rather limited; here protests (not only of the major sectoral unions) are growing (see CGIL 2017).

4.2 Job number and quality dynamics

Over the previous pages, we have already discussed the descending trends of employment levels in the hospital sector in recent years. According to OECD data, doctor density per 1 000 population decreased from 6.9 in 2011 to 6.8 in 2016; this reduction was greater in the case of nurse density per 1 000 population, which dropped from 6.5 to 6.1, far lower than the values of other EU countries and the OECD average. Together with the negative trend affecting the quantity of jobs, our case study highlights a worsening of several dimensions of the quality of work, first of all wages, albeit with variations across professional groups. Government initiatives aimed at freezing wages and controlling – de facto blocking – wage increases (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a) have negatively affected pay levels. This is a critical issue, in particular among nurses and assistants with non-medical duties. Surveys conducted with large samples of workers confirm this evidence. Their findings show that a large percentage of hospital employees, above all nurses and assistants, were dissatisfied with their wages: about one worker in two complained that their wage was not sufficient to maintain themselves and their family members (Carrieri *et al.* 2005; Carrieri and Damiano 2010).

Moreover, in recent years there has been a general trend towards an extension of working time, in particular through overtime, an intensification of work through a saturation of time, and a speeding up of the work process. According to trade unions, these tendencies affect nurses above all, but also a number of doctors. One of the main

drivers is widespread understaffing. The blocking of staff turnover and the consequent lack of personnel ‘imposes’ huge dependency on overtime, in particular in hospitals situated in regions under recovery plans, i.e. most of Southern Italy. Another major driver is internal reorganisations, such as the reduction of the average duration of hospitalisation, which requires carrying out visits, examinations, etc. in less time. In addition, it must be considered that Italian regulations on working time deprives doctors and nurses of their right to a limit on weekly working hours and to minimum daily rest periods. Several qualitative studies and quantitative surveys confirm the progressive extension of working time and increasing workloads (Gagliardi and Accorinti 2014; Carrieri and Damiano 2010). A recent national survey of more than 4 300 nurses, commissioned by NURSIND (the most important Italian nurses’ organisation), carried out in 2012, shows that 80% of nurses complained of high and increasing work intensity and 89% of worsening working time arrangements (NURSIND-CERGAS 2013).¹⁰

Increased work intensity in hospitals is a central concern of the trade unions and is an important issue as regards their recent initiatives. They emphasise not only the deterioration of the quality of work and workers’ well-being, with a dangerous growth of work-related stress, but also the increasing risk of service deterioration (see for instance FP CGIL 2015). With regard to the issue of workloads, sectoral trade unions promoted a number of campaigns with the aim of denouncing the situation. An important result – also the upshot of union pressure – was the decision of the European Commission to refer Italy to the EU Court of Justice for failing to correctly apply the Working Time Directive to hospital workers. An interesting example of campaigns around this issue was that launched in 2015, *Giusto orario per medici e infermieri* (Right Working Hours for Doctors and Nurses). Along with a wide dissemination of information on the problem, in order to raise public awareness, the campaign provided various services for hospital workers, including free legal support.

As mentioned above, an increasingly key issue in union activity is the negative effect of the deterioration of quantity and quality of employment on the performance of hospitals, i.e. on service levels. Among other problems, they insist on the persisting urgency of long waiting periods that represent an obstacle to accessing medical care. Moreover, unions also emphasise the problem of increasing territorial variations/disparities in terms of healthcare provisions and of the dramatic polarisation between regions with sufficient or good levels and regions – particularly those of Southern Italy – with insufficient levels: a tendency which has been evidenced by several national and international studies (Pavolini 2011; OECD 2014; 2015; ONSRI 2017). In this regard, as already discussed, our case study findings show growing attempts by the unions to build alliances with other actors around the issues of healthcare. A number of demonstrations, campaigns, informational activities, etc. have been organised at the national level and at regional and local levels.

10. Some interviewed trade unionists insist on the growing number of situations of non-compliance with the legislation on working time, in particular with law 161/2014, which, in line with European directives, defines shifts in the healthcare system. It establishes 11 hours of rest between one working day and the next, with at least 24 hours of rest every 7 working days.

