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Preventing and contrasting gender-based violence and sexual harassment.
The role of universities and their equal opportunities bodies

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Preventing and contrasting gender-based violence and sexual harassment. The role of universities and their equal opportunities bodies

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Abstract

This work deals with the topic of gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual harassment in the academic context, a phenomenon that is sadly widespread but poorly reported, which has increasingly emerged as a result of the international ‘Me Too’ movement, leading to an increase in the number of cases of allegations. Considering Italy’s backwardness in terms of gender equality, it was decided to focus the analysis on the Italian academic context. This work is specifically aimed at examining what the role of universities and their Equality Opportunity Bodies can be in preventing and combating GBV and sexual harassment. To achieve this objective, a mix-method methodology is used. Firstly, the annual COUNIPAR survey has been involved, allowing us on the one hand to collect descriptive statistics on the functioning of the ‘Comitato Unico di Garanzia’ (CUG, i.e., Equal Opportunity Body) and on the general gender-sensitivity of universities, and on the other hand, through the inclusion of specific questions on policies to prevent and combat GBV and sexual harassment, to have an overview of the policies already implemented by Italian universities. In this phase 36 universities, heterogeneous in terms of geographical area and size, are analysed. In order to further explore the potential of universities in prevention and law enforcement actions, it has been decided to examine the policies planned by Italian universities, as a further step in addition to existing policies. Hence, Italian universities Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) are taken under consideration, as the main tools for planning policies from a gender perspective. A sample of 47 Italian universities, heterogeneous both in terms of geographical area and size, is selected and 295 preventive and counteracting actions are detected by means of the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) method. Additional features, such as the allocation of human and financial resources for the planned actions, intersectionality, the involvement of the CUG and the existing network with local institutions, are also taken into account in the analysis. As a result, it can be found that the most planned actions by GEPs of Italian universities concern the preventive aspects rather than the countering policies, as awareness-raising policies and training policies accounted together almost the 40% of the total detected actions. Looking at specific counteracting policies, policies for handling cases of harassment and violence, the adoption of a code of conduct, the figure of the Confidential Counsellor and psychological support services result to be the most planned actions by Italian universities in this regard. There is still considerable ground for development for specific policies such as the Anti-Violence Desk and collaboration with the network of local institutions, as well as with local Anti-Violence Centres, in a perspective of participative processes, able to act as a bridge between the university and the skills and experiences carried out at local level by all actors involved in gender equality policies.

Keywords: *gender-based violence; sexual harassment; university; prevention; contrast; policies*

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Introduction

Gender inequality is still a persistent phenomenon that affects every sector, with the most recent estimations stating that it will take another 131 years globally to achieve full gender parity (World Economic Forum, 2023). Within this background, the academic and research sector cannot be excluded from considerations of gender inequalities. Taking into account the specific context of universities and Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), the European Commission has been working for a decade on ‘gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research’, considered one of the priorities in achieving the European Research Area (ERA) (European Commission, 2021a) and a crucial priority of the European Commission’s Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 (European Commission, 2020). Another main objective of the Strategy is ‘Ending gender-based violence’, which represents the focus of this paper. According to the latest data published by the European Commission (2021a), the gender gap in academic sector is still evident, as women hold only 23.6% of leadership positions in research and innovation as heads of institutions in the Higher Education Sector (HES). Considering the academic career, it is important to highlight the differences between men and women along career paths, where the former account for the largest share of Grades A and B positions, while the latter make up almost half of the positions in Grades C and D (European Commission, 2021a), without strong differences between Italy and the European average, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage of women by grade along the academic career, EU and Italy, 2018

	EU-27	IT
Grade A	26.18	23.74
Grade B	40.29	38.41
Grade C	46.61	46.77
Grade D	47.08	50.13
Total	42.32	40.48

Source: authors’ elaboration on European Commission (2021a) data

Another significant figure is represented by the Glass Ceiling Index (GCI), considered that a GCI score of 1 indicates that there is no difference between women and men for being promoted, while score of less than 1 means that women are over-represented at grade A level and a GCI score of more than 1 unveils the glass ceiling effect, meaning that women are under-represented in grade A positions. According to the data published by European Commission (2021a), the current GCI is far from 1, as the European GCI accounts for 1.52 (while in Italy is slightly higher, 1.71). Another aspect to be taken into account is the horizontal segregation, in addition to the vertical segregation already highlighted: Table 2 shows shares of women holding grade A positions in different fields of

research, and it is found a strong gender gap in full professorships in STEM area, both at European and Italian level, but with Italy seriously lagging behind.

Table 2. Percentage of women by grade and research field, EU and Italy, 2018

	EU-27	IT
Natural Sciences	21.99	24.30
Engineering and Technology	17.91	13.84
Medical Sciences	30.08	17.05
Agricultural Sciences	28.50	19.45
Social Sciences	30.85	29.46
Humanities	34.95	37.43

Source: authors' elaboration on European Commission (2021a) data

Also looking at latest data published European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) about gender equality in European member States, Italy (68.2/100) scored below the European average overall (70.2/100) and the figures reporting gender equality status in education are consistently lower than the European average (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison between EU and Italy of gender equality in education, 2023

	EU27-W	IT-W	EU27-M	IT-M
Percentage of graduates of tertiary education (15-89 population)	28	17	26	14
Percentage of people participating in formal or non-formal education and training (15-74 population)	19	16	18	16
Percentage of tertiary students in education, health and welfare, humanities and arts (15+ population)	43	47	21	25

Source: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/domain/knowledge/IT>

In order to counter gender inequalities, policies promoted by European institutions in recent years have attempted to stimulate a number of developments within member States aimed at achieving greater gender equality in higher education institutions and RPOs. Some of the most pivotal policies involved the 'Horizon Europe' programme¹ by making the integration of the gender dimension in Research & Innovation (R&I) content a default requirement across the programme itself and having

¹ Horizon Europe is the European Union's key funding programme for research and innovation which helps to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and fosters the EU's competitiveness and growth.

a Gender Equality Plan (GEP) an eligibility criterion for accessing Horizon Europe funding (European Commission, 2021b). Additionally, the programme provided funding for initiatives that support the development and implementation of inclusive and sustainable GEPs across EU Member States and Associated Countries (European Parliament and the Council, 2021). To foster the implementation of GEPs, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) developed the ‘GEAR Tool’, which offers concrete and practical guidelines for creating GEPs tailored to an organization's specific context and aligned with Horizon Europe requirements. Drawing from practical experiences and examples, the tool provides detailed information on the nature of a GEP, the necessary stakeholders, the importance and relevance of gender equality to organizations, and the process of developing and implementing effective and sustainable GEPs in six stages, from starting to monitoring and evaluating (EIGE, 2022). The interest for this topic is not recent, and over the past decade the European Commission’s strategy on gender equality in research and innovation policy has focused on promoting equality in scientific careers, ensuring gender balance in decision-making processes and bodies and integrating gender into the content of research and innovation (EIGE, 2016). In this perspective, Gender Equality Plans have a pivotal role and have been recommended by the EU since 2015 (European Commission, 2015) as specific tools able to provide a structural change in Universities and RPOs. GEPs are defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as ‘a set of commitments and actions that aim to promote gender equality in an organisation through a process of structural change’ and as ‘a systematic and strategic instrument’ establishing priorities and tangible objectives (based on an accurate assessment of the *status quo*), and the specific measures to be implemented to improve gender equality within organisations and in R&I (EIGE, 2022). GEPs can play a crucial role in fostering a gender culture having been recognised as important vehicles of change with multifaceted benefits for individuals and organisations (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2020). As already mentioned, the European Commission, when introducing Horizon Europe, has made GEPs a fundamental requirement for participation in this program, but – to stress the importance given to GEPs also at a national level—GEPs are also an eligibility-criterion to access to the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan research funds, encouraging academic institutions and RPOs in designing and implementing them. Considering the Italian academic context, Italian Directive No. 2/2019 and European Commission Communication No. 152/2020 introduced the obligation for universities to draft the Positive Action Plan (PAP) for the removal of obstacles to full equality between women and men. Following the PAP, according to the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, universities are encouraged to adopt the GEP, which, from a planning perspective, fits within the Strategic Plan, since GEP has been understood as the main document outlining the universities’ strategy for gender equality, aimed at strengthening the introduction of a gender-sensitive perspective

in Strategic Plans. In this perspective, GEPs have to be included in universities' planning procedures and harmonised with the PAP and drawn in continuity with the Gender Budgeting (GB) process, as suggested by the CRUI (2019), creating a gender equality management system which covers all the phases, from budgeting to monitoring. The harmonization between GB and GEP, taking into account the fact that GEPs can reach their full potential only coupled with the use of GB, is also recommended by the Horizon2020 Project 'Leading Towards Sustainable Gender Equality Plans in research institutions – LeTSGEPs²' (Addabbo and Badalassi, 2023), coordinated by University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, and aimed at supporting the design and implementation of GEPs and GB in six different European institutions.

The European Commission underlined the importance of involving all the stakeholders in designing and monitoring GEPs and in this regard CRUI (Conference of Italian University Rectors), when issuing the official guidelines, stated that these processes should involve the Rector, the Director General, the Delegate for Equal Opportunities, and overall, all the stakeholders involved in gender equality policies (CRUI, 2021). As mandatory requirements for GEPs, the Commission identified having dedicated resources for the design, implementation, and monitoring of GEPs, including arrangements for data collection and monitoring, since the GEP must be evidence-based and founded on sex or gender-disaggregated data collected across all staff categories, being a public and formal document signed by the top management, and disseminated within the institution and being supported by training and capacity-building, as it can include developing gender competence and raise awareness within the institution. By defining the GEP, the European Commission stated that it consists of a strategic plan with the objective of (1) conducting impact assessments of procedures and practices to detect gender bias; (2) identifying and implementing innovative strategies to overcome gender bias; and (3) defining targets and processes to monitor progress through indicators. Moreover, the European Commission recommended five thematic priority areas when drafting Gender Equality Plans, namely:

- work/life balance and organisational culture,
- gender balance in top positions and decision-making bodies,
- gender equality in recruitment and career advancement,
- gender mainstreaming in research and teaching programmes,
- measures to combat gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

² LeTSGEPs - Leading Towards Sustainable Gender Equality Plans in research performing organisations received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program under Grant Agreement n° 873072. LeTSGEPs was coordinated by University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and involved Mathematical Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MISANU), Serbia, University of Messina (UNIME), Italy, University of Tirana (UT), Albania, Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM)/Agencia Estatal Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Spain, Cergy Paris Université (CY), France, Max-Planck-Gesellschaft (MPG), Germany.

