Chapter N 025

The inclusion of gender diversity in Italian universities: main priorities and critical issues

**Abstract.** The policies for gender integration represent one of the most important on the European social agenda, in the awareness that the promotion of equal opportunities is a necessary and priority condition for the achievement of the objectives of the European Union in terms of growth, employment and cohesion social.

Gender permeates all aspects of our individual and collective, private and public life defines opportunities, shapes identities.

In Italy, gender inequalities, exacerbated by the Covid-19 emergency, can be multiple ambitious processes, such as the labor market, women's participation in decision-making, education and access to health.

The same National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) has identified measures that can act directly or directly to the elimination of gender inequalities.

The purpose of the work is to analyze the issue of gender equality in Italian universities in the light of the initiatives undertaken in recent decades and of the changes that have occurred also following the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in the management of daily life times with reference to family commitments and all professional responsibilities.

In particular, the innovative tools at the University of Salerno see wellness devices as a fundamental element for the affirmation of a model of human resources, culture and business processes, with a view to equal opportunities

The University of Salerno has recently adopted a plan for gender equality, which outlines a series of concrete actions aimed at ensuring full participation of men and women in scientific research and in the organizational life of the university. An initiative that ensures equal opportunities improves people's well-being and, finally yet importantly, makes the University of Salerno a model of "best practices" on a national and European level.

**Keywords.** Gender equality, Organizational well-being, Diversity Management, social inclusion

# Background

Gender equality represents a fundamental value, enshrined not only in the Constitution, but also in the international charters dedicated to individual rights and is an essential condition for combating discrimination and prevarication and for promoting inclusive environments, in which differences are valued, and individual, social and organizational well-being is promoted.

In Italy, the legislator has intervened in an articulated and complex way to affirm and implement the principle of gender equality, introducing many changes in social policy. However, the disparity between men and women continues to persist because the traditional family vision of reference has not been significantly changed, which entrusts to women, making them visibly invisible, the care of family members and the carrying out of domestic activities (Lombardo & Del Giorgio, 2013).

In fact, women are often forced to choose between family and career, due to the persistence of serious imbalances in family responsibilities and the lack of flexibility in working hours and the lack of childcare services (Gatti and Iannotta, 2014).

The same principle of gender mainstreaming, as a value to be pursued in all sectors of intervention, as codified in the Code of equal opportunities (legislative decree 11 April 2006, n.198), has not found so far an adequate level of application and, therefore, an exhaustive transversal recognition in the choices of economic and social policy (Directorate of Human Rights, 1998).

The laws on reconciliation between life and work times, for example, addressing women above all, seem to assume that it is the woman who must try to reconcile childcare and work and have not questioned distribution of tasks between genders (Lombardo and Del Giorgio, 2013).

Furthermore, very often on the labor market a male worker is appreciated more for flexibility and for the possibility of dedicating more time to work than women (Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2014).

Important factors such as raising women's educational levels have helped promote their participation in the labor market and feed their expectations of personal fulfillment and professional success. Nevertheless, in Italy more than in other democracies, women find it difficult to translate the success achieved in education into the workplace.

The third annual report on the labor market in Italy states that "gender gaps remain high: half of women of active age do not work and almost one in five would like to work but cannot find a job" (Ministry of Labor and Policies Social, Istat, Inps, Inail and Anpal, 2020).

In addition, according to the EU gender equality index (EIGE, 2021), it is highlighted that, in Italy, compared to other EU countries, gender inequalities are more pronounced in the sectors of power, of time and work. The scores relating to money and knowledge are less distant and in any case lower.

In particular, female employment in Italy is growing much slower than the growth recorded in other countries.

In fact, Italy is very far from the employment levels of women in countries such as Sweden (75.4%), Denmark (71.5%), and Germany (71.5%).

Furthermore, there are still phenomena of occupational segregation (concentration of women in some sectors, lower wages, low qualifications and limited career prospects) which translate into significant factors of direct and indirect discrimination.

Also in the scientific and academic context, there are processes of segregation and gender bias. Within Italian universities, the female component is still significantly under-represented: compared to 12,303 full professors, there are 2,952 full professors. There are 19,676 associate professors while 7,575 colleagues (Ubbiali, 2021); the presence of women at the head of universities is extremely scarce, not only in Italy but also at a European level.

