



SISSA

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS' COMMUNICATION

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Candidate: Nicola Vuolo

Supervisor: Leo Brattoli

Co-supervisor: Sam Giles

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ABSTRACT AND KEY WORDS

What's the role of institutional communication in fostering diversity and inclusion in European higher institutions? Universities, research centres and similar institutions should be responsible not only for the education of future generations, but also for giving them the right tools and skills to better understand society and be responsible citizens.

Communication plays a pivotal role in the shared narrative of how our world is made, influencing people's lives and rights and the future. Society is changing, the new generation is challenging the older one to change the paradigm through which they see reality. Higher education institutions need to adapt their way of communicating to embrace a more connected and diverse world. Universities and other higher educational institutions in Europe benefited from EU policies on exchange programs for students, mobility for researchers between countries and on research funding. However, they also have to deal with the complexities arising from this increased mobility if they want to stay competitive in the international arena.

Diversity and inclusion issues and opportunities have been studied for more than 80 years by corporations as they came to understand all the possible advantages of a high level of diversity in the workplace. Compared to the private sector, European institutions of higher education are lagging far behind.

Even though there are clear European recommendations and guidelines on what the country members are expected to do to guarantee equality in higher education, every country, and even every institution in the same country, have chosen a different way to implement this. And sometimes they decided not to deal with it at all.

In our study we decided to explore the issue of diversity and inclusion in European higher institutions' communication practices, focusing on the LGBTQ+ community. In literature there are papers on institutional communication, LGBTQ+ issues and diversity and inclusion, but there are no systematic studies examining all these three areas together. Therefore, we adopted a twofold approach in our studies. We used a mixed research method, using a preliminary series of qualitative interviews to build a

questionnaire which we then used to collect quantitative data. Both surveys focused on how institutional communication supports and makes sure that institutional policies on equality and inclusion became known.

From our research two things are clear. Institutions of higher education in different European countries are all trying to somehow deal with the urgent issue of inclusion. And also that this process is being accelerated by European mobility policies for students and researchers. However, there is a lot of disparity among European countries on how successfully their higher education institutions are addressing this issue and for how long. We can put those European countries for which we have more data into three groups: those which have already spent years trying to find the best way to tackle discrimination and inequality, those which have more recently started this process and those which have only recently realised that they should do something about it.

People in these institutions expect the institution's policy announcements to be followed by swift action. They also ask for clear communication guidelines and for diversity training courses. People should also be strongly encouraged to participate in these courses.

We identified some best practices and good initiatives that can be replicated by other institutions in other countries. We think that there should be more comparative studies on how the issue of diversity and inclusion is handled by different institutions in different European countries. This is because higher education institutions can learn from each other and because a minimum standard in common policies should be guaranteed across Europe to ensure real equality in higher education.

Key words: institutional communication, diversity and inclusion, LGBTQ+, Europe, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Culture changes. Even if every culture tends to be conservative at his heart, since people do not want to give up old values and beliefs, no culture is static and when a change happens in one sector of a society, then the others will soon or later follow that trend.¹

In 1891 Henri Tajfel said that

We live in a world in which the process of diversification and unification are much faster than in the past years: large human groups are connected and are more dependent on each other than ever before. The progressive decreasing, increasing or preservation of the elements of diversity are among the triggers of some of the harshest industrial and social conflicts²

He wrote this text a bit less than one hundred years ago. We are now living in 2022 and these words are truer than ever before. Our society is hyperconnected and physical and virtual circulation of people, values and ideas is quicker and easier than ever before. This leads to new opportunities and new complexities arising.

There are three main processes that lead to cultural change: discovery, innovation and diffusion³. The first process, the discovery, is about perceiving an already existing aspect of our reality (e.g., other societies cultural practices). The second one is about using the new discoveries to make something new arise (e.g., international institutions such as the United Nations or the European Union). The last phase is about the spreading od these new elements from one culture to another.

In 1992 the European Union (EU) was created with the aims of fostering union between the European countries, achieving the free circulation of people, goods and ideas⁴.

¹ I. Robertson, *Elementi di sociologia*, Zanichelli, 2001, p. 47

² H. Tajfel, *Gruppi umani e categorie sociali*, Il Mulino, 1995, p. 267

³ I. Robertson, *Elementi di sociologia*, Zanichelli, 2001, p. 47

⁴ Cvce.eu, <https://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unit-content/-/unit/d5906df5-4f83-4603-85f7-0cab24b9fe1/2f31100f-c3d2-42ee-ad52-3f3f07822fd7>

This strongly impacted all the areas of societies in the countries that joined the EU, higher education included.

With the Yerevan Communiqué that followed the homonymous EU conference in 2015, the diversity in the higher education systems of the different European countries was officially recognised⁵. This is the official document that gave rise to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The Communiqué highlighted how the common goals of all these different education systems should be used to lay the foundations for a common reform of the EHEA.

The Yerevan Communiqué identified several challenges such as economic and social crisis, unemployment, marginalization of young people, demographic changes, migration, extremism and radicalizations⁶. But there are opportunities as well. And those opportunities arise because of the greater mobility of staff and students that leads to a better mutual understanding, while the fast development of technologies and spreading of knowledge fostered a huge transformation in higher education and research.

The Yerevan Communiqué aims to achieve the goals of European countries trusting each other's education systems, of higher education systems being able to contribute to a more inclusive society by promoting cultural understanding critical thinking, political and religious tolerance and democratic civil values. To do so, four main points were identified⁷:

- 1- Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching.
- 2- Fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives.
- 3- Making European higher education systems more inclusive.

⁵ Yerevan Communiqué, final version, EHEA ministerial conference, 2015, p. 1

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ Yerevan Communiqué, final version, EHEA ministerial conference, 2015, p. 2

4- Implementing agreed structural reforms across the EU countries.

To fulfil point 4 of the Yerevan Communiqué, European higher education system structure has to be reconsidered and made more inclusive.

The Bologna Process is a mechanism fostered by the European Union (EU) to promote intergovernmental cooperation between European countries in the field of higher education. Each of the 48 countries that joined the Bologna Process agreed on three main points:

- 1- Introduce a three-cycle higher education system consisting of bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies.
- 2- Ensure the mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad completed at other universities.
- 3- Implement a system of quality assurance, to strengthen the quality and relevance of learning and teaching⁸.

Mobility of students and researcher greatly increased in the last twenty years thanks to the Bologna Process and to the Erasmus+ programme. Being able to move across Europe means more opportunities of training and employment for the students but also trigger changes that challenges universities, research centres and museums (URM) are urgently called to answer. In its opening statement in the 2018 report on the Bologna Process Tibor Navracsics, the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said that the EU higher education system must answer to a series of questions:

How do we recognise and reward good teaching as well as good research? How do we ensure that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can access and successfully complete higher

⁸ EU, The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education, European Union official website, https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en

education? How do we remove burdensome recognition procedures to ensure that students and graduates can be mobile? And how do we increase the relevance of higher education programmes for a labour market that is in a state of permanent transformation?

The entire 5th chapter of the Bologna Process report is dedicated to the topic of making higher education open to a diverse student population.⁹

Diversity is a word used to embrace a multiplicity of identities. In our research we chose to consider only the case of LGBTQ+ community in the context of three main big higher education institutions: universities, research centres and science museums. For the latter we considered only the research activity and not the dissemination and public engagement ones. From now on in this text when we refer to higher education institutions we explicitly talk about universities, research centres and museums. Our research is restricted to European countries.

The focus of our research is on the role of institutional communication in diversity and inclusion policies in European higher education institutions. We think that communication is a powerful and versatile tool through which institutions can build their public and private images, shape their studying and working environments, share their values and missions and chose the kind of people they want to preferentially attract. Institutional communication is a fundamental step to create a more inclusive institutional culture.

Group theory and human interactions

When two or more people interact with each other, their social interaction is always influenced by their belongings to one or more social group¹⁰. A group is made by a people that interacts with each other in an orderly way based on shared expectations on how they are supposed to behave¹¹.

There are three elements that contributes to define if someone belongs to a group:

⁹ EU Education and Training, *The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation*, Education and Training, European Commission, 2018, pp. 153 – 214

¹⁰ H. Tajfel, *Gruppi umani e categorie sociali*, Il Mulino, 1995, p. 292

¹¹ I. Robertson, *Elementi di sociologia*, Zanichelli, 2001, p. 53

- 1- A cognitive element, meaning that the person is aware of their belonging to a certain group.
- 2- A value element, meaning that the person is aware that being part of a group comes with positive or negative connotations.
- 3- An emotional component, meaning that a person may have positive or negative feelings about their belonging to a specific group¹².

According to Tajfel¹³, it is possible to recognise a continuum between two imaginary situations that never happens in real life: on one side a true and exclusive interpersonal interaction and on the opposite side a pure intergroup interaction.

That's why when we talk about diversity and inclusion in institutional communication, we cannot forget that the individuals belonging to a certain institution are part of different social groups. In particular, LGBTQ+ people belong to what are called a social minority group, and this add an extra layer of complexity in social interaction and inter-group communication.

What is a minority group?

Belonging to one or more than one social group contributes to define our social image as an individual. We usually belong to more than one social group at the same time (e.g. Italian, student, basket player etc). How much each social group means to us usually vary according to the social context and to the kind of interaction we are having with other individuals or group. For example, being Italian may not be very important to us until the soccer's World Cup begins or until we move to a foreign country.

Minority groups are a particular kind of social groups. Despite of their name, numbers have a low importance in define which group is a social minority and which one is not.

¹² H. Tajfel, *Gruppi umani e categorie sociali*, Il Mulino, 1995, p. 278

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 294

Social minority groups are roughly defined by five characteristics that are not bonding, though. In fact, a minority group can possess only some of these characteristics and still be labelled as minority. The five characteristics are:

- 1- Being a small fragment of a bigger society.
- 2- The possess, by the minority group members, of physical or cultural characteristics that are considered of low or no value from the dominant groups in the society.
- 3- Being self- conscious units kept together by specific characteristics shared by the members of the group who are usually discriminated because of these characteristics.
- 4- Usually, the belonging to a minority group is transmitted by lineage to the later generations.
- 5- Members of minority groups tend to marry each other by choice or out of necessity.¹⁴

As said before, numbers are not important in this definition. Some social minority groups are also much less numerous than the majority groups, but it is not always the case. For examples women are often considered a minority group, even if they represent a bit more than half of the global human population.

LGBTQ+ people represent a small fragment of society, possess physical and cultural characteristics that are considered of low value when not negative by the majority of people and the characteristics they share brings discrimination upon them.

Often, people belonging to minority groups were originally put in that specific social categories by people who do not belong to that category. Being labelled and treated differently by the rest of the society may generate cohesion among the member of a

¹⁴ G. E. Simpson, J. M. Yinger, *Racial and cultural Minorities*, New York, Harper & Row, 1965, p.17

specific minority group overtime, resulting in those people becoming aware of their differences¹⁵.

For all these reasons, between the LGBTQ+ community and the rest of the society there is a long history of social and cultural differences and discrimination that institutions should take into account if they want to build an inclusive institutional environment.

Diversity and inclusion in the workplace

Institutions represent a group of values, laws, roles and groups that arise to fulfil the society fundamental needs¹⁶. For example, schools must transmit cultural knowledge to the younger members of the society. All institutions are inherently conservative¹⁷ since institutional models have been formerly validated by society costumes and traditions. This ensures stability to the society but can also cause dysfunction when the old institutional models are antiquated, oppressive or non- efficient.

The first to understand the potential of diversity where the corporations. Diversity is one of the most popular business topics in the last three decades, together with quality, leadership and ethics¹⁸.

Diversity management practices and inclusion policies in corporations have their roots in legislation compliance. The first efforts made by companies in the US to increase diversity in the workplace were only made to fulfil legal requests from the title VII of the Civil Rights Act¹⁹. Diversity become a real field of study and object of strong corporative actions only at the end of the 80s because of the publishing, in the US, of the *Workforce 2020* report by the Hudson Institute²⁰. This report predicted a shift in the composition

¹⁵ H. Tajfel, *Gruppi umani e categorie sociali*, Il Mulino, 1995, p. 399

¹⁶ I. Robertson, *Elementi di sociologia*, Zanichelli, 2001, p. 53

¹⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁸ Anand R., Winters M. F., *A retrospective view of corporate diversity training from 1964 to the present*, *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2008, vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 356- 372

¹⁹ <https://www.justice.gov/crt/types-educational-opportunities-discrimination>

²⁰ W.B. Johnston, A. E. Packer, *Workforce 2000: work and workers for the 21st century*, Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute

of the workforce that by 2020 with an increase in ethnic and gender diversity. Since the publication of this report, the term *workforce diversity* become part of the business dictionary.

The term *inclusion*, meaning the creation of an organisational environment that works for everybody, gained popularity from the late 90s and become the logic extension of the concept of diversity²¹.

Diversity and inclusion are now considered essential skills in the competitive business field. Higher education institutions and public administrations in Europe only recently joined the process towards a true implementation of diversity and inclusion policies in their institutional routine. That's why now corporations represent the best way to understand the state-of-the-art in diversity management.

We talked about diversity, inclusion and diversity management with Antonio Messina, president of Hara- Risorse Umane. He has decades of experience in the field of human resources and diversity management in multinational corporations. The interview below is a quick overview on how diversity and inclusion issues and complexities have been tackled by corporations from the 90s until now. Opportunities and challenges that arise from fostering diversity in the workplace are told by the voice of someone who saw the field of diversity management evolve in the last 30 years.

Diversity management and communication in multinational companies. Interview with Antonio Messina, President of Hara-Risorse Umane

There is a huge difference between private and public institutions in the amount of time and effort they invest in research and action dealing with diversity and inclusion issues. Corporations have been discussing diversity and inclusion issues and diversity management for more than sixty years. Although there is

²¹ Anand R., Winters M. F., *A retrospective view of corporate diversity training from 1964 to the present*, Academy of Management Learning & Education, 2008, vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 356- 372

now a rich literature on this, the concept has only recently been gaining importance in the higher education sector in Europe. Since you have a lot of experience in the field of human resources I would like to know how diversity management works in the environment of corporations and why it seems to be so important.

As you said, I'm in charge of human resources, which involves communication as well as hiring and promoting people, fostering workforce wellbeing, learning and development, etc. Of course, communication plays an important role in the managing of human resources in the workplace.

Diversity management is about making sure that all the people in the corporation are considered for their unique skills and experiences rather than for the specific social categories they belong to. Diversity and management then is about avoiding generalisations, biases and prejudices.

In the workplace we have to deal with several issues related to diversity and inclusion: for example, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, language, disability, sexual orientation.... the more you look, the more diversity you find. Until we understand and accept that we are all different.

What are the main differences that need to be considered in the workplace?

Well, in a corporate environment a lot of time is spent dealing with generational conflict. For example, nowadays we have corporations where there are up to six generations: from the senior managers that were born before the war to the young people from the Z generation.

Since when have corporations been implementing policies on diversity management?

In the mid '90s I worked in multinational US corporations and they were already talking about diversity and inclusion. The role of diversity manager was created at the end of the '90s in this kind of multinational environments whose specific task was dealing with diversity and inclusion issues. However, in some corporations the diversity manager has other tasks as well as dealing with diversity and inclusion issues.

What were the main tasks of the first diversity managers?

Their main task was to gather information on diversity and inclusion in the workplace and write reports for the relevant committee in the corporation. This information was then used by the committee to analyse corporate inner dynamics. Also today, the role of diversity managers is to identify and monitor those situations that may lead to non-inclusion or discrimination. Then, they also have to propose possible solutions and action plans to foster gender equality and inclusion.

What parameters do diversity managers use to spot and monitor these situations?

Usually diversity managers act in synergy with the human resources department. One of the main things to measure is allocation of different categories of people in the organizational chart. For example, if we focus on gender equality, we need to look at how many people of a certain gender are in every level of the hierarchy. Usually, the number of women is higher in the lower positions and decrease when we move up to the leading roles.

So is it important not only to count how many people from each category there are but also how they are distributed in the organizational chart?

Exactly. How many managers, executives, employees, workers are from each gender? Of course, this kind of analysis also applies to other social categories, for example ethnicity. When I was working for a multinational corporation I was responsible for human resources in other parts of the world, including South Africa. The corporation needed to have a minimum number of local people in their executive board to be able to apply for public tender.

Do you think that diversity and inclusion training and activities are an effective way to build a more inclusive working environment?

Yes, of course. This kind of training should be part of the training programs in every corporation and the first people to train are the executives. Because it is the executives who decide the guidelines for the corporate code of conduct: culture, including corporation culture, is shaped by our behaviours.

So if we want to trigger a change do we need to start from the top?

Yes. Then, it is useful to have this kind of training at every level of the organisational chart. For example, nowadays lots of corporations have a diversity week or a diversity month. These are weeks or months in which there are events, speeches, workshops on different issues related to diversity. The aim of these initiatives is to create a culture of tolerance and inclusion.

In addition, in most corporations there are also committees dedicated to monitoring the situation, raise issues and propose concrete solutions on diversity and inclusion issues.

Do you think that the practice of having dedicated quotas for specific categories at each organisational level is effective in triggering a cultural change?

Personally, I don't like the quotas system because I think that it is not meritocratic. The risk is that people who are not that good end up in the executive board just because they belong to a specific category. On the other hand, I think that having these quotas is the first step in creating a new kind of culture in the workplace.

So you think that quotas are effective in changing people's mind?

Yes. Also because otherwise you have to hope that whoever is in the highest position is enlightened and sensible on those issues. But this is almost never the case. That's why it is better to have guidelines, fixed quotas. Even if in the short- term it is not the best option for the business.

If it is not desirable from an economic point of view, then why invest so much in diversity and inclusion? Why should corporations do that?

Oh, but there is an economic return for the corporations! And a huge one! It is all about the brand. Nowadays, people are very sensitive about issues of diversity and inclusion. Young people, before applying for a position, want to know more about the inclusion policies of their future workplace. If a corporation wants to attract the best people, they need to take this into account.

But how can you be sure that a corporation policy on diversity and inclusion is for real?

There are organizations whose work is to certificate the solidity and efficacy of the policies on diversity and inclusion in a specific corporation. For example, for gender equality there are organisations that check a series of parameters such as how many women work in a certain place, if they are paid as much as their male colleagues etc. If all these parameters are respected, then the corporation gets a certificate and a stamp that it can put on its products. This way, consumers can choose to buy a product that is consistent with their ethics and values.

How can the producer convince a sceptical consumer that the stamp is authentic and that it truly reflects effective diversity and inclusion policies?

Because there is a validation process, like for European certifications. Corporations cannot self- certify. Unfortunately, there are companies that will never apply for this certification because they know that they will never get it.

It seems like private companies do a lot of work to create an inclusive culture... or at least this is true of some companies.

Yes, it is true. But I think that it is important to say that companies find themselves having to do all this work on diversity and inclusion because it is not done in families and schools where it should be done.

I also think that it is important for corporations to make diversity and inclusion issues part of the assessment process when they hire or promote someone. Especially when they are promoting someone to a position of power, because everything starts from the head. When I select people for executive positions I take this into account. The people in higher positions should set an example.

It would be amazing to have inclusiveness among the selection parameters for people in executive position.

In some companies this already happens. They take strong positions and make statements. For example, some companies decide not to participate in meetings where

there are no women. They only participate in workshops, conferences and meetings where there are both men and women. I think that this is a very strong signal for the job market.

Maybe this can help change cultural biases and prejudices that are still present.

Exactly. For example, when I go to clients, I always call them out if there are only men at the meeting. I say “Oh, I can see that there is plenty of diversity here. So many different points of view!”. I feel it is my duty to encourage and promote a sense of diversity and inclusion.

I’m hopeful that one day diversity and inclusion issues will no longer exist.

Oh, it will happen for sure. One day. I’m sure that we will get there, we just need to remain resolute in what we want to achieve.

Communication in diversity and inclusion management

Organisations can be defined as networks of people who communicate with each other for different reasons²², both formally and informally. Not all the communication that happens in the workplace is strictly related to work topics, but it contributes to shape the working environment, nonetheless.

Institutional communication, according to van Riel²³ :

[Is] an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent.

Universities and other higher education institutions play a vital role in our society not only in giving formal education to the future generations, but also in enforcing our societies values and prejudices. Despite this great responsibility, the number of

²² B. M. C. Van Riel and C. J. Fombrun, *Essentials of corporate communication*, Routledge- Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York, 2007, p. 13

²³ Van Riel, C.B.M., *Principles of corporate communication*. London and New York: Prentice Hall, 1995

systematic studies on diversity and management communication in public higher education institutions is surprisingly low. This is particularly true for European institutions, even if there are explicit guidelines from the European Union on fostering diversity and inclusion in higher education²⁴:

At the European level, several political commitments to strengthen diversity and inclusiveness in higher education have been made throughout the past few years, starting with the Paris Declaration of EU member states in March 2015 on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

Higher education institutions can be considered as corporate entities for what concerns their social responsibility and strategic management²⁵. That said, strategies about diversity management and diversity and inclusion communication that were developed for a corporate environment can be adapted to a higher education context. This process already started in the US and to some extent in the UK.

Higher education institutions have a large number of stakeholders such as students, other institutions, the government, employees, companies, local communities and others²⁶. These stakeholders and their expectations, as well as the higher education institutions social responsibilities should be taken into account when these institutions define their strategic objectives and communication plans.

University Social Responsibility (USR) is the capacity of the capacity of higher education institutions to disseminate and implement a set of principles, general and specific values aimed at enhancing the educational and social challenges of the society through four key processes: management, teaching, research and extension [1].

Due to their strong influence on societies, higher education institutions play a pivot role in current and future nations welfare and in promoting social development.

²⁴ A.-L. Claeys-Kulik, T. E. Jørgensen, H. Stöber. *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions Results from the INVITED project*, editorial board: C. Royo and H. Mariaud, 2019, p. 8

²⁵ Universities as Corporate Entities: the role of social responsibility in their strategic management

²⁶ Ibidem

RESEARCH CONTEXT

EU policies on exchange programs for students, mobility for researchers and international projects funding opened a plethora of new opportunities for European higher education institutions. But together with the opportunities, also new issues arise.

Even though there are clear European recommendations and guidelines on what the country members are expected to do to guarantee equality in higher education, every country, and even every institution in the same country, have chosen a different way to implement this. And sometimes they decided not to deal with it at all.

In the last decades, the European Commission supported surveys and initiatives to tackle inequalities in European higher institutions and to picture the situation of specific minority groups across Europe²⁷. The importance of an intercultural and inclusive environment is very clear to the European Commission. However, there are no systematic studies on the role of institutional communication in fostering diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions. Also, most of the initiatives to foster diversity and inclusion in the higher education field, mainly only tackle gender equality issues²⁸, and give less or no space at all to other dimensions of diversity.

Since the beginning of the XXI century, higher education institutions are going through a process of branding²⁹: in this period of crisis, the institutional image they give through their communication practices is more important than ever in attracting new students, researchers and staff members³⁰.

²⁷ For examples the surveys carried out by the FRA- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, <https://fra.europa.eu/en>

²⁸ E.g. <https://eige.europa.eu/topics/education>

²⁹ <https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/> According to the definition given by the American Marketing Association, a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination them, to identify the product(s) of one company and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. Brands are becoming more and more important for universities and other higher education institutions as well, allowing them to differentiate from each other and attract the more promising students

³⁰ M. Joseph, E. Wall Mullen, D. Spake, *Universiyt branding: understanding students' choice of an educational institution*, Journal of Brand Management, 2012, Macmillan Publishers, Vol. 20, 1, 1- 12

Society is changing, the new generation is challenging the older one to change the paradigm through which they see reality. Higher education institutions need to embrace a more connected and diverse world to stay competitive in the European scene.

Higher education institutions are complex entities, with an important role in our societies as they will shape the future European citizens. That's why we think that it is crucial to understand how European higher education institution's communication deal with the issues of diversity and inclusion and to map how this is done, or not, in different European countries. We think that knowing this information is an essential preliminary step to a more even diversity and inclusion policy shared among all the European higher education institutions.

OBJECTIVES

Our objective is to investigate the role of institutional communication in diversity dynamics in higher education institutions.

Due to exploratory nature of this research, we decided to restrict the research field only considering three European higher education institutions: universities, research centres and museums. For the latter, we only consider their training and research activities. When we refer to “higher education institutions” in this text, we refer specifically to these three institutions.

For what regards the concepts of diversity and inclusion, we chose to focus on one minority groups: the LGBTQ+ community. We chose it because of the strong debate that is still going on in Europe and in the rest of the World on LGBTQ+ rights, because it is a visible and represented community in the higher education environment and because it is the minority group for which we already have the more contacts and information.

The main objective if this thesis can be break down to smaller, operational objectives:

- 1- Understanding the main opinion of people belonging to European higher education institutions on the integration of diversity and inclusion in their institution’s communication.
- 2- Highlights differences, if any, between points of view of people the ingroup (people who belongs to the LGBTQ+ community) and the outgroup (people who do not belong to the LGBTQ+ community).
- 3- Map similarities and differences in how institutional communication deal with diversity and inclusion issues in different European countries.
- 4- Find out if there are trends in people’s opinions on diversity and inclusion in institutional communication issues that are related to country of origin, age, gender, etc.

Moreover, we investigated how inclusive institutional communication, or the lack of it, is perceived by people who doesn't belong to the LGBTQ+ community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of our research, investigating the role of institutional communication in diversity dynamics in higher education institutions, corresponds to the principal research question:

- What's the role of institutional communication in fostering diversity and inclusion in European higher institutions?

The secondary objectives of our research correspond to the following questions:

- What's the opinion of people who belongs to a European higher research institutions on the idea pf institutional communication playing a role in diversity and inclusion issues?
- How does institutional communication on diversity and inclusion perceived by people who belong to that institution? Are there significant differences between LGBTQ+ and other people? Does people's feeling vary according to characteristics like age, institutional role or country of origin?
- Are there significant differences in how institutional communication deal with diversity and inclusion issues in different European countries?
- Which communication channels and institutional initiatives are more effective in fostering inclusion?
- What are the critical points that higher education institutions should carefully consider in their equality and anti-discriminatory communication campaigns?

METHODS

To answer our research questions, we used a twofold approach by mixing qualitative and quantitative methods in an exploratory research design³¹. We chose this kind of research design because there weren't enough literature data available or specific theories on the topic, and we wanted to identify the main characteristics of the studied phenomenon³².

According to Greene, Caracelli and Graham³³ through a mixed approach it is possible to mix qualitative and quantitative research methods in different ways. We chose to use an exploratory design, in which the two research methods are used consequentially. The first phase is characterized by a qualitative approach and the second phase by a quantitative one.

The first phase of the research consists in a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews aiming to frame opinions, values and issues of the main stakeholders: students, researchers, professors and staff studying and working in European higher education institutions.

The second part of this research uses a quantitative approach to measure people's awareness and acceptance of the main topics identified thanks to the semi-structured qualitative interviews.

To collect the quantitative data for the second phase of this research we used a questionnaire build on the basis of the interview answers and distributed online.

In our research, the two phases of the exploratory design have the same weight since we used the data obtained during the first, qualitative phase to write the items for the questionnaire we used in the second, quantitative phase.

³¹ F. Ortalda, *Metodi misti di ricerca*, Carocci editore, 2013 p. 44

³² *Idibem*

³³ J. C. Greene, V. J. Caracelli and W. F. Graham, *Toward a conceptual framework for mixed- method evaluation designs*, in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 1989, 11, 3, pp. 255- 274

Definition of the research model

The theoretical part of our research model is mainly based on literature data about corporate communication and corporate communication results. We looked mainly at the private sector because there are much more studies on institutional communication, diversity management and their intersections than in the public one.

To understand to what extent the established standard on corporate communication on diversity and inclusion can be applied to higher education institutions we design an exploratory study based on qualitative interviews. We chose qualitative interviews over focus group because they are easier to organise and manage online. In fact, we didn't have the chance to do in- person interviews because of the lack of funds to cover any expense of this research, the very short time we had to complete all the interviews on time (one month), the global pandemic situation that made travel risky and the fact that all the interviews were made by the same interviewer. Also, since some of the interview's questions are about very personal and sensible issue, it was easier for the interviewees to talk one- to- one with the interviewer, rather than to disclose some very personal information and thoughts in a group with other people.

Data collected from the interviews were used for the qualitative analysis and also to build a quantitative questionnaire for the second part of the research.

We carried the qualitative part of our research using a questionnaire that was created and shared online trying to reach as many people as possible that were working or studying in a European higher institution. We had a minimum objective of 100 completed questionnaire to have a statistically significant sample for our analysis. Luckily, we not only reached this objective, but we exceeded it reaching a final count of 205 completed and valid questionnaires.

Research flowchart

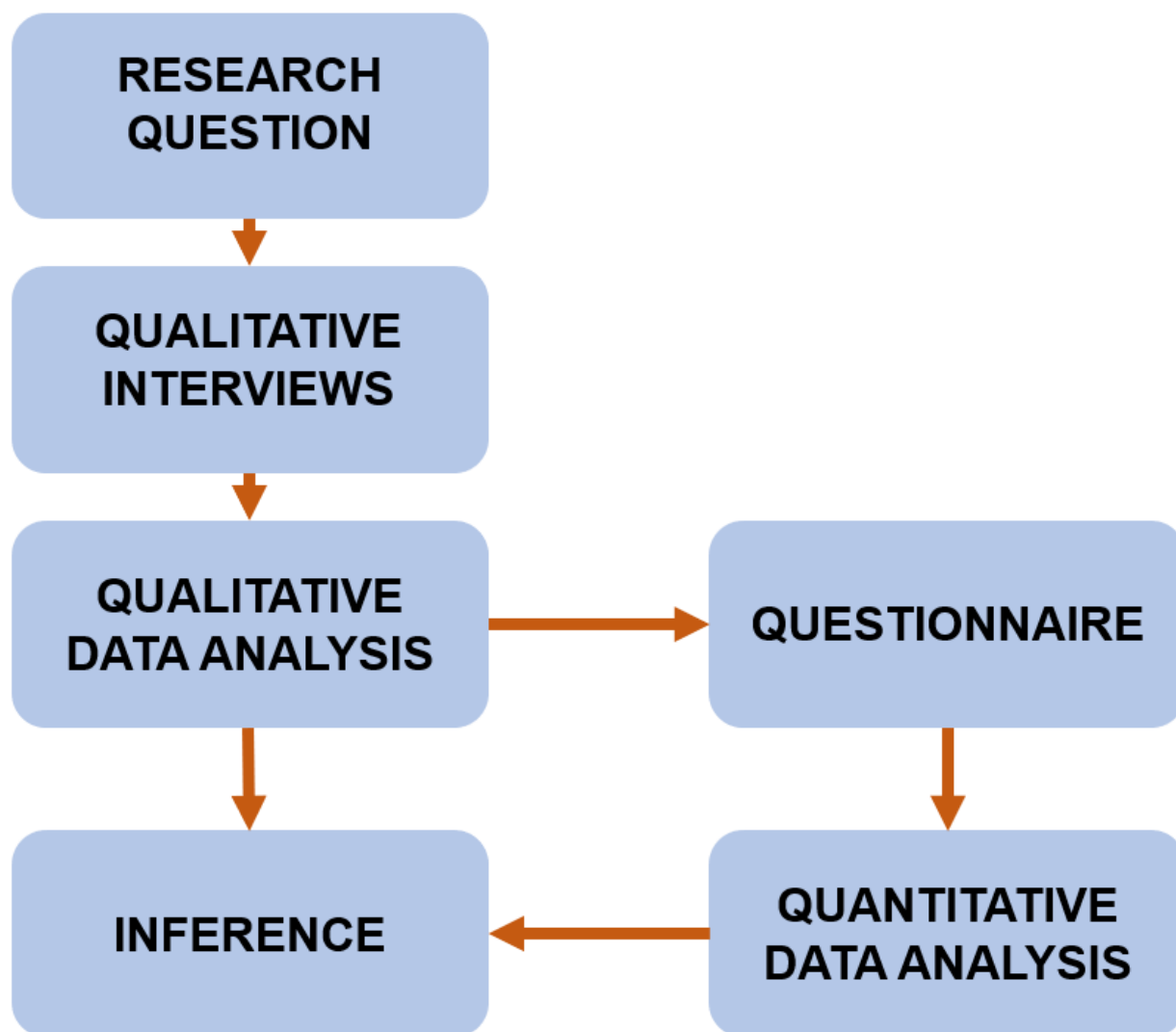


Figure 1- Research flowchart

Timing and data collection

MCS Thesis Timeline

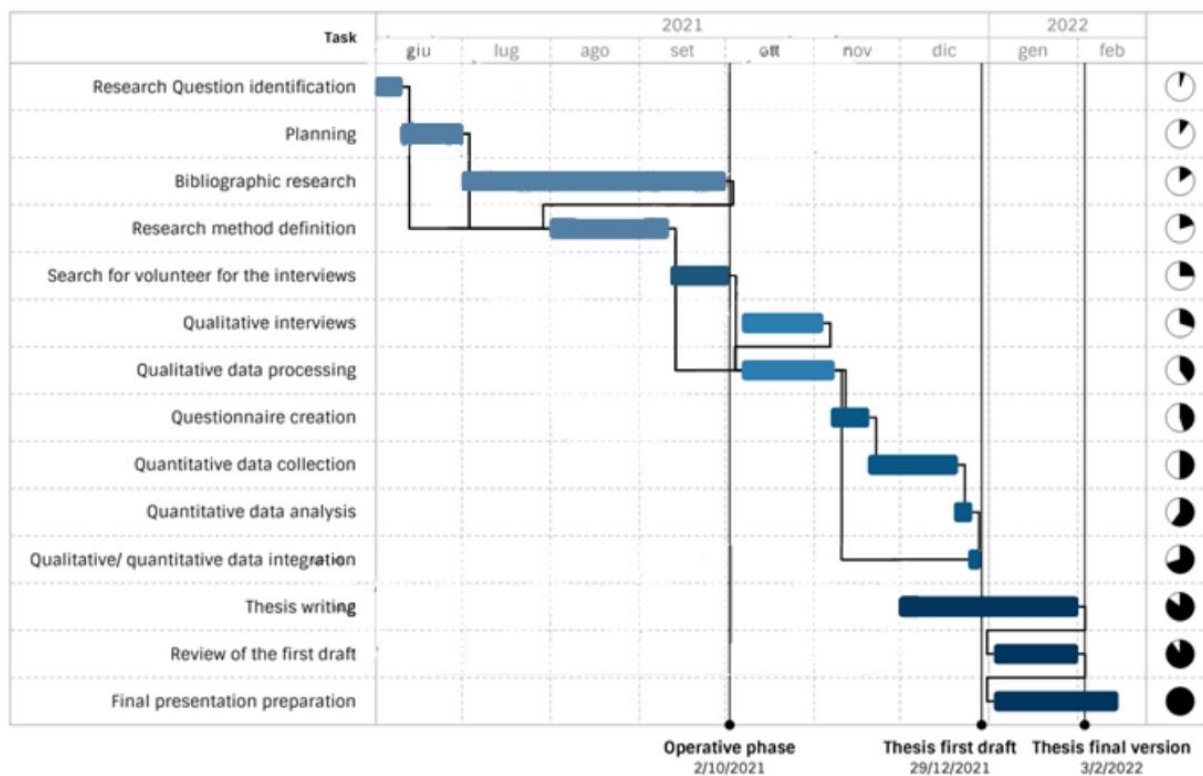


Figure 2- Thesis timeline

Semi- structured interviews

The main characteristic of the qualitative research is the lack of an *a priori* categorization and protocol: the structure of the research is built throughout the progression of the study itself, according to emerging empirical evidence³⁴. We had no hypothesis that needed to be confirmed at that stage of our research, however, we had exploratory research questions:

- What's the role of institutional communication in diversity and inclusion issues in higher education?
- What are the expectations, obstacles and fears of the main stakeholders on diversity and inclusion in institutional communication?

The main objective of the qualitative approach in sociological research is to understand the point of view of the studied subject on the chosen topic³⁵: knowing their mental categories, understanding their way to interpret their experiences, their perceptions and feelings and what's behind their actions.

Qualitative interviews have the following characteristics³⁶:

- a) They exist because of the interviewer asks the subject to be part of the study, they're not spontaneous conversations.
- b) The interviewees are chosen according to a research design and to answer a research question.
- c) They are in a number that is big enough to be significant for the research.
- d) Their final goal is to acquire knowledge on one or more topic(s).

³⁴ F. Ortalda, *Metodi misti di ricerca*, Carocci editore, 2013 p. 19

³⁵ P. Corbetta, *Metodologia e tecnica della ricerca sociale*, Il Mulino, 1999, p. 45

³⁶ Ibidem

- e) They are led by the interviewer.
- f) They are based on a flexible and non- standardised scheme of questions.

We chose qualitative interviews over focus groups because of the difficulties of organising and running online focus groups with subjects belonging to social minority groups that could have been discriminated for their social identity. Qualitative one-to-one virtual interviews were the best option to collect the necessary data since the interviewees were able to express themselves and their opinion without fear of being judged by other people as if they were in a focus group.

All the interviews were online to have homogeneity among the subjects. It wouldn't have been possible to do all the interviews in person since the interviewees were based in different European countries. All the interviews were one-to-one with this thesis author with the only exception of the interview Marta/14 in which two people from the same class were interviewed together because of their explicit request.

To establish a better connection with the interviewees, despite being online, we used software that implements a webcam such as Zoom, Google Meet and Skype so that visual expressions, that play an important role in non-verbal communication, weren't lost. It also helped both the interviews and the interviewees to stay focused during the interviews.

All the interviews were in English except the ones with Italian interviewees. Since the success of data collection in a qualitative research design strongly depends on the ability of the researcher to build an empathetic relationship with the studied subject³⁷, talking in English with other native Italian speakers would have been unnatural. The Italian interviews were later translated into English.

The interviewees were chosen among the people who currently belong to a higher education institution in Europe, trying to get at least one person for each institutional position. The interviewees were not willingly selected among members of the LGBTQ+

³⁷ F. Ortalda, *Metodi misti di ricerca*, Carocci editore, 2013 p. 20

community, since institutional communication should reach every member of the institution, despite their belonging to a specific minority group. Also, when we talk about a place diversity, we talk about all the groups that belongs to that place, not only the minority groups.

Majority groups must be included in the institutional communication, and more widely in all the institutional actions, to foster inclusion. That's why they were included in the interviews and in the questionnaire.

A total of 18 people from 7 different countries were interviewed (Table 1).

Transcriptions of the interviews are available in Annex IV of this thesis. The pieces of information that are more sensitive and may expose interviewees to discrimination have been omitted: mainly their name and the names of their institutions (see Annex I for further details).

Due to the nature of the semi-structured qualitative interview, the number, order and type of question changed from person to person. However, in general the interview is structured as follows:

- a) A first, introductory part to know better the interviewee and collect demographic data (some of those data are not reported for privacy reasons).
- b) A second part about definition and opinions of diversity and inclusion to understand interviewees' point of view on the topic, their ideas and beliefs.
- c) A third part that is about the interviewee's institution communication strategies on diversity and inclusion.
- d) A final part that collects the interviewee's proposal for a better communication on diversity and inclusion.

This subdivision of the questions is illustrative, since in every interview the questions order was shuffled to follow the conversation's flow. Extra questions were added when needed and specific questions were made to people according to their institutional role. An illustrative list of the interview questions can be found in Annex II.

| Interview Number | Interviewee alias* | Interviewee country of origin | Institution's country | Interviewee's position |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Luca | Italy | Germany | PhD Student |
| 2 | Chiara | Italy | Italy | Master Student |
| 3 | Paola | Italy | Italy | Master Student |
| 4 | Adrienne | France | France | PhD Student |
| 5 | Sophie | France | France | PhD Student |
| 6 | Charlotte | France | UK | Post-Doc Researcher |
| 7 | Jean | Lebanon | Portugal | Post-Doc Researcher |
| 8 | Paul | Germany | Poland | PhD Student |
| 9 | Maurizio | Italy | Italy | Associate Professor |
| 10 | Angela | Italy | Italy | Full Professor |
| 11 | Susanna | Italy | Italy | Bachelor Student |
| 12 | Danielle | South Africa | France | PhD Student |
| 13/ 14 | Marta/ Veronica | Italy | Italy | Bachelor Students |
| 15 | Krys | Poland | Poland | PhD Student |
| 16 | Anton | Germany | Spain | Erasmus Internship |
| 17 | Giorgia | Italy | Italy | Communication Office |
| 18 | Francesco | Italy | Italy | Adjunct Professor |

*Table 1- List of qualitative interviews. * We choose to identify each interviewee with an alias instead of using their real name for privacy reasons.*

Questionnaire

Unlike the semi- structured qualitative interviews, a questionnaire offers a series of standardised questions³⁸ and aims to frame the interviewees inside boxes that have previously been defined.

Surveys in the form of questionnaire have the following characteristics³⁹:

- 1- Information is obtained through interrogation.
- 2- The individuals who join the survey are also the research subjects.
- 3- They should represent a statistically significant sample.
- 4- Information is collected through a standardised procedure.
- 5- The aim is to study the correlation between different variables (while obtaining data in their frequencies).

For our research, we used the interviews answers to the qualitative interviews to identify four macro-areas:

- 1- Demographic and background questions.
- 2- Institutional environment.
- 3- Institutional communication and its language.
- 4- Accessibility to information and public statistics.

³⁸ P. Corbetta, *Metodologia e tecnica della ricerca sociale*, Il Mulino, 1999, p. 407

³⁹ Ivi, p. 169

With this questionnaire we aimed to find more general results than the one we had from the interviews and for this reason we excluded from this survey all the subjects that already participated in the interviews⁴⁰. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out if variables such as age, institutional role, country of origin and country in which the institution is based are somehow correlated to the quantity and quality of diversity and inclusion institutional communication activity and acceptance.

The questionnaire was created using an online app called Survio⁴¹. It has a decent variety of question options to easily and quickly build different questionnaires. A link to share the questionnaire is generated automatically and data are stored directly in the app and can be downloaded in excel format. The questionnaire was open to people in Europe studying or working in a research institution at any level and for this reason it was in English.

The questionnaire was distributed through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn), email, word-of-mouth and the platform Survey Circle⁴² that allows researchers looking for survey participants to share their questionnaires. A total of 224 questionnaires were completed, 8 were discarded because of incomplete or missing answers.

The complete list of questionnaire items can be found in the Annex III of this thesis.

⁴⁰ F. Ortalda, *Metodi misti di ricerca*, Carocci editore, 2013 p. 69

⁴¹ Survio, <https://www.survio.com/it/>

⁴² Survey Circle, <https://www.surveycircle.com/en/>

RESULTS

Qualitative results

Through the analysis of the quantitative interviews, we identified 7 main diversity and inclusion issues in institutional communications. We are aware that those results cannot be generalised because of the unicity and number of the studied cases, but this was not the aim of our qualitative survey that we intended as an exploratory study. We aimed to identify the feelings of the interviewees on diversity and inclusion in institutional communication, their ideas, needs, values and the impact of their institution's communication. Through interviewees answers, we were able to identify the needs, problems, doubts and proposed solutions that higher education institutions should consider in their communication plans, and policies, on diversity and inclusion. We think that this first survey has the potential to be further extended in the future and that it can be used as a starting point for further studies.

1- What are we talking about? The concept of diversity and inclusion

No clear communication can be done if we don't know what we are talking about. A shared, unambiguous definition of diversity and inclusion is the very base to build an effective institutional communication. Diversity is one of those concepts we instinctively think we know what it means. But when we need to explain it, we find out that its meaning is fuzzier than we expected. When we asked the interviewees to give their definition of diversity, most of them made a comparison with what is usually considered "normal" by mainstream society. An example of contrastive definition of diversity is given by Chiara, saying that «diversity is when someone is perceived as different from the expectation of society. »

Some of the interviewees were asked to define a when a place is diverse instead of the concept of diversity itself, to help them focusing on something more tangible. In this case most of them used statistics and demographics in their answer. For example,

they described an ideal diverse institutional environment as one that reflects the demographics of the broader society their institution is in:

If I had to describe an institution that respects diversity and inclusion I would say that it is an institution that reflects the composition of the population of the country it is based in. [...] I would say that there should be at least more women than men, because globally women are more than men. I cannot remember the precise proportion, but it should be something like 55% of women and 45% of men, something like that. But it should be the same for ethnicity, it should be the same for the whole "gender domain". (Adrienne)

The interviewees that gave this definition agree that these proportions are not respected in their institutions. This is particularly true for balance between men and women, which is also one of the easier phenomena to observe. Jean observes that «Because of the relative percentages of men and women in the whole world, in a very diverse place at least 50% of the people should be women» but it is not the case in her institution.

Other than statistics and percentages, another common topic among the interviewees in the subjectivity of the definition of diversity and the idea that it vary in time and space, because it is closely bonded to specific societies and time. This idea is expressed by Anton's statement «Diversity is something that depends on the context (Anton) ».

None of the interviewees perceived diversity as something alien or artificial, most of them described diversity as something that occurs naturally unless there is something that actively prevent it from happening. For example, when specific categories are discriminated against and cannot reach high institutional positions. Among the interviewees, scientists seem to be used to the idea that being diverse is just natural.

Because of my studies in the field of natural sciences, for me diversity is just normality. Diversity belongs to everything that exist on Earth, biologically or psychologically speaking. (Sophie)

When this concept is taken to the extreme, the idea that there is a group of "normal" people and then several different outsiders collapses and the definition of diversity completely overlaps with those of unicity, like in Chiara answer:

[...] but if you look closer everybody is unique and therefore different. We define someone different when we make a confrontation with normality, but normality disappears when we took the point of view of the other person.

Even if some of the interviewees belong to social minority groups, the idea that some kind of diversities are less accepted by the society than others clearly emerged only in the interview of Susanna who said that

There is no difference that is more different than another. But since we are used to see the world in a certain way, some thoughts and some experiences are considered more important than others. We talk more about them in our culture, painting them as the “normal thing we all experienced” and this creates an unbalance that goes beyond the effective discrimination. [...] Some people are seen as different just because there is not enough general knowledge on them. They are just different from the mainstream narrative. Narrative stresses some diversities more than others. (Susanna)

Susanna clearly explained concepts that are present in other interviews, such as the idea that every person is different or that knowledge is the best way to overcome diversity issues. What Susanna adds in their answer is the link between diversity and mainstream narrative, since when there is a lack of true knowledge on a topic, the only way we have to process and categorise it is through the mainstream narrative. Susanna highlights how this kind of narrative usually privileges one point of view on the reality that is pictured as “normal”, while everything that differs from it is classified under the label of “diversity”. Once again, the interviewee expresses the idea that the concept of diversity is not absolute and that it varies according to the narrative of the dominant social group.

Since diversity and inclusion are often named together, for most interviewees separate these two concepts is difficult. Because in most interviews the definition of diversity was usually asked before the one on inclusion, interviewees realised that they gave the definition of inclusion or a partially mixed- up definition when trying to define their idea of diversity:

Mhh, inclusion? Will it be different from diversity? Diversity would be – I’m still talking about institutions – the act of including different people on the basis of their gender, sex, ethnicity... also sexuality even if this is not a thing your institution should know about you when you are hired. Inclusion means including

people from social minority groups. At least for me diversity doesn't include any minority problem, but inclusion does. (Adrienne)

The strong link between diversity and inclusion and their partial overlapping appears when the interviewees are asked to describe an inclusive place and their descriptions are similar to what they said about diversity, using the average demographic of the population in their society to discriminate if an institution is inclusive or not:

If I had to describe an institution that respects diversity and inclusion, I would say that it is an institution that reflects the composition of the population of the country it is based in. (Adrienne)

In fact, often the interviewees describe the effect of inclusion when a definition of this term is asked them. To the interviewees agreed on diversity being something natural, something that happens by itself, while inclusion is something that needs to be achieved.

When it comes to the definition of inclusion, interviewees intuitively feel that there is a step to do to move from diversity to inclusion. Chiara, an Italian Master student, introduce the concept of negotiation. If diversity is something that can happens more or less randomly and can vary from social context to social context, inclusion is something that must be achieved. There is a switch from a passive attitude, letting the higher education be diverse, to an active attitude to create inclusivity through dialogue between different social groups with their own diversities.

Being inclusive means negotiating a common ground and trying to see the things from other's people point of view, without thinking to have the only and absolute truth in your pocket. (Chiara)

While the interviewees see diversity as something neutral, something that is just normal and can be observed daily, they give an overall positive value to the idea of inclusion. Inclusion is seen as a way to read diversity in a positive way, embracing and evaluating the differences among people. To the interviewees, the concept of inclusion is not about being all the same, but letting every person to be different, giving the right value to that diversity and allowing them to express their personalities.

For me the meaning of diversity is when you have a group of people with different backgrounds, culture and other traits. Inclusion means that all those differences have the same value and dignity and there aren't identities that are better than others. (1)

I think that an environment is inclusive when everybody can be themselves. (Chiara)

There is a strong connection between the idea of inclusion and the belief that to achieve it is necessary to be able to wear other people's shoes and learn to see the reality from different point of views,

Inclusion is basically just keeping in mind that there are people with different experiences and needs than you and being accommodating to that. (Anton)

One crucial element to build an inclusive environment, according to the interviewees, is to create a place in which people is free to express, dress and behave the way they feel to. Francesco, an Italian professor, says that «In our Academy we have people going around dressed in the craziest possible ways. ». Clothes are an important way to express themselves, especially for young people and people being comfortable in wearing whatever they prefer is a positive signal.

A similar observation is made by Chiara, an Italian Master student, that remembers the department where she did her first master's degree, in Italy, as being particularly inclusive respect to other departments in the same university, stressing the fact that people could dress as they wanted without being judged for their appearance

the professors were open- minded and students could dress and express themselves as they want. In this sense, I think that the work environment is way more discriminatory than the university one. For example, people with tattoos are heavily discriminated in the workplace, but no one cared at the university. (Chiara)

A lot can be done through institutional communication for people to achieve a better knowledge about the real meaning of diversity and inclusion and the difference between these two terms.

2- Anybody home? The weight of institutional presence

Institutional communication cannot be random. It must be planned, it must follow the institutional guidelines and it must reflect the institution's values. Feeling that higher education institutions have a strong position and a clear line of action is very important

for diversity and inclusion communication and policies to be effective. All the interviewees see under a positive light the idea that their institution plays a role in the internal diversity dynamics. The degree to which it should happen vary from country to country since in some places the institutional inferences is more accepted, while in other, like in France for example, social identities such as sexual orientation or gender identity are considered private and there is cultural resistance to the idea of sharing them publicly in a working or studying environment.

In countries in which there is an established and pervasive presence of the institution in the communication dynamics about diversity and inclusion, such as in Germany, a discrepancy between the institutional communication and the institutional actions is perceived by the interviewees. This discrepancy will be further analysed in the subsection about the trust in institutional communication.

There is still present the idea that inclusion is something that has to be built in a conscious way, as stated by Paola, an Italian Master student «Institutions need to put more effort in building inclusion, it doesn't happen by chance ».

Even interviewees that don't have a clear idea about how the institution can intervene in an effective way to tackle the discrimination issues, they feel that it must be something coming from the institution itself and that it must be somehow related to the communication.

I don't know, but whatever it is it must come from the administration. Like something official. I will say open communication. It will be good to see diversity and inclusion in different media around the university. (Charlotte)

In the UK the institutional weight in the diversity and inclusion dynamics is well established and generally accepted by the different stakeholders. Charlotte, a post-doc researcher that moved to the UK from France, noticed that the presence of established procedures for each issue and an initial training given to all the new students and employees gives very positive results in terms of awareness and acceptance of the diversity and inclusion policies.

Here [in the UK] the situation is very good for that because here we have a procedure for everything. When we first arrived, we had a little induction on the building, the safety things, and there was another one- now everything is online because of covid- where they explain all the procedures: for health problems, in case of fire and also if we see any sign of harassment. (Charlotte)

The main issue reported by the majority of the interviewees, especially those based in Italy and France, is the lack of clear institutional guidelines for official communication. Further exploring this issue with them, it turns out that these guidelines exist, but their existence is not advertised. Also, they are not updated to meet the requests of the new generation of students and young researchers. Those who worked with communication in companies found that public higher education institutions are less careful in incorporating diversity and inclusion issues in their communication, giving less or no training at all to their staff and not sharing their guidelines properly to their teaching personnel.

Well, in my life I mostly worked in the private sector, so I have less experience in the public one. For more than 10 years I worked in strict contacts with other private corporations and freelancers and only recently I joined this big public administration. What I can say is that the topics of diversity, inclusion and diversity management were more considered, discussed and researched in the private institutions' communication than in the public ones. (Giorgia)

Even in countries where guidelines on diversity and inclusion are clear, shared and advertised properly there are problems because of people not following them. Interviewees belonging to higher education institutions in these countries identified the main reason for this phenomenon in the lack of institutional control on whether those guidelines are respected or not.

There must be a guideline issued by central university administration on the use of gender-neutral language but it is ignored by individuals or parts of university as people wish. So, it is an expression of people personal opinion whether to use it or not. The guidelines exist but are not mandatory, they are like "It would be nice if you do this, but if you don't there is no way we can force you". (Paul)

Sometimes communication guidelines are presented to the employees from the communication offices, but most of the time the physiological turnover of these employees is not considered. Therefore, the communication guidelines are newer introduced to the new staff members. As said Giorgia, that works in the communication office of an Italian university «I'm sure that there was some sort of general communication when the guidelines were firstly written. But you also must think that there is a turnover of people in the bureau. »

Even when the communication guidelines do not exist or are not advertised, the interviewees general feeling is that on average professors and people from the admin staff try their best to be at least a bit inclusive, but they are not supported by the institution. Individuals do their best to try to fill the gap left by the absence of direction from the institution. The results of these individual actions may vary greatly from person to person according to their level of knowledge, empathy and personal experiences.

I think that professors in my faculty try to be very inclusive about LGBTQ+ issues. Sometimes they lack training, and they make mistakes, but they never discriminate on purpose. They are also interested in knowing more: for example, when I brought research on LGBTQ+ issues they were very interested. On the other hand, they didn't know anything on the topic of transgender people even if I chose it because of a text we read in class and that has been given to us by that same professor. (Susanna)

Often, because of the lack of institutional support, professors and staff members seek help from the same people belonging to minority groups, asking them to share their experiences and somehow educate their peers. Some of the interviewees, such as Anton, a PhD student from Poland, thinks that this is a good practice and that « They should give the opportunity to queer people to speak for themselves instead of speaking for them». Other interviewees, while agreeing on the fact that people belonging to minority groups should have guaranteed enough room to talk for themselves, highlight the risk of this practice to expose these people to further discrimination and to put an excessive weight on their shoulder. This dualism is well-told by the example of Susanna, that talks about one special event in which a professor asked a blind girl to talk to her peers about her situation.

There is also a blind girl that has been invited to talk about that in class... These were all good initiatives, but on the other hand there was one blind girl that had to educate the whole class and the professors on how to include her. There was no previous work done on this issue. I don't think that it is anybody sin, and they did a good think giving space to people to talk but it is still a work in progress. (Susanna)

Even if the overall evaluation of the experience is positive, Susanna highlights how this was a one-time event not preceded by any preparation and not followed by any debriefing.

In general, the interviewees identify the students and early-stage researchers as the most vulnerable people that need to be supported by their institutions, especially if the

belong to discriminated minority groups. This is because these two groups are in a more fragile position and have no power to fight back in case of heavy discrimination episodes.

I think that students and early career researchers need the most support on this thing. Because when you are just starting your career and you are surrounded by an environment that is not very welcoming it can be kind of traumatising to enter and become stable. To go to this environment is hard, so you need someone to support you. You need support in general, not necessarily by a person. For example, you can get support from the institution. Like changing regulation, etc. (Jean)

From the interviews it is clear that the institutional presence plays a pivotal role in fostering diversity and inclusion. And institutional communication is a powerful tool for higher education institutions to take a firm stance on the issue of diversity and inclusion and be sure that people inside and outside of the institution are aware of that.

Interviewees' voices on this topic are not unique and the difference between countries are quite clear: where there is a lack of communication tackling diversity and inclusion issues the interviewed people ask the institution to show its presence, take a clear position and let everybody know about it. Where the institutional weight is clearly perceived and there are even a bureau and officers in charge of diversity and inclusion issues, then the interviewees ask their institution to implement for real what they advertise and control that their guidelines are followed.

When this happens, the feedback is positive

I can see that the place is diverse, and I can see that they are trying to do things for inclusion. In the email that we received they advertised some events to promote that, and we have some posters on the wall trying to speak about inclusion and diversity. I didn't have the chance to go to that kind of event yet, so I don't know what they are actually doing but it is something that I want to try. But I can see that it is something people speak about publicly. They do things at the administrative level, the institution tries to do things about it, it is not just the people between themselves. You can feel the presence of the institution. (Jean)

3- Where are you from? How European mobility policies influence higher education institutions' diversity and inclusion actions

The most popular opinion among the interviewees is that the increasing mobility of students and researchers fostered by the European Union had a positive influence on

the development of diversity and inclusion policies in higher education institutions. The first positive effect identified by the interviewees is the fact that different people from different background can get in contact with each other.

I think the EU positively influenced diversity and inclusion because people from different countries with different views on life and society and if they can move around and share their experiences and values and get to know different ways of seeing the world and society. (Luca)

Interviewees that moved to a foreign country reported that it helped them to have a better view of the situation in their country of origin. For what concerns the topic of diversity and inclusion there were people who discovered that there were more effective way to tackle the issues related to inclusivity, realising what can be improved in their country:

It is something that I'm experiencing right now [in the UK] because when I was in France I didn't realise how big it was the problem with diversity that we had in my country. But now that I'm here I'm learning a new way to communicate about that and to do things and in my experience it is very useful. (Charlotte)

There are countries in which minority groups rights are guaranteed by the law or strong institutional policies. Seeing that push foreign people to ask for the same treatment once they go back to their country of origin. Mixing people from different institutions will prevent the establishing of bad behaviours and discrimination:

Mobility can prevent a university from perpetrating discrimination out of habit. Institutions are forced to open up. Students and young researchers now can pretend to have certain rights or services because they saw them elsewhere and now they know that it is possible to implement them. If you see only one thing you never question it. (Susanna)

4- Support or segregation? Students and staff groups

In several higher education institutions students, and sometimes staff members, have the possibility to join official groups based on shared values, hobbies, religion, ethnicity etc. In some countries, such as in the UK, these groups are an established tradition, they are officially recognised and advertised by their institutions (e.g. through the students' union) while in other countries, like in Italy, there isn't such a strong tradition.

Seeking for people with similar experiences or background and cluster together is a common behaviour and can foster students' integration in the new environment. It may also help foreign students to find their place in the new country. Members of minorities may use these groups to meet and support each other. The overall opinion of the interviewees on the existence and advertising of these groups is positive.

I think that we need those spaces where we are surrounded by people who have lives and at least some of their experiences to ours. I don't think that it will isolate those communities from the rest of the students. It will be natural to make some friends there, but we still have classes with everyone else. (Danielle)

Some concerns are raised by the possibility that these groups may lead to self-segregation of people belonging to a social minority. But even for the interviewees that are concerned about this risk the overall positive outcomes of this kind of groups are considered to outnumber the negative ones.

The presence of official minority groups and associations is important to help people meet and connect in a safe space, but I think that they should never become exclusive or isolated from the rest of the people. (Luca)

It's up to every person not to let themselves trapped in a circle of people but maybe people are also making a big deal of it because of the topic: if it was a Star Wars fan club or Harry Potter community we will not make a big deal about that. Why should it be OK to have a Harry Potter community and not to have a Muslim community? (Charlotte)

Even if those groups are not directly created by the institution itself, having an institutional official recognition is important for these groups as well as having the chance to exploit the institutional communication channels to advertise their activities.

I studied in the UK where they have this Students Union that is a physical place where the students can meet and do their activities. When I was a student there was board showing all the activities and the events, now I imagine that everything is online. We don't have anything like that in Italy. It is a pity because our students don't know where to meet, not even for a coffee or a chat.

Offering to these groups places to gather, room on the official website and access to specific mailing lists and institutional communication services is a way for the institutions to legitimize these groups. Also, institutions and students' groups and collectives supporting each other increase students' engagement and acceptance of institutional policies on diversity and inclusion.

5- Who should I speak to? Communication between higher education institutions and students and staff

Communication between the higher education institutions and students, at every level, is a critical issue. Most of the interviewees says that it is difficult to contact their institution through the official channels and that it is very rare for the institutions to actively involve the students in the planning, organization and implementation of actions, events and other diversity and inclusion activities.

Often, students do a lot of work on diversity and inclusion, but it never reaches the institution authorities. The students often report a lack of dialogue with their institution.

For us students it is very difficult to talk to the Academy authorities. We do a lot of talks, workshops and activities on diversity and inclusion and related issues, but they stay among us students and never reach the Academy officials. We need dialogue because if there is dialogue it is more difficult for discrimination to happen. (Paola)

The lack of synergy between the institutions and the students' actions prevent the official institutional committees to fully exploit the job that has already been done by the students. This results in a loss of time and energy that could have been employed otherwise. Also, if activist students are not directly involved in the creation of institutional policies, they don't have the chance to understand the bureaucratic obstacles and restrictions that the institutions have to face in order to update or create a new policy.

Sometimes there are groups of students tackling a certain topic before the institution does. But when the institution makes its own committee, they do not contact or actively involve the students. Students' work can be used as a base for the institutional one. They should listen to the students' ideas in general,

think about that, even if they are not applicable yet. If students participate to the entire process, they can realise what the implementation difficulties are. (Susanna)

Initiatives on diversity and inclusion organised by the institutions, on the other hand, are often not enough advertised or advertised through the wrong communication channels. The result is that often students don't know about these initiatives.

