

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

Italy

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

Law 183/2010 established the Unique Guarantee Committees for Equal Opportunities in Public Administrations for Workers' Wellbeing and against Discrimination (*Comitati unici di garanzia per le pari opportunità, la valorizzazione del benessere di chi lavora e contro le discriminazioni*, CUGs). These Committees replaced the previous Equal Opportunities Committees (CPOs). Although the Law indicates general rules for the Committees' composition, the task of drafting internal regulations on their election and functioning remains with public administrations (including universities and research organisations). This law also defines the requirement to identify a Confidential Advisor (*Consigliera di fiducia*) to hear employees who were bullied or sexually harassed and to find a suitable solution. In 2019, the Ministry for Public Administration (*Ministero della Funzione Pubblica*) issued Directive 2/19, which reinforces CUGs in public administrations and fosters gender equality in the public sector.

The National Code of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men was established in 2006 by Legislative Decree No. 198. It obliges public administrations (including universities and research organisations) to adopt a Positive Action Plan (PAP). The three-year plan must assure the removal of barriers to equal opportunities between women and men at work. The Directive of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of 23 May 2007 identifies the instruments and areas of intervention: positive actions to balance female representation in sectors and professional levels where they are underrepresented; organisation of work to promote work-life balance; and hiring and promotional mechanisms targeting women. Law 240/2010 on the General Reform of University Education sets out two important aims for equal opportunities. Firstly, it calls for gender balance on the board of trustees of research institutions. However, it does not specify targets, and the respect of gender balance is limited to a general declaration of intent. Secondly, it extends maternity leave (five months, 80 % of salary) to post-doctoral researchers. To support this legal measure, the government provides a budget of EUR 3.5 million through the annual act setting out the Ordinary Financial Funds (*Fondo di finanziamento ordinario*, FFO) for public universities. Research institutions can also choose to provide independent additional benefits to women researchers.

Policy framework

In 2021, the Department for Equal Opportunities (DPO) of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers issued the “National Strategy for Gender Equality”^[1]. Although not specifically focused on research organisations or universities, it nevertheless impacts the research and innovation (R&I) sector. It refers to the revision of the funding allocation mechanism to universities by the Ministry for University and Research (MUR) so as to consider the gender difference in research and academic institutions. It also proposes the allocation of ad hoc funds for universities reaching minimum levels of gender representation among professors, researchers, administrative staff, the academic council, and women students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). To date, these actions remain merely proposals.

The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) coordinates the National Research Programme for 2021–2027 (*Programma nazionale di ricerca* (PNR), the so-called Horizon 2020 Italia (HIT 2020)). This is the main government document for research and development (R&D) planning. Generally, it recommends ensuring gender-balance on recruitment and selection panels, and invites research institutions to promote equal opportunities and include a gender dimension in research^[2].

In 2019, Directive 2/19 of the Ministry of Public Administration reinforced the CUGs^[3]. The Directive emphasises the strong relationship between gender equality, equal opportunities and organisational well-being. It updates the verification tasks of the CUGs, which must report annually on compliance with the objectives of the three-year PAPs, monitoring of performance assigned to managers and non-executives, and additional salary components, in order to identify pay gaps between women and men. Together with human resources offices, CUGs must establish an internal counselling desk and monitor any form (direct/indirect) of violence or discrimination in the workplace.

In 2019, the Health Ministry issued the “Plan for the Application and Dissemination of Gender Medicine”. The Plan targets coordinated and sustainable support for gender medicine through dissemination, training and health practices in research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment. It aims to ensure full integration of the differences deriving from sex and gender in the health sector in order to guarantee the same quality and appropriateness of National Health Service (SSN) services throughout country^[4].

Other stimulatory initiatives

In 2021, Italy hosted the W20, an official G20 engagement group that supports the goal of reducing the gender employment gap by 25 % by 2025 (25 by 25). Held in Rome, the W20 disseminated a final policy report, “A new challenging vision: from inclusion to empowerment of women”^[5].

Key actors

MUR is the key research policy actor and funding agency at State level. It coordinates the preparation of the PNR. MUR’s engagement in promoting gender equality in research led to a Memorandum of Understanding with the DPO. In September 2015, the Rectors’ Conference of Italian Universities (*Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane*, CRUI) and MUR launched a survey of Italian universities to identify how gender is integrated in research content and gender equality achieved. The CRUI and MUR sought to identify concrete actions to foster numbers of women in research organisations and on their decision-making boards, to better integrate the gender dimension in policies, programmes and research projects, to periodically assess equal opportunities policies in research organisations, and to identify good practices.

The DPO is responsible for the guidance, proposal and coordination of regulatory and administrative initiatives in all fields related to the planning and implementation of equal opportunities policies. The National Network of University Committees for Equal Opportunities (*Rete Nazionale degli Organismi di Parità*) brings together the CUGs of Italian universities and research organisations.

The Gender Working Group of the CRUI was created in 2018 to disseminate actions and interventions to promote equality between women and men in the university system. The Group first focused on the dissemination and use of gender budgeting as a fundamental tool for including gender equality in universities' development strategies. A working group of experts developed the "Guidelines for the Gender Budgeting of Universities", published in autumn 2019. This operational tool is intended to help universities to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of their measures, improve results, report contradictions and opportunities, and highlight policies and tools to be adopted. In 2021, the working group published a manual on designing and implementing Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), following Horizon Europe's adoption of GEPs in its eligibility criteria for public organisations^[6].