5. Municipalities

Italian municipalities number 7 882: about 45% have less than 5 000 inhabitants and their population amounts to 16% of that of the country as a whole; only 0.5% of municipalities have over 100 000 inhabitants, but their population amounts to 23.6% of the country as a whole. In 2016, municipalities employed 393 093 workers; about 4 000 were public managers. Permanent workers numbered 357 579, while workers with fixed-term contracts or other forms of non-standard employment amounted to 35 514. 88.6% of municipal employees worked full-time; among part-timers, only a small percentage (2.9% of the total workforce) were marginal part-time, on less than half the average working week. 53% were women, who more frequently than men had non-standard and/or part-time positions. Unfortunately, these statistics do not include an important group of non-permanent workers, those with contracts for continuous and co-ordinated collaboration (the so-called *co.co.co*), widely used by local authorities, even if there are no precise estimates on their scope (Carrieri and Ricciardi 2006; Bordogna and Neri 2011). Such contracts are considered hybrid work arrangements between autonomous and dependent employment.

Our analysis focuses on municipalities as a totality, even if they are complex organisations providing very different kinds of services. The main reason is that most recent transformation processes and most reforms (including budget cuts) have affected municipalities in terms of general organisation, involving all employees, with similar pressures and effects on their working conditions. And the responses of the trade unions have been (implemented) at the municipal level, i.e. for municipal workers as a whole.

5.1 The role of industrial relations in shaping the sector

As well as in other public subsectors, over the last two decades, municipalities have been touched by several NPM-inspired reforms. As discussed above, attitudes and positions (of social partners, scholars, experts, etc.) towards these reforms varied, as they did not always produce the expected outcomes (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Della Rocca and Dell'Aringa 2017). Regardless, it is important to highlight that during the 1990s, in the municipalities sector, there was a more optimistic view towards NPM-inspired reforms, among social partners as well as among scholars. In that wave of reforms, defined 'first privatisation', trade unions were key and proactive actors with regard to both labour regulation and reorganisation of municipal services. Such a consensual context was favoured not only by the relevant power resources of the sectoral unions, but also by unions' commitment to innovating public administration (Matteini 2013; Carrieri and Treu 2013) and the fact that the major federations thought they would be able to negotiate with the New Public Management ideas. As a trade unionist admits: 'at that time we were strong protagonists, we thought that was the horizon and we had to bet on it' (FP CGIL representative).

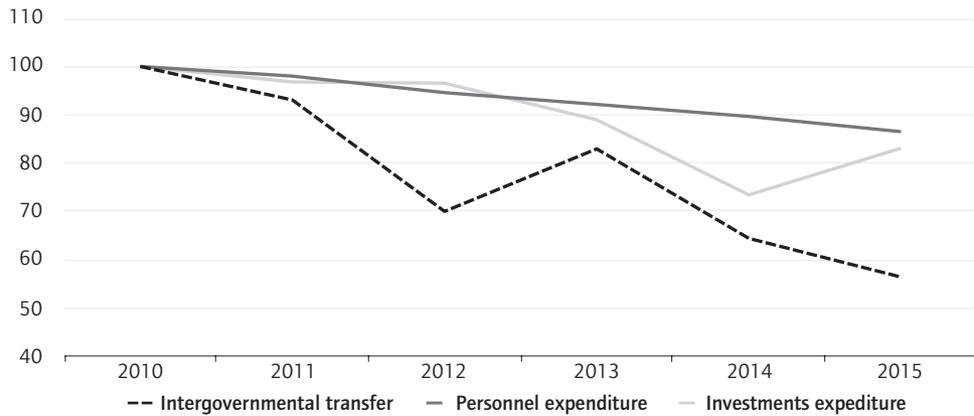
Over the following decades, it was possible to identify two different trajectories of reforms and social partners' involvement and positions. The first, characterised by