In this work, we decided to focus on the fifth area covered by GEPs, considering the social criticality of the topic and what Tutchell and Edmonds (2020) defined as ‘serious problem in academia’ and Bartos and Ives (2019a, 2019b) described as one of the most common yet highly debilitating obstacles, which is the culture of sexual harassment and misconduct that permeates higher education and the daily experience of many students and workers. In this regard, European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC, 2020) defined gender-based violence as ‘an unrecognised issue and an underdeveloped field of knowledge at the national level in the European Research Area’.

This work is structured as it follows: in the first Section, a presentation of the phenomenon of gender-based violence and its context-specific features are outlined, together with prevention and counteracting policies recommended in the literature; in Section 2 the role that universities and Equal Opportunity Bodies can perform is investigated by presenting the results from the analysis of the policies already implemented by universities through the analysis of the annual COUNIPAR survey; in Section 3 the policies planned by Italian universities in terms of combating and preventing GBV and sexual harassment are investigated through the content analysis of the Gender Equality Plans actions conducted on a heterogeneous sample in terms of size and geographical location. Concluding remarks and possible further development of this work are presented in the last Section.

1. Gender-based violence and sexual harassment in Academia

1.1 The phenomenon

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a concept that spans over a continuum of violence and abusive behaviour on the basis of sex and gender, intersecting with other dimensions such as ethnicity, age, sexuality and disability (Hearn et al., 2022; Strid et al., 2021). The concept of GBV can be used as a framework for covering gender-based harassment, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape violence and other forms of GBV (Latcheva, 2017). In this perspective, sexual harassment is part of a continuum of different forms of GBV, ranging from bullying and sexist slang to sexual abuse and rape (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2020). Others define sexual harassment as ‘as coercive behaviour, which may include gestures, actions, and other modes of verbal or nonverbal communication, with sexual connotations, which intimidate, humiliate, and exercise power over another person’ (Kloß, 2017). Among the aforementioned features, it must be recalled that *quid pro quo* sexual harassment (Johnson et al., 2018; Morley, 2011) and online harassment (Brown et al., 2016; Poland, 2016) are other forms of sexual harassment and, consequently, of GBV.

Global exposure studies show that one in three women globally is exposed to physical and/or sexual violence by a partner, or to sexual violence by another person (WHO, 2013). Considering the European Union, between 45% and 55% of women (equivalent to approximately 100 million women) have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15 (Latcheva, 2017): among these women, 32% named someone in a work-related context, such as a colleague, boss or customer, as the perpetrator. Taking into account the Italian context, latest data published by ISTAT (2024) estimated 2,322 million people between 15 and 70 years old who have experienced some form of harassment at work in their lifetime, of whom 81.6% are women, i.e., approximately 1,895 million. In addition, women who experienced sexual blackmail at work amounted to 298,000. Italian women aged between 15 and 70 who have experienced some form of harassment or blackmail in order to get a job and/or a career advancement make up about 15% of the total number of women aged between 15 and 70 (about 2 million 68 thousand women). Harassment within the workplace is often determined by hierarchical power relations and HES is characterised by an embedded power imbalance both between students and lecturers and between employees in different positions and of different genders (McDonald, 2012; Henning et al., 2017). According to Valls et al. (2017), a power structure with men at the top, the presence of sexist stereotypes, of a gender-biased hostility towards victims and a habitual tolerance for such violence are reasons behind GBV in universities. Following the analysis conducted by Naezer et al. (2019) on the different types of academic harassment, the strongly hierarchical structure with large inequalities of power and precarious positions, the possibility of those with the most power to facilitate or end careers, and the competitive and individualistic culture of academia, together with inadequate responses to occurrences resulted to be factors which foster harassment. Similarly, the belief in a wide tolerance for harassment and the effective lack of sanctions against perpetrators, the hierarchical structure with power centralised on a few people and the environment dominated by male power figures are the enabling factors for sexual harassment identified by Johnson et al. (2018). In this latter view, factors facilitating sexual harassment appear to be organisation-related, with exposure directly proportional to male dominance in the organization. In addition, it should be highlighted that direct exposure to GBV is not evenly distributed between men and women, with the consequence that the negative outcomes hit women in HES disproportionately: horizontal and vertical disparities in research and HES, together with gender inequalities in society as a whole, are thus influenced and maintained by the presence of GBV (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2018; Henning et al., 2017; Husu, 2000; ILO, 2019; Latcheva, 2017).

Considering the severity of the phenomenon, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted in 2019 the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206) making it clear that violence and harassment in the workplace would not

be tolerated and had to cease. Although sexual harassment can theoretically affect anyone in the work environment, the No.109 Convention reiterates harassment is often based on the abuse of power and reports that most of cases are generally committed against women and perpetrated by men. This resonates with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the ‘Istanbul Convention’, which defines GBV as ‘deeply rooted in social and cultural structures’ and based on an imbalance of power, affecting women disproportionately. The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention defines sexual harassment as ‘a serious manifestation of sex discrimination and a violation of human right’, underlining key-elements such as (1) *quid pro quo* (‘any physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature and other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of women and men, which is unwelcome, unreasonable, and offensive to the recipient; and a person’s rejection of, or submission to, such conduct is used explicitly or implicitly as a basis for a decision which affects that person’s job’) and (2) hostile work environment (‘conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the recipient’). Hence, sexual harassment may cover a range of behaviour and practices of a sexual nature, such as unwanted sexual comments or advances, ‘jokes’, display of images that objectify women, physical contact or sexual assault. Sexual harassment may be committed by various individuals, including colleagues, supervisors, subordinates and third parties. In Italy, the ‘Codice delle Pari Opportunità’ (Equal Opportunities Code, D.Lgs. 198/2006), contains the specific definition (art. 26) of sexual harassment for the Italian legislation, defined as ‘unwanted behaviours, carried out for reasons related to sex, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a worker and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive climate’.

Although sexual misconduct in academic environments is a realistically well-known phenomenon and not recent, it has not been openly e properly addressed over time (Tutchell and Edmonds, 2020): one of the reasons for this deficiency can be that many universities may try to hide what is actually happening in their institutions for reputational reasons (Oliver, 2016). Nevertheless, GBV has been described as a phenomenon with a ‘high prevalence on university campuses’ (Villalonga-Aragón et al., 2023), and feminist campaigns intended to break down the wall of silence and the complicity of the institutions have become increasingly public in recent years, with cases of sexual misconduct by university staff and students detected by social and mainstream media, as well as by renewed feminist studies and student activism (Phipps 2018a, 2018b; Bondestam and Lundqvist 2020). In the wake of the global attention shown towards GBV and sexual harassment consequent to the popular ‘MeToo’ movement, also HES has been impacted, as it had an influence on awareness of GBV in the education sector in RPOs in several countries (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir, 2021), with allegations of sexual abuse in British universities that have more than doubled in recent years

(Woolcock, 2021). Accordingly, as Perini (2019) stated, the academic environment cannot be considered separate from society as a whole and the societal events that pass through it: indeed, as Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) claimed, gender discrimination and violence in higher education represents a global ‘epidemic’ and immediately after the military, the academic setting is ranked second in the analysis by Ilies et al. (2003) with 58% for the high rate of sexual harassment in relation to the different fields of activity—with both sectors highly characterised by the large disparity in the presence of women at all levels, but especially at leadership levels. As ERAC (2020) reported, specific features of HES and research sector, such as the asymmetrical power-relations, insecure employment conditions, and ‘uninformed leadership’ justify the need for identifying sector-specific measures to address this issue.

The phenomenon, as mentioned, involves all institutions, but it should be borne in mind that universities have been described as places harbouring rape culture (Lewis et al. 2018; Phipps 2018a). As Bondestam and Lundqvist (2018) found, gender harassment is the most common form of exposure within academia and occurs in all disciplines of academia and is reported by all members of the institution (students, Ph.D. students, employees) (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2018; Naezer et al., 2019) leading to considerable negative outcomes and costs (McDonald, 2012) including physical, psychological and professional consequences for individuals. In particular, Bondestam and Lundqvist (2018) reported that sexual harassment in the academic sphere can lead to, among other consequences, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical pain, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, increased alcohol use, reduced career opportunities, decreased work motivation. At the same time, researchers found strongly negative consequences also for the organization itself and at a societal level (Henning et al. 2017). It should also be taken into account that a non-negligible aspect of research work includes academic mobility and mobility conditions are arranged according to gender, sexual orientation, disability and geographical origin, and this includes exposure to GBV (Leeman, 2010; Jöns, 2011; Gedro et al., 2013; Mähle, 2016, 2018; Du Toit, 2018). In this regard, it has been found that being an international student constitutes a risk factor, also bearing in mind the frequent lack of a supportive social and family network (Bonistall Postel, 2017; Ridde et al., 2019).

On average, and according to the context and conceptual framework, international studies show that 25% of female students have experienced GBV in higher education. Similarly, research indicates that workplace harassment is prevalent in higher education at all levels and in all disciplines (ERAC, 2020). Other scholars (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2018) show a wider variation in prevalence (from 2 to 93%) according to a variety of factors: depending on several major studies, 20-25% of female students in the US have experienced sexual harassment, in high-level peer-reviewed articles, the prevalence of sexual harassment in academia ranges between 11 and 73% for women and

between 3 and 26% for men, in Swedish surveys, 4 to 26% of women and 2 to 6% of men reported experiences of sexual harassment in HES. Although anyone can be exposed to sexual harassment in academia, with varying probability, those who have less power and who are more dependent on others face a higher risk of being exposed to sexual harassment in academia. The variability depends on intersectional characteristics and vulnerability factors such as gender and gender identity, sexuality, race/ethnicity/skin colour, age, function, religion, role, position, etc. (Bondenstam and Lundqvist, 2018). International research analysed by Bondenstam and Lundqvist (2018) shows that the perpetrator of sexual harassment in more than nine out of ten cases is a man. Most often the perpetrator is a colleague or fellow student of the same level, secondarily a superior and thirdly another person met in an ordinary situation in the study or work context. The latest and widest study on this topic has been carried out by the Horizon2020 UniSAFE Project, which is the largest cross-cultural survey at European level. At the core of the project lies the measurement of the prevalence of GBV, with the aim of understanding the role of university and research organisations in prevention and counteractions. The survey involved 46 universities and RPOs in 15 European countries and with more than 42,000 respondents and found that 62% of those surveyed had experienced at least one form of GBV since they started working or studying at their institution, with women and non-binary people more likely to experience sexual violence within universities. The most common form of GBV was psychological violence (57%), followed by sexual harassment (31%), economic violence (10%), online violence (8%), physical violence (6%) and sexual violence (3%) (Lipinksy et al., 2022).

