



National report – Italy

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Table of contents

Introduction	3
Part 1. Desk research	
1.1. Executive Summary.....	5
1.2. State of Art in Gender Equality.....	5
1.2.1. Previous/recent surveys and research on gender equality.....	5
1.2.2. Curricula, action plans and educational policies on gender equality.....	10
1.2.3. Good practices and initiatives on promoting gender equality.....	13
1.2.4. Additional inspirational experiences: Alchemilla and the Artoo project.....	17
Part 2. Field research	
2.1. Executive Summary.....	21
2.2. Methodology.....	21
2.2.1. Children.....	21
2.3.2. Parents.....	22
2.3.3. Teachers.....	23
2.3. Results.....	24
2.3.1. Children's views and knowledge on GE.....	24
2.3.2. Parents' views and knowledge on GE.....	25
2.3.3. Teachers' views and knowledge on GE.....	28
2.4. Good practices in GE.....	30
2.4.1. Methodologies.....	30
2.4.1. Tools.....	33
2.4.2. Activities.....	33
2.5. Challenges and Limitations.....	34
2.6. Conclusion.....	36
2.6.1. Lessons learned.....	36
2.6.1. Recommendations.....	37
Overall conclusions	38
References.....	41

Introduction

Gender is usually marked from birth: pink dresses and dolls for young girls, blue dresses and adventurous games for boys. While growing up, children are expected to align themselves with a rigid and binary representation of gender roles which is deeply rooted in cultural and societal models and can represent a major obstacle in the pursue of individual desires and inspirations.

In this framework, Ed.G.E aims to contribute to the prevention and fight against gender-based violence and stereotypes by raising the awareness of young generations on gender equality, through culture-based activities, including art-based online games and applications, and the involvement of children museums and schools.

The aim of the present report is to share some relevant theoretical approaches and practices in this field from Italy (desk research report); and to give voice to the children, parents and teachers that were interviewed with the purpose of understanding their knowledge, attitudes and stereotypes regarding gender equality (field research report).

This work is to be considered as the preliminary step of a very ambitious project whose aim is to draw an overall review of existing gender-related educational initiatives in Europe and to identify the most appropriate techniques and practices for educating and raising the awareness of children and young people about gender equality. We hope that this national report will contribute to achieve the main goal of Ed.G.E and that it will be of inspiration for all those educators and parents who want to challenge social norms and gender stereotypes, laying the foundations for a more equal and fair society.

Part 1. Desk research

1.1. Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to draw a short state of the art on Gender Equality in Italy. In particular, it will draw a review on recent researches, educational policies, initiatives and good practices promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based discrimination and violence among children and youth, mainly in the educational setting.

Italy seems to progress towards gender equality at a much faster pace than other EU Member States but, nevertheless, the Ed.G.E Gender Equality Index places Italy below the European average. In particular, Italian laws have reacted slowly to cultural changes and strong inequalities still persist, especially for what concerns equal opportunities in the labor market, income distribution and accessing power positions. On the other hand, despite all efforts made to limit gender differences in schools and in other educational contexts, gender inequality seems to remain a prominent feature of the Italian education system. The reason for this failure, and the consequent lack of investment in policies for gender equality in education, is a consequence of a massive misunderstanding related to the importance this topic has in children's growth. Among the actions taken by schools to promote freedom of expression and gender equality, greater attention has been given the inclusion of artistic disciplines in educational programs already from kindergarten. Today, the great challenge of the education system is precisely to keep emotional and cognitive skills together in order to help understand gender equality social role.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic, that all countries are facing globally without any distinctions, is exposing our social system to further weaknesses and even the goals that we thought had now been reached and consolidated on the front of equal opportunities risk being eroded. Indeed, this crisis and all related consequences affecting social and economic conditions in which people leave could undermine consolidated emancipation processes and exacerbate inequalities, including gender inequalities. That said, some interesting experiences emerged, showing how education can be the key to promote gender equality.

1.2. State of Art in Gender Equality in Italy

1.2.1. Previous/ recent surveys and research on gender equality

The concept of “gender” was originally developed in the USA, meaning the set of socio-cultural characteristics that go hand in hand with belonging to one or the other sex, recognizing gender

differences, in mutual respect. The awareness about this concept started to develop in Italy around the 1970s/1980s, furthered among other factors by the recognition of language as an instrument of political action. It was inserted within a process linked to the realization of “*de facto equality* that is to say the equal opportunity for each individual of both sexes to fully realize themselves in every field ”(Sabatini A. 1987: 23).

At a general context level, we can say that Italian laws have reacted slowly to cultural changes. Women voted for the first time in 1946 and the Italian Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality in one of its fundamental articles (Article 3). However, for a long time, just a little has been done to enforce this principle: women in Parliament were a small minority, general culture rested on the principle that the traditional family was the foundation of the social order and the main source of social protection (Lombardo and De Giorgio 2013). Furthermore, the Christian Democratic Party - holder of political power from 1948 to 1994 - followed the principles of the Catholic Church, while the Communist Party shared in part the same values fearing to lose consensus by contesting the traditional gender roles according to which “the man earns and woman is devoted to home and family ”. The courts, from which women were excluded until 1963, have largely confirmed their subordinate position¹. In the late 1960s, requests for change intensified, supported by civil rights and women's movements. Only in 1970, a law introducing divorce entered into force (law 898/1970) and in 1978 the law on abortion (law 194/1978).

Progress in gender equality in the 1990s/2000s stemmed primarily from the need to transpose EU directives (such as Directive 97/80/EC on discrimination² and 2002/73/EC on equal treatment at work³) and to use European funds, while the media and television in particular kept on spreading gender stereotypes and representing women as sexual objects. In this scenario, the affirmation of gender identity and the culture of equal opportunities - two fundamental objectives in social development and educational processes - are officially recognized by the Prime Minister's Directive of 27 March 1997 "Actions to promote the attribution of powers and responsibilities to women". The Italian legal framework on gender equality is represented by the "National Code of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" approved in 2006 (DL 198/2006), with the aim of regulating the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men in all the fields of society.

¹ European Parliament (2014), *The Policy on Gender Equality in Italy*, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2014/493052/IPOL-FEMM_NT\(2014\)493052_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2014/493052/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2014)493052_EN.pdf)

² Council Directive 97/80/EC of 15 December 1997 on the burden of proof in cases of discrimination based on sex, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1997/80/oj>

³ Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32002L0073:EN:HTML>

Today, according to the European Institute for Gender (EIGE)⁴, Italy is progressing towards gender equality at a much faster pace than other EU Member States but, nevertheless, the EIGE Gender Equality Index places Italy below the European average. In particular, between 2005 and 2017, Italy's Index score remained lower than the EU's score but improved faster than the EU's score, reducing the gap between them over time. With 63.0 out of 100 points, Italy ranks 14th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, 4.4 points lower than the EU's score. But, between 2005 and 2017, Italy's score increased by 13.8 points, improving by 12 places since 2005. Gender inequalities are most pronounced in the domains of power (47.6 points), time (59.3 points) and work (63.1 points). What weighs heavily is in particular economic disparity and discrimination in access to the world of work⁵, where Italy has the lowest score of all EU Member States. The only exception is in the domain of health, where Italy has the highest score (88.7 points). Furthermore, since 2005, Italy's scores have improved the most in the domains of power (+ 31.5 points) and knowledge (+ 7.1 points). Challenges remain in the domain of time, where Italy's progress has stalled (- 0.8 points) since 2005. The countries that reported a score closer to 100 are those in which gender equality is most guaranteed.

The goal of totally eliminating all forms of gender-based discrimination is still far from being achieved in Italy and these inequalities are strongly embedded in people beliefs: according to a study⁶ published by ISTAT in November 2019, gender discriminatory opinions are still quite widespread. For example, that "*for men, rather than women, it is essential to be successful at work*" or that "*men are less suitable to deal with housework than women*".

With regard to inequalities in accessing the labor market in Italy, the employment rate (of people aged between 20 and 64) is 53% for women and 73% for men. About 33% of women work part-time, compared to 9% of men. On average, women work 33 hours a week and men work 40. Another problem is the uneven concentration of women and men in the various sectors of the labor market: about 26% of women work in education, health and social work, compared to 7% of men. Only 6% of women work in the scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical (STEM) professions, compared to 31% of men. As far as economic differences are concerned, gender inequality in income distribution has grown in Italy. If on the one hand the average monthly earnings of women and men have increased, on the other hand women continue to earn 18% less than men. In particular, in couples with children women earn 30% less. Between 2005 and 2017, the risk of ending up in poverty remained unchanged for women (20%) and increased for men (from 16% to 18%). The people at highest risk of poverty are single parents (36%), people born outside Italy (35%) and single women (28%). With regard to inequalities in

⁴ <https://eige.europa.eu/>

⁵ The Gender Equality Index has drawn up a report for each European country on the gap between men and women in six sectors, based on 2017 data: the latest news concerns the introduction of the thematic area on work-life balance in relation to the European directive in this field.