increasing constraints on public expenditure, began around 1997-1998 and ended in 2006-2007; the second developed between the financial crisis and the austerity measures approved by the government (Bordogna and Neri 2014; Neri 2017). In the first period, despite some tensions and conflicts at the national level, the relations between social partners were quite co-operative. Moreover, unions affiliated to Italy's major confederations had a high level of co-ordination. To reduce the negative effects of the decrease of financial transfers by the central government, unions accepted and agreed to a rationalisation of municipal work organisation. Specifically, in most local structures longer working hours and functional flexibility were implemented. In addition, municipalities increasingly outsourced a wide range of services (from street maintenance, waste collection, cleaning and catering to core services, such as social care, and residential home services). Such a strategy was strongly supported by central governments, which proactively intervened to incentivise contracting out of services to external providers as a tool to reduce public spending (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2005; Gori *et al.* 2014; Mori 2015). However, outsourcing was – and continues to be – a key tendency and debate; even more in recent years, dominated by austerity measures that significantly hit local government budgets. Only relatively few municipal employees have been transferred to private enterprises, i.e. to private providers. But contracting out has created a large segment of outsourced workers with worse employment terms and conditions and protections, including collective bargaining coverage, and it has also increased inequalities between workers performing the same activities (Pedaci and Di Federico 2016; Dorigatti 2017; Mori 2017; Neri 2017).

The second period began after the onset of the financial crisis and the national government approved austerity policies. The latter, intended to reduce public debt, decreased still further financial transfers by the central government, limited the power of municipalities to increase taxes, and introduced tighter constraints on personnel expenditure, turnover and recruitment (Bordogna and Neri 2014; Ambrosanio *et al.* 2016). Figure 4 describes how these measures affected personnel expenditure and investments. Indeed, local authorities could only partially compensate for meagre transfers from the state by using tax collection, although this has greatly increased over the last decade (IFEL 2016; Neri 2017). Furthermore, austerity policies have negatively affected not only municipal spending, employment levels and service provisions (see below), but also industrial relations. In this period, trade unions suffered from a decrease in opportunities for dialogue and negotiations at the national and decentralised level. As an interviewee explains: 'the financial crisis and the austerity measures represented the turning point; since then, collective bargaining has not been so relevant' (FP CISL representative).

Against this backdrop, the major unions pressured the national government to discuss policies, in particular austerity measures, but with few results. Sectoral unions partially succeed in influencing the implementation of national policies by using initiatives at a local level, often in alliance with other actors, such as political parties and/or movements. However, as mentioned, social dialogue and negotiations at a decentralised level have been weakened by cuts to financial resources. As a result, co-operative solutions have become less frequent. As an interviewee argues: 'To find solutions in terms of new forms of organisation, you need adequate resources, for upgrading skills and

Figure 4 Municipal revenues and spending, 2010-2015 (€ millions)



Source: Authors' calculations based on IFEL data.

recruitment. These pre-conditions were not there' (FP CISL representative). Obviously, a lot has also been due to the behaviour of the counterpart (the local government), its choices, policy-making approach and orientation towards labour and industrial relations. In some regions, such as Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Veneto, social partners have had positive experiences. They have set up negotiation tables that have made it possible, for instance, to agree on a redistribution of employees among regional authorities and municipalities, so as to address the problem of understaffing in many public administrations. In other words, our case study findings show that in several instances co-operative initiatives at a decentralised level, with a pragmatic approach, have reduced the negative impact of austerity measures on both jobs and the range and quality of services provided by municipalities. Finally, even if not strictly related to public employees, it is worth noting that an increasingly key target of the unions has been public procurement, so as to improve the terms and conditions of outsourced workers. Unions have also addressed municipalities, demanding changes to procurement rules (for instance to abandon the lowest price as the major selection criteria in tendering procedures) and the introduction of social clauses. On this issue, agreements have been signed with some municipalities; important examples are the agreements with Milan, Florence, Parma, and Genoa.