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

By law, public administrations – including all 96 public research organisations and universities – must have a PAP. In light of Horizon 2020 requirements, many universities and research organisations are now developing a GEP, as the PAP does not meet all EU requirements. The CRUI's 2021 manual on designing and implementing GEPs builds on earlier PAP development, and numerous research organisations have adapted the existing PAP to the new EU GEP requirements. More specifically, PAPs have been reinforced to include a dedicated budget for gender equality activities, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality measures, and clear implementation responsibility within the organisational structure.

In recent years, many Italian universities and research organisations have coordinated or participated in structural change projects supporting GEP design and implementation. The University of Naples was a partner in GENOVATE, the University of Cagliari in SUPERA, and the Italian National Research Council (CNR) and the National Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN) were supporting partners in GENERA. PLOTINA was coordinated by the University of Bologna, and MindTheGaps is coordinated by the University of Turin, with the CNR as implementing partner. LeTSGEPs is coordinated by the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, with the University of Messina as implementing partner. These EU-funded projects have broadened expertise on gender equality in the Italian research system and prepared the ground for the adoption of GEPs. MUR sits on a number of advisory boards for EU funded-projects, but has taken no specific action to support the adoption of GEPs in the Italian academic and research system.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Gender budget at the CNR

The CNR published its first gender budget in 2020. The CNR is the largest public research organisation, with more than 9,000 employees. The report showed that the general composition of CNR staff is equally distributed, but a gap becomes evident in the subsequent career levels: 38 % of senior researchers and 26 % of research directors are women. That gap is even wider at top management level, where women make up only 22 %. The Glass Ceiling Index (which measures the likelihood of reaching top career levels) disadvantages women in departments where the presence of women balances or is higher than that of male colleagues. The distribution of personnel varies by department: 34 % women in Engineering, ICT and Technologies for Energy and Transport, 40 % in Physical Sciences and Material Technologies, 50.3 % in the Science departments, Human and Social, Cultural Heritage, and 62.5 % in Biomedical Sciences (the only department women dominate)^[7].

Transformative mentoring scheme at University of Naples Federico II^[8]

Recent studies have confirmed a glass ceiling in Italian academia, or, rather, segregation processes that negatively affect women's access to academic and scientific careers. The University of Naples Federico II Gender Observatory on University and Research developed a mentoring scheme to combat the practices and mechanisms that foster gender inequalities in academia. The model takes a dual approach to mentoring, as proposed by Jennifer De Vries (2010), simultaneously working to support women's careers and create institutional change. It was designed following research to identify gender mechanisms in academia and research. The study by Ilenia Picardi^[9] enabled the design of a transformative mentoring scheme, which was specially designed to create greater awareness of the gender dimension in research and innovation, and to change the mechanisms for gender segregation. Several mentoring programmes were implemented: GENOVATE @ UNINA Mentoring (2015-2017), INFN Mentoring (2018-2019, 2020-2021), UNINA Athena Mentoring (2021-2022)^[10].

On-site childcare at Polytechnic University of Milan

In 2015, a structured childcare service was installed at Polytechnic of Milan, one of the largest technical universities in Northern Italy. During the summer and Easter school holidays, on-site childcare is available for employees' children aged four (first year of kindergarten) to 13 years (last year of junior high school) at the two Milan campuses. The cooperative *Il Melograno* has managed the service in summer since 2015 and at Easter since 2016. In 2019, the service was extended to non-permanent university staff (doctoral students, research fellows, contract professors), under conditions similar to those for permanent staff, particularly focusing on improving the service for foreign children and children with disabilities. In 2019, 113 children attended the summer centre, mainly the children of technical and administrative staff, while the Easter holiday service was used by 43 children, almost twice that of 2018 (22 children)^[11].

Footnotes

- [1] <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/strategia-P...>
- [2] <https://www.mur.gov.it/sites/default/files/2021-01/Pnr2021-27.pdf>
- [3] <http://www.funzionepubblica.gov.it/articolo/dipartimento/27-06-2019/dire...>
- [4] https://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_2860_allegato.pdf
- [5] <https://w20italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/W20-Italy-Communique%CC%...>
- [6] https://www.crui.it/documenti/54/New-category/854/VademecumGEP_CRUI.pdf
- [7] <https://www.cnr.it/it/nota-stampa/e-17349/presentazione-del-bilancio-di-...> (highlights and full report in Italian).
- [8] Picardi, I., Agodi M.C., "Gender perspective in the mentoring relationships. A case study of [GENOVATE@UNINA](#)", in H. Lawton Smith, C. Henry, H. Etzkowitz and A. Poulouvassilis (Eds.), Gender, Science & Innovation. New Perspectives, 2020; Picardi, I., "The Glass Door of Academia: Unveiling New Gendered Bias in Academic Recruitment", Social Science, Vol. 8, 2019, p. 160, doi:10.3390/socsci8050160.
- [9] La dimensione di genere nelle carriere accademiche. Riflessività e cambiamento nel progetto pilota di [GENOVATE@UNINA](#), Napoli, FedOAPress. ISBN: 978-88-6887-017-1.
- [10] <http://www.og.unina.it/aree-di-ricerca/carriere-scientifiche/>
- [11] https://www.cug.polimi.it/?page_id=989&lang=en ; https://www.polimi.it/fileadmin/user_upload/il_Politecnico/Bilancio_gene...
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