⁶ Borgia C. (2020), *Speciale bambine e bambini. Educare oltre gli stereotipi*, Uppa Magazine n. 3/2020, Uppa Edizioni

access to positions of power, Italy has the lowest score despite this being the field in which the most significant efforts have been done. The percentage of women on the Boards of Directors of the major listed companies grew by 33%, from 3% in 2005 to 36%. With regard to the level of tertiary education (higher and /or university) it emerges that it has increased for both genders, although for women has grown more: Italy has achieved the EU 2020 national target of having 26-27% of people aged between 30 and 34 with tertiary education: the current rate is 28% (but with 34% for women and only 22% for men).

Index score for Italy for 2019

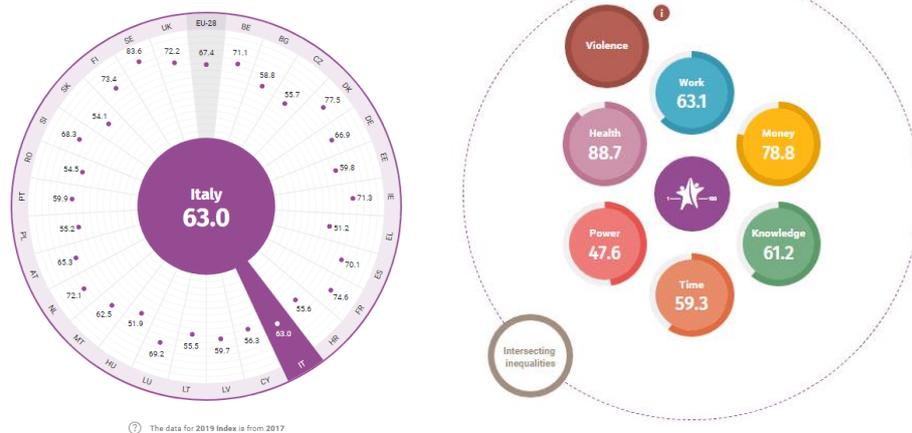


Figure 1. Gender Equality Index⁷

For what concerns to gender violence, there were 133 women victims of voluntary murder in 2018 in Italy, 0.43 per 100,000 women. Despite the cautions that international comparisons require, it can be said that this incidence is contained in relation to the European context: among the 22 countries of the European Union for which recent data are available, lower values are observed only in the case of Greece and Cyprus. However, an interesting key to analyse gender violence in Italy is provided by examining the relationship between the victim and the murderers: 81.2% of the 133 women killed in 2018 were killed by a person they knew. In particular, in 54.9% of cases it was current or previous partner; in 24.8% of cases (33 women) by a family member (including children and parents); and in 1.5% of cases by another person (friends, colleagues, etc.) (2 women)⁸.

⁷ Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/violence>

⁸ Source: ISTAT. More information available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne/il-fenomeno/omicidi-di-donne>

Sexual violence was recognized as a "crime against the person" only in 1996, incredibly late. Stalking, on the other hand, is considered a prosecutable crime thanks to a law adopted in 2009. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) was converted into law in 2013 after it was passed unanimously by parliament. Overall, the Italian system is consistent with the guiding principles adopted internationally and in 2006, new laws came into force aimed at punishing the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography and prohibiting female genital mutilation. However, Italy regrettably lacks an adequate infrastructure to promote gender equality: in particular, adequate coordination and monitoring are weak, assessment tools at central level are not completely and correctly applied due to limited resources in terms of both staff and funding, and the Italian network of anti-violence centres considerably lacks funds and resources.

According to a report released in January 2020 by GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence)⁹, "a succession of legislative reforms has created an extensive set of rules and mechanisms reinforcing the authorities' ability to match their intentions with concrete actions to stop the violence", nevertheless equality is still facing resistance in Italy. Indeed, GREVIO expressed its concern about "the emerging signs of a tendency to reinterpret and refocus gender-equality policies in terms of family and motherhood policies". To overcome these difficulties, GREVIO considers that "it is essential that the authorities continue to devise and effectively implement policies of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women which clearly acknowledge the structural nature of violence against women as a manifestation of historically unequal power relation between women and men".

The recent Covid-19 pandemic, that countries are facing globally without distinctions, is exposing our societies to strong risks and to lose out in areas where we believed that certain rights were now acquired. Probably women have already paid the highest price for this pandemic, and yet they have once again shown resilience in managing with work and family time. Suffice it to say that the sectors mostly affected by the pandemic during these last months¹⁰ (like healthcare but also education) are highly participated by women. In this scenario, the Minister for Family and Equal Opportunities has established the taskforce "*Women for a new Renaissance*"¹¹, an all-female team composed by scientists, entrepreneurs, managers, communicators, jurists and economists who joined forces to elaborate ideas and proposals for the social, cultural and economic revitalization of Italy after

⁹ Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-italy-first-baseline-evaluation/168099724e>

¹⁰ Meaning March-June 2020

¹¹ More info available at <http://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/news/mercoledì-15-aprile-in-videoconferenza-la-prima-riunione-della-task-force-donne-per-un-nuovo-rinascimento-voluta-dalla-ministra-per-le-pari-opportunita-e-la-famiglia-prof-ssa-elena/>

the Covid-19 emergency, while promoting a strongest participation of women in all fields and career paths, in particular in the fastest growing fields (like STEM, cloud computing, data and artificial intelligence).

1.2.2. Curricula, action plans and educational policies on gender equality

Law 128 of 2013¹² focuses on the "need for schools to encourage young people to increase skills related to education, affectivity, respect for diversity and gender equality and overcoming gender stereotypes". The prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination are laid down by the National Guidelines adopted in 2015 by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR): "The training offer ensures the implementation of the principles of equal opportunities by promoting education for gender equality, the prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination in schools of every order and degree to inform and sensitize students, teachers and parents"¹³. In addition to that, schools are called to implement the fundamental principles of equal dignity and non-discrimination of the Italian Constitution, reaffirmed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and by the European Convention on Human Rights.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education, University and Research issued national guidelines on the use of gender in the MIUR administrative language¹⁴, with the aim of overcoming the stereotyped models on the roles of women and men who still resist. An action that follows the various interventions already made on language in the public administration, more than thirty years after the "Recommendations for a non-sexist use of the Italian language" by Alma Sabatini and Cecilia Robustelli¹⁵, consultant to the Accademia della Crusca and author of the above mentioned MIUR manual. The aim is not to change the language, but to invite a more conscious use of what it expresses. The revision in administrative texts, also within the school, is an important signal: language must reflect the end of the model of homologation of women to the male paradigm.

Gender violence and discrimination at school is also often associated to bullying. With the entry into force of the Law of 29 May 2017 n. 71, the Italian Parliament has provided regulations in

¹² Law decree of 14 August 2013, available at (in IT) <http://www.lexitalia.it/leggi/2013-128.htm>

¹³ Law 13 July 2015, n. 107, available (in IT) at <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg>

¹⁴ Ministry of Education (2018), *Guidelines for the use of gender in the administrative language*. Wednesday, available (in IT) at

https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Linee_Guida_+per_l_uso_del_genere_nel_linguaggio_amministrativo_del_MIUR_2018.pdf/3c8dfbef-4dfd-475a-8a29-5adc0d7376d8?version=1.0

¹⁵ Available (in IT) at

http://www.funzionepubblica.gov.it/sites/funzionepubblica.gov.it/files/documenti/Normativa%20e%20Documentazione/Dossier%20Pari%20opportunit%C3%A0/linguaggio_non_sessista.pdf

order to contrast the phenomenon of the so called "cyberbullying"¹⁶. The main innovations introduced by the measure were to counteract the phenomenon of cyberbullying in all its manifestations, with preventive actions and with a strategy of attention, protection and education towards the children involved, both in the position of victims and of those responsible of offenses, ensuring the implementation of the interventions without distinction of age within the educational institutions. In this context, both family and school educators take on a fundamental role. The Ministry of Education retains the task of preparing guidelines for prevention and contrast by focusing, among other things, on the training of school staff and the promotion of an active role for students, while individual institutions are entrusted with education to legality and informed use of the internet. The police and local associations will also collaborate with school initiatives.

In spite of important efforts made, gender inequality seems to remain a prominent feature of the Italian education system. Indeed, several studies conducted in school settings show unequal treatment and, in general, a low gender awareness among teachers¹⁷. For example, they tend to encourage passivity and conformism among girls, and independence and individuality among boys; they show different expectations (e.g. that girls take charge of 'domestic' activities such as taking care of others or putting the classroom in order); they tend to give leadership roles mainly to boys; they usually apply gender-based criteria in organising activities and groups; they generally perceive girls as more cooperative and malleable and boys as more self-confident and, even when they recognize girls as the best students, the reason which is adduced is behavioural rather than cognitive or intellectual. Moreover, school textbooks often tend to reproduce sexist representations and stereotypes: male characters or features are represented more frequently and mostly in outdoor spaces rather than interiors; men they are generally depicted engaged in socially recognised as rewarding activities. Women are almost never portrayed in managerial roles at work but rather in domestic contexts.