Critically, the phenomenon is largely underreported: over half of the students and staff who experience sexual harassment do not report it to management (Bondenstam and Lundqvist, 2018) and intersectional inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and precarity not only increase the risks of gender-based abuse, but also prevent survivors and victims from reporting, as women with precarious contracts and weak contractual positions are more likely to experience sexual harassment (Wånggren, 2023). The fear of retaliation and career damage, the lack of trust in the system and of clarity about procedures often discourage reporting (Russell et al., 2021; Vargas et al., 2022). According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2015), among women who experienced sexual harassment, 35% concealed the incident by not talking to anyone, 28% talked to a friend, 24% reported it to a family member or relative and 14% informed their partner, while only 4% reported it to the competent authorities, 4% talked to their employer or a superior and less than 1% consulted a lawyer or a victim support organization. Academic personalities of important standing and at the top of institutions are unlikely to be reported (Johnson et al., 2018). It is estimated that between 5% and 30% of cases are reported and less than 1% result in prosecution (McDonald, 2012). This happens also because it is not uncommon for allegations to result in retaliation, generating fear in reporting

even in bystanders, with cases where victims were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements (Naezer et al., 2019). A research study that involved an anonymous Italian university found that in 90% of the detected cases of sexual harassment the perpetrator was a man against a female victim, more than two-thirds of harassment came from individuals over 45 years of age, and most harassment took place in the workplace and during working hours. But 30% of the victims of sexual harassment did not share the experience with anyone, while 70% confided in friends and family, while services such as human resources and other relevant figures were practically ignored (Torelli, 2019). A study on sexual harassment in the academic environment promoted by the ‘Comitato Unico di Garanzia – CUG’ (i.e., Equal Opportunity Body) of the University of Trieste, conducted through qualitative interviews with a sample of 17 people, mainly students, found that in 94% of cases the harasser is male and of a heterogeneous profession such as students, lecturers and also technical-administrative employees of the institution (Anastasia, 2019). In a survey conducted on harassment in Dutch universities, only 3% of the persons interviewed stated that they had received adequate help from the academic institution following the incident, while 29% stated that they had received help but no satisfactory solution and 60% that they had received no support (Naezer et al., 2019). These results are aligned with what Lipinsky et al. (2022) found as results of the UniSAFE Project: among those who have endured any form of GBV, only 13% reported it. Among the main reasons given, almost half of those who had experienced GBV (47%) said they were not sure if the behaviour was serious enough to report it, while 31% did not recognise the incident as a manifestation of GBV at the time of the occurrence. The failure to report may be justified by the lack of consequences for the offenders: out of the 54 qualitative interviews conducted, most of the people interviewed (43) stated that they were not aware of any consequences for the perpetrators. According to the interviewees, the perpetrators did not receive any sanctions, mainly because they generally occupy more powerful positions than the victims. In some cases, the perpetrators not only did not receive any consequences, but on the contrary were promoted and remained respected members of the organisation carrying out the research. The lack of designated response bodies may also discourage reporting: in 14 out of 54 interviews, those interviewed explained that there was no officially appointed person or body that they were aware of and to whom a formal complaint could be made. These results highlight the need for awareness-raising and prevention programmes, as well as safe spaces to report and firm consequences for the offenders.

1.2 The recommended policies

Given the severe context outlined in the previous paragraph, international scholars and institutions have been engaged in identifying policy recommendations to prevent and combat GBV

and sexual harassment. The ERAC (2020) proposes among its recommendations: (1) achieving awareness that GBV in academia is unacceptable; (2) giving this issue at least the same level of attention and the same amount of resources as are given to other reprehensible behaviour; (3) requiring research institutes and universities to report annually on their activities and measures taken to eliminate this form of violence; (4) including measures taken in this area among the criteria for evaluating research institutes and universities; (5) monitoring that research institutes and universities impose sanctions on perpetrators. Amongst the policy indications produced by the aforementioned UniSAFE Project³ in different policy briefs and deliverables of the Project itself it can be found (1) strengthening internal knowledge and skills on GBV (widespread specific training); (2) adopting a strong institutional framework that addresses GBV by including clear values and procedures (e.g., a code of conduct and protocols); (3) creating monitoring and evaluation structures; (4) adopting a victim/survivor-centred approach to addressing GBV; (5) promoting leadership commitment to addressing GBV; (6) improving internal transparency of policies, data, measures, knowledge and support structures. Hill and Crofts (2023) suggest as practical recommendations to raise awareness and to provide support, policies, procedures and safe spaces. They stress the need of having adequate reporting structures which may begin to address long-standing norms. A number of studies have shown that addressing GBV and sexual harassment in academia requires a coordinated effort from all members of the academic community and a focus on different areas (Lichty et al., 2018; Rizzo et al., 2020). Only through a comprehensive, institution-wide approach it seems to be possible to build a culture of awareness, empathy, respect and equality on campus, with active witnesses and adequate support (Hill and Crofts, 2023), while seeking additional allies outside the institution, in addition to establishing a strong internal network working in the same direction (Moylan et al., 2022) result to be other recommendations. Addressing GBV on campus, therefore, requires significant and responsive involvement from all areas of the university community (Hill and Crofts, 2023). The need for more training on the subject is also emphasised, given the lack of knowledge and skills largely evidenced by institutions, suggesting dedicated courses also promoted by national central authorities (Coker et al., 2011; Coker et al., 2015; Naezer et al., 2019). In this regard, Roskin-Fraze (2020) identifies as recommendations for preventing the phenomenon the need to ‘cultural competency training’ and to increase institution-sponsored health care services for sexual violence victims while emphasises how the policies currently in place do not consider the ways in intersectional dimensions as race, sexuality, class and disability shape women’s experiences of GBV. Given the fact that, as we have noted, GBV arises from an imbalance of power, Johnson et al. (2018) argue for an increase of

³ For further details see: <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/outputs/recommendations/>

up to 30% of women at every academic level and the evaluation of gender-responsive values when hiring new staff.

Among the strategies to mitigate its incidence, in addition to specific prevention strategies for potential victims, bystander programmes are currently a common strategy to reduce violence (Banyard, 2013; Banyard and Potter, 2017; Orchowski et al., 2010, 2020) at international level. The bystander model considers GBV to be a community problem—so that all community members are considered potential bystanders and are involved in developing solutions to address the issue and promote a culture against violence (Beres et al., 2019)—and bystander prosocial behaviour and action have been found to be effective with results such as a decrease in sexual violence, an increase in prosocial behaviour and recognition of patterns of violence (Villalonga-Aragón et al., 2023). A key feature of this ‘whole-campus approach’ to address violence is the recognition of all the members of the campus community as relevant stakeholders (Flood et al., 2009), as happened at the University of Otago, where this model was implemented in 2018 to provide a ‘comprehensive response to the issue of campus sexual violence’ (Beres et al., 2019). In this regard, a number of studies have focused precisely on bystander intervention training (e.g., the evidence-based programme The Green Dot, Coker et al., 2011; Cook-Craig et al., 2014), which have been found to be the most widespread initiatives inducing statistically significant changes in both cognitive and behavioural dimensions (Degue et al., 2014; Fenton et al., 2016) and helped in reducing victimisation and perpetration at the campus community level (Coker et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is possible to identify support services as tertiary prevention as they can mitigate the impact of the violence event once it has occurred (Powell and Henry, 2014). In this view, scholars claimed that there is a lack of secondary prevention aimed at assisting offenders and of re-education of offenders, the latter being almost neglected (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2020; Naezer et al., 2019).

In the Italian context, De Fabritiis (2019) stresses the need for greater awareness starting with central institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and the Equal Opportunities Department, and in the collection of data regarding the phenomenon. In another contribution, Avveduto (2019) emphasises the need to start with activities that can ‘easily’ be implemented by organisations and institutions, such as the approval of Guidelines for dealing with sexual harassment and Codes of Conduct that protect victims and ensure consequences for perpetrators. In this regard, University of Padova has pioneered the adoption of a code specifically against sexual and psychological harassment since 2004 (Perini, 2019), but the author complains that the adoption was not followed by any communication campaign or monitoring action. Furthermore, Avveduto (2019) highlights the importance of training activities for preventive and reactive purposes and counsellors. In this view, it has been emphasised by Sangianantoni et al. (2019) that the role of the Confidential Counsellor—

defined as ‘a bridge towards harassment prevention’—not only can play an important role of providing first-hand consultation, but also perform an active role in proposing, drafting and implementing ethical policies. The Counsellor also informs about inappropriate behaviour, establishing targeted principles to promote the right attitude between managers and supervisors and ensuring that they are respected. The Confidential Counsellor also has the duty of informing about inappropriate behaviour, setting principles to promote the right conduct in the workplace and ensuring that they are respected. Internationally, this task is translated into the creation of ombuds offices made up of people who are not part of the academic staff and who can guarantee discretion and confidentiality to those who approach them and provide critical independent support to persons experiencing harassment (Johnson et al., 2018).