It is the case of the CTS -*Comitato Tecnico Scientifico* (Technical and Scientific Committee) that was created less than one year ago by the University of Rome "La Sapienza", in Italy. The main aim of this committee is to tackle the inclusion issues for as many categories of diversity as possible. The statement on the CTS webpage says that their goal is to design strategic plans and actions to value the potential of each individual, to foster equality and integration, to promote collaboration and networking and to foster inclusion policies.⁴³

Among the interviewees there are three students from "La Sapienza" e none of them knew about the existence of the CTS, even if Maurizio, that is part of the CTS, said that:

We shared the creation of the CTS on all university channel, such as social and video, but as far as I know no information was directly delivered to the students, for example during the lessons. It is also true that each department is autonomous in its decisions because our university is very big and lots of functions are decentralized. The university website gave it plenty of visibility, even if I'm not sure that this is the best form of communication to reach our students. (Maurizio)

Professors and admin personnel recognise that the main problem in diversity and inclusion initiatives isn't that there are no contents or activities but the lack of an effective communication plan. As highlighted by Angela, an Italian professor, « The problem is the communication channel, not the communication content. We already have plenty of contents. The problem is that is not properly communicated. »

Also, institutional communication on diversity and inclusion is often not differentiated by target

⁴³Università di Roma "La Sapienza", Comitato Tecnico Scientifico per la diversità e l'inclusione, <https://www.uniroma1.it/it/pagina/comitato-tecnico-scientifico-sulla-diversita-e-inclusione>

It depends on who organise the event and what's the target: if the gender and diversity office will organise an event it will probably be attended only by old people and no 19 years old person will go just because they are not the right target. There are also much more younger people organising things and they are much more relatable and the discussion is better and emotionally closer to students and young researchers but the problem is that those initiatives are not very well promoted. It seems like the university doesn't know their target groups. Very few people having trouble with gender at university are 50, it is just not happening. Most of them are just students of the age of 20 and the institution do not manage to reach them. (Paul)

To tailor the communication strategy to different targets, those targets need to be first identified. None of the interviewees was ever involved in any institutional survey on diversity and inclusion and data about student's ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation etc are usually not collected by the higher education institutions outside the UK.

6- "Yes, I'm talking to you!" Higher institutions direct communication

Higher education institutions have a wide range of tools that can be used to directly communicate their diversity and inclusion policies: website, newsletter, email, public speeches, talks, workshop, posters, social media etc.

Direct communication is important not only to talk to stakeholders and target groups, but also to clearly show what are the value and issues the institutions is interested in.

The institutional website is a very powerful communication channel and it talks both to people inside and outside the institution. Higher education institution websites usually contain all the information about the institution offers in terms of course, degrees and research opportunities, the main contacts, the institution missions and values and the main results obtained by the institution. In most case it is the first contact that potential students, researchers, staff and professors have with the new institution, and they may decide which place they want or don't want to go on the basis of the information they find on its website. As Danielle, a PhD student in France, said about whether a university should advertise its policies on diversity and inclusion she answered « Yes, there is no reason not to do it. It will be a plus point for most people, a reason to go to that university».

The interviewees identify the institutional website as an effective way for higher education institutions to make a statement about diversity and inclusion issues:

I think that one way is through a statement on their website (we wrote one when our research group moved to Harvard). This way a student can know about the university position before going there. (1)

Sometimes institutional websites are poorly designed and not user- friendly. This can make hard for people to access the information they need. The problem is even worse when there are no specific offices in the institution whose task is to deal with diversity and inclusion issues. When these offices exist, they make the advertisement of diversity and inclusion initiatives much easier:

Our university in Germany has a centralised gender and diversity office backed up by individual people at different levels in the university (such as departments or individual institute) that are responsible for distributing that kind of information to provide an information flow in both directions (Paul)

Since there is a lot of disparity among European about LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion policies, interviewees agree that it is important for students and early- stages researchers that belongs to this minority group to find information about higher education institutions diversity and inclusion policies before deciding to move to a new place for their studies or research. Danielle, a PhD student coming from South Africa, when she was if there are places in Europe she will not consider for her postdoc because of not being LGBTQ+ friendly she answered:

Yeah, definitely. I'm not sure which one they are because I didn't grow up with all of this, probably also myths [she grew up in South Africa]. I don't know the difference exactly between all the countries, but I will definitely ask some people around me. Perhaps other queer people will know if it is a good idea to go to that place. I will check before moving there. (Danielle)

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of communication initiatives about diversity and inclusion being consistent over time. They agree on the fact that several, short communication and events on diversity and inclusion happening every day are way much effective than one big event once a year. According to the interviewees, an effective institutional communication on this topic should become part of the everyday routine of the institution and be automatically included in every piece of institutional

communication. Charlotte, a post-doc that moved from France to the UK, is very impressed by how effective the diversity and inclusion policy of her institution is. When asked about the advertisement of institutional diversity and inclusion events she answered:

[...] here we receive an email every week and every week there is at least one event, topic, something to talk about... I think that seeing small things but all the time and everywhere helps to see feel that the topic is really considered by the university, that they put it under the spotlight. People will have it in their mind and think about it and do efforts to achieve it. I think that the useful part is that you can see it every day. One big event once a year is cool, but then people will forget about it, while a little bit of communication on a regular basis helps keeping the discussion open all along. If you do just one great thing occasionally then people will just go back to their life, their work and their science and forget about it. (Charlotte)

From her experience, this kind of communication is very effective because it is something that is constantly present in every piece of institutional communication so people get used to it and consider it normal. For example, using an inclusive language. This is a way for the institution to show that it cares about this topic.

If the institutional communication is consistent and coherent with the institution statements about its inclusion values, then the idea that this is an important issue and will be transmitted. Even when people do not remember exactly which initiative were organised by the institution, they still have the feeling that the institution is very active on this specific topic.

Inclusion of every kind of minority? Yes, I think that there are a lot of initiatives: conferences, webinars, not really meeting in person for now. My impression is that people is very aware of these kinds of issues. I think that not everyone feels concerned about that and not everyone will participate but I do see the emails going around. (Danielle)

Sometimes institutions use specific pieces of communication tackling one specific diversity issue, such as racism in the institution or the lack of women in certain fields of higher education. Anti- racism campaigns usually are permanent or at least long-lasting and they often exploit virtual communication. A good visual communication can be very effective because people will remember it even if they were not paying attention, while reading texts or listening to speeches is effective only if the people are actually focused on those pieces of communication.

I saw some posters from a campaign saying that we are all equal and it was just this equal sign and there was one person looking like from the Middle East and the other human was white. I saw quite a lot of these posters. (Krys)

Campaigns to increase the number of women in specific fields of higher education such as the STEM campaigns targeting young women are usually punctual and happens during the period of the open days. While these campaigns to encourage women to join typically “masculine” faculties, opposite campaigns to attract men into more “feminine” faculties, such as art or psychology, are not very common.

I never saw a campaign to encourage male students to register to any traditionally “feminine” course as the university does for women in STEM faculties, for example. But working on this kind of advertising will be more useful than considering “heroes” the very few men interested in subjects like social sciences or social services. (Susanna)

In Susanna experience, the strategy adopted to increase the number of men in social sciences courses is to put the very few male students under the spotlight, giving them more attention and all the leadership positions. No efforts are made in designing communication campaigns to attract more men as it is done for women.

The interviewees ask for their institutions to be honest about how good their diversity and inclusion policies are. To them, writing a statement on the institutional website is not enough. Several interviewees ask their institution to share their statistics on their official websites so that they can be accessible to everybody.

If I were a university with good policies on diversity and inclusion I will put some numbers on my website, such as the number of queer events per semester or the number of clubs, organisations etc. I think it is something that they already state on their website, saying that these are the values they believe in, but it will be nice to also see some numbers. Photos of the event maybe. (Danielle)

It is a very interesting attitude that will be analysed in depth in the section about people’s trust in institutional communication, below in this text.

Language and tone of voice are two important components of institutional communication, and they can both say a lot about institution’s values and policies on

diversity and inclusion. In the last decade, the discussion around the use of neutral language become more and more urgent. This is a problem that affects different languages in different ways. This problem mainly belongs to gendered languages that do not have a neutral form in their grammar. The problem of neutral language can be divided in two sub- problems: one is about gender equality and women representation and the other is about non- binary people representation. In the public discussions the latter is rarely addressed.

In English speaking countries and in international contexts the issue can be solved by introducing the neutral pronouns they/them, a practice that is becoming a routine in English speaking countries but that encountered the strong resistance of conservative people.

In my English- speaking scientific bubble it is absolutely normal to use a gender- neutral language so for me it is absolutely standard and you will be called out for assuming, for example, that the main officer is a guy. You will be called out by someone. (Paul)

Using a neutral language, in this case, also helps fighting prejudices about the gender of the people in leadership positions.

In countries with gendered languages this solution is not applicable, though. Usually in those countries the plural form is usually masculine and includes also eventual women. The easiest way to solve the problem is to include both forms for each noun. This is a solution easy to implement but it makes the texts longer and less easy to read. Therefore, the speeches become also longer. However, this solution is implemented by most of the higher education institutions in European countries with gendered languages.

Using the double form male/ female is generally seen in a more positive way than using the asterisk or the schwa or other neutral options since these options are perceived as unnatural and ugly by the general public. Also, the double form can be easily used also in the spoken language, while the other options are more difficult to use during a speech.

I know that recently there is the trend of using * at the end of the words, but I think that it is too much: we should be able to speak. I think that it is important to keep the language natural flow when we speak.

Still, I think that we can do something also to improve the inclusivity of spoken language, for example using the double form male/female. (Chiara)

Despite the operational difficulties, inclusive language is becoming more and more common. At least for what concern gender equality between men and women. Adrienne, who is a post-doc in France, noticed that « changes in official communication between the beginning and the end of my PhD. The inclusive writing is improving a lot and a lot faster than how I expected. »

Changing language is a way to challenge prejudices and even if it is hard to use and rejected from the main linguistic academies in France and in Italy, the schwa has a strong symbolic and revolutionary power:

Language is made of symbols and the schwa has a great power as a symbol. Language is crucial in the transmission, or in the elimination, of stereotypes. Stereotype origins some of the social norms that generate or perpetrate social inequalities. That's why the symbolic power of the language should be used to remove stereotypes and inequality. So I'm in favour of all the neutral options, especially in written language: from WhatsApp messages to institutional email. (Angela)

The adverse opinion of the Crusca Academy⁴⁴ in Italy and of the Académie française⁴⁵ in France are not preventing people who wants to use a neutral language to do so.

I heard that the French Academy, which I think is a big and old organization deciding all the rules about how we should talk and write for university purposes, made a law to forbid inclusive writing in the official text but nobody is going to control if you respect that rule or not. That's why there is always a conflict between the bottom, the people, that are changing their minds, and the top. (Sophie)

It seems that the gradual implementation of inclusive language in formal and informal communication is a bottom-up process. It is pushed forward by new generations that are more sensitive to this topic but also people from older generations that understand this need, such as Francesco, an Italian professor that is « slowly getting used to a more inclusive language but more because I'm making a personal effort to change my behaviour than because I received any specific direction. » In the absence of a clear

⁴⁴Accademia della Crusca, <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/>. The Crusca Academy is a public Italian institution with legal entity gathering the major linguistic and philology experts

⁴⁵ Académie française <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/>. The Académie française is an institution born in 1635 that is charged to define French language by the creation and update of its dictionary

institutional position, people are experimenting with neutral language trying to find the best option.

Even if all the interviewees said that their institutions are at least trying to do a communication that is respectful of gender equality in considering both men and women, queer and non- binary people are usually not considered.

There isn't much more that can be done to include the LGBTQ+ people since they are already included in that kind of communication, with the exception of non- binary people like me but I don't expect them to do anything (like using the schwa for example).(Susanna).

Transgender movement in the recent years become louder and louder, asking for transgender identities to be recognised in every aspect of a person life, from education to work. Accomplishing that can be challenging for higher education institution because it one of those cases in which institutional policies are called to fill the gap left by the law of the country. This is because in several countries the procedure to legally change the name and gender marker on the documents may take years, forcing people to deal with documents that do not reflect their identity and appearance.

Even if there is no coordinated international policy on that, several higher education institutions in Europe offer the possibility to their transgender students and staff members to be registered by the institution with their chosen name and gender (the so- called ALIAS career). The ALIAS career can make the difference for a transgender person to choose between one institution or the other and can also prevent transgender students from dropping the studies if they start a medical transition.

All the interviewees recognize that it is important for a person to choose how they want to be called and to have their choice respected by the institution:

I think that people have the right to ask to be called by a different name or gender according to how they identify because it is our right to be called the way we want, and this right should be guaranteed to everybody. Even if making an effort means involves more time and money for universities, they have to do it because it is about people's rights and dignity. It isn't too much to ask and admin people should be trained on what to do in this case, especially when dealing with people coming from or going to a different university. It is necessary especially because bureaucracy can be an obstacle. (Luca)

More or less half of the interviewees weren't able to say if there was an ALIAS career for transgender students in their institutions. There is no European not even national

regulation on that topic, so for example in Italy every higher education institutions can decide if they want to have an ALIAS career for their transgender students and also the requisites for the students to get it. While the Italian standard, for example, is to bring a psychiatric certificate attesting that the person is transgender, in some institutions they are removing this obstacle:

We have an alias career for transgender students and since the beginning of this year there is no need for a medical referral to get access to this career. Everybody can choose how they want to be called without any specific bureaucracy. (Francesco)

One of the main barriers the interviewees identified in communication between different university groups such, e.g. between students and professors or students and admin staff, is the professors and other members of the staff lacking of knowledge on diversity and inclusion issues. Training courses on diversity and inclusion and on diversity manager have been organised since long time ago in corporations, even if sometimes with controversial results. Higher education institutions are slowly following the corporations example, at least in some countries such as Germany and the UK. Interviewees all shown an overall positive reaction to the idea of their organisation offering these kind of courses:

I think that diversity training courses for professors and admin staff will be useful and will prevent them from making mistakes, supporting them in their good propositions. Knowing which kind of diversity you may encounter and how to correctly deal with it can also help the students to feel more at ease. This can apply to any kind of diversity. (Susanna)

So far, in many institutions these kinds of events, training and workshops on diversity and inclusion have been organised only for the students, but the interviewed professors were all very keen on organising the same activities also for the staff:

We already organise seminars targeting high school students, treating different topics. So far, we only did those seminars for students. It is a good idea to organise online events that can be posted on the CTS page collecting experiences, talks, numbers and information on diversity issues. It is also very important that the admin personal is informed about that. (Maurizio)

Doubt on the real usefulness of these courses arose from the interviewees coming from institutions that have an already established routine of diversity management

training courses. Those interviewees said that, if these courses are not mandatory, the only people who goes to be trained is the people that is already interested on the topic.

These courses existed at the German university, but nobody went there, even after having sent around the information and having provided the teaching staff with all the details. People didn't have any interest in attending them and in improving their supervising skills. (Paul)

For some of the interviewees the solution is to make these courses mandatory, so that every person from the institution will receive at least a basic knowledge on the topic.

In my experience it is the same as management courses: if it is not mandatory people that go to these courses are people that are already interested by the subject and they will be attended only by people that already do things well so it's not that useful. (Charlotte)

According to Adrienne, a French PhD student, the first people that should be trained are the permanent staff and those who are in a position of power, since they are the ones that can make significant decision about institution communication and policies:

It would be more important to do this for the permanent staff because they are older than us, while the students are more aware of the problematics of their time. Older people with permanent jobs also have a greater influence on the admin side. They should be trained on this topic. (Adrienne)

7- “Show, don't tell!” Indirect institutional communication

Indirect communication is as important as the direct one. It should be considered in the broad institutional communication plan and it should be consistent with what is stated through the direct communication channels.

Most of the interviewees agreed that for diversity and inclusion should become part of everyday institutional life, pervading each product of institutional communication rather than remaining something that will be brought out only in special occasions.

I would like to make the idea of diversity and inclusion something ordinary, something that you experience everyday. (Giorgia)

From the interviewees experience, in higher research institutions where there are solid policies on diversity and inclusion people belonging minority groups are not afraid of showing it openly. For the interviewees the communication that an institution can do about its diversity and inclusion policies is showing that people are not afraid to show their true selves, for example talking freely about their same- sex partners or of their gender identity.

I noticed that there were many people being openly LGBTQ+ and I never felt they were ashamed or afraid to be out. There were many examples of people who were openly LGBTQ+ occupying different positions at the research centre, from researchers to department leaders. (Luca)

Representation of minority groups is another important way to show that institutional diversity and inclusion policies are successful. Seeing people from a minority group occupying leadership positions increase the self- esteem of other people from the same community. For the interviewees, seeing LGBTQ+ that are comfortable to be completely out in their institution and that can occupy also position of leadership is more effective than any statement the institution can make. As stated by Chiara, an Italian master student, « More than advertising inclusion, there should be real policies about it. ».

Several interviewees asked their institutions to make statement and to show their values and positions also outside the institutional environment, for example joining events such as the Pride march for the LGBTQ+ people rights. Most of the interviewees reacted in a very positive way to the idea of their institution joining this kind of public events.

I think that it is a good thing that universities take position and officially join events like pride, it also gives a good image of the university and a good message for students who want to join the university. I'm happy that the universities take a clear position. (Chiara)

The question about institutions joining the Pride or other civil rights marches shows quite clearly how different the institutional policies and guidelines in different European countries are. In fact, while in some countries the participation of higher education institutions in Pride or similar events is already happening, in other it seems something that is very unlikely to happen. The main obstacle will be the fact that events such as the Pride are seen as "political" and higher education institutions, being mostly public

institutions, don't want to take any political position. This happens because traditionally in many European countries certain kind of civil rights are considered as being part of the political agenda of left parties.

I think that in France it is related to the admin position of the university because it is a public institution, so it represents the government and has to stick to the guidelines of the government. It isn't something a university can decide for itself. I'm not sure about what the guidelines from the government will be, but I'm sure that I never saw any French university joining events like the pride.

On the other hand, interviewees belonging to institutions that openly support and join the Pride, for example officially sending queer people in representation, raise the suspect that this may only be an operation of rainbow- washing.

I think that universities joining the pride is like rainbow washing because from my experience there are individual people who are motivated in pushing this gender issues forward but the institution itself, the university, has no motivation or interest. It is more a "public relation" thing, and it feels inappropriate in a sense. (Paul)

Interviewees coming from countries whose institutions are still trying to successfully develop policies on diversity and inclusion, such as Italy and France, are more prone to see the positive effect of the participation of their institution to this event. To them, this will be a strong, public statement made by their institution.

I will be absolutely in favour if my Academy would do that, I don't see anything negative in taking part in these events. Quite the opposite, actually. This is a very strong statement for an institution, a brand, an organisation to make. (Francesco)

In country in which LGBTQ+ rights and people are at risk, the idea of a public institution such as a university joining an event such as the Pride march is considered utopic. But even if it happened, there would still be political concerns:

[my university officially joining the Pride march] it is a shocking idea for me! Of course I would be happy but I'm not sure, if they go officially for the pride for example, there may be other groups pretending to go also to right wing events. So I see lots of problems here. I will be happy if they would participate in Pride officially but I'm also afraid that far right groups may take advantage of it. (Krys)

A special situation is represented by higher education institutions that are based in countries that do not guarantee LGBTQ+ people rights or openly discriminate against them. Higher education institutions are influenced by the surrounding society in their policies about diversity and inclusion and in their institutional communication. The interviewees identify a social duty for the higher education institutions that are based in countries in which some social minority groups are strongly discriminated against to support people from these minorities:

I think that universities are strongly influenced by the surrounding society in how they accept and handle diversity and foster inclusion. If a society is discriminatory the research centre/ university has the duty to actively support the members of the discriminated groups and offer a safe space. Universities in discriminatory societies should be more open and should care more for minorities than universities in more open- minded societies. Students spend most of their days at the university, so it is important that it is a safe environment for them. (Luca)

Higher education institutions are seen as entities somehow independent from the local government, at least among certain boundaries. According to the interviewees, those institutions can try to shape their inner environment the way they want it to be, for example selecting the kind of behaviour and people allowed in their premises:

I think that universities are partially independent from the country and society they are based in. There are hard jurisdictional boundaries they have to stick to, like they cannot shoot someone, but I think they can actively foster an environment as they want it to be as any large group can. It is just a matter of where you want to go and what kind of people you want to have in your institution. (Paul)

Higher education institutions in discriminating societies can offer a safe place to the members of the discriminated groups

In Poland, people outside the university are pretty conservative and I get shouted at on the bus and stuff like that but in the institutions, in the universities, people are extremely liberal and pro- LGBTQ+ up to a level I never experienced in Germany. For example, professors displaying rainbow flags and their position on abortion law on their social media: something that is completely unthinkable in Germany. (Paul)

8- “Marketing vs reality” Trusting institutional communication

One issue about diversity and inclusion communication in higher education institutions is about the lack of trust that some of the interviewees have toward the official communication of their institution, especially those who comes from institutions that picture themselves as very inclusive and base their brand on it:

Especially in the German University, they like to market themselves as very diverse but I often feel that they only do just enough so that they are able to print on their flyers that they are diverse and that's what is important and not the actual measures that they implement. (Giorgia)

Inclusive communication and initiatives are often seen only as marketing by the interviewees that are « just very suspicious of marketing. » as Anton, an Erasmus research internship says.

The negative feelings about institutional communication and initiatives on diversity and inclusion are triggered by personal experiences in which the interviewees saw a discrepancy between the institutional communication and the institution concrete actions. For this reason, there is a strong request of number and statistics, “proof” of what the institution is really doing. There is a special attention towards statistics of negative events, that are usually hidden by the institution to preserve its reputation.

To improve the situation, I will start recording the violations happening in the university because you need to have a statistics to see what's wrong before you can really change something. Institutions need to provide a complete and public database on what's happening and then start writing on the clear implications of what happened. Both to protect the victims and to show that there were very clear implications for the perpetrator. (Paul)

The solution proposed by the interviewees are practical actions the institution can make to produce evidence of its commitment in building an inclusive environment for everybody.

I will start by practical things. For example, electing a black, gay, woman as the head of the University, this is an extreme example of course. But using only the communication will sound a bit fake to me, it will become a branding of a movement, this is a risk. (Giorgia)

Quantitative results

Quantitative data results have been collected by a questionnaire created and hosted on the online platform Survio⁴⁶. This platform gives users the opportunity to share their questionnaire through a direct link, it collects all the answers and give the opportunity to apply search filters and do some simple statistics and graphic representation. Data collected through Survio have been processed using Excel⁴⁷.

The link to the questionnaire was shared through Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and WhatsApp researcher's personal accounts, through European network such as Euraxess, through direct emails, word-of-mouth and the online platform Survey Circle⁴⁸. The completion rate of this questionnaire is 27.3 %. According to Survio, the questionnaire was visualised 820 times, but the website doesn't track if the same person opens the link twice.

The survey was officially online for one month, from the 20th of November until the 20th of December.

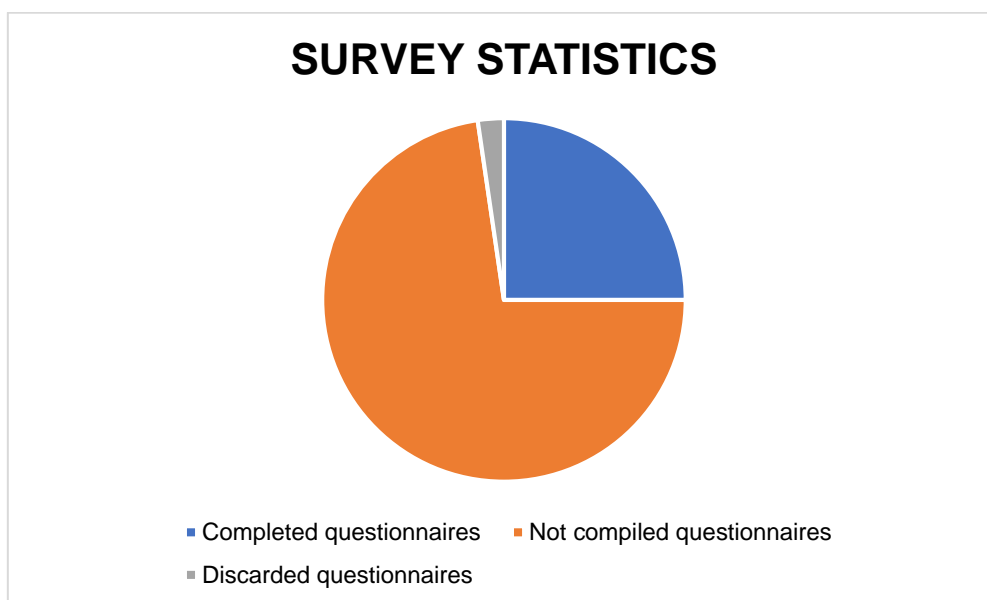


Figure 3- Survey general statistics

⁴⁶ Survio, <https://www.survio.com/it/>

⁴⁷ Microsoft excel, <https://www.microsoft.com/it-it/microsoft-365/excel>

⁴⁸ Survey Circle, <https://www.surveycircle.com/en/>

The first block of items in the survey is about demographics. We are interested in people's country of origin, current residence, age, position in their institution, sexual orientation and gender identity. We also asked them if they felt like they belong to any minority group other than LGBTQ+ community.

These data may be not very interesting per se, but they are the frame where to place all the other pieces of information we collected from the other 3 blocks of questions in the survey.

Item 1- Country of origin

In this first of demographic item, we ask for people's country of origin. It is an open-answer question. The most represented countries (see table 3) are: Italy, Slovenia, UK, and France.

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| Austria | 3 |
| Belgium | 2 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 1 |
| Brazil | 1 |
| China | 1 |
| Croatia | 3 |
| Czech Republic | 2 |
| Denmark | 1 |
| Estonia | 1 |
| Finland | 1 |
| France | 15 |
| Germany | 6 |
| Greece | 3 |
| India | 1 |
| Italy | 94 |
| Italy and Germany | 1 |
| Luxembourg | 1 |
| Morocco | 1 |
| Netherlands | 5 |

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Poland | 2 |
| Romania | 1 |
| Russia | 1 |
| Serbia | 1 |
| Slovenia | 30 |
| Spain | 6 |
| Switzerland | 2 |
| UK | 17 |
| USA | 2 |
| Total count | 205 |

Table 2- List of survey participants country of origin

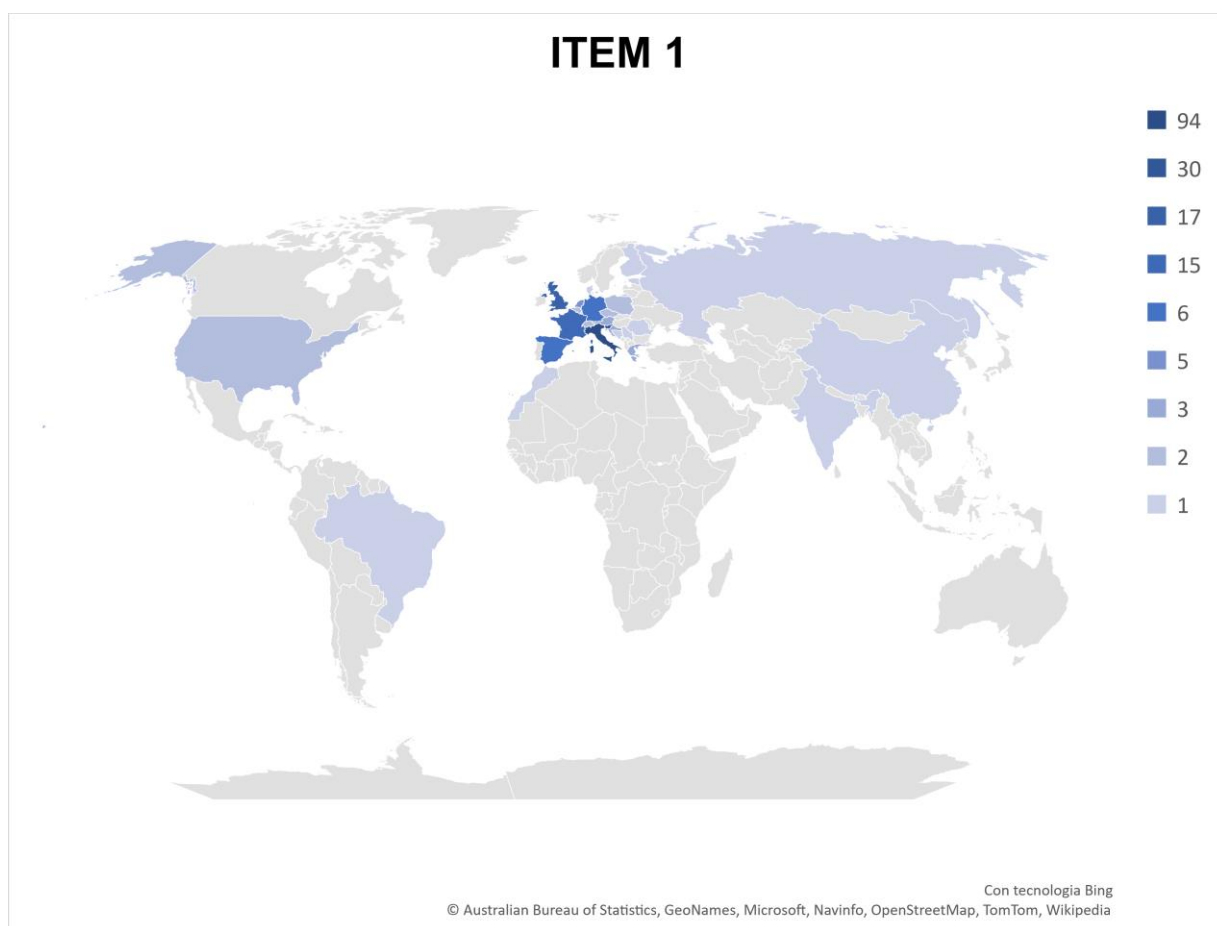


Figure 4- Survey participants' country of origin

Item 2- Country you currently live in

In the second item we asked for the place where people currently live in. We wanted to know about people mobility but also which country they and their institutions are based in. The most represented countries (see table 4) are Italy, Slovenia, UK, France and Germany.

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Austria | 3 |
| Belgium | 1 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 1 |
| Croatia | 3 |
| Czech Republic | 1 |
| Denmark | 2 |
| Estonia | 1 |
| Finland | 1 |
| France | 17 |
| Germany | 10 |
| Greece | 1 |
| Italy | 88 |
| Luxembourg | 1 |
| Netherlands | 5 |
| Poland | 1 |
| Romania | 2 |
| Slovenia | 33 |
| Spain | 6 |
| Sweden | 2 |
| Switzerland | 4 |
| UK | 22 |
| Total count | 205 |

Table 3- List of survey participants' country of residence

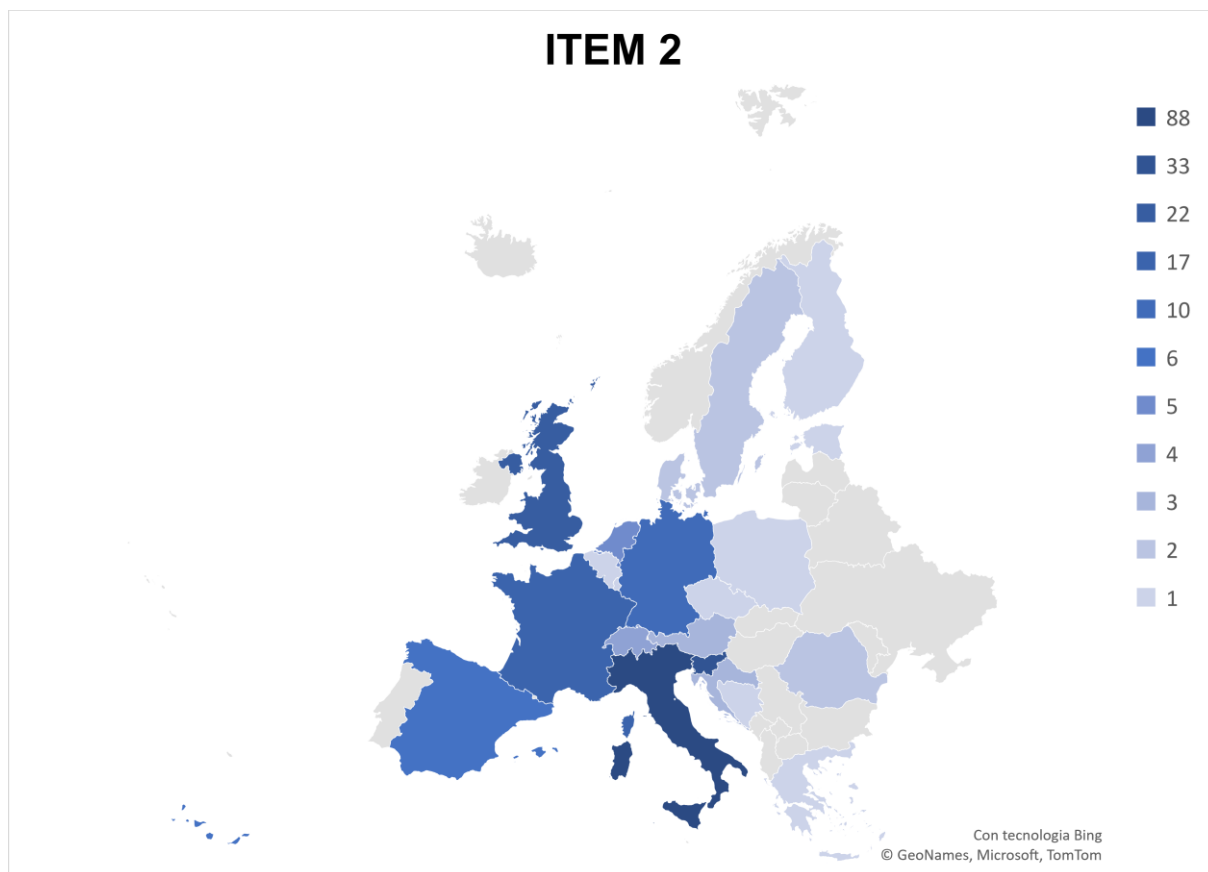


Figure 5- Survey participants' country of residence

Item 3- Gender identity

In the third item we ask for people's gender identity. Since the LGBTQ+ community is the focus of this research, it was essential for us to know the gender identity and sexual orientation of survey participants. It is a closed- answer question but we put an open option "other" was available for people that didn't recognize themselves in any other definition.

Even if the transgender/ trans* identity is often used as an umbrella term to include both transgender people that belongs to the man/woman binary and people who belongs to the non- binary spectrum, in this survey we decided to include as many options as possible for people to express their gender identity. With this choice we an indirect statement including identities that do not belong to the binary- vision of society.

Due to the limited options for customization offered by Survio, we chose to only explain the meaning of the word "cisgender" since cisgender people that are not familiar with gender identity issue may not know what cisgender means and be confused about

what the correct answer is. Despite this explanation, there were a few cisgender people who couldn't figure out the correct answer for them and wrote it in the "other" option. Only a few people used that same option to express their annoyance for the absence of the canonical choice between man and woman. There were a few people that used the "other" option to describe themselves as questioning.

92.23 % of the participants of this survey identify themselves as cisgender.

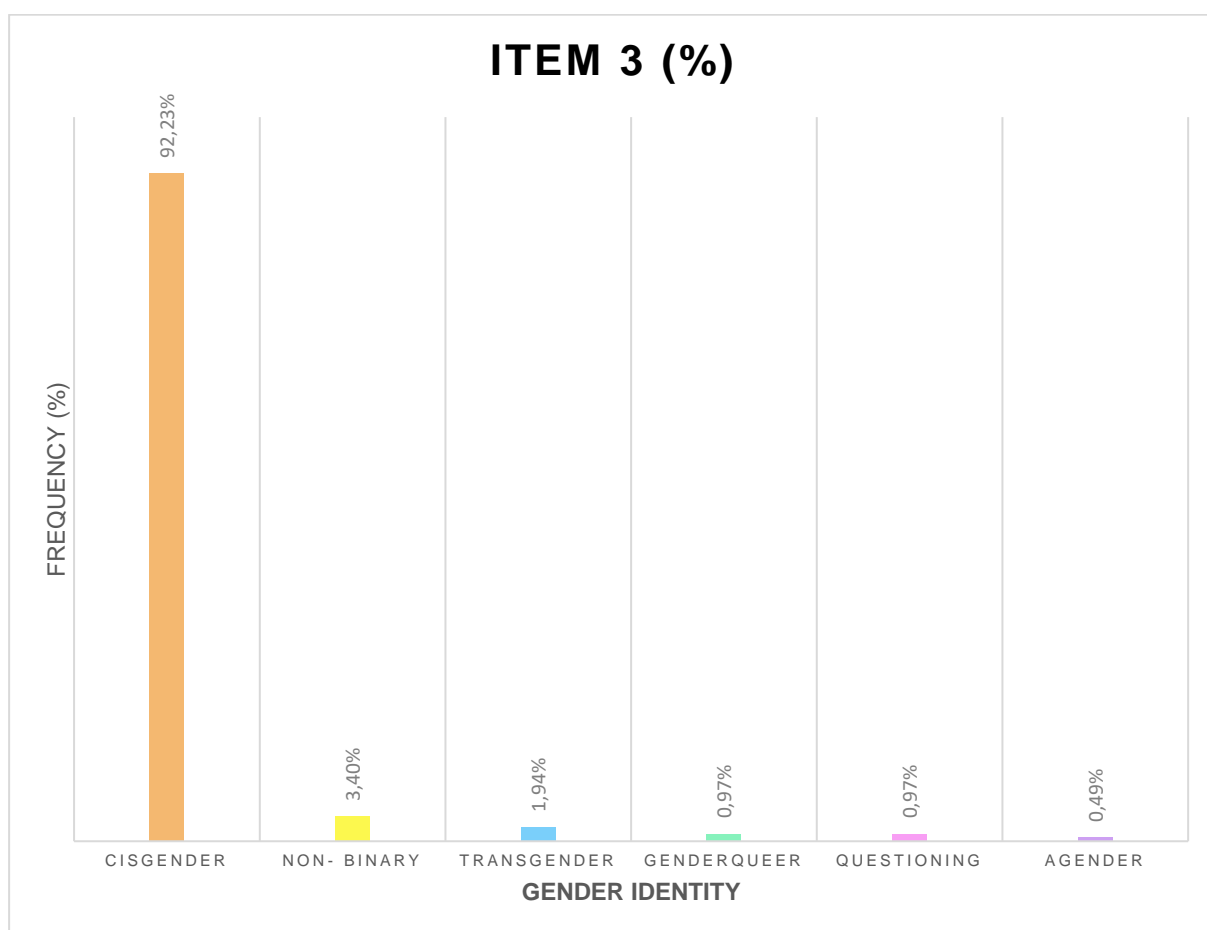


Figure 6- Survey participants gender identity frequency (in percentage)

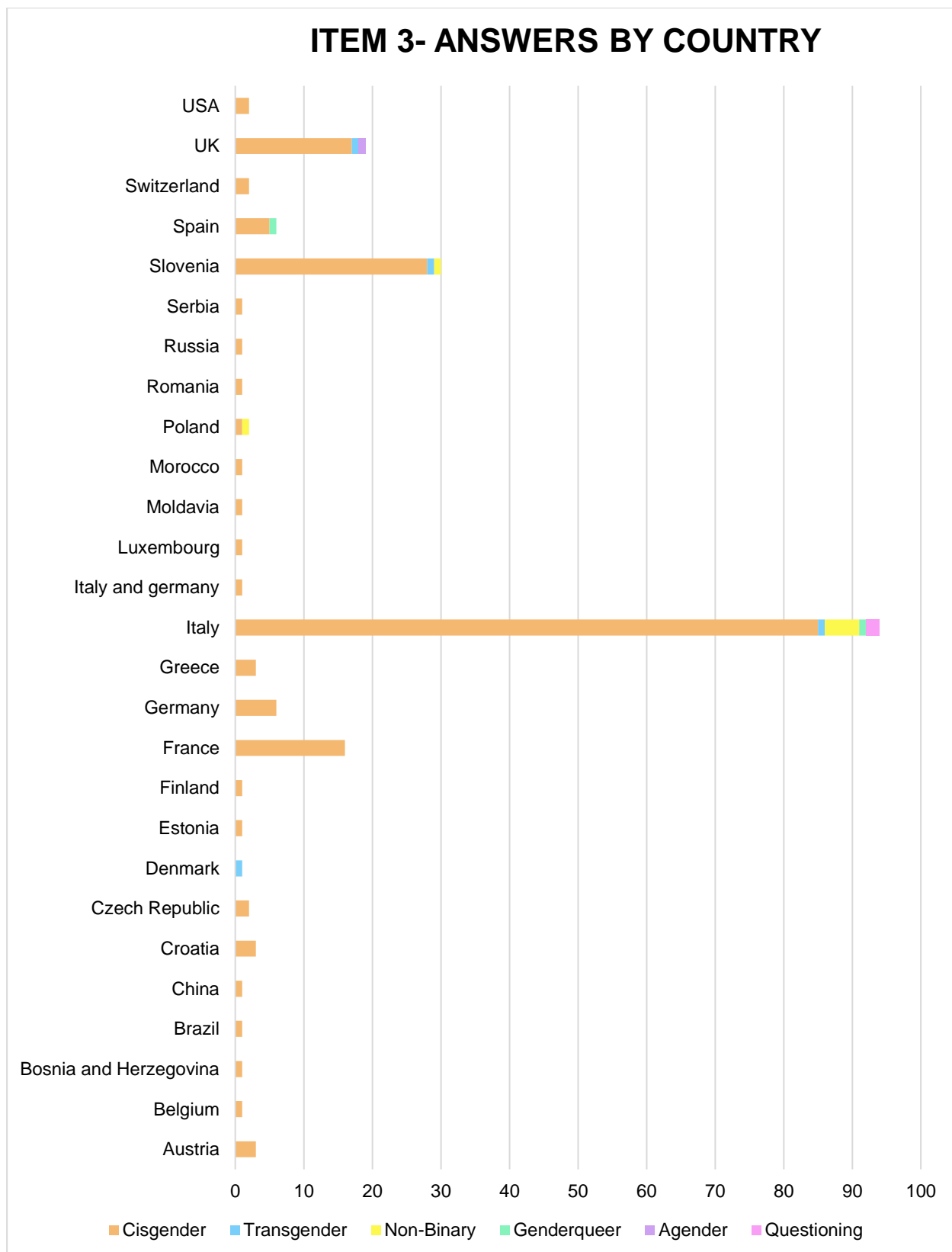


Figure 7- Survey participants' gender identity by country of origin

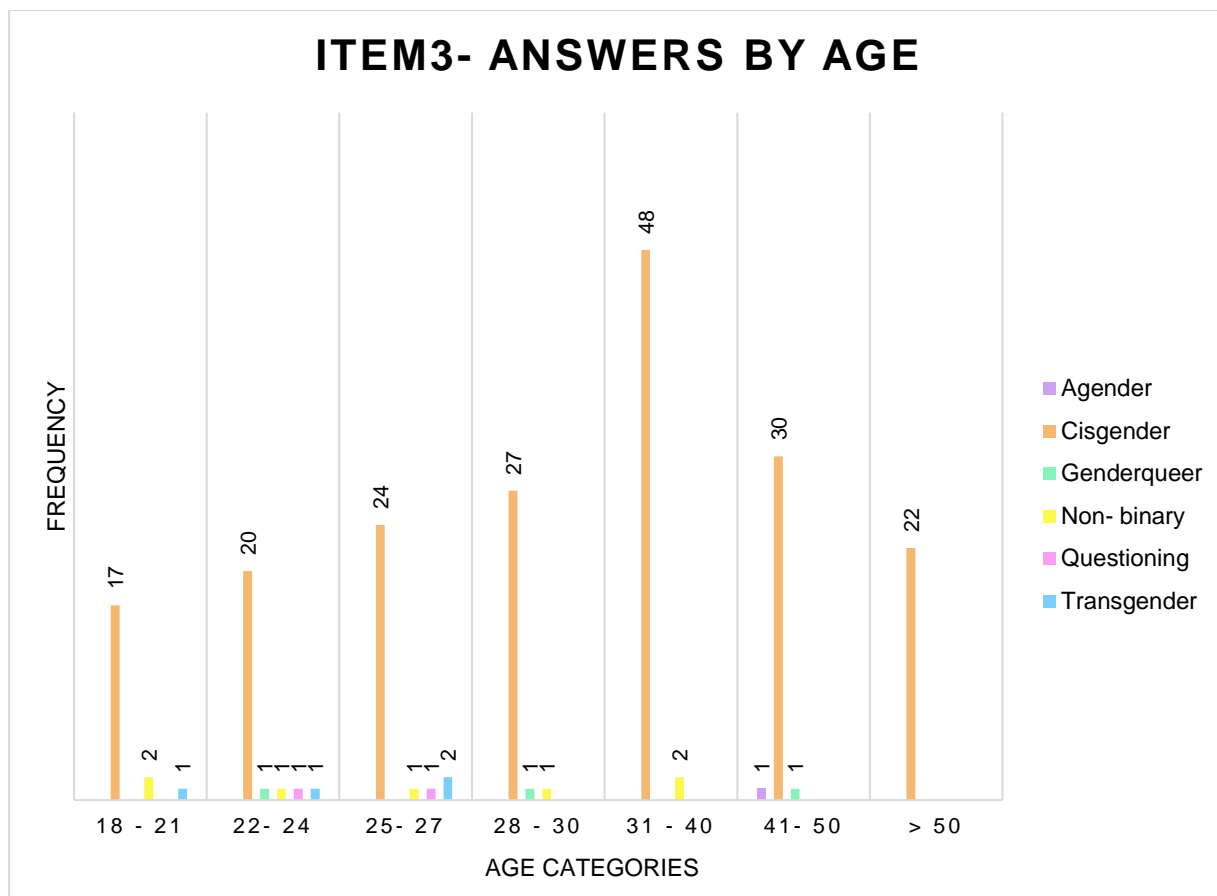


Figure 8- Survey participants gender identity by age

Item 4- Age

The fourth item asks for participants' age and we asked about it to see if it is somehow related to survey participants answers to the other questionnaire items. The majority, 24.39% of the participants, belongs to the 31-40 age range, but all the age ranges are more or less equally represented. The less populated age range is the 18 -21 that covers 9.76% of the participants.

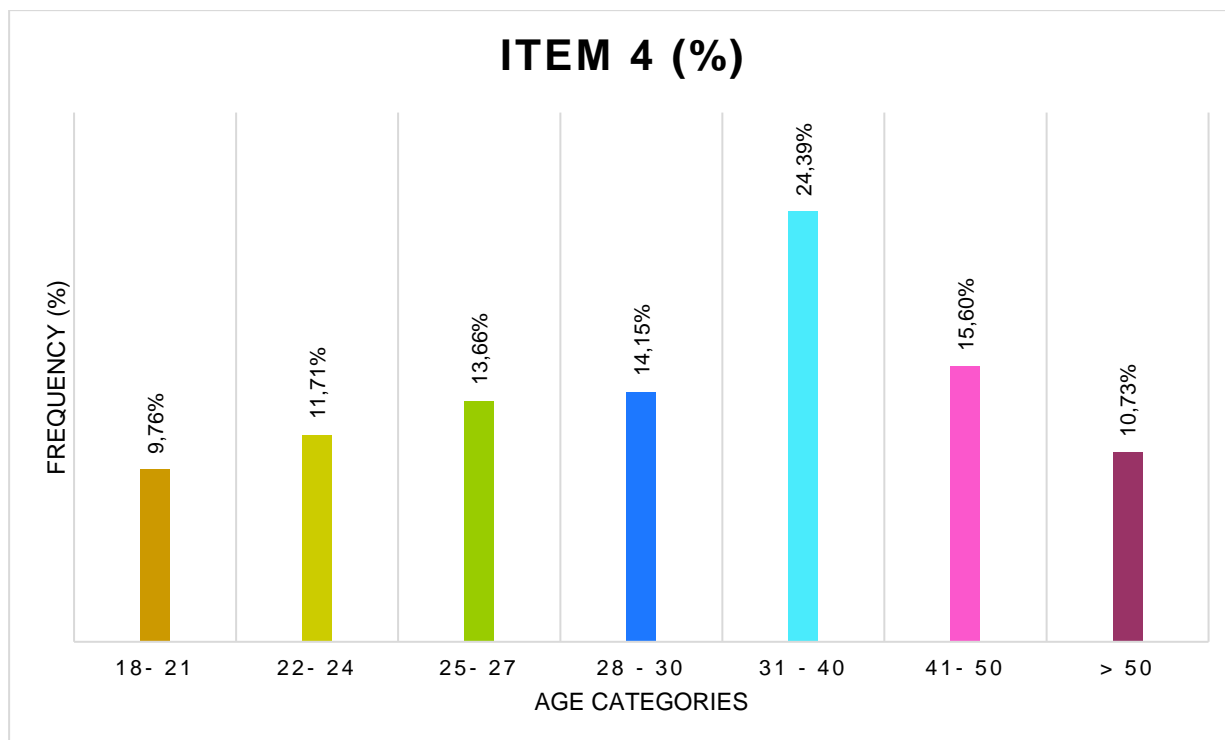


Figure 9- Survey participants age ranges frequency

Item 5- Sexual orientation

The fifth item is about survey participants sexual orientation. As for the third item, we chose to ask this question because we need to know how many participants belong to the LGBTQ+ community, and which sub- group they belong, and if there is correlation between participants belonging to LGBTQ+ community and their answers to the questionnaire.

As we did for the gender identity, we tried to include all the main sexual orientations and left the open option “other” for people whose sexual orientation was not listed among the options. Even if the bisexual and pansexual sexual orientation somehow overlap, they are considered two different orientations by the majority of the Bi/Pan community and that is why we decided to include both options. Only a few participants were upset by this list of options and used the “other” open answer to express their annoyance. Most of participants (77.56%) describe themselves as heterosexual.

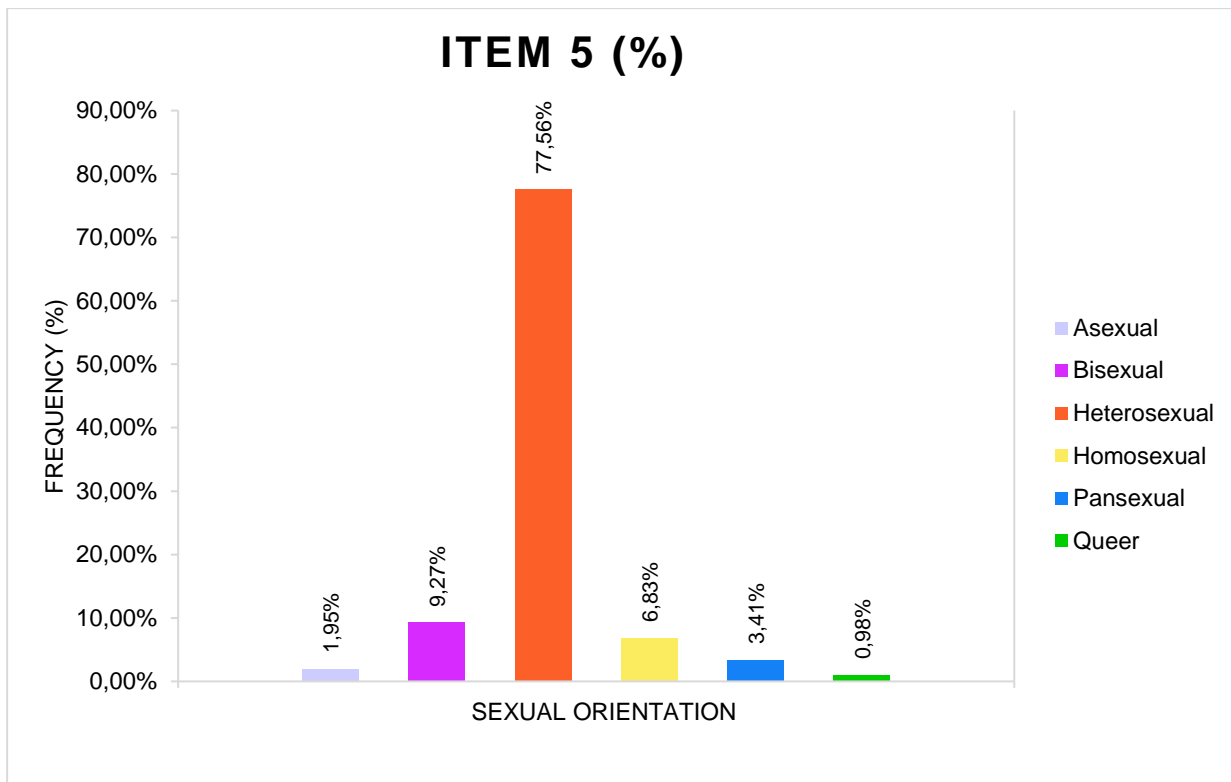


Figure 10- Survey participants' sexual orientation (%)

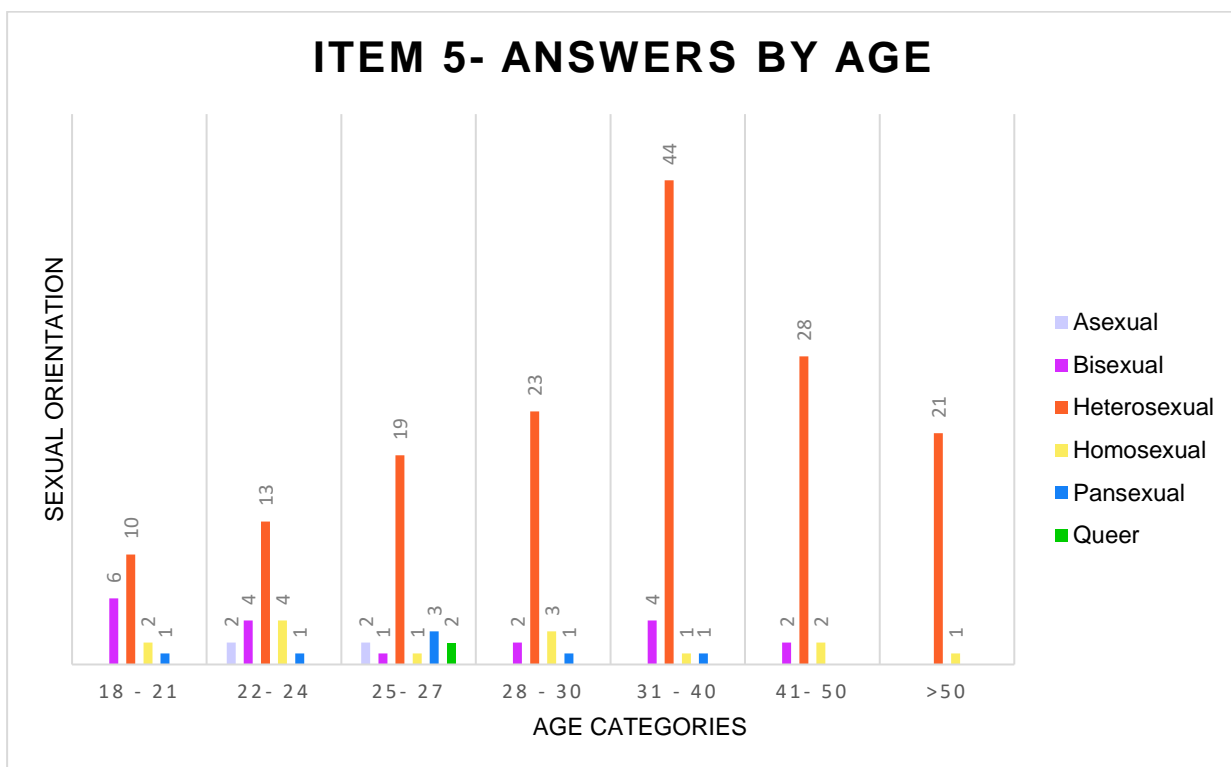


Figure 11- Survey participants' sexual orientation by age

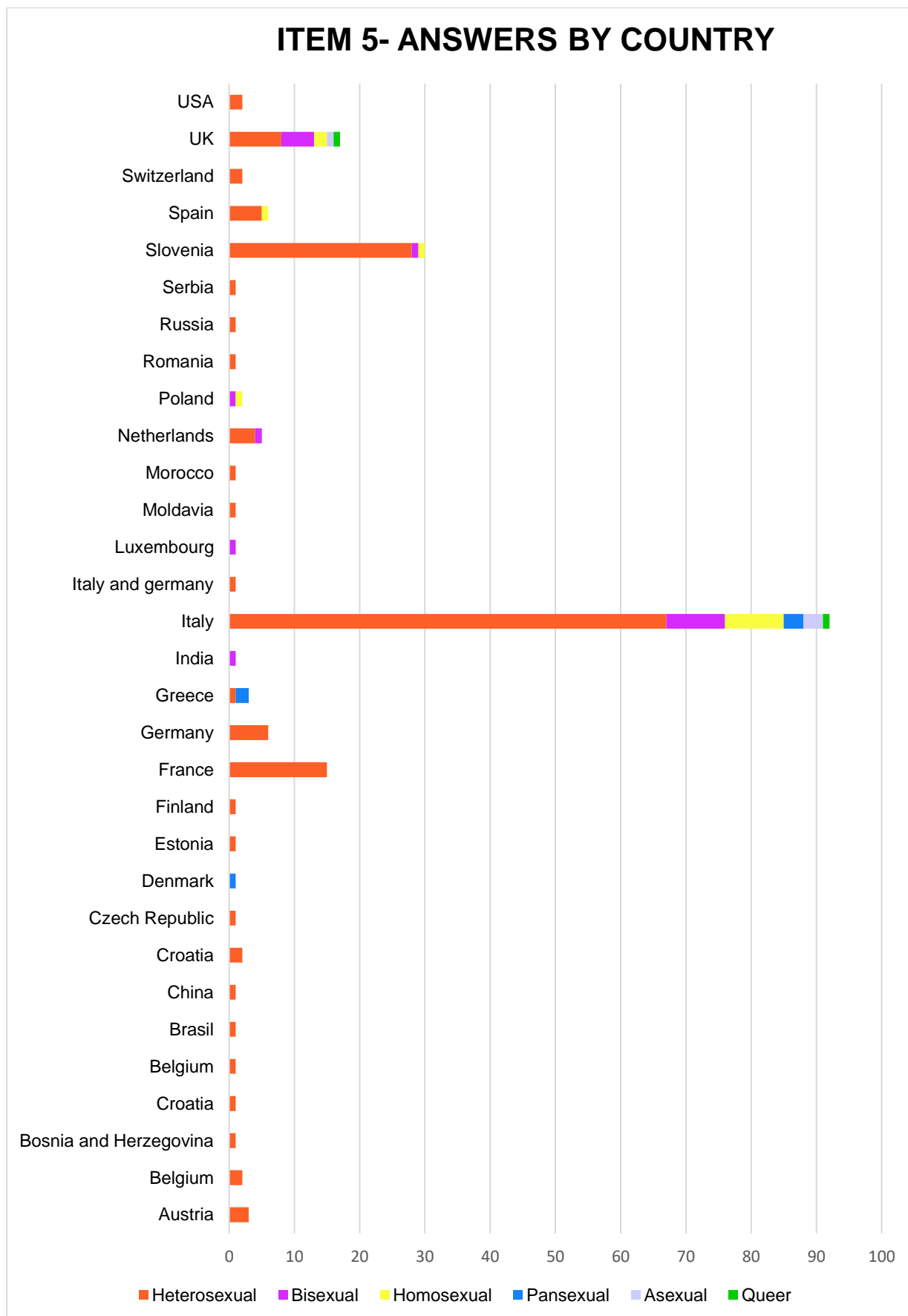


Figure 12- Survey participants sexual orientation by country of origin

Item 6- If you belong to any other social minority groups (e.g. because of your gender, religion, disability, neurodiversity etc) list them here:

Item 6 is an open, non-mandatory question. We used it to understand how many other minority groups were present apart from the LGBTQ+ community, but also which groups perceive themselves as a social minority and in which countries. People answered listing neurodiversity, physical disabilities, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender (women). See table 5 for a complete list.

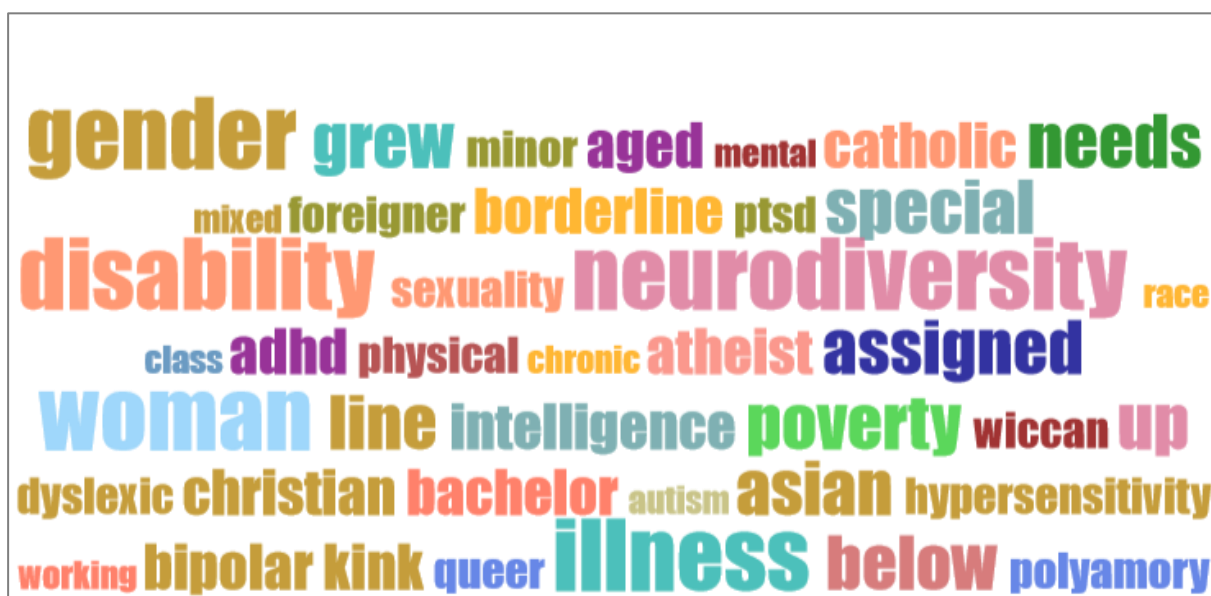


Figure 13- Item 6 answers word cloud. Other minority groups

| | |
|---|---|
| Neurodiversity | Mixed race, mental illness, chronic illness |
| Woman | Neurodiversity (autism) |
| Working class queer | Physical disability |
| Gender, sexuality | Polyamory |
| Gender, hypersensitivity | Woman |
| Foreigner | Dyslexic |
| I'm a wiccan, i have a minor disability and I have PTSD | Kink |
| Disability, neurodiversity | Aged person |
| Catholic | ADHD. Bipolar/ borderline |

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Because of intelligence | Bachelor |
| Atheist | Christian |
| Association for Individuals with Special Needs | Grew up below the poverty line |
| Assigned to women | Asian |

Table 4- Answers to item 6. Other minority groups.

Item 7- The institution you currently belong to is:

The 7th item is to know to which higher education institution the survey participants belong. This is a closed- answer question with three options: university, research centre and museum. A fourth, open, “other” option was left for those who belongs to equivalent institutions, and it was only used three times. The majority of the participants to this survey belongs to universities (80.5%).