Also, male presence among teachers is very low. On this regard, Ida Magli, Italian pedagogist, points out an excessive feminization in Italian schools with an average percentage of women that is around 85%: in kindergarten 90% of the staff are women, in primary and secondary school is higher than 80%, and slightly lower in upper secondary school, where the male presence is slightly higher than in the other education cycles. Again, according to Magli, the predominance of female teaching staff prevents children and young people from contacting a male influence with whom to identify themselves.

¹⁶ Ibidem

¹⁷ Rossella Ghigi, (2013) *Educazione di genere*, [Gender education], Lecture during the public hearing *Il rispetto del genere nella cultura e nell'educazione per una società inclusiva* [Respect for gender in culture and education for an inclusive society], available at <https://demetra.regione.emilia-romagna.it/al/articolo?urn=er:assemblealegislativa:verbalecommissione:20130614;7-A>

The reason for this failure, and the lack of sufficient investment in policies for gender equality in education, seems to be the consequence of a massive misunderstanding: namely that school is generally perceived and represented as a place where equality has been substantially achieved. On closer examination, however, Italian school is merely the image of a sexist society which in turn acts as the driving force for a traditional and stereotypical view of male and female roles¹⁸. This gap has been recently confirmed by the entry into force of the law 20 August 2019 (n. 92) that, starting from 2020, will reintroduce Civic and Environmental education as a mandatory subject from primary to higher secondary school and, regrettably, gender equality will not be among the topics covered.

On the other hand, greater attention has been recently given to the inclusion of artistic disciplines in educational programs, starting from pre-school programmes. Indeed, several studies show that, from the earliest years of the child's life, art contributes to improving their expressive abilities, to promoting logical-mathematical and linguistic learning, to strengthening self-awareness, to freeing the creative potential inherent in it. Art seems to be decisive for individual development¹⁹: in its most varied forms (visual arts, music, theatre, dance, etc.), it involves all the senses of the child and strengthens cognitive, socio-emotional and multisensory skills. Art influences brain development, skills, creativity and self-esteem. This process, together with the practice of sharing, promotes the appreciation of the efforts of others and, at the same time, the awareness of the uniqueness of each individual, from which derives a positive awareness of themselves and others. Art also promotes the integration of who and what appears to be "different". According to Munari (Italian artist and writer), children should have the opportunity to make art and develop their creativity within school teaching, finding space to freely express their individuality.

Interestingly, studies report that episodes of gender-based violence involving teenagers show a lack of empathy but also troubles in recognizing and accepting differences or frailties²⁰. Thus, the need arises for new training courses which, starting from school, educate the new generations to the emotional dimension, along all the stages of the educational path. Today, the great challenge of the education systems is precisely to keep emotional and cognitive skills together. Education cannot disregard this attempt: almost all European countries have set up awareness-raising tools, emotional education and the fight against stereotypes in education and

¹⁸ Marinella Baschiera (2019), *From bullies to cyberbullying. Loss of values or lack of direction. Reflections starting from L. 71/2017*, available at <https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/events/dai-bulli-al-cyberbullismo-perdita-di-valori-o-mancanza-di-direzione-riflessioni-partire#event>

¹⁹ Elena Bazzanini (2013), *Art and childhood. The importance of art in the development of the child*, available (in IT) at https://www.tafterjournal.it/2013/02/04/arte-e-infanzia-limportanza-dellarte-nello-sviluppo-del-bambino/?fbclid=IwAR17vC7Ed1_dqaj8lbWfS44eImMPrwOigEXFHWz2oPJcE8jyxoWyJQMqoE

²⁰ Vanna Iori (2018), *Educating to emotional life in school to prevent gender-based violence*, available (in IT) at https://www.huffingtonpost.it/vanna-iori/educare-alla-vita-emotiva-a-scuola-per-prevenire-la-violenza-di-genera-a-23403447/?ncid=other_facebook_eucluwzme5k&utm_campaign=share_facebook&fbclid=IwAR00Pt1FN31pd16Gtr98mQ6xx0vTTNFqT-UdL5gGa_bLbDXChVwPDg2CDmA

schools. In Italy, this task largely relies on the initiative and capacity of head teachers and teachers who, within the autonomy granted to each school, decide - with the consent of the families - to start specific paths in this sense. However, there is a need for a specific law regulating interdisciplinary education in all school curricula, based on the respect for diversity, equal opportunities for all, and gender equality for preventing violence, discrimination, and hate speech.

The promotion of education and training for “gender citizenship” are tools for preventing and combating all violence, especially when it comes to younger generations. This implies also awareness-raising and recognition of stereotypes in the media (advertising, games, books) and their influence in the socialization process on identity and gender roles from early childhood, as well as on the conceptualization and representation of motherhood and fatherhood. As already said, sexist stereotypes are present in fairy tales, in advertising, in textbooks, and in the language itself, where masculine is always prevalent in both lexicon and grammar. Representation of strong and active man against weak and passive woman is often proposed.

If on the one hand the family is asked to do their part in this process, on the other the educational institution has a major responsibility on that, starting from the kindergarten. The goal is also to provide the most fragile families (due to social, cultural, economic, technological poverty) the opportunity to educate children on gender equality and let them become what they want, not what society expects them to be. This is possible only if adults and young generations develop critical skills towards the dominant social models. As a matter of fact, ideas and opinions about gender in young generations are usually strengthened through the example of parents (roles, behaviours, words): girls and boys observe, imitate, internalize models. The main risk is that children are deprived of the possibility to develop their identity in a full, free, and original way, and parents and teachers must join forces in order to avoid this happening.

1.2.3. Good practices and initiatives in promoting gender equality

Good practice 1	
Title:	Museo Explora – Rome: Equal path
Aim:	EQUAL offers children, families and schools the opportunity to think about and learn more about rights and duties, equality and uniqueness, and overcome gender stereotypes. The new play-based path includes 11 interactive stations and educational activities focusing on “learning by doing” approach, typical of the children’s museums.

	Age: 6 years and up
Methodology/ Approach:	<p>A play-based path exploring gender stereotypes and raising awareness on “gender equality”. It was made under the scientific supervision of the Catholic University, the Sapienza University and the Unitelma Sapienza University.</p> <p>Encouraging both genders to take up scientific and engineering careers; encouraging girls and boys to choose their sports and pastimes; promoting self-esteem and awareness; improving the use of technology in schools through computer science education; quoting examples from female scientists, male dancers, female astronauts and many more examples of women and men who challenged stereotypes and were successful in traditionally gender-specific fields; promoting and encouraging girls and boys to seek economic independence, that is the ability to have economic means to live in dignity.</p>
Tools:	Interactive installations including audio-visual tools and screens.
Activities:	The play-based path includes 11 interactive stations dealing with three broad themes: stereotypes, rights and duties, equality and uniqueness.
Website:	https://www.mdbi.it/en/percorso-pari/ (EN)
Good practice 2	
Title:	E4E (Education for Equality - Going beyond gender stereotypes)
Aim:	<p>Main objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreading a culture of gender equality and support the overcoming of gender stereotypes by developing tools and methods for the educational system and institutions <p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of good practices among the project partners in relation to the spread of a culture of gender and to overcoming gender stereotypes • To promote innovative learning approaches that focus on the gender culture and overcoming gender stereotypes, taking particular account of the development of transversal key competences for children • To train kindergarten and primary school teachers for the implementation of the project methodology

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the project methodology with the children, aged 3-6 and 6-8 years through Creative Labs • To develop methods and tools for the evaluation of the key skills acquired by children and after the test phases • Facilitate the dissemination and sustainability of project results involving the policy makers at national and EU level.
Methodology/ Approach:	<p>The project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission and involves partners from Italy, Spain, Austria and Sweden and includes also the The Italian Committee for UNICEF.</p> <p>The project refers to gender stereotypes related to different family contexts, such as family with parents, single parenting, gay parents, migrants. E4E partners, in collaboration with experts and teachers in each partner country, have created an E4E Teachers Tool Kit for Gender Equality in preschool and primary school education: a series of exercises and activities designed to help children (and adults) to act outside of gender roles and expectations, to broaden their action space.</p>
Tools:	<p>The project developed the E4E toolkit, designed to be easily accessed for whom ever wants to work with gender equality with children between the age of three and eight.</p> <p>It consists of 4 activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's play: role playing games and body contact exercises that help children to act outside gender roles and expectations and to broaden their action space • Training4life: activities that helps children to learn the importance and value of caregiving skills. It also focuses on emotions for a healthy personal growth. These abilities are both necessities in our societies and on an individual level • My family: activities that aim at creating an inclusive atmosphere regarding family forms. To broaden the norms and expectations connected to the concept family and to work with the hetero norm • A room for equality: a way to analyse materials for children so that they give them more opportunities
Activities:	See above (Tools)
Website:	http://www.education4equality.eu/eng/index_eng.php (EN)
Best practice 3	
Title:	imPARlaSCUOLA