2. The role of universities and their Equal Opportunity Bodies: mapping the policies implemented by Italian universities

Because of the exposure to the risk of sexual harassment and GBV within universities and the occurrence cases recorded not only internationally, but also nationally, and bearing in mind Italy's backwardness in terms of gender equality in education, we decided to focus our analysis on the context of Italian universities. The aim of this work is to investigate what the role of Italian universities and their ‘Comitato Unico di Garanzia’ (CUG – i.e., Equal Opportunity Body) can be in preventing and combating GBV within their institution, considering the policies they can pursue in this regard. In order to achieve this objective, we had firstly to begin with the policies already implemented by Italian universities, and in order to review them we relied on the accounts of the members of the CUGs of the universities. The decision to focus on CUGs is due to the centrality of the institution (Torelli, 2019; De Fabritiis, 2019) in ensuring, in the context of Italian public work, gender equality and equal opportunities, the protection of workers against discrimination and mobbing as well as the lack of any kind of physical and psychological violence. Specifically, the CUG is a body through which it is aimed, among other tasks, to ensure equality and equal opportunities in public employment, preventing and combating all forms of physical and psychological violence, harassment and direct and indirect discrimination. The Italian Directive 2/19 ‘Measures to promote equal opportunities and strengthen the role of CUGs in public administrations’ prescribed the different tasks to be covered by CUGs, stating that CUGs are supervisory bodies with propositional, consultative and monitoring tasks. In the context of the CUG’s propositional function, the drafting of Positive Action Plans aimed at fostering substantive equality at work between men and women, conditions of wellbeing at work, as well as preventing or removing situations of

discrimination or moral and psychological violence, mobbing, and organisational discomfort, within the public administration, is of particular importance. Considering its consultative function, the CUG performs an action to prevent potential situations of discrimination, while taking into account the monitoring function, the CUG must perform important functions of verifying the absence of any form of violence or discrimination, both direct and indirect, in the public workplace. With reference to this last aspect, CUGs can act, within the public administration, as important sensors of malaise situations related to violence and discrimination and can report these situations to the functionally and territorially competent subjects. In order to strengthen this verification function, the President of the CUG promotes the establishment, in collaboration with the office responsible for personnel management, of an organised listening unit within the administration.

We decided to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon by using the data collected by National Conference of Equal Opportunities Bodies of Italian Universities (COUNIPAR) in its annual survey. As sensors of unhealthy situations and reporting bodies, in addition to the function of drafting the institution's Positive Action Plan, the analysis of the survey responses received by the CUGs allows for an assessment of the actual status of overall gender equality and of the prevention of and counteracting GBV and sexual harassment at universities. COUNIPAR brings together in a Network the representatives—in office—of the University Committees working on Equal Opportunities issues, in order to build systematic inter-university cooperation relations on the areas of competence. Among the activities carried out by COUNIPAR, such as conferences, seminars, round tables and workshops, a crucial role is played by the annual survey delivered to the CUG members and presidents of Italian universities. The survey is aimed at gathering, in addition to the knowledge of the functioning of CUGs in the various Italian university contexts, useful information regarding the policies implemented by the universities, training needs and willingness to participate in working groups, which will be shared and disseminated by COUNIPAR in order to provide support indications and to draw up proposals to be shared during the COUNIPAR National Convention. This tool allows a dialogue between the experiences of the various university CUGs, fostering mutual knowledge and collecting data on specific needs, enabling a fruitful exchange of ideas, measures and actions adopted in the various local realities. Through specific questions included in the questionnaire, we sought to monitor the overall gender-sensitivity of the institution and the state of implementation of policies to prevent and combat GBV and sexual harassment, as well as the perceived need for CUGs to train themselves on the subject in the light of the findings in the literature regarding the lack of, and consequent need for, training (Coker et al., 2011; Coker et al., 2015; Naezer et al., 2019). As already mentioned, we were able to edit the survey by adding specific questions to analyse the status of gender equality policies and GBV counteractions and prevention policies carried out by the institutions, as

detailed below (see Table 5). The survey was made available in November 2023 and was submitted to 86 universities (of which 67 public and 19 non-public but legally recognized), which is the total of Italian universities, excluding the telematic ones. Overall, 36 universities fully answered the questionnaire, with a response rate of 41.9%. The universities which have completed the survey and have been considered in our analysis are heterogeneous in terms of geographical area and size, with 19 universities from Northern Italy, 9 universities from Central Italy and 8 universities located in Southern Italy or Islands, while, regarding the size, 4 universities are ‘Major’, 10 ‘Large’, 10 ‘Medium’ and 12 ‘Small’ (see Table 4).

Table 4. Geographical and size distribution of the sampled universities

University size/Geographical distribution	North	Central	South and Islands	Total
Major	4			4
Large	6	2	2	10
Medium	4	3	3	10
Small	5	4	3	12
Total	19	9	8	36

Source: authors’ elaboration on COUNIPAR data

The survey consisted in 67 questions and covered different topics, from the interest in participating in thematic working groups to the functioning of the CUG. In particular, we decided to focus on a sample of questions covering the topic of GBV or being proxies assessing the general gender culture of the institution (see Table 5). Before performing this analysis, we focused on other recurrent questions asked annually by COUNIPAR survey, to be able to collect as preliminary descriptive features of the respondents that:

- 91.8% of the surveyed universities have a GEP;
- 63.6% of the surveyed universities adopted the GEP in 2022, 23.7% adopted it in 2021, 6.1% adopted it in 2020 and 3% in 2023;
- the adopted GEPs contain monitoring indicators in 93.75% of the cases;
- among those universities which have adopted the GEP, the CUG was involved in the drafting of the document in 100% of the cases;
- 80.6% of the surveyed universities have also already adopted Gender Budgeting, while 11.1% of the universities have started the adoption process;
- 80.3% of the surveyed universities have adopted the Positive Action Plan;
- 50% of the CUGs are convened once in a month, 30.6% are convened once every two months and 19.4% are convened a few times a year;

– in 77.8% of cases more than 50% of the CUG members are female, if we consider also the cases where half of the CUG members are women, this percentage increases to 94.4%.

These data allowed us to observe that the majority of universities have adopted a GEP and have done so recently, following the Horizon requirement and guidelines (European Commission, 2021b), showing how they have proved to be a catalyst for adoption by Italian universities. In addition, the adopted GEPs containing monitoring indicators represent the 93.75% of the cases, showing how the guidelines were followed in order to make the actions foreseen in the GEP effective and monitorable. The large majority of the considered universities have also adopted Gender Budgeting (80.6%), albeit in a smaller proportion than those who have adopted GEP, but it should be noted that in more than half (57.1%) of the cases of the universities that have not yet adopted it, the process of adopting the Gender Budget is currently ongoing. The wide presence of multiple documents, such as the GEP (91.8%), the Gender Budget (80.6%) and the Positive Actions Plan (80.3%) appears to suggest that a broader process of gender mainstreaming is actually underway in Italian universities, in addition to European-level prescriptions. Focusing on the CUG itself, this body was involved in the drafting of the GEP in all the cases of the universities that have already adopted it, showing a positive involvement of this body as suggested by the guidelines. The majority of CUGs meet once a month or once every two months, while about 1 in 5 hold sporadic annual meetings. Furthermore, CUG membership remains a strictly female prerogative, considering the low presence of effective male members.

Table 5. Selected questions from COUNIPAR survey

Questions	Detailed questions
Q.25	Does the University have a Confidential Counsellor?
Q.27	What services are offered to support victims of sexual harassment?
Q.29	Does the University offer a free psychological counselling service?
Q.30	Does the university have a Code against sexual harassment and gender-based violence?
Q.32	Has the university taken clear measures to formally intervene against perpetrators of sexual harassment, including disciplinary action or suspension?
Q.33	What sexual harassment and/or gender-based violence prevention initiatives aimed at students, staff and/or academics have been implemented?
Q.34	Does the university have a gender equality manager or officer?
Q.37	Has the university adopted guidelines for the use of gender in administrative language?
Q.54	Has your university adopted alias careers for students?
Q.57	Has your university adopted alias careers for technical-administrative staff?
Q.60	Has your university adopted alias careers for teaching staff?
Q.64	As CUG, are you interested in taking training courses about sexual harassment and gender-based violence?

Source: authors' elaboration

Considering the specific questions we asked to assess gender-sensitivity of the institution and policies to address GBV and sexual harassment, we referred to the most common actions included in GEPs when dealing with this phenomena, retrieving data about the presence (or absence) of a specific Code against sexual harassment and GBV and of Confidential Counsellor (*'Consigliera di fiducia'*)—a crucial figure who is called upon to prevent, manage and help resolve cases of discrimination, sexual harassment, moral or psychological harassment, mobbing and straining, which take place in the work, study and research environment, brought to her attention—the services offered to support victims of sexual harassment, among which a free psychological counselling services; the kind of prevention policies implemented by the university and measures clear measures to formally intervene against perpetrators of sexual harassment; the compliance to guidelines for the use of gender in administrative language; the presence of a gender equality manager/officer and of alias career for both students and teaching/technical-administrative staff; the interest in training courses specifically aimed at addressing and preventing sexual harassment and GBV. As results, we found that:

- 72% of the considered universities have a Confidential Counsellor (Q.25),
- the most frequent serviced offered to support victims of sexual harassment is the Confidential Counsellor (43.3%), followed by psychological support services (25%), partnerships with anti-violence centres (16.7%) and the 'Anti-violence desk' (13.3%) (Q.27),
- 67% of the considered universities offer a free psychological counselling service for both students and staff, while 25% offer this service only to students, 3% limit this service to staff and 5% do not have a counselling service (Q.29),
- 69% of the surveyed universities have a Code against sexual harassment and GBV (Q.30),
- 64% have taken clear measures to formally intervene against perpetrators of sexual harassment, including disciplinary action or suspension (Q.32),
- 50% have implemented an awareness-raising campaign, 42.5% have implemented courses/workshops aimed at prevention, while 7.5% have planned but not implemented prevention actions (Q.33),
- 75% of the sampled universities do not have a gender equality manager/officer (Q.34),
- 61% of the considered universities adopted guidelines for the use of gender in administrative language (Q.37),
- 94.4% of the surveyed universities have adopted alias career for their students (Q.54), but only 38.9% provide it for technical-administrative (Q.57) and teaching staff (Q.60),

- 53% are interested in taking training courses about sexual harassment and gender-based violence (Q.64).

