



**Comments and Recommendations
for the GREVIO Delegation
during their visit in Italy (13th – 20th March 2019)**

**THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION**

1. Towards the constitution of a synergic and inclusive academic network

Today the university system is called to play a pivotal educational, scientific, cultural and social role for developing alternative epistemic paradigms and nourishing a critical evaluation of mainstream cognitive models in order to pursue the elimination of harmful prejudices, discriminating traditions and stereotyped patterns in gender relations, which prevent equal respect between women and men, the functioning of human capabilities and the establishment of fair societies.

The issue of gender-based violence challenges traditional academic ways of thinking and teaching because it imposes the adoption of a multi-disciplinary and intersectional perspective and the collaboration with experts from different fields, including working with non-academic institutions and sectors of the civil society. Thus, the university system must include within its realms different forms of knowledge in order to contribute to the fight against gender-based violence and the adequate training of professionals devoted to such fight.

Although numerous Italian universities and research centers have long played an important role in preventing and combating violence against women and minors in the fields of research, education and training in different local socio-economic contexts (third mission), the work to be accomplished is still huge.

Gathered information on academic research and networking activities foregrounds that experiences and expertise in the field of the prevention and fight against gender-based violence are neither developed adequately nor distributed homogeneously within the Italian university system.

Graduates from different universities - professionals such as medical doctors, psychologists and nurses, lawyers, magistrates and law-enforcement officers, cultural communicators and operators, social workers, academics in the human sciences, etc. - are not equally competent nor similarly aware of the measures that can be deployed to prevent violence, care for survivors, and educate abusers. Unfortunately, the scientific community so far has offered interventions aimed at preventing and combatting violence against women and minors in an uneven and unstructured manner. As a consequence, up to now the collaboration and possible benefit that local communities have enjoyed from the academy has been uneven.

Therefore, the constitution of a synergic academic network is crucial. Universities that operate in synergy can effectively contribute to promote significant educational and cultural initiatives that may nourish social change, so that European / international conventions, national legislations, regional action plans and local policies find their due materialization. The UN.I.RE Network Project is aimed precisely at promoting and developing teaching, training, research, third mission activities, advocacy/ awareness campaigns in an international perspective in order to chase this goal.

UN.I.RE – UNiversità IN Rete contro la violenza di genere, which means Universities Networking against Gender-based Violence –, was launched in May 2018 and is part of the program financed by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – Department of Equal Opportunities for the prevention and fight against gender-based violence.

UN.I.RE is aimed at promoting the exchange of information, experiences, practices and skills in this field as well as at building an academic network engaged in educational, scientific, social and cultural activities, able to strengthen existing activities and to ensure the application of the provisions foreseen in the Council of Europe - *Istanbul Convention*.

Although at its onset, U.NI.RE is composed by 10 university and research centers units (whose representatives are scholars well-known for their expertise in gender studies), its declared goal is extending the academic network for the prevention of gender-based violence to include all 96 Italian universities and propose the network to European partners as well.

In full respect of the autonomy of the single universities, whose freedom of research and teaching is protected by art. 33 of the Italian Constitution, there is an unquestionable need to strengthen academic commitment to the fights against gender-based violence - that is, to provide courses and surveys in collaboration with local authorities and NGO's in the light of the development of *ad hoc* social policies that work to implement the *Istanbul Convention*.

With the aim to elaborate and propose a strategy to all Italian universities, UN.I.RE is formulating a proposal to the Minister of Education, University and Research (MIUR) for activating nation-wide BA-, MA- and PhD- level courses that reflect upon gender-based violence from various disciplines.

With the support of university-elected bodies, like the Conference of the Rectors of the Italian Universities (CRUI) and the National University Council (CUN), UN.I.RE is planning to gather information about the activities performed academically as well as by local communities in order to strengthen the collaboration with non-academic institutions and NGO's. At the same time, UN.I.RE understands the local perspective in its international and cross-border dimension and is planning to feed its project with the widest possible exchange of information among different cultures.

Based on such premises, UN.I.RE is presenting to GREVIO the following recommendations, listed according to the articles of the *Istanbul Convention* that specifically address issues that the university system can regard and that lie at the core of the UN.I.RE project.

2. Applying the Istanbul Convention: the duties of the university system

The *Istanbul Convention* stresses in several parts – for example in articles 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 - the crucial role that the university system can play in fighting sexual and domestic violence in the educational, training, research and cultural realm, by contributing to change mentalities.

In particular, the *Istanbul Convention* refers to the following issues: I. *Data collection and research*, II. *Prevention*, III. *Awareness-raising*, IV. *Education*, V. *Training*.

I. Data collection and research

- *Article 11 states that:*

“For the purpose of the implementation of this Convention, Parties shall undertake to: a. collect disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention; b. support research in the field of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention in order to study its root causes and effects, incidences and conviction rates, as well as the efficacy of measures taken to implement this Convention”.

- *Comment:*

In 2012 the Italian Government promoted an agreement with ISTAT (the National Statistics Institute) for a national survey on “Women’s safety” (realized in 2014 and predetermined in 2019). Nevertheless, these surveys are partial and dissimilar. When compared with research carried out in other European universities, Italian academic research is overall lacking nation-wide proportionate and integrated surveys, with the sole exception of some studies supported by the EU Daphne program. The majority of researches are local and financed by local entities because national funds are not available. Appropriate data and information about gender-based violence and the monitor system are still inaccurate. Research on the actions developed against gender-based violence and domestic violence is still to be done. UN.I.RE’s construction of a database on gender violence within the university system may indeed represent the first step towards bridging this gap.