<p>Aim:</p>	<p>Promoting knowledge on gender-related issues and the valorization of gender differences in schools, with specific attention to the access to work and equal opportunities. It addresses primary and secondary schools through training and awareness-raising meetings with teachers and parents, and the realization of educational activities with pupils of the classes involved.</p>
<p>Methodology/ Approach:</p>	<p>The project activities are supported to by an expert in gender pedagogy and a tutor. They are designed as cross-cutting and supplementing the curricular subjects, and they are co-designed and modulated in relation to the educational offer already existent in each involved school.</p>
<p>Tools:</p>	<p>The project website includes a comprehensive <u>repository</u> of tools that can be used in educational activities on gender-related topics: researches; a webliography; a bibliography; a filmography; videos. Furthermore, the <u>media</u> section of the website shares pictures and videos taken during the activities' implementation.</p>
<p>Activities:</p>	<p>1. Teachers (3 meetings of 2 hours each)</p> <p>The involvement of teachers is considered strategic because it allows the initiative to be reproduced after the end of the project with the aim of making it "systematic" and incorporated within the educational offer plan. The first two meetings prepare and raise the teacher' awareness on equal opportunities and gender stereotypes, and support them in identifying possible links with the curricular subjects they teach. The third meeting is dedicated to the evaluation of the project path and to elaborating proposals for its transferability within the curricular activities and the school's educational offer plan.</p> <p>Topics covered: the concept of gender and its evolution through time, generations and symbols; male and female models (conditioning and stereotypes); work and roles in the family (how gender affects jobs, occupational segregation, workloads and distribution of caregiving, work-life balance); textbooks and communication through TV, Web, video game; methodologies for the dissemination of educational practices on gender-related topics</p> <p>2. Parents (2 meetings of 2 hours each)</p> <p>The collaboration between school and family is important in order to build a dialogue and a common path among two main training agencies in helping girls and boys to recognize their authentic desires and to build a concrete and actionable life project in line with their own expectations.</p> <p>The first meeting is dedicated to training and sensitizing parents toward the distribution of caregiving workload and gender identity, with particular attention to the ongoing changes in family models and roles within</p>

	<p>contemporary society. The second meeting is aimed to sharing and discussing the contents learned and making an overall assessment of the activity results.</p> <p>3. Children (2 meetings of 2 hours each)</p> <p>Activities are scheduled to be held in curricular hours. The contents of the meetings are identified in collaboration with the teachers also in relation to the issues that emerged during their participation in the meetings. However, centrality is given to the issue of work and equal opportunities.</p> <p>Active teaching methodologies are practised, with the direct participation of pupils, in order to facilitate their free expression, starting from their own experiences and avoiding rigid definitions and gender stereotypes.</p> <p>Activities: role plays; the description of one's reality (mom's and dad's job or the distribution caregiving workload in the family); dialogue with adults or peers, using play-based interview methods; individual reflection (questionnaires); research in group work; meeting external people (e.g. the municipal councillor for equal opportunities).</p>
Website:	https://www.impariascuola.it (IT)

1.2.4. Additional inspirational experiences: Alchemilla and the Artoo project

Alchemilla²¹ designs and implement artistic-laboratory activities aimed at promoting free expression of children as well as the respect for others. Furthermore, Alchemilla has started exploring digital applications to bring everyone closer to the artistic disciplines and allow everyone to enjoy art through digital educational tools. Thanks to the use of a digital application, tools can be used outside the school, in particular within the family.

In addition to the good practices indicated above, we would like to share the project “Artoo – the art told by children”, a digital application developed by Alchemilla²² that makes kids play with art in an unusual and fun way by interacting with Artoo the bear, a rather unusual bear who lives in the attic of a museum and adores art. Artoo the bear involves kids in a special mission: explaining to him (and to adults) the deep meaning of works of art. Kids can use the app to record and listen to the thoughts and emotions a painting aroused in them. Then they can listen to the ideas of other children and an explanation by Umberto, the director of the museum -

²¹ <https://alchemillalab.it/>

²² Further information available at <https://artoobear.com/en/>

considered the art critic. Parents, in turn, can share their children's voices with the Artoo community, to create a great collective story of art as seen through the eyes of children. Kids can also give free rein to their creativity by drawing directly in the app, free drawing or taking the graphic motifs of different painters as their starting point and thereby learning about the multiplicity of artistic styles in a fun way.

Artoo foresees the continuous implementation of the method and application: new rooms and new artists spread digitally, new authorial content by children in a protected User Generated Content platform. An important part in the development of the project lies in the recent publication (2019) of Artoo's first illustrated book - "*Artoo e Margherita e l'angelo richiedente*" (in Italian only), starting from the children's contents on Klee works of art. The book and the application are the protagonists of laboratory training activities in areas with educational, technological and cultural poverty.

During the Covid-19 lockdown and schools' closure, Artoo became the protagonist of short videos to suggest creative, fun, stimulating and educational activities that can be done by children and their families at home. For two weeks Alchemilla produced and daily distributed short animated "pills" with the suggestions by Artoo the bear²³. The video pills were also used by the Municipality of Milan, in particular they were uploaded on a Padlet for teachers and parents to facilitate distance learning and the exchange of creative ideas outside schools. In addition, the pills were sent to parents and teachers of kindergarten and primary schools, leading to create a remote digital laboratory for two schools in Milan with the direct involvement of teachers in shaping the content of the video pills.

The purpose behind these initiatives was contrasting the marginalisation of children during the implementation of the so called, with a bad lexical choice - we believe, "social distancing measures". Indeed, the isolation of children during the Covid-19 emergency went beyond the physical distancing and involved also a sort of progressive disappearing of them from public attention and debate. Apart from mentioning the issue of children's care during the lockdown (where children were mostly represented as passive care recipients or a mere "problem to be solved" in the day-by-day family management), who didi really care what children feel and think? Interestingly, the audios recorded by children through the Artoo app during the lockdown reveal their need to get out from that isolation and make their voice heard. Indeed, in some cases, children freely reinterpreted the use and purpose of Artoo actively adapting it to their needs: many children described their days or what they were doing and not the painting (e.g.: "I'm going to eat now") or, in some other cases the audio was a sort of message to Artoo.

²³ First video pill (in IT) available at <https://www.facebook.com/artoobear/videos/2538005576454548/>

This example helps illustrate that children have much to say and, when provided with the adapted tool and conditions, can display their power of action and expression. Artoo consists precisely in a new way of approaching art and promoting cultural authorship among children aged 3 to 8. An innovative approach that favours the recognition of children as citizen-authors of cultural content. It was born from the conviction that we need to build a world in which the arts, imaginative thinking and poetic feeling are recognized as fundamental for the happiness and well-being of children and to achieve social respect. The aim is to encourage authorship in mutual respect between boys and girls, and to facilitate access to museums (and cultural institutions in general) of families with children. It can display its educational role for social inclusion and mutual respect among children. The project was selected among the 10 best ideas of cultural innovation of the IC – Cultural Innovation program of the Cariplo Foundation. Its implementation, especially in this particular period, let us understand the central role technology has in educating young generations as well as the role it can have in building a more closed approach among teachers, parents and children.

Part 2. Field research

2.1. Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to give voice to the children, parents and teachers that were interviewed with the purpose of understanding their knowledge, attitudes and stereotypes regarding gender equality. Through a qualitative research approach, the fieldwork analysis will try to assess the knowledge gaps in GE and to identify the most appropriate culture-based techniques and practices for educating about gender equality. The qualitative approach was found to be the most appropriate when it comes to investigate practices, opinions and representations from the selected groups.

2.2. Methodology

A methodology change was agreed with the project partners in March 2020, due to the measures related to the COVID-19 emergency and the consequent suspension of school activities and difficulty in organising face to face group activities. The methodology applied for the present report, consisted of focus groups - FG (for children), that took place just before the entry into force the Law Decree No.6 23 February 2020, introducing urgent measures regarding the containment and management of the epidemiological emergency, and online questionnaires (for parents and teachers), in the context of qualitative research.

Although the participation was quite high for the three target groups (40 children, 28 teachers and 42 parents), it is worth mentioning some methodology weaknesses. For what concerns children, as we will see further into details later in this report, the researcher/facilitator met some difficulties in sharing the questions in the form they had been previously formulated or exploring concepts like “gender” or “equality”, which entail a certain degree of abstraction not always accessible to children under 9-10 years old.

On the other hand, regarding the sample composed by 42 parents and 28 teachers taking part into the online survey, they belong to a circle of people who have been in contact with Alchemilla and/or have been involved in former educational initiatives or projects, thus we could reasonably say that they are not totally representative of what “normally” takes place within families and schools in Italy, because these people presumably have a certain degree of awareness or interest on educational issues.

2.2.1. Children

Two focus groups were carried on the 21st of February 2020 with 40 children in total (2 classes of children between 6 and 8-year-olds). Some questions had been previously identified with partners:

1. Are boys and girls equal in our lives/ societies? Yes, no, why?
2. Do you know what gender equality (GE) is?
3. Is it important to you? Why?
4. Are girls and boys treated in the same way in your class? Can you share and examples/ anecdotes?
5. Do you talk about boys and girls equality in class? In which subjects? When? Why?
6. How do you feel when discussing about this topic? How do others feel?
7. Are there any problems one may have when discussing this topic at school and at home?
8. How can someone better teach/ discuss this topic at school and at home? Give me 3 ideas.
9. How can you find out/ learn more about this topic at school and at home?