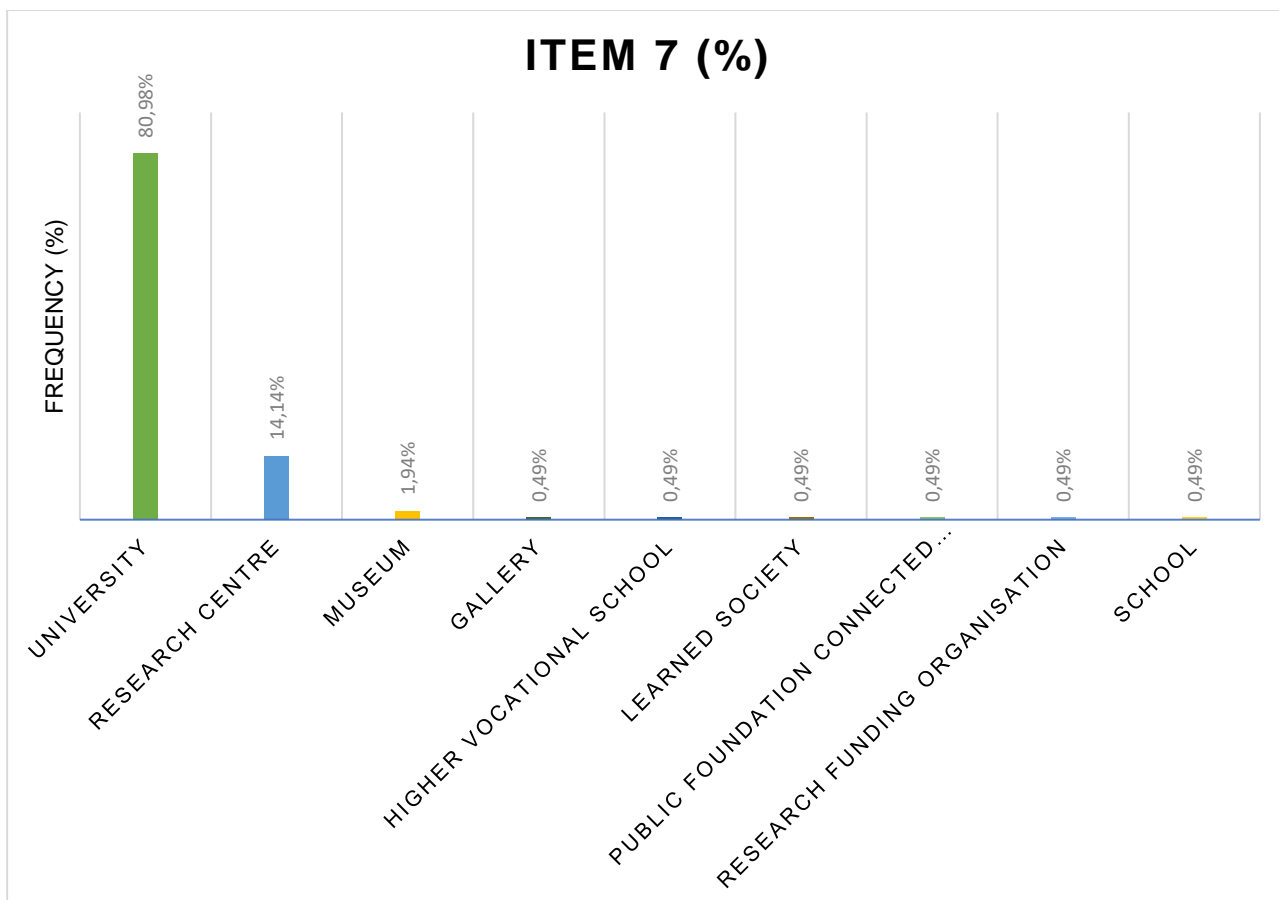


Figure 14- Survey participants institutions (%)

Item 8- Your current position in your institution is

With the 8th item we collected information about survey participants position in their institution. It is an closed- answer question with an open “other” options since we know that different higher education institutions may have differetn role that are not equivalent. We collected data for each of the higher education positions we listed: from Bachelor’s students to full professors.

The two most represented categories are the Bachelor’s students (23.2%) and the admin staff (21.7%). The less represented gathegories are the associate (3.9%) and full professors (3.4%).

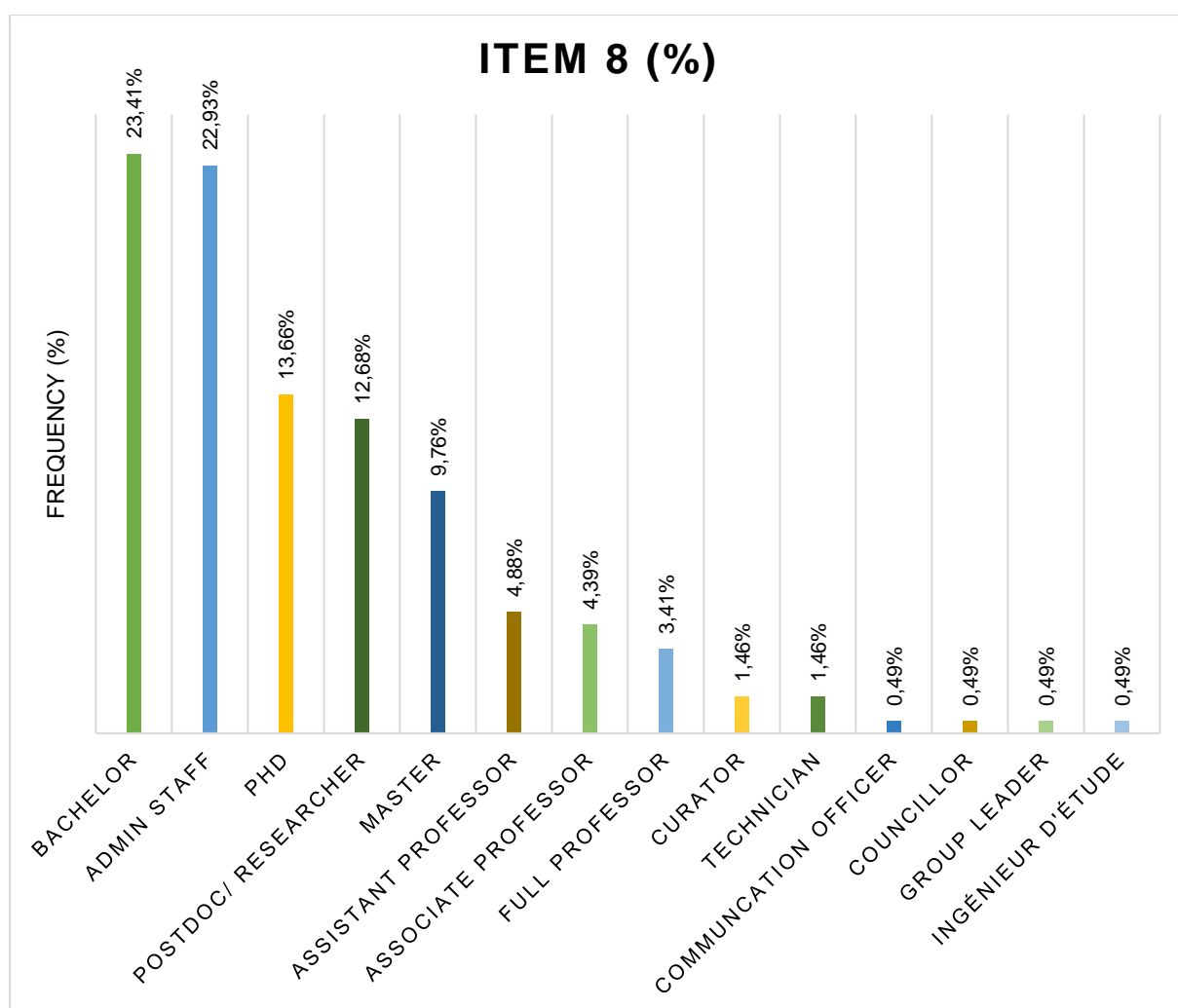


Figure 15- Survey participants' institutional position

In the second block of items, we explored how different institutions tackle the issue of diversity and inclusion from the communication point of view. We tried to summarize all the inputs we received from the interviewees during the qualitative data collection phase. From now on, whenever possible, the questionnaire items came in pairs: the first item is about the survey participant opinion on a topic, issue, statement or institutional communication policy and the second item is about their institution implementing an action on the same issue or not.

Item 9- Within one year, how many events (seminars, webinars, talks, shows etc) on diversity and inclusion does your institution organise?

The 9th item measures how many events on diversity and inclusion topics, not necessary on LGBTQ+ issues, are organised by the survey participant institution on average within one year. It is a closed- answer question with four options: 0, 1-5, 6- 10, >10. According to the survey participants, 59.51% of their institutions organises 1 to 5 events on diversity and inclusion. A bit less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the institutions, the 21.5%, doesn't organise any event diversity and inclusion.

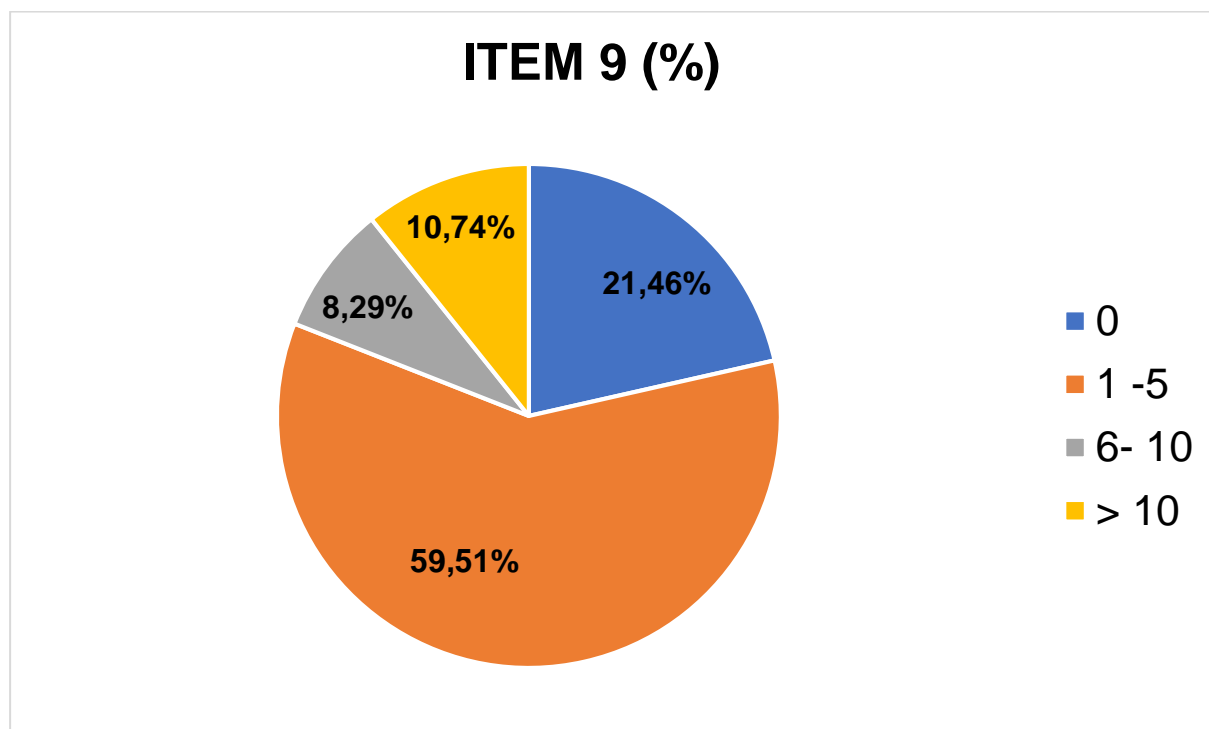


Figure 16- Average number of events on diversity and inclusion in a year

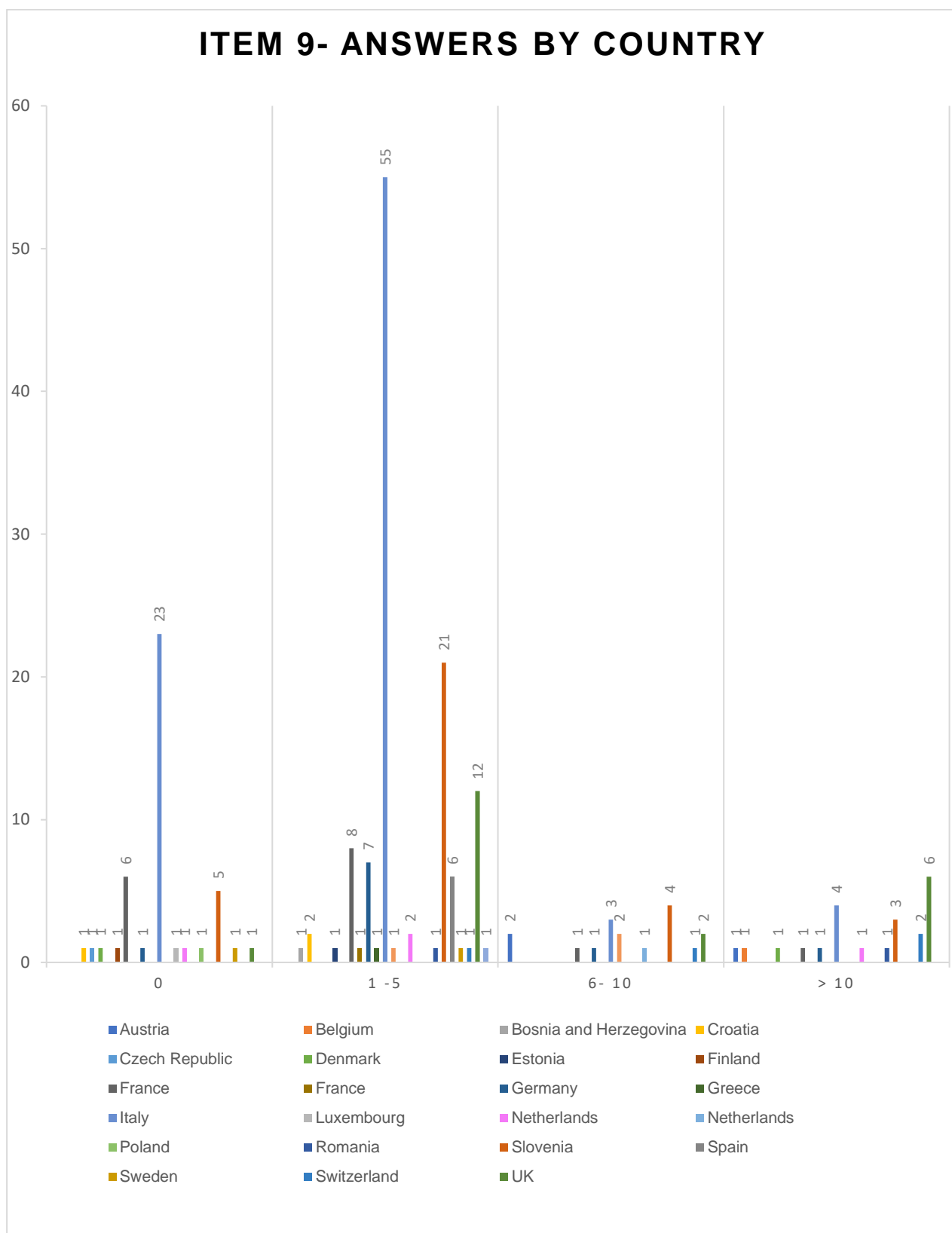


Figure 17- Average number of events organised by institutions in one year by country

Item 10- Diversity and inclusion events organised by my institution are advertised through

It is a closed- answer question with an “other” open answer. This item addressed an issue that emerged from some of the qualitative interviews pointing at the fact that often the channel chosen by institutions to advertise their initiatives are not the most appropriate to reach their target. In every country the most used channel to advertise diversity and inclusion initiatives is the email, followed by the website. Facebook and Instagram are the more used social media for this purpose.

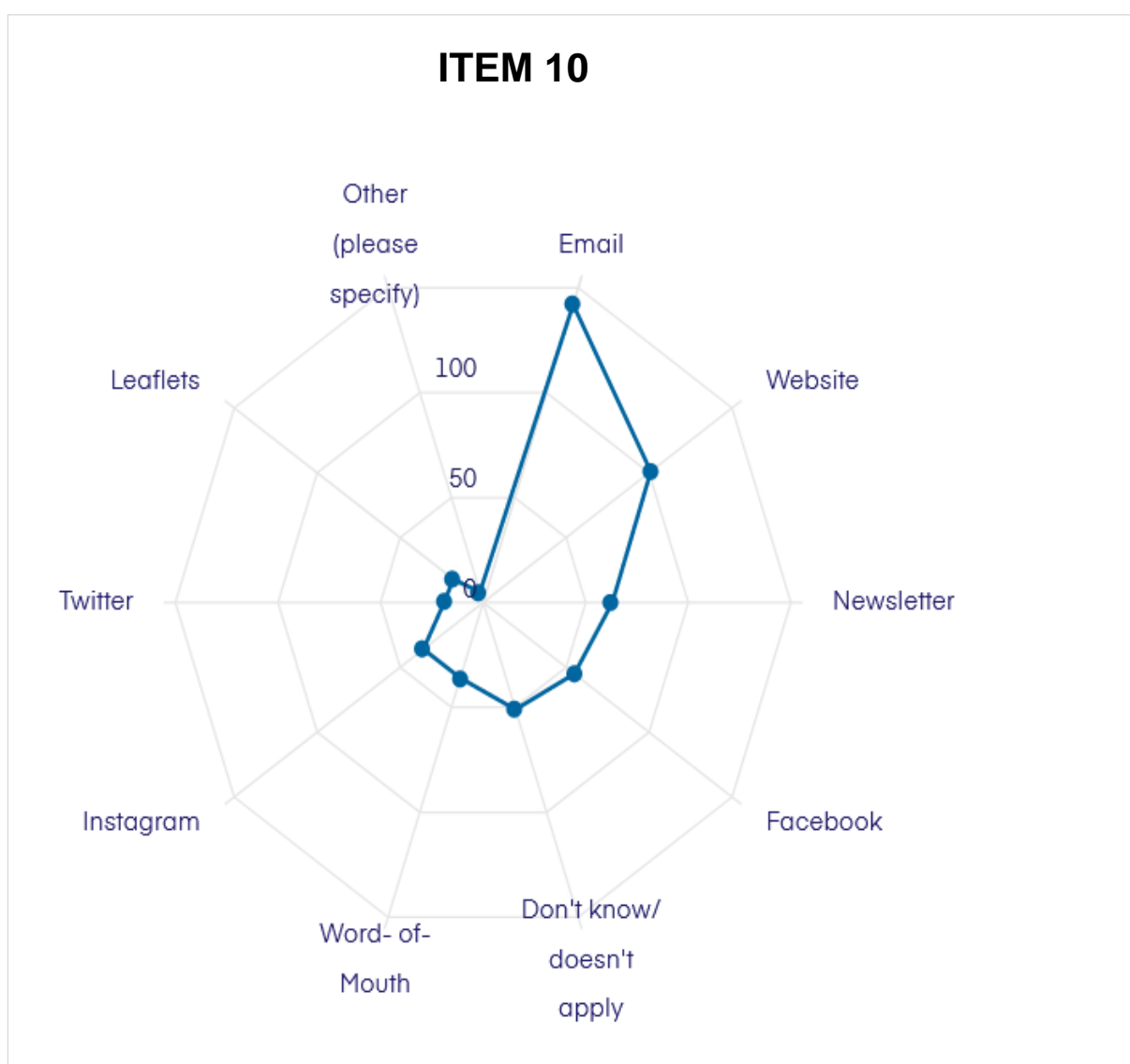


Figure 18- Communication channels used by higher education institutions

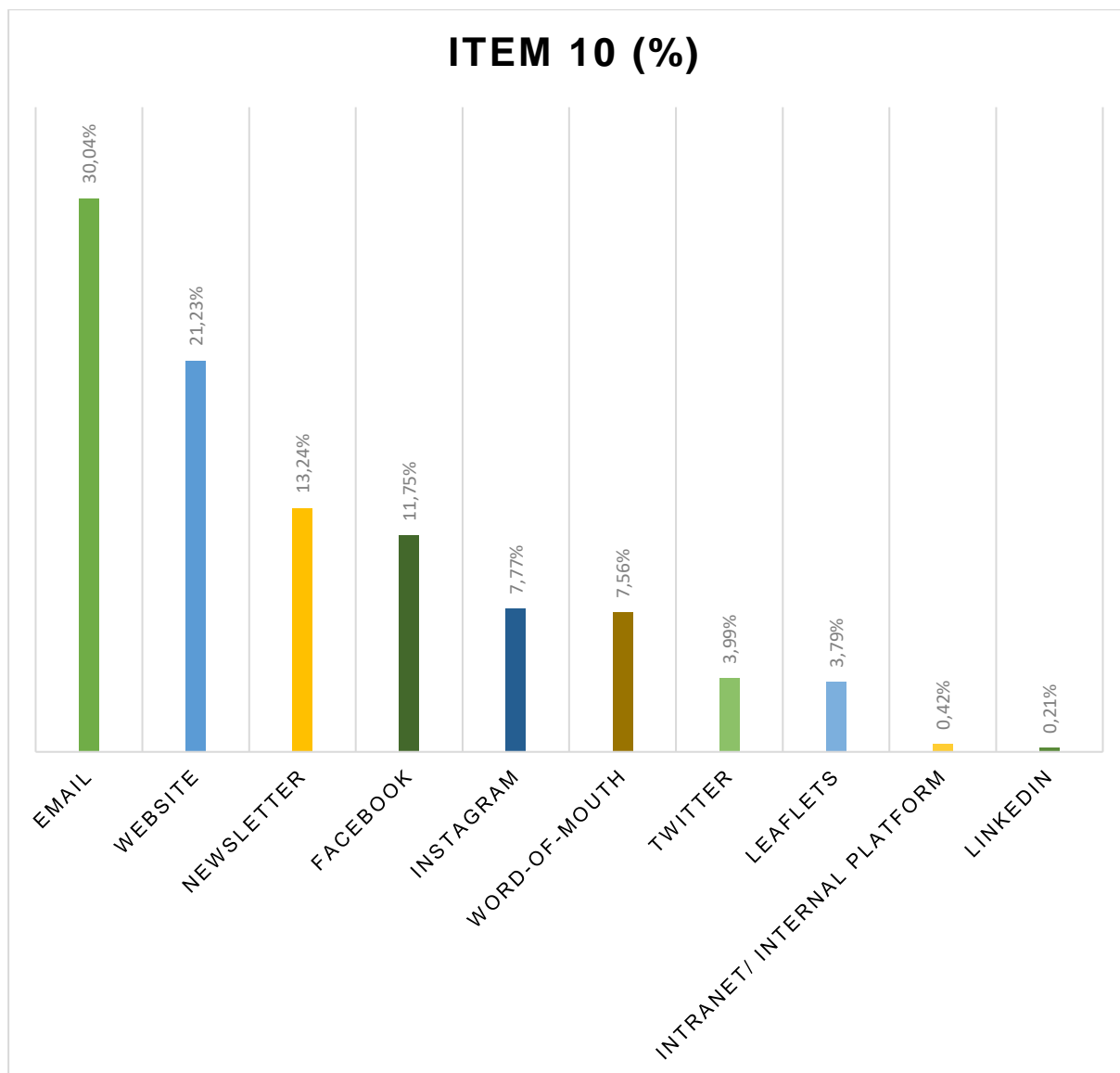


Figure 19- Diversity and inclusion institutional communication channels

Item 11- Diversity and inclusion organised by my institution are properly advertised

Item 11 is a closed- answer one. Most of the interviewees in the qualitative interviews said that diversity and inclusion events are often not properly advertised. From the questionnaire we can see that almost half of the survey participants (44.87%) thinks that the diversity and inclusion events organised by their institutions are well advertised.

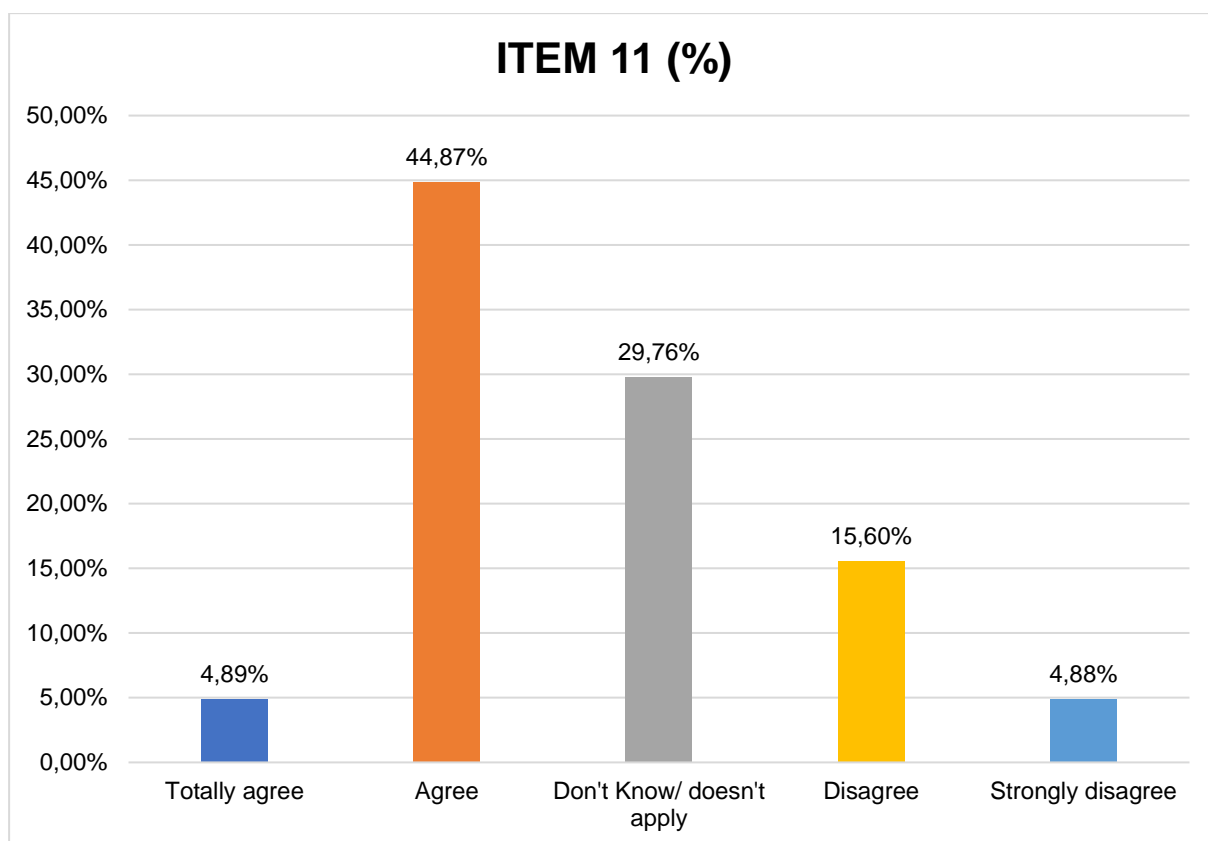


Figure 20- Survey participants' opinion on how well advertised are their institution's initiatives on diversity and inclusion

Dividing the answers by country didn't evidence any clear trend. For some countries only one or two options were selected, but it isn't significant because it happened for those countries for which we have only a few (<10) cases.

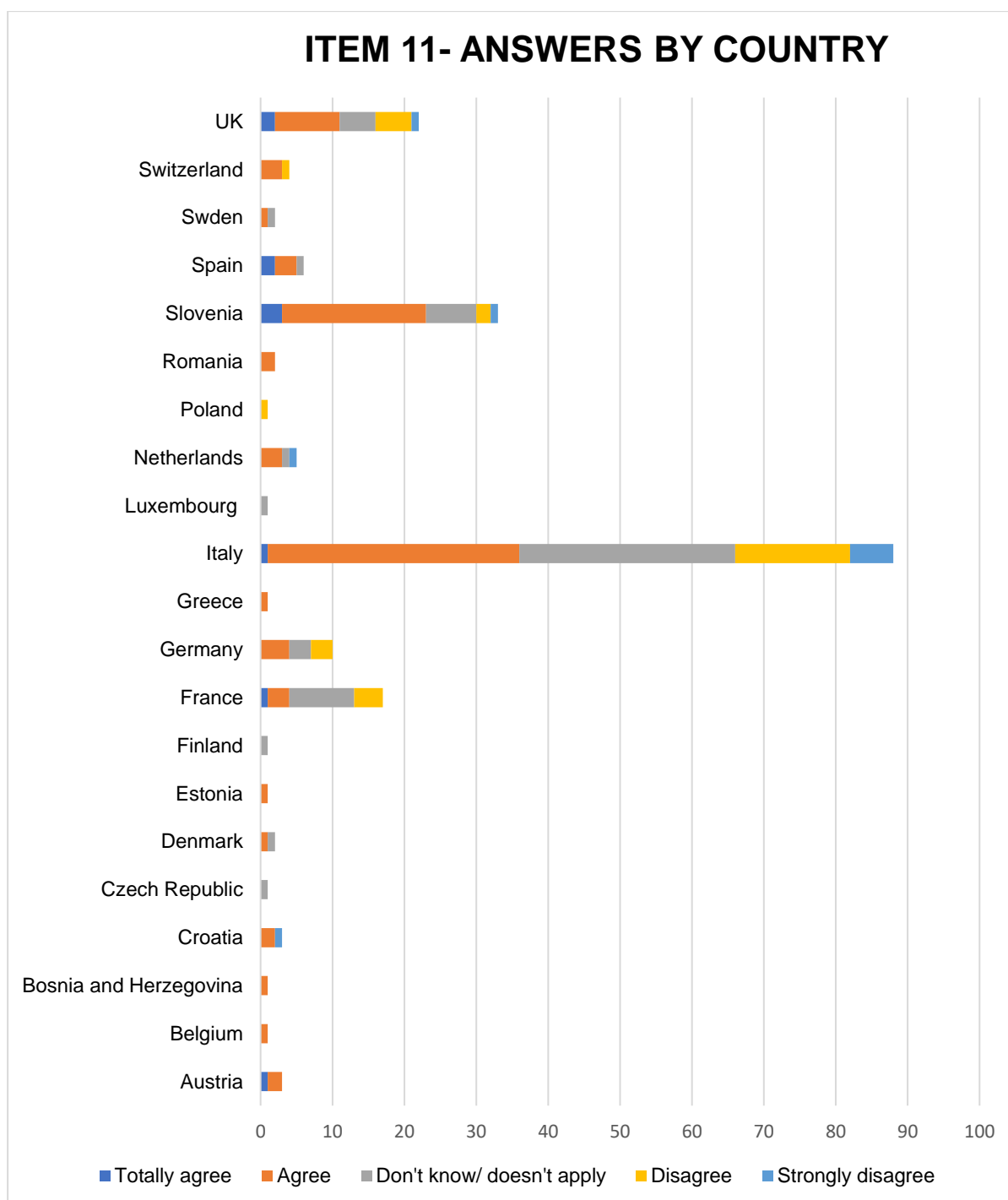


Figure 21- Survey participants opinions on how well their institution advertise its diversity and inclusion events in its communication.

Item 12- After attending an event on diversity and inclusion organised by my institution, they ask for my feedback:

During the qualitative part of this research, many interviewees said that their institutions never asked for their feedback after they attended a diversity and inclusion

event, even if they recognise that it is an important thing to do to understand how effectively well an event went. Item 12 is a closed- answer to understand if institutions ask for participants' feedback on the diversity and inclusion events they organise. Half of the questionnaire participants (50.24%) chose the "I don't know/ doesn't apply" option. The other half is split equally between "yes" (24.88%) and "no" (24.88%).

More or less half of the events organised by higher education institutions on diversity and inclusion organised by the participants institutions are followed by a request for feedback.

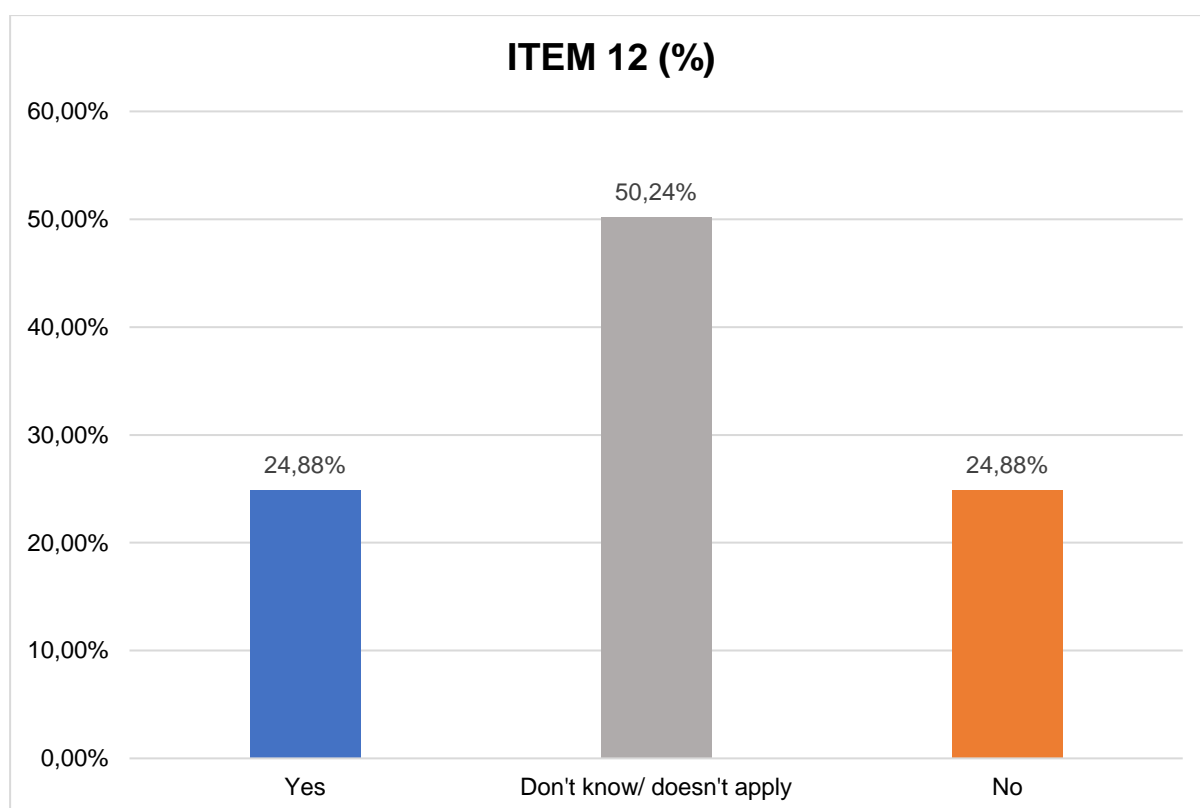


Figure 22- Survey participants' answer about their institution asking for their feedback on its events on diversity and inclusion

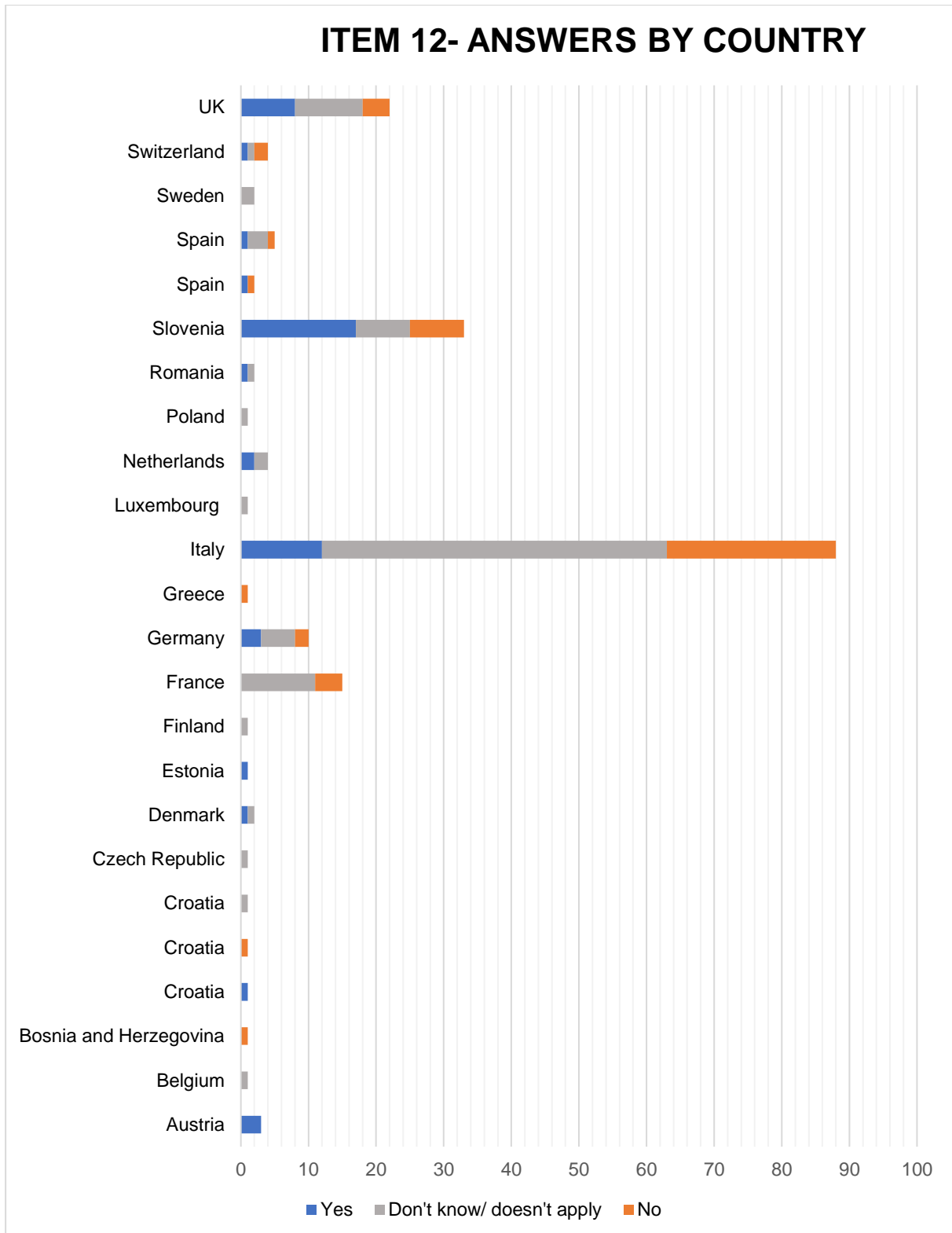


Figure 23- Survey participants' answers about their institution asking for their feedback on its events on diversity and inclusion by country

Item 13- Students are actively involved in planning/ organisation/ realisation of institutional diversity and inclusion initiatives:

Students' involvement in higher education institutions diversity and inclusion communication and policies was a critical point for many of the interviewees in the qualitative phase of the research. Some of the interviewees complained because often student's groups are not involved in institutional initiatives on diversity and inclusion, not even when they belong to LGBTQ+ collectives. Professors and staff personnel among the interviewees said that in some cases single students were involved at least marginally in diversity and inclusion initiative communication, but they also reported a lack of cohesion among the students that makes difficult for professors and other staff members to have a unique student's representative they can talk to. This is particularly true for countries where there are no physical places where students can meet and organise, such as the student's unions in the UK.

We wrote item 13, a closed- answer question, to understand if the interviewees feeling on this matter are shared by questionnaire participants.

Half of the questionnaire participants chose the "don't know/ doesn't apply" option (54.63%), the other half is divided between those who totally agree or agree (26.33%) and those who disagree or strongly disagree (19.04%) with item 13 statement.

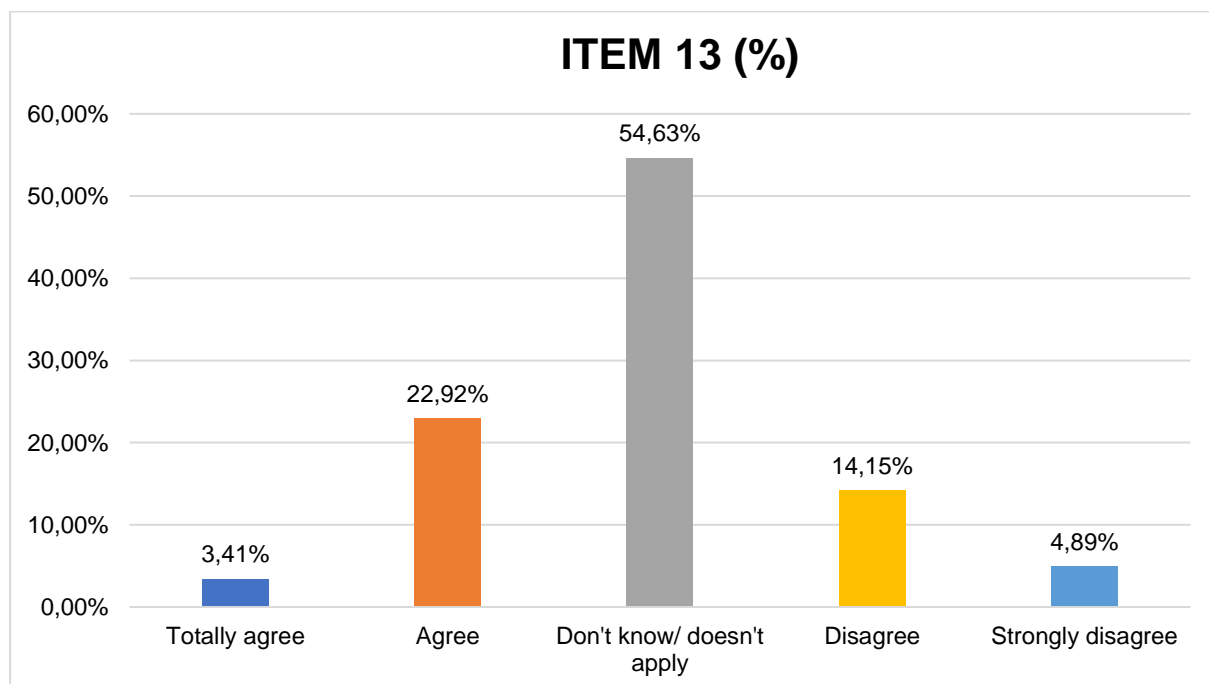


Figure 24- Survey participants' opinion on students' involvement in institutional events on diversity and inclusion

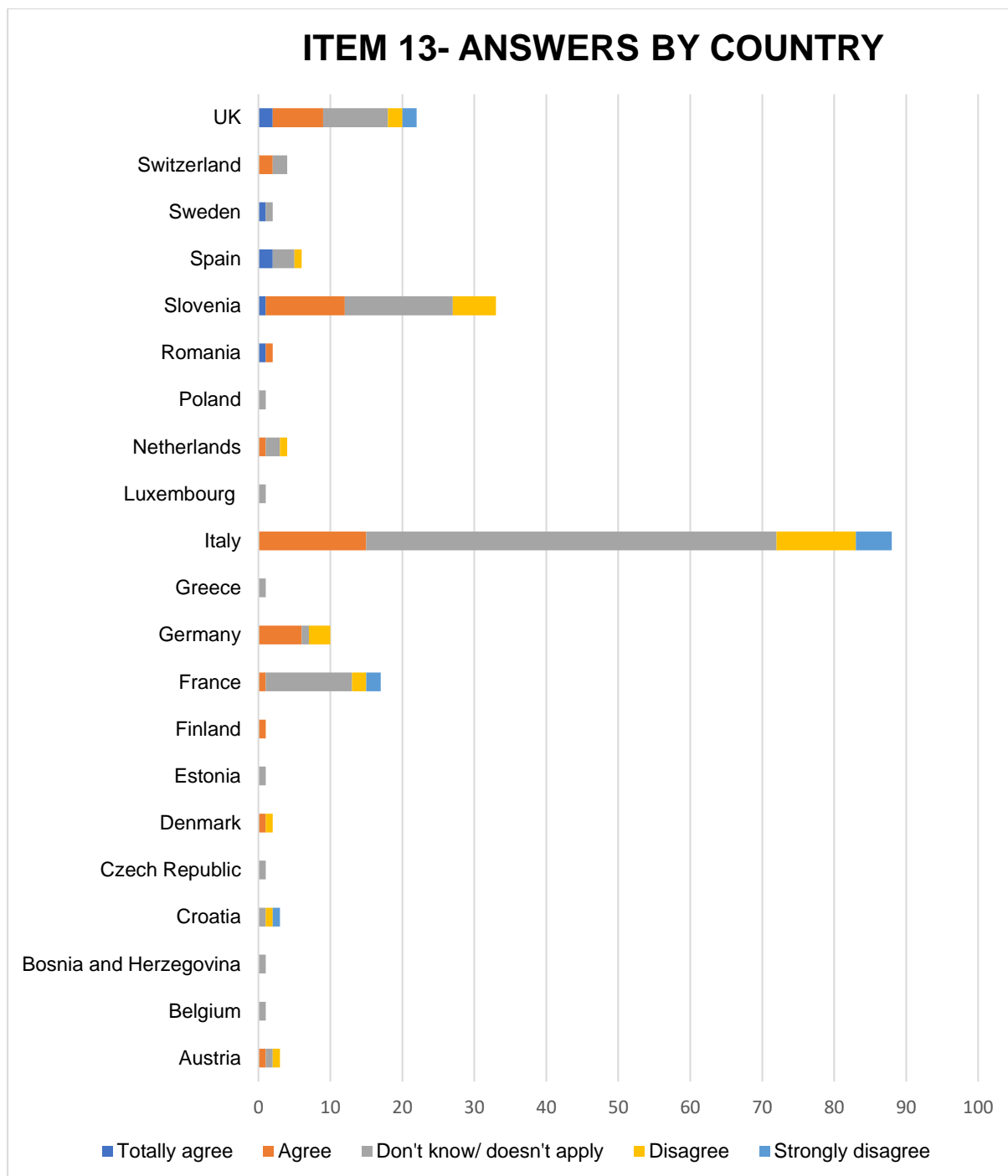


Figure 25- Survey participants' opinion on students' involvement in institutional events on diversity and inclusion by country

Item 14- I have participated in surveys (e.g., interview, questionnaire, etc) from my institution on diversity and inclusion at least once:

With item 14, a closed- answer question, we want to explore to which degree institutions collect data about their target audiences. Knowing your target is essential to plan an efficient communication, however most of the interviewees from the

qualitative interview research phase said that their institution often used the wrong tone to communicate with their target group. Higher education institutions outside the UK usually do not collect information about people ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. so there is no statistic base to perform a target analysis. That information should be collected through surveys, but almost all the interviewees said that their institution never asked them to take part in any survey related to diversity and inclusion issues.

38.05% of the questionnaire participants said that they took part at least once in a survey on diversity and inclusion organised by their institution. However, 49.27% of the questionnaire participants reported that they never took part to any kind of institutional survey on this topic.

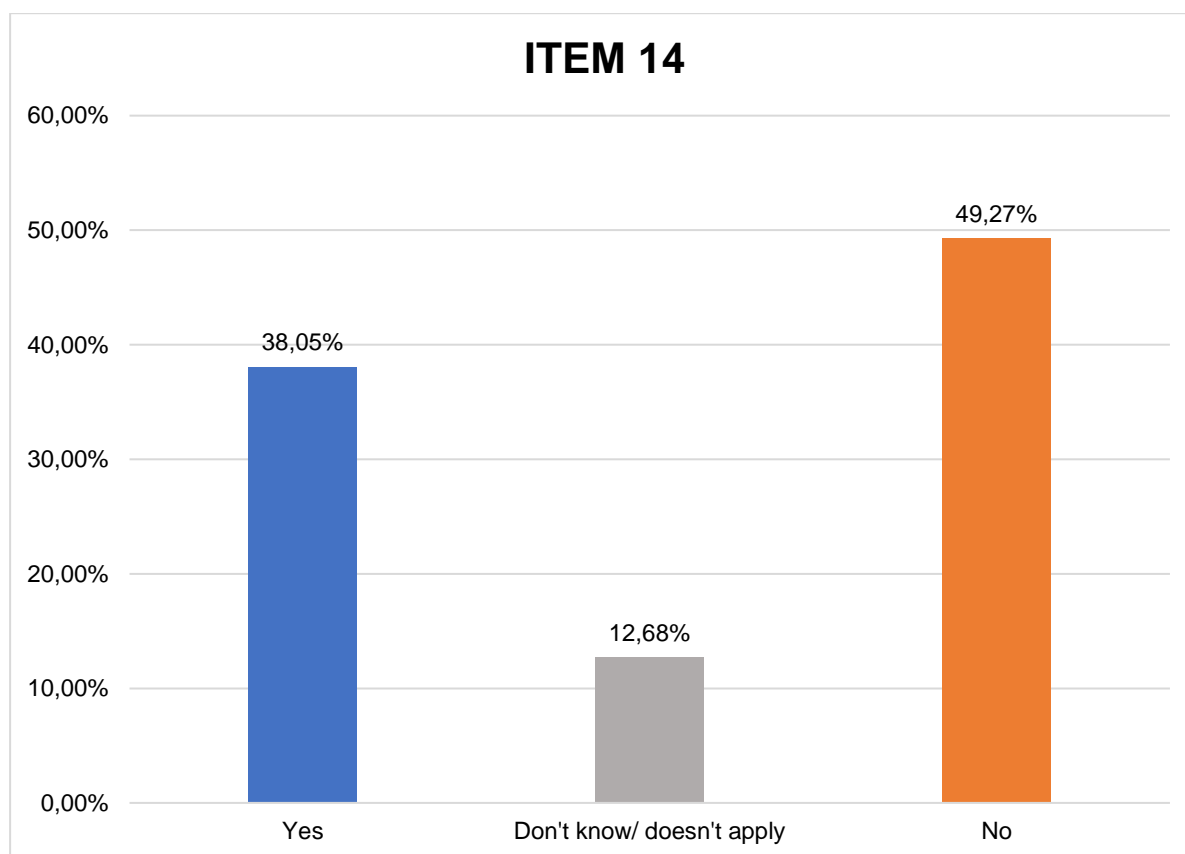


Figure 26- Interviewees' participation in survey on diversity and inclusion organised by their institution

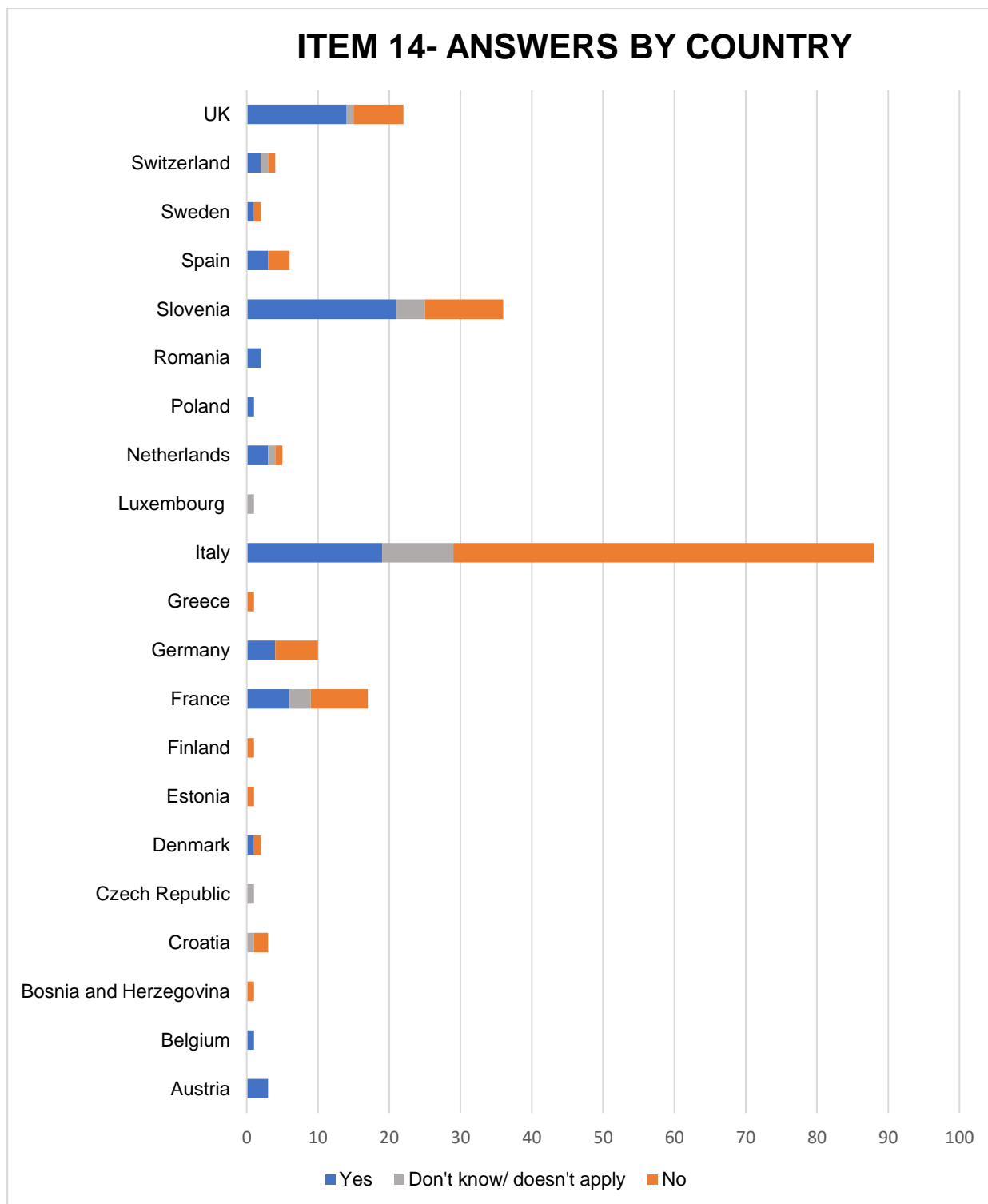


Figure 27- Interviewees' participation in survey on diversity and inclusion organised by their institution by country

Item 15- There are clear institutional communication guidelines on diversity and inclusion for employees:

The lack of communication guidelines or the fact that they are not properly distributed and advertised is a big issue highlighted by some interviewees during the qualitative phase of this research.

Item 25 is a closed- answer question to understand how's the average situation for what concerns institutional communication guidelines in European higher education institutions. 33.66% of the questionnaire participants selected the "Don't know/doesn't apply option". Among the remaining 66.12%, a bit more than half of the people think that their institution provided clear institutional communication guidelines. (30.73% agree and 4.39.% totally agree with item 15 statement).

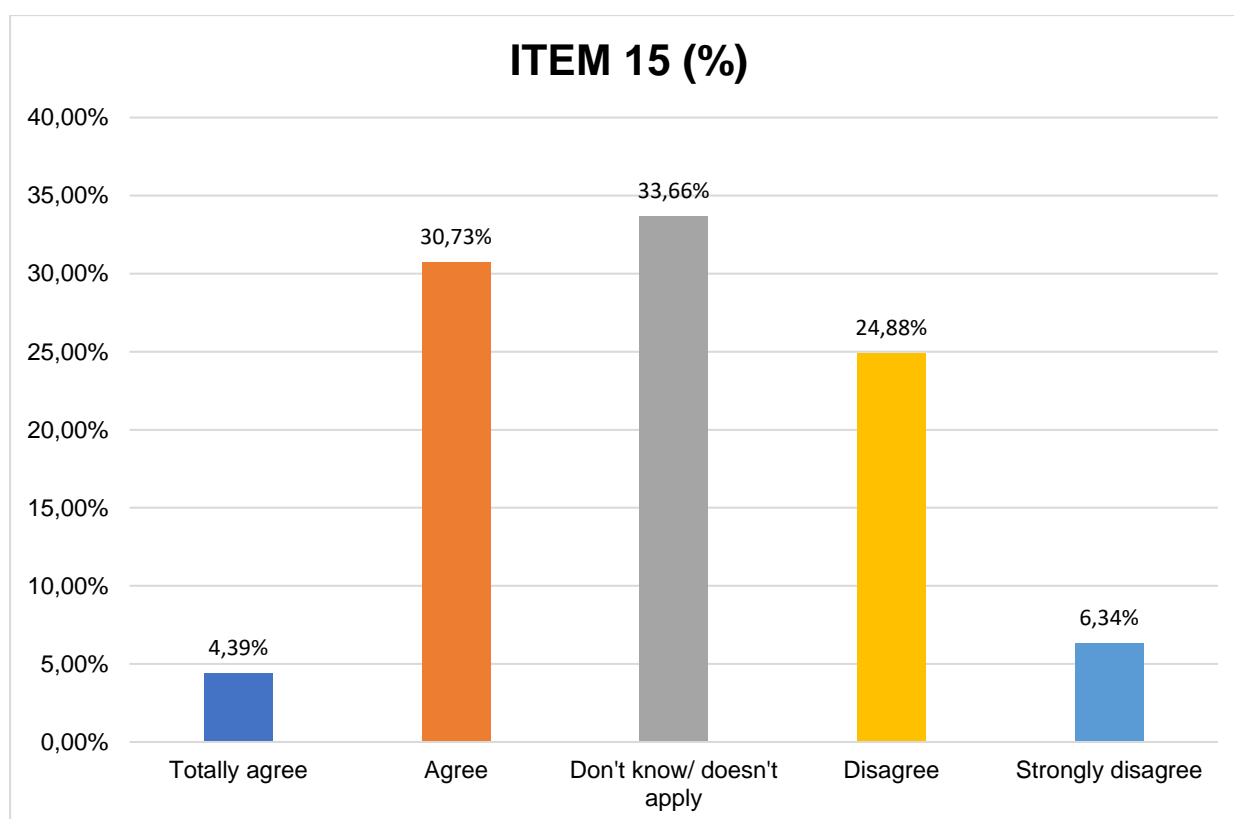


Figure 28- Survey participants feeling about their institution communication guidelines on diversity and inclusion

Grouping the answers by country no significant trend can be noticed. The countries that show strong differences from the total frequency distribution are not significant

from a statistical point of view because of the number of their cases being too low (<10).

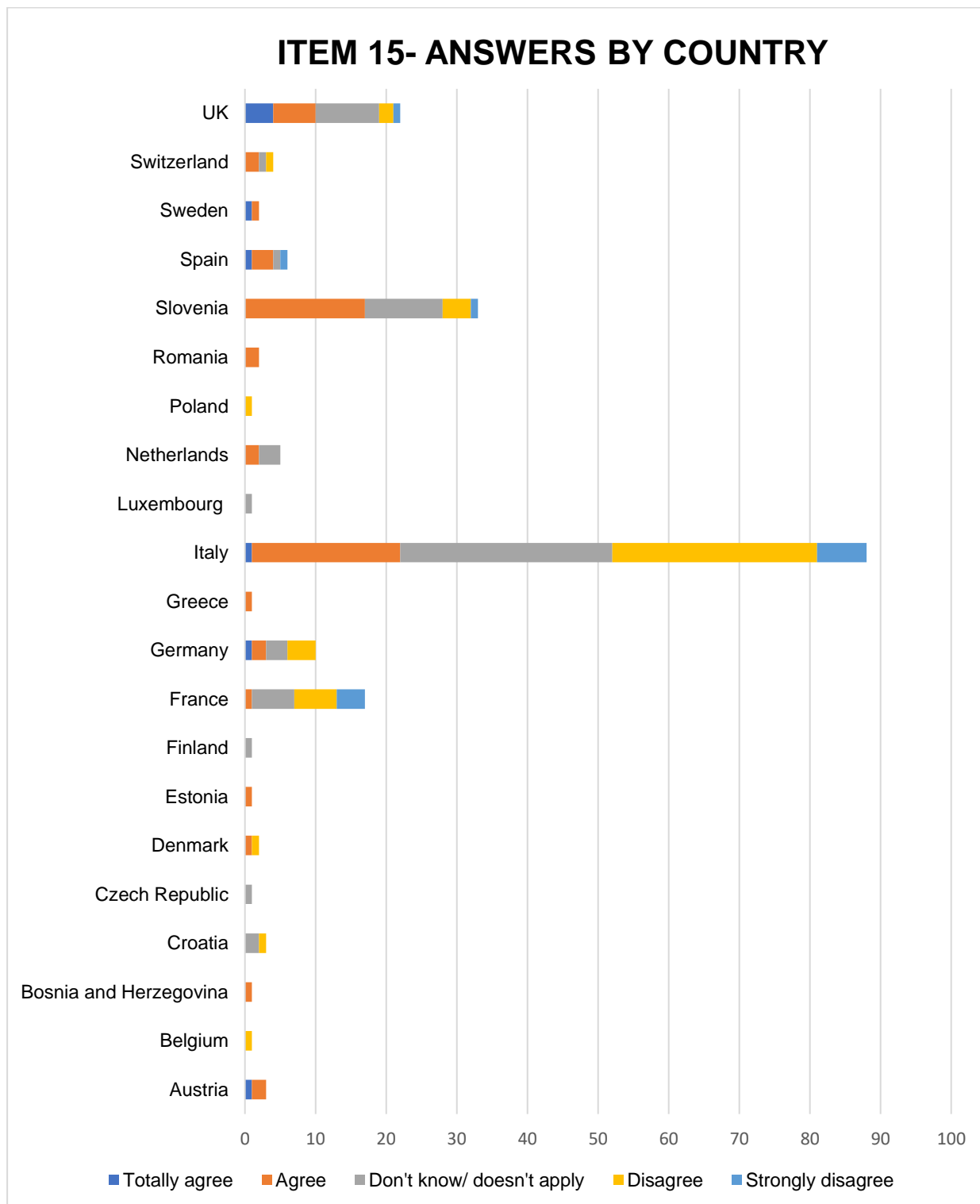


Figure 29- Answers to item 15 (communication guidelines) for countries

Item 16- My institution is really committed to diversity and inclusion issues and I can trust their equality policies:

The topic of the lack of trust in institutional communication emerged in several of the qualitative interviews. In fact, most of the interviewees doubted their institution's true commitment on fostering diversity and inclusion. In particular, young interviewees (between 20 and 30 years old) are sceptical towards their institution diversity fostering actions, that they see as pure marketing.

Item 16 is a closed- answer question that we wrote to understand if this is a shared feeling among the questionnaire participants. A conspicuous part of the people who took part in our survey (41.47%) agree on the statement that says that their institution is really committed to diversity and inclusion issues and 6.82% strongly agree. 17.56% of the questionnaire participants do not agree with item 16 statement and 4.88% strongly disagree.