5.2 Job number and quality dynamics

Because of the above-mentioned transformations, our case study findings highlight a drop in employment levels and a worsening of some dimensions of the quality of work. From 2001 to 2016, the sector has lost more than 130 000 jobs, of which 94 300 were permanent (see figure 2), while a large majority of temporary contracts (from fixed-term contracts to contracts for continuous and co-ordinated collaboration) have not been renewed. This decline has continued in recent years. The ratio of municipal staff to population has decreased: the number of service officers per 1 000 inhabitants declined from 8.0 in 2007 to 6.9 in 2014. In addition, the progressive ageing of the municipal

workforce has also developed. In 2016, the average age of permanent employees was 53, and employees below the age of 34 decreased from 4.3% in the previous year, to 3.7%.

With regard to job quality, we have already discussed wages dynamics and the declining possibilities of career advancement. According to our case study findings, another important change in the working conditions of municipal employees has been an increase in workload and work pressure. This has been produced by a combination of several factors. A fundamental one is widespread understaffing, linked to budget cuts, tight constraints on personnel turnover, difficulties in hiring workers, and reorganising and innovating work organisation and/or service provision. Another important factor is that the economic crisis has produced a growing demand for municipal services by the population, resulting in an increase in the amount of work to be done, but with a declining number of employees.

Moreover, our case study shows insufficient and rapidly diminishing resources for workers' training and then declining skill development opportunities even though there is a strong need for upskilling in order to respond to the demands of the population and to exploit the possibilities offered by new technologies. As some interviewees argue, this appears to be a 'paradox': 'by using new technologies it would be possible to improve the efficiency and quality of a lot of municipal services, but there are not enough resources and investments for the necessary skills upgrading' (FP CGIL representative). Finally, the above-mentioned tendencies of working conditions have had – and continue to have – a strong negative effect on the work satisfaction and motivation of municipal workforce, which is rapidly shrinking, as confirmed by other studies (Ricciardi 2014; IFEL 2016).

Nevertheless, although available resources remain very limited, our findings evidence the emergence of new co-operative initiatives to improve job quality and workers' satisfaction, for instance forms of occupational welfare. As examples, we can mention the (most significant) cases of the municipalities of Crema and Florence, with initiatives specifically aimed at improving the work-life balance of their employees. The municipality of Crema has agreed with trade unions the introduction of a 'company butler': employees can benefit from a wide range of services (such as babysitting, cleaning, laundry and ironing, etc.) at low prices (the administration covers part of the cost); these activities are carried out by other organisations, which have contracts with the municipality. The municipality of Florence has agreed to flexible working hours to the benefit of employees, so as to improve the possibility of a good work-life balance; alternatively, workers (with special needs, i.e. parents with children under 3 years old, etc.) can ask for cash payments.

Moving from the above-mentioned tendencies, sectoral trade unions are, to an increasing extent, promoting a debate about the impact of employment changes on the quality of municipal services. As many trade unionists highlight, the economic crisis has extended/strengthened vulnerabilities and generated new demands for these services that play a fundamental role in the Italian system of social protection and inclusion. Nevertheless, government responses to the economic crisis, largely based

on austerity measures, have limited the implementation of new services and/or the enlargement of existing ones. Against this backdrop, an important debate concerns the ‘skills of public workers in the future’; an issue that involves recruitment practices, training opportunities, etc. In this regard, it must be emphasised that about six out of ten municipal employees (56.3%) hold a high school diploma and only a negligible segment (2%) hold a bachelor’s degree.

6. Conclusions

Over the 2000s, primary education, hospitals and municipalities – as well as other public subsectors – have undergone major reforms, driven by a combination of New Public Management ideas and pressures to cut public expenditure. They have promoted a decentralisation of powers and responsibilities for services provision, introduced market mechanisms and spurred competition between sectoral organisations, either public or private. Moreover, in all the examined subsectors, reforms have supported a process of managerialisation and an increase of employer/manager unilateralism in the regulation of many issues, including employment relations. In more recent years, after the financial crisis, austerity pressures have risen, leading to severe cuts to public budgets. Public employment (of all subsectors) has been one of the main targets of this kind of policy, with measures aimed at reducing the number of jobs and measures centred on working conditions.