- *Recommendations:*

Firstly, a study about trials and sentences can be relevant in order to evaluate the discrepancy between legislation and application in the real field of prevention, protection and repressive measures and to introduce also in Italy the *Domestic Homicide Review* and a multi-agency approach for high risk victims, comparable with the British model of the M.A.R.A.C. (*Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference*).

Secondly, a systematic mapping of research activities within the Italian university system would be crucial in order to identify strong and weak points as well as best practices, to enable the country to effectively address social policies, as indicated in the *Istanbul Convention*. Both dimensions show that university research can play a significant role to ensure objectivity, scientific analytical methodology and impartial evaluation. It is necessary also to widen the range of university areas and to involve the humanities more factually, which can contribute to spread awareness and to train action-oriented and empowered citizens, as well as to include disciplines such as statistics, mathematics and economics.

II. Prevention

- *Article 12 on General obligations states that:*

“Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behavior of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men.”

- *Comment:*

The battle against gender-based stereotypes and any form of discrimination requires a systemic and pervasive education, which our country has so far failed to institutionalize. The Shadow Report drafted by women and feminist associations commendably stresses such deficiency and UN.I.RE recommends also basing such action on qualitative and quantitative scientific methodologies.

- *Recommendations:*

Enabling theoretical, cultural and historical research as a means to produce initial guidelines for actions aimed at a radical socio-cultural transformation that empowers the elimination of gender-based discrimination, including offensive, hating and humiliating use of language or images and aggressive use of the social media both in the private and public sphere.

III. Awareness-raising

- *Article 13 on Awareness-raising states that:*

“Parties shall promote or conduct, on a regular basis and at all levels, awareness-raising campaigns or programmes, including in co-operation with national human rights institutions and equality bodies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, especially women’s organizations, where appropriate, to increase awareness and understanding among the general public of the different manifestations of all forms of violence”.

- *Comment:*

For some decades now, institutions, civil society and universities have cooperated and promoted awareness-raising campaigns and programs, mainly on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25th November. Yet for too many universities such action has been confined to this specific occasion only.

- *Recommendations:*

Third-mission activities related to the *Istanbul Convention* have to be coordinated through a national integrated program, by which the dissemination of information and sensitization of public opinion are carried on beyond the contingency of the 25th November International Day.

IV. Education

- *Article 14 on Education states that:*

“Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual

respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education”.

- *Comment:*

According to this article, Gender studies must be institutionally recognized in university curricula. Nevertheless, in Italy ideological resistance towards Gender studies and diversity management still persists, and this despite the “National Strategic Plan to Combat Men’s Violence against Women 2017-2020”, which mentions the promotion of university courses about topics related to gender-based violence.

- *Recommendations:*

Gender studies, diversity management and the battle against stereotypes and any form of discrimination need to be recognized as an integral part of the university system. A *National Plan on Gender Respect in Education* was issued in 2017 by the Ministry of Education, Research and University in the past legislature, but it has not been put into force by the new government. The activation of Gender studies remains dependent on the decisions of the executive power, despite the fact that it is not only the educational and university system but society at large that can benefit from the inclusion of Gender studies and the development of programs specifically related to the fight against gender-based violence in educational curricula.

V. Training

- *Article 15 on Training of professionals states that:*

“1. Parties shall provide or strengthen appropriate training for the relevant professionals dealing with victims or perpetrators of all acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, on the prevention and detection of such violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims, as well as on how to prevent secondary victimization.
2. Parties shall encourage that the training referred to in paragraph 1 includes training on coordinated multi-agency co-operation to allow for a comprehensive and appropriate handling of referrals in cases of violence covered by the scope of this Convention “.

- *Comment:*

The development of activities against sexual and domestic violence has prompted the formation of new professionals with specific competences. The university system can play a crucial role in training such professionals in different disciplines, thanks to a cooperation integrated with institutions, women’s and feminist associations, anti-violence centers and

experts on this issue. Actually, although the *Strategic Plan on male violence against women 2017-2020* foresees the possibility for universities to promote courses on the topic under discussion and to train future professionals, this recommendation has not been fully adopted within Italian universities.

- *Recommendations:*

Training, formation and life-long learning courses at all university levels (BA, MA, Master, PhD, post-doctoral fellowships) are crucial to the struggle against domestic violence. Moreover, courses and seminars starting from the very first year of the academic curriculum can contribute to spreading a culture of gender-equality and respect among new generations. In this regard, a national integrated and holistic plan is therefore crucial. UN.I.RE considers the university as the primary public agency for guaranteeing a correct education and training, based on scientific knowledge rather than ideology, as is the case of some private subjects who in the name of anti- “gender theory” deny the core problem of the reality of gender-based violence.

3. UN.I.RE.’s commitment

UN.I.RE claims that equality can be reached through an educational commitment to fighting discriminations and any form of violation and that it can be attained only when human capabilities are freely developed and expressed. For this reason, UN.I.RE is calling on every constituency to a united collaboration for the pursuit of social justice, the establishment of fairer democratic societies, and the respect for all of fundamental rights and human dignity.

UN.I.RE foregrounds that the educational system and in particular the university system are called to be on the frontline for the change of unfair conditions and cultural paradigms that nourish domestic and gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination.

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