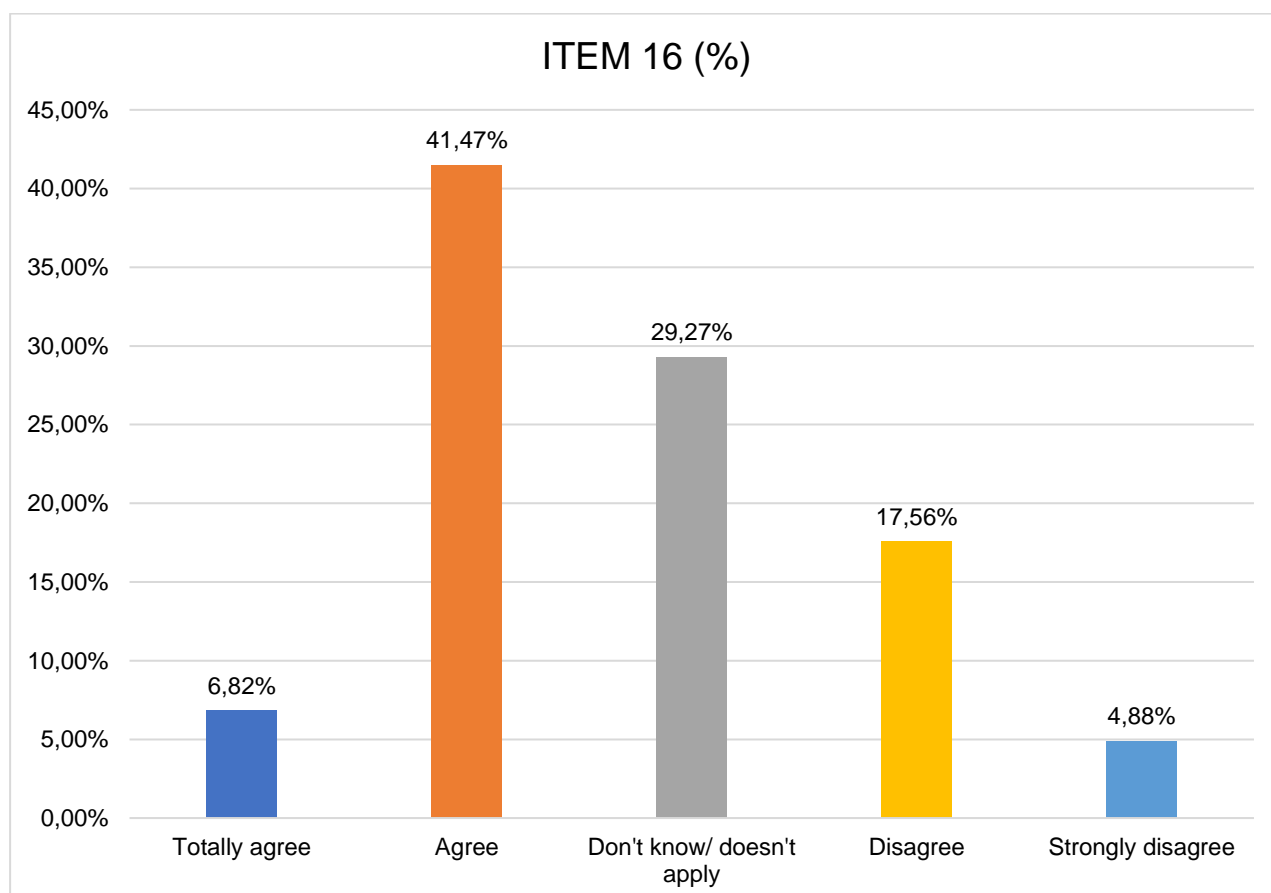


Figure 30- Survey participants' trust in their institutions commitment and policy on diversity and inclusion

We grouped survey participants' answers by country and among countries that have more than 10 cases we can observe that the trust in institutional commitment on diversity and inclusion is slightly lower than the average in France and slightly higher in the UK.

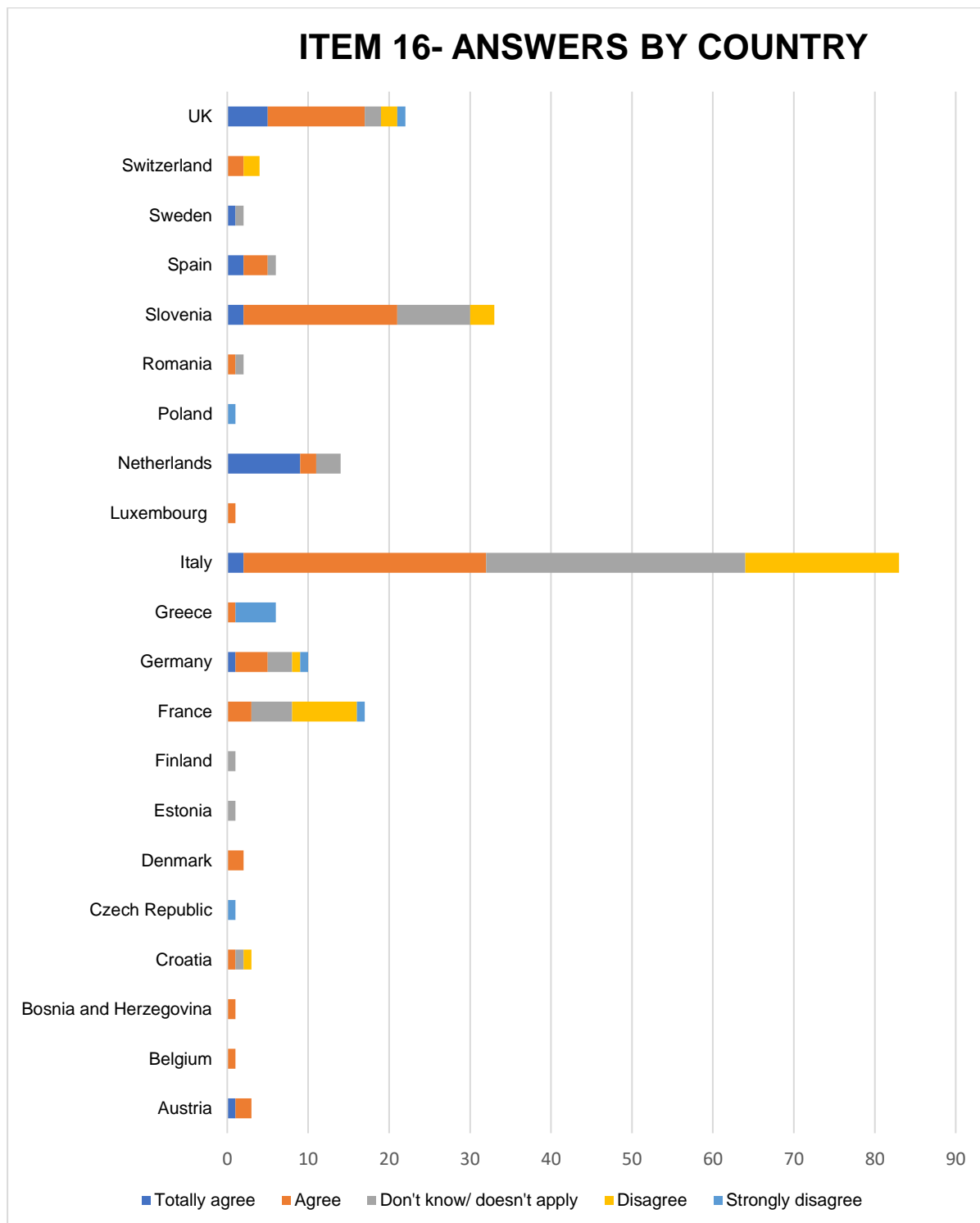


Figure 31- Survey participants' trust in their institutions commitment and policy on diversity and inclusion by country.

If we look at the data divided by age range, we can see that the number of people that totally agree with the item 16 statement about trusting their institution communication is zero for younger people (18-21 and 22- 24 age ranges) and has a peak (6 people) in the 31- 40 age range. There are no people who strongly disagree with item 16 statement among the oldest survey participants (41-50 and >50 age ranges) and the number of people who doesn't know how to answer this question also decrease in these two age ranges.

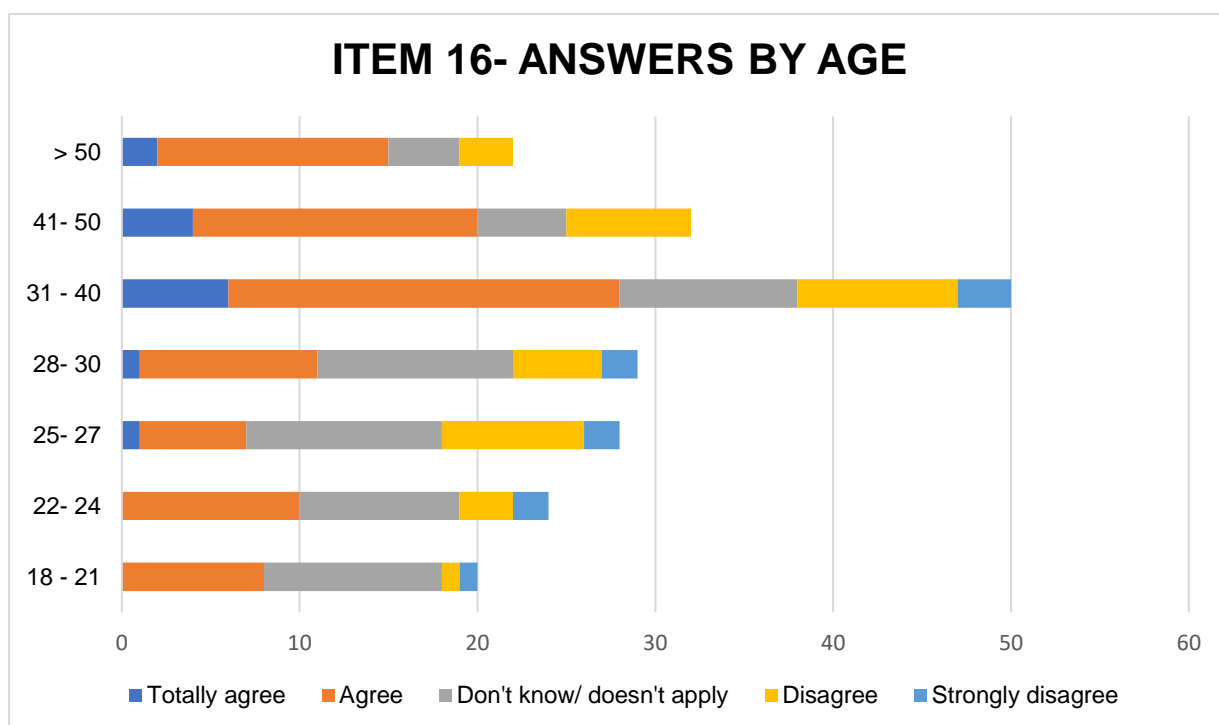


Figure 32- Survey participants' trust in their institutions commitment and policy on diversity and inclusion by age

Item 17- My institution should organise training courses on diversity and inclusion for professors and admin staff:

Diversity and inclusion training courses for professors, staff members and admin personnel were proposed during the qualitative phase of this research by the first interviewees (1) and all the other interviewees, when this question was asked them, agreed on the importance of having these courses. Interviewees that are also professors or members of the institutional staff and administration all said that they would have been happy to join these training courses, as long as they are good- quality ones.

Item 17 is a closed- answer question written with that need in mind. It seems that the questionnaire participants and the interviewees are on the same page on this issue. According to our data, 47.32% of the questionnaire participants agree on the statement that these courses should be organised by their institutions and 24.39% totally agree. 15.12% of the participants chose the “don’t know/ doesn’t apply option” while the people against this proposal represent the 13.17% of the survey participants (8.78% disagree and 4.39% strongly disagree).

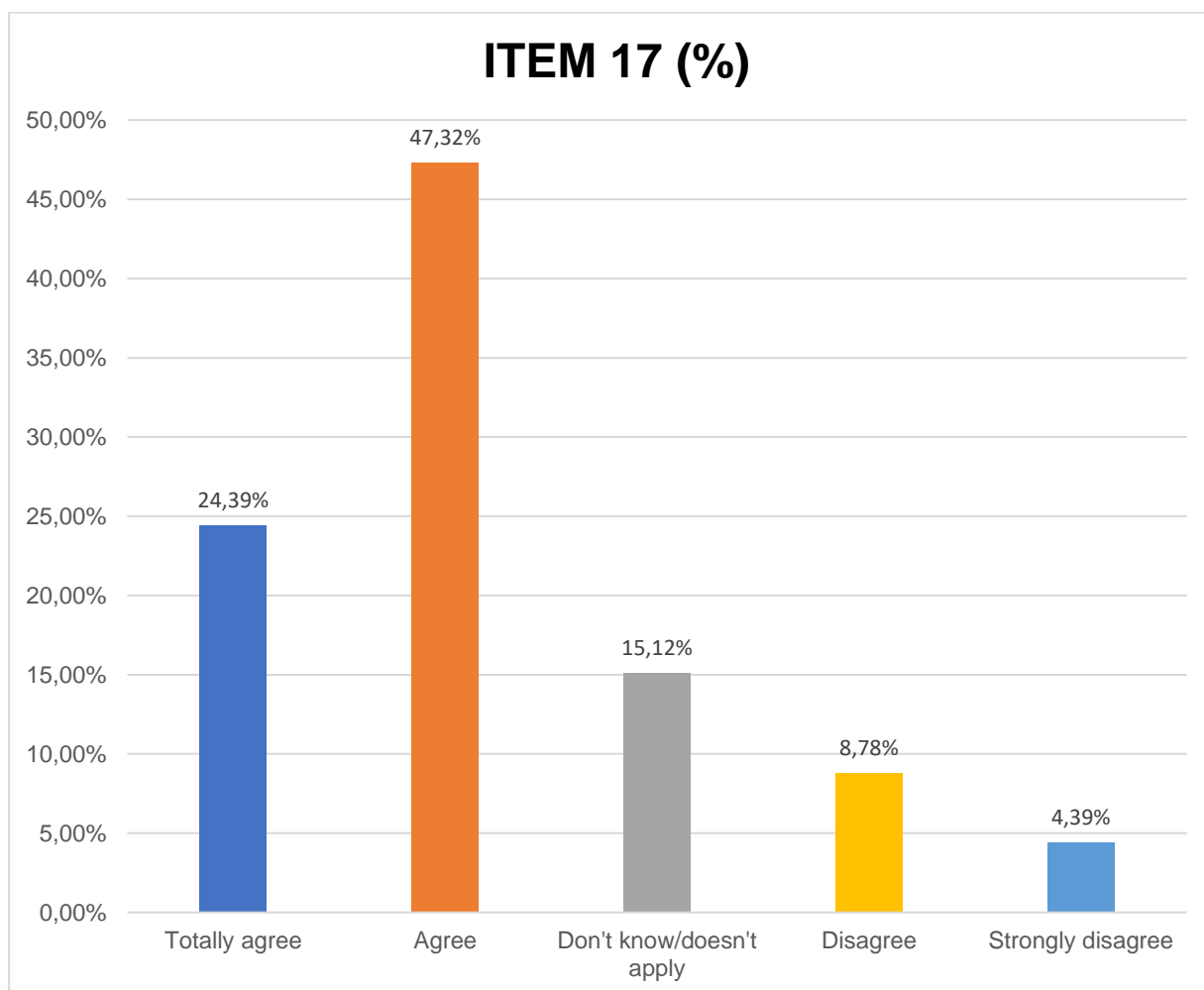


Figure 33- Survey participants opinion on the possibility on institutions organising diversity and inclusion training courses for their staff members

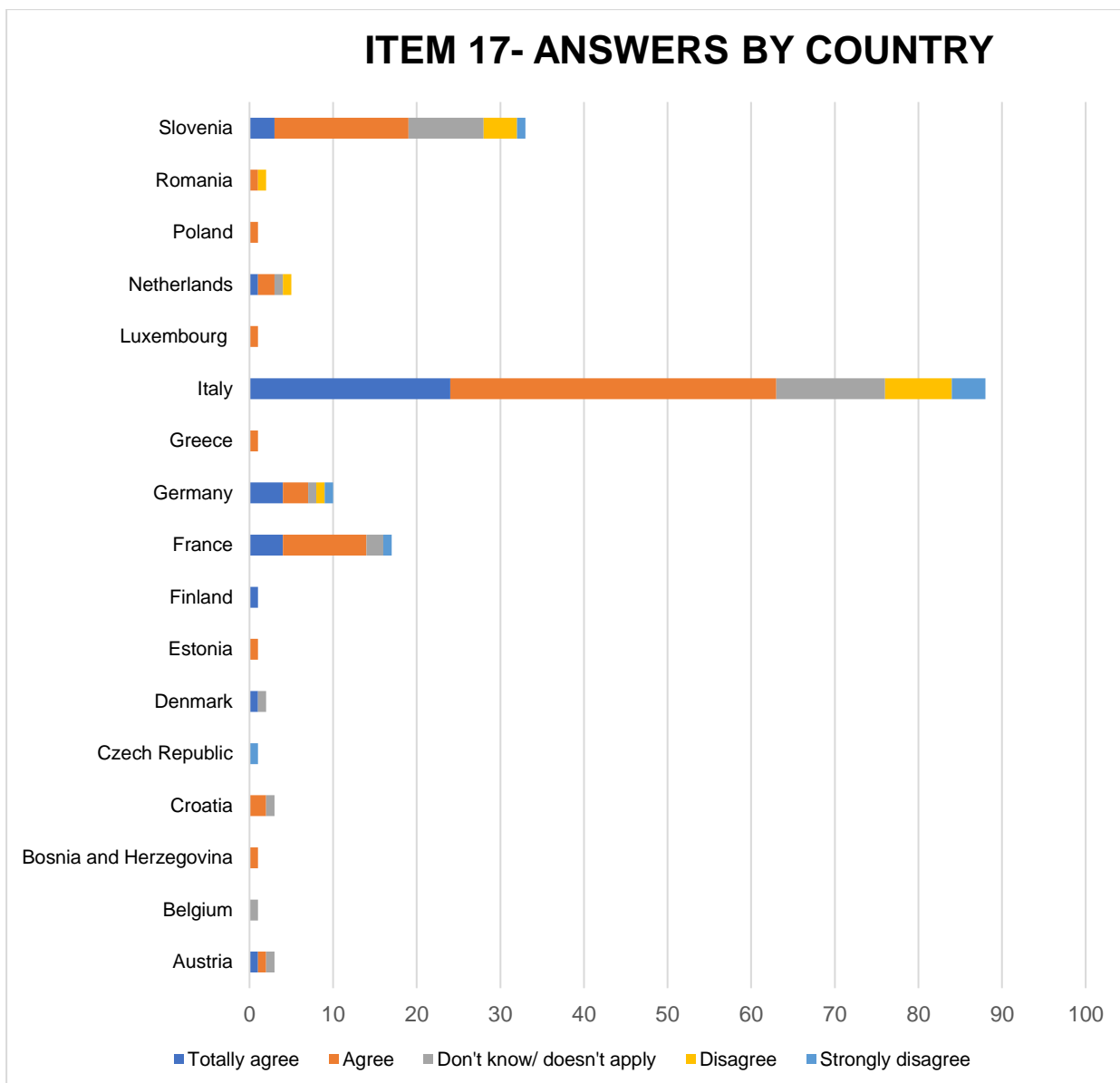


Figure 34- Survey participants' opinion on diversity and inclusion courses by country

We looked at the data grouped first by country and second by institutional position to see if there was some significant difference linked to country or institutional role but there were none, at least not for statistically significant categories (>10 cases).

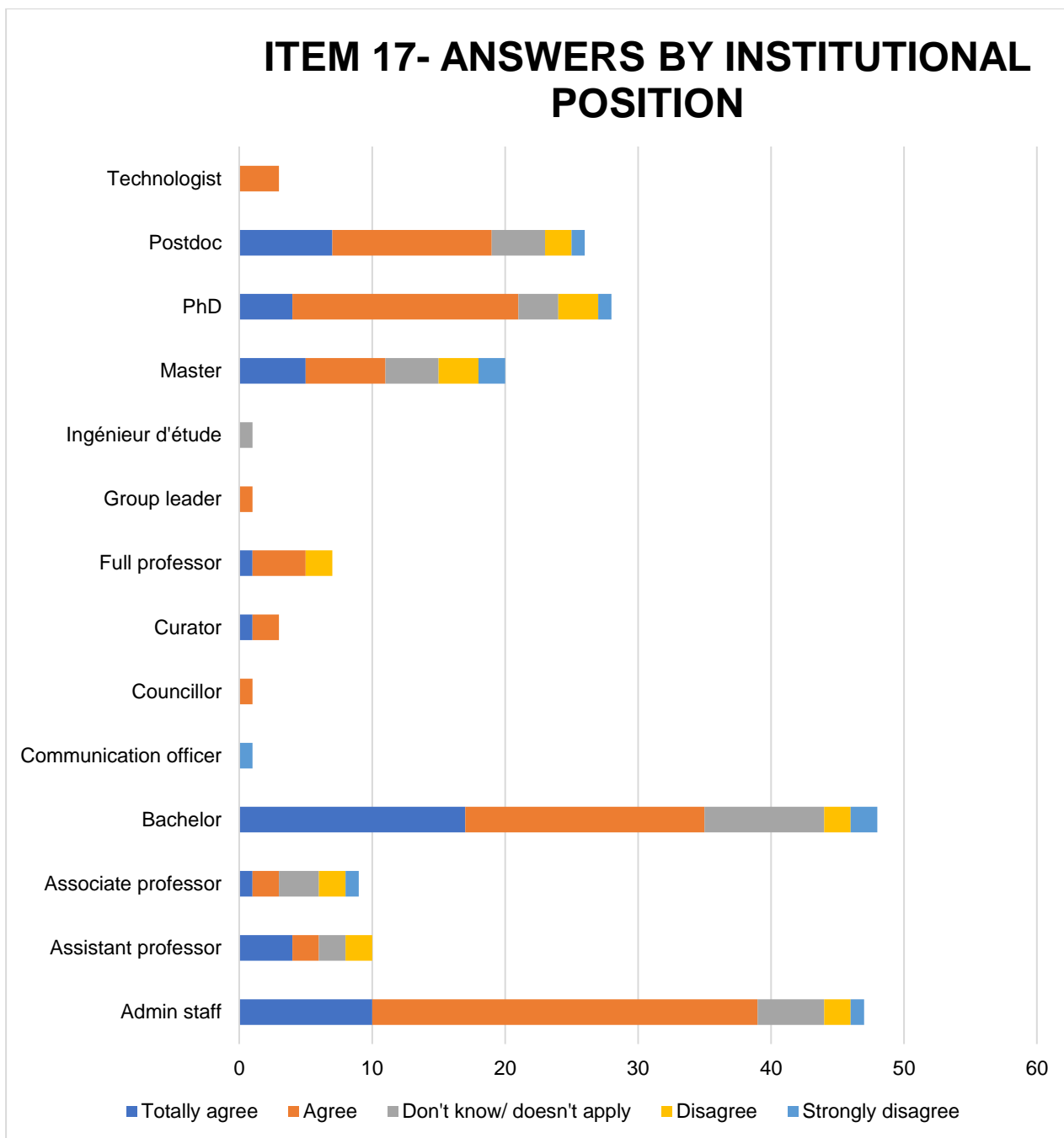


Figure 35- Survey participants' opinion on diversity and inclusion courses by institutional position

Item 18- Diversity and inclusion training courses for professors and admin personnel should be mandatory:

Interviewees from institutions already offering training opportunity for their professors, or equivalent, and admin staff on diversity and inclusion highlighted the issue that since these trainings are not mandatory the only people who actually take them are those

already interested and educated on the topic. That's why for these interviewees the training courses should be mandatory to be effective.

More than half of the people that participate in the survey (68.2%) agree on the fact that diversity training courses should be mandatory.

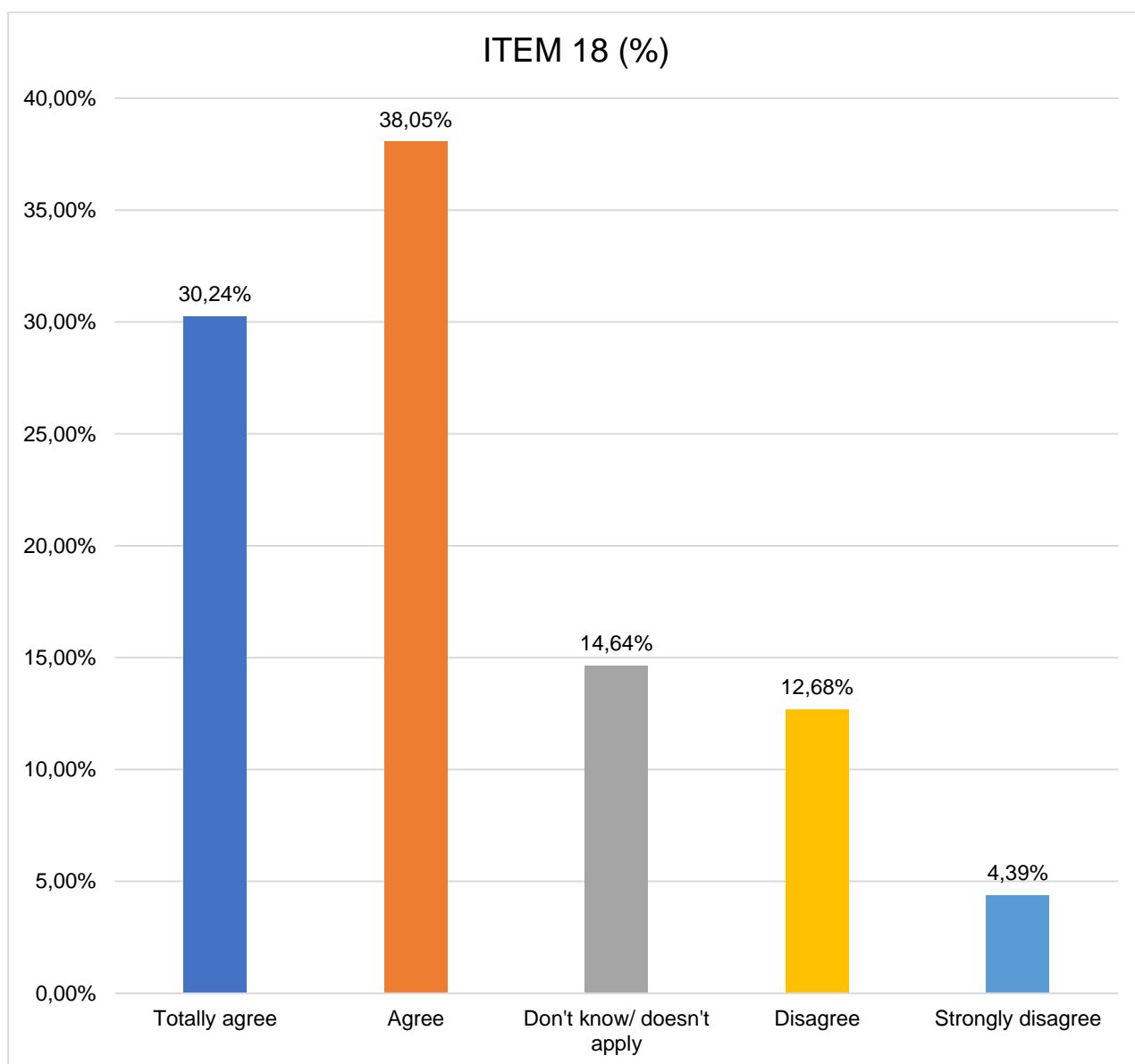


Figure 36- Survey participants' opinion on their institution organising mandatory diversity and inclusion courses

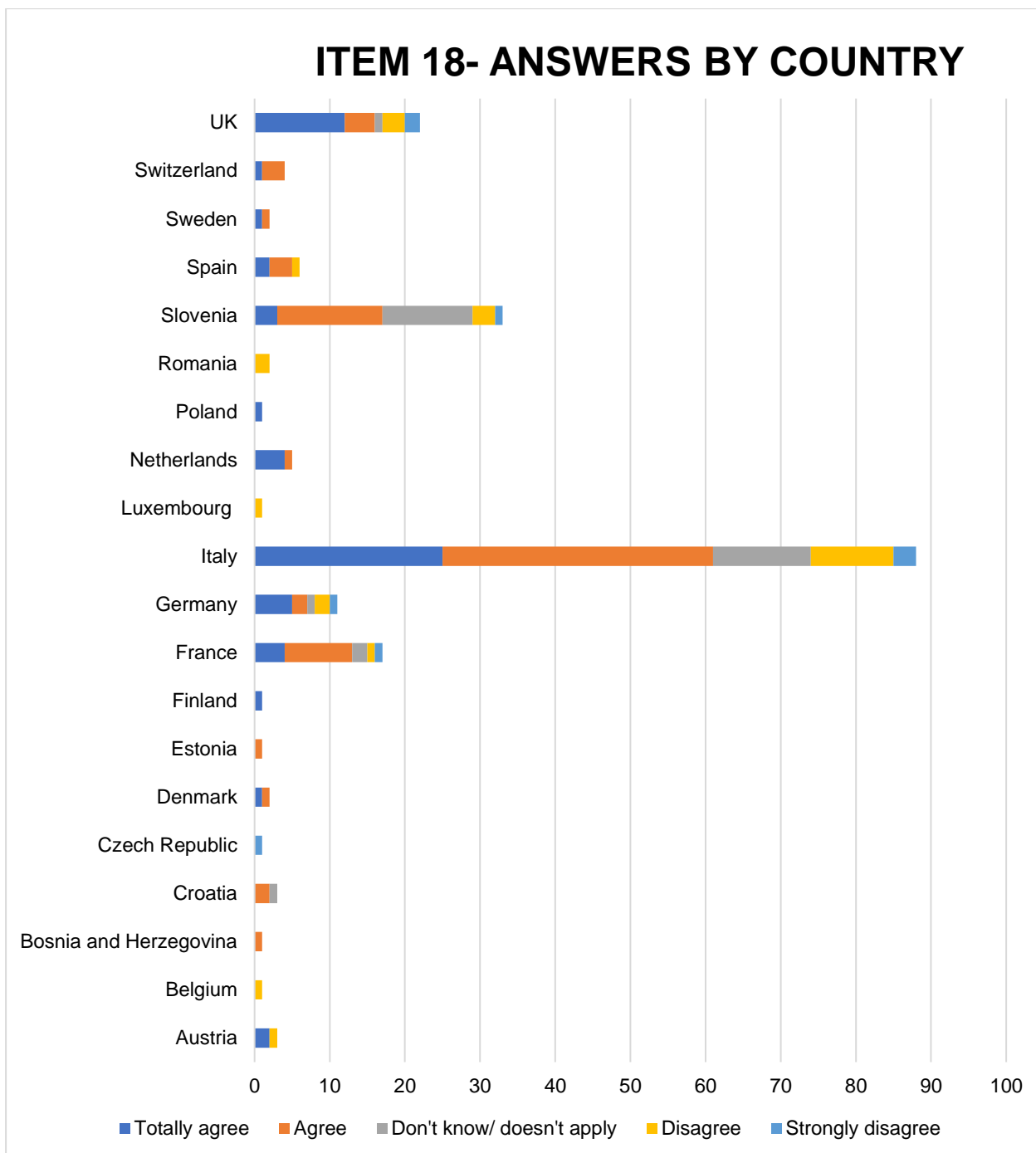


Figure 37- Survey participants' opinion on their institution organising mandatory diversity and inclusion courses by country

Item 19- My institution should officially support and join events such as the Pride march:

The idea of their institution officially supporting civil rights marches such as the Pride had an overall positive reaction from the interviewees, with a few concerns about the possibility of a rainbow- washing operation from the institutions or on the reaction of

more conservative groups in the institution. On average, interviewees coming from countries in which higher education institutions, such as universities, do not officially join/ support Pride march are more prone to see the positive sides of this action. In countries where higher education institutions have people officially representing them in the Pride march, interviewees are more concerned about the authenticity of their institutions' commitment.

From the qualitative survey results, we can see that slightly more than half of the participants (53.17%) agree to some level that their institution should officially support the Pride march, against the 29,76% of survey participants that are against it.

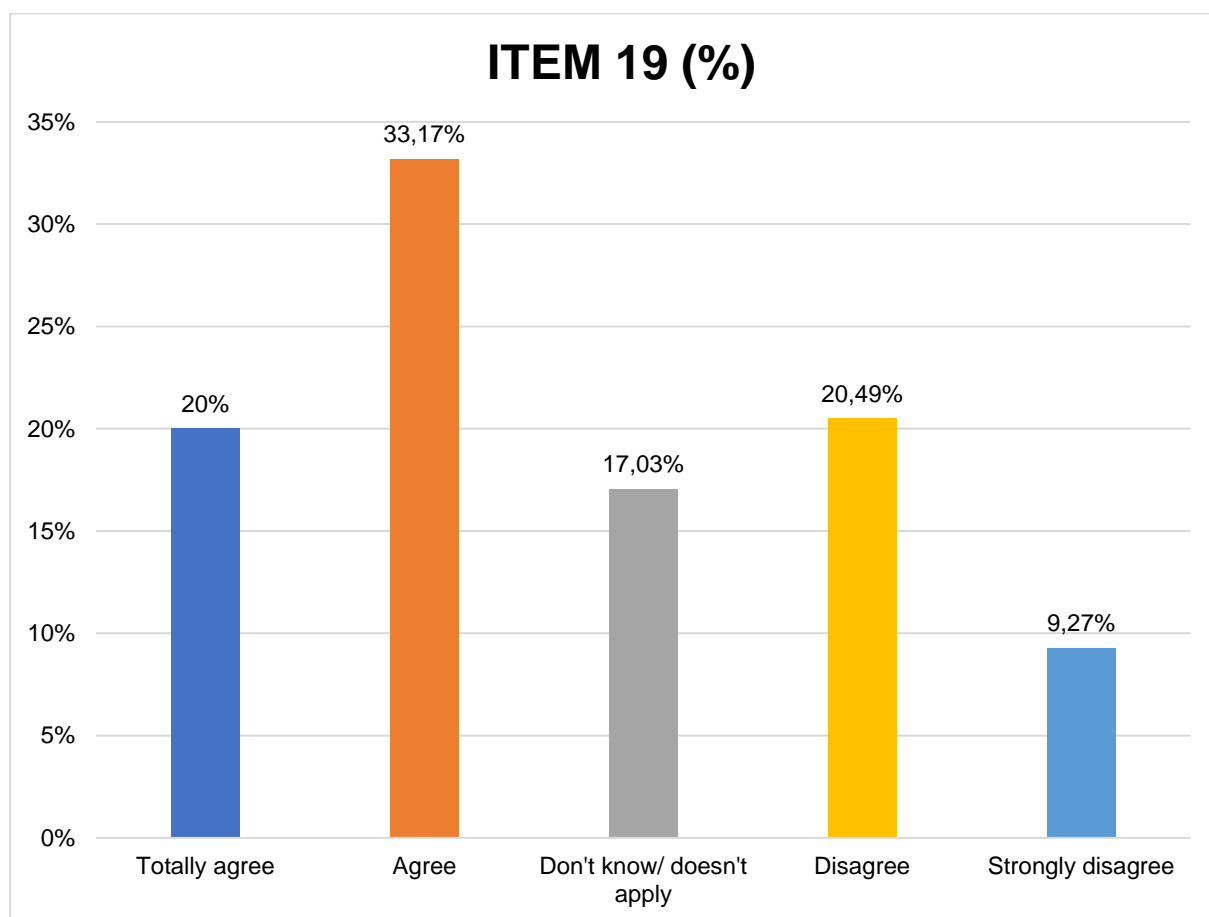


Figure 38- Survey participants' opinion on higher education institutions officially joining the Pride march

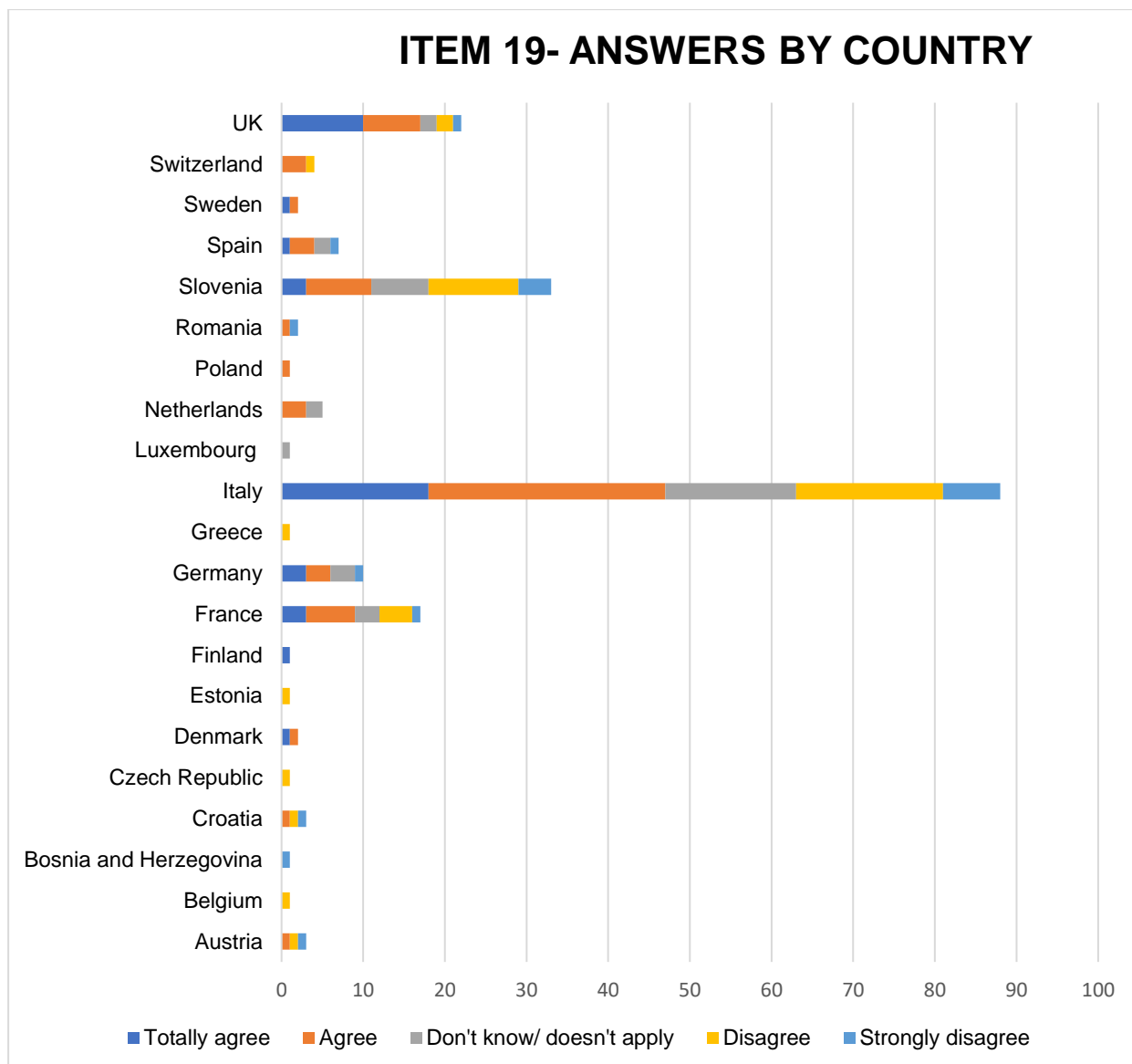


Figure 39- Opinion on higher education institutions joining Pride by country

Item 20- In my department/ faculty/ class/ team there is an equal number of men and women:

Gender equality and communication campaign to encourage women to join traditionally masculine fields in greater number were two very important points for the interviewees in the qualitative phase of this research. Even if women are not a minority group if we only look at the numbers, they still have the characteristics of a social minority in several country⁴⁹. In item 6, when people had the option to say if they felt

⁴⁹ H. Tajfel, *Gruppi umani e categorie sociali*, Il Mulino, 1995, p. 267

like belonging to one or more minority groups, two people answered “woman” and one person said that they felt like belonging to a social minority because of being AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth). Being a woman or being perceived as a woman can be a source of discrimination and it may overlap to other social identities that are at risk of being discriminated as well, such as being part of the LGBTQ+ community. An equal number of men and women doesn’t automatically imply that there is an inclusive environment or that the communication campaigns on gender equality were successful, but it can still be read as a positive sign.

Also, we are aware that this is a binary view of the society and the gender spectrum, since not everybody can be labelled as man or woman, but it seemed to us that there was no better way to formulate this question.

40,97% of the survey participants disagree on the fact that in their institution there is an equal number of men and women, while the percentage of people that strongly disagree with that statement are 16,03%.

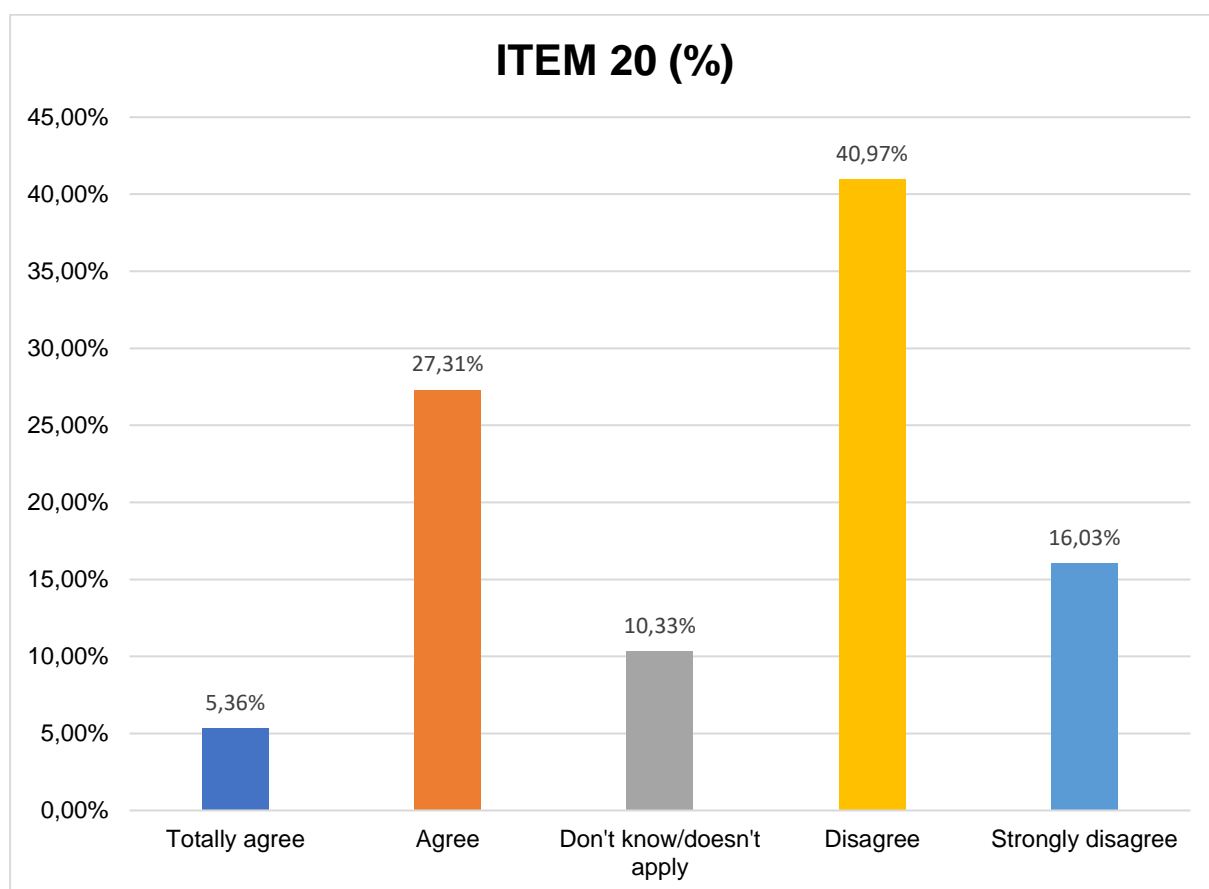


Figure 40- Survey participants' feeling on equal representation of men and women in their institutions

Item 21- The amount of LGBTQ+ people in my institution is higher than the average of other social contexts in my country

Several interviewees, during the qualitative phase of the research, noticed that in their institutions LGBTQ+ people are more open about their sexuality and gender identity than the average society outside their institutions. The interviewees said that LGBTQ+ community often represent the biggest or the more visible minority group in their institution. We wrote the item 21 with that in mind, to see if it is a general feeling about institutional environment, but since more than half of the survey participants selected the “I don’t know/ doesn’t apply” option we think that maybe the question wasn’t clear enough for people to answer it.

The remaining half of the participants are equally divided between those who think that in their institution there are more LGBTQ+ people than the average in the rest of the society and those who think that there aren’t.

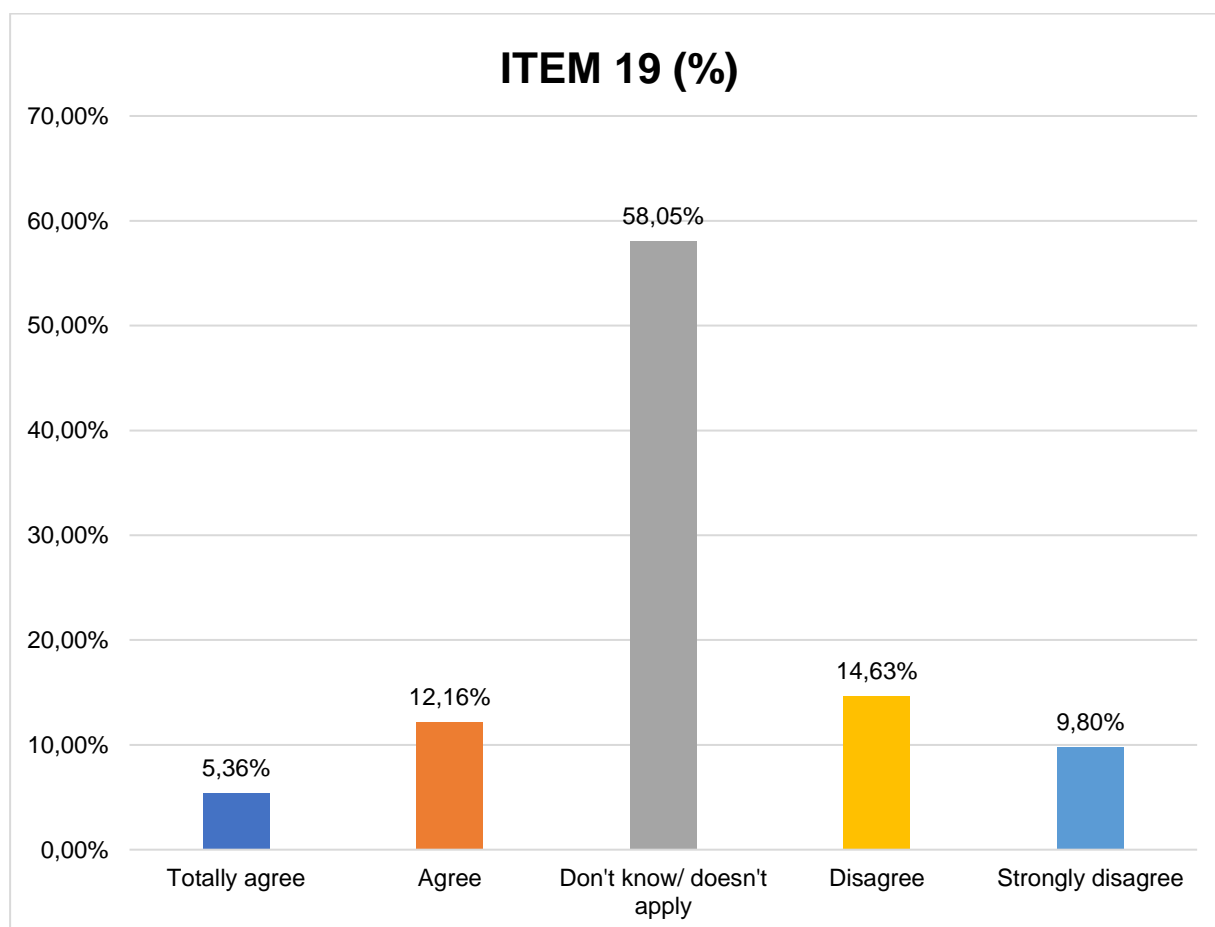


Figure 41- Perceived amount of LGBTQ+ people in survey participants' institutions

Item 22- It is important for institutions to use both masculine and feminine nouns in their official communication (for gendered languages)

This and the other items on gendered language are very important for our research, since the use of an inclusive and neutral language is the core of several, similar discussions in countries with gendered languages. Even in non- gendered languages, such as English, these issues are present, even if they are more pervasive than in gendered languages such as Italian.

The majority of the survey participants agree on the fact that institutions should use both masculine and feminine nouns in their official communication.

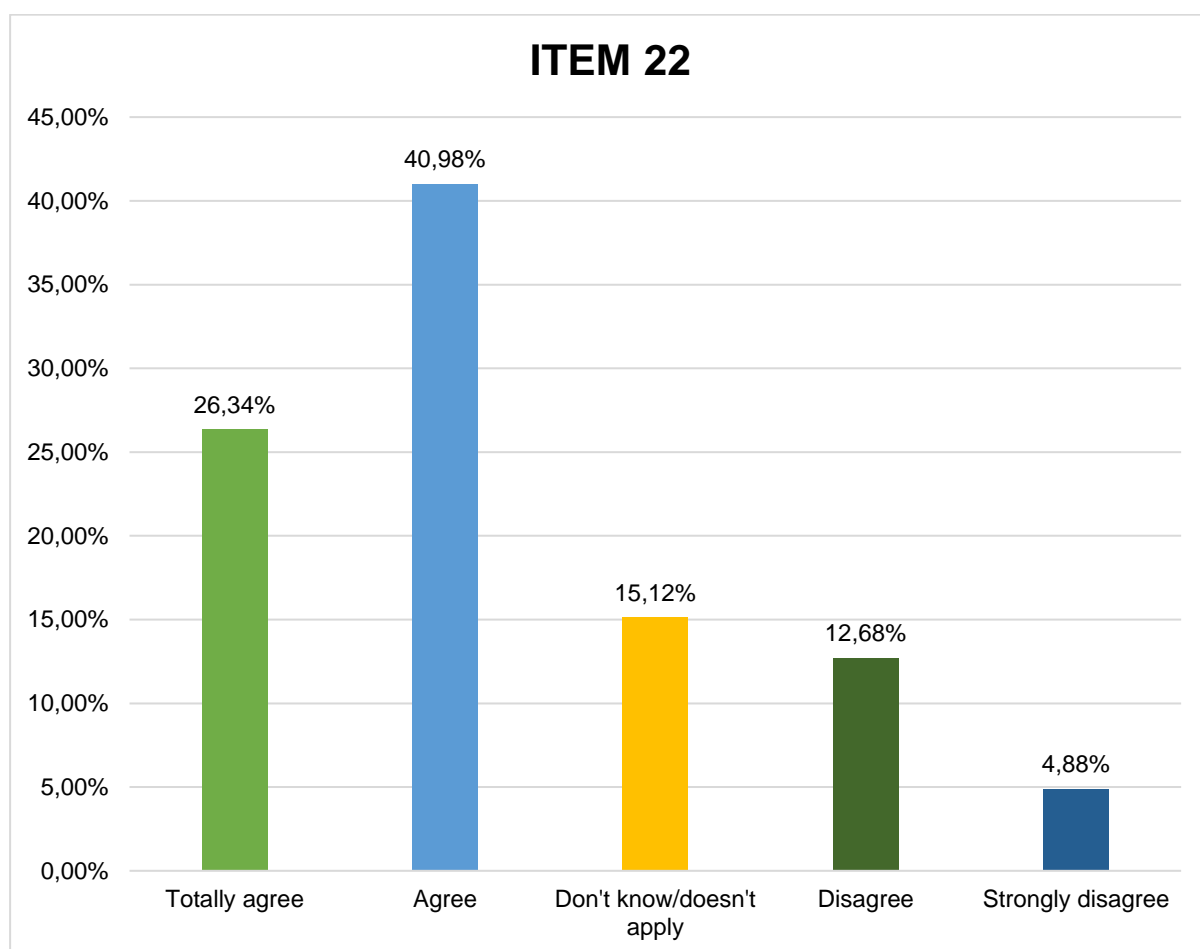


Figure 42- Survey participants' opinion on the use of both masculine and feminine in institutional communication

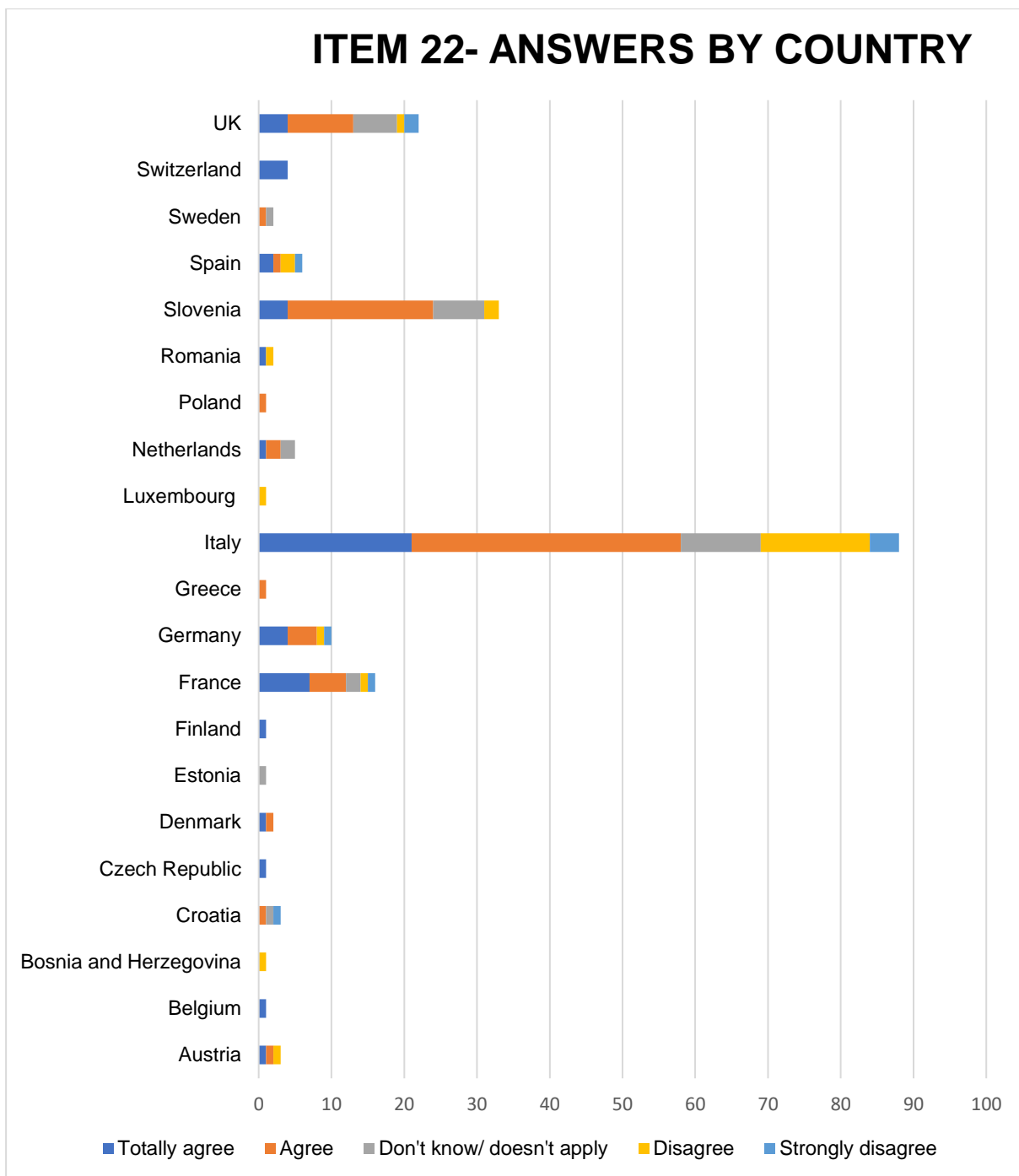


Figure 43- Survey participants' opinion on the use of both masculine and feminine in institutional communication by country

Item 23- My institution uses both feminine and masculine nouns in official communication (for gendered languages)

The use of the double form (masculine/feminine) in official institutional communications is becoming more and more common as time passes. One of the interviewees, a

postdoc researcher in France, said that she noticed a huge difference respect to her first PhD year.

50,73% of the survey participants thinks that in their institution there is an equal number of men and women (11.71% totally agree and 39.02% agree). 24.88% of the participants thinks that there isn't an equal number of men and women in their institution.

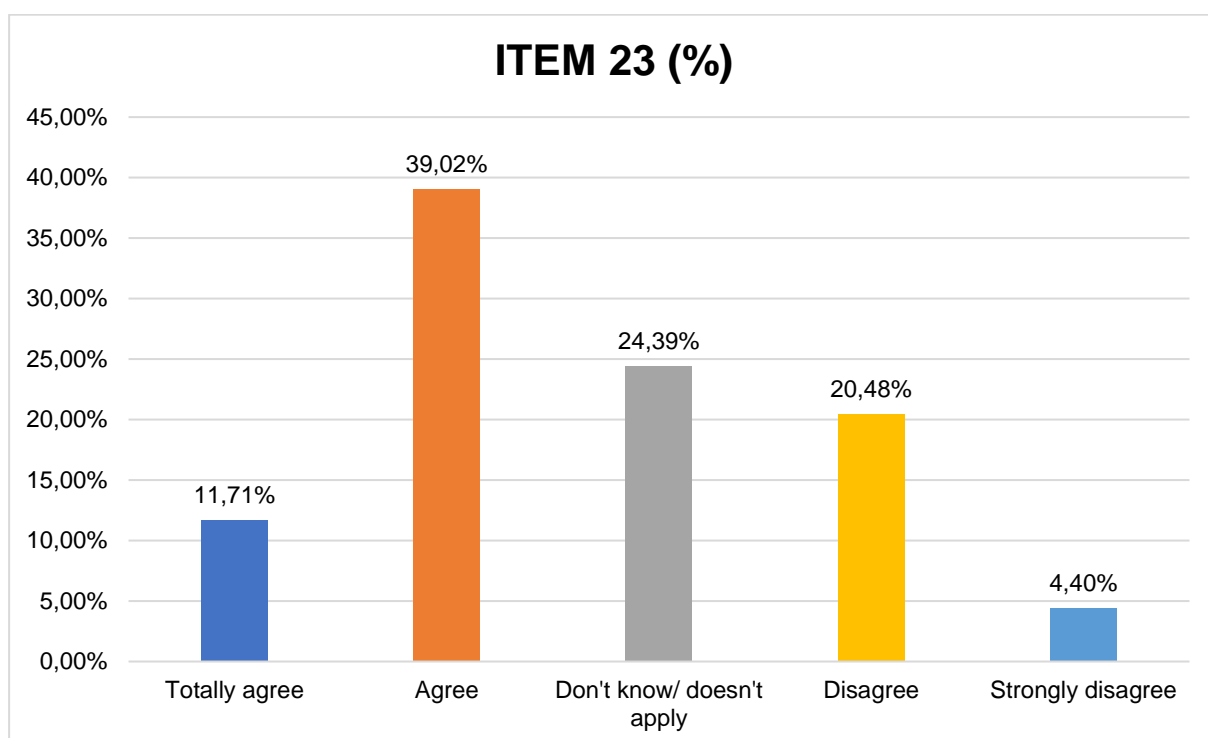


Figure 44- Percentage of institutions that use (or don't use) both masculine and feminine in their institutional communication

We grouped the data by country to see if there is some significant difference among European countries on the gender balance issue, but the countries for which we have enough cases (>10) all show a similar pattern. However, it is interesting to know that the number of “don't know/ doesn't apply” answers is higher than average in the UK.

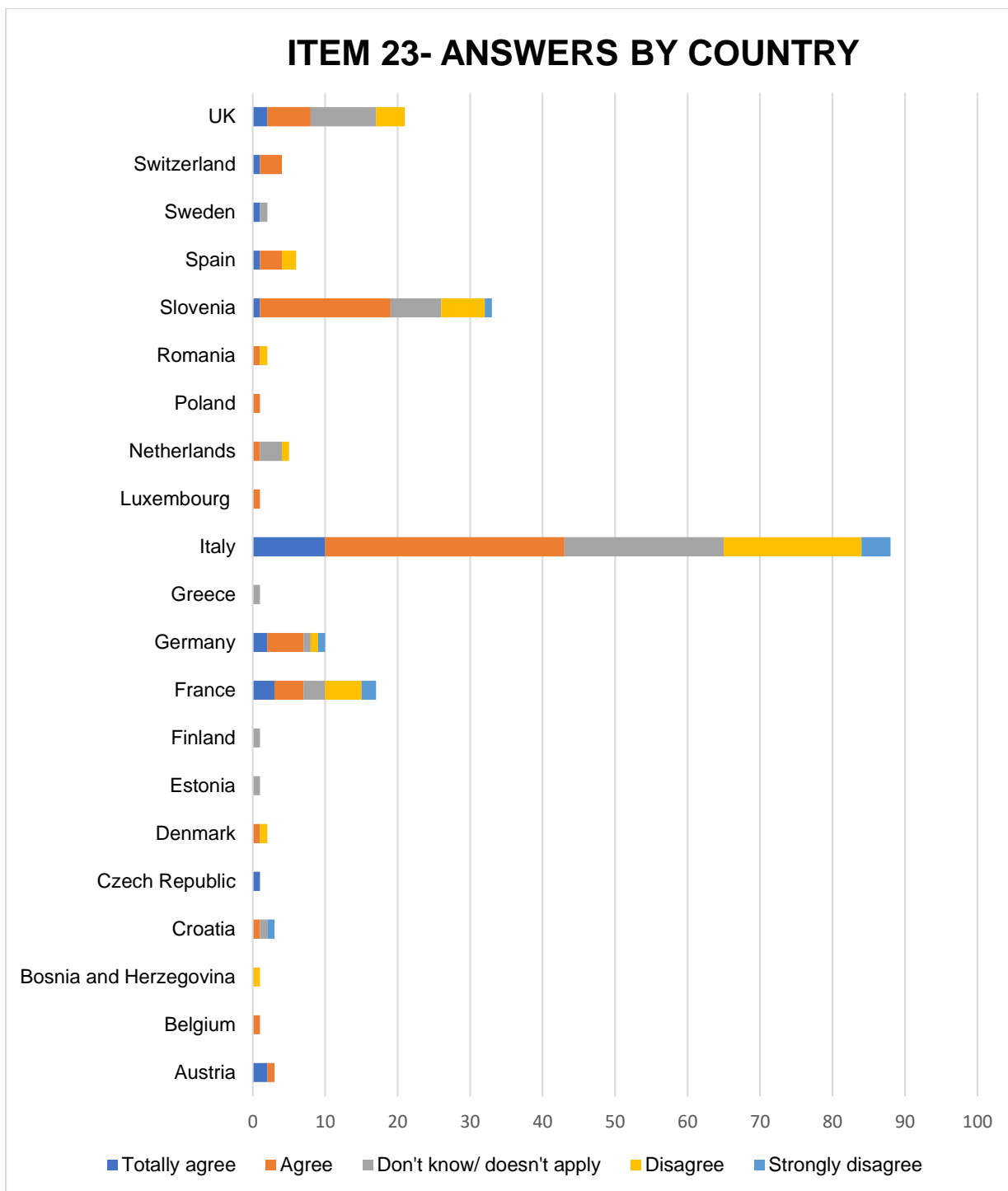


Figure 45- Use of both masculine and feminine in institutional communication by country

Item 24- I think that putting your pronouns in your email signature is a good practice

This item may seem unrelated to the previous two, but it really is strongly connected to the idea of neutral and inclusive language. In fact, pronouns are usually added to

somebody signature to pass two messages: the first one is obviously about what pronouns that person uses and want you to use with them, while the second one is about the idea that isn't always possible to a person's gender identity, and therefore pronouns, only by their name. It isn't only true for transgender people, but also for people that have names we are not familiar with. Adding your own pronouns in your email signature or zoom ID is very common in the UK and in the US but it is not as widespread in other European countries. Interviewees answers from the qualitative survey are mainly in favour of this practice, even if some of them cannot see the point of doing it.