Table 6. Detailed answers to the surveyed questions (percentages in parenthesis)

Questions	Answers			
Q.25	Has a Confidential Counsellor (0.72)	Does not have a Confidential Counsellor (0.28)		
Q.27	Confidential Counsellor (0.433)	Partnerships with anti-violence centres (0.167)	‘Psychological support services’ (0.25)	‘Anti-violence desk’ (0.133)
Q.29	Offers a free psychological counselling service for both students and staff (0.67)	Offers a free psychological counselling service only for students (0.25)	Offers a free psychological counselling service only for staff (0.03)	Does not offer a free psychological counselling service (0.05)
Q.30	Has a Code against sexual harassment and GBV (0.69)	Does not have a Code against sexual harassment and GBV (0.31)		
Q.32	Has taken clear measures to formally intervene with perpetrators of sexual harassment (0.64)	Has not taken measures to formally intervene with perpetrators of sexual harassment (0.22)	Does not know (0.14)	
Q.33	Awareness-raising campaign (0.50)	Courses/workshops aimed at prevention (0.425)	Has planned but not implemented prevention actions yet (0.075)	
Q.34	Has a gender equality manager/officer (0.19)	Does not have a gender equality manager/officer (0.75)	Does not know (0.06)	
Q.37	Has adopted guidelines for the use of gender in administrative language (0.61)	Has not adopted guidelines for the use of gender in administrative language (0.39)		
Q.54	Has implemented alias career for students (0.944)	Has not implemented alias career for students (0.056)		
Q.57	Has implemented alias career for technical-administrative staff (0.389)	Has not implemented alias career for technical-administrative staff (0.611)		
Q.60	Has implemented alias career for teaching staff (0.389)	Has not implemented alias career for teaching staff (0.611)		
Q.64	Have an interest in taking training courses about GBV and sexual harassment (0.53)	Does not have an interest in taking training courses about GBV and sexual harassment (0.47)		

Source: authors’ elaboration on COUNIPAR data

Summarising the results collected, we can say that most of the surveyed universities have a Confidential Counsellor (72%), offer a free psychological counselling service for both students and staff (67%), have a Code against sexual harassment and gender-based violence (69%), have taken clear measures to formally intervene against perpetrators (64%) and have adopted alias career for their students (94.4%). The role of the Confidential Counsellor emerges in particular from the responses to the survey: not only it is widely available in universities (72%), but it also appears to be

main figure to deal with cases of violence or harassment, considering that the most frequent serviced offered to support victims of sexual harassment resulted to be the Confidential Counsellor (43.3%). Other means employed by the universities include psychological support services (25%), although 67% of the universities have implemented a free psychological counselling service for all members of the organisation, while the specifically dedicated Anti-violence desk remains more underdeveloped (13.3%), pointing out the need to improve this service in order to be able to offer a wide range of different services, responding to different needs, to the whole academic community.

There is, however, considerable ground for improvement, taking into account that only 25% of the universities have a gender equality manager/officer and most of the institutions do not provide a change-name policy (the use of the name of choice for transgender and nonbinary people) for their teaching and technical-administrative staff (61.1%), while more than the half of the interviewed universities are interested in taking training courses about sexual harassment and GBV (53%), signalling this specific training need and highlighting the importance of continuing further training on this topic. It was also found that few universities (16.7%) have established collaborations or partnerships with local Anti-Violence Centres, indicating the need to strengthen this cooperation in order to be integrated in a territorial system of response to violence, bearing in mind that the university is not an institution detached from society but embedded within it. Although not representing a low proportion, it stands out that only 64% of the universities proceeded with formal measures against the perpetrator subsequently to episodes of violence or harassment. This finding is aligned with the results found in the literature about the difficulty of following up the report with formal prosecution of the offender, showing how clear regulations and procedures are needed in order not to leave these acts with impunity.

3. The role of universities and their Equal Opportunity Bodies: the analysis of a sample of Italian universities GEPs

Following the analysis of the policies already implemented by the universities resulting from the previous section, we decided to investigate the role of universities in preventing and countering GBV and sexual harassment by examining the policies that have been planned by Italian universities, as a further step in addition to, or improvements to, existing policies. As far as universities are concerned, the main policy document for actions to foster gender equality is the GEP, which, as mentioned above, is a tool that can be transformative and support actual change in the institution adopting it. Furthermore, the European Commission has recommended a priority area (the fifth) within the GEP dedicated to combating GBV, including sexual harassment.

To this end, we detected and analysed 295 GEP actions proposed by 47 Italian universities, in order to map the commitment and progress made by Italian universities in addressing GBV and sexual harassment, the consistency with policy recommendations found in the literature, and identify good practices and ground for improvement to foster actual change.

3.1 The Italian universities' GEPs analysis: Materials and Method

As mentioned above, universities have GEPs as their gender mainstreaming planning tool for their policies. According to European Commission (2021b) GEPs aim to promote gender equality through the sustainable transformation of organisational processes, cultures and structures that generate and maintain gender imbalances and inequalities. GEPs should not only address the visible structure and practices of an organisation (such as policies and procedures) but also consider how to advance shared values and underlying assumptions, such as unconscious beliefs, thoughts and feelings, including in the production of knowledge and its applications. In this view, to be effective a GEP must involve the entire organisation including the senior management and governing bodies (European Commission, 2021b). According to the recommendations issued by the European Commission (2021b), in the thematic area of measures to combat GBV and sexual harassment, GEPs can be a tool for organisations to assess the prevalence of sexual harassment and other forms of GBV and undertake measures to ensure comprehensive policies and organisational measures on sexual harassment that address every aspect of the phenomenon, such as behaviour, reporting and investigation, victim support, and disciplinary measures for perpetrators. In this regard, GEPs can be means to implement a zero-tolerance culture towards GBV and sexual harassment in institutions, leading a path from raising awareness of the problem to empowering people in the academic community as bystanders, hence specific training is encouraged.

Taking the Italian academic context into consideration, the GEP is a pivotal document that mainstreams the university's policies in a gender perspective in the university's strategic plan, which should be synchronised with the Positive Action Plan and the Gender Budgeting process. The Italian universities have been able to rely on the GEP guidelines issued by the Commission on Gender Issues of the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI, 2021), which have made it possible to adapt the general indications provided by the European Commission to the Italian context, considering that the transformative processes for gender equality must intercept the specificities of local contexts and respond to them respecting the differences and diversities that characterise each context.

In order to map and assess the level of implementation of policies to prevent and tackle GBV and sexual harassment by Italian universities, it was decided to use the Qualitative Content Analysis

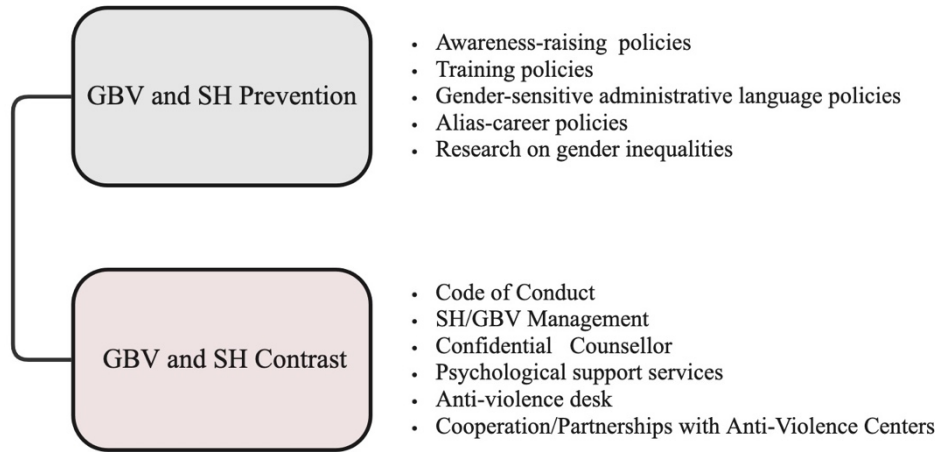
(QCA) method (Schreier, 2012) after selecting a sample of 47 Italian universities (out of 74 available) heterogeneous in terms of size and geographical location. In this regard, we analysed 15 universities located in Northern Italy, 15 located in Central Italy and 17 located in Southern Italy or Islands, while, considering the size⁴, 8 universities were ‘Major’, 14 were ‘Large’, 12 were ‘Medium’ and 12 were ‘Small’ (see Table 7). Within the sample, all material was examined (Schreier, 2012). The data were collected between November 2023 and February 2024 and the analysis was carried out from March 2024 to July 2024. While the unit of analysis was the GEP of each university, with reference to the coding unit it was agreed by the authors to use any portion of text to which it was believed a code may apply (Krippendorff, 2004), which can be practically translated with ‘actions’ and/or ‘policies’. In other terms, we coded within each unit of analysis (GEP) the policies/actions that would fit into the coding frame. The coding frame, although the starting point was what reviewed in the literature in terms of GBV prevention and contrast policies to design it, was partly data-driven in order to adapt it to the material examined (Schreier, 2012). The authors individually analysed their material (i.e., the randomly assigned GEPs) to find categories based on the themes identified in the data. Subsequently, virtual meetings were held in order to share the common recurring themes across all the material and the identified categories and subcategories were agreed upon. As a result of this first stage, a trial coding frame was advanced and specified (each code was provided with a label and definition, examples and decision rules, Schreier, 2012). Each unit of analysis was firstly coded by a researcher and eventually coded by a ‘supervisor’ second researcher (the same for every unit of analysis), so that the inter-coder reliability (Boyatzis, 1998) could be tested together with the consistency of the coding (Schreier, 2012). The consolidated coding frame included two categories (namely ‘GBV and SH Prevention’ and ‘GBV and SH Contrast’), and within any category a number of sub-categories (see Figure 1; Table 8).

Table 7. Geographical and size distribution of the sampled universities

University size/Geographical distribution	North	Central	South and Islands	Total
Major	3	2	3	8
Large	8	2	4	14
Medium	2	4	6	12
Small	2	7	4	13
Total	15	15	17	47

⁴ The size of the universities depends on the number of enrolled students: Major: over 40,000 students enrolled; Large: from 20,000 to 40,000; Medium: from 10,000 to 20,000; Small: up to 10,000 students enrolled.

Figure 1. Coding frame (categories and sub-categories)



Source: authors' elaboration

The category 'GBV and SH Prevention' included 5 sub-categories, named 'Awareness-raising policies', 'Training policies', 'Gender-sensitive language policies', 'Alias-career policies', 'Research on gender inequalities'. This category included all coding units, meaningful portions of text, that could be translated into practice as actions and/or policies aimed at the prevention of GBV and sexual harassment included in the university's GEP. In this category, we have decided to include explicitly preventive actions (such as 'Training policies', 'Awareness-raising policies') and implicitly preventive actions ('Gender-sensitive language policies', 'Alias-career policies' for non-binary and trans people, 'Research on gender inequalities'), which are more broadly related to the institution's gender equity attitude and policies, and which aim to result in a gender culture to be reflected in preventive actions to GBV.

The category 'GBV and SH Contrast' included 6 sub-categories, named 'Code of Conduct', 'SH/GBV Management', 'Confidential Counsellor', 'Psychological support services', 'Anti-violence Desk'. This category included all coding units, meaningful portions of text, that could be translated into practice as actions and/or policies aimed at the contrast of GBV and sexual harassment included in the university's GEP. In this category, we have decided to include policies to manage cases of violence or harassment, which intervene once the violent act has occurred, the figure of the Confidential Counsellor, whose task is to provide counselling and assistance, including full legal protection, to those who report being a victim of sexual or moral harassment, general psychological support services and support services explicitly dedicated to providing help in cases of violence or harassment ('Anti-violence Desk'), and the institution's Code of Conduct, which should state

prosecutable behaviour and consequences for perpetrators (see Table 8 for the complete coding frame breakdown).