However, instead of using a purely theoretical approach/inquiry, and in order to facilitate the research flow in the context in question, the researcher chose to carry out a workshop. These questions were thus merged with practical activities aimed at facilitating children's active participation. Indeed, it could be quite challenge for young children to master abstract concept like "gender"; "opportunity"; "equality" etc.

2.2.1. Parents

As far as parents are concerned, an online questionnaire (Google form), in the context of qualitative research, was shared in May with a list of about 250 pre-identified parents of children attending primary and middle school (covering the age range between 6 and 14-year-old) and 42 questionnaires were returned completed. The questionnaire included mostly open-ended or multiple-choice questions. Furthermore, as for teachers, the questionnaire included a section including information about the research project as well as a consent form.

The questions included in the questionnaire for parents are listed here below:

Gender Equality in the Home

1. What does gender equality mean to you? You can provide a few sentences or simply keywords that you associate with gender equality.
2. How important do you think it is to discuss gender equality in the home? Very important; Important; Moderately important; Slightly important; Not important; I don't know
- 2.a. Please give reasons for your response above.
3. Do you talk about gender equality with your children? Always; Often; Sometimes; Rarely; Never; I don't know

3.a. When and how does this topic come up? E.g. when talking about school, playing games; doing homework; watching tv; playing sport, etc.

4. What are the problems / challenges you encounter when approaching this topic with your children? E.g. low attention or interest from your children; difficulty in finding the suitable words; difficulty in finding the right moment or occasion; other reasons, etc.

Effective Educational Resources & Support

5. In your opinion, what are the 3 most effective ways to educate children on gender equality?

6. In your opinion, what are 3 useful activities to educate children on gender equality? E.g. telling stories, creative writing, having an open discussion, etc.

7. In your opinion, what are the 3 most effective tools to educate children on gender equality? E.g. games, film, books, digital applications, drawings etc.

8. What are your needs in order to better approach this topic with your children?

8.a. Which local organisations/institutions could provide this support? E.g. school, community associations, museums, NGOs, public authorities etc.

2.2.3. Teachers

As far as teachers are concerned, an online questionnaire (Google form), in the context of qualitative research, was shared in May with a list of about 100 pre-identified teachers from primary and middle school (covering the age range between 6 and 14-year-old) and 28 questionnaires were returned completed. The questionnaire included mostly open-ended or multiple-choice questions. Furthermore, the questionnaire included a section including information about the research project as well as a consent form.

The questions included in the questionnaire for teachers are listed here below:

Gender Equality in Your Education Setting

1. What does gender equality mean to you? You can provide a few sentences or simply keywords that you associate with gender equality.

2. How important do you think it is to teach gender equality at school? Very important; Important; Moderately important; Slightly important; Not important; I don't know;

2.a. Please give reasons for your response above

3. Do you explicitly teach or discuss gender equality to/with students at your school? Yes/No

3.a. If not, why? E.g. lack of interest; not foreseen in the educational programme; lack of skills; etc.

3.b. If yes, how do you teach/ approach this topic? Please describe any methods, approaches and practices you have, or any ways in which your students broach the topic.

3.c. When you teach this topic, what are the main problems/ challenges you encounter? E.g. low interest among students; low cooperation from parents and/or colleagues; lack of supporting materials and tools, etc.

4. Have you ever been involved in projects focused on gender equality in your current or any schools where you worked previously? Yes/No/I don't know

4.a. If yes, what skills or insight did you gain from this activity?

4.b. Would you be interested in being involved in such a project with this focus? If you click YES we will use your provided email address to contact you about the project in future. Yes; No; Not sure

Effective Teaching Resources

5. What are the 3 most effective methods for teaching gender equality? E.g. collaborative learning, independent learning, Philosophical Inquiry (P4C), etc. Please briefly describe the methods, approaches and practices you have, or any ways in which your students broach the topic.

6. What are the 3 most effective materials/tools that assist you when using this method to teach gender equality? E.g. Books; videos; songs; games, etc.

7. What are the 3 most effective activities for teaching this topic? E.g. role play, storytelling, debate, etc.

Professional Development

8. Have you received any relevant training to teach gender equality? Yes/No/Not sure

8.a. If no, would you like to participate in such training? Yes/No/I don't know

8.b. If yes, please tell us a few things about relevant training courses that you have attended. E.g. title of training, year of delivery, content and provider, etc.

8.c. What impact has this training had on your everyday teaching practice? Was it useful or not?

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Children's views and knowledge on GE

The children surveyed were not able to express the meaning of "gender equality" as such, when the question was made in the abstract. However, after reformulating the questions, carrying out playful activities/workshops and stimulating dialogue, children have shown awareness on the topic and managed to take a position on it (see the section on methodology below). Children were asked if "males and females have the opportunity to do the same things, in different contexts such as sports, professions". "If males and females can do the same jobs then they can do the same things"; "If I can do something, I can do it if I'm male or if I'm female. You just have to know how to do it and you can do it".

However, when guiding them through examples, jobs and sports assume a quite strong gender connotation. There are "jobs for men and jobs for women"; because for certain jobs "you need more strength and endurance", characteristics attributed mainly to males. Among the jobs for men, jobs that were automatically considered dangerous, children mentioned the plumber, the footballer, "who makes diamonds and who works with iron" but also the "bricklayer, the swimming instructor and the basketball player". "Gymnastics is only for girls" while "driving airplanes, being a flight hostess or babysitting are jobs that work for both". As for "female jobs", these were associated to elegance because "females are better in that" like the dancer, although some males have pointed out that there are also male dancers. "Handball is a sport for boys because the ball is heavy and it takes muscles". A girl contested saying that "even females get muscles if they go to the gym". "Only males play football because they are stronger"; "Basketball is only for males because they are sportier, females are more elegant".

The children did not directly express the importance they associate to GE, within the school or family or society. However, the participating children responded by drawing a lot from their daily lives, for example the jobs for boys / girls were based on the work done by the parents (as they know little about the different kinds of jobs that exist).

The difference between males and females, seem less important in some answers, and the reason for their choices falls on the "ability" of one person to do one sport / job rather than another, and not because of gender: "If males and females can do the same jobs then they can do the same things"; " If I can do something, I can do it if I am male or if I am female. You just need to know how to do it and you can do it".

2.3.2. Parents' views and knowledge on GE

The definition of GE is given in reference to various areas, including many concrete ones relating to daily life, concrete situations and points of view.

In some cases, it is associated to having the same rights and duties, as well as receiving the same treatment: e.g., "*Male and female have the same rights and duties*", "*People must have equal opportunities and treatment regardless of gender*". Furthermore, GE is associated to equal opportunity and treatment: e.g. "*People of different sex or different sexual orientation must enjoy the same rights and have the same opportunities. Opportunities of all kinds: quality of life, study, work, childcare, politics*"; "*Equal educational opportunity, growth and future prospects (employment, social and otherwise) for females and males, without the expectation to conform to force pre-packaged models*".

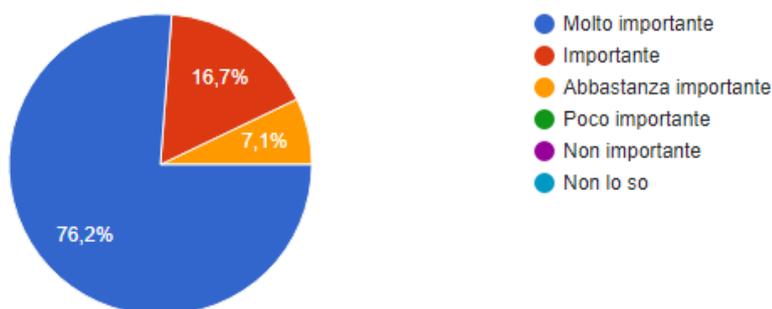
Concrete examples such as work and equal pay are evoked: e.g., "*No distinction of type of work by gender (jobs for women, jobs for men), access to equal job positions and equal pay*";

"Equality at work and equal salary for men and women". In addition to that, the distribution of tasks within the family is also mentioned: "Equal access to career opportunities and remuneration, equal division of household responsibilities"; "Everyone in the family has duties and assignments and if someone is in difficulty, it helps "exchanging roles".

The concept of equality is sometimes seen critically, in that it does not recognize the diversity that makes anyone unique, "I do not like the term equality: because it is the opposite of diversity. Both wrong to describe gender dialectic. I would rather say gender balance. The latter indicates the possibility for men and women to fully express their talents through equal opportunities. This implies the absence of inequalities in accessing resources, possibilities, roles". And someone would expect a more radical process of emancipation by overcoming the concept of gender equality itself: "Not having to face the problem of gender equality at all. Be yourself and desire to improve as a person without any external conditioning".

Other concepts associated to GE are the freedom of expression and self-determination, as well as the emancipation from stereotypes: "I associate the respect for genders to the freedom to express oneself"; "Recognize gender stereotypes that are sources of social inequality "; "No more stereotypes and social, economic, affective privileges ".

All respondents believe it is important to talk about gender equality: 76% of respondents give high importance to it, followed by 16.7% (important), and 7.1% (quite important).