Less than half of the participant to this survey (48.3%) thinks that this is a good practice, by selecting the "totally agree" (11.2%) or the "agree" options (37.07%). 19% of the survey participants chose the "I don't know/ doesn't apply" option, while the remaining 32.69% disagree or strongly disagree with this practice.

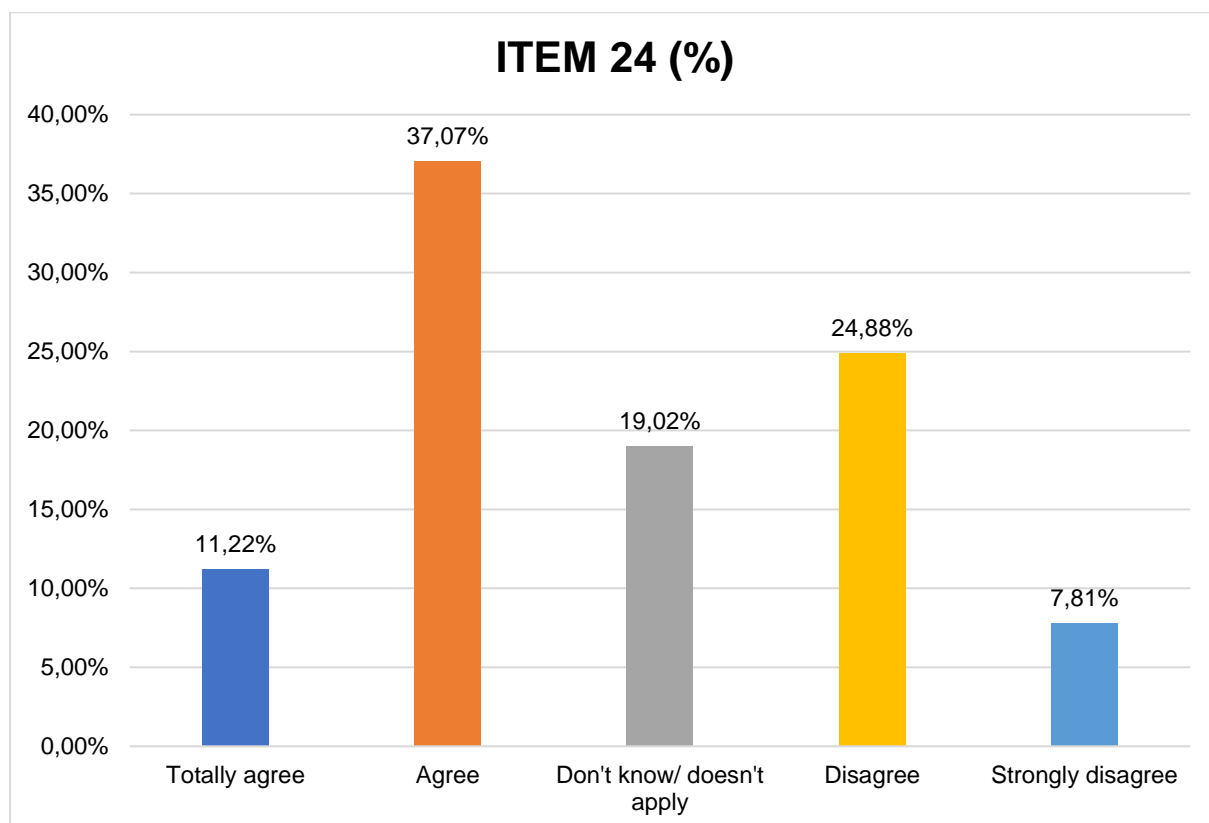


Figure 46- Survey participants' opinion on the use of pronouns in email signature, zoom id etc.

Item 24 answers divided by country show that in all countries with 10 or more cases almost half of the survey participants think that putting your pronouns in your signature or using them in official meetings is a useful thing to do.

It is interesting to notice that there are no “don’t know/ doesn’t apply answers” for the UK, probably because the practice of using your pronouns together with your name in official meetings and emails is the standard in most institutions. For this reason, survey participants from institutions based in the UK have more clear idea on this issue and are able to clearly say if they like it or not.

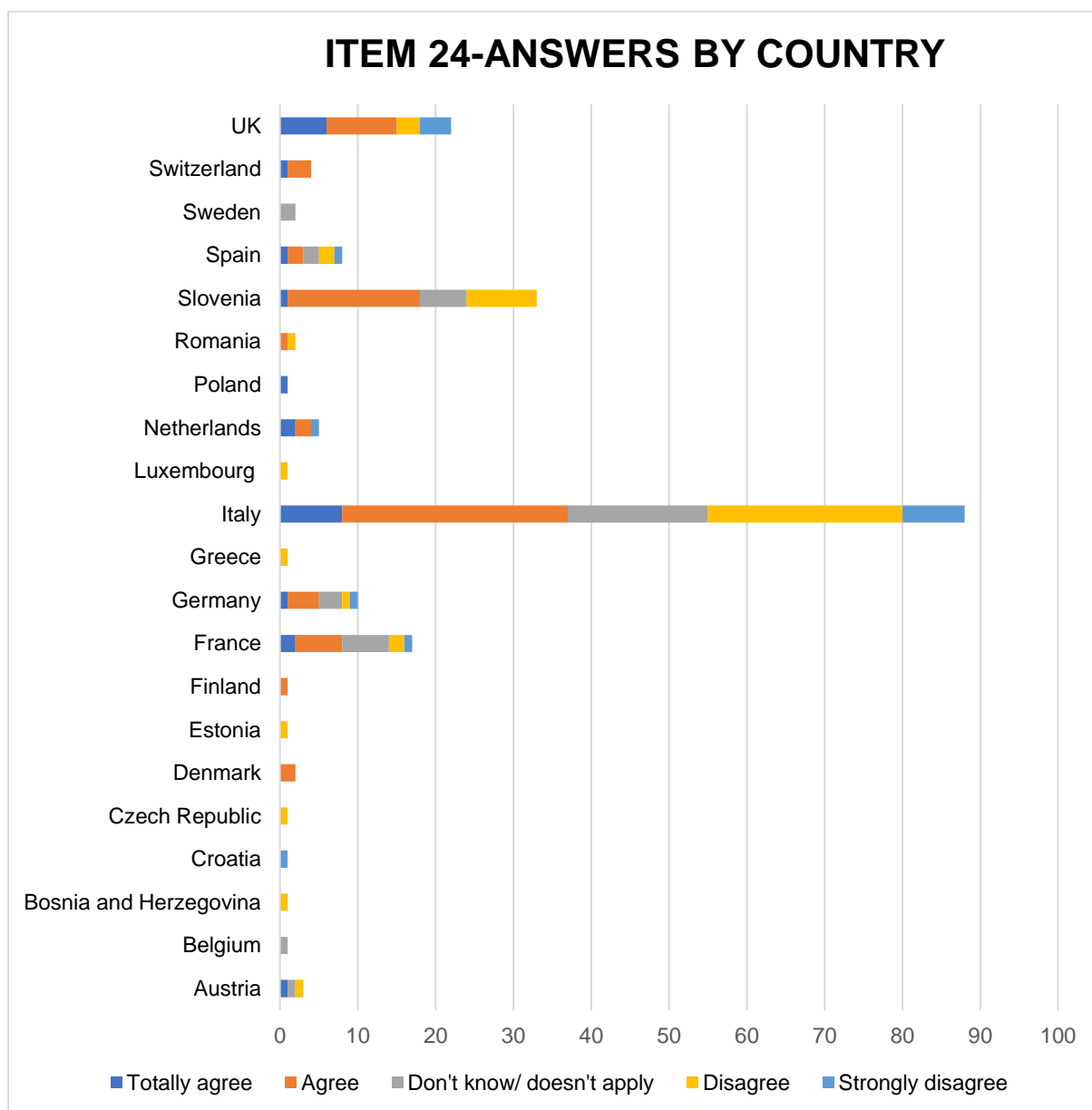


Figure 47- Survey participants’ opinion on the use of pronouns in email signature, zoom id (etc.) by country

Item 25- I think that institutions should use neutral language (they/them, *, Θ) in their official communication

The use of a neutral language is much easier in non- gendered languages such as in English, while for gendered languages more “adjustments” are needed and there is poor agreement on which one is better to implement. Neutral solutions have the advantage of including also non- binary people in their communication, while the use of masculine and feminine nouns does not include these people. Usually, the neutral option is less used in institutional communication than the double form masculine/ feminine, particularly for gendered languages in which the neutral forms are perceived as “artificial” and alien to the native language.

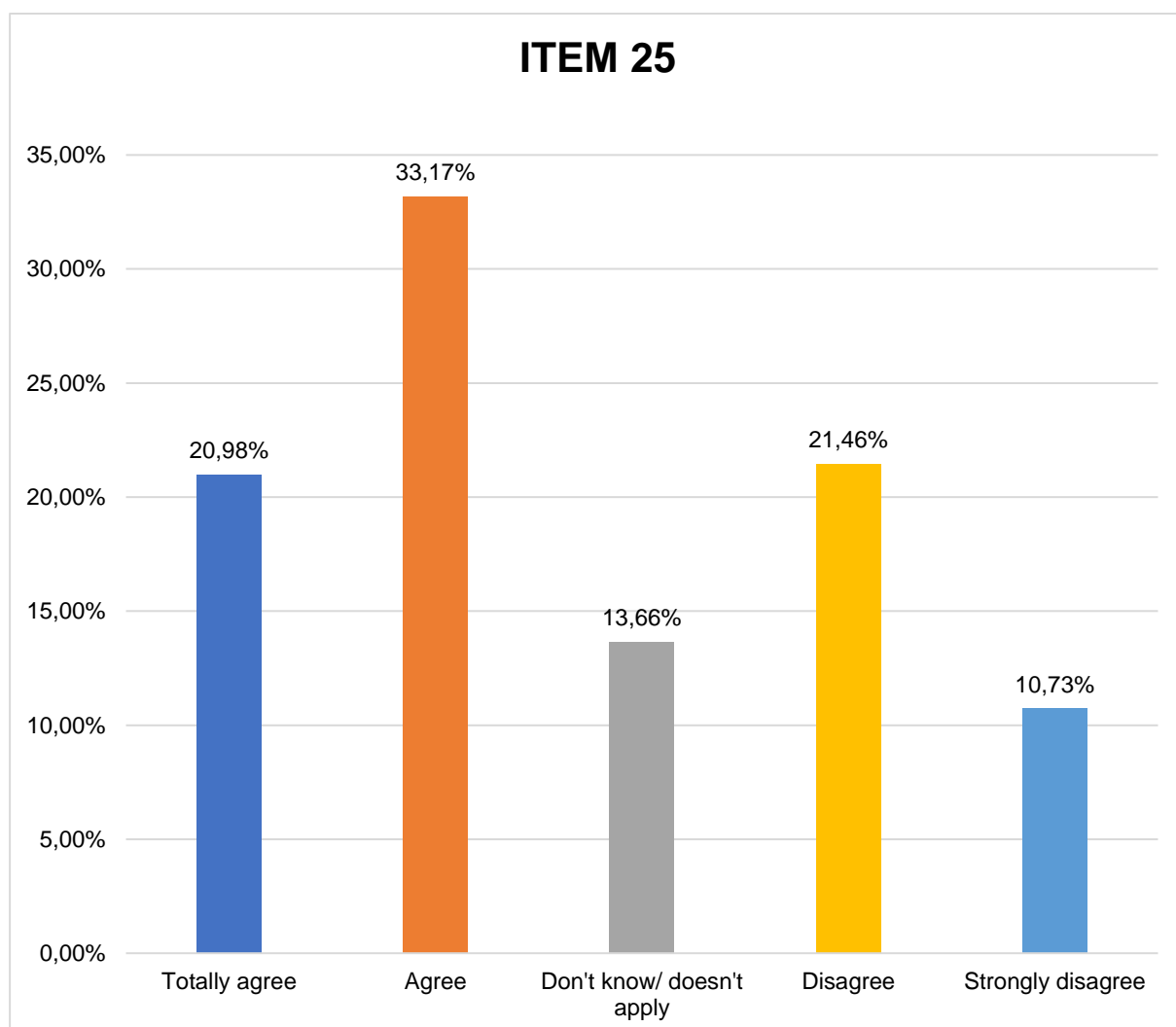


Figure 48- Survey participants' opinion on using a neutral language in institutional communication

More than half of the survey participants (54.15%) thinks that higher education institutions should use a neutral language in their official communication, while the people who disagree (21.46%) or strongly disagree (10.73%) represents 22.19% of the participants.

Looking at the answers grouped by country there are no significant differences among the countries with 10 or more cases. France is the only country in which there are no “don’t know doesn’t apply” with the great part of the survey participants agreeing or totally agreeing with institutions needing to use a neutral language in their official communication.

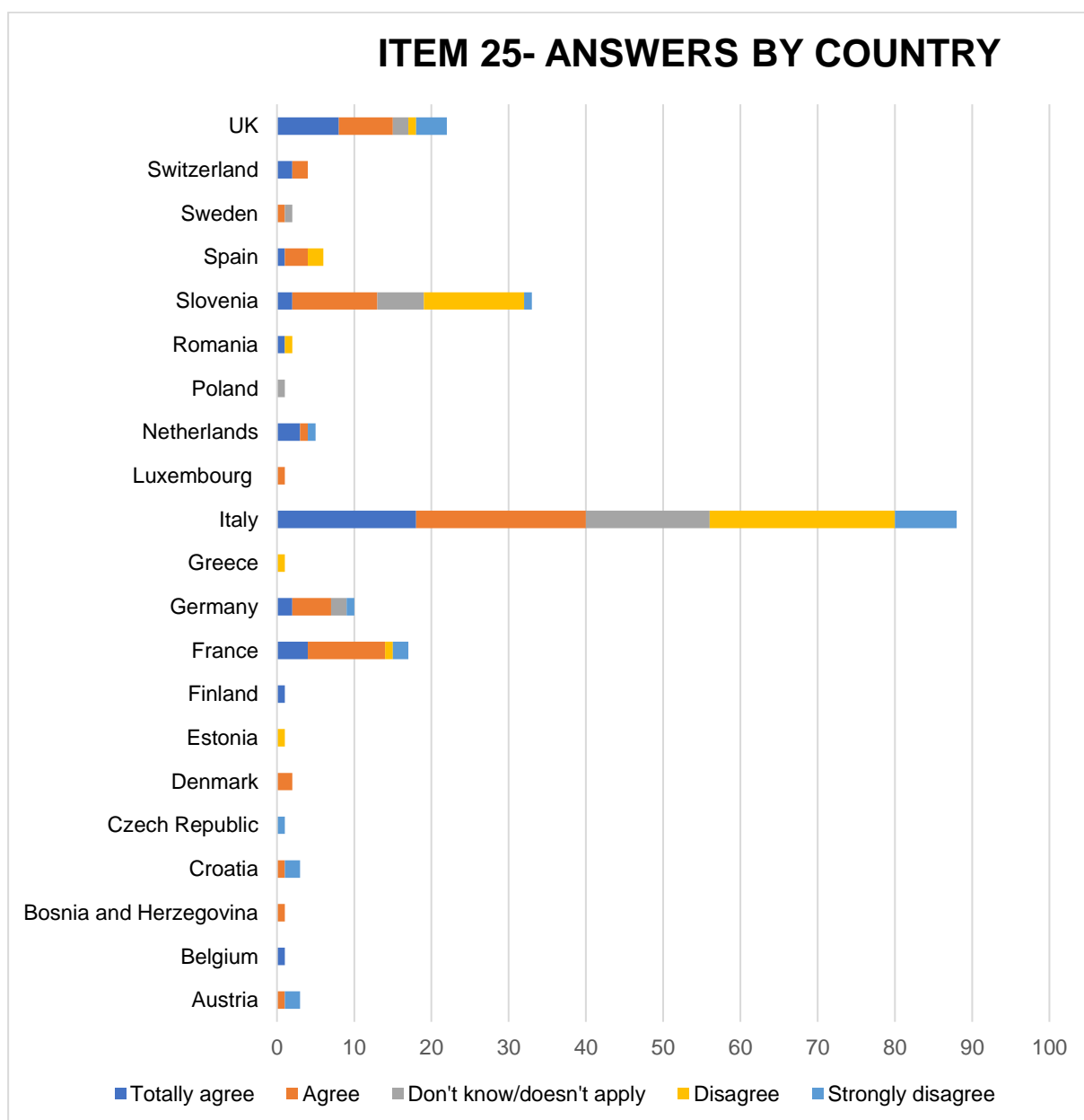


Figure 49- Survey participants opinion on the use of neutral language in institutional communication by country.

Differences in answers to item 25 from survey participants from different age ranges are not so big. The main difference is between the youngest people (18- 21) and the oldest ones (>50), the former being more favourable to the use of a neutral language than the latter.

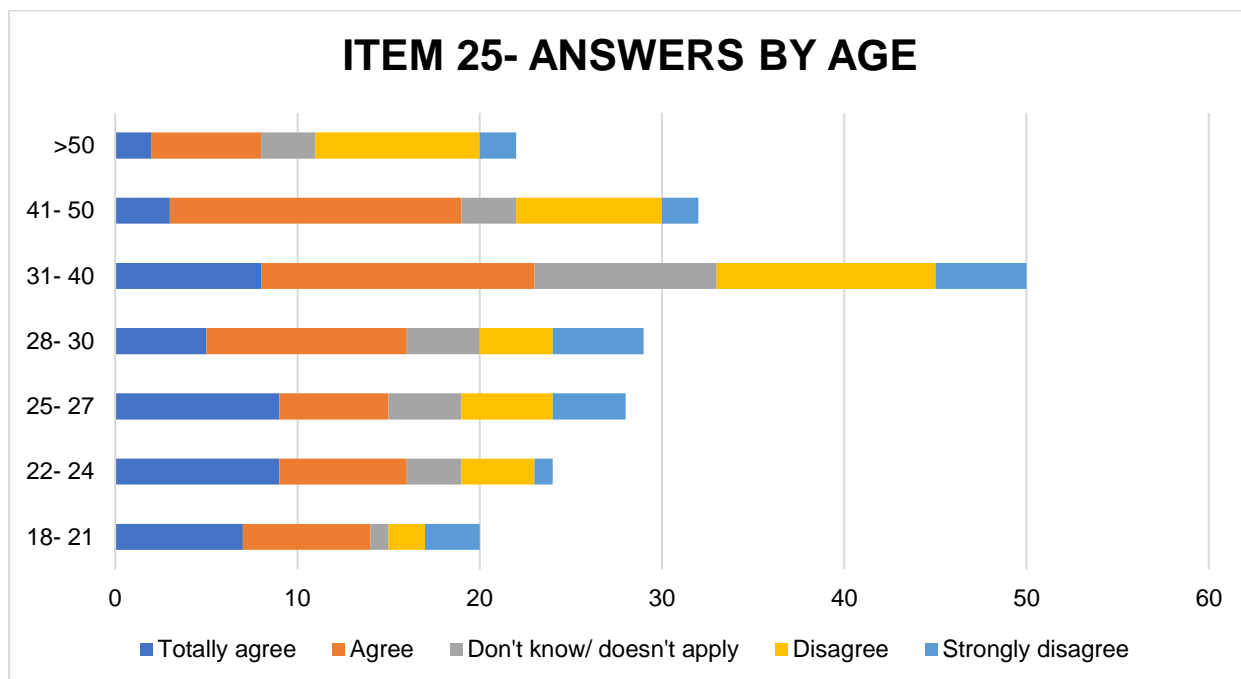


Figure 50- Survey participants opinion on the use of neutral language in institutional communication by age

Item 26- My institution uses neutral language (they/them, *, Θ) in its official communication

With this item we took a step forward to see if there is a correspondence between what the survey participants think about the use of a neutral language by their institutions and what these institutions really do. 21% of the survey participants says that their institutions are using a neutral language, at least to some extents, in their official communication.

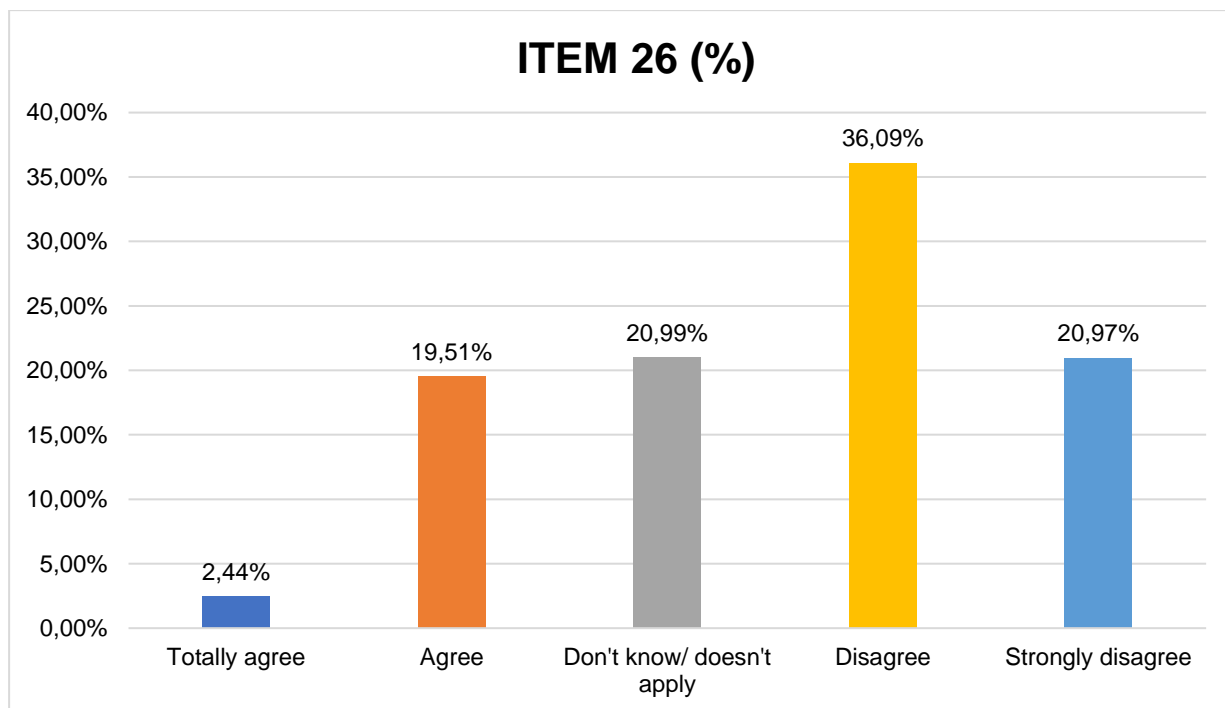


Figure 51- Use of neutral language in survey participants 'institutions official communication

Grouping the answers by country shows that, only considering countries with 10 or more cases each, the UK is the country with the highest relative (and absolute) number of people totally agreeing on the fact that their institution uses a neutral language. This and the relatively high number of “don’t know/ doesn’t apply” options from people in the UK can probably be explained by the fact that English isn’t a gendered language. Among the other European countries, Slovenia has the highest relative number of people agreeing on the fact that their institution uses a neutral language.

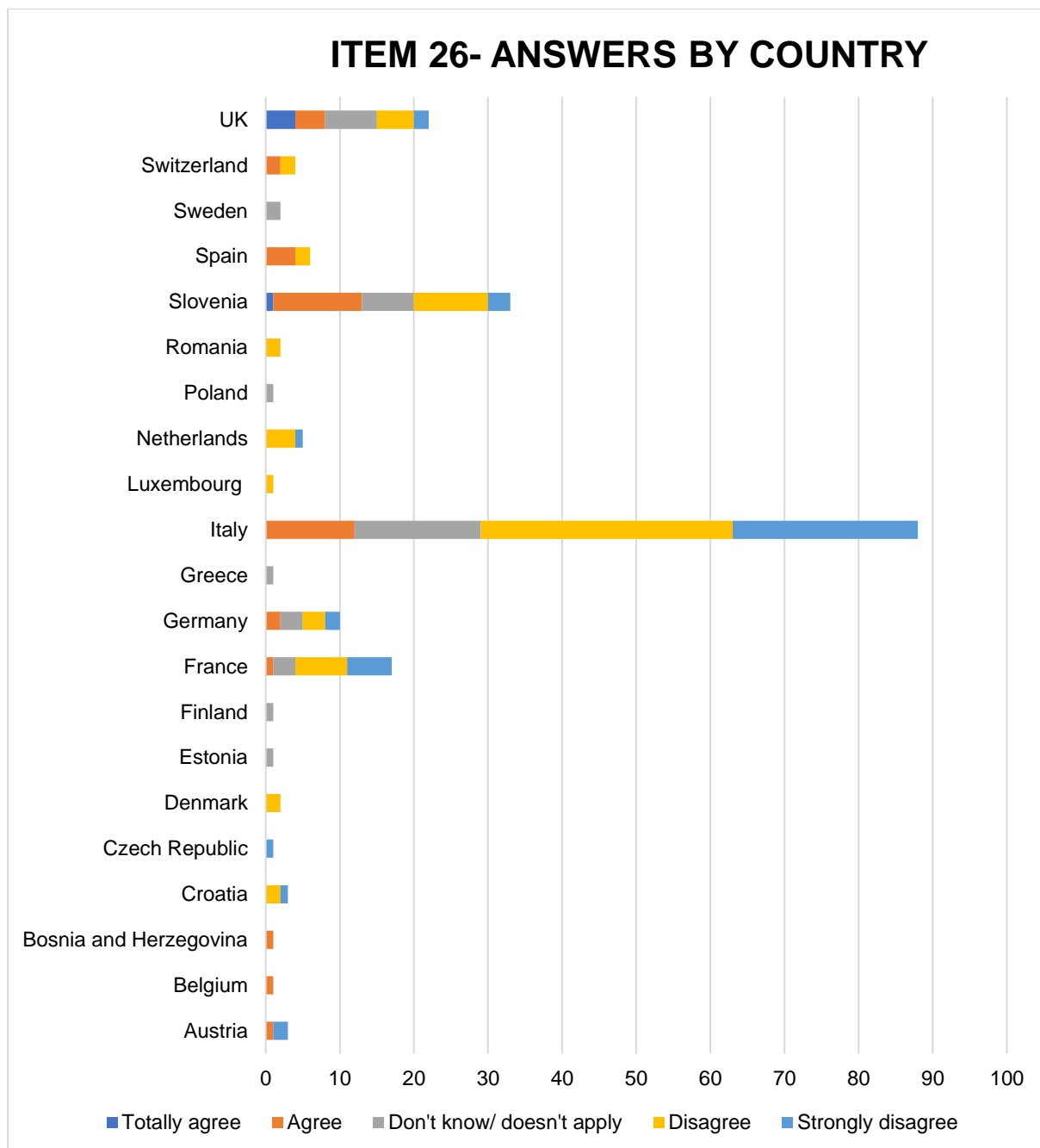


Figure 52- Use of neutral language in institutional communication by country.

Item – 27 I can easily obtain the information I need** from my institution

During the qualitative phase of this research, the problem of a confused communication between the institution and the students, the lack of clear information and official contacts came out from different interviews, and it was pictured very well by Susanna, a bachelor' student, during her interview. This item is related to the topic of access to information, which should be the very base for an effective institutional

communication. This question is also related to the issue of diversity and inclusion because, even if the lack of accessibility to institutional information services affects everybody, people that have less resources or are already exposed to other forms of stress (see social minority stress) are more severely affected.

Unlike the interviewees from the qualitative survey, the majority of the participants feel that they can get the information they need from their institution fairly easily (71.70%).

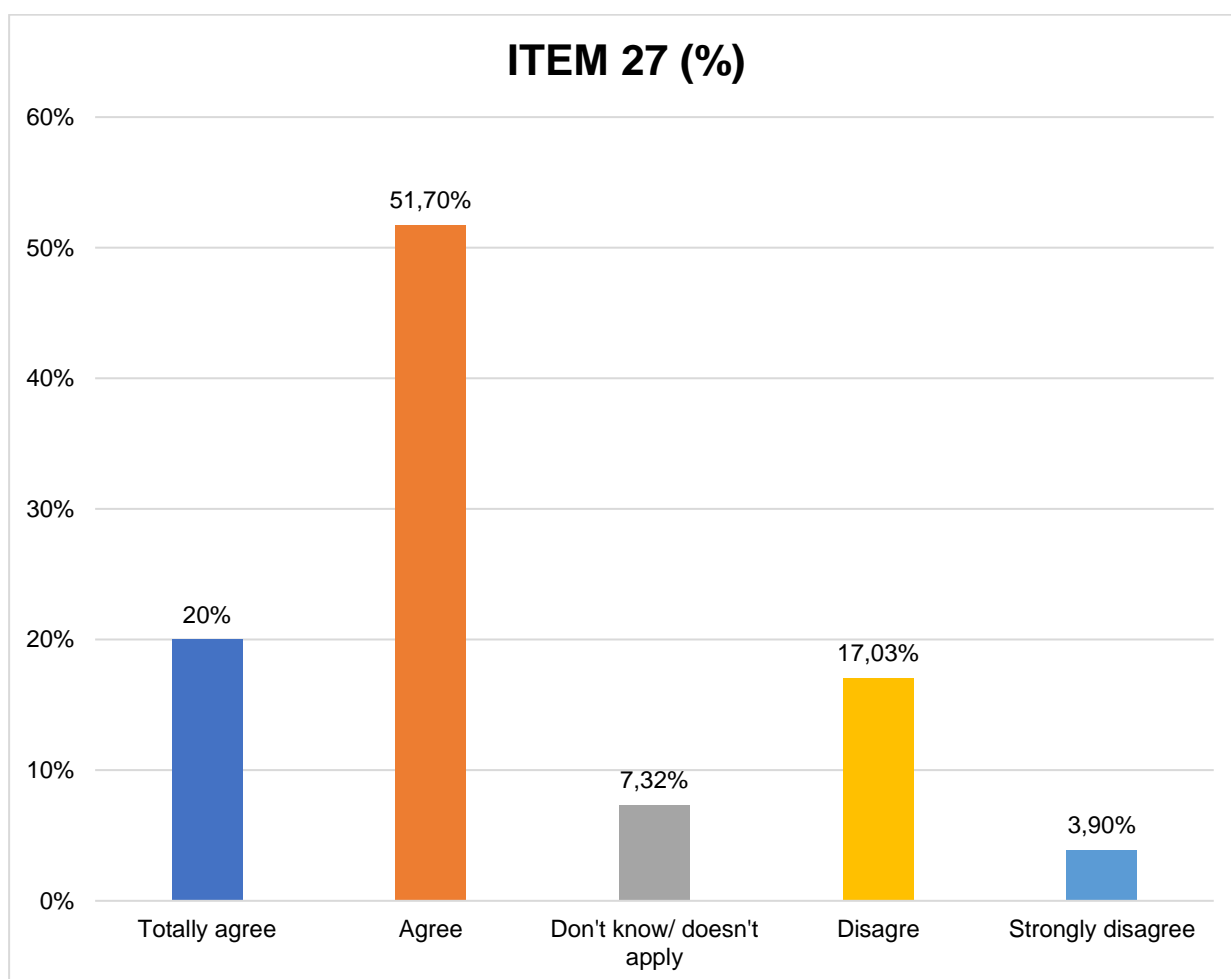


Figure 53- Survey participants' opinion on institutional information accessibility

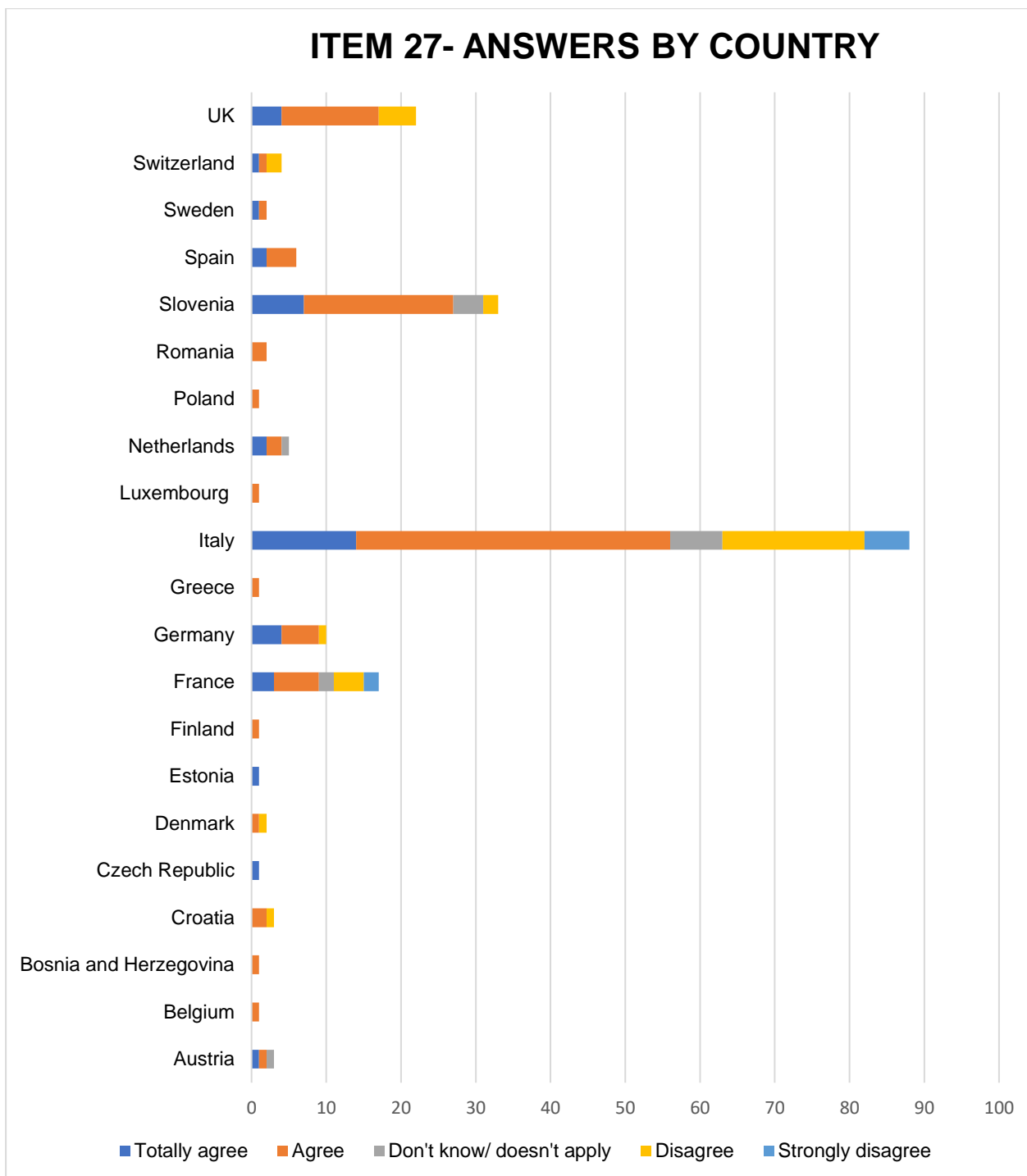


Figure 54- Survey participants' opinion on institutional information accessibility by country

Item – 28 In my institution it is easy to get the contacts (email, phone numbers, addresses) of the admin offices I need

Most of the interviewees in the qualitative phase of this research had no idea who to contact in case they have any issue related to diversity and inclusion. Only a few

interviewees said that there are offices and people whose role is to help with this kind of issue and that they know how to contact these people. As it happened for Item 28, the answer from the questionnaire says the opposite to what affirmed by the interviewees. In fact, 26.83% of the interviewees totally agree and 53.17% totally agree on the fact that it is easy for them to obtain the contact they need from their institution. Only 14.15% disagree and 0.97% strongly disagree.

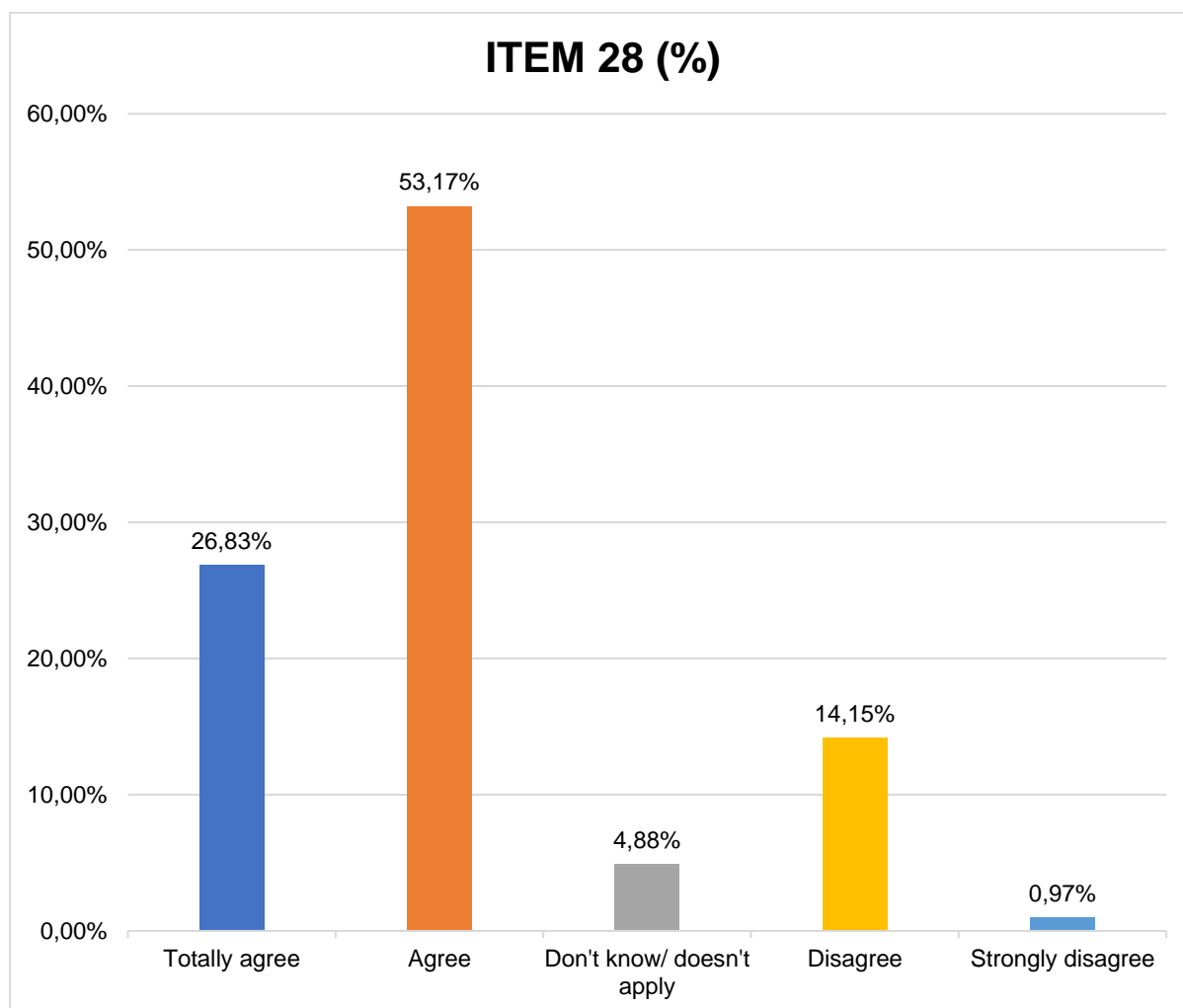


Figure 55- Survey participants' opinion on how easy is to obtain the contacts they need from their institutions

If we look at the data divided by country, we see that there are no huge discrepancies between different countries in survey participants answers. It is interesting to note that the answer "strongly disagree" is give only in two countries: France and Italy. In both cases the frequency of this answer is 1.

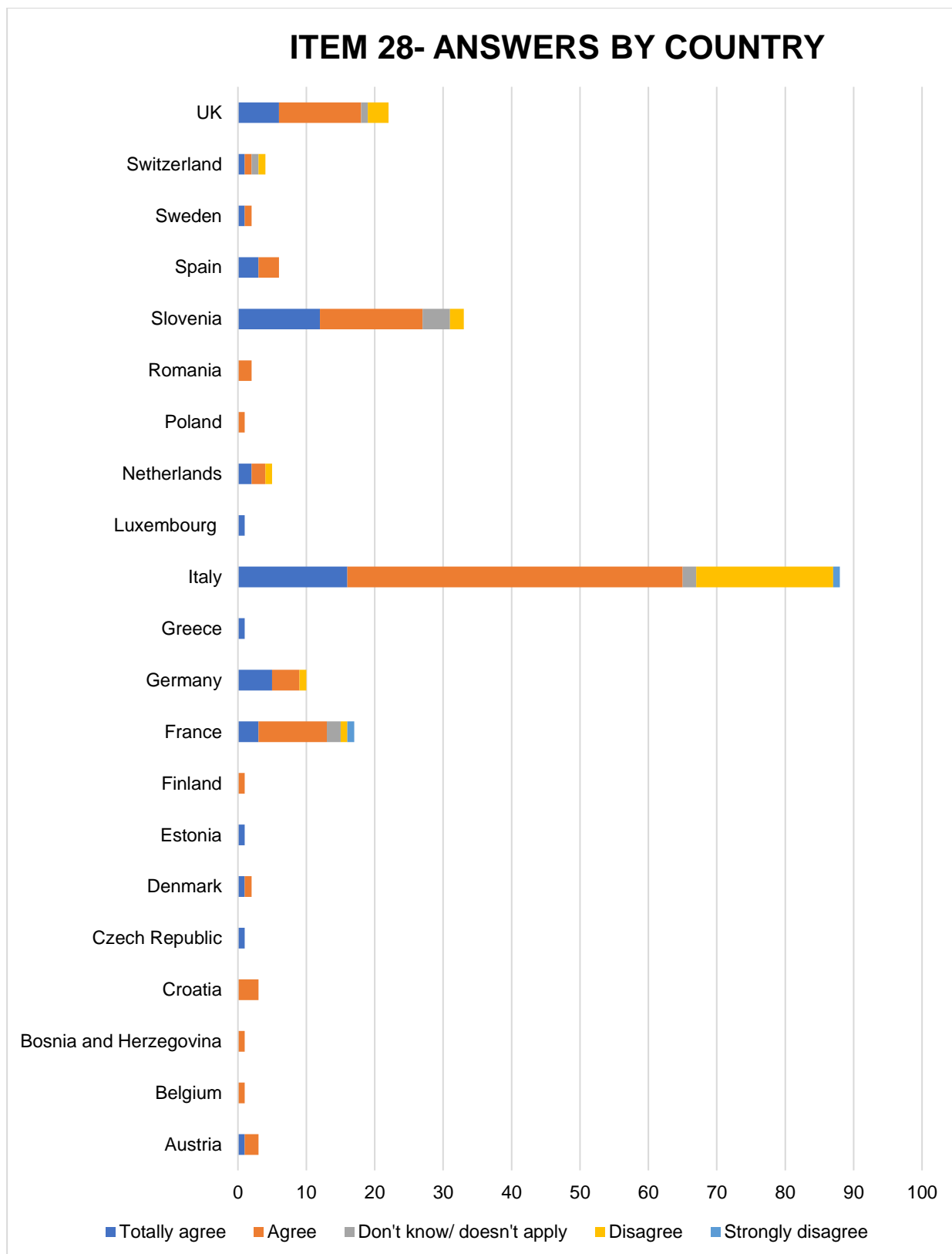


Figure 56- Survey participants opinion on how easy is to get the contacts they need from their institution by country

Item 29- I know who to contact in my institution for issues around discrimination

This item is more specific than the previous one (item 28) since it only focuses on information about who to contact in case of discrimination. Very few of the interviewees were able to answer this question during the qualitative phase of this research. Respect to the item 28, the previous one, questionnaire participants answer are less compact: 13.7% and 36.10% respectively totally agree and agree on the fact that they know who to contact in case of discrimination, while 24.88% and 8.78% respectively disagree and strongly disagree with the item's statement.

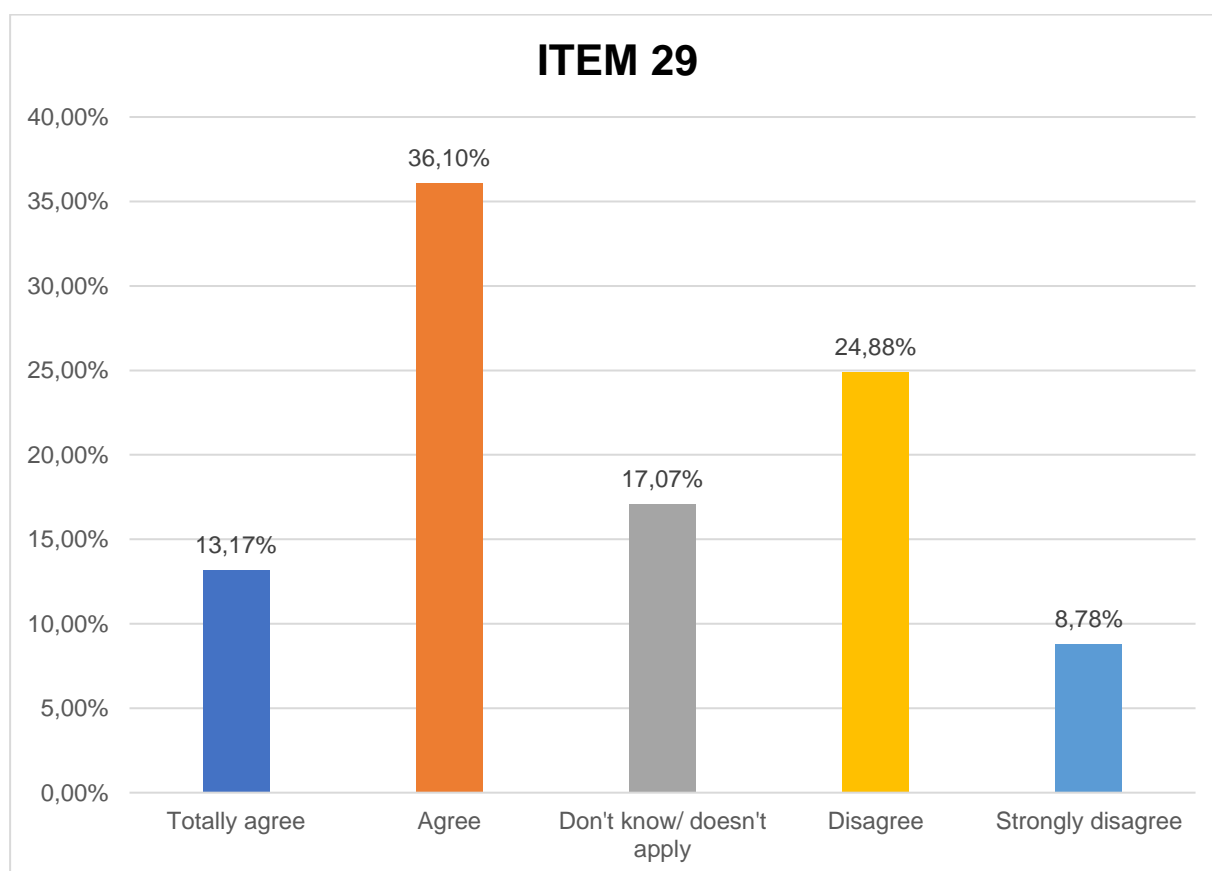


Figure 57- Survey participants know who to contact from their institution in case of discrimination.

In the answers divided by country we see that the answers are more or less equally distributed among the five options, with the “strongly disagree” being the less represented. For some of the countries the participants are less than 6, and that's why not all the options are represented.

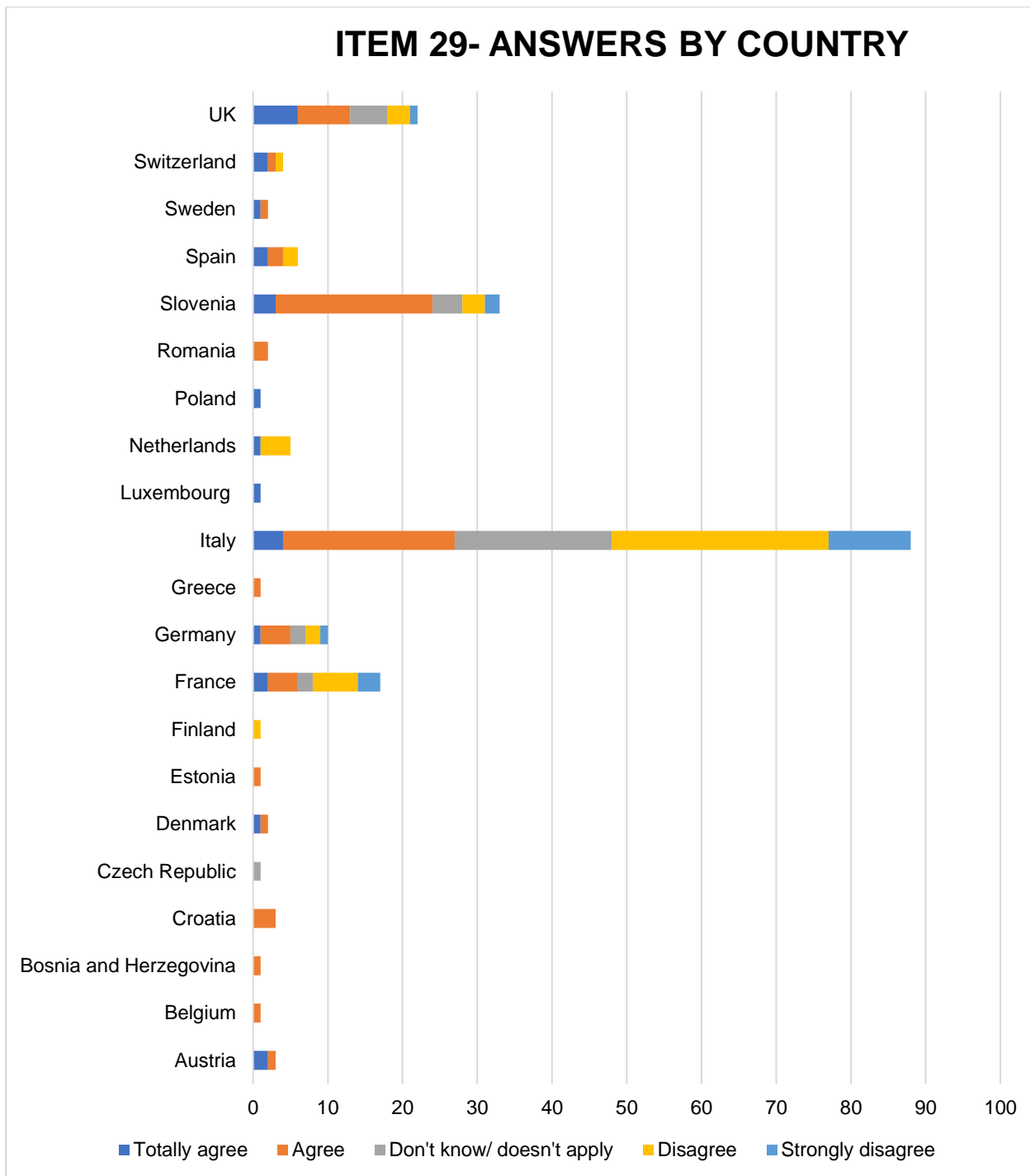


Figure 58- Survey participants know who to contact from their institution in case of discrimination (answers by country).

Item – 30 In my institution admin personnel speak English and are able to interact with foreign students/ researchers/ professor

A shared language is at the very base of every form of communication. The interviews highlighted the issue that in some institution’s admin personnel is not able to effectively

speak English with foreign people. This creates a communication barrier that is usually overcome by the foreign people learning the language of the institution country.

This item is meaningful only for countries whose official language is not English, but since they are the majority of European countries, we think that it is an important problem to address.

The answers from the questionnaire participants are more positive than the ones collected during the qualitative interviews. In fact, 21.52% of the survey participants totally agree and 45.38% agree on the fact that the admin personnel in their institution is able to communicate in English with foreign students and researchers. Only 14.64% disagree and 2.93% strongly disagree with item 30 statement.

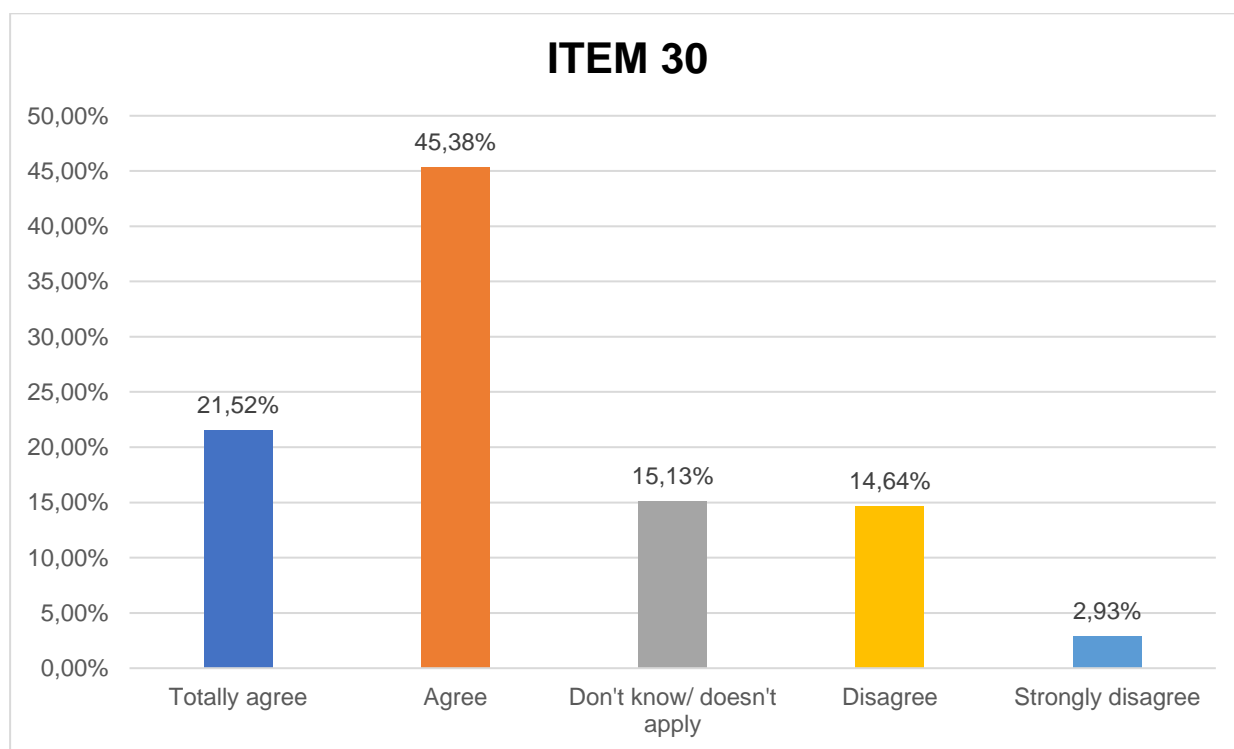


Figure 59- Survey participants opinion on their institution staff and admin personnel ability to communicate in English with foreign students and researchers.

The answers divided by country mainly follow the general trend. France, Italy and Spain are the countries with the higher number of people disagreeing with the statement of item 30 about admin personnel being able to speak in English with foreigner students and researchers. All survey participants based in Germany agree or totally agree with the statement that their admin personnel are able to communicate

in English with foreign students and researchers. A very high rate of positive answers also come from Slovenia.

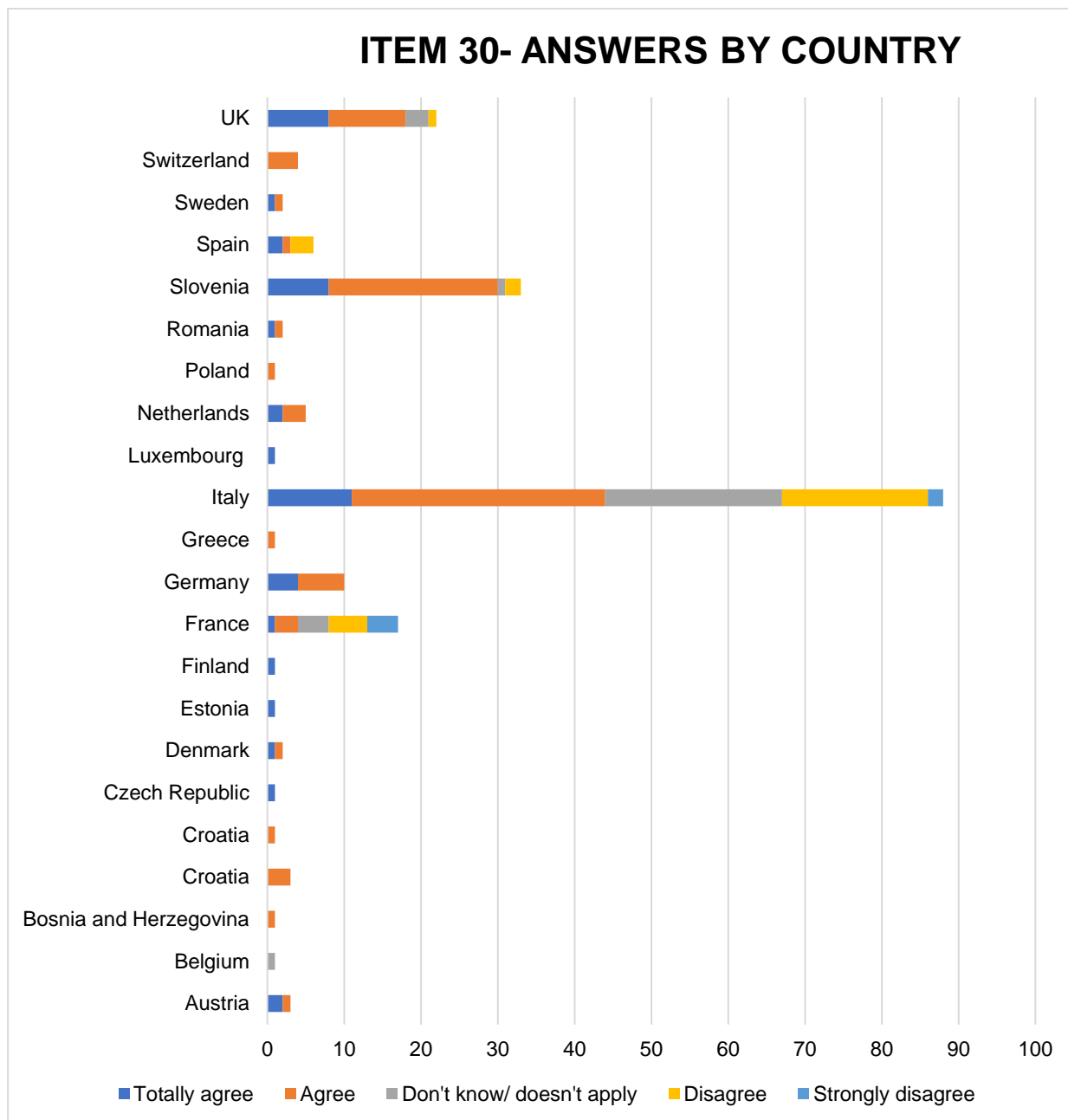


Figure 60- Survey participants' answers to the question whether the admin personnel in their institution is able to communicate in English with foreign students and researchers

Item 31- I think that every institution should have a public record of episodes of discrimination and harassment

The need for public records, statistics and numbers strongly emerged from some of the qualitative interviews, especially from interviewees based in countries in which

higher education institutions already have at least some established policies on inclusion, discrimination and harassment issues. For those interviewees, a public record of these episodes from the institutions is crucial for a transparent and trustworthy institutional communication.

Questionnaire results aligned with what emerged from the qualitative interviews. 61.95% % of the survey participants are in favour of their institution having a public record of discrimination and harassment episodes that happened in their premises.