Table 8. Coding frame breakdown

Category	Sub-category	Definition (Description + Example + decision Rule)
GBV and SH Prevention	Awareness-raising policies	D. This includes prevention policies focused on raising and spreading awareness of GBV and SH E. <i>'Awareness-raising campaign to develop gender and equal opportunities culture among students and staff'</i> . d.R. It is related to campaigns, initiatives, programs and action explicitly or implicitly aimed at raising-awareness within the institution.
	Training policies	D. This includes prevention policies aimed at training on GBV and SH any member of the institution. E. <i>'Design, planning, implementation of training activities of academic module on sexual harassment and combating sexism'</i> . d.R. It is related to campaigns, initiatives, programs and action explicitly or implicitly aimed at training students and staff of the institution.
	Gender-sensitive language policies administrative	D. This includes the adoption or the revision of guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language within the institution. E. <i>'Recognition of University forms and setting up work on the adaptation and revision of documents and forms with a focus on gender-sensitive language'</i> . d.R. It is related to the use of gender-sensitive language in administrative documents issued by the institution.
	Alias-career policies	D. This includes the adoption or the revision of alias-career ('name of choice') policies for the all the academic community. E. <i>'Adaptation of the 'Alias Career' Regulation to include teaching, research and technical-administrative staff and its monitoring'</i> . d.R. It is related to the adoption or improvement of the alias-career policies for any member of the institution (student and staff).
	Research on gender inequalities	D. This includes research/surveys about gender discrimination and gender gap to create a gender-sensitive culture aimed at preventing GBV and SH. E. <i>'Contextual analysis on the basis of administrative source data and surveys conducted disaggregating data by gender'</i> . d.R. It is related to research/surveys with a focus on gender inequalities which can harbour a gender-sensitive culture across the institution.
GBV and SH Contrast	Code of Conduct	D. This includes any action regarding the Code of Conduct (e.g. adoption, renewal, monitoring) within the institution addressing GBV and SH and stating consequences for perpetrators. E. <i>'Adapt the University Codes to the 2019 ILO Convention and National Law 4/2021 on violence and harassment in the workplace'</i> . d.R. It is related to actions regarding the functioning or the adoption/renewal of the institution's Code of Conduct which addresses GBV and SH and provides consequences for perpetrators.
	SH/GBV Management	D. This includes management/handling of SH/GBV cases within the institution.

	E. <i>'Detecting and handling cases of sexual harassment and more generally of gender-based violence and harassment among teaching and research staff, technical-administrative staff and students'</i> .
	d.R. It is related to policies provided by the institution to manage/handle cases of GBV/SH.
Confidential Counsellor	D. This includes any policy concerning appointment/renewal/empowering of Confidential Counsellor within the institution.
	E. <i>'Appointment of Confidential Counsellor'</i> .
	d.R. It is related to any policy providing appointment/renewal/empowering of Confidential Counsellor within the institution.
Psychological support services	D. This includes services such as psychological counselling, 'listening desk' and psychological support for any member of the institution in need of help because of psychological malaise and/or discomfort in the organisational context (e.g. mobbing).
	E. <i>'Psychological listening and counselling service for students'</i> .
	d.R. It is related to services any member of the institution in need of help because of psychological malaise and/or discomfort in the organisational context (e.g. mobbing) can benefit from.
Anti-Violence desk	D. This includes a specific service aimed at offering a listening and helping relationship space for all members of the institution, in support and protection against all forms of violence and/or discrimination against women.
	E. <i>'Promoting and strengthening the Anti-Harassment Desk'</i> .
	d.R. It is related to a service explicitly aimed at support and protection against GBV and SH.
Cooperation/Partnerships with Anti-Violence Centers	D. This includes any cooperation and/or partnership with local Anti-Violence Centers.
	E. <i>'Setting up specific agreements with territorial anti-violence centres'</i> .
	d.R. It is related to any cooperation and/or partnership with local Anti-Violence Centers.

Source: authors' elaboration

3.2 *The Italian universities' GEPs analysis: results*

As we aimed at mapping and understanding the way universities contribute to prevention and contrasting GBV and sexual harassment through actions included in the GEP, the QCA described in the previous section was performed, leading to the findings we now present in this section, concerning the actions that resulted using the coding frame.

Taking into account GBV and sexual harassment prevention policies, we found:

- 74 actions included 'Awareness-raising policies' in 35 GEPs (74.5% of the total GEPs),
- 36 actions included in 'Training policies' in 25 GEPs (53.2% of the total GEPs),
- 22 actions included in 'Gender-sensitive administrative language policies' in 19 GEPs (40.4% of the total GEPs),
- 21 actions included in 'Alias-career policies' in 21 GEPs (44,7% of the total GEPs),

- 26 actions included in ‘Research on gender inequalities’ in 15 GEPs (31.9% of the total GEPs).

Within this category, the most recurring subcategory was ‘Awareness-raising policies’, followed by ‘Training policies’, ‘Research on gender inequalities’, ‘Gender-sensitive administrative language policies’ and ‘Alias-career policies’.

The sub-category ‘Awareness-raising policies’ was not only the most recurrent in terms of actions found in absolute value, but also in terms of GEP involved in these actions, covering the 74.5% of the total GEPs included in the analysis. For these reasons, we can state that most of the attention and efforts paid to GBV and sexual harassment by Italian universities involves awareness-raising policies. The analysed GEPs showed a variety of awareness-raising actions, from information flyers to more extensive campaigns. For instance an university planned to ‘*Screen at every first lecture, at the beginning of each academic year, of short videos on all the tools (measures, bodies, the University’s code of ethics) put in place to prevent and combat all forms of discrimination, harassment and violence within the university*’, while others were committed in international campaigns such as this university which planned the ‘*Continuation of the ‘Out of the Shadows’ project: design and implementation of additional red benches (‘Panchine Rosse’⁵), involving the entire university community, including the students*’.

The sub-category ‘Training policies’ was the second-most recurring sub-category in absolute values and taking into account the number of GEPs which included training actions (representing the 53.2% of the total GEPs). In this regard, we can assess that Italian universities decided to commit mostly on awareness-raising and training policies to prevent GBV and sexual harassment—preventive actions also aimed at eradicating the root of the phenomenon. The analysed GEPs showed different training actions, but most of them focused on ensuring training courses for all the members of the academic community, such as the ‘*Realisation of a training course (also remotely) for the whole staff on the topics of GBV and sexual harassment*’ and even for the local community, as in this instance ‘*Annual multidisciplinary workshop on gender-based violence and related issues, also open to citizenship*’.

The sub-category ‘Research on gender inequalities’ was quite common in fewer organisations, being included in 31.9% of the GEPs, meaning that the institutions that decided to act on this issue are fewer than in other sub-categories but have planned a relatively high number of actions (within the same institution). In most cases, the actions we have observed within this sub-category concern research conducted to identify and reveal gender inequalities in general or specifically aimed at

⁵ Red benches (‘Panchine Rosse’) is a cultural, social and community project that aims to visualise in public and private spaces the fight for awareness, information, prevention and raising awareness against gender-based violence and femicide.

studying GBV and its impact, such as this instance: *‘Research and analysis activities on the costs of violence and policies to combat and prevent it in cooperation with other institutions in the area’*. In addition, we also considered in this sub-category encouragement to produce research on issues of gender inequalities and GBV, as in this detected action: *‘Promotion, through specific awards, of dissertations or doctoral theses on the subject of combating gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination’*.

The sub-category ‘Gender-sensitive administrative language policies’ involved 40.4% of the total GEPs with a number of actions. Specifically, in this sub-category we mostly identified policies of adoption (e.g., *‘Adoption of gender-sensitive institutional/administrative language’*) and/or raising awareness on the use of a gender-sensitive administrative language (e.g., *‘Awareness raising of the various University Bodies/Offices on the use of inclusive institutional language, through the adoption of guidelines on the correct use of gender language in the various University activities’*).

The actions included in the sub-category ‘Alias-career policies’ were the least-recurrent (representing a total of 21 actions) but were quite common in almost the half of the analysed GEPs (44,7% of the total GEPs), meaning that the different institutions planned basically one action in this regard. This can be explained by the fact that most of the universities have already adopted this policy for their students, while fewer have provided it for the staff. Indeed, most of the action we were able to detect involved this aspect (e.g., *‘Adopting Alias-career for academic staff’*; *‘Revision of regulations involving lecturers and technical-administrative staff in order to extend the ‘Alias-Career’ tool to the entire academic community’*).

These results are consistent with the most widespread policy recommendations proposed in the scientific literature (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2018, 2020; Coker et al., 2011; Coker et al., 2015; Avveduto, 2019; Naezer et al., 2019; Roskin-Fraze, 2020) and in international reports dedicated to the topic (ERAC, 2020; UniSAFE, 2023), concerning the need of spreading awareness of the phenomenon, provide specific training courses for each person involved in the organisation, creating aware and responsible bystanders, the need to foster ‘cultural competency training’ (Roskin-Fraze, 2020). We decided to include in this analysis policies concerning Alias-career considering the risks of gender discriminations and psychological violence that non-binary and transgender people may face if they are denied the possibility of using the ‘name of choice’.

Concerning GBV and sexual harassment counteracting policies, we found:

- 17 actions included ‘Code of Conduct’ in 16 GEPs (34% of the total GEPs),
- 39 actions included in ‘SH/GBV Management’ in 21 GEPs (44.7% of the total GEPs),
- 18 actions included in ‘Confidential Counsellor’ in 16 GEPs (34% of the total GEPs),

- 18 actions included in ‘Psychological support services’ in 18 GEPs (38.3% of the total GEPs),
- 11 actions included in ‘Anti-violence desk’ in 11 GEPs (23.4% of the total GEPs),
- 13 actions included in ‘Cooperation/Partnerships with Anti-Violence Centers’ in 13 GEPs (27.7% of the total GEPs).

Within this category, the most recurring subcategory was ‘SH/GBV Management’, followed by ‘Psychological support services’, ‘Confidential Counsellor’, ‘Code of Conduct’, ‘Cooperation/Partnerships with Anti-Violence Centers’ and ‘Anti-violence desk’.