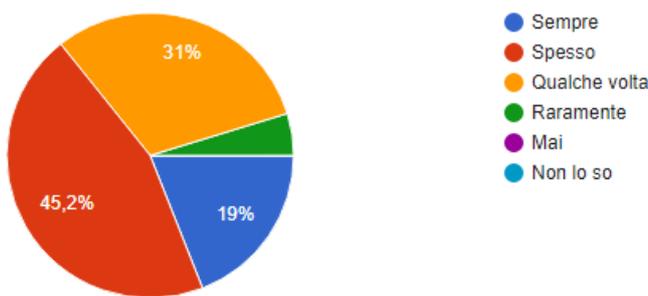


According to the respondents, in fact, the family has a central role in educating gender equality: "The family offers a world view, interpretations and behavioural modalities as well as paradigms of thought". Interestingly, the family is often described as having an emancipatory role in opposition to a mainstream society perceived as hostile or misleading on this issue: "It is very important for what happens around us, to educate to gender respect" , or again, "We live in a country where it is still not recognized in the right way", "Our society is still strongly patriarchal", "Often the misleading messages that our children encounter are out of our parental control, just think at school, at grandparents, TV, at an afternoon in the park where something can happen,

it is not possible to control everything but a dialogue within the family is important to give way to a different point of view and above all to allow sharing of ideas".

Furthermore, the predilection for an educational approach based on practice and good examples clearly emerges: *"I believe that parents must live and behave in daily life with respect for gender equality by giving their children a good example. Rather than just dealing with the topic as if it were a civic education lesson"; " It is important to talk about it, but perhaps more important is to live embodying equality"; "It is family habits that first affect the perception that the individual has of himself , of the expectations that society has towards it, of the objectives to be set"; "Because the gender balance is also expressed in the routine dynamics of everyday life".*

19% of respondents they "always" talk about GE with their children, 45.2% "often", 31% "sometimes" and the remaining (4.8%) "rarely".



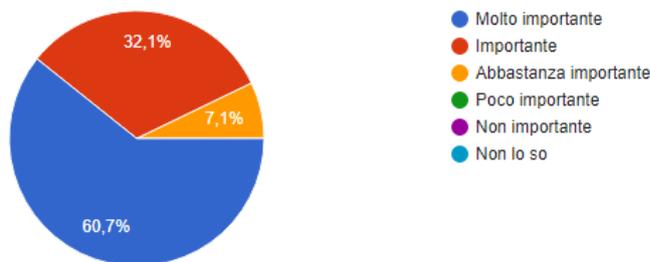
Speaking about needs, there seem to be among respondents a widespread perception of a certain distance between family practices and “outside” socio-cultural models. Distance that is sometimes expressed in an oppositional way, making the family exercise its educational role in a position of substantial vulnerability and solitude. So much to declare the need for *"A more advanced society"*, or *"Examples and models that are consistent with what I say"*; *"For a community open to change "*; *" Putting into practice, impossible in Italy "*.

Parents require support from society which can also be associated with the *"dialogue between parents"* and with the teachers, the desire that the topic is addressed also outside the family (e.g. school), up to a request for greater support *"from welfare and the communication environment"*. Furthermore, there is a need for training and for external models which are consistent with what is said / taught in the family but also examples in the community but also in the readings, in the movies, on TV.

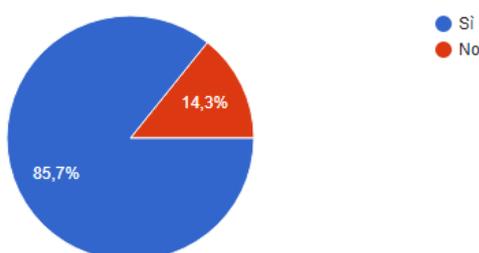
2.3.3. Teachers' views and knowledge on GE

The definition of GE is mainly associated with the concept of "equality", "equal opportunities", "rights and duties", "freedom", but also in relation to "respect" and to "acceptance", regardless of gender. *"Gender equality means the same rights and duties, without exception. It means allowing boys and girls to achieve the same goals in life, having the same means at their disposal. It means equal dignity, free from the gender preconceptions typical of our history"; "Each individual is important and of great value regardless of the gender of belonging"; "Equality not equality. Man and woman are different. But they should be equal in dignity, in freedom, in possibilities".*

In one case, the association between gender dimension and awareness of one's biological characteristics emerges quite clearly: *"Equal opportunities, equal recognition, awareness of one's female and male parts"*. In other cases, respondents prefer to speak of human beings without dwelling on the connotations of gender: *"No difference between human beings regardless of the sex with which we are born"*. GE is also associated with the concept of stereotypes' deconstruction *"Same opportunities, deconstructing stereotypes"; "Different does not mean wrong"; "Free from the gender preconceptions typical of our society"*. More than half of the respondents (60.7%) indicated that it is *"very important"* to teach GE at school, followed by 32.1% who believes it is *"important"* and 7.1% *"fairly important"*.



Similarly, as we can see in the graph below, 85.7% of respondents deal with this topic in class with their students.

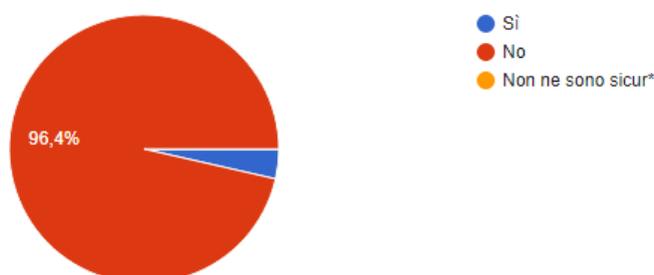


Indeed, a strong relevance is given to the role of GE education at school, not only pedagogical but also with an overall social dimension. As regards its social dimension, teachers emphasize its usefulness and value, both for the enrichment of social skills and empathy and as an ingredient in education for responsible citizenship and a form of struggle against any prejudice and discrimination.

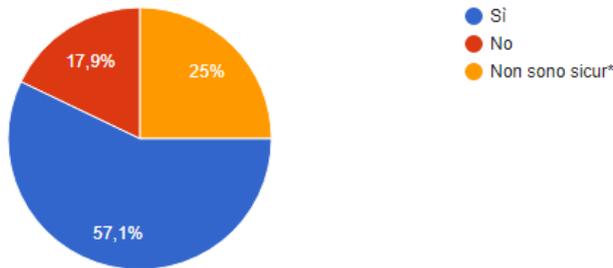
"The fact of educating children to gender equality will ensure that they grow in respect for each other, good citizens, respectful of others, supportive towards a goal of common good"; " Gender equality is fundamental for living healthy relationships and develop empathy and educate to respect diversity ", " I believe that school affects or can have a strong impact on the training of people who participate and are part of it. The education of the person as a member of society and a citizen of the world cannot ignore this aspect"; "It is important to teach gender equality to instil mutual respect in the new generations and to develop one's potential without fear of judgments"; "to make aware citizens".

More explicitly, it is recognised that *"The school has an important educational role and training, it is not only didactic"* and education is given a powerful role in personal development and in the full achievement of individual freedom: *"Providing all with the necessary tools to recognize oneself in order to be able to fully realize oneself in life, avoiding being imprisoned in prejudices and gender stereotypes dictated by power"*. The value teachers give to GE is confirmed by a high average (85.7%) of respondents who speak openly about the topic. For those who do not address the topic at all (14.3%), the reasons are deduced in particular from the lack of skills and opportunities to adequately address the topic or the pupils' age.

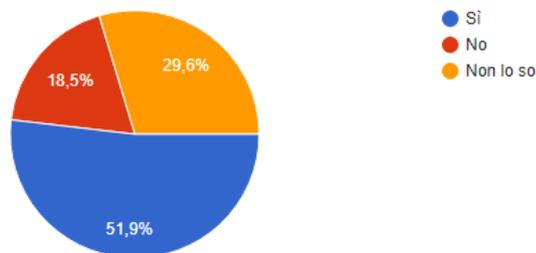
Among the needs that teachers highlight we find the need to develop more skills on the topic. In this regard, almost all respondents (96.4%) declare that they have not received any training on education about gender equality.



57.1% show interest in being involved in gender equality education projects.



51.9% would like to receive specific training on this (which suggests that, in general, teachers would prefer an experiential approach and project learning rather than conventional training).



There is also a need for greater support / involvement of families (sometimes wary and create barriers to teachers) and colleagues from other disciplines, as well as having more tools to support teaching.

2.4. Good practices in GE

2.4.1. Methodologies

Children

No particular methodology they come into contact with within their family or at school was raised. However, instead of using a purely theoretical approach/inquiry on this specific issue, the researcher chose to carry out a workshop.

The activity was divided into two parts: one initial playful part investigating through the use of colors their perceptions of the difference between girls and boys; in the second part children were asked to link them to sport and professions. This method helped investigate their

awareness of the difference between males and females avoiding too abstract and hardly accessible questions.

The researcher used a suitcase with a box of crayons inside, and asked children what coloured crayons belonged to girls and boys, pretending not to be able to find an answer to that by herself, so asking them to give her a hand. *Are there any colours for females? Are there any colours for males?* Each colour mentioned and attributed by the children has been put down in a circle, dividing the colours of the males from those of the females. They were asked if they agreed, also trying to play on differences (*do you agree? Why don't you agree?*).