Data from the European University Association show that in 2020, among 28 EU member states, only 15% were rulers (ranging from 9.5% in 2010 to 13% in 2013 and 14.3% in 2019). On a national level, there are directors in only eight Italian universities.

In some areas, such as in some scientific departments, the gap is very wide: women - professors and researchers - are less than a third of the total.

The scientific literature includes among the segregation factors, not only ideological beliefs and persistent stereotypes about the attitudes of the two sexes, but also unconscious biases and/or implicit biases, practiced by people of both the sexes (Pettit, 2021; Prandini, 2012; Solera and Bettio, 2013; Supino, 2016).

The current health emergency from COVID-19, by reshaping the times of life and work and the same urban geography, has further aggravated the situation of women and tragically highlighted the weaknesses of the Italian family welfare system.

The measures adopted by the Italian government to deal with the socio-economic and health emergency have led to a remodeling of the tools and legal regulations in use, providing for ways of organizing work (smart working) and forms of teaching management (smart schooling ) united by the requirement of "distance" from the places where work and education are traditionally carried out. In this scenario, working mothers suddenly found themselves forced to extricate themselves, in the home environment, between the sudden increase in childcare, education and upbringing and a new way of organizing work that made it even more difficult to reconciliation of the times of life with those of work.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the issue of gender equality in Italian universities in the light of the initiatives undertaken in recent decades and the changes that have occurred also following the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in the management of daily life times with reference to family commitments, and professional responsibilities.

In particular, the efforts made at the University of Salerno (UniSa) see welfare devices as a fundamental element for the affirmation of an innovative model for the management of human resources, culture and business processes, with a view to equal opportunities. In fact, although we are aware of the need for work-life balance policies to go beyond the narrow channel of the female universe, we cannot overlook the powerful contribution they can offer to resolve the gender gap.

The University of Salerno has recently adopted a plan for gender equality that outlines a series of concrete actions aimed at ensuring full participation of men and women in scientific research and in the organizational life of the university. An initiative that ensures equal opportunities improves people's well-being and, finally yet importantly, makes the University of Salerno a model of "best practice" on a national and European level.

# The path of equal opportunities in UniSa

The University of Salerno has always promoted policies in support of equality and equal opportunities, from the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Committee (in 1999) to the appointment of the first Rector's Delegate for equal opportunities (in 2000), to the establishment of a Interdepartmental Observatory for Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities (OGEPO) in 2011, whose Board created the basis for the establishment, in 2014, of the CUG (Single Guarantee Committee).

In recent years, the University has implemented and planned multiple positive actions aimed at involving all social actors in order to direct the attention of the latter to the "value" generated by diversity. In fact, the planning of educational courses for the affirmation of a gender culture that give full citizenship to differences and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination has been particularly active in recent years.

The strategic path undertaken by the University is aimed not only at highlighting the cultural changes taking place, but is aimed, above all, at attenuating the differences between men and women in terms of needs, conditions, life, work and life opportunities. participation in decision-making processes, as well as demonstrating that policies are not gender neutral but, on the contrary, have a differentiated impact on men and women. In this context, an important role is played by the Gender Budget, which the University of Salerno has endowed with, which represents an important tool for promoting and disseminating gender culture.

The document, supported by the logic of numbers, highlights the areas of imbalance still present, even if much has been done to overcome them, and reveals many lights, by virtue of the strong commitment made in pursuing objectives of equality and equality in training , in research and work.

In the face of a number of graduates quantitatively and qualitatively higher than their male colleagues, the gap gradually decreases in the first levels of the academic career up to the reversal of positions to the advantage of male staff in the role of associate professor and, in particular, in that of full professor (this situation is also shared at the international level, as confirmed by the latest surveys).

UniSa, starting from the critical issues highlighted in the previous BdG, has tried to overcome them both through the creation of a network of organizations, structures and services, aimed at combating all forms of discrimination, and through the implementation of the Positive Action Plan and the Gender Equality Plan (GEP).

The latter - approved, in 2018, within the two most important decision-making bodies of the University (Academic Senate and the Board of Directors) - outlines a series of concrete actions aimed at ensuring full participation of men and women in scientific research and in the organizational life of the university.