Our case studies’ findings show that recent policies, and in particular austerity measures, have had a significant negative effect on the number and quality of jobs in primary education, hospitals and municipalities. Firstly, significant job losses emerge, mainly achieved through the non-replacement of retiring employees (or those leaving for other reasons) and the non-renewal of temporary contracts. The decline of the number of jobs has multiplied the cases of understaffing, and intensified existing ones. In addition, the analysis shows a deterioration of several aspects of job quality, in particular wages and workloads. As regards pay levels, in nominal terms they have remained frozen or decreased slightly, but in real terms they have suffered significant losses, with primary education being the most striking case. Furthermore, high and increasing workloads emerge. This tendency arises in all three subsectors and has been driven by similar factors. One of the most important is the above-mentioned widespread understaffing; then, it is necessary to consider the enlargement of activities and tasks, tighter deadlines, the new/growing demands for services (in particular in the case of municipalities), i.e. an increase in the amount of work to be done in a situation of a declining number of employees. In short, one could say that, in the examined public subsectors, work has become more demanding, but given less recognition. These findings confirm that employees in public schools, hospitals and local authorities, as well as those of other administrative branches, have shouldered a significant part of the burden of budgetary pressures and fiscal consolidation.

Sectoral industrial relations have been profoundly affected by the reforms, austerity policies related to the crisis and their effects on the number and quality of jobs. In all three examined subsectors, our case study findings confirm an increasing unilateralism

on the side of government. Trade unions had little room to discuss and negotiate reforms, budget measures, etc. Successive governments adopted a policy-making approach based on the ‘marginalisation’ of workers and their organisations, reaffirming their power to make decisions on employment terms and conditions (Bordogna and Pedersini 2013a; Bordogna 2016), which represented an important ‘break’ with previous, more participative, approaches (Dell’Aringa and Della Rocca 2017; Braga 2017). Pressures from the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) and from financial markets, threatening negative sentiments, were considered inescapable, and the resulting policies and the unilateral decision-making approach were presented as unavoidable. A fundamental role was also played by the spreading of anti-public sector union rhetoric, arguing that unions were obstacles to public administration changes and innovations, defending the interests of privileged groups of workers. Within this discourse, dialogue with the unions has become unnecessary, ineffective, and ‘a waste of time’.

With regard to all three examined sectors, existing institutions of social dialogue and collective bargaining were weakened. The former, at the national level, was almost entirely suspended. In the meantime, sectoral collective bargaining was frozen, resuming only in 2017 after a change in the government. Decentralised negotiations have been subjected to stricter constraints and controls, de facto greatly destabilising them. In some cases, at this level, trade unions succeed in influencing the implementation of national reforms and policies, by negotiating measures with individual schools, hospitals or municipalities that mitigated their impact. This happened more frequently in the last two subsectors, with greater financial autonomy and where more ‘political’ actors, such as local governments and regional governments (in the case of hospitals), tried to mediate national pressures so as to maintain a consensus among citizens, and non-conflictive relations with ‘their’ workers. However, unlike in the past, these co-operative experiences at a decentralised level developed in a more problematic context, characterised by stricter constraints and limited financial resources. Summing up, the economic crisis brought about an unfavourable context of conditions for industrial relations. And social partners, in particular trade unions, did not have the possibility or capacity to participate in the design – but also in the implementation – of reforms; in other words, they had a very limited role in shaping the sectors, including employment quantity and quality.

An important development of sectoral industrial relations, evidenced by case study findings and closely related to those discussed above, is that social partner relations have become very conflictive, with an increasing level of protest. The latter has taken a variety of forms, such as campaigns, demonstrations, strikes, occupations, etc. Protests have been directed at employers and more frequently governments, and have addressed declining employment levels, worsening working conditions, cuts in public expenditure, and lack of investments. Against this backdrop of increased protest, in all three considered subsectors, our analysis highlights a growing fragmentation of unionism, with the emergence and/or the strengthening of new actors, of new workers’ organisations. In the majority of cases, these are professional/occupational organisations, often with small memberships, representing workers in a radical way, and fuelling disruptive disputes in public services. They have taken advantage of

workers' increasing dissatisfaction with their working conditions and the disappointing attitudes and positions of the 'traditional' unions, i.e. those affiliated to Italy's major confederations, which have sometimes appeared too weak, too moderate. Protests have garnered mixed success, even if they have often enjoyed high levels of participation and attention from the mass media; greater results have been achieved at decentralised levels.