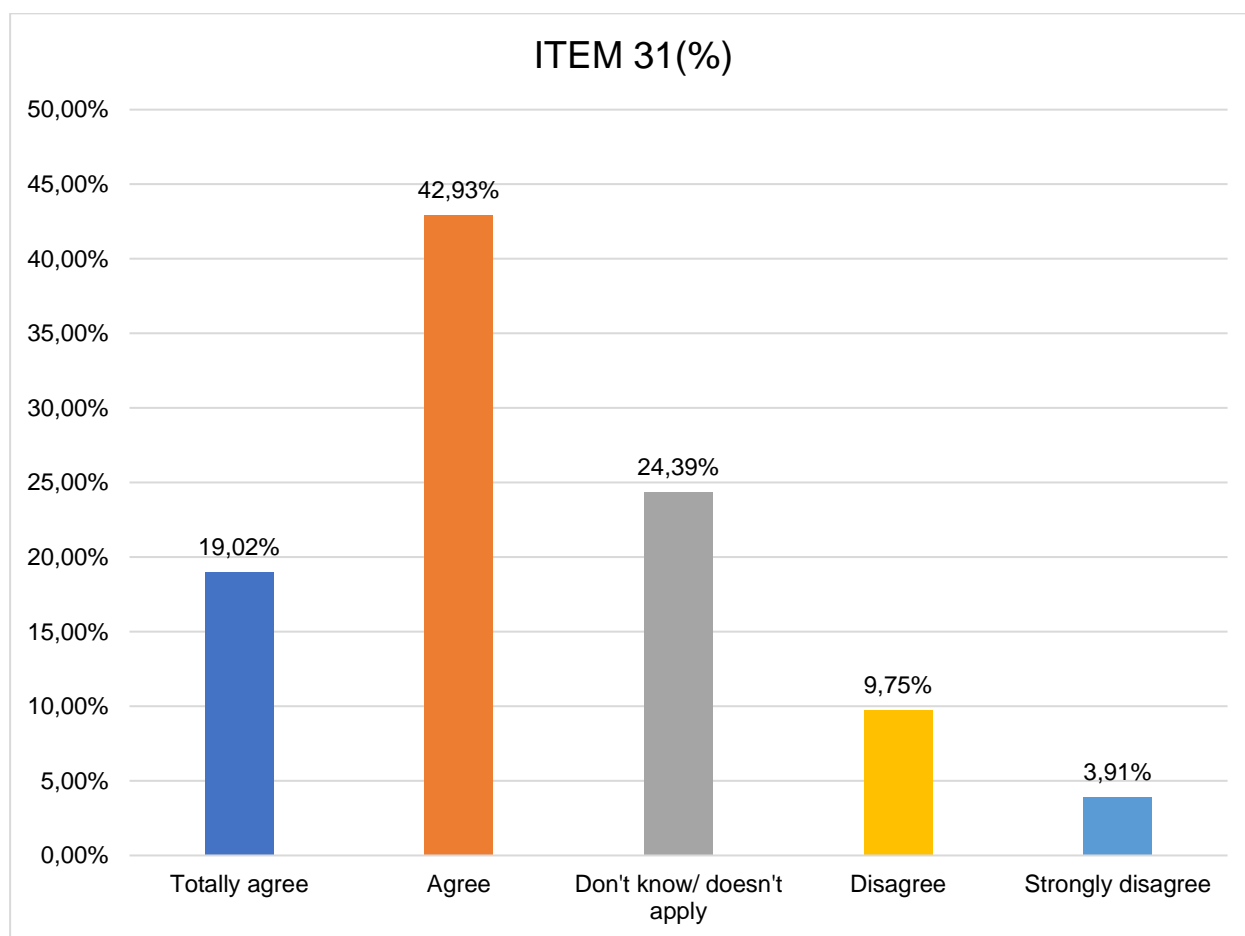


Figure 61- Survey participants opinion on the opportunity for a higher education institution to keep a public record of discrimination and harassment episodes happened in its premises

Item 32- My institution has a public record of episodes of discrimination/ harassment

During the qualitative phase of this research, none of the interviewees declared that their institution already has a record of discrimination and harassment episodes. Among the questionnaire participants, only 5.37% of them said that they are aware of

the existence of such a public list from their institution. The majority of the participants (57.07%) don't know if such a record exists in their institution, while 37.56% of them know for sure that this record doesn't exist.

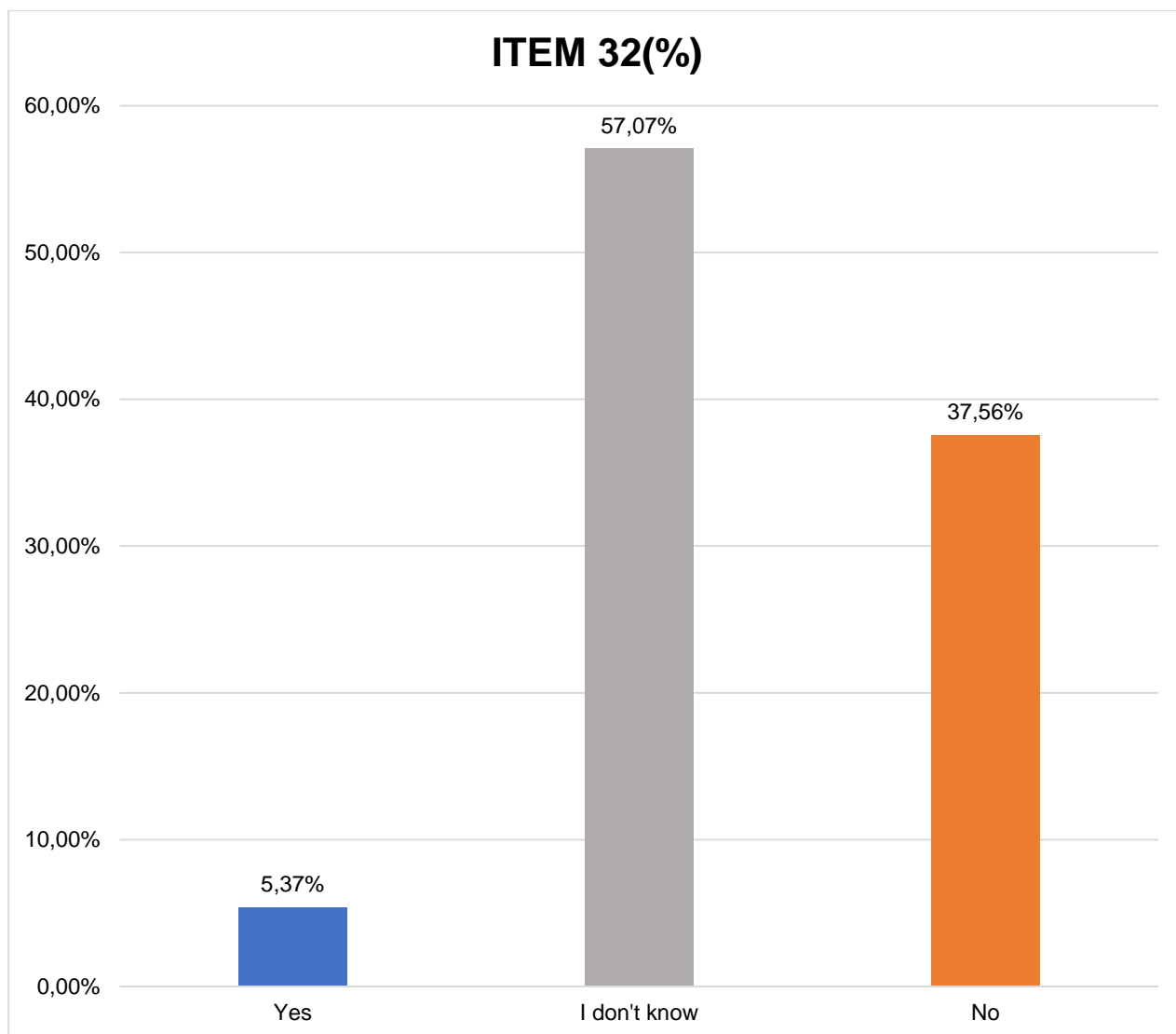
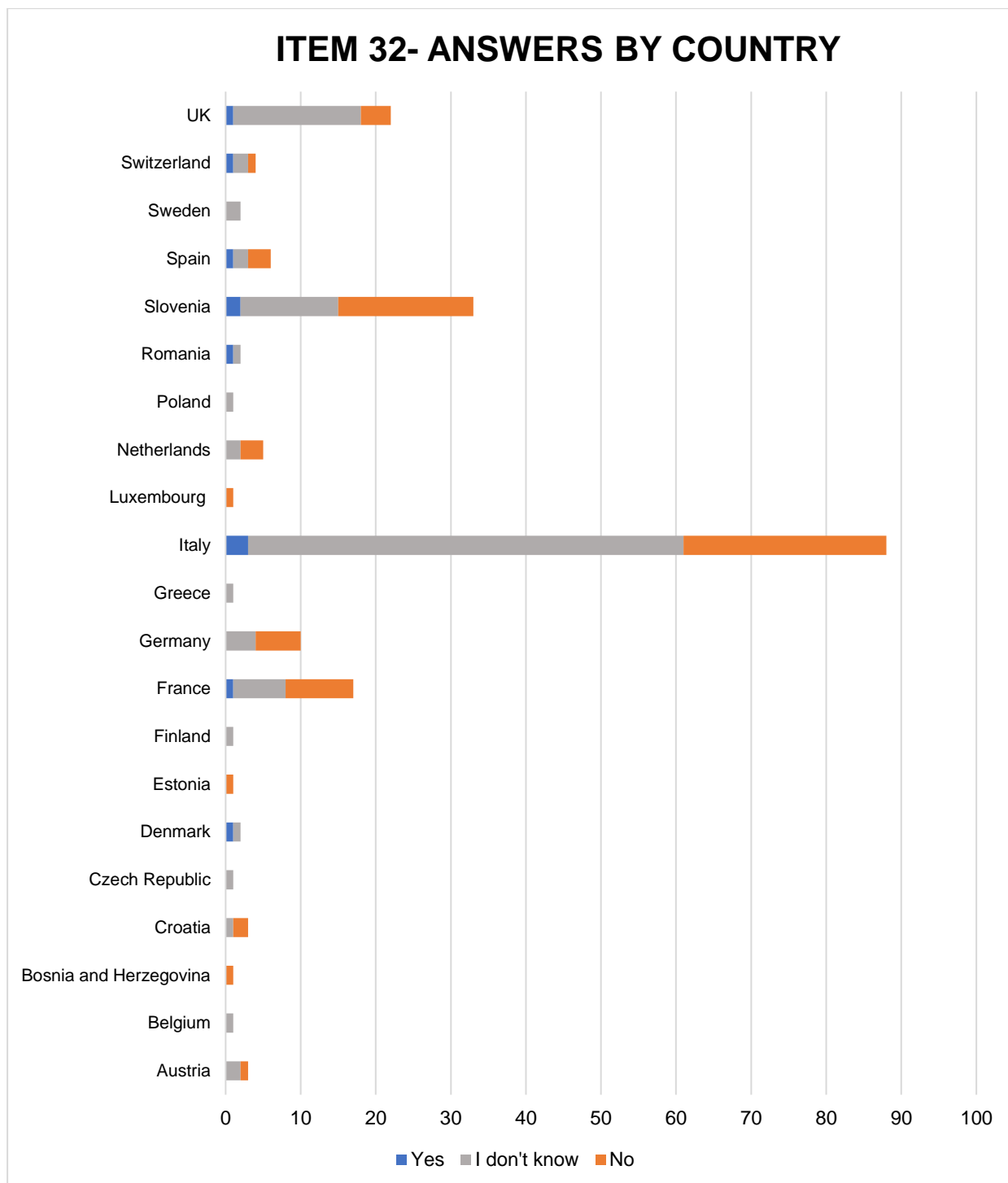


Figure 62- Survey participants knowledge about the existence of a public record of discrimination and harassment episodes that happens in their institution's premises

The countries in which survey participants know for sure that there is a public record of discrimination and harassment episodes made by their institution are: UK, Switzerland, Spain, Slovenia, Romania, Italy, France and Denmark.



Item 33- Every institution should guarantee that transgender people are called with their chosen name and the gender they identify with

Item 33 and 34 are specifically about transgender people, a part of the LGBTQ+ community that recently is becoming more and more visible, asking society and institutions to acknowledge their existence and needs. A person's name and pronouns

are constantly used by their institution in any direct communication. Regulation on transition protocols for transgender people greatly vary from country to country even inside the European Union, and so does the bureaucratic procedures to legally change their name and pronouns in their documents. For non- binary people in most European country there isn't even the option for them to choose a neutral gender marker and pronouns.

This situation can cause transgender people to drop their studies, or it may prevent them to choose some countries or institutions. All the interviewees agreed on the fact that higher education institutions should guarantee transgender people the right to be called the way they prefer even if their documents are not updated. 82.9% of the survey participants agree that higher education institutions should guarantee transgender people this right. The percentage of people who didn't express any opinion on this topic is 9.3%, while 3.9% of people disagree and 3.9% strongly disagree with institutions guaranteeing this service.

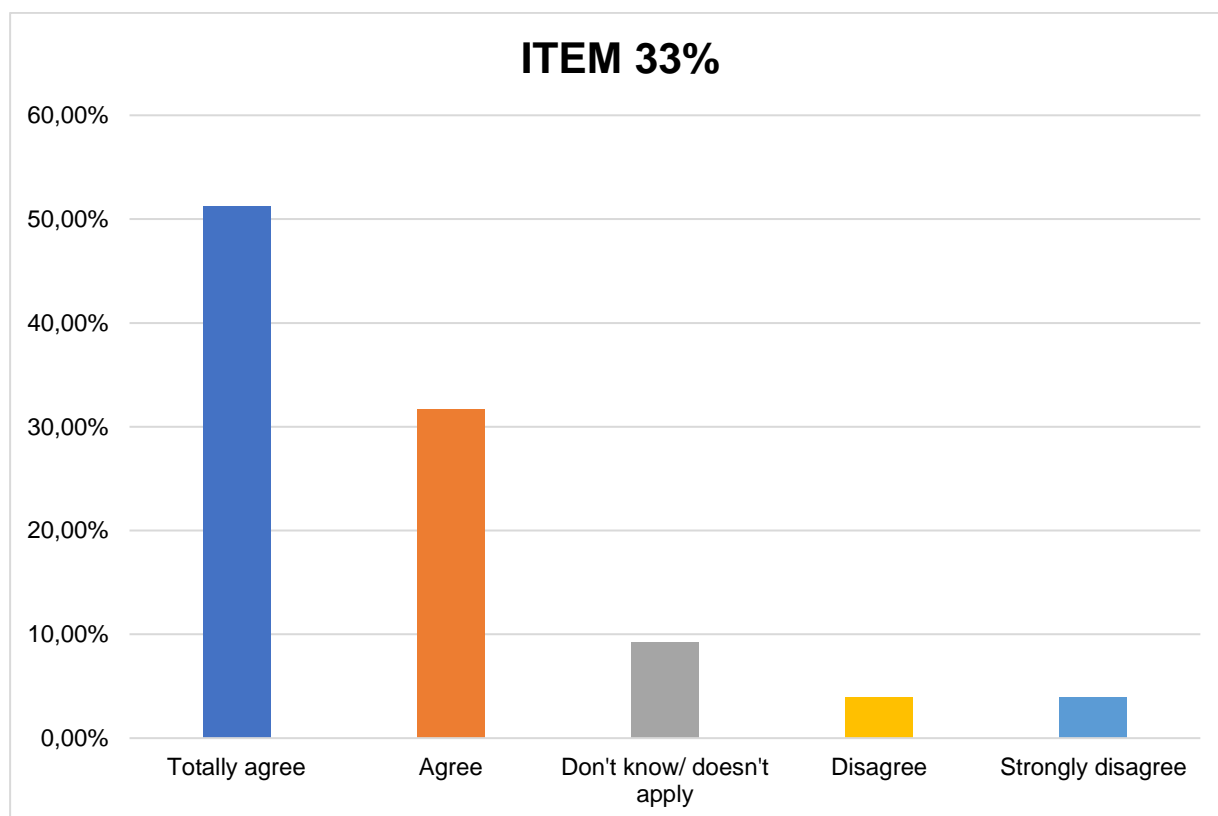


Figure 63- Survey participants opinion on transgender people right to be called with their correct name and pronouns by their institution

The countries in which there are people who disagree or strongly disagree with item 33 statements are: UK, Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Czech Republic and Austria.

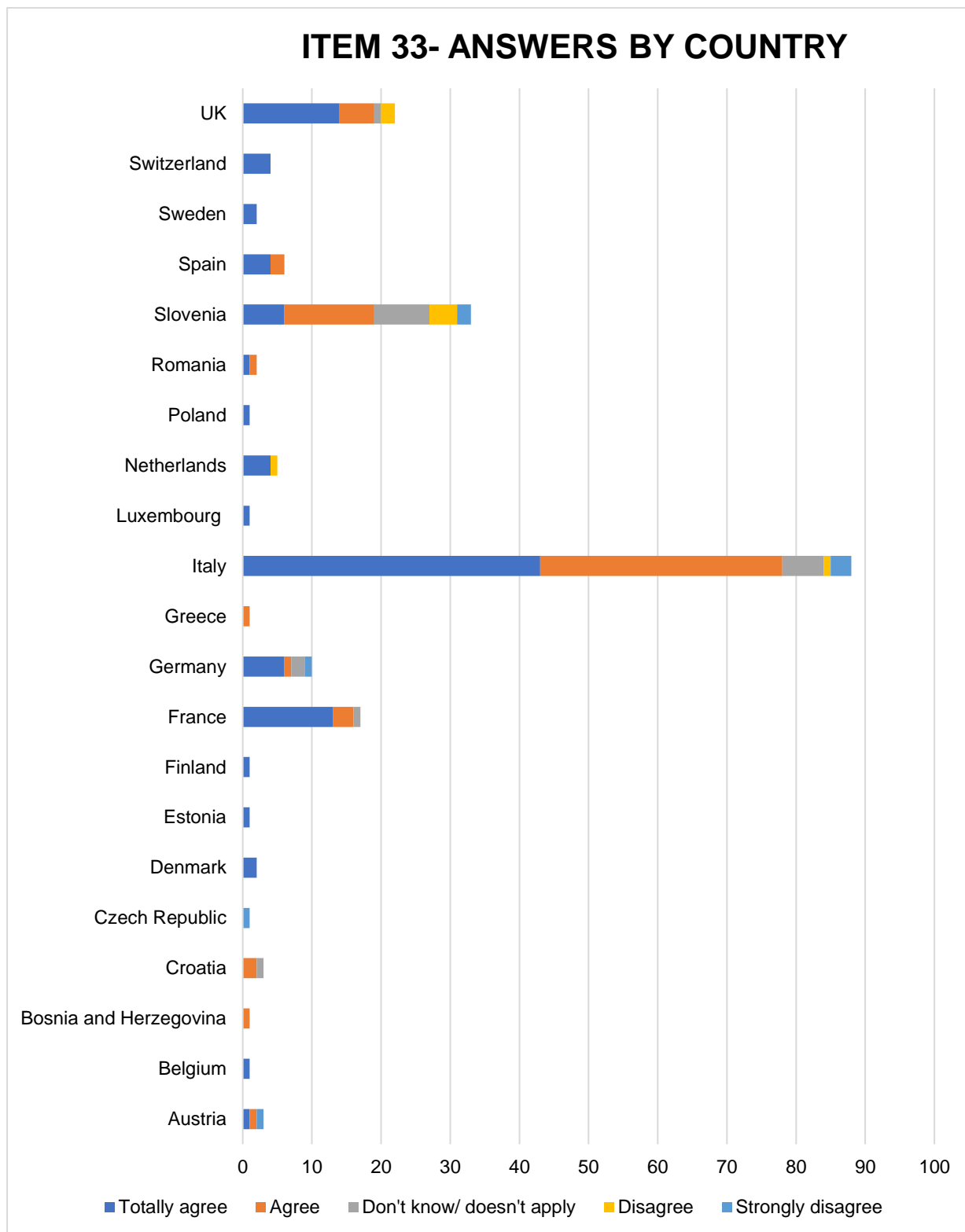


Figure 64- Survey participants opinion on transgender people right to be called with their correct name and pronouns by their institution by country

Item 33 answers divided by age don't show any significant variation related to the age of the questionnaire participants. In all the age range categories people generally agree with the statement saying that every institution should guarantee that transgender people are called with their correct name and gender.

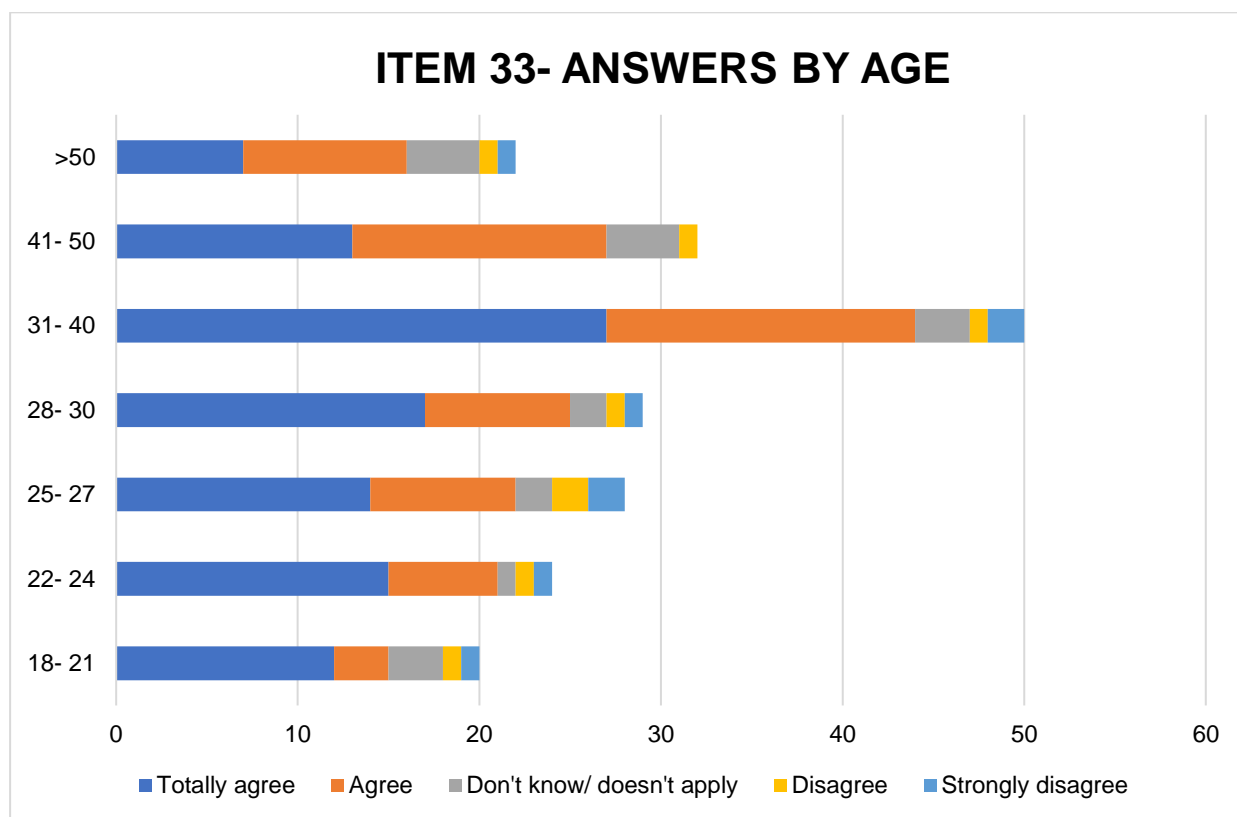


Figure 65- Survey participants opinion on transgender people right to be called with their correct name and pronouns by their institution by age

Item 34- In my institution it is possible for transgender people to change their details and institutional email etc to the name and gender they identify with before they legally change this information**

As it happened for most of the interviewees during the qualitative phase of this research, the majority of the questionnaire participants (72.69%) don't know if there is the option for transgender people to be registered with their chosen name and gender by their institution. 19.02% of the survey participants are aware of that possibility in their institution, while 8.29% knows that this option is not available.

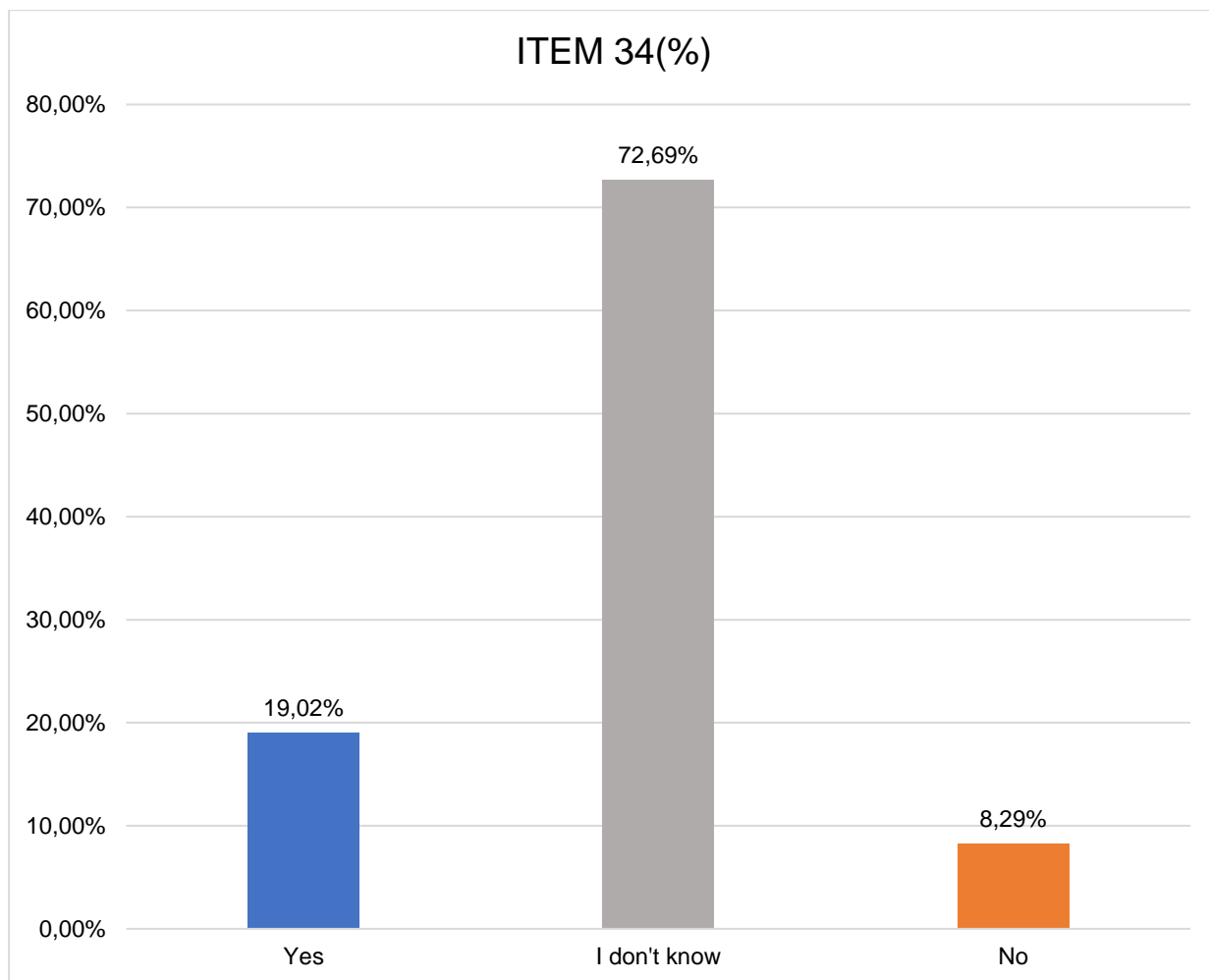


Figure 66- Survey participants knowledge on their institutions policies about alias careers for transgender people

Apart from Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium and Austria, whose data are not reliable because of the small number of cases, the most frequent answer in all the other countries is “I don’t know”.

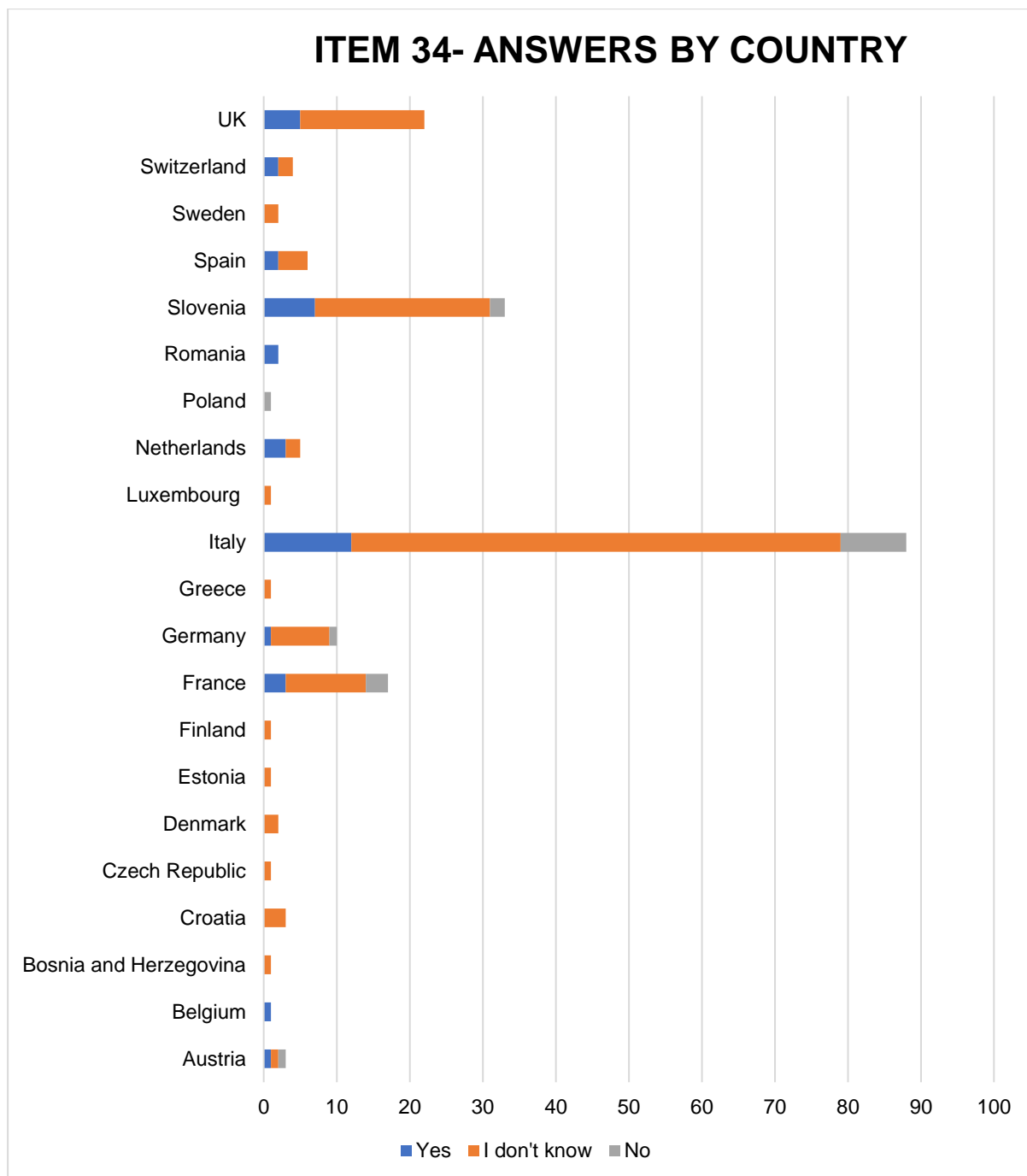


Figure 67- Survey participants knowledge about an alias career for transgender people being available in their institution by country

Item 35 – Questionnaire feedback

This item is an open, facultative question and asks people to leave feedback on this survey. There was not word limit.

There were both positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback is mostly about people being interested in the topic and willing to know more and to be informed on

Comments about the survey are people finding that most of the item statements are not applicable to their experience in their institution

I think sometimes the answer agree/ disagree is not adapted. MY institution does deliver trainings about diversity and inclusion, so it should not do it, it does. And the questions about neutrality of language are not adapted to my mother tongue

People also asked for more nuances in the item answers because to some questions they weren't able to select the best option to describe their institution situation. Some people reported that some questions were not clear enough.

Some of the participants whose don't belong to the LGBTQ+ community or to other minorities pointed out that for them it is « almost impossible» to answer some of the questions because « This survey is not very applicable for heterosexual cisgender persons as they are usually not the ones who are discriminated ».

Other feedback statements are about the topic of the survey itself. Some participants point out that for them there are more important topics that should be addressed first, using depreciative expressions

Weird survey about unimportant stuff. There are much more important issues in universities than inclusion of people with mental disabilities.

The main point of this kind of feedback is that higher education institutions should only be about teaching, without employing time and effort to tackle other issues such as inclusion of minority groups. This kind of vision consider the institutional environment as a neutral background that has no impact on how students and workers perform their tasks.

| Positive feedback | Neutral/ mixed feedback | Negative feedback |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Thanks for letting me participate | I teach on a distance learning course so don't have much contact with university admin staff | Survey only consisted of leading questions which is not a balanced and inclusive research practice rather than forceful |
| Interesting | It would be nice to tackle not only gender issues, | Fortunately, people are still intelligent in Czechia |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| | but other diversity issues (cultural aspects) | |
| Very interesting | The problem with surveys is that the results are usually not properly advertised, at least not as much as the requests to complete the survey | Sometimes hard to think about the situation in my institution because it doesn't always apply. |
| Very interesting, thank you. | Thanks for having agender, asexual, disability and neurodiversity as options, it's rare I get to select the accurate answers. For the question about whether he/she should be used, I said don't know/doesn't apply as 'they' is more inclusive and is grammatically correct and more concise in the context I've seen it used. For whether pronouns should be in email signatures, I only said strongly disagree because a policy would mean closeted trans/non-binary people would be forced to misgender or out themselves. | Weird survey about unimportant stuff. There are much more important issues in universities than inclusion of people with mental disabilities. |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Very interesting | The subject is really vast, and I personally feel not prepared to properly reply to many questions. Therefore, I believe that some training/discussion with University personal could be a great education initiative (but I disagree to enforce that with mandatory attendance). | most questions do not apply |
| it is good to be done. we do need changes and quality for everyday lives | In two question I can't select if my institution support gender equality or the Pride march, I can only selected if I would that they should do | It would have been helpful to have not only the option agree and disagree but some neutral position in between, since some points were only partly realised at my institution, and I had to choose either agree or disagree. |
| The right topic | | I would have answer with 'sometimes' to some questions instead of 'yes' or 'no', because maybe they do 'the thing' in some occasions and not all the time, or I just partially agree/disagree but I do know. |
| I really liked the survey. | | there are diversity and inclusion aspect much more important than sex (income, place of birth....) |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>It's a good topic, that we do not talk enough about.</p> | | <p>I think sometimes the answer agree/ disagree is not adapted. MY institution does deliver trainings about diversity and inclusion, so it should not do it, it does . And the questions about neutrality of language are not adapted to my mother tongue</p> |
| <p>Some professors are strongly conservative and harassing people that are different from the average</p> | | <p>it would be better to have the possibility to say "partly" for some of the questions because "doesn't apply/ don't know" isn't the correct answer in these cases.</p> |
| <p>Please publish the results via the EURAXESS network as well!</p> | | <p>I think several questions are not easy to answer for cis people that are less likely to be involve and know about institutional resources for minorities.</p> |
| <p>Interesting topic.</p> | | <p>Some questions were unclear</p> |
| <p>La tematica di genere e inclusività necessità di essere sensibilizzata da enti sia privati che</p> | | <p>This survey is not very applicable for heterosexual cisgender persons as they are</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| pubblici. Trovo il questionario molto interessante. Grazie! | | usually not the ones who are discriminated. Therefore the questions are almost impossible to answer |
| love the topic! | | |
| Good. | | |
| I hope that in the early future it will not be necessary do this kind of survey | | |
| Happy to participate. | | |
| I have no critical points about this survey. | | |
| thanks for doing this study | | |
| Very interesting survey. In Bosnia and Herzegovina generally there is a lack of discussion on this topic. I think due to conservative ecosystem we live, diversity related to gender issues rarely is a subject. | | |
| Long survey but also interesting | | |
| I would like to see the results of this survey, I'm interested! | | |
| I would be very interested in the results as we lead | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| a task on diversity and inclusion in TOPIV and we focus on gender and diversity topic in Euraxess Hubs. Best regards , (name + email) | | |
| I'd likes to know what Is the result of the research | | |
| I appreciate the research being done on this topic, because often people assume that universities are always open-minded but this is not always the case | | |
| Very useful survey, really important matter | | |
| so interesting, please share the results | | |
| I think getting a wide variety of opinions on institutional diversity and inclusion topics is a noble goal. Thanks and good luck with the study! | | |
| Finally a survey on such a delicate topic, hoping that it will become an ordinary one | | |
| important | | |
| Thanks for doing this! | | |
| it was ok | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Necessary | | |
| Nice job! I think that also the impact of parental leave policies should be explored since it plays a significant role in women drop out and this lack of inclusion | | |
| Interesting and useful | | |

Table 5- Questionnaire feedback results table

Item 36- Is there something your institution can do to improve their communication on diversity and inclusion?

The last item (36) is another open question with no word limits in which we asked to the survey participants if they can think about something that their institution can do to improve their communication on diversity and inclusion issue.

Some of the participants answered that their institutions are already doing well, while other says that they would like their institution to organise seminars and event on diversity and inclusion issues and in general they ask their institution to be more active and do more things on that regard.

Only a few participants use this item to strongly criticise the questionnaire or to say that higher education institutions shouldn't care about diversity and inclusion because they should be only about learning and nothing more.

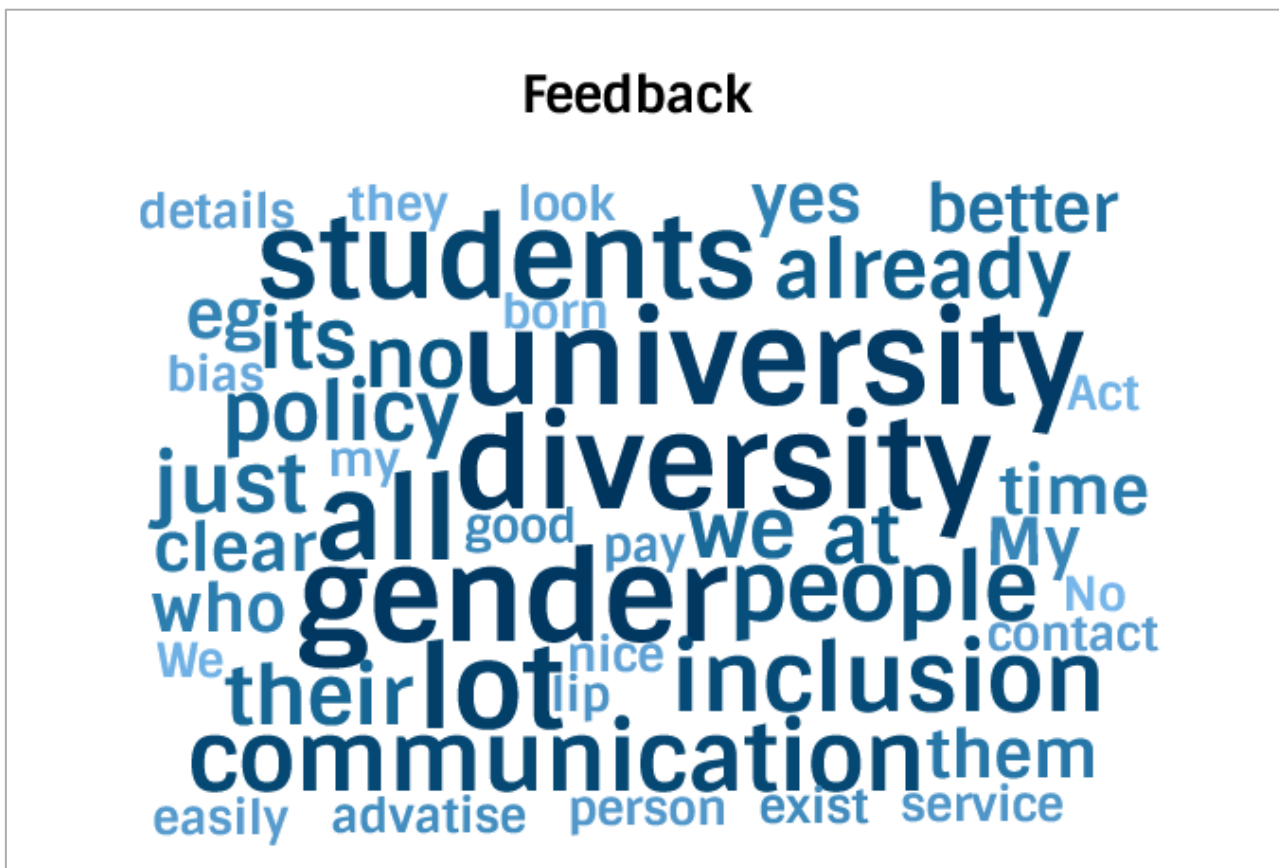


Figure 69- Questionare feedback word cloud

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>do more than pay lip service</p> | <p>I think my institution is already clear about its policy in terms of diversity and inclusion</p> | <p>Persist their current policy when people are called by their pronouns assigned to them when they were born.</p> |
| <p>Identified person, and easily accessible information and contact details</p> | <p>We are inclusive and open for improvements</p> | <p>no, institutions are about learning and studying.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>would be nice to look into additional aspects of diversity (intercultural communication at the workplace and bias management) this survey is only about gender</p> | <p>so far I have not detected any problems</p> | <p>it is not its purpose</p> |
| <p>To organize more events related to these topics.</p> | <p>A lot is done already, but some things take a lot of time and persistence (e.g., language guidelines for the entire university)</p> | <p>My university (university for humanistic studies in Netherlands) is already quite diverse and inclusive, we have literally courses on in- and exclusion. But, we still have only female or male toilets and not yet gender neutral, all though a lot of people just ignore it (for example when a toilet is taken nobody cares you go to the other one) and within the university a lot of protest happens, like placing a gender neutral sticker on the male/female sign</p> |
| <p>Seminars</p> | <p>My university has only just started realising diversity and inclusion is something which needs discussion. They have</p> | <p>Don't know</p> |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>only recently started running workshops and organising support groups, so it's hard to say what need improvement at this stage.</p> <p>Communication (on any topic) has always been a problem at our institution, so I hope the enthusiasm for diversity and inclusion awareness continues.</p> | |
| Act fast | Good as it is | <p>Universities are institutionally biased against all minorities and most only pay lip service to diversity and inclusion. Mine is one of the better behaved ones, but it's still terrible. As a disabled person I believe they still have a long way to go as they only really started promoting disability inclusion (events, awareness weeks etc) in the past year or two.</p> |
| Better communicate official diversity and equality strategy of the | better ads and inclusive language, make pronouns on emails mandatory, | not having a president who says in an email forwarded to all the university that he will not |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>University in the different faculties and University units.</p> | <p>support more causes relevant to LGBTQ+</p> | <p>respond to any email writing inclusively...</p> |
| <p>Introduce rules related to diversity and inclusion.</p> | <p>Having all relevant staff read and check students' disability profiles so accessibility doesn't have to be fought for by disabled students, and to improve their knowledge on students' disabilities and appropriate language. Answering questions directly, or giving an account of the progress of the query (eg who it was referred to). Not assuming all students are cisgender and straight, eg not assuming and talking as if we all have common (cis/het) experiences.</p> | <p>Be clear on the approach the institution would like to have on the issues in official documents, organize workshops/seminars on diversity+inclusion</p> |
| <p>Raising awareness, helping and protecting the students and listening to them A more structured communication. This should be improved through the actions included in the Gender</p> | <p>More documents available on the public website and in English, but it is improving.</p> | <p>More publicity</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Equality Plan presented this year | | |
| Clearer and more prominent communication is needed | establish a gender equality policy | Let people know if there is a committee for inclusive communication. If there isn't it'd time to set it up |
| A lot, but I don't know what | Use they/them; train students and teachers in including everyone, also underprivileged and marginalized, in discussions and activities | They should position themselves more publicly regarding LGBTQ+ issues and issues of race and, gender and social class. Being supportive is more meaningful if the university openly opposes discrimination. |
| a gender plan and diversity plan | Organise more specific events to change more effectively people' minds on this. | Take a more active role in organizing events and spreading this information effectively |
| A multilingual website and more support in all areas behind voluntary position and gender balance | A lot | more representation inside the institution |
| Be more involved in related external initiatives and not just live in its own little world | communicate about it to start off.... | How they use pronouns in official communications |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Organizing courses and events | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|

Table 6- Survey participants answer to item 36 about how their institutions can improve their communication on diversity and inclusion

CONCLUSIONS

This research was designed as an exploratory study of a topic that we think needs more attention from both sociology and communication fields. Diversity and inclusion are becoming more and more important for younger generations and present and future higher education institutions students and staff in Europe and beyond. No institutional communication plan can ignore the dimensions of diversity and inclusion in their strategy and communication products.

Also, there is a discrepancy between the European policies on students and researchers' mobility and the uneven awareness shown by different EU countries' institutions on the issue of diversity and inclusion. Lack of clear institutional guidelines and policies to foster inclusion may be an obstacle for some social minority groups, resulting in an effective discrimination against specific groups (e.g. transgender people).

Through the qualitative interviews we were able to listen to the voices of different people from different countries, age, background, position and gender. We tried to cover as many social categories as possible, not limiting our choice to LGBTQ+ people. This is because diversity in a group is not made only by minorities, but also the majority group should be considered and be an active part of the institutional actions to foster inclusion. As we saw, for example, in interviews 6 and 18, when the communication on diversity and inclusion is integrated in the general flow of institutional communication it reaches all the people in the institution, despite them belonging to a social minority or majority group.

Effective communication is based on clarity. Diversity and inclusion are two different terms that are often used together and for this reason their meaning is often overlapping in people's mind. Corporations realised that diversity is an added value to their workforce by the first half of the last century, but they also understood that diversity alone is not enough. Fruitful coexistence of different social groups needs an active institutional presence. Institutions should provide a neutral ground for inter-group negotiations. Where the presence of the institution is solid but not invasive, the interviewees noticed that the communication initiatives are more effective. In general, there is a rising awareness in Europe towards diversity and inclusion issue, and

particularly LGBTQ+ issue, and higher education institutions are slowly understanding that they need to deal with this in their policy and communication. In some cases this triggers strong drawback from more conservative people, but in general there was a slow but constant progress towards a more inclusive studying and research environment in the last few years.

Data from interviews and questionnaire show that people are hungry for information and statistics. They ask their institution to be transparent on their policies and on the effect of their actions to foster inclusion. Only very few institutions have public record of incidents of discrimination and harassment that happened in their premises and even less higher education institution monitor and share the results of their initiatives, campaigns, workshops and other events on the topic of diversity and inclusion.

Erasmus+ students, PhD and researchers ask for information on the policies on diversity and inclusion in foreign countries and institutions. This information is not present in the Erasmus+ information kit, which is usually far than exhaustive, even if they can make the difference for a person to choose to go or not to go to a specific institution. This is a very subtle form of discrimination, since officially nobody prevents anybody to go anywhere, but when it comes to real life the truth is that some people cannot access to certain key steps for their career.

Another thing that is not enough considered by institutions is the weight of minority stress. As said during the qualitative interviews, this burden is particularly heavy on the shoulders of students and early-stage researchers, since they are in a position in which they have no or very little decisional power. In cases in which institutions are not prepared to face issues related to diversity and inclusion, they tend to delegate it to the members of the minority group themselves. Even if LGBTQ+ interviewees agreed that it is good to give space for the member of the social minorities to speak for themselves, they also ask their institution to provide a frame in which they can safely speak about their experience. It is very clearly explained by Susanna when she talked about one of her colleagues educating her classmates on the problematic of a deaf person: the intention of the professors who asked the girl to do that were very good, but also came out of the blue, with no preparation whatsoever. Once, again, the weight of the institutional presence is important to protect minority group members, give them a safe

space to talk and be sure that their efforts are followed by real actions and institutional policies.

A greater support from the institutions is requested not only by students and early stages researchers, but also by professors and admin personnel. This is clearly visible from the positive reaction to the idea of diversity training courses specifically organised for professors and admin staff: according to our questionnaire, these training courses are seen as something positive despite people institutional position or age. The interviewees coming from countries in which those courses are already organised by their institution raised the issue of people not attending them because they are not mandatory. People working in the higher education institutions are usually overwhelmed by lessons, meetings and other bureaucratic issues and if they tend to not go to extra courses or workshops unless they are directly involved in the topic. That's why, according to our interviewees, the final result is that those who attend diversity and inclusion training courses are the same people that are already interested and educated on this topic. In our questionnaire we asked for survey participant's opinion about making these courses mandatory and even if the reactions were less positive than those for the generic organisation of diversity and inclusion training course, there was a general consent on that.

There is a problem of communication between higher research institutions and the many groups that belongs to them: students, staff, professors etc. The entity of this problem varies according to country and size of the institution. Bigger institutions face problems related to their department and faculties being dispersed on a big territory. In some cases students have no physical place to group together in their institution premises.

According to the questionnaire results the main institutional communication channels for advertising diversity and inclusion initiatives are the websites, email and Facebook official institutional account. The problem is that institutional websites are sometimes not easy to navigate, the information are not clear and easy to reach and often there are not contacts you can call or email for better information. Facebook is a social media that is scarcely populated by young people, such as the bachelor and master's students, so it is not very effective in reaching this target audience that is more, for example, on Instagram. Institutions should invest both in improving both broad

communication channels, such as their websites and emails, and in developing and differentiate their communication channels according to the audience they want to reach (e.g. using Facebook to advertise events for professors and Instagram to advertise events for students).

Inclusive language is something that is slowly becoming part of the communication routine in most higher education institutions, even if it is still a debated issue. But if the need for women not to be erased in institutional communication is understood by the majority of people in higher education institutions, the need for a neutral language that is inclusive also of people belonging to non- binary gender identities is still not understood by the majority of people. There are two main problems related to the implementation of a neutral language in institutional communication: the first one is that people do not understand why they need to consider something else rather than “men” and “women” since “there are only two genders”. The second problem affects all gendered languages (that are the majority of languages in Europe) that do not have any true and easily implementable neutral solution. For this reason, most of the proposed solutions (e.g. schwa, asterisk) are perceived as impractical, ugly and hard to use in spoken language. These solutions are slightly more accepted in written communication products and some institutions are starting to use them in some of their communication, even if they are not standard in institutional communication products.

Among the LGBTQ+ community, transgender people face extra issues because of their appearance not matching with their assigned at birth gender. Even if the majority of the questionnaire participants agree that higher education institutions should guarantee transgender people to be called by their institutions with their chosen name and gender, the institutions that give this opportunity and properly advertise it are very few.

Positive initiatives

Europe explicitly asks higher education institutions to be more inclusive. Several higher education institutions in different countries are trying to answer this call even if there is not shared protocol across Europe. However, there are good initiatives that have the potential to change things if they are properly implemented and advertised.

1- Equality charters

Two well-established programs in the UK are the Athena Swann⁵⁰ and the Stonewall programs. They work following the footsteps of equality certifications for corporations in the private sector: these companies act as guarantors that some standards of equality and inclusion are respected. Athena Swann focuses on gender equality and gender balance, while Stonewall is about LGBTQ+ people.

The Athena Swan Charter is a framework established in 2005 that aims to support and transform gender equality within higher education and research. It is based on ten key principles: the acknowledgment that academia must benefit from all its talents, the need to reach gender equality, the commitment to address unequal gender expression in academia, the need to fill the gender pay gap, the need to remove obstacles in women career development, the commitment to address the negative effects of short-term contracts for the retention and progression of staff in academia, to tackle the discriminatory treatment experienced by trans people, the acknowledgment that reaching gender equality needs commitment and action from all levels of the organisation and particularly from the leadership positions, the commitment to the creation of a mainstream, sustainable structural and cultural change to advance gender equality, the commitment to an intersectional approach.

Universities and other institutions that join the Athena Swann Charter are committed to adopt these 10 principles and implement them in their policies, practice, action plans and of course communication.

⁵⁰ Athena Swann Charter, <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter>

Even if this system is quite widespread all over the UK, there are some criticisms to it. For what concerns the Athena Swann, people complaints mostly about the fact that most of the extra- work that needs to be done in terms of data collection, monitoring and reported lays on the shoulders of the women, piling up un top of their other tasks.

The Race Equality Charter⁵¹ is based on the same mechanism of the Athena Swann one but tackles issues related to Asian, Black and Ethnic minority students and staff members. Institutions committed in race equality can join the Race Equality Charter and follow its five guiding principles: the acknowledgment of the big weight of racial inequalities within higher education, the acknowledgement that UK education cannot reach its full potential unless all individual are free to equally benefits from the opportunities offered by the higher education system, the commitment to achieve long-term institutional culture change, the acknowledgment that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and students are not an homogeneous group and their different background and experience should be considered in institutional policies, the adoption of an intersectional approach that consider individuals multiple identities.

Stonewall Equality Charter ⁵²focuses on the creation of inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ people through the Diversity Champions program. This program is about ensuring that LGBTQ+ staff are free to be themselves in the workplace and is joined by over than 850 organisations across the UK.

Stonewall Diversity Champion program helps organisations to develop structured and systematic policies and practices to foster LGBTQ+ people inclusion. The Workplace Equality Index and the Global Workplace Equality Index are designed to highlight the strengths and weakness of the organisations in terms of LGBTQ+ people inclusion. Stonewall program will provide help to the organisation to reach the best possible level of LGBTQ+ people inclusion.

⁵¹ Race equality Charter, <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter>

⁵² <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-champions-programme>

The organisations that choose to join the Diversity Champion program have several advantages, such as the fact that they will be able to attract and retain the best talents and building a solid, positive reputation.

Reputation is becoming more and more important for Higher education institutions, also because of the branding process. New generations, as highlighted by Antonio Messina during his interview, are very sensible on the topic of inclusion and an institutions that has a valid policy and a good communication plan on that can have a great advantages on other institutions. As Antonio Messina said:

It is all about the brand. Nowadays, people are very sensitive about issues of diversity and inclusion. Young people, before applying for a position, want to know more about the inclusion policies of their future workplace. If a corporation wants to attract the best people, they need to take this into account.

The screenshot shows the Brighton University website header and a row of award logos. The header includes navigation tabs for 'STUDY', 'RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE', and 'GUIDE', along with a search bar. Below the header, there are three columns of text: 'GENEROSITY OF OTHERS', 'DEVELOPMENT PLAN', and 'GUIDE'. A row of award logos follows, including Athena Swann Silver Award, Race Equality Charter Bronze Award, Stonewall Top 100 Employer 2019, disability confident Employer, 1st University League 2019, and Customer Service Excellence CSE. Below the logos is a 'COVID-19 UPDATE' section with contact information and a link to read more. At the bottom, there are social media icons and navigation links for 'QUICK LINKS' and 'INFORMATION FOR'.

Figure 70- Examples of Athena Swann, Stonewall and other equality charters labels on the Brighton university (UK) website

2- Institutional bodies on diversity and inclusion

Several European countries have specific bureaus in their higher education institutions to deal with diversity and inclusion issues. These institutional bodies are different for

each European countries and in some cases only deal with gender equality issues, while other times they also tackle gender and diversity issues.

In Italy, the CUG (Comitato Unico di Garanzia) was created in 2010 by the government to prevent discrimination in the public administration and in public education at every level. GUGs are very active on gender equality issues but they rarely address other discrimination problems, such as the one based on race, sexual orientation or gender identity. CUGs are present in every University and they produce a document, every three years, called PAP -Piano di Azioni Positive (positive action plan). While in some universities CUGs are very active, in other their presence is almost effectless. For example, most of the Italian people involved in the qualitative interviews had no idea about the existence of the CUGs, even if those who belongs to social minority groups.

Usually, CUGs activities are advertised on the University webpage but in most cases the CUG section is very poor of information. A positive example of a CUG page on an institutional website is the SISSA one, in which there are plenty of information on CUG and its activities and it is also possible to download informative leaflets and guidelines.

The screenshot displays the SISSA CUG website. At the top, a breadcrumb trail reads: Home » About » General organization » CUG. The main header features the text 'News' and 'Older News' on the left, and 'CUG' in a large font on the right. Below the 'News' section, a list of recent articles is shown, including dates and titles such as '03 June 2021 | Roundtable on "Picture a Scientist"', '26 May 2021 | Scienza e Discriminazione', and '08 March 2021 | March 8, International Women's Day: tribute to Cecilia Payne'. The right side of the page contains a vertical navigation menu with blue background and white text, listing various topics: 'What is CUG', 'Who is CUG', 'The SISSA wellbeing network', 'At glance', 'SISSA actions for the for the reconciliation of professional and family lives', 'Regulations', 'Codes of conducts', 'Unconscious bias', 'Gender balance and language', 'Gender equality plan', 'CUG documents', 'Events supported', 'More documents', and 'Links'. At the bottom of the page, there are social media icons for Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, and Twitter, along with a yellow button featuring a document icon.

Figure 71- The CUG webpage of the SISSA (Trieste, Italy)

The University of Rome “La Sapienza” took a step forward and in 2021 created the CTS- Comitato Tecnico Scientifico (Technical and Scientific Committee) to tackle all form of discrimination in their university, following what has already been done by other universities in Italy.

The CTS put together several professors coming from different background, from psychology to economy. This choice was made so that every member of the CTS can offer their own expertise to tackle a specific form of discrimination. This system has a great potential, especially when it comes to big institutions like the University of Rome “La Sapienza”. Another good initiative the CTS made was to incorporate also students in its committee. Such structure will help the communication between students, staff and professors and hopefully will help the voice of the students to reach the CTS. On the other hand, there is a huge disparity between the number of students, just two, and the number of professors/ staff: 17 people. Since there are only two students in the committee, they cannot successfully represent the diversity that is present among the university students at “La Sapienza”.

The CTS has several initiatives planned, from surveys to understand better the composition of the students to the development of applications that can help tracking and removing architectural barrier or increase students’ safety in the University premises. Unfortunately, none of these initiatives is advertised on the CTS webpage⁵³. The web page about the CTS future activities is very vague, with no practical examples of what they are going to do and no schedules or deadlines: the overall impression is that the good intentions are never going to be implemented. This may not be the case, but it is the message given by their communication. Also, the English version of the page is not available, so that only Italian speakers can understand it⁵⁴. Another problem is that the link to the “Sapienza inclusiva”⁵⁵ (inclusive Sapienza) where the

⁵³ CTS page on University of Rome “La Sapienza” website, <https://www.uniroma1.it/it/pagina/il-programma-di-lavoro-del-comitato-la-diversita-e-linclusionione>

⁵⁴ CTS program to foster diversity and inclusion, <https://www.uniroma1.it/en/pagina/il-programma-di-lavoro-del-comitato-la-diversita-e-linclusionione>

⁵⁵ CTS page on University of Rome “La Sapienza” website, <https://www.uniroma1.it/it/pagina/il-programma-di-lavoro-del-comitato-la-diversita-e-linclusionione>

CTS and its initiatives are advertised, is present only on the Italian version of the CUG page on the university website.

Communication is definitely the weak point of the CTS initiative. If we look at the answers we collect from our survey, people mostly agree on the fact that integrating diversity and inclusion in everyday communication is more effective than making a big event once a year. The CTS organised a very nice online event for the international day against omolebbitransphobia in 2021, but none of the students we talked to knew about it because it was very poorly advertised. Moreover, none of the students we talked to during our research knew about the existence of the CTS. This can be an effect of the restricted sample of people we contacted, but it is a significant data that also people that are very active in students' collectives on diversity and inclusion don't know anything about this initiative.



Home / Il programma di lavoro del Comitato per la diversità e l'inclusione

Il programma di lavoro del Comitato per la diversità e l'inclusione

Il Comitato tecnico-scientifico sulla Diversità e l'Inclusione è costituito da docenti, studenti e personale tecnico-amministrativo ed opera per favorire i **processi di inclusione e contrastare ogni forma di discriminazione, diretta o indiretta**, all'interno dell'Ateneo.

Finalità e attività del CTS sono coordinate con **gli altri organi dell'Ateneo operanti in ambiti analoghi** come il Comitato Unico di Garanzia, la Consigliera di Fiducia, il Comitato tecnico-scientifico per la Sostenibilità per realizzare **piani strategici** ed iniziative volte a valorizzare le potenzialità dei singoli individui, a sostenere parità ed integrazione, a promuovere la collaborazione e la creazione di nuovi network, sia interni che esterni, per favorire politiche per l'inclusione.

Nel suo primo programma di lavoro il CTS ha definito le **seguenti tipologie di attività**:

- Ascolto: organizzazione momenti di ascolto e confronto con rappresentanti di altri organismi/gruppi/responsabilità (audizioni interne)
- Elaborazione di proposte a partire da ipotesi di iniziative maturate nei sottogruppi
- Condivisione e sintesi: scelta collettiva delle iniziative da avviare e delle loro priorità
- Elaborazione di proposte esterne con riferimento alla Rettore e alla Governance dell'Ateneo
- Elaborazione di proposte alla Comunità accademica ed eventualmente ai media con eventi pubblici fisici o virtuali.

Linee programmatiche delle attività del CTS sviluppate attraverso il lavoro di appositi sottogruppi sono i seguenti:

- mappatura delle percezioni degli studenti su diverse aree di possibile discriminazione, sugli effetti sul benessere percepito, sulla conoscenza dei servizi e delle iniziative di Sapienza per l'inclusione
- individuazione e intervento sulle barriere architettoniche
- promozione di un linguaggio e una comunicazione non ostile

Links
[Sapienza inclusiva](#)
[Comitato per la diversità e l'inclusione](#)

Figure 73- CTS program web page (displayed in Italian even after selecting the English language option)

Also, CTS page doesn't have any contact on it, just the list of the members' names so that there is no way for a person to contact them unless they look for the email address of each person through the university website.

This is one example of a potentially good initiative that risks failing because of the lack of communication and organisation. There is time to improve, since this committee only exists from a bit more than one year, but if no efforts were made to improve communication, particularly towards the students, the risk is that it will be perceived just as another "marketing" operation from the university.


3- Don't forget about the staff!

While students and early-stage researchers are identified as the more fragile people and therefore need more protection against discrimination and more institutional efforts to ensure them safety and freedom of being themselves, also researchers, admin staff and professors or equivalents need attention.

Lots of groups and initiatives on diversity and inclusion are for students only, but also the other institution's members need support as well. For example, the University of Bristol (UK) has a very active diversity and inclusion program and a dedicated webpage on their university website⁵⁶.

University of Bristol diversity and inclusion program is not flawless, starting from their answers being very slow because of their team being understaffed respect to the number of people that contacts them, but when you look at their equality, diversity and inclusion webpage you can tell that they are trying to transmit that these are three things they are trying to achieve for real. The pages display strong, unambiguous statements on the institutional position about diversity and inclusion issues and there are plenty of sections clearly organised to help the people in their research for information.

⁵⁶ Web page on staff diversity and inclusion, on the University of Bristol website, <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/inclusion/>



Equality Diversity Inclusion


Current students Current staff Alumni

 search

Equality Diversity Inclusion 🏠

- Governance, Policy, and Guidance
- EDI News
- Bristol Counts
- New Staff
- Diversify Your Workforce
- Staff Networks
- LGBT+**
- ↳ Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion
- ↳ LGBT+ Events
- ↳ LGBT+ Stories
- ↳ LGBT+ Active Allies Programme
- ↳ Stonewall Diversity Champions
- ↳ LGBT+ Inclusivity Steering Group
- Gender
- Race
- Disability
- Parents and carers

LGBT+



LGBT+ people form an integral part of our University community. We aspire to a fully inclusive culture where staff feel able to be themselves in the workplace.