The sub-category ‘SH/GBV Management’ was not only the most recurrent in terms of actions found in absolute value, but also in terms of GEP involved in these actions, covering the 44.7% of the total GEPs, meaning a variety of both actions and institutions. In this sub-category we detected actions aimed at the practical management of harassment and/or GBV cases, and some universities also provided innovative services (e.g., the ‘*Creation of anonymous mobile phone number for support/reporting requests*’) to facilitate the reporting procedure and the coming forward of the victims and services linked to the territorial context to provide an integrated response system, such as the ‘*Activation of a system of integrated territorial services to support victims of violence and harassment in the workplace*’ planned by an analysed university.

The sub-category ‘Psychological support services’ was the second-most recurring sub-category in absolute values and considering the number of GEPs which this form of support actions (representing the 38.3% of the total GEPs), pointing out that the most common counteracting policies involved the the case management, both considering the services offered to facilitate reporting and psychological support services, which in this sense can provide a first stage in addressing GBV and harassment. In this sub-category we found policies to establish the service (e.g., ‘*Providing psychological listening and counselling service for students*’) and improve it (e.g., ‘*Strengthening the university psychological counselling desk and the Listening and Inclusion Service*’), although the majority of cases showed a focus especially on the students, leaving out the staff.

Other common actions involved the sub-category ‘Confidential Counsellor’, which were found in 34% of the total GEPs. In this case, the percentage is slightly lower than the sub-categories analysed above, which could be due to the fact that the Confidential Counsellor is a relatively diffuse figure in Italian universities. In this sub-category we were able to encounter both actions aimed at the adoption of this figure (e.g., ‘*Appointment of the Confidential Counsellor within the university*’) and aimed at the strengthening of the body (e.g., ‘*Promotion of the role of the Confidential Counsellor within the university*’).

The 17 actions regarding the sub-category ‘Code of Conduct’ were found in 16 GEPs (representing 34% of the total GEPs), a result which can be translated into the fact that there has not been a wide variation in the policies adopted by universities in this sub-category, rather the universities that have planned actions in this field have focused on the adoption or improvement of the instrument (e.g., *‘Adapt the University Codes to the 2019 ILO Convention and National Law 4/2021 on violence and harassment in the workplace’*; *‘Revision of the University Code against Sexual Harassment’*).

Although the COUNIPAR survey data showed that cooperation with the territorial system of Anti-Violence Centers was underdeveloped, in the QCA of the GEPs a large number of actions concerning this sub-category was not found, showing once again the need for further implementation of this important territorial networking instrument. In particular, only 13 actions were identified in 27.7% of the total GEPs, showing how few universities had planned this policy. The actions detected in this sub-category mainly concerned the stipulation of agreements with Anti-Violence Centers (e.g., *‘Establishing specific agreements with territorial Anti-Violence Centres’*), but innovative actions were also identified, including those concerning traineeships at the same centers (e.g., *‘Planning traineeship activities (Anti-Violence Associations)’*), conveying additional awareness-raising purpose.

Finally, the last recurrent actions involved the ones included in the sub-category ‘Anti-violence desk’, found in only 23.4% of the total GEPs. This policy was also found to be underdeveloped in the COUNIPAR data analysis and it does not appear that Italian universities, through the GEPs analysed, intended to strengthen this device, favouring other methods to handle cases of violence or harassment and leaving considerable ground for future development. However, it should be pointed out that in this sub-category we found predominantly actions to set up the ‘Desk’ (e.g., *‘Setting up a specific desk for reports’*; *‘Activation of a specific orientation service for anti-violence psychological support, to be implemented in close synergy with the Psychological Help Desk aimed at the student community’*), which means that the actions concerned universities that did not already provide for it, indicating that a growing number of universities have decided to undertake also this strategy to contrast GBV.

To summarise, the overall results are consistent with what has been found in the literature review on GBV management and countering policies, in particular with regard to the provision of formal support and reporting spaces, clear regulations concerning unacceptable acts and their consequences for offenders (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2018, 2020; Naezer et al., 2019; ERAC, 2020; Moylan et al., 2022; Hill and Crofts, 2023), as well as figures typical of the Italian legal system such as ‘Confidential Counsellor’, which can be compared to the international figure of the ombuds offices, whose criticality has been mentioned by a number of scholars, both a national and

international level (Sangianantoni et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018). On the other hand, a large scope of development is reserved for the Anti-violence desk, which appears to be a tool that is still little acknowledged and implemented by universities and that could be instrumental in increasing the number of reports, as it can support victims precisely in cases of occurred violence.

Table 9. Detailed results from the coding frame (category – sub-category)

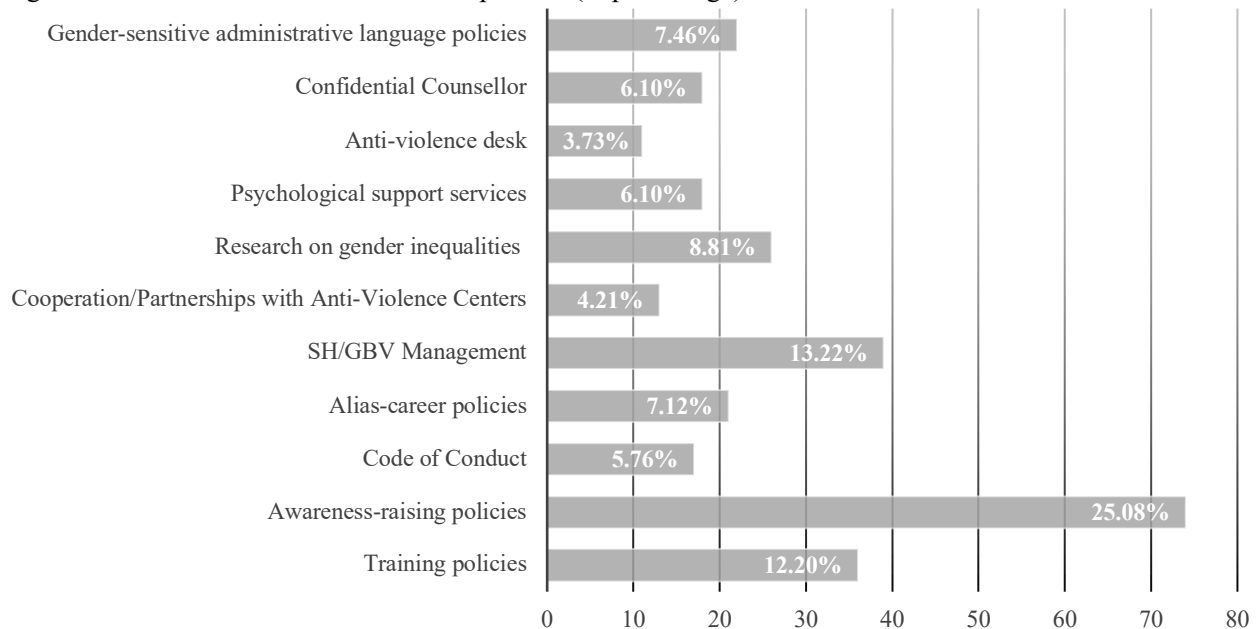
Subcategory	Unit of analysis (#GEPs)	Coding unit (#Actions)
Training policies	25	36
Awareness-raising policies	35	74
Code of Conduct	16	17
Alias-career policies	21	21
SH/GBV Management	21	39
Cooperation/Partnerships with Anti-Violence Centres	13	13
Research on gender inequalities	15	26
Psychological support services	18	18
Anti-violence desk	11	11
Confidential Counsellor	16	18
Gender-sensitive administrative language policies	19	22

Source: authors' elaboration

Considering together the results across the two categories, we can observe (see Figure 2) that overall, the actions most planned by the GEPs of Italian universities concern awareness-raising policies (25.08%). This result is consistent with the fact that the central strategy in eradicating GBV and sexual harassment consists of addressing sexist beliefs and educating on the recognition of discrimination and abuse due to gender. In this regard, awareness-raising is the first prevention and thereby opposition strategy to eliminate GBV. Similarly, training policies are also relevant (making up 12.20% of the total actions detected), also considering that, as pointed out above, many victims of violence did not report because they did not recognise the episode as violence at the time (Lipinsky et al., 2022). Furthermore, harassment and GBV management policies are very prominent, constituting 13.22% of the detected actions, showing that after preventive programmes, the actual management of cases of violence is considered central by the universities. Also in this case, it has

been acknowledged in the literature that the management of violence cases is crucial both in counteracting the single episode and in encouraging reporting, since many victims do not report since they are aware that no measures are taken against the perpetrators after reporting (Lipinsky et al., 2022). Lower figures concern the cooperation and/or partnership with Anti-Violence Centers (4.21%

Figure 2. Occurrence of the coded actions/policies (in percentage)

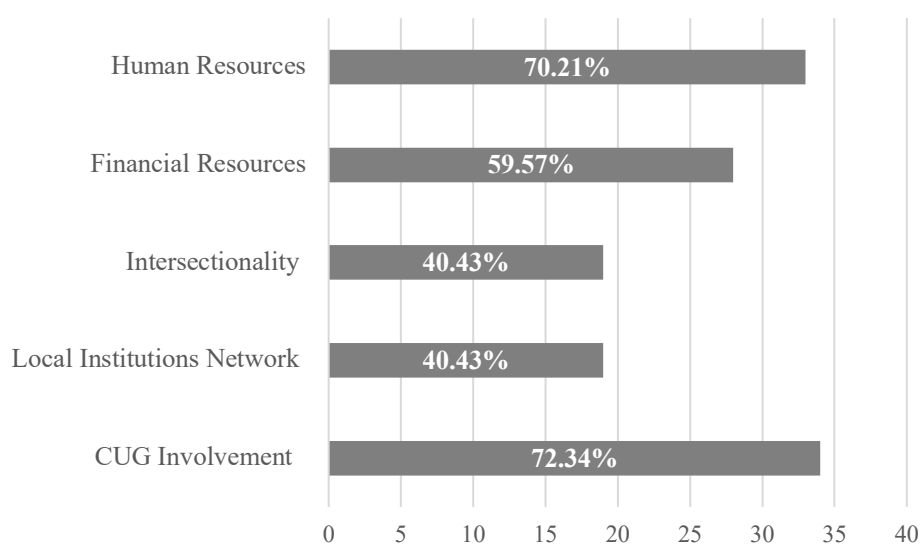


of the cases considered) and the Anti-Violence desk (3.73%), showing how these may be policies that could be pursued to a greater extent. Specifically, general psychological support services (6.10%) seem to be preferred over the Anti-Violence desk, while it would be desirable to offer the two services jointly, with the Anti-Violence desk as a dedicated place to collect cases of GBV and harassment and to offer prompt help and response.