Then the researcher led a session on professions and sports: *what professions/sports are for male/female?* In younger children it is difficult to focus on the concept of "work" so they were guided referring to the parents' job which however distorted their perception: boys (dad's job) / girls (mom's job). In some moments interesting debates came out, in which the children made concrete examples and listening to the opinions of others bringing out interesting conclusions "*if boys and girls know how to do the same jobs, then they can do the same things / jobs*".

Parents

Again, the example and the reference to positive models are the methods the responders consider the most effective for educating the new generations on gender equality: "*The example above all; information at home and at school; openness to children's requests*"; "*Example of parents at home, application of behaviours (not just theory)*"; "*Example and consistency between what is said and how one behaves (means that mom and dad take turns in the kitchen, daddy irons, does the cleaning and mom repairs electronics)*".

In parallel, a "situational" approach is often evoked, where discussion and dialogue start from the experience lived by children, news items and messages which children are exposed through TV, etc.: "*Explaining by addressing the issue through concrete episodes of their life*"; "*Give examples of behaviours that are discriminatory but tend to go normal, so that they do not accept them and learn to recognise them*"; "*The most important is to open a discussion starting from concrete situations.*"

Moreover, the importance of challenging gender stereotypes is stressed on several occasions, starting from the respect for the tastes and personality of the children: "*Avoiding to differentiate games, clothes, homework starting from early age*"; "*Listening and supporting them in the choice respecting their preferences, even if they differ from the standards inculcated by society*".

Teachers

The method indicated as the most effective for GE education at school is collaborative learning: *"Collaborative learning is definitely the best one, the creation of Circle Time in which to feel free to express their opinions, the realization of posters with a Focus of this topic are just a few examples"; "Collaborative learning promotes the enhancement of each person's peculiarities and promote the idea that collaboration helps to give answers and solve problems. "*

It turns out that it is also important to support collaborative learning through the creation of workshops and practical activities (e.g. posters), which can be followed by a collective guided reflection *"Collaborative learning, focus group, guided critical thinking"; "I would organize a flipped Classroom - providing materials (articles, videos ..) and dividing the students into groups who work on presentation to share with the other groups. Then, a collective reflection in the classroom led by the teacher and a final work (graphic / multimedia / video / banner... a creation of a slogan); "Activities can be graphic art or related to new technologies or based on theatre. It could end with a reflection and debate on what has been done by the class on the topic " . It also emerges the importance of stimulating a critical-argumentative dialogue through a method such as a philosophical investigation, to " stimulate the pupils' mind to critical and creative thinking " , starting for example from stimulation through reading.*

Moreover, teachers emphasize the importance of an experiential approach that, regardless the educational methodology applied, starts from the experiences of children and the concrete situations that they live both in and outside the classroom: *"I think the best way is addressing the topic starting from concrete situations that can occur in the classroom or from stories and moods of the pupils themselves". Or, again, from attentive listening and deepening of the opinions and reflections that spontaneously raise in the classroom: "starting from the opinions of the children"; "from real situations that have occurred both to the children themselves or to others; "I usually try discuss it transversally in every subject if conflicts happen in the classroom"; "There is no specific teaching, but the topic emerges transversely and when this happens, space is given to conversations, possibly accompanying them with readings " .*

Respecting the age of the children and not forcing the time is equally stressed: *"Often, at the first-grade secondary school, there is, at least in the first two years, a separation between boys and girls. This emerges mainly during group work (while desk buddies are exchanged periodically to promote socialization). The boys tend, during the group work, to create groups among themselves and the girls join in the girls. These occasions give me the opportunity to introduce the topic of gender equality, highlighting the strengths of each pupil, inviting them to a more productive cooperation based on mutual respect. Mixed groups made up of girls and boys are not always welcomed by the class at the beginning (especially in middle school), often the pupils do it only because "so said the teacher", or they grumble a bit. Over time they get to know each other and collaborate more and more. Later, there is hardly any difficulty in third grade in cooperating between boys and girls".*

2.4.2. Tools

Children

For what concerns the activities done during the interview, no specific materials were used apart from colored crayons. No reference to any tools/material (at school, or in the family) emerged during the FG.

Parents

Among the tools that respondents believe are most effective in educating on GE, we find: films, games, music, books, digital applications, sports and art. The centrality of the experiential factor re-emerges as does the exposure to positive models: "*No matter what, but always starting from daily experiences*"; "*Meeting in person people who break the mold*"; "*Reading stories about emblematic people*

Teachers

Among the tools that respondents consider most effective for educating GE in schools we find: games, videos, books, and songs. "*Videos and songs, I think are effective tools because they touch the sensitivity of children and keep their attention alive, images and music are a very strong tool. Group games in which to experiment with the resources of each child are another fundamental tool*"

2.4.2. Activities

Children

Children interviewed address the issue of gender equality through subjects like "Art and image" and in "Italian", however it has not emerged in what terms and through what specific activities / modalities.

Parents

The activities put in place by the parents to address the issue of gender equality are above all open discussion, reading, and watching movies, followed by playing and sport. "*I think creative play is the most immediate to convey a subtle, sometimes complex, message in a fun and positive way. Leaving room for a free expression. Through good communication and a suspension of judgment*".

Again, the need to bring activities into concrete experiences emerges clearly: "*It depends on what stories. You should find a metaphor in which to identify otherwise, the books that make the matter explicit, sometimes even in a moralistic way, I don't think they need much. Maybe just to*

introduce the matter. Writing seems like a good activity, not just stories. Retrace the experiences, draw from personal experience or from biographies". "The activity is only a pretext, a tool, and it could be anything, but it must be linked to the reality experienced by children, otherwise it will slip away."

Examples and positive models are once again pointed out: *"Guided discussions among peers through questions and debate from the answers. Talking about inequalities in various social contexts / geographical areas and getting them used to recognise them. Facilitate experiences that help eradicate stereotypes (e.g. meeting female astronaut, male dancers, or female firefighters)".*

Teachers

To address the issue of gender equality in the school environment, the activities proposed are predominantly role-playing and debate. At the same time, teachers also find it useful to read short stories (or newspaper articles) followed by a collective and critical discussion: *"Short stories, collective guided reflection to fix the fundamental points followed by individual work (graphic/multimedia work...)",* as well as brain storming activities to discuss *"good practices"*.

2.5. Challenges and limitations

Children

The age of the children did not allow to discuss the issue for a long period therefore the researcher' intervention was necessary on several occasions to bring attention back to the theme.

A certain difficulty was shown by young children to master abstract concept like "gender"; "opportunity"; "equality" etc. For what concerns the questions, in particular those with answer "yes / no", we noticed that once the mechanism was understood (focus on the answers out of the choir to spark the debate) the children were led to give negative answers to be at the centre of attention.

Parents

According to 14 out of 42 parents, there are no particular problems in dealing with the topic *"nor is there any particular difficulty because they [the children] always show sensitivity to the topic"*.

However, 12 out of 42 respondents said they have difficulty finding the right words and an accessible and understandable language or form of communication for their children: *"Finding the right words to explain it to the girls without making them think that they start in some way*

disadvantaged"; "Explaining it in simple understandable words"; "Difficulty in giving meaning and concreteness to a value that my son (11 years old) recognizes in abstract terms, but of which he struggle to see the concrete implications in life and relationships"; "difficult to find the right argument".

Others highlight the problem of attention and interest by children: *"Little willing to listen and deal with the topic"; "Using language that does not lead to boredom and keeps them interested and stimulates questions. Keep his attention high"; "I prefer to wait for the opportunity to arise or for them to raise the issue, because in these circumstances they are more receptive"; "swinging attention".*

Other parents complain of a difficulty in resisting and fighting stereotypes reproduced elsewhere: *"Difficulty in overcoming the stereotypes of society, which also go through school and involuntary attitudes (e.g. the difficulty of finding clothing that is not already gender-connoted, see colors)"; "The reproduction of commonplaces that they hear at school or in other educational agencies"; "To make it clear that the messages that come from outside, in the form of jokes or 'idioms' are incorrect".*

Teachers

Among the main problems shared by teachers in teaching these issues, the perception of negative conditioning by parents (and families) on children's behaviours and opinions emerges quite strongly. Reference is often made to the influence exercised by the cultural models of the family, as well as by the "mainstream" society, as a source of difficulty and criticality in teaching: *"I believe that the greatest difficulty is linked to the conditioning coming from the families and from the society that it soon turns into beliefs that are difficult to transform"; "It happened to me that I had males who were very reluctant to accept gender equality because families in turn did not educate them on it".*

In some cases, the perception of a "cultural distance" leads the teacher to question himself about his own practices and values: *"Sometimes I ran into the difficulties arising from relating to different cultures, in which the woman has no equal opportunity, so I started questioning myself if my teaching, so different from their family's one, was right or wrong".* Further difficulties are represented by the lack of materials or tools to teachers' provisions and the lack of cooperation between colleagues from different disciplines.