LGBT+ Equality Initiatives

- + [Stonewall Diversity Champions](#)
- + [Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion](#)
- + [LGBT+ Supporters Programme](#)
- + [Bristol Pride](#)
- + [Lanyards Campaign](#)

LGBT+ Staff Network

A social and supportive group for LGBT+ Staff.

LGBT+ Events


View our upcoming and past LGBT+ events, including Pride and LGBT+ History Month celebrations.

LGBT+ Stories

Read the stories and experiences of LGBT+ staff at the University of Bristol.

LGBT+ Glossary of Terms

A brief guide to common terms used in writing about LGBT+ communities and subjects.



Equality Diversity Inclusion

Current students Current staff Alumni

 search

Equality Diversity Inclusion 🏠

- Governance, Policy, and Guidance
- EDI News
- Bristol Counts
- New Staff
- Diversify Your Workforce
- Staff Networks
- LGBT+
- Gender
- Race
- Disability
- Parents and carers
- Childlessness
- Intersectionality
- Stand Up Speak Out
- Learning & Development




Staff Inclusion




Bristol Counts

Help us to understand the makeup of our staff community


Update your personal details on MyERP

We aspire to a fully inclusive culture. We value the diversity of thought, belief and background in our community that enables the University to be effective at challenging accepted norms and resilient in the face of continual change.

Tweets by @UoBrisEDI



Nov 30, 2021

University of Bristol Staff Inclusion Team Retweeted

Bristol Pride @BristolPride

Ahead of this year's #WorldAIDSDay, our friends @BigstowInfo have planned a series of events that begin today, with the red ribbon flag being raised by @MarvinRees at City Hall.

Take a look at what's planned this week bit.ly/30j8JXj

[Embed](#) [View on Twitter](#)

Figure 74- Equality, diversity and inclusion web pages on Univeristy of Bristol university website

4- Next steps

This study is far than being exhausted, but we get some very positive feedback from people involved in both the qualitative and quantitative surveys. We received quite a few request for our data and results to be shared through the same channels we use to spread the questionnaire (e.g. the Euraxess network).

Diversity and inclusion, institutional communication and United Europe are three hot topics in our time and their interaction should be studied in depth.

From our experience, we think that mapping the situation on diversity and inclusion in European higher research institutions is a necessary step to plan any European action in the area of EHEA. We focused on LGBTQ+ community issue, but similar researches should be done for each social minority group.

One of the major strengths of the European Union is the free circulation of people and ideas. On one hand the EU should guarantee this freedom to all its citizens, despite them belonging to a social minority or not. On the other hand, being able to freely move across Europe helps people to see different realities, different ways to do things. There is no need for us to invent the wheel over and over again: we can look at each other to see what solution worked and what didn't.

Information on diversity and inclusion policies in foreign higher education institutions should be added to the Erasmus+ information kit, because otherwise students from specific minority groups may end up in difficult situations they are not prepared to deal with.

A systematic study of the most successful communication initiatives on diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions is needed, so that a good practices and guidelines documents can be created. We are aware that each country, each institution is different and there is no universal receipt to fix every problem, but this isn't a good excuse to don't look at what others are doing well and be inspired by them.

We wish that this project does not end with this thesis. More stories need to be told more connections among people have to be made.

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

I really want to say thanks to Leo Brattoli, the supervisor of this thesis, for accepting to take this journey with me. He is a person of rare kindness that never let me down, trusted me and my idea and helped me to go successfully go through it.

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ANNEX I – Glossary

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Lesbian | Women who are primarily or exclusively attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other women. |
| Agender | A person who doesn't identify in any gender. |
| Ally | From a Latin verb meaning "to bind to". It is a word used to define someone who supports disenfranchised and underrepresented groups of people within their own country. |
| Aromantic | Sometimes abbreviated to "aro". People who experience little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behaviour. Aromanticism exists on a continuum from the lack of romantic attraction to low level of it. Many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (e.g. demiromantic). |
| Asexual | Sometime abbreviated to "ace". People who experience little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behaviour. Asexuality exists on a continuum from people who experience no sexual attraction, to those who experience low levels, or sexual attraction only under specific conditions. Many of these different places on the continuum have their own identity labels (e.g. demisexual). |
| Bisexual | A person who experiences attraction to some people of their gender and another gender. Bisexual attraction does not have to be equally split, across the genders an individual may be attracted to. |
| Cisgender | Sometimes shortened into "cis". A person whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, and identifies as a man). |
| Cisnormativity | The assumption, in individuals and in institutions, that everyone is cisgender and that being cisgender is intrinsically better than being trans*. |

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| Closeted | A person who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) sexuality or gender identity. Also known as being “in the closet.” |
| Coming out | The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one’s own sexuality or gender identity (to “come out” to oneself) and share it with others. |
| Sex assigned at birth (SAAB) | Intentionally recognize a person’s assigned sex (not gender identity). Sometimes specifically used as “assigned male at birth” (AMAB) or “assigned female at birth” (AFAB). |
| FtM / F2M; MtF / M2F | Female-to-male transgender person; male-to-female transgender or transsexual person. |
| Gay | Experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of the same gender. Can be used to refer to men who are attracted to other men and women who are attracted to women. In some case it is used as an umbrella term for the whole LGBTQ+ community. |
| Gender expression | The external display of one’s gender, through a combination of clothing, grooming, demeanour, social behaviour, and other factors. |
| Gender-fluid | A gender identity that is a dynamic mix of men and women. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, or they may feel more man some days, and more woman other days. |
| Genderqueer | A gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman. Often used as an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary identities. |
| Heteronormativity | The assumption, in individuals and/or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual and that this condition is superior to all other sexualities. It also leads us to assume that only masculine men and feminine women are straight. |
| Heterosexual | Experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of a different gender. |
| Homosexual | Person who is sexually attracted to people of one's own gender. |

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| Intersex | Person, animal, or plant having male and female reproductive organs, or in which the chromosomal patterns do not fall under typical definitions of male and female. |
| Kink | A slang term to describe bizarre or unconventional sexual preferences or behaviour. |
| Non- binary | Person whose gender identity does not fit into the binary male/female division. |
| Outing | Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status. |
| Pansexual | A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for people despite their gender. |
| Passing | Trans* people being accepted as, or able to "pass for," a member of their self-identified gender identity without being identified as trans*. |
| PGPs | Preferred Gender Pronouns. Often used during introductions, becoming more common as a standard practice. Many suggest removing the "preferred," because it indicates flexibility and/or the power for the speaker to decide which pronouns to use for someone else. |
| Plus | The plus sign symbolizes other gender or sexual identities that are not already included in the LGBTQ acronym, such as pansexual or gender-fluid. |
| Polyamory | Ethical, honest, and consensual non-monogamous relationships Often shortened to "poly." |
| Pride | Celebration of a specific minority group and affirmation of equal rights for members of that community: |
| Queer | An umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight and/or cisgender. In the past was a slur used to refer to someone who isn't straight and/or cisgender. |
| Questioning | An individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity. |

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| Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) | Group of surgical options that alter a person's biological sex. "Gender confirmation surgery" is considered by many to be a more affirming term. In most cases, one or multiple surgeries are required to achieve legal recognition of gender variance. |
| Sexual orientation | The type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others. |
| Stealth | A trans person who is not "out" as trans and is perceived/known by others as cisgender. |
| Third gender | Person who does not identify with either man or woman but identifies with another gender. This gender category is used by societies that recognise three or more genders. |
| Trans* | An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially-defined gender norms. Trans with an asterisk is often used in written forms (not spoken) to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term, and specifically including non-binary identities. |
| Transgender | noting or relating to a person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person's sex assigned at birth. |
| Transition Transitioning | Referring to the process of a transgender person changing aspects of themselves to be more congruent with the gender they know themselves to be. |
| Transphobia | Discrimination against, or hatred of trans* people, the trans* community, or gender ambiguity. Transphobia can be seen within the queer community, as well as in general society. |
| Tanssexual | Almost not used anymore in the Trans* community for its negative connotation, this term describes a person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth and wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex. |

The main source used in this glossary are: <https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/> and <https://www.dictionary.com/e/lgbtq-terms/>

ANNEX II – Qualitative interview structure

| |
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| Semi- structured qualitative interviews questions: |
| |
| Background and demographic questions |
| 1) Can you briefly tell me about your university career? Which universities you attended and in which country? |
| 2) What is your current position? In which Country are you currently based? |
| |
| Awareness on diversity and inclusion |
| 3) Can you give me a short definition of diversity? |
| 4) What's your definition of inclusion? |
| 5) What do you think of neutral language? Do you think institutions should try to implement it in their communication? |
| 6) What do you think of people putting their pronouns in their signature/ bio/ web pages etc? Do you do it? |
| |
| Institutions environment and policies on diversity and inclusion |
| 7) Do you think that institutional communication can have a role in building a more inclusive environment? |
| 8) Do you think that the increased mobility of students and staff influenced how diversity and inclusion is discussed and managed in universities/ research centres? |
| 9) Do you think that there is a stage in which it is more important to have a dedicate communication towards LGBTQ+ people (students, PhD, staff etc). |
| 10) Do you ever felt that some product of institutional communication was tailored on you and your experience and was speaking directly to you? If yes when? |

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| 11)How can institutions let people know about their policies on diversity or inclusion? Which tools do you think that are more effective? |
| 12)Is your institution using any of them? If yes, can you give an example? |
| 13)What do you think about universities/ research centres officially joining pride? |
| 14)What do you think about organising diversity training for professors, staff and admin personal? Is your university/ research centre doing them? Are they useful? |
| 15) What do you think about diversity and inclusion programmes such as Stonewall or Athena Swann? |
| 16)Do you know if in your institution is it possible for a transgender student to have an alias career before they legally change their name? |
| 17)Do you know if there is a referent you can report episodes of discrimination/ harassment? Do you know how to contact them? Will you feel safe to contact them if needed? |
| 18) What do you think about university groups open only to a certain minority (LGBTQ+ groups, religious groups etc)? |
| 19)Did you notice if your university/ research institution uses both feminine and masculine in their official communication? |
| 20) Did you notice if any of your professor/ other researchers put their pronouns in their signature? Do you know why they do it? |
| 21)Were you ever invited to take part of a survey from your university/ research centre on diversity and inclusion issues? |

22) Do you know if there is any group/activity organised by the university/ research centre specifically targeting LGBTQ+ people (groups, informative day, helpdesk etc)?

23) If you ever attended any official event on diversity and inclusion organised by your university, have you ever been asked to leave feedback after?

24) Do you think that your university/ research centre must share the outcome of their diversity and inclusion initiatives (number of participants, impact measures etc)? Do you think that they must share them even when they are negative?

ANNEX III – Questionnaire items

| Diversity and inclusion in institutional communication | |
|--|--|
| 1- Country of origin | Open answer |
| 2- Country you currently live in | Open answer |
| 3- Gender Identity | (cisgender, transgender, agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, non binary, other (please specify)) |
| 4- Age | (18- 21, 22- 24, 25- 27, 28- 30, 31- 40, 41- 50, >50) |
| 5- Sexual orientation | (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, other (please specify)) |
| 6- If you belong to any other social minority groups (e.g. because of your gender, religion, disability, neurodiversity etc) list them here: | Open answer |
| 7- The institution you currently belong to is: | University/ Research Centre/ Museum/ Other (please specify) |
| 8- Your current position in your institution is: | (Bachelor student, Master student, PhD student, Postdoc/ researcher, assistant professor (or equivalent), full professor (or equivalent), admin staff, other (please specify)) |
| 9- Within one year, how many events (seminars, webinars, talks, shows etc) on diversity and inclusion does your institution organise? | (0, 1- 5, 6- 10, >10) |
| 10-Diversity and inclusion events organised by my institution are advertised through: | (email, website, newsletter, facebook, instagram, twitter, leaflets, word-of-mouth, don't know/doesn't apply, other (please specify)) |

| | |
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| 11-Diversity and inclusion organised by my institution are properly advertised: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 12-After attending an event on diversity and inclusion organised by my institution, they ask for my feedback: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 13-Students are actively involved in planning/ organisation/ realisation of institutional diversity and inclusion initiatives: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 14-I have participated in surveys (e.g. interview, questionnaire, etc) from my institution on diversity and inclusion at least once: | (yes, no, don't know/ doesn't apply) |
| 15-There are clear institutional communication guidelines on diversity and inclusion for employees: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 16-My institution is really committed to diversity and inclusion issues and I can trust their equality policies: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 17-My institution should organise training courses on diversity and inclusion for professors and admin staff: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 18-Diversity and inclusion training courses for professors and admin personnel should be mandatory: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 19-My institution should officially support and join events such as the Pride march: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |

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| 20-In my department/ faculty/ class/ team there is an equal number of men and women: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 21-The amount of LGBTQ+ people in my institution is higher than the average of other social contexts in my county: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 22-It is important for institutions to use both masculine and feminine nouns in their official communication (for gendered languages): | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 23-My institution uses both feminine and masculine nouns in official communication (for gendered languages): | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 24-I think that putting your pronouns in your email signature is a good practice: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 25-I think that institutions should use neutral language (they/them, *, Θ), in their official communication: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 26-My institution uses neutral languages (they/them, *, Θ) in its official communication: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 27-I can easily obtain the information I need from my institution: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 28-In my institution it is easy to get the contacts (email, phone numbers, addresses) or the admin office I need: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |

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| 29-I know who to contact in my institution for issues around discrimination: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 30-In my institution admin personnel speak English and are able to interact with foreign students/ researchers/ professors: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 31-I think that every institution should have a public record of episodes of discrimination/ harassment: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 32-My institution has a public record of episodes of discrimination/ harassment: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 33-Every institution should guarantee that transgender people are called with their chosen name and the gender they identify with: | (Strongly disagree, disagree, don't know/doesn't apply, agree, totally agree) |
| 34-In my institution it is possible for transgender people to change their details and institutional email etc. to the name and gender they identify with before they legally change this information: | (Yes, no, don't know/ doesn't apply) |
| 35-Leave us feedback on this survey: | Open answer |
| 36-Is there something your institution can do to improve their communication on diversity and inclusion? | Open answer |

ANNEX IV – Qualitative interviews transcriptions

| |
|---|
| 1* translated from Italian |
| Country of origin: Italy Institution's country: Germany Position: PhD student |
| <p>Q: can you tell me a bit about your academic career?</p> <p>A: I did my Bachelor and Master in an Italian university, I'm from Italy. I spent the first two years of my PhD in a Research Centre in and the third and last year in the US. The German Research Centre is a very friendly and safe environment, full of open- minded people. I never heard or saw anybody being discriminated against or physically assaulted because of being part of a minority group. I noticed that there were many people being openly LGBTQ+ and I never felt they were ashamed or afraid to be out. There were many examples of people who were openly LGBTQ+ occupying different positions at the research centre, from researchers to department leaders.</p> <p>Q: there were LGBTQ+ or specific activities on LGBTQ+ related topics in your research centre in Germany?</p> <p>A: I don't know if there were any LGBTQ+ group or any specific activity organised by the Research Centre, maybe there was something at the University nearby, which is a bigger place and has more students than the Research Centre, but I do not know for sure. I never received any institutional email or other communication about special activities on diversity and inclusion or special days such as the international day against homophobia and transphobia</p> <p>Q: where you able to identify other social minority groups in your Research Centre?</p> <p>A: I think that the main minority group at the Max Planck's institute was the LGBTQ+ group. I didn't notice any other minority group that was as big as the LGBTQ+ one. I don't think that there were minority groups related to race or ethnicity because the institute was full of people from different countries. Most people in the Research Centre are not from Germany. So instead of a few people belonging to some minority group there were lots of different people, each one with their own background.</p> <p>Q: what's the weight of institutional communication in shaping the environment of a Research Centre like the one you were in?</p> <p>A: I think that the way the research centres, and even more the universities, handles communication is very important, particularly if we consider intra- institutional communication and communication with students. It can really make a difference in making a person feel seen and appreciated. I didn't see much of that kind of communication at the Research Centre, but I think that this could be because it is a research centre and not a university. Probably there are more initiatives on that at the University nearby.</p> <p>Q: you said that a good communication can make a difference for the students. Do you think that there is a category that is more vulnerable in the academic environment?</p> |

A: Yes, the undergraduate students. I think that PhD students and researchers don't need as much attention in terms of diversity and inclusion as undergraduate students because the former already have a more established and secure positions, being in a more advanced stage of their career, while the latter are more vulnerable and need more protection from the institution.

Q: during your academic career, did you ever received a piece of institutional communication that you felt was really talking to you, to your experience?

A: No, there was never a moment in my career when I felt that some piece of institutional communication spoke directly to me as a member of a minority group, but it was never a problem because I was in a very friendly and safe environment, so I didn't feel the need for any special attention. As the place was full of people of different backgrounds, genders and sexualities there was no specific minority group that could have stood out. I never really felt "different" from other people.

Q: do you think that high education institutions, such as research centres, are influenced in their diversity and inclusion policies by the values and believes of the society they are surrounded by?

A: I think that universities are strongly influenced by the surrounding society in how they accept and handle diversity and foster inclusion. If a society is discriminatory the research centre/ university has the duty to actively support the members of the discriminated groups and offer a safe space. Universities in discriminatory societies should be more open and should care more for minorities than universities in more open- minded societies. Students spend most of their days at the university, so it is important that it is a safe environment for them.

Q: what's the best way for a research centre or a university to let people know about their policies on diversity and inclusion?

A: I think that one way is through a statement on their website (we wrote one when our research group moved to Harvard). This way a student can know about the university position before going there.

Q: there was a similar statement also on the German Research Centre website?

A: I can't remember if there was such a statement on their website.

Q: when you were a student in Italy, did you feel that the environment of your university was inclusive?

A: When I was a student in Italy, I was in a very inclusive group of friends and colleagues. I didn't really feel the University had any strong position regarding diversity and inclusion policies, but I didn't mind because my group of peers was diverse and inclusive. When I moved to Germany I didn't notice a big difference in the academic environment, but the approach to diversity and inclusion in German and Italian society are really different, so I noticed it more in everyday life.

Q: what do you think it is the meaning of "diversity and inclusion"?

A: For me the meaning of diversity is when you have a group of people with different backgrounds, culture and other traits. Inclusion means that all those differences have the same value and dignity and there aren't identities that are better than others.

Q: what's your opinion on high education institutions' organising workshops and seminars on diversity and inclusion?

A: I think that organising seminars, meetings etc in which you can talk and learn about different type of diversities is very useful and should be done not only in universities but also and especially during the early stages of education. Knowledge is necessary to understand diversity and to build inclusion. Information is never a bad thing.

Q: what's your opinion on university groups such as LGBTQ+ students' group?

The presence of official minority groups and associations is important to help people meet and connect in a safe space, but I think that they should never become exclusive or isolated from the rest of the people. For example, at the Research Centre there was a small group of French people who spent all the time among themselves and never really bonded with anybody else in the institute. The fact that they were always speaking in French discouraged any interaction with non- francophone people.

Q: what do you think about high education institutions officially joining events such as the Pride or the women's right march?

A: I think that is a good thing that universities and research groups join events such as the Pride wearing uniforms or showing their institution's logo because it would mean that their institution is actively supporting an inclusive event.

Q: do you know if it is possible for transgender people to be registered by the Research Centre with their chosen name and gender even if they haven't changed their documents yet?

A: I don't know if there is such a possibility at the Research Centre. I know that there is an officer who deals with students' problems, particularly if they have problems with their supervisors, and that you can be contacted via e-mail.

I think that people have the right to ask to be called by a different name or gender according to how they identify because it is our right to be called the way we want, and this right should be guaranteed to everybody. Even if making an effort means involves more time and money for universities, they have to do it because it is about people's rights and dignity. It isn't too much to ask and admin people should be trained on what to do in this case, especially when dealing with people coming from or going to a different university. It is necessary especially because bureaucracy can be an obstacle. Professors and admin staff should take diversity training courses.

Q: do you know if in the Research Centre there is someone you can talk to in case you are victim or witness episodes of discrimination?

A: I don't know if there is also someone who is specifically in charge of reporting incidence of discrimination etc. It is better to have more than one officer for discrimination issues and preferably these officers should be of different gender, religion etc. to give students a choice. Since some students since they can chose whoever they feel more comfortable with. Also, if there is only one officer and you do not like them or have a problem with them you may hesitate to report your issue at all, and if you do, they may not report it. At the same time, having too many people can result in organizational problems.

Q: what's your opinion on neutral language?

A: The Italian language has only two genders, male and female, and every word is male or female, so we have no real neutral options. Some people propose to use the star or the schwa. I agree with

that because we need a more neutral language since Italian is sexist and always privileges males over females. I don't think that using a schwa or a star instead of an "a" or an "o" is a big issue and it is totally worth the effort. At the same time, if someone is making an effort to use a more neutral language I don't think it is useful to put too much stress on any mistakes they may make. Of course, the situation is different if they are doing it on purpose to disrespect people.

Q: do you think that the EU policies on students and researchers' mobility influence the way high education institutions handle the diversity and inclusion issues?

I think the EU positively influenced diversity and inclusion because people from different countries with different views on life and society and if they can move around and share their experiences and values and get to know different ways of seeing the world and society. People moving from a more open minded country to a close minded one may trigger a change, but I think that when people from close- minded countries go to a more open minded countries are unlikely to change their own opinion. In any case, they do not travel very much. It is also important that these open-minded people form networks and I think that in this case the role of universities is of paramount importance in helping them do that. Universities should be more in contact with each other, have a dedicated section on their website and encourage people to visit other universities. For example, by providing a list of the universities with all the information for the students/ staff. It is also useful to state the universities' position regarding their inclusion policies towards specific minorities. It is important for the members of a minority group to know how safe a place is for them, and I don't think that it will impact more close- minded people since they don't usually like to move between countries.

Q: how can high education institutions become more inclusive?

To be more inclusive and to have a more inclusive image a university should organise diversity management and informative courses for students and staff and clearly advertise them on their website and other online channels. They also should ask for feedback on the impact of these initiatives and should monitor the results and make them accessible to everybody. I think that the results should be published even when they are negative since hiding information is never a good thing. Promoting diversity and inclusion is not enough if you do not measure the impact of your activities. You should never hide information in communication, as you shouldn't do it in science. You need to know that something doesn't work before you can fix it.

2* translated from Italian

Country of origin: Italy

Institution's country: Italy

Position: Master student

Q: can you tell me where did you study, which university did you attended and what are you doing now?

A: yes, I did my bachelor's and master in natural science in Italy and I'm currently doing a second master's in environmental engineering at a University in Italy.

Q: do you identify as a member of one or more than one social minority group?

A: I do not identify as a member of a minority group, but since I'm a woman I must face the fact that I'm more vulnerable to certain dangers because of how society is made. For example, I feel that I'm more at a risk of aggression. But I never felt discriminated or in danger at university.

Even if engineering is traditionally seen as more masculine topic, I found out that there are quite a few women in my master's class, probably because there are more women in environmental engineering and I never felt discriminated or out of place because of being a woman.

Q: what do you think that is the meaning of diversity?

A: I think that diversity is when someone is perceived as different from the expectation of society, but if you look closer everybody is unique and therefore different. We define someone different when we make a confrontation with normality, but normality disappear when we took the point of view of the other person. I think that an environment is inclusive when everybody can be themselves.

Q: and what's inclusion for you?

Being inclusive means negotiating a common ground and trying to see the things from other's people point of view, without thinking to have the only and absolute truth in your pocket.

Q: thinking about your university experience, do you feel that you were or are in an inclusive and diverse environment?

A: If I think about my experience during my Bachelor and my first Master I remember our department being particularly inclusive and I think that this was an exceptional situation respect to other courses in the same university. Me and my colleagues were a bunch of very diverse people, and we respected and included each other so that in the end there was no diverse people anymore, but just a set of unique individuals. Also, the professors were open- minded and students could dress and express themselves as they want. In this sense, I think that the work environment is way more discriminatory that the university one. For example, people with tattoos are heavily discriminated in the workplace, but no one cared at university.

Q: does your University implement some form of communication to foster diversity and inclusion?

I never noticed any form of institutional communication that directly aimed to improve diversity and inclusion, but I never noticed anything discriminatory either. I also must admit that I do not look to carefully to official communications from university. I'm always very busy and only look for the information I really need. I never had any problem with the admin personal, every time I need something they were kind and efficient.

Q: do you think that there are several minority groups at your University?

More than minority groups let's say that I noticed a lot of diverse people. I noticed a lot of individual variation because the environment was inclusive enough to let everybody express as they wanted.

I think that being in a very diverse group help us to grow and being more acceptant of diversities, I'm still in touch with lots of my colleagues from university. I'm a very shy person and university really helped me to open up and trust myself more. The fact that we were a small group and that all the students were motivated by passion and not by the idea of getting a good job or money helped us to create a non- competitive environment in which we could help and know each other. Another important thing is the fact that we did a lot of lab and field work together, and this helped forging

lasting bonds. Sleeping together in the same tent, walking in the forest, climbing mountains and seeing each other in different and sometimes challenging situations gave us a boost respect to other “more canonical faculties”.

Q: do you think that the increased mobility of students and researchers, fostered also by the EU policies, influence how higher education institutions approach the issue of diversity and inclusion?

A: yes, I think that it does. Us Italian historically have been one of the discriminated minorities if we think about all the migrants that left our country, I think that since we have never been a true colonialist country we have different issues than the US and the UK when we came to ethnicity. I think that seeing more diverse people, if we can really say that someone is “different”, will help us having a more open mind and changing our idea of “normality”. I think that being in contact with lot of different people helps pushing towards a more inclusive environment, even if then there could be individuals who don't like it or have adverse reactions. Recently we saw that many stuff that we thought we moved forward were still there, just slightly submerged and ready to come up again. We still hear a lot of horrible words and phrases that may seems superficial but reveal hidden prejudices. Despite of that, I think that students and researchers mobility can only bring people closer to each other.

Q: how do you think high research institutions should advertise their policies on diversity and inclusion?

A: The lack of discrimination should be the norm: universities and research centres should make a good advertisement of the services they offer and that are for everybody, despite of people's belonging to a specific social group. These advertising should be inclusive without showing being inclusive or it will become another form of discrimination. For example, there is no need to specify that everything is open to both women and man or to people from every country because I think that this is something obvious nowadays.

More than advertising inclusion, there should be real policies about it. For example, we should put more efforts in integrating migrants because they can be useful also for us (e.g. the Olympics games in which black athletes are usually stronger than the white ones). I think that inclusion can be good for people but also for the country. For our grandparents the world was much smaller than it is for us and they considered “strangers” even people from southern Italy.

Q: What do you think about a high education institution organising training courses for their professors and admin staff?

A: I think that training courses on diversity management for students, professors and admin staff are a very good idea. It is always good to let people know new things, bring them together etc. I think that we should start even earlier than university, for examples during the school years when people can be more discriminated, and they are more at risk of being bullied. I think that other than the classic school subject students should learn also about these things that are as important as the other topic.

Q: What do you think about university groups such as the LGBTQ+ students' group or the Muslim students group? Groups where students with the same background can gather together.

A: I think that university groups are not really important because they don't last long. I think that groups can become boundaries and can create more discrimination. I never belong to any group and I never saw them at uni, so this is just a generic thoughts. I don't think that groups are negative per se but I think that they can be useless or too much abstract. I think that if I did the university, for example, in Australia I probably would have joined a group of Italian student. Even in diversity there is diversity.

Q: What do you think about universities and other high education institutions officially joining events such as the pride or the women's right march?

A: I think that it is sad that some people must fight for what they should have for granted. It is sad to think that there are people who cannot live the life they want. I'm happy that there are events like the pride or the Fridays for future. I think that it is a good thing that universities take position and officially join events like pride, it also gives a good image of the university and a good message for students who want to join the university. I'm happy that the universities take a clear position.

Q: What is your opinion on the use of neutral language in official institutional communication?

A: Italian language has no neutral option, plus we tend to always use the masculine more than the feminine. I usually read the official communication from university very quickly, but I never find anything discriminatory, usually they are very clear and goes straight to the point. I know that recently there is the trend of using * at the end of the words, but I think that it is too much: we should be able to speak. I think that it is important to keep the language natural flow when we speak. Still, I think that we can do something also to improve the inclusivity of spoken language, for example using the double form male/female.

I think that declining female professionals using the male name of the profession is no big deal. As a woman, I do not feel discriminated. I think that there are more important topics to talk about and to fight for. If we are obsessed in removing taboo we are going to add more.

On social media I see a lot of discussions but very few concrete things, I don't think that all these people act in real life the same the say you should do on the social.

Q: Do you know if there is an ALIAS career for transgender students ate your university? It means that a transgender student can have their chosen name and gender on their badge, in the exam lists etc even if they haven't legally changed yet.

A: I don't know if there is an alias career in my university. Is it correct to say that someone is transgender even if they have completed all the surgeries? If you do not live something it is hard to understand or be informed.

Q: Yes, it is correct to call a transgender person "transgender" even after they have had any surgery they wanted to have.

A: I think that if I was transgender I would have asked for information at the admin office. I think that it will be possible to do it but I'm not sure. Maybe it is written on the website but I do not have time to read it because I'm studying and working so my time is very limited, but the website is not up to date so it may be not updated on that as well.

Italian, Master student in Italy, she/her, member of the LGBTQ+ community

Can you tell me about your academic career?

A: I'm a master student at the Academy in Italy. It is a separate institution than the University.

Do you feel that the Academy is a diverse and inclusive environment?

A: There is big queer group in our Academy and in my class most people are queer, but it isn't like that in all the classes. I think it depends on the course. The high school I attended before the Academy was very open towards queer people, but not as open as the Academy. Being in an environment full of queer people helped me to grow up as a person and made me understand more things about myself. Before university I perceived me being different as a negative thing but my group of peers at the Academy is made of people that are all different from each other and from the "average" person. We don't judge each other, and we are all free to express ourselves. Now I live my diversity with the knowledge that that we are all different.

Q: When do you think that an environment is inclusive?

A: I will describe an environment as "inclusive" when people listen to each other and they are able to build empathetic relationships. Institutions need to put more effort in building inclusion, it doesn't happen by chance.

Q: How can the students from the Academy communicate with their institution? There are some direct channels?

A: No, no specific channels. For us students it is very difficult to talk to the Academy authorities. We do a lot of talks, workshops and activities on diversity and inclusion and related issues, but they stay among us students and never reach the Academy officials. We need dialogue because if there is dialogue it is more difficult for discrimination to happen.

Q: What's your opinion on diversity and inclusion training courses for admin staff and professors?

A: Everyone at the university should have some training on issues of discrimination and privileges. Students learn new things everyday in their studies, and I don't see why the same thing shouldn't happen with other people at the university: they should learn about diversity issues, especially if they are in a position of power. It is essential for our professors to take courses and to be trained on diversity and inclusion since now they don't have a good understanding of students' needs and issues that are important to student. I'm not saying that they do not take us seriously, but they do not understand what we are talking about. We don't even have an alias career for transgender students like they have at the nearby university: our professors are not ready to talk about these topics. Talking with our professors always takes a lot of energy and effort even if our city is very active on what concerns LGBTQ+ people's rights.

I think that the students are already very inclusive, and so are the informal and formal groups made by them. We don't have any interest in discriminating against other people. But the institution should form our professors on those topics and give more space to younger people that can have a similar vision to the students. We need someone who really wants to listen to us. Since we are a university, we should learn from each other.

Q: Are there any other social minority groups in the Academy?

A: There are other minorities in our university, and I can't say that they are all treated well. For example, the Chinese minority is treated very poorly. I think that the Academy has some sort of partnership with China and they take money for each Chinese student they get. Each year a number of places in our Academy is reserved for Chinese students. These students are often marginalised, and the professors don't make any effort to include them. Italian and English classes offered by the Academy are not adequate. There are very few people with disabilities at the Academy and they are not very visible. Even if there were more, they would still not be very visible because it is difficult for them to access areas of building because of stairs, narrow corridors and very small rooms. Spaces generally are not adequate for the number of students at the Academy and their needs and there are no funds to improve the building.

Q: Is there an ALIAS career for transgender students at the Academy?

A: Unfortunately no, even if there is one at the nearby University.

There is a representative group of students who speaks directly with the director of Academy, they are called *consulta studentesca* and they have been asking for an alias career for transgender students for a long time. They have a lot of meetings, but the process is incredibly slow. The board of decision-makers at the Academy began discussing it four years ago but haven't decided anything yet.

Asking the professors to use a pronoun that is different from what is reported in our documents is not easy. We know that we can ask some professors but not others because they will not do it. It would be amazing if they could understand why this is so important to us. On the other hand, transgender people with updated documents never have this problem. The pandemic and online lessons have exacerbated this problem because we've had to connect online displaying our name and transgender students are not allowed to change it.

Q: Do you know if there is an officer for the discrimination and harassment incidents?

A: There are no specific people we can talk to when there are incidents of harassment or discrimination. When something happens, we talk to the *consulta studentesca* and they talk to the professors and/or the admin personnel.

Q: Did you ever receive an official product of institutional communication from your Academy on the topic of diversity and inclusion?

A: No, in four years, I have never received any institutional communication about LGBTQ+ community events, issues, special days, or workshops. The Academy website is old and doesn't work in general. The professors have different approaches to the LGBTQ+ community: some of them are very empathetic, they talk with us and are interested in what we have to say, but others just don't care. It really depends on which professor you are talking to because there isn't any official position from the Academy which is not at all involved in diversity and inclusion issues.

Q: What's your opinion on university groups such as the LGBTQ+ students group?

A: Wanting to be surrounded by people who are like us and can understand and listen to us is a need we all have. That's why it is important to have LGBTQ+ groups at universities. I'm sorry if some people who do not belong to these groups they are excluded. But honestly our groups are open to everybody

who wants to join them and is ready to listen without judging. All we want is a space where we can exist directly.

We have some official groups of students who offer help to all the students at the university. Some are informal groups created by the students themselves and in every class there are many small groups. There are also lots of art collectives.

Q: What do you think could be a good communication channel for the institution to provide information on their diversity and inclusion policies?

A: I think there is a spirit of inclusivity among most students, also found in formal and informal groups created by the students. We don't have any interest in discriminating against other people. But the institution should train our professors on those issues and give more opportunity to younger people who work at the university and may have a similar vision to the students to express their views. We need people who really want to listen to us. Since we are a university, we should learn from each other. I think that the message on diversity and inclusion from the institution should pass more through actions rather than words. They should talk about that during the open day, professors should attend training courses on diversity and inclusion issues, and they should talk more about that.

There have never been any seminars on diversity and inclusion for professors.

Q: Is it easy to talk with your professors and the admin staff about diversity and inclusion related issues?

A: Communication is always very hard. We only have one professor who is responsible for dealing with all the issues of our year, but there are so many issues that it is impossible for a single person to go through them all, the result of which is that some are always left behind. Having more members of staff dealing with specific issues may help to solve this problem.

Q: Does the academy organise events, seminars or other initiatives on diversity and inclusion topics?

A: Not really. It is true that the Academy doesn't have a lot of money, is not an issue when organising activities on diversity and inclusion since there are many students that can talk about their experiences, and it will cost nothing to the university. At the same time, the institution cannot delegate everything to the students, they cannot put everything on our shoulders. Professors should do their part as well. There is a complete lack of direction from the institution, each small group is left alone dealing with their problems and they all must report their issues to the *consulta studentesca* since they are the only ones who can talk directly with the institution. I think that having smaller independent groups that are in direct contact with the institution can make the communication smoother and easier. We need a collective made of students and professors that focuses on inclusion issues. At the moment one member of staff is responsible for 150 students. If we ask too much of him, he won't be able to do much.

Q: What's your opinion on the Academy officially joining the pride? I mean, joining it officially as an institution.

A: There should be official representation of the university in the Pride march. I think that's important because it would be like making a statement. My feeling is that the institution and the students are moving in two different directions at the moment, and this should not be the case.

4

Country of origin: France

Institution's country: France

Position: PhD student

Q: Can you give me a short resumé of your academic career? Which universities did you attended before and where are you now?

A: I did my Bachelor's degree in France, it was in biology for the first year and then in geology for the second and third year so in the end I have a Bachelor in geology that I took in 2015. Then I did my Master in France in 2017, in geology, with a specialization in palaeontology and I stayed in the same city in France for my PhD. I defended my PhD thesis in December 2020. Now I am postdoc ATER (Research Professor Assistant): it means that I do research and teaching at the same time at a University in France since October 2021 and it is an 11 months contract.

Q: Do you feel belonging to any minority group?

A: As a woman, I feel that I can be considered as a part of a social minority group because I'm associated to the feminine gender. So yes, I consider myself as a part of a minority group.

Q: Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination because of you being part of this minority, which of course is not a "minority" in terms of numbers?

A: I would say yes but not in a professional context. I don't think that anybody refused something professionally to me because I'm a woman but I do remember some weird episodes. For example, once I was attending a lab meeting during my PhD and I was sitting near my supervisor who was sitting next to the head of the lab – the "big guy". The environment was very friendly and relaxed: we students are not afraid of people who are head of some departments or got responsibility for the lab. Then, at a certain point, my supervisor left the room because he had some work to do and since I was sitting on an uncomfortable chair I moved to the chair where my supervisor was sitting, near the head of the lab. And the head of the lab said "Oh, now I have a good company with me!" and laughed. And I was like "Er... OK, can you please stop?" It wasn't a trauma. I wasn't traumatised by this situation but obviously if I wasn't a woman it wouldn't have happened. Still, I was very uncomfortable because he was the head of the lab and I was just a PhD student in this lab. Another episode that happened– I think it was at the same meeting- was when a guy was giving a speech during an internal seminar and he concluded his speech saying that maybe his speech wasn't very sexy but it would have been more "sexy" if he was a woman and he could have wear a short skirt to catch the attention of the people. I was quite uncomfortable.

At work, I never experienced very violent situations related to my gender, my sex. Just these "funny" situations.

Q: So these episodes happened during informal interaction, rather than during formal ones?

A: Yes, it wasn't during interviews or other official moments.

Q: Can you tell me what do you think is the meaning of the expression "diversity and inclusion"?

A: If I had to describe an institution that respects diversity and inclusion I would say that it is an institution that reflects the composition of the population of the country it is based in. And even... I would even say that this institution should be representative of the world population composition because when you do research you have people from every countries coming and going. So the population of the institution should represent the entire world population in terms of proportion, for example in terms of men and women – even if it is a very cisgender point of view. But I would say that there should be at least more women than men, because globally women are more than men. I cannot remember the precise proportion but it should be something like 55% of women and 45% of men, something like that. But it should be the same for ethnicity, it should be the same for the whole “gender domain”.

Q: What’s your definition of inclusion?

A: Mhh, inclusion? Will it be different from diversity? Diversity would be – I’m still talking about institutions – the act of including different people on the basis of their gender, sex, ethnicity... also sexuality even if this is not a thing your institution should know about you when you are hired. Inclusion means including people from social minority groups. At least for me diversity doesn’t include any minority problem, but inclusion does. For me inclusion is being aware of difficulties correlated to a specific social situation, so inclusion is being aware of this and include people even if it is more complicated for them to get a permanent position in the university. “Positive discrimination” will be part of the inclusion process.

Q: Do you think that the increasing mobility of students and researchers, also fostered by the European Union, is going to influence the institutional policies on diversity and inclusion in universities, research centres and other universities?

A: I will say “yes”, at least in theory. Because if you allow people to come to your country, then your students will have the chance to talk to people who are from different countries, adding to the melting pot. But, the thing is, practically talking even if the Erasmus program is open to every student that wants to go abroad you need to be aware that only people who has the money can really do it. In the end, with the Erasmus, you mix people from the academic world, but only those people who has the money. I remember that when I went to England, which is not far from France, for my Erasmus I get the money from the Erasmus program two weeks before going back to France. Luckily, I had my parents helping me and the accommodation was provided by supervisor so the rent was cheap and the owner flexible about the payment. Also I already spoke English before going to England, not in a perfect way but enough to interact with people. And I needed to speak English to get that internship. So, international mobility is a nice utopia but unfortunately it is constrained by social differences between people. I still think that Erasmus programmes should exist because at least it is something but all the student’s costs should be covered by the university. The problem is that it is a huge amount of money. At least the accommodation should be provided by your university and it is not always the case. For example, my brother went to Sweden for its Erasmus and the local university gave him an accommodation, which is good. But they told him less than one month before he went to Sweden. It wasn’t clear, he never had any information from the university about who was going to host him. So in theory Erasmus is a very good programme, but practically talking it needs to be improved. It is not

surprising, it is always like that: if you have more money you have more chances to develop your skills in every field.

Q: Are you aware of any initiative from your university to foster inclusion of social minority group?

A: I can tell you about the University I spent six years in and I never noticed any initiative on diversity and inclusion. It doesn't mean that the University didn't do anything, but maybe their events were not visible. I couldn't find any seminar, I cannot remember receiving any email asking me to attend any event. I don't want to give a negative picture of the University, but I have to say that in general in France we do not promote diversity and inclusion as they do in the US, in the UK and in Germany. You can see it when you visit the websites of institutions in these countries: there is always a diversity and inclusion page and it is not hidden, it is very visible. You can find this page at the very beginning of the website. You don't see it in the websites of French universities, but maybe I'm too negative. Talking in general, I feel that France is handling the problem of diversity and inclusion worse than some other European countries.

Q: Do you think it should be important to have this webpage about diversity and inclusion in every university in France? Or will it be too much?

A: It will help, because as long as discrimination exists there will always be people having more problem studying or finding a job than others. So, as long as discrimination exists, universities should make clear statements on that topic. Higher education is a very particular field, because in France and in other countries universities are public, and if they are public, they should be available to everybody. And that should be for real.

Since discrimination exists, institutions should be aware of it and they should show to people that they are aware of the problem and that they consider it when they hire people or choose the students.

I'm not part of a very discriminated minority like black people are for example- I don't want to make a rank of discrimination- but it is true that some people have more difficulties than others in life due to their background. I was a black woman I would have found helpful to see in the university webpage that they account for the fact that I'm a discriminated person and they would help me to be treated equally. It is important also because the people who were hired by university in the past, let's say before 2010, before the black lives matters and all the events that "woke up people's mind". In my lab most of the permanent people are men, white, French – which is OK-ish since we are in France, but it is funny how the country tries to be more international, selling its skills and attracting people from other countries but in the end when you see who was hired, you will see that they have always the same profile. If you are young and you want to be hired and you enter to the lab just to visit and you see that all the people who have the permanent job are not like you in terms of age and any other characteristics it is not very inspiring. Since now we are aware of the discrimination issues, the universities should show it on their website.

Q: Do you know if in your University there is an officer you can talk to in case of discrimination? Someone who is officially in charge for that?

A: I will say the Human Resources because I think that they are the people who must handle this kind of problem and if they can't I think you should go to the police. There is always a legal office in the

universities dedicated to this kind of problem, but if the university can't help, or doesn't want to help you, then you must look for help somewhere else.

I will say if you have a problem inside the university with another student or a colleague you should go to the Human Resources if you are working inside the university, but if you are a student who should you talk to? I would say the *pedagogique commitee* or the head of the teaching of your department. But the problem is: if you are a student and you have a problem with the teacher and the teacher is the head of the teaching what should you do? You should go to someone higher like the head of the department or of the university. Thanks to my answer you can tell that we are not very aware about who we should talk to.

Q: What do you think about training courses or programs on diversity and inclusion being delivered not only to students but also to professors and admin staff?

A: It would be more important to do this for the permanent staff because they are older than us, while the students are more aware of the problematics of their time. Older people with permanent jobs also have a greater influence on the admin side. They should be trained on this topic. And sometimes it will take longer for them because they grew up in another time, with a different view of the world. I can see it also with my parents, even if they are very open minded sometimes when we start some conversation my father is like "Blah blah blah in my time we didn't ask for this or that..." and I'm like "yes, but we not in the 50s anymore, times are changing." So I will say that yes, it will be very important for the permanent staff to be trained. It is the same that teaching to students: if you want to learn new concepts you must repeat them years after years. And maybe in the future people will have more knowledge. If you don't speak about the topic, how can you expect the people to know about that topic and think about it? So I think that it will be at least a bit useful. These courses cannot be a one-time event, they have to be repeated through time.

Q: Do you know if any of the university you attended ever officially joined an event like the Pride march?

A: I don't think so. But I think that in France it is related to the admin position of the university because it is a public institution, so it represents the government and has to stick to the guidelines of the government. It isn't something a university can decide for itself. I'm not sure about what the guidelines from the government will be, but I'm sure that I never saw any French university joining events like the pride.

Q: Will join the pride be considered as taking a political position?

A: Yes and no. The university doesn't do anything against LGBTQ+ people. I would say that it is more about not getting problems from the people who are not in favour of LGBTQ+ community. So yes, I would say it is politics because the government will lose the votes from people who are not into the LGBTQ+ community and they are a lot. But I won't say that the president of the University is against the LGBTQ+ community just because he doesn't do anything for the pride. I wouldn't say it. In France it is like... sometimes there are things I do not understand and sometimes it is like "Mhh, I see that you don't do anything because you don't want to have problems with some kind of people."

On the other hand, I think that if during the pride week students come to university with the LGBTQ+ flag I don't think that they will be expelled, I don't think that it can be done. But I don't know, maybe it is at the discretion of the professor.

Q: Do you know if in your university there is the option for transgender students that haven't had their names and gender legally changed to have the university badge, emails etc with their chosen name and gender instead of the official one?

A: I don't know anybody in that situation in France so I don't have any examples to give but I would say that since bureaucracy is very strong in France maybe it is not possible. Not because of the university being against transgender students, but because of strict administration boundaries. But I don't know anybody in this situation so I cannot know for sure. I think it depends on the admin staff you deal with. If they are open minded and aware of your situation and nice, they will help you since it is just informatics. But if they are very strict in their administration or they don't want to have problems or they do not understand your issues... I can imagine a person from the admin office being like "Well, it is just a name"

Q: Since in France you have the same issue that we have in Italy with language that doesn't have any neutral form and have inclusive masculine for plural, did you noticed if your university is trying to use a more neutral language in its official communication?

A: It depends on who is writing. For the very official emails, for example from the president, it is more inclusive, I noticed it during my PhD. I don't think they are implementing all the possible solutions, but at least they are doing the very basics. They changed very simple things, so for example instead of saying "Bonjour a tous" they write "Bonjour a toutes et a tous". Even if it is not a very subtle inclusive things with a median dot, things are changing. I noticed the changes in official communication between the beginning and the end of my PhD. The inclusive writing is improving a lot and a lot faster than how I expected. I think that it is a fun exercise to do when you are writing something and you notice "Oh, it is just masculine but it is for people from all genders, so I need to be more inclusive." And then you start writing short and inclusive words and you try to find a median point to make the sentence inclusive and understandable and visually nice. It is kind of fun so I think that people are happy to try the thing.

Q: Have you ever noticed someone putting their pronouns together with their signature in official emails or in zoom calls etc? Do you do it yourself?

A: I saw it but for PhD and postdocs. I cannot remember in France French researchers showing his or hers or their - yeah, their is better- pronouns but I saw it from international researchers such as German or English. But in France I wouldn't say that I saw it from permanent researcher. I wouldn't say it doesn't exist but I never saw it myself.

Q: What is your opinion about this practice?

:A My opinion? I think that it is good! Because for now we know that the reality is more complicated than he or she so during meetings instead of asking at least the person can avoid the uncomfortable situation of "I don't know how to address you and talk about you", but like that you can just break the ice knowing that the person is a he, a she or a their, anything and it's like "Good. I'm good with it."

Q: Just one last question. How much do you think that each country society influence the university and other research institutions in their diversity and inclusion policies?

A: I would say that they define it. It is the university choice but they depends from the government but we can say that in France universities are more or less independent and they can do things on their own but I don't know how independents universities are for diversity and inclusion issues. I can't say. But I think that of course they can make a difference and take important decision to be more inclusive and diverse. I think that the influence of government and society is very strong on university policies. When there is a problem the university should react, if you try to avoid any conflict situation or you try tu find justifications like "it was a particular situation" or "don't take it personally" but it is something that happened to me and to people before me and it can happen again to other people. It should stop. Even for the "funny" situation I told you before about the colleague saying "Oh, you would have paid more attention to my speech if I were a woman" even in that case someone, the head of the lab, should have gone to this person that what he said wasn't good at all, explaining him why it wasn't good and why he should not say it anymore and he shouldn't be mad at being warned about having said something inappropriate. This is a common problem, when you go to someone and say to them that what they said before was problematic the person usually reacts saying "Ohm I didn't say anything wrong, we cannot say anything anymore etc" But it isn't like that, I mean, I didn't stop you during your speech, I let you continue, but now I say that what you said is problematic and you shouldn't do it anymore because of this and that... You are not ging to jail, we are not firing you because we are aware also that not every people are aware of the situation and you have the right to be wrong once, but it shouldn't be the same for the next seminar or event. So yes, of course if the university is not reacting for every situation that it is problematic the problem will not be solved. So universities have strong power and influence in the diversity and inclusion issues, of course.

Q: So do you think that the official intervention of university is essential to truly solve the issue? Or groups of students can solve it alone?

A: I think that the intervention of university is essential because the decision making people occupy very high position in the university and they represent the government and it is important to have it in mind. So the decision make by the president of the university is a decision that is approved by the government and so a strong statement from the university is technically a statement approved by the government.

Q: There is something you want to add?

A: I would just say that since as I am now doctor and I'm older and I lived more than students that are starting their studies now, I would let them know that they shouldn't be afraid of being themselves. Also, if they notice a situation that is not OK they shouldn't be scared of reporting it to a teacher or some other academic authority because if you never report what's wrong, then things will never change. I'm aware that's complicated because nobody wants to have troubles or be expelled from the university.

Also, I understand that when you are part of a minority group you are going to experience a big amount of violence every day. That's why sometimes you can be pissed of even by small things, but when you report something to the academic staff you should always try to be as kind, pedagogic and

nice as you can be. You must explain the situation, showing that you are not taking it personally because the specific event you are talking about is the result of the issues we have in the society. These kind of problems shouldn't happen inside the university because it should be a safe place for you. I think that students should be able to focus only on their studies, without being distracted by discrimination problems.

Most of the times we prefer to do nothing and be like "It will pass, it will pass" but it will not. If you ignore the problem you will do your stuff, you will get your diploma and when you are applying for a job you will realise that the problem is not solved at all and you will encounter the same problems you had as a student but everything will be more complicated. It is your life now. So if it is possible report everything you notice that is not good for you and report it as kindly as possible even if I know that it is hard.

Interview 5

Country of origin: France

Institution's country: France

Position: PhD student

Q: Can you please tell me a bit about your academic career? In which university are you now and what's your current position?

A: Sure. I got my bachelor's degree in 2013. I went to an engineering school that follows a typical French organisation system with two years of preparatory classes and then three years of engineering school, which I made in four years instead of three because I decided to take the chance to spend two semesters in Brazil. After graduating, I spent 6 months looking for a job but I couldn't find anything because my specialization is in a very competitive but not very lucrative field. I couldn't find anything that interested me, so I decided to find a PhD topic. I got the funding and I'm currently doing my second year of PhD in a University in France.

Q: Do you identify as a member of one or more than one social minority group? It can be because of any of your characteristics: gender, ethnicity, religion, social background etc.

A: I consider myself a cis woman and I don't believe in any religion, I'm born in France and my parents are French as well, so regarding to my ethnicity I belong to the majority. As for my sexual orientation, I used to love girls and boys and any kind of gender and identity so I think that I can be called pansexual. I have the feeling that there are lots of things on sexual orientation issues that are changing in our society. I'm meeting more and more tolerant people and people coming from the LGBTQ+ group, so even if I do not consider myself belonging to a minority because my "alternative" sexual orientation, I'm happy to see that society is slowly considering every sexual orientation as "normal".

Q: Is your University organising any activities on diversity and inclusion?

A: I don't know if there is any activities for LGBTQ+ people organised by my university, because I never looked for them. I wouldn't be surprised to find out that they exist, though. The city the University

is based in is famous for being a LGBTQ+ friendly city, not only the university is very friendly but the whole city.

Q: What is your definition of diversity?

A: Because of my studies in the field of natural sciences, for me diversity is just normality. Diversity belongs to everything that exist on Earth, biologically or psychologically speaking.

Q: And what's your definition of inclusion?

A: I think that it is a pity that we have to talk about inclusion because it means that people are not directly included yet. At the moment I'm in love with a transgender woman and she was the first transgender person I ever met. Knowing her helped me to discover how many transphobias there is in society, even from people who defines themselves "tolerant". I discovered that I also have some interiorized transphobia. This is because of what we absorb from the rest of society when we grow up. I think that homophobia, transphobia and all the other forms of "phobia" exists because some minorities are still invisible in society, so there is a lot of education to do, and it is a pity that the idea of doing this education actually scares some people. This education should be given to everybody at school and should be for everybody.

Q: What is your opinion on higher research institutions organising diversity and inclusion management training for professors and admin staff?

A: I think that training courses on diversity and inclusion for professors, staff and admin personal will be very useful but I think that the real solution is to organise this kind of education very early in life because even if you organise this kind of classes for professors, which I think are irreplaceable, they are already too old to integrate those kind of things and that we should begin with very young kids if we want the mind of the entire society in 20- 30 years.

Q: Do you know if your university has a dedicated communication campaign or if it organises any event during international days such as the women's right day or the international day against homolebbitransphobia?

A: I don't know if my institution is doing anything special for occasions such as the international day against the homolebbitransphobia but the University is in a very gay friendly city with a lot of students, during the pride we have a lot of people going out in the street, so I'm sure that there are lots of students from the university but I don't think that this initiative come from the university. I'm not sure but I think that it is something coming more from the students. The major and the city are involved in the pride organisation, and you can find information on the city website. They make special decorations with the rainbow flag in the city. I think that it is important for an institution to officially support the pride or other similar events.

I just arrived in this University one year ago, before that I was in the same city but in another institution, that is not that much involved in this kind of initiatives and topics. Also, the last year I worked mostly from home because of the pandemic, so I didn't go to the University that much and I don't know if there is a lack of initiative or a lack of communication in the institution. Anyway, I never heard about it. The University is a big institution, while I had the feeling that engineering school is more for "upper-classes" because it is very hard to enter to that kind of school and we have problems of social equality

and there are much fewer gay people in engineering school, or at least I have that feeling. They are a bit old- fashioned.

Q: Do you know if at your University there is an officer you can talk to in case of an episode of discrimination or harassment happens?

A: I think that exists an official person you can report any act of harassment or discrimination happening in the university, but I do not know who this person is. I don't know how it is possible to contact this person because I never needed it. But if I will ever need to report something, I think that I should just ask people around and they will be able to tell me who to talk to.

Q: Did you ever experience any episode of discrimination or violence because of being a woman in your University?

A: It happened only once, but it wasn't in France. While I was a student, I made an internship of research and I spent 3 months in the desert and I had a problem of sexual harassment from my translator. It is the kind of problem you can face when you go to another country with a different culture, especially in the Islamic countries. It was related to the fact that I'm a woman, obviously, but those things it happens, and this was not a problem coming from the French institutions.

Q: Do you think that the increased mobility of students and researchers, for example thanks to the Erasmus programme or other EU policies is influencing the policies of the higher research institution on diversity and inclusion?

A: Yes, I think it has a big influence on how diverse universities and research centres are. I had the chance to spend two semesters in Brazil because my engineering school had a partnership with a Brazilian school there. Brazil is very conscious of all these problems about diversity and inclusion and even if it didn't have any effects of my school in France it had it on me and on my perception of others. It was very helpful for me. All the students from my engineering class were in different schools in the world and when we all went back to France, I'm sure that we did it with more open minds. It was a very positive experience.

Q: French, like Italian, is a gendered language. What do you think about the efforts some people made to speak in a neutral way?

A: French is a language with only two genders, and it uses the masculine when it refers to more than one person, even if there is only one man and all the other are women. It also doesn't have any neutral term. I think that it is very important for the university to use a neutral language. I first heard about the debate on inclusive language 4-5 years ago I had the typical reaction "Oh, it is not pleasant to read, it is not easy to write this way etc." But today I totally changed my mind and now I always use an inclusive writing and even when I speak, I always use "*Il ou Elle*" even if it makes the sentence longer, or "*la personne*". I think that the road to inclusion also goes through the way we write and speak.

Q: Does your University use a neutral language in its official communication? What's your opinion on that?

A: Inclusive language in official communication from the university is beginning more and more common in the last two years and you can notice that. I heard that the French Academy, which I think is a big and old organization deciding all the rules about how we should talk and write for university

purposes, made a law to forbid inclusive writing in the official text but nobody is going to control if you respect that rule or not. That's why there is always a conflict between the bottom, the people, that are changing their minds, and the top.

Q: Have you ever seen anybody putting their pronouns in their signature, for example at the bottom of official emails? What do you think about it?

A: I never saw anybody writing their pronouns in their signature in their official emails. To be honest I think that it will be strange but I will not be surprised to change my mind in one- two years and maybe if we talk again I will tell you "Of course, it is necessary!".

Q: Do you know if there is the possibility for transgender students whose documents have not been officially updated to have their badge, emails etc in with their chosen name and gender? Before having these data legally updated I mean.

A: I don't think that there is this kind of career for transgender students. Since the University is a very big university so I think that if you go to the admin people and ask them "Please, can you change my name?" they will probably just answer you "Go fuck yourself". Sadly, it is a responsibility of the transgender person to just tell professor, admin people and other students "Please, just use this name". I'm not 100% sure but I don't think that there is an official way to do it.

Q: Imagine to be in charge of all the communication channels of your university, what do you think will be the best way to advertise your university policies on diversity and inclusion? Which channels do you think that will be more effective?

A: If I was in a perfect and inclusive university, instead of attracting people to my place- we won't have enough room for everybody- I will try to make other universities to be better, for example sending some professors in the other universities. It should be useful to build a network of university to empower them. This way we can change the whole system.

6

Country of origin: France

Institution's country: UK

Position: postdoc researcher

Q: Can you give me a quick resumé of your academic career?

A: I did my Bachelor, Master and PhD in France. I did a one- year post-doc in a natural history museum in France . Then there was one and a half year of break because of covid and I just started a new post-doc position in the UK and I'm here for three years. Everything is new here for me but I think, for the topic that interests you, I already saw a lot of differences between France and the UK.

Q: Do identify as a member of any social minority group?

A: For me this question is kind of tricky because I'm bisexual but I never felt belonging to the community because I've been with a guy for so long that it doesn't impact my life. So I feel that I'm not experiencing the struggles that other people can have, I don't feel that I'm part of the community even if I can understand some of their problem.

Q: Think about a place with a high diversity, in terms of human beings. How will you describe it?

A: The first image that cross my mind is about a place with people coming from different countries, from different universities as well and I will also think of people that can be disabled- I don't know if that's the right word in English. First of all I will think about more physical things, I don't know why, and then I will think about more cultural, religious and LGBTQ+ identities.

Q: And when do you think that a place can be called "inclusive"?

A: A really inclusive place is one well all the above is irrelevant because all people will be treated the same.

Q: Will you define the place where you are now as a diverse and inclusive place? Why?

A: It's funny because according to the definition I just gave you I will say "no", but I actually think that this University is really doing things for inclusion and diversity because I can see, just walking here in the corridors, a lot of diversity that I didn't saw in France.

In terms of country of origin: people are speaking different languages. In terms of ethnicity: people are from every part of the continent here. Also, in terms of religious believes I think. Here people are more relaxed with women wearing the, I don't know the name, the head-coverage (hijab) that we never see in France. We have a big problem with that. And here is totally fine for women that wear that to work wherever they want: I can see a lot of them here. I can see that the place is diverse and I can see that they are trying to do things for inclusion. In the email that we received they advertised some events to promote that, and we have some posters on the wall trying to speak about inclusion and diversity. I didn't have the chance to go to that kind event yet, so I don't know what they are actually doing but it is something that I want to try. But I can see that it is something people speak about publicly. They do things at the administrative level, the institution try to do things about it, it is not just the people between themselves. You can feel the presence of the institution.

Q: And what are your feelings on that, what do you think about all this communication that is made by the institution on diversity and inclusion topics?

A: I think that it is a good thing and it's incredible. If we were in a perfect place I think that we won't need it because it will be OK for everybody to be themselves and not put a stickers on their head or say to the community "please accept me", but obviously we are not in a perfect environment and community. It is really different for me because I think that in France especially it is kind of taboo. We don't speak about this kind of things, especially in a working environment. It is not a good thing, people will think that it's weird. Not the young people but more the bosses, the institution....

And so here I think that it's very good and when I see the diversity around the place I thought "It works!", people seem to be happy and free to be whoever they want to be, so it's a good thing.

Q: Thinking about your experience in France, did you ever notice any initiative on diversity and inclusion coming from the institution?

A: No. The only thing that I ever saw in France was one year ago when the CNRS sent to all the women with a CNRS contract an email, it was so weird, saying something like "Hi girls, so we realised that we have some problems with the number of women in science but we also realised that we don't have so many women that want to try the concur. So girls, grow up and try to do something about it!".

So weird! It was signed by the director of the CNRS and when I read the letter I thought “so basically you are saying that the problem of women in academia comes from women in academia because they are too shy?”

Q: So basically he was asking the women to solve the problem of the lack of women in academia?

A: Exactly. Because he thought that the problem is that women are shy and they don't dare to do things and to ask for the position they want and everything. It was really bad. That guy (the director) is not a good guy anyway, he is the president of one of the most important institution of research in France. He did that thing for women and he never, never, did anything for any minority group. In the administration, institution, universities, I never saw any communication about anything (about diversity and inclusion). As I said, it is very taboo.

Q: Do you think that it is because of French culture? Some topics are considered too personal to be shared in public?

A: I think that maybe the first thing is that the French people tends to separate their work form their private life and I know that for a lot of people the fact of being gay, for example, is about personal life. In France being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not something that is perceived as correlated to work. It shouldn't be but I can understand how important this can be. And so it's considered personal life. The other thing is the laicity which is very important for French people it's really important but it leads to far rights problems. The far right is more and more present in France and this people of course are racist, homophobic. So maybe there is also the thing that you never know who you are speaking to. In France you have a lot of these people, like in the administration and everywhere. So maybe that's a taboo topic for all of these reasons. In France we are going to have elections in a few months which is why everything is coming up again... yeah, finger crossed for the election.

Q: Did you ever felt discriminated, for example for being a woman?