In conclusion, we decided to examine whether essential elements such as human and financial resources explicitly indicated and dedicated for all the process phases involved in the implementation of the policies from design to implementation and monitoring—essential elements for assessing coherence and commitment in the implementation of the activities—were present in the design of the actions included in the GEPs, as recommended by the CRUI Guidelines (2021). Furthermore, we decided to take into consideration additional features, such as the involvement of the university CUG in the policies planned in the GEP (as suggested by CRUI, 2021), the reference to the intersectionality dimension and the involvement by networking with local institutions, to be understood as stakeholders. As results of this analysis (see Figure 3), we found that the CUG, as explicitly recommended, is involved in at least one action in 72.34% of the cases examined, and a large majority of GEPs (70.21%) specifically allocate human resources to the planned policies, while 59.57% have precisely identified financial resources to be dedicated to the actions. The allocation of financial (and human) resources is essential in the effective implementation of planned actions, and its absence

constitutes a well-grounded risk that planned policies will remain unimplemented. Smaller figures cover the aspects of intersectionality (intersectional dimensions are only explicitly considered in 40.43% of the analysed cases) and networks with local institutions (40.43%), displaying wide room for improvement in these areas, as the dimensions of intersectionality cannot be neglected when it comes to GBV, increasing the risk of exposure due to a multiplicity of concurring factors (Bondenstam and Lundqvist, 2018). Likewise, the network with local institutions must be strengthened in a perspective of participative processes, capable of acting as a bridge between the university and the skills and experiences conducted locally by all stakeholders involved in gender equality policies (CRUI, 2021).

Figure 3. Occurrence of the additional features of GEPs' actions (in percentage)



Source: authors' elaboration

4. Conclusions and further developments

Taking into account the widely documented phenomena of GBV and sexual harassment, largely committed against women, within higher education institutions, this paper decided to examine what the role of universities and Equality opportunity bodies could be in preventing and combating GBV and sexual harassment, by examining already implemented and planned policies.

In order to meet this objective, we first took into consideration the policies already implemented by universities by examining the answers that members of the CUGs of Italian universities gave in response to the annual COUNIPAR survey. Through specific questions included in this survey, we attempted to monitor the overall gender-sensitivity of the institution and the state of implementation of policies to prevent and combat GBV and sexual harassment, as well as the

perceived need for CUGs to train themselves on the subject. From the analysis of the survey, looking firstly at the functioning aspects of the CUG, we were able to observe how CUG membership remains a strictly female domain (given that in 94.4% of cases women make up at least 50% of the body's effective members) and how the majority of CUGs are convened at least once every two months. A further important finding concerns the involvement of the CUG in the drafting of the GEP: indeed, the CUG was involved in the drawing up of the document in all the cases reviewed. The analysis of the responses to the survey also revealed that around 92% of universities have a GEP and 91% have adopted it between 2021 and 2022, showing how the Horizon guidelines and requirements have boosted the adoption of the tool. In addition, the adopted GEPs containing monitoring indicators represent the 93.75% of the cases, showing how the guidelines were followed in order to make the actions provided in the GEP measurable and monitorable. Most of the considered universities have also adopted Gender Budgeting (80.6%), even if in smaller figures than those who have adopted GEP, but it should be highlight that in more than half (57.1%) of the cases of the universities that have not yet adopted it, the process of adopting the Gender Budget is currently ongoing. The great presence of different documents, such as the GEP (91.8%), the Gender Budget (80.6%) and the Positive Actions Plan (80.3%) appears to imply that a broader process of gender mainstreaming is underway in Italian universities, in addition to European-level prescriptions.

With regard to the policies already implemented by the universities, the analysis of the COUNIPAR questionnaire allowed us to find that the majority of the universities have already implemented the Confidential Counsellor (72%), which is the support service most offered to victims of violence (43.3% of cases). Other tools employed by the universities include psychological support services (25%) and 67% of the universities have implemented a free psychological counselling service for all members of the organisation, while the specifically dedicated Anti-violence desk remains more underdeveloped (13.3%). Even if not constituting a low proportion, it stands out that only 64% of the universities proceeded with formal measures against the perpetrator subsequently to episodes of violence or harassment, meaning that 36% did not provide for formal consequences. These findings are aligned with the results found in the literature about the difficulty of following up the report with formal prosecution of the offender, showing how clear regulations and procedures are needed in order not to leave these acts with impunity. In this regard, prosecutable offences and their consequences should be clearly identified, thus combining punctual law enforcement and prevention actions to encourage potential victims to report. In addition, the clear majority of the universities (69%) have adopted a Code of Conduct, while the figure of the Gender Equality Manager/Officer remains largely unknown and underexplored, with only 25% of the universities sampled having it in place. It was also found that few universities (16.7%) have established collaborations or partnerships

with local Anti-Violence Centres, indicating the need to strengthen this cooperation in order to be integrated in a territorial system of response to violence, since the university is not an institution detached from society but embedded within it. Almost all the universities (94.4%) have already achieved the implementation of Alias-career (the use of the name of choice for transgender and nonbinary people) for students, while many fewer (about 39%) provide it also for lecturers and technical-administrative staff, revealing considerable areas for the development of this tool. Half of the universities surveyed have already implemented awareness-raising campaigns and 61% have already adopted guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language, again showing room for further progress. Finally, 53% of the CUGs surveyed indicated that they were interested in taking training courses on GBV and sexual harassment.

Given these initial findings, we wanted to explore the potential in preventing and countering GBV and sexual harassment by universities by analysing the institution's planned policies. To achieve this, we considered the GEPs of the Italian universities, which represent the main policy documents for actions to promote gender equality and which contain within it, following the recommendations of the European Commission, a priority area (corresponding to the fifth) dedicated to combating GBV and sexual harassment. Therefore, we performed a QCA on a sample of 47 GEPs, detecting and examining 295 GEPs actions/policies. Taking into account the coding frame, we recognized two categories ('GBV and SH Prevention' and 'GBV and SH Contrast') within which a number of sub-categories have been created. Looking at the results gathered in this second phase of our analysis, we can state that the actions most planned by the GEPs of Italian universities concern awareness-raising policies (25.08% of the total actions), following the recommendations of the relevant literature concerning the need to spread awareness of the phenomenon, favouring its eradication at its root. In this view, awareness-raising is the first prevention and consequently opposition strategy to end GBV. Another kind of policy widely planned in the GEPs analysed concerns training actions which are essential in providing the tools to be able to recognise the signs of violence and counteract them. This is especially true in light of the fact that many victims of violence did not report because they did not recognise the episode as violence at the time (Lipinsky et al., 2022). In addition, harassment and GBV management policies are very central to the universities' action planning in their GEPs, showing that, beyond prevention programmes, effective management of violence cases is considered pivotal by universities. Also in this case we have to bear in mind the potential positive effects this policy may have not only to counteract the individual episode but also to encourage those who doubt the utility of coming forward to formally report an episode of violence to do so, since many victims do not report because they are aware that no measures are taken against the perpetrators after the report (Lipinsky et al., 2022). As far as Alias-career is

concerned, this kind of policy was not among the most frequent actions found in our analysis (7.12% of the total actions), but this may be consistent with the data collected in the COUNIPAR survey which showed that 94.4% of the universities surveyed had already implemented Alias-career for students, while only 39% had it in place for technical-administrative staff and lecturers, which suggests that the actions planned in the GEPs concern the latter. In our view, another underdeveloped policy concerns the Anti-violence desk, which represents only 3.73% of the total actions monitored, being the least common, and provided for in only 11 GEPs (representing 23.4% of the total GEPs analysed). This policy was also found to be underdeveloped in the results derived from the COUNIPAR survey, suggesting the need for greater awareness of this tool, spreading the practice among universities that already implement it and those that do not have knowledge of its existence or are unaware of its functionality. On the contrary, psychological support services were more common among actions planned by GEPs (representing 6.10% of total actions), and this result might suggest that psychological counselling services are employed more extensively than the Anti-violence desk, with the former being considered comparable to the latter, whereas, as it has been pointed out, the latter represent services that might better address specific situations of harassment and violence, while the former remain a useful tool for any situation of malaise. This result is consistent with the findings of the COUNIPAR survey analysis, where also in that instance, the sample of universities considered featured the psychological counselling service (25%) more than the Anti-violence desk (13.3%).

Looking at other essential elements such as human and financial resources explicitly indicated and dedicated to all the phases—from designing to implementation and monitoring of the GEPs actions, we found that 70.2% of the analysed GEPs specifically allocated human resources to the planned policies, while fewer (59.57%) had precisely identified financial resources to be dedicated to the actions. The allocation of resources is a critical aspect of the GEP drafting and should not be neglected as it is essential to the effective implementation of planned actions, and its absence constitutes a well-grounded risk that planned policies will remain unimplemented. In addition, we found that the CUG, as recommended by the CRUI Guidelines (2021), is involved in at least one action in 72.34% of the cases examined, while smaller figures cover the aspects of intersectionality (intersectional dimensions are only explicitly considered in 40.4% of the analysed cases) and networks with local institutions (40.4%), displaying wide room for improvement in these areas, since the dimensions of intersectionality cannot be left out when it comes to GBV, increasing the risk of exposure due to a multiplicity of concurring factors (Bondenstam and Lundqvist, 2018). Likewise, as already pointed out when discussing the role of cooperation with local Anti-Violence centers, it is crucial to strengthen the network with local institutions must be in a perspective of participative

processes, capable of acting as a bridge between the university and the skills and experiences conducted locally by all stakeholders involved in gender equality policies (CRUI, 2021).

As a future development of this work, we intend to conduct qualitative interviews with full members or chairs of CUGs of Italian universities in order to further investigate the role of the CUGs themselves and of universities in preventing and countering GBV and sexual harassment, as well as to investigate the policies considered most effective and the policies to be developed in institutions in order to achieve greater effectiveness in prevention and countering actions. It might also be useful to investigate some universities and their GEPs as multiple case studies. In addition, the qualitative analysis conducted could be coupled with a quantitative analysis to infer the effectiveness of the policies planned and implemented.

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