2.6. Conclusion

2.6.1. Lessons learned

Young children hardly master the meaning of GE if they are asked about that in abstract terms. On the contrary, playful activities and more accessible languages can stimulate dialogue and reflections on the topic. The interviewees have shown that they can dialogue and take a position on that, drawing in particular from their daily lives and close experience (family; school).

Parents attach considerable importance to the topic, putting themselves on the frontline in educating on GE at home. The issue of gender discrimination sometimes fits into a broader value perspective of education in the fight against socio-economic inequalities, equal rights and duties, equal access to resources, *"With my children we tend to discuss socio-inequalities. economic conditions from which people of suffer beyond gender"*. It has been strongly stressed to promote education to GE through the concrete example, the exposure to positive models, as well as the open dialogue that starts from the experiences lived in everyday life. The widespread perception of a distance between family practices and overall socio-cultural models was strongly underlined by parents. A distance that is sometimes expressed in an oppositional way, making the family seem as invested with an educational role in a position of substantial vulnerability and isolation. Very critical positions are also expressed towards the school, which in some cases is perceived more as a place of reproduction of stereotypes rather than of emancipation from them, *"The school should primarily educate about gender equality, but it does not"*. The strong criticism of the school, however, does not compromise its role as an educational agency in the eyes of the parents. When it comes to the need for external support, indeed, the respondents think that help should come primarily from the school, as well as from associations, museums, cultural institutions (such libraries), and from adults' training: *"Schools are perhaps the most important actor after the family, but also associations and places of culture in general"*.

The answers provided by teachers show how the topic appreciated and the importance they give to it, giving the school a social and cultural role, rather than purely didactic. The methods used range from learning collaborative to critical-argumentative dialogue through philosophical investigation, with a strong importance given creative workshop, as well bringing out the activities from the concrete experiences and the reflections spontaneously emerged in class. This suggests that the teacher's skills do not end in the knowledge of the "method" but also imply transversal empathic-relational skills and a strong propensity to listen. The interest and practices declared by the teachers, however, clash with a not so positive picture in terms of the training received. Only 1 respondent out of 28 have received specific training and only 17.9% were involved in gender equality projects in the schools where they work / worked. In this regard, the

participants highlighted that the projects in which they were involved were useful in addressing the problems in different ways, giving a broader vision of the topic.

2.6.2. Recommendations

We would recommend simplifying the topic, involving children through open dialogue in a playful and relaxed way and bringing the topic as close as possible to concrete inputs stimulating their active reflection and creative involvement, which is something more than the mere reference to concrete examples and experiences coming from their daily life. Indeed, the experiential approach is useful in so far as children are properly guided and their critical reflection stimulated, otherwise risk being to reinforce and reproduce unequal behaviours and practices they are exposed to in their daily life. Art-related activities could be a very effective expedient and method for this purpose.

The responses highlighted that parents need not to be left alone and to be supported in their educational effort through positive examples and models. Education institutions should play a central role in addressing parents' sense of isolation, but also the parents themselves as lever effect for their children education on GE. In short, there is a need to build together an "*enlarged educational community*" because "*Gender equality must be equally managed and acted out by all*".

Despite the teachers give considerable importance to the topic, both from an educational and social point of view, almost all (96.4%) have not received any specific training on educating on GE. Although the average of those who made training is low, the usefulness of the experience is underlined: "*After this experience I learned to observe my pupils more carefully, especially in the dynamics of the game and during sports activities. I also started reading books on the subject addressed to women, men but also texts for the little ones. I follow conferences and participate in lessons with a study group*"; "*Very useful. Man and woman are profoundly different in their attitudes, inclinations, outlook on life in concrete aspects etc... But they are the same in their desire for happiness, freedom, to find meaning for their own life*".

51.9% of those who have never been involved say they would like to participate in such training. 57.1% expressed interest in being involved in education on gender equality projects, which suggests that, in general, they would prefer an experiential and project-based learning rather than a more conventional training.

Overall conclusions

Our work aimed to share some relevant theoretical approaches and practices in the field of Gender Equality education in Italy. It has to be considered as the preliminary step of a very ambitious project whose aim is to draw an overall review of existing gender-related educational initiatives in Europe and to identify the most appropriate techniques and practices for educating and raising the awareness of children and young people about gender equality. Through these conclusions, we would like to share highlight some considerations and concrete suggestions for the next steps of this important and ambitious project.

Although Italy seems to progress towards gender equality at a much faster pace than other EU Member States but, the EIGE Gender Equality Index places Italy below the European average. In particular, Italian laws have reacted very slowly to cultural changes and strong inequalities still persist, especially for what concerns equal opportunities in the labor market, income distribution and accessing power positions. Moreover, despite all efforts made to limit gender differences in schools and in other educational contexts, gender inequality seems to remain a prominent feature of the Italian education system.

Studies report that episodes of gender-based violence involving teenagers show a lack of empathy but also troubles in recognizing and accepting differences or frailties. Starting from these considerations, greater attention has been recently given in Italy to alternative approaches in education, focused not only on cognitive but also emotional learning, and the inclusion of artistic disciplines in educational programs, starting from pre-school programmes, could play a crucial role in this field. Indeed, several researchers show that, from the earliest years of the child's life, art contributes to individual development as well as the awareness and appreciation of the uniqueness of each individual. Educating the new generations to the emotional dimension along all the stages of the educational, could represent a strong ally in gender equality education but require a substantial effort in terms of re-designing and regulating interdisciplinary education in all school degrees and curricula.

These theoretical suggestions find several confirmation and food for thoughts in the results of our field research. Teachers consider important to address the topic of gender equality but, as a matter of fact, their efforts result often from their individual initiative rather than a systematic educational approach promoted by schools or educational programmes. Most of them have received no specific training on this topic and generally feel a lack of support, specific material as well as cooperation with other disciplines' teachers. On this specific issue, we think that teachers (and parents) should be provided with adequate tools and training, and this goes much beyond the mere theoretical approach and integration of gender equality in the curricula and school educational offer: they should be better trained to listen, facilitate and carry out open dialogue with children, because children have much to say but, regrettably, do not often receive

adequate inputs from adults. This entails capacity of adults to listen and for children to express themselves and be heard and, more generally, a more innovative way of considering childhood and education. We refer in particular to the need to pay more attention to children's "agency" and power to change.

Interestingly, both parents and teachers underlined the importance of adopting an experiential and situational approach in approaching the topic with children, namely carrying out dialogues or activities that are based on children experiences from daily life. This implies for adults important empathic-relational skills and a strong propensity to listen. Although we tremendously believe that education should be based on concreteness and accessible language for children, we would recommend not be more ambitious: indeed, the experiential approach is useful in so far as children are properly guided and their critical reflection stimulated, otherwise risk being to reinforce and reproduce unequal behaviours and practices they are exposed to in their daily life. Art, as we saw, could be a very effective expedient and method for this purpose (suffice to recall the example of Artoo, that children actively reinvented as narrative mediator for sharing their thoughts and experiences during the Covid-19 lockdown).

As far as children agency is concerned, it is worth mentioning also the concept of self-efficacy theorized by Bandura, that is, being aware of one's ability to produce certain results in real life: "those with self-efficacy recover from failures and approach situations thinking about how to manage them, without worrying about what could possibly go wrong". Among the strategies that Bandura identifies to affect self-efficacy there is the observation of people and models close to us who achieve their goals through action, which was also evoked by teachers and parents.

On the other hand, the parents and teachers answering to the questionnaire tend to reproach each other for not being fully supportive in educating children on gender equality, and both complain about a certain distance between their practices and overall socio-cultural models, which are often perceived as a source of reproduction of gender stereotypes. However, the strong criticism of the school underlined by parents does not compromise its role as an educational agency. The responses highlighted that parents and teachers need not to be left alone and to be supported in their educational effort through positive models, training and tools.

There is a need to build together an "enlarged educational community" because "Gender equality must be equally managed and acted out by all". The goal is also to provide the most fragile families (due to social, cultural, economic, technological poverty) the opportunity to educate children on gender equality and let them become what they want, not what society expects them to be. On this regard, and starting from the assumption that inequalities result from multiple processes and oppressions (gender oppressions but also economic, social and cultural oppressions), we think that teachers should be better trained and prepared to recognise inequalities and stereotypes in all their different forms (even in their own opinions and

behaviours) and critically react to them. For example, teachers could be uncomfortable to treat the topic related to gender equalities because they assume these are linked to “other” cultures and values. That’s why training addressed to them should also consider other approaches and skills, such as intercultural education.

This reflection takes on new contours in light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The sense of abandonment felt by families, and the progressive disappearing of children from public dimension in Italy has inevitably widened the distance between families and schools on one side, and the risk of marginalisation for children. Furthermore, this situation has further marked

the difference between families, underlining their unequal access to social and cultural capital as well as the technological equipment required for their children education and distance learning. Furthermore, the current situation is exposing our societies to strong inequalities and probably women have already paid the highest price for this pandemic. Now more than ever, we need tools and methods for education, and for gender equality education in particular, which are accessible to everyone and everywhere, and provide children with the possibility to actively rethink gender roles beyond stereotypes, display their power to change their surrounding society and pursue their individual desires and inspirations.

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