In fact, the effectiveness of the GEP is widely recognized as a strategic and operational tool to facilitate the identification of the most suitable legal, organizational, economic and social framework for implementing gender mainstreaming in practice.

The UniSa GEP was developed as part of the Horizon 2020 Project "R&I Peers - Pilot experiences for improving gender equality in research organizations" of which the University, supported by OGEPO, is the leader of a Consortium made up of 10 research organizations (EU-Cordis, 2019).

The GEP aims to address the challenges still present in achieving gender equality, in particular the obstacles and lasting limitations to the recruitment, advancement and mobility of women, especially in the STEM area, where women receive fewer opportunities, as students, researchers and leaders. It also takes into account the low presence of women in top positions and the limited integration of the gender dimension in research programs, which hampers research excellence and full innovation potential.

Thanks to the initiatives undertaken by the University, important results have already been achieved in terms of integrating the gender dimension into research perspectives.

However, despite the considerable commitment made, from the study conducted so far new and important challenges emerge for UniSa, to achieve a real transition towards a more widespread and institutionalized adoption of welfare programs. Challenges that UniSa is ready to take on through new and more ambitious objectives aimed at combining and enhancing different needs, inclusiveness and organizational flexibility, to implement a profound social and cultural change and offer a solution to the gender gap.

# Conclusions and future perspectives

Over the last few years, the strong commitment made by the University in promoting inclusive cultural and organizational processes has enabled the achievement of some of the many objectives set in the field of equality and equality in training, research and work.

The governance of UniSa has, in fact, activated important synergies with the academic community, based on forms of sharing values, on mutual trust and on the search for organizational well-being. This in a context, such as the current one, characterized by profound transformations both in the traditional structure of work and in family units, but also by strong economic and social criticalities.

Many and varied positive actions have been implemented to promote the implementation of the principles of equality and equal opportunities between men and women in the workplace in academic career paths through forms and tools for reconciling life and work times. A substantial gender balance has been achieved in terms of participation in the academic path up to graduation and any attendance of specialization and / or doctoral courses. There was an increase in the percentage of women, albeit modest, present in the scientific-technological disciplines (i.e. STEM) in various study paths. This important result was achieved thanks to the orientation actions dedicated to final year high school students and the awareness and information actions that involved all students. In addition, the policies undertaken by the University in recent years have also led to an increase in graduates, PhD students, PhDs and research fellows in some scientific-technological disciplines that may have important implications in the academic career paths in the coming years. In recent years, educational programs have been designed for the affirmation of a gender culture that gives full citizenship to differences and eliminates all forms of violence and discrimination; courses on gender studies were advertised and promoted which could be included in the curriculum of all students of the University. In general, there was a wide involvement and active participation of the academic community in gender-related initiatives promoted by the University.

UniSa has also strengthened the territorial network with industries and stakeholders, for the promotion and dissemination of a gender culture and, more generally, a gender culture even beyond the binary perspective, in order to develop heterogeneous skills and abilities as well as carrying out synergistic actions and activating organizational and social innovation processes.

The cooperative dimension is, moreover, a strong point that facilitates the involvement of competent and motivated human resources who are often little used in the area. The establishment of a territorial network also allows the dissemination of valid practices to inspire cultural and mental changes, with the aim of spreading a culture of equality and equality that, while respecting differences, includes their specificities.

The trend lines followed by the University will increasingly go towards an increase in economic resources to promote gender equality in the field of scientific research, an objective to which the group of scholars belonging to OGEPO is committed, as well as in the implementation of good practices in line with the CUG Positive Action Plan.

The challenges that UniSa will have to pursue will not be limited, however, only to achieving gender balance, but will be aimed at adopting Diversity Management measures. The benefit of Diversity Management arises precisely from the possibility of the uniqueness of the human being who can develop and apply, within the organization, a broad and integrated spectrum of skills that reflects their own background and experience. Only in this way, the University, by internally reflecting the social and economic landscape, will be able to respond more easily to the even latent needs of the area in which it operates, investing in a management approach oriented towards the enhancement of human resources at a professional and personal level.

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