Table 3 Summary of the case studies' findings

	Primary education	Hospitals	Municipalities
Scope and shape of recent reforms/policies	NPM reforms Reduction of the scope of collective bargaining (in part. at decentralised level) Increasing employers' unilateralism Budget cuts	NPM reforms Reduction of the scope of collective bargaining (in part. at decentralised level) Increasing employers' unilateralism Budget cuts	NPM reforms Reduction of the scope of collective bargaining (in part. at decentralised level) Increasing employers' unilateralism Budget cuts
Role of SPs in reforms/policies	Marginal role of social dialogue; sectoral CB frozen (2010-2017) → Very limited influence of TU in the designing of reforms Uneven and limited influence of TU on reforms implementation	Limited role of social dialogue; sectoral CB frozen (2010-2017) → Limited influence of TU in the designing of reforms Some influence of TU on reforms implementation	Limited role of social dialogue; sectoral CB frozen (2010-2017) → Limited influence of TU in the designing of reforms Some influence of TU on reforms implementation
Changes in quantity and quality of jobs	Decline of employment level Nominal wages frozen; decline of real wages Extension of working hours (not formalised) Increased workload Decline of job satisfaction, motivation, etc. Decreasing attractiveness of public school as an employer	Decline of employment level Nominal wages frozen; decline of real wages Long working hours - overtime Increased workload Increased work-related stress	Decline of employment level Nominal wages frozen; decline of real wages Decline of career prospects Reduction of training opportunities Increased workload

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Increasingly, a key argument of protests has been the negative impact of the decline in the number and quality of jobs on service quality. In other words, the link between 'good public services' – which amounts to citizens' right to have (adequate) access to quality education, health and municipal services – and 'good jobs' emerges as a central issue of the initiatives of (old and new) workers' organisations. In this respect, they emphasise the worsening of pre-existing critical difficulties with the availability and quality of public services and the growth of social and territorial inequalities. Around these discourses, unions have tried and often succeed in establishing alliances with civil society organisations, such as parents' associations, patients' associations, customers' groups and social movements. Such kinds of initiatives – pursued to varying degrees and with different levels of attention, investment and effectiveness – have emerged as a key challenge for unions in a time of limited options; as argued above, these actions shape a fundamental strategy with which to conduct a 'battle of ideas', subverting

the dominant framework and reinforcing workers' resources of power (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013).

The growing concern of workers' organisations also as regards the quality of public services, shared by a number of scientific studies, adds further important indications on the reforms, austerity policies and decision-making approach of recent years. Generally speaking, one could observe that the two fundamental objectives of any policy concerning public administration, i.e. high(er) availability and quality of the services and satisfaction of the employees engaged in their production (Pavolini *et al.* 2013), have not been achieved. More specifically, having relevant theoretical and political implications, our case study findings show first of all the limits of NPM-inspired reforms and austerity policies. Second, they support evidence showing the importance of preserving the scope for collectively agreed solutions, also in times of crisis (Glassner and Keune 2010; Marginson *et al.* 2014). The study findings show that the weakening of industrial relations institutions, in particular social dialogue and collective bargaining, has not enhanced 'better' restructurings of the public sector, able to produce efficiency gains, higher performance, etc.; while relations have deteriorated, conflicts have exacerbated and, in many cases, the trust between employers and workforce has diminished.

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All links were checked on 18.12.2019.

Appendix

Interviewees

	Primary education	Hospitals	Municipalities
Unions	FLC CGIL x 3 (2 national level, 1 local level) UIL SCUOLA x 1 (national level) SNALS x 1 (national level)	FP CGIL x 2 (1 national level, 1 local level) FP CISL x 1 (national level) FPL UIL x 3 (2 national level, 1 local level)	FP CGIL x 2 (1 national level, 1 local level) FP CISL x 4 (1 national level, 3 local level)
Employers	School head x 2	Hospital manager x 1 Representative of regional government x 2	
Others	Expert x 2	Expert x 2	Expert x 3