A: Personally, I don't think so. Actually it is the other way around because recently there has been a lot of “positive” discrimination for papers and grants trying balance the number of men and women and I feel that I wouldn't have had so many chances before as I'm a woman so I can get in the numbers. But I never had problems because I'm a woman. Maybe also because there are a lot of women in biology, it's not like computer science. But I know a lot of people who have been.

Q: In your current workplace there is someone who's in charge for the cases of discrimination and harassment?

A: Yes, here is very good for that because here you have a procedure for everything. When we first arrived, we had a little induction on the building, the safety things, and there was another one- now everything is online because of covid- where they explain all the procedures: for health problems, in case of fire and also if we see any sign of harassment. After that I don't know how it works, if someone come to talk to you. I don't know if they really take action... I think they do. But I'm not sure. So that's the official way but I also know that I can always go to see my boss or other people in my department.

Q: And will you feel safe in speaking to them?

A: I think that I will feel comfortable in talking to them, especially to my boss, my supervisor, because he is a great human being.

Q: And there was something similar when you were in France?

A: Quite the opposite. In France there was nothing like that. It was the same in both the universities I went: if you have a problem go and see your boss and if the problem is with your boss go to see the director. During my PhD I thought that we could go to the doctorate school if we had any problem. I wasn't very happy with my supervisor at the time, I went to see the direction, I spoke to the doctoral school and nobody cared because they have no power and they cannot do anything. They didn't want to get involved and to speak to him or anything and it wasn't that kind of problem, you know, it was just management problem so I cannot imagine how it would have been if I was harassed or if he had bad behaviour with me or something like that.

I know that at the last University I was in France, after I left they had a big problem with a professor having bad behaviours towards students and the administration knew it but they did nothing until all the girls gathered and spoke together about it. It is always like that in France: something happens and people try to cover it because they don't want bad advertising. There are very few places where you can speak freely if something bad happens. When I was in France, during my post-doc I think that I could have gone to my supervisor to speak because she was a very good human being, but I think that she would have been powerless after that. You don't have any leverage on the administration, there are no procedures that can be activated. I could have talked but no action would have followed.

Q: Do you think that having lots of procedures, let's say one for every kind of discrimination, is a good policy?

A: I think it can be because first of all discrimination exists and everybody know that it is out there. On both sides I think that people are more comfortable and confident if they know that those things exists but you can do something against them. On the other side I think that people who could have bad behaviour, they know that if they do that there will be consequences so it can prevent that a little bit I think.

Q: What do you think about the institution organising training courses for professors, staff and admin personnel on how to manage diversity?

A: I think it's a good thing because it could always help but in my experience it is the same as management courses: if it is not mandatory people that go to that courses are people that are already interested by the subject and they will be attended only by people that already do things well so it's not that useful. On the other hand, even if it is mandatory if people that go there don't want to change anything and are not interested they will not change their behaviour. It is always more problematic when you do things in practice. But I think that you can never have too much communication or too much education. So yeah, these kind of courses will be a very good thing.

Q: What do you think about universities, museums or research centres officially joining events such as the pride or the women's rights march?

A: I think it's good but I think that sometimes it can be sort of rainbow-washing. Of course joining the pride is a good thing but if it is only that and there are no actions on a daily basis it's useless.... well I don't know if it is useless because it is still representation, but... you know....

It's already something because I think that it shows that things are moving. It was the same thing for the Black Lives Matter movement, all of the students, everybody was with the Black Lives Matter because it was the appropriate thing to say at the moment, so it shows that things are moving and people's mind is changing, but if it is only that is not as useful as it can be.

Q: Do you think that students and researchers increasing mobility is influencing the university policies on diversity and inclusion?

A: It is something that I'm experiencing right now because when I was in France I didn't realise how big it was the problem with diversity that we had in my country. But now that I'm here I'm learning a new way to communicate about that and to do things and in my experience it is very useful. So it will be good if other people could travel abroad to see what's happening in other countries. It is also good if people that are used to the way these issues are addressed in the UK go to other countries such as Italy or France, they can bring this experience with them and help a little bit.

When I went to the UK it was like "OH, they already have the handbook and they just need to send it to other countries!".

Q: Is your current institution part of programs such as the Athena Swann or Stonewall?

A: No. I know that these programs exists but it is a very vague idea in my mind. I don't know much about them.

Q: If you could use any of the communication channels of your institution to let people know about your diversity and inclusion initiatives, what channel would you choose?

A: I don't know because I feel like that between tell a little to a lot of people, educate a few people. So if I want to speak to a lot of people I will use social media and YouTube videos and things that can go viral but it will show people that it is possible but it will not help people to get there. If I want to really tell people how to do it I don't know... it will obviously reach less people but I think that I will go for courses, workshops and that kind of things. Maybe I can reach more people with webinars and online workshops. Videos will also be useful. And everything should be free so that everybody can access it.

Q: There is an alias career in your institution?

A: I have no idea, I think that it could be possible because one of my colleagues is Iranian and she has two different names: the birth name that her grandfather gave her when she was a child and the usual one she always use the last one at the university. Even on her badge. And everybody call her like that. She chose to use her official name in publications but it is her choice. I think that she could have gone for the other one. So if it possible for her I think that it should be possible for trans people but I don't know.

Q: And there was this possibility also in France?

A: I have no idea. I think that here in the UK is more institutionalised while in Paris or in Lyon it is more up to the people you talk to make it or no. I have the feeling that if the person you talk to is ok wit that it would be easy to get an alias but otherwise it will not be possible. Because I think that on the badge and on everyday basis I don't see why they will say "2no" for any reason other that they do not want to.

Q: What do you think about university groups such as the LGBTQ+ groups, or Muslim groups etc?

A: I don't know, this is a question I'm asking myself about the feminist group those meeting I went. Basically I think that if they like to do it, it can be helpful to speak with people from their community and if people are happy and it is something that it is good for them I'm OK with that. It's up to every person not to let themselves trapped in a circle of people but maybe people is also making a big deal of it because of the topic: if it was a star wars fan club or harry potter community we will not make a big deal about that. Why should it be OK to have a Harry Potter community and not to have a Muslim community?

Q: What do you think about neutral language? Now it should be easier for you in the UK, but French is a gendered language as Italian is. Did you notice any efforts from your institution when you were in France for a more inclusive language?

A: No, I didn't see any effort from the French institutions.

Q: What do you think about the use of they/them pronouns and other neutral options?

A: The only place where I saw they/them really used is on social media. I don't personally know anyone that use this kind of pronouns. I'm not educated enough on the pronouns question but I think that you do not have to understand something to respect it and I think that if it is important for some people to be addressed with specific pronouns, even if I do not understand it I should respect it. And I know that I have to educate myself more on that topic.

Q: Have you ever noticed anybody putting their pronouns in their signature, for example in official emails?

A: Yes, but not in official emails. In the scientific community I saw it in twitter, in the little bio people can write they specify their pronouns even if they are the "traditional" ones. But I saw that only there.

A: And do you think that it is something useful to do?

Q: I think it can be because people cannot know if you do not tell them, so if it is important for you to be called with a pronoun rather with another you should say it. I think it's a good thing.

Q: If you participated into any event on diversity and inclusion from your institution, did they ever ask you a feedback on that event?

A: I haven't been here long enough and due to covid there were no event for the last two years. But I think that it is a good things to collect and share feedbacks and outcomes of the event.

Q: Do you think that they should be shared even if the feedback is negative?

A: Yes, especially if it is negative because usually institutions are like "oh, look how diverse we are" and OK, it is a good thing but recognising problems is the first step toward finding a solution.

Q: As a bisexual person, you told me that you never felt like really belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. But would you have been happy to gather with other bisexual people, for example in university groups or events?

A: Well, I don't hide my bisexuality, but it is not something I'm interested in talking about because I think that everybody should do whatever they want with whoever they want and it shouldn't be a topic.

I don't need to know the sexual preferences of other people and they do not need to know mine. I never felt that need.

If I have the opportunity to participate to an event or going on a meeting on this topic I probably will go and have a look. I have already been to events like the gay pride and stuff like that but it's just because it is a topic that interests me in general and not because I'm bisexual. It's more because I want to educate myself, I want to know new things and I want people to tell me their experiences. I'm just interested in human.

Q: If you had to choose one thing that you saw in the UK about inclusion and diversity to bring back to France, what will it be?

A: Which one? I don't know, but whatever it is it must come from the administration. Like something official. I will say open communication. It will be good to see diversity and inclusion in different media around the university. For example here we receive an email every week and every week there is at least one event, topic, something to talk about. I think that seeing small things but all the time and everywhere helps to see feel that the topic is really considered by the university, that they put it under the spotlight. People will have it in their mind and think about it and do efforts. I think that the useful part is that you can see it everyday. One big event once a year is cool, but then people will forget about it, while a little bit of communication on a regular basis helps keeping the discussion open all along. If you do just one great thing once in a while then people will just go back to their life, their work and their science and forget about it.

7

Country of origin: Lebanon

Institution's country: Portugal

Position: postdoc researcher

Q: can you tell me about your academic career?

A: yes, I did my undergrad studies in biology in Lebanon, in Beirut, but after that I moved to France for my Master and my PhD. I did both in Lyon. My Master was in palaeontology and sedimentology and after that I did a PhD in taphonomy, still in Lyon. I'm now doing a postdoc and I'm associated with the university in China but I work remotely from Portugal.

Q: do you consider yourself as a member of one or more than one social minority group?

A: I'm a member of LGBTQ+ community and I consider myself to be gay, and I also consider myself part of the middle-east community so I do not consider myself white. These are the main two groups that I think describes me in terms of minority group in science.

Q: to you, what's the meaning of the word "diversity"? When do you think that a place, like a workplace for example, is "diverse"?

A: I think that every environment should be diverse and once we don't need to think about diversity anymore everything will be awesome. But we are still very far away from that goal. Anyway, I think that in a very diverse place at least 50% of the people should be women. People should also be able to freely express their ethnic background and sexual orientation without hesitation or without being

scared that this will cause any negative effects on their career. In academia, for example, in several universities many people don't say that they are part of the LGBTQ+ community because they are afraid. It is true that academic environment is still controlled by white heterosexual male individuals and so I understand why some people don't like to come out in their working environment. But ideally the workplace in order for it to be diverse should be accepting first. In every country there are official census of representations of certain categories and stuff like that so maybe if I speak about France it doesn't necessary reflects the situation of the UK.

For example, in palaeontology the representation of LGBTQ+ people is higher than in the UK census. I'm a diversity officer for an association in which we cannot favour members of the LGBTQ+ communities in our applications because they are overrepresented.

Q: when do you think that an environment is inclusive?

A: An ideally inclusive environment is where women have equal opportunities/ salaries than men and where people can freely express everything they want about themselves.

Q: did you ever felt discriminated throughout your academic career for your belonging to two social minority groups?

A: I felt discriminated many times in the academia but more for my ethnic background than for my sexuality. Coming from the middle- east was the main problem because many scientists still don't accept that someone coming from the middle- east can lead a project or do science on their own and so it is very complicated. In several conferences I had different comments ranging from "I've never heard from a middle- east scientist" "I've never met someone from the Middle- east working in science", "You do some good job for someone coming from the middle east". My ethnic background was more problematic than my sexuality even though I'm publicly open about my sexuality. I try to attend conferences as much as possible wearing gay pride shirts and gay pride colours just to show "we are here and we are not afraid". All the people I worked with know about my sexuality and I never experienced any discrimination for that. Sometimes they did some jokes that I felt inappropriate but usually there was lots of alcohol involved. People in Lyon were very supportive. People in China are also very supportive. But I will say that the ethnic background brings more stigma around it.

Q: there wasn't anybody you could speak about these episodes?

A: There were people I could report those discrimination episodes but I never did because I don't know if it was worth to think about it a lot, maybe it was a bad perception from my behalf. For example, if someone said, for example "I never heard about a middle eastern scientist" I never know if it insulting or it is just the reality. However, some comments/ jokes like "I cannot think of a middle- eastern scientist" or "can middle- east people do real science?" are a bit insulting but I wouldn't say that they were too insulting. I have high tolerance and I don't get easily offended.so I didn't find the mean comments insulting enough to report them. Some comments are mean but they don't make me sad. As soon as the comment passes I can cancel the person from the conversation. But probably now, if it happens again, I would speak loudly about it but I was still at the first year of my PhD when this happened. There was a code of conduct for the conference I was at and a reporting procedure but I didn't do anything. I think that I was too afraid back then.

Q: do you think that there are some phases in the academic career in which people are more vulnerable and they need to be particularly protected against discrimination?

A: Students at all levels need support to be themselves and not to live in shadows and early career researchers because they are transitioning from a degree to the work environment and the work environment, especially in the academia is not so welcoming and it is very, very competitive. So I think that students and early career researchers need the most support on this things. Because when you are just starting your career and you are surrounded by an environment that is not very welcoming it can be kind of traumatising to enter and became stable. To go to this environment is hard, so you need someone to support you. You need support in general, not necessarily by a person. For example you can get support from the institution. Like changing regulation, etc.

I can't say that there was a support in term of academic work in a way that there was no guidance, or at least no direct guidance on how to enter, for example, the job market. There was some association that kind of provided a supporting environment for members of certain groups. For example in France there were associations that welcomes LGBTQ+ people, they are very supportive and try to help you in different processes and not necessarily workwise. Still in France, there was something for international students and also for refugees. It was quite comprehensive but I don't think that any of that was meant to help you workwise, to help early stage researchers to enter the job market, for example. There are associations that are focusing on that more and more. For example in Palaeontological Association there is a mentoring scheme were that put you in contact with a mentor and that mentor will typically discuss with about stuff like the problems you may have with early stages career. The mentor will help you find a job, boost your confidence and stuff like that. So at least now something is changing but there are some stuff that still need to be done. For example, lots of people in academia that comes from the global south, in general, are on very specific visas and residence permit to stay in the UK, Canada, Europe, USA... These people face more stress than the others. Speaking about my own experience, I was finishing my PhD and one week after I had my residence permit expired so I needed to think about my PhD and then move all my stuff from France during covid in less than a week. It was so frustrating, so scary, so stressful. When you want to provide a support environment for some individual you cannot limit yourself to a specific stuff, like academia-wise. You should also think of their economic, social background, their passport, how they are staying in this country to really provide a fair opportunity to everyone.

8

Country of origin: Germany

Institution's country: Poland

Position: PhD student

Q: Can you tell me something about your academic background?

A: I finished my Master degree at a University in Germany and I moved to a University in Poland two weeks ago to start my PhD, so I'm a very fresh PhD student.

Q: do you identify as a member of one or more than one social minority groups?

A: I identify mostly as queer. Having a chronic mental illness also plays a role in me being part of a minority group and it makes me more exposed.

Q: what is your definition of diversity? When do you think that a place is “diverse”?

A: A diverse place should, first of all, have diverse people. The people should be from different groups and there should be no obvious social selection on the people. So it shouldn't be that, for example, the supervisor is a white male and he grow a group of PhD students that are all white males as well. And I also think that in addition to people just being there, especially for early career researcher the environment, the supervision should match their characteristics so it should match the individual problems and challenges this individual groups have. Queer people, people with children... whatever, but it should individually match their needs. The variety of supervisors shouldn't necessary cover all the different options, but they should be able to recognize the need for a specific supervision and if necessary they should ask someone to help or additional advice so that you don't need to overemphasize, for example, the women and the black guys in the institute. People should be educated in recognizing these issues or mental health issues and they should be able to know where to seek for help or further advice if they are not competent enough to handle the problem.

Q: do you think that it should be useful to have diversity and inclusion training courses for professors and admi staff?

A: It will be definitely useful to have training courses on diversity and diversity management for professors and admin staff. These courses existed at the German university, but nobody went there, even after having sent around the information and having provided the teaching staff with all the details. People didn't have any interest in attending them and in improving their supervising skills. Here in Poland I cannot tell because I haven't been here long enough to know the whole supervising structure. The courses in Germany were offered by the gender and diversity office and were sent to all staff. The information was additionally sent around by the person responsible for gender and diversity and our institute.

Q: do you know if there is someone at the University you can go and talk to in case of an episode of discrimination happens?

A: The German University has a centralised gender and diversity office backed up by individual people at different levels in the university (such as departments or individual institute) that are responsible for distributing those kind of information to provide an information flow in both directions, so what kind of problems there are at institutes level and let the gender and diversity office know and also to let departments and institutes to know which kind of offers where available from the gender and diversity office.

Q: do you believe that the institutional communication of a university can influence how its environment is friendly and inclusive?

A: I don't think that the communication strategy of the German University can influence the institutional environment in being more diverse. Since the biggest problem is that everybody is totally overworked, if you have a voluntary offer to inform yourself about gender and diversity it is just catching the attention of people who are already aware of this issue. That's why it is necessary to make this kind

of education on diversity and inclusion mandatory as a part of the teaching education of a university teacher. Because otherwise people who are not interested will never be reached by these kinds of initiatives.

Q: what's your opinion on asking people from a social minority group to educate others, maybe giving talks or organising activities at the university?

A: Expecting people who belongs to a certain minority group to educate others it's very valid point and it links into the incentive structure I mentioned before, because those are people who already have experienced these problems and so they have a strong interest in tackling these issues so of course they are going to talk about that but if you never had this kind of problems in your life, you will never spend your spare time explaining it to someone else.

Q: What's your opinion on universities officially joining events such as the Pride?

A: I think that universities joining the pride is like rainbow washing because from my experience there are individual people who are motivated in pushing this gender issues forward but the institution itself, the university, has no motivation or interest. It is more a "public relation" thing, and it feels inappropriate in a sense. The sudden shift from total indifference from "let's put a lot efforts into showing how open we are" is not matching what I experienced in everyday university life.

For example, everyone at the German University was shocked by the Harvey Weinstein stuff, but our university doesn't even document sexual harassment of staff against students so this is just like "OK, everybody is shocked, but you also have to implement actions to back up your emotional response". There are people responsible for this but there is no systematic statistics or documentation on who did what or no paper trace of whatever happened. And that is no good.

Q: do you think that it will be useful to collect information about students on their ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation etc like they do in the UK? Maybe through an anonymous questionnaire when the students begin their studies?

A: I have no opinion on how useful it could be to collect anonymous information about students' gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity etc. Because on one side you don't want to brand people and say "university is a very leftie, LGBTQ+ infested, ideologically charged thing" but on the other hand I know, from the UK, how important is to trace, for example, how many black people are in geoscience and how systematic the discrimination against them is. And I really cannot decide which one of those sides is stronger. So, I cannot answer this question. It is just too difficult. It is something that can be used also against university. For example, here I have the impression that the large proportion of the working group is LGBTQ+ and very liberal so it can be used by conservatives as ammunition against the institution to say things like "oh, obviously they are pro- climate change because look at all these liberals and gays at the university".

Q: since Poland doesn't exactly seem a LGBTQ+ friendly country, were you worried before moving there? How's the situation in the Country?

A: At the beginning I was a bit worried about moving to Poland but I visited the city before starting my PhD, I knew the working group here in Poland and I knew that it was pretty liberal but that aside here in Poland there is a lot more tension than in Germany. The university itself is very open, very liberal. In the city there is a lot of demonstration of asylum seekers and abortion rights and stuff like that. I

don't feel comfortable going in some parts of the city. The discrepancy between academic environment and the rest of the society is much stronger in Poland than in Germany.

Q: if you could choose any of the official communication channels of your university to make a statement about diversity and inclusion policies in your institution, which channel will you choose?

A: I don't think that universities should make statements about being LGBTQ+ friendly, but they should make hard guidelines that are within the constitutions of their countries because everything else is just advertisement. You need to have written somewhere that you are not allowed to discriminate on the basis of people sexual orientation or whatsoever. That needs to be a very hard line with very clear implications for people that violates it. If you really follow throughout these guidelines, I'm sure this information will be the best advertisement you can get. Just writing how inclusive you are on your webpage will look nice but it will do nothing.

Q: are you familiar with programs such as the Athena Swann or the Stonewall programs? They exist in the UK and aims to foster inclusion and empowerment of women and LGBTQ+ people in academia. Each university that joins the program must meet a list of standards in terms, for example, of number of women at a certain institutional level etc. If the university respect the standard then it will get a certificate.

A: No, I don't know those programs. They sound like a good start but again they should be stricter. It is like when you go to conferences and the code of conducts are like "everybody be nice to each other" and then I have constantly colleagues being sexually harassed on conferences. It is like: of course, people should be nice to each other but like, what happens if they're not? That's the interesting question. It is a good start, but you should be very aware of what are the consequences if you don't respect the code of conduct.

Q: did you ever join any events on diversity and inclusion organised by your University?

A: I went to a play once that was organised by the gender and diversity office, but I never attended any other event on diversity and inclusion organised by the university. Actually no, I went twice. It depends on who organise the event and what's the target: if the gender and diversity office will organise an event it will probably be attended only by old people and no 19 years old person will go just because they are not the right target. There are also much more younger people organising things and they are much more relatable and the discussion is better and emotionally closer to students/ young researchers but the problem is that those initiatives are not very well promoted. It seems like the university doesn't know their target groups. Very few people having trouble with gender at university are 50, it is just not happening. Most of them are just students of the age of 20 and the institution do not manage to reach them.

Q: did you ever took part in any survey on diversity and inclusion organised by your University?

A: No, never. I think that university official groups such as the LGBTQ+ group or the Muslim students' group are very good because they provide an overlap between the students and the university structures: they are at the intersection and can know both groups so they know how the university works and how to approach people and they will have a lot of connection with the students' group so

they are definitely a good thing. The organisers never asked for a feedback for the events I attended. I provided them a feedback, but they didn't actively ask for it. I think that it is useful to collect feedbacks, especially because there is large room for improvement. The results of these feedbacks should be shared because it shows where the problem is and it kind of make it public. For example, one event was horribly organised and it turned out that the students that organised it did not have access to the email list to reach all university, so even if they wanted to advertise it, they couldn't. In this case, making the results of the feedback public and showing where this very obvious problem was could have provided them access to the mailing list next time so that more people could be reached. That would have been very good for that event.

Sometimes it almost feels like the university is sabotaging this kind of event, knowing that you're not going to reach a great number of people. They just pay you a little bit of money to do your event, and then you do your diversity thing and in the end nothing happens really.

The students and the institution do not work together.

Q: what's your opinion on institutions like universities trying to use a neutral language?

A: In my English- speaking scientific bubble it is absolutely normal to use a gender- neutral language so for me it is absolutely standard and you will be called out for assuming, for example, that the main officer is a guy. You will be called out by someone.

Q: do you have neutral options in German?

A: Gender neutral language in the university it is highly debated, especially because there is no agreement in how to use it in Germany. Different offices will use it in a different way in the same university. There has to be a guideline issued by central university administration on the use of gender-neutral language but it is ignored by individuals or parts of university as people wish. So it is an expression of people personal opinion whether to use it or not. The guidelines exist but are not mandatory, they are like "It would be nice if you do this, but if you don't there is no way we can force you".

Q: what do you think about people adding their pronouns in their email signature or on their zoom profile?

A: I find pretty helpful having a person pronouns together with their name just because I had people in the zoom call or in the chat that put lot of emphasis and it was very important for them so why not do it? And it just, like, makes communication easier. The thing is that our university doesn't allow us to do that because we couldn't change our names so we couldn't even add our pronouns. But in international- English speaking conferences it is absolute standard.

Q: Do you know if in your university there is the possibility for transgender students to attend classes and have their badges and emails with their chosen name on it instead of the legal one, even if they haven't changed their documents yet?

A: Here in Poland I don't know about any alias career for transgender students. In Germany I know of one transgender person that officially has got a new email address from the university but I don't know when the change happened so I don't know if they already had their official documents.

Q: do you think that the increasing mobility of students and researchers is influencing the policies on diversity and inclusion in universities?

A: I don't think that it actually had a big influence on universities policies on diversity and inclusion. Just because it doesn't necessary mean that people coming are more diverse than the ones that are already here. Also, Erasmus+ people do not stay long enough to take responsibility and speak up within their new institution and ask for their rights to be respected. People need to stay long enough to see the institution as their own and then also try to change it and ask for more rights.

Q: what can university do to become more inclusive?

A: To improve the situation, I will start recording the violations happening in the university because you need to have a statistics to see what's wrong before you can really change something. Institutions need to provide a complete and public database on what's happening and then start writing on the clear implications of what happened. Both to protect the victims and to show that there were very clear implications for the perpetrator. This will be the way to go. It will be very unpopular, I think, because it will make the university look extremely bad because, for example, universities never have problems with sexual abuse but just because nobody ever write it down. The moment you start writing down, you will be the place with the highest reported numbers, but just because the other places are not reporting anything. You need to make the problem visible and create hard facts about it. To share the statistics you just have to publish all of them, to make a yearly report on "this is what happened in our university" and just show "those many cases of racism, those many cases of horrible supervision, psychological abuse, whatever" and then you can start working from there. I'm not sure how to do it because I lack this kind of knowledge but there are very clear measures you can implement if there are, for example, too many racists in your institution. There are evidence- based measures against racists. And all these things.

I think that universities are partially independent from the country and society they are based in. There are hard jurisdictional boundaries they have to stick to, like they cannot shoot someone, but I think they can actively foster an environment as they want it to be as any large group can. It is just a matter of where you want to go and what kind of people you want to have in your institution.

Q: do you remember any piece of institutional communication that you really felt it was speaking directly to you and your experience as member of a social minority?

A: No. Actually, the opposite happened. I've read stuff from my institution that made me thought "you stupid motherfuckers". We have a lot of foreign students in Germany and they struggle a lot with day to day racism, just having general problems like finding a flat, not being understood, feeling alone, not connected with people and all these things and my supervisor wanted to highlight this when the black life matters happened and she went to the press office and the press office was like "Yah, no. We don't have racism here. This is just a language barrier." They were all old people. I listened to some interviews, and it is obvious that there is a racism problem at different levels of universities and institutions and the people who made the interviews wrote an article for the press office to publish it and the press office just censored it. There was like nothing left. And it never happened before. The

press office handed the final version of the article to the students and the students were like “No, this is not what we said, we’re not publishing this.” This article never happened just because the head of the press office said “no, we don’t have racism.”

Q: thank you for your time, is there anything you would like to add?

A: I just want to emphasize the difference between institutions in Germany and Poland. In Poland, people outside the university are pretty conservative and I get shouted at on the bus and stuff like that but in the institutions, in the universities, people are extremely liberal and pro- LGBTQ+ up to a level I never experienced in Germany. For example, professors displaying rainbow flags and their position on abortion law on their social media: something that is completely unthinkable in Germany. So, within the university the environment is pretty liberal, left wing, but outside the university it is very conservative.

On the other hand, in Germany everything is kind of the same and you will not see any political statement by professors in the public. The gap is so much stronger in Poland than in Germany, there is a lot more discussion and debates going on than in Germany and depending on where you are you are either in a very safe space within university where people openly talk about their same sex partners and you get support and supervision from a supervisor that is, for example, homosexual but nobody speaks about it because they are the dean at the university and stuff like that but this will never happen in Germany. So the difference between these two countries is extremely obvious even after a few weeks. And it is very good for Poland, I’m very positively surprised. This is amazing, I’m really impressed by Poland to be honest which is not something I expected.

9* translated from Italian

Country of origin: Italy

Institution’s country: Italy

Position: associate professor

Q: can you tell me a bit more about the CTS (Comitato Tecnico Scientifico- a committee on diversity and inclusion)? How it is born and when?

A: The Technical and Scientific Committee (CTS) was born less than one year ago under the request of the chancellor of our university (the first female chancellor of Rome “La Sapienza”) to tackle all forms of inequality. I’m in charge for socio- economic inequalities, social mobility and intergenerational inequality. Socio- economic inequalities pervade every level of our life because they overlap and influence many other forms of inequality. But it is also something that is not easy to talk about in the university. Socio-economic inequality is hard to tackle even if there are formal laws designed to prevent discriminations. In fact, it is almost impossible to control if laws and policies are applied in everyday life. It is a horizontal issue, overlapping with many others, that needs to be monitored. It is impossible solve it with one single action. Diversity and discrimination issues are very important for the CTS. Some of the policy measures we are thinking about are very sectorial, such as the architectural barriers for people with disabilities, while other are more general. The CTS is born this summer (2021), so it is at a very early stage and so far we are thinking about dealing with issues that

requires a minor intervention to be solved. We also discussed gender balance, gender equality plan etc.

Q: does the CTS has some specific communication strategy to let people at the university know about its initiatives?

A: I'm not directly in charge for the communication so I know very little about it, you should ask to the president of the CTS (prof. Lucidi) but there is plenty of communication on gender communication. We are planning a questionnaire to understand if a person has been object, subject or witness of an act of discrimination. Our university communicates our inclusion policies through seminars and other events. Also having elected the first woman chancellor of our university is a strong signal and got a lot of attention from the media.

We shared the creation of the CTS on all university channel, such as social and video, but as far as I know no information was directly delivered to the students, for example during the lessons. It is also true that each department is autonomous in its decisions because our university is very big and lots of functions are decentralized. The university website gave it plenty of visibility, even if I'm not sure that this is the best form of communication to reach our students. I have no idea if the information was shared also through the official Facebook account or on any other social media.

Q: is there a way students can contact the CTS if they witness or are victims of discrimination?

A: We have some students among the members of the CTS, but we still don't have a system of whistleblowing to transmit information and we need to think how to develop this channel. For now, if someone report something to us, we will forward it to the competent authority.

Q: how's the situation of the communication between students and professors or admin personnel at the university?

A: There is a communication issue between students and professors/admin people. There are no official guidelines, it depends on the single professor and how much open they are to communicate to the students. I think that this is a very important issue that needs to be addressed.

It is easier to communicate with the master's students because the classes are smaller, so it is easier to build a more personal relationship between students and professors. People will get to know each other more, they can interact etc. I think that the university, as an institution, should have more attention towards all the inclusion and diversity issues, they should talk about them during the lessons. Universities should be places where people can talk and be listened.

Q: What's your opinion on organising diversity and inclusion training courses for professors and admin staff?

A: Webinars, seminars and lessons on diversity and inclusion should be organised since they are a good way to talk about these problems. We already organise seminars targeting high school students, treating different topics. So far, we only did those seminars for students. It is a good idea to organise online events that can be posted on the CTS page collecting experiences, talks, numbers and information on diversity issues. It is also very important that the admin personal is informed about that.

Italian, professor in an Italian university, she/her

Q: looking at your university website while doing some research for my thesis, I found the CTS page. To me it seems that the CTS is doing something more than the CUG that are already implemented in the universities.

A: yes, it definitely goes beyond the CUG. It is a very recent project born only a few months ago. CTS is a new institution trying to explore gender from a multidimensional point of view, so it is not limited to gender equality (like the CUG). The CTS wants to tackle gender inequality but also disability, ethnicity, migrant issues, religious differences etc for our university communication but also for projects on inclusion of more fragile subjects.

Q: what's your position in the CTS?

A: I'm part of a CTS group that address the issue of hate speech and organises initiatives against it. Hate speech is an issue touching different sensitive topics, from religious differences – especially against Muslim and Jewish- to social media use. From revenge porn to insults to the professor whose give you a bad mark. It is a very general concept. We get inspired by other initiatives that already exists in other universities, such as the Ca' Foscari. We would like to define a book of guidelines on inclusive language with the support of experts. Some of those experts are already part of the university staff while others will be called from outside the university. We also thought about making posters such as it was done years ago by the collective Vocabolaria⁵⁷. We want to get inspired by different national and international projects.

CTS is involved in writing the gender equality plan that goes beyond the list of positive actions made every by the CUG. The positive action plan is about gender equality actions, while the gender equality plan is a bigger frame in which the positive action plan has its own place together with other initiatives. We aim to establish long-term strategic guidelines for the university to reach equality at every level.

Q: there is a way the CTS is planning to reach all the people belonging to such a big university as the University of Rome? There is also the problem that lots of departments are physically very far from each other.

A: distances and mobility barriers for people with disabilities are among the topic addressed by the CTS. Disability is a core topic for us, such as the sexual orientation that I forgot to mention earlier. Lots of services for LGBTQ+ students already exists but they are not organised and included in the system yet. One of the aims of the CTS is also to group all the good things that we already have in our university. To guarantee all our services to be accessible to everybody we are strongly oriented towards their digitalization. For example we were thinking to develop an app for the physical barriers in the university so that our students can let us know about the presence of anything that can be an obstacle for people with reduced mobility. We will use those data to make a list of the refurbishment work that needs to be done in our departments. We have a professor of architecture in the CTS that is responsible for these actions. Through the app we can create a community and we can rise people's

⁵⁷ <https://pianoeffe.wordpress.com/vocabolaria-dire-la-differenza/>

awareness on this topic. This way we can make visible for everybody a topic that is usually visible only to people that have to deal with it on a daily basis.

For this activity we may involve engineering and experts from outside the university that maybe are already active in this field. Honestly I don't know if this kind of app already exists, maybe it does but we still need to gather all the pieces of information.

However, we know that there are app that already exists to fight sexual harassment and violence against female students and LGBTQ+ students. One of my favourite is called "where" and it is developed by a team of young developer and even won international awards. Basically, a woman can signal every possibly dangerous situation she encounter on the street using this app- For example if I meet a group of dangerous people in the street I can signal it to other women through the app while finding a safe way for me to avoid the bad situation. In our university we have 150 000 students and our departments are everywhere in the city. For example the department of architecture is in a wonderful place in a park, Villa Borghese, and it isn't very safe for students who leave at 8 pm and must cross this big, dark and empty park to take the bus. We have several situations like this one.

When all our libraries will be open until late again we should think that the students that use these services should also be able to go back home safely. And not only the students but also the personnel working there.

Being present in our territory is very important for our university, the third mission is very important to us, but there are also risks that we as institution cannot ignore.

Q: I imagine that students collectives on diversity and inclusion topics already exists in the University. Are you planning to contact them and collaborate with them?

A: We already have students in our staff and I think that this is an important difference with the CUG. We have two students, and one is deaf, so she can also help us with the dynamics of disabled communities. We count on them to interest the other students in the CTS initiatives. The CTS commission wasn't elected, people was directly called by the head of the university so I don't know how the students were selected. As far as I know, there two students are known for being very active for what concerns diversity and inclusion. That said, I cannot tell how much representative they will be for the students community since, as I said, we have 150 000 students in our University.

There are lots of students collectives but I have to say that they're quite isolated from each other, they do not form a network. They're not very visible, only during election time. There is no representative of the students you can go and talk to for diversity and inclusion issues and I think that this is a pity.

Q: it is a very fragmented reality, then.

A: Unfortunately yes. You have to think that all our biggest departments (medicine, engineering and economy) are very distant from each other and far from the university main pole. That's also why the students' life doesn't happen in one place. I studied in the UK where they have this Students Union that is a physical place where the students can meet and do their activities. When I was a student there was board showing all the activities and the events, now I imagine that everything is online. We don't have anything like that in Italy. It is a pity because our student's don't know where to meet, not even for a coffee or a chat. Talking with you I just had the idea of creating virtual student's union for our students.

Q: This seems a really good idea. I was just going to ask if you think it's feasible.

A: it is for sure feasible, with digital technologies you can do everything. I don't know if the students are going to use it though. We should try it.

Q: Speaking about language... are there institutional guidelines on inclusive communication?

A: yes, we have guidelines that can be downloaded from our website. They're mostly about the non-sexist use of Italian language, the use of masculine and feminine mostly. We want to edit those guideline to make the file easier to read for everybody. We want them to be more accessible also to the students. The problem is not that there are no guidelines but that they're not properly communicated. For now we all the guidelines are in a pdf downloadable book called "Scrivere con Sapienza", the problem is that is a big handbook: we want to extract parts of it to make short factsheets, selecting only the most important points. We are also thinking to make posters to hang around in the university. I think that this way the guidelines will be easier to know and follow, also for the students. The problem is the communication channel, not the communication content. We already have plenty of contents. The problem is that is not properly communicated.

Q: Are those guidelines share also with the admin personnel and the press office? Are they introduced with a training?

A: I don't think that there is any training. But our young researchers must do a mandatory induction when they start working here. It is called QUID: it covers lots of subjects, from how to ask for money when you go on a mission to how lessons are structured. We want the HR resources to put also the communication guidelines in this series of courses. But for now there is no mandatory training on communication issues. The guidelines only exists in the website and are not advertised.

Q: This is a common problem in several universities: that the communication guidelines and initiatives on diversity and inclusion exists but are not advertised.

A: I think that the best example is Vocabolaria. I have one of their poster in my office and it is made by 14 papers, each of them can become a poster as well. It is an old project but to me it remains a good starting point.

Q: What's your opinion on the neutral language, that is more difficult for us Italian than for English- speaking people?

A: the famous "schwa"?

Q: yes, but also other options...

A: well, I agree that for English people is easier. I really care about the topic of neutral language and I think that every solution is welcome. It could be the schwa, the asterisk, the upside-down three... everything that could work, especially in written language. It is harder for the spoken language because the schwa can have a funny sound but I think that it is very powerful for the written language. Language is made of symbols and the schwa has a great power as a symbol. Language is crucial in the transmission, or in the elimination, of stereotypes.

Stereotype origins some of the social norms that generate or perpetrate social inequalities. That's why the symbolic power of the language should be used to remove stereotypes and inequality. So I'm in favour of all the neutral options, especially in written language: from whatsapp messages to institutional email.

I teach informatics and statistics in a faculty of engineering, even if I'm an economist. I'm used to be in environments in which there are almost only men and so for me it is important to have an option to avoid to use always the plural masculine form. It is a way to acknowledge the differences. I always say "tutte e tutti" and I always write using the asterisk. To me is a way to say that even if in the faculty there are almost only men this shouldn't be the case.

I will do the same if I was in the opposite situation, for example in the faculty of literature or psychology, where they do have mostly women. That, because I think that we should fight against every kind of inequalities. To me it is a big problem that a young men feels uncomfortable in studying history of the art. It is the same difficulty faced by a young woman that wants to study mechanic engineering. To me, both things are at the same level.

Acknowledging the value of diversity is giving the opportunity to every people to find their own place despite how the environment is built, fostering a more diverse and inclusive environment.

11* translated from Italian

Italian, Bachelor student in Italy, AFAB, LGBTQ+

Q: can you please tell me what are you studying and where?

A: I'm a second-year bachelor's student at a University in Italy and this is the only university I attended, I never did an Erasmus or any other experience in other universities.

Q: do you identify as a member of one or more than one social minority group?

I identify as a LGBTQ+ person, I'm an AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth) person and this is a source of discrimination even women aren't a minority group in terms of numbers. I'm an atheist and this is a disadvantage if you want to go through some specific paths at university, since some environments are dominated by Church and catholic people (like hospitals).

Q: have you ever been discriminated throughout your academic career for being part of these minority groups?

A: I never felt discriminated during my academic career for any of my identities. At least not personally. But in my class there is a majority of female students and I have the feeling that the very few male students are always more praised and cheered for what they do. They are a bit privileged because they are considered a "rare species". This is something that I can understand, and I imagine that the reverse is happening in those environments in which there are very few female students. For example, it makes sense to try to attract more women in the traditionally "masculine" faculties and I think that also doing the opposite will be good. But I'm not sure that it is the right way to do it.

I'll be happy to see more men in my field or in other fields where they are a minority presence, but I don't think that the solution is to privilege the men giving them all the leading position. I never saw a campaign to encourage male students to enrol in any traditionally "feminine" course as the university does for women in STEM faculties, for example. But working on this kind of advertising will be more useful than considering "heroes" the very few men interested in subjects like social sciences or social services. These are all topics that really need to also have a male voice, so it is essential to have more male students. Still, this is never focus during the open days: I always see campaigns to

encourage women to do STEM, but I never saw a single campaign encouraging men to do social sciences. Even if I think that the lack of men among, for example, elementary schools' teacher is a problem and there are also very few male social assistants. Instead of encouraging male participation, they just give all the position of leadership and power to men, discriminating against the women and never solving the problem because they do not attract more male students.

I think that professors in my faculty try to be very inclusive about LGBTQ+ issues. Sometimes they lack formation, and they make gaffes, but they never discriminate on purpose. They are also interested in knowing more: for example, when I brought researches on LGBTQ+ issues they were very interested and I was never penalised for bringing out those topics.

Q: do you think that it will be useful if your University organises training courses on diversity and inclusion for professors and admin staff?

A: I think that diversity training courses for professors and admin staff will be useful and will prevent them from making mistakes, supporting them in their good propositions. Knowing which kind of diversity you may encounter and how to correctly deal with it can also help the students to feel more at ease. This can apply to any kind of diversity. For example, I think that all my professors are against racism but those who studied the topic and did research on it are more educated on this topic and can manage better this kind of diversity. Everything is left to personal education, there is no common ground. Professors in my course have more knowledge on diversity issues than the average professor, but it should be good in any case for them to have a shared base of knowledge. There is a lack of intervention from the institution to guarantee that everyone starts from the same base level. If someone wants to do more it is normal for them to know more, but at least they should have a basic knowledge of the topic.

Q: what's your definition of diversity?

A: I don't think that diversity is connected to a real difference among people, but it is more linked to differences in narratives. In some way, we are all different and we are all the same since everybody has its own peculiarity and this is true for everybody. There is no difference that is more different than another. But since we are used to see the world in a certain way, some thoughts and some experiences are considered more important than others. We talk more about them in our culture, painting them as the "normal thing we all experienced" and this creates an unbalance that goes beyond the effective discrimination. Of course, discrimination still exists, but sometimes the problem is that there are some realities that are not known and are not considered as something that may happen and they never come up to your mind when you talk with someone. Therefore, some people are seen as different just because there is not enough general knowledge on them. They are just different from the mainstream narrative. Narrative stresses some diversities more than others.

Q: what's your definition of inclusion?

A: Inclusion is when you try to build a reality, an environment, a thought that considers all these different ways to be human the same. You should try to consider all the possibilities and all the realities the same. This is the only way to make everyone feel seen, understood and appreciated for who they are.

Q: do you think that your University is an inclusive environment?

A: I think that my faculty is partially diverse and inclusive: they should do more, but I think that it isn't a completely discriminatory or close-minded environment. I noticed different gender identities and sexual orientation among my colleagues. There are also people from different politics groups and ethnicities. There are students with disabilities and the professors try to include everyone even if sometimes they make mistakes.

All those different people are attending university: they are studying and nobody is preventing them from doing that or is openly discriminating them. When I presented researches and surveys on LGBTQ+ issues for my exams they were always considered with interest by the professors, but on the other hand my professors knew almost nothing on these topics and I always had to explain everything to them. The only exception is one professor that teaches intersectional feminism.

For example, once I did a research on transgender people for one of my exam and the professors were really interested but they didn't know anything on that topic even if I chose this topic based on some texts we read in class and that has been given to us by that same professor.

I have one colleague coming from Africa and she talked about her experience with African rituals. There is also a blind girl that has been invited to talk about that in class.

Those were all good initiatives, but on the other hand there was one blind girl that had to educate the whole class and the professors on how to include her. There was no previous work done on this issue. I don't think that it is anybody's sin, and they did a good thing giving space to people to talk but it is still a work in progress.

Q: is there someone from the University you can talk to in case of discrimination?

A: I don't know if there is someone in charge as a referent for discrimination/ harassment episodes. Now that you make me think about it, I think that probably there is someone but I have no idea who. They never said to me "This is the official person you can talk to." I imagine that if you have a problem you can go to the admin office or that there is a specific office but it has never been advertised.

Q: are you aware that your university create a committee on diversity and inclusion called CTS? Do you know about any of their activities?

A: I had no idea that the CTS existed, and I don't know about any of their activities. I never heard about them.

Q: do you think that your University is making efforts to have a neutral and inclusive communication in its formal interactions with the students?

A: I noticed some efforts in the official communication from the university to use a neutral language, at least the very basic one. For example, they do not talk about students using only the male plural. They do not use a neutral language, but at least they use both feminine and masculine words (*studenti e studentesse*). I prefer the "*il/le student/i*" option but the only person using it is the professor from the intersectional feminism course. They try to avoid sexism, racism and other discriminations. There isn't much more that can be done to include the LGBTQ+ people since they are already included in that kind of communication, with the exception of non-binary people like me but I don't expect them to do anything (like using the schwa for example). Even the Crusca Academy is against us! But I think it is already a great goal that they do not talk only about men anymore, and that they do consider also

people coming from non- Italian schools in the admission forms. Those things are quite mainstream nowadays.

Q: do you think that the increased mobility of students and researchers, for example for the Erasmus+ program, is influencing the University policies on diversity and inclusion?

A: I think it does. It helps having more uniformity among policies in different institutions. In fact, each institution has a sort of “traditional” kind of discrimination: all those discriminations are inherited by our culture and history and they are often linked to traditionalism. Mobility can prevent a university from perpetrating discrimination out of habit. Institutions are forced to open up. Students and young researchers now can pretend to have certain rights or services because they saw them elsewhere and now they know that it is possible to implement them. If you see only one thing you never question it.

Q: do you know if there is an ALIAS career for transgender people at your University?

Yes, I know that there is this option. I also know that there are polemics about the documents needed to access it.

Q: did you ever notice any of your professors or colleagues writing their pronouns with their signature in official emails, for example? What do you think about that?

I never saw any professor put their pronouns together with their signature in official emails, zoom id etc. I think that may help people being more at ease and it may also make easier for them to talk about pronouns if they have to. On the other hand, if they make it mandatory without any explanation/ training on that it won't really change anything, and it will give zero information to the student about the professor ideas and if they can ask the professor or not to use specific pronouns during the exam etc. Instead of imposing it, it should be explained and accompanied by training/ education.

Q: what do you think about universities and other institutions officially joining events such as the pride?

I think that Universities should participate in civil rights march such as the women's right march and the pride. Universities should take position on that since it isn't about politic parties, it is about civil rights, in spite of what people can say and of which parties the professors belongs to. All ideas and political alignments should be respected but there are things that aren't “politics” they are civil.

Q: imagine to have the complete power over all the communication channels of your University. How will you use them to foster inclusion?

I will try to talk to students in a neutral language, including also non-binary people. I will advertise inclusion initiatives for disabled people and training courses on diversity and inclusion. I will talk a lot about diversity and inclusion, during the open day but also during the first days of lessons. The professors may present those services during their first day of lesson, they should also advertise it through flyers, posters and on the website.

For example, it was told us that there is an office for DSA and I wanted to get information from them because I have a type 1 autism diagnosis and I wanted to know if it is considered among the DSA cases and I can have access to the special exam sessions. I wrote to the faculty office, but they didn't know. They gave me directions for a physical office, but it was closed because of the pandemic and there was no email or other way to contact them, so I looked for it on the internet. They don't have a

phone number and all I could find was an email. For me contacting them via email is a problem because I always feel like I'm not able to explain myself properly in a written form and I'm always worried that people may misunderstand me. This makes me very anxious. In the end I never contacted them. If you think that this is a specific service for DSA people, it is possible that also people with dyslexia may have problems in writing emails. They can do more to make this service really useful. For example, they can just add a phone number. I'm still happy that at least they advertised this service, though. But it will be great if they could also make it work properly.

Some faculties have the "tradition" of a lack of organization in their admin office and it can be discriminatory towards people who do not speak Italian very well, or have some mental illness, neurodiversity, anxiety etc. It is a mechanism of bureaucratic difficulties that ends up excluding all those people who haven't an iron will or a perfect knowledge of Italian language and this has nothing to do with students' intellectual ability or on how much they study. These things often go unseen or are considered "normal". Everybody complains about admin offices never picking up the calls or never being open when they should be or being open for only two hours a week. This is annoying for everybody, but it can push people that have also other issues to abandon the university.

It is OK if you do not pass an exam because you didn't study or they asked you something that you do not know, but it isn't OK to quit university because you don't know where the exam is or nobody can give you directions or the information you need. Or that everything on the internet is on different websites so you get lost and you forget to register somewhere or you have to look to several different pages to find the complete information. This is a big issue also for people who cannot attend the lessons because they are working, for example. Why should it be necessary to be a very strong person and to go eight times to the same office to solve your problem? Students should focus only on studying: they shouldn't be tested to see if they are "tough enough" to deal with bureaucracy and lack of organisation. It is a sort of "trial" of resistance. Universities should try to form and educate the best possible people, so that then they can give their contribution to society instead of testing them to see if they are strong enough to earn a place in the society.

Q: do you know about the CUG and their activities?

A: I never heard about the CUG (Centro Unico di Garanzia).

Sometimes there are groups of students tackling a certain topic before the institution does. But when the institution makes its own committee they do not contact/actively involve the students. Student's work can be used as a base by the institutional ones. They should listen to the students' ideas in general, think about that, even if they are not applicable. If students participate to the entire process they can realise what the implementation difficulties are. Even if sometimes the personal experience of a single person does not represent the whole complexity of a minority group asking to LGBTQ+ people about their experiences and needs is a good starting point. What do the students want?

You cannot pretend that the students give you the solution to every problem, but they can tell you what they need so that the institution can find the solution. Institution's expertise is not doubted but if the students are the target, then their needs should be heard to have a goal to aim at.

The communication in my university is generally very bad on everything, but we should stop considering it normal. Why things should be so bad? Why shouldn't we think that they can improve?

Why surviving to university admin and bureaucracy should automatically make me a better person? I can be a wonderful researcher even without this skill. It is not a fair criterion to select people and I refuse to believe that it is impossible to organise better the offices. It is also a choice from the institution to not put any effort to make things better. If you want to be elite or want to select your students you can make the exams harder, there is no need for impossible bureaucracy.

It is wrong to say that “We teach you how the world is” because this is a system structured to produce a certain kind of people. People with a specific attitude and specific privileges in terms of free time, mental energy etc. People that already have other issues may not have all these mental energy and free time to deal with the university’s lack of organisation. This is a system always privileging the people with more privileges. You shouldn’t necessary be a “strong- willed man” to graduate at university.

12

Country of origin: South Africa

Institution’s country: France

Position: PhD student

Q: Can you please tell me about your academic career and you current position?

I’m currently a PhD student at a University in France , I’m at my second year and I’m studying genetics, in brief. Before that I did a master at another University in France, but originally I’m from South Africa. I did a bachelor in zoology in South Africa and I moved to France a bit more than three years ago.

Q: Do you identify as a member of one or more than one social minority group?

Yes, I guess I identify as a member of LGBTQ+ community and I’m also a foreigner in France. I’m surrounded by French people.

Q: When you hear the word “diversity” what do you think about?

A: Something that is not the same. Instead of being surrounded by people that are exactly like you, with the same background, with the same ideology and with the same believes, I guess. Diversity is the opposite situation, where you are surrounded by people of different walks of life.

Q: Can you also give me a definition of inclusion?

A: That’s a good question. My first thought would be inclusion of minorities so that minorities should not be excluded from any type of space, this could be a definition of inclusion. Not even necessarily minorities but all people I guess. If they want to be included in any space they should be allowed to, within some limits.

Q: Will you define the university you are at the moment a diverse and inclusive place?

A: That’s a hard question because I have been here for a bit more than one year and I haven’t seen any reasonable part of the university and I’m sure it differs between faculties, so I can only talk for my close environment. I’m at a research lab that’s part of university of Montpellier that studies evolution in particular. I think it it’s mostly white, I will definitely say. I wont’ be able to say if it is mostly heterosexual, I don’t know many people so well to say. But I do know queer people in the lab. It is

quite diverse in terms of nationality, we have lots of foreign students in our labs but everybody is francophone, especially at research level. You have to speak French to survive here.

Q: Will you or any of the queer person you know at the university be comfortable in coming out with their colleagues of being open about their identity in the university?

A: The queer people I know are very open about their lifestyles and preferences. Obviously I wouldn't know about who is not open about it because they will not talk to me about it. But I know at least 5 queer people and most of them are in my team and at my floor. I think it is a pretty open environment.

Q: Did you ever know about any initiative from the university that aimed to foster diversity and inclusion? Everything, from a webinar to a poster campaign.

Q: Inclusion of every kind of minority? Yes I think that there are a lot of initiatives: conferences, webinars, not really meeting in person for now. My impression is that people is very aware of these kind of issues. I think that not everyone feels concerned about that and not everyone will participate but I do see the emails going around.

A: Did you ever attended any of those events?

A: Not specifically about inclusion I would say.

Q: Do you think that these kinds of events will be a good way to reach people that are not usually interested in these topics? Or there are some other tools that are more effective?

A: I feel that people are naturally not inclined to go to this kind of events or have no interested in them won't go if they just see an email. I do think that perhaps should be not compulsory but let's say standard that, for example, everyone goes to one of these talks. I don't know in which format but I feel that it should be kind of standardised so that everybody has some idea about this, I'm just not sure about how to do it.

Q: And do you think it will be useful for example to organise training courses or webinars for professors or admin staff?

Yes, for example this sound like a good idea.

Q: And as far as you know there are not such courses in your university?

A: Not specifically about this topic. I may be mistaken but I can't remember having seen them.

Q: Have you ever come across any form of communication from your institution targeting specifically the LGBTQ+ community?

A: I've seen many things about feminism, maybe once I saw something about LGBTQ+ issues but it is not very frequent.

Q: Do you think that it is important for university to advertise their policies on diversity and inclusion?

A: Yes, there is no reason not to do it. It will be a plus point for most of people, a reason to go to that university.

Q: What do you think is the best way to advertise it? For example if you are going to choose a university for your postdoc, what will you look at?

A: Maybe, if I were a university with good policies on diversity and inclusion I will put some numbers on my website, such as the number of queer events per semester or the number of clubs,

organisations etc. I think it is something that they already state on their website, saying that these are the values they believe in, but it will be nice to also see some numbers. Photos of the event maybe.

Q: Did you ever receive any survey or questionnaire from your university about diversity and inclusion topics?

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: Do you know if there is a person in charge to collect all the reports about episodes of discrimination happening in the university?

A: I know that there is someone for sexual harassment issues, I know there is an email address you can write to. I'm not sure if it is only for this kind of discrimination, it may be for every type of discrimination. I'm not sure.

Q: Do you think that it is better to have only one person handling these problems or do you think that it will be better to have more people in charge of different issues about discrimination?

A: I think that it will be good to have at least a few people to handle the different types of issues because, you know, I guess you need different kind of expertise for each of these cases and I will imagine that they receive lots of email perhaps.

Q: Are you, or were you in your previous University, part of any collective or LGBTQ+ students association or group?

A: I know about the existence of these groups in both Universities. I didn't take part in their activities specifically university related.

Q: What's your opinion on having this kind of groups officially recognised and advertised by the university?

A: I think that it is very important. As a student, I think that this is where I would start. The first place where I would look for this kind of support frameworks. Because firstly it is a nice way to find peers that are your age as well and also your social environment. I guess you have a lot in common, I would imagine.

Q: I guess it will be easier to open up with people that are your age.

A: But then that is less diverse, I guess. For example, there will be no mixed ages.

Q: Do you think that it will isolate those people from the rest of the student community?

A: No, not at all. I think we need those spaces where we are surrounded by people who have lives and at least some of their experiences to ours. I don't think that it will isolate those communities from the rest of the students. It will be natural to make some friends there, but we still have classes with everyone else.

Q: What do you think about university officially joining events such as the Pride or the women's rights march?

A: I think that will be great. It will be a great way to show support in a very clear way, in a visual way, not just for students but also for people outside the university showing that this is what we believe in. That will be so great.

Q: Do you know if it ever happened in France?

A: I don't know.

Q: Did you ever notice if in official communication your university tries to use neutral language?

A: In France this is an interesting question because French is a gendered language, so every word is masculine or feminine, is one or the other and it is like that for almost all words. But in the emails and communication from universities they include both sexes always, but only the two, so it is binary. Because in French the neutral pronouns and everything I don't think they're much of a thing, but at least including women in job titles they do. It is an interesting question also because it's quite long then so they add punctuation marks for every word they include the male and the female. So for example students will have etudiant and etudiante and so it gets quite long and heavy to read. But at least they are showing some sort of progress. I feel that it is so much easier to be inclusive with everyone in English because it is just so much more neutral.

Q: You are from an English speaking country, how was the feeling to switch from a genderless to a gendered language?

A: I guess it is similar, is just that in French the emails are longer. Because every time there are the two of the same.

Q: Have you ever seen people putting their pronouns with their gender at the end of their email or beside their names during online calls?

A: I saw that once in an international seminar but I didn't see it used among French people. I think that they are a bit behind in that sense compared to the UK at least, I think. I was surprised when I saw that.

Q: Do you think that it will be a useful thing to do?

A: It depends from the type of the event I would say. If it going to be very collaborative, such as a roundtable type of thing where everyone is going to talk I think that is will be useful not only when people speak to you but when they refer to you in the third person. I think that it is when it will come in. Then I think that it is nice to out that. Otherwise in a huge webinar with two hundred people I don't think it will be necessary. But if you do that it does create awareness toward that already, on the other hand.

Q: Do you know if at your university there is the possibility for transgender students to have their chosen name and gender in their university badge, emails, etc even if they haven't changed their documents yet?

A: I'm not sure because I haven't truly investigated that. But for example I never chose my email address, it was just automatic so I would imagine those people will have quite a bit of difficulties to get through all of that because the admin system in France is notorious to be very... the bureaucracy is very heavy and you have to go through so many steps just to find out what you are supposed to do so I imagine that for those people it will be very complicated but I do not really know.

Q: It is necessary to speak French to go through all the bureaucracy at your university or you will find admin people speaking English since you are in an international environment?

A: I think it is quite necessary to speak French. Unfortunately, they are very old school in this sense, I think it is the case almost everywhere in France. It is very French though. So if you don't understand French it is quite difficult to know what to do and often times people just don't want to speak English

with you. For example admin staff that are supposed to help you to do something, I've heard that they do not speak English so it is a bit complicated.

Q: And did you ever noticed anybody from the admin offices trying to communicate using translation software (like google translate)?

A: Not specifically to translate entire words but to translate certain words that they forget yes.

Q: Did you ever had the feeling that some specific events or communication of an event was really talking to you and to your experience as an LGBTQ+ person?

A: I can only think to one example when they had a webinar... not a webinar, a zoom meeting scheduled with someone who is from an organisation that teaches women self- defence but verbal one. So different courses of actions when you are confronted with harassment and catcalling. That was nice. I saw this advertisement and I did reply and I did participate in this zoom meeting and it was quite cool because you know, as a woman this is what you have to do almost every day so it was nice.

Q: Did you ever have to deal with this kind of things in university?

A: I don't have any horror story, but I mean just in an everyday kind of way I think the way professors interact with students... especially the master students since the classes are smaller and they start to know the students, I will say that the way they interact with male and female students is not the same. It can vary in different ways but I will say that I've been aware of that difference. I've heard of people in my quite immediate environment, not my lab but just next door, that there was someone who apparently is a bit... like... creepy so that's my only direct experience, luckily.

Q: Do you think that the mobility of staff and students is somehow influencing university policies on diversity and inclusion?

A: Yeah, I think so. Having people from other countries in your university already boosts the chances of having a diverse student and staff population. Diverse not only in terms of where they come from but also life experience and social class, I guess. I think that this can already be a start to diversity because even within Europe countries are quite different on issues like homophobia or trans rights, it is not at all the same between countries so in that sense they are already diverse.

Q: There are countries in Europe in which you don't feel safe to go, and that you will prefer to apply for a position in the future?

A: Yeah, definitely. I'm not sure which one they are because I didn't grow up with all of this, probably also myths. I don't know the difference exactly between all the countries but I will definitely ask some people around me. Perhaps to other queer people to know if it is a good idea to go to that place. I will check before moving there.

Q: If you could fix one diversity and inclusion issue at your university, which one will it be?

A: Me personally I would go for equal rights and everything accompanying that between men and women. I would choose that because of my personal experience and because and because it is at least half of the population. It is hard because you cannot really separate all these issues.

Q: So you feel like you still don't have gender equality in your institution?

A: No. Maybe on paper but if you look at figures of the facts, if you just talk to people, ask their personal experience no. it is definitely not equal.

| |
|--|
| 13- 14* translated from Italian |
| Country of origin: Italy/ foreign country Institution's country: Italy Postition: Bachelor' students |
| <p>Q: can you please tell me what are you studying and where?</p> <p>13: we are both Bachelor's students from the same University in Italy and the same class. We both are at our second year.</p> <p>Q: Do you identify as a member of a minority group? It could be for whatever reason, from your gender to your religion.</p> <p>13: I do identify as a member of an ethnic minority group and I'm also part of the LGBTQ+ community, so I belong to two social minority groups at the same time.</p> <p>14: I do not belong to any minority group.</p> <p>Q: when do you think that an environment is "diverse"? What's your definition of diversity?</p> <p>13: I think that something is diverse when it doesn't respect the mainstream standards of aesthetics. For example when you're not a cis, white woman with a career... or even without a career but at home with children.</p> <p>14: to me diversity should just be the norm. We are all different.</p> <p>Q: what are the characteristics of an inclusive environment?</p> <p>14: to me, it is an environment in which we all have the same opportunities because we are all just people and we all have the same rights.</p> <p>13: even if I think that this thing never happens. We are not treated the same way.</p> <p>14: it should be like that, though.</p> <p>Q: will you describe your university as a diverse and inclusive environment? Or maybe just diverse or just inclusive? Or none?</p> <p>13: I think that it is inclusive, at least until a certain point, because in any case there are plenty of issues that are not even considered.</p> <p>Q: on which topics do you think that it is inclusive? And on which it isn't?</p> <p>13: to me, it isn't inclusive on everything that concerns psychological issues. I think this is something very important that they are missing. Because from psychological issues more problems may develop.</p> <p>Q: and what's your opinion 14?</p> <p>14: I don't know, I think that I haven't had the chance to observe enough the environment of the University to answer this question. In fact, our lessons were mostly online because of the pandemic.</p> <p>Q: do you know if your University offers some psychological support services for the students, someone you can talk to if you need it?</p> <p>13: I know that the University offers a service of psychological support but the students rarely use it.</p> <p>14: I didn't know about it, honestly.</p> |

Q: Why do you think that it is not used?

14: well, for example I would have been happy to use it if I only knew about its existence.

13: I think that the main problem is that people do not talk about it and it is poorly managed. Only very few people heard about it and usually not directly but because they spoke to a friend of a friend. Never from a trustworthy source.

Q: so they never have this information from an institutional source?

13: exactly. We never received any official communication about this service.

Q: do you think that it could have been useful to receive those information at the beginning of your first year at the University?

14: yes, of course.

13: yes, very useful.

Q: do you know if there are groups of students for what concerns diversity and inclusion issues?

14: no.

13: I just know the social pages of two of these groups from my University. I also volunteered for one of those groups but I don't know anything else. With another association, still from my University, I joined a group of students coming from all over the world and we did two or three online meetings in which we shared opinions on different subjects and we taught to each other words in our native languages.

Q: did your University ever send you a questionnaire or involve you in any kind of survey on diversity and inclusion issues?

13: no.

14: no, never.

Q: do you know about the CTS, that was created in your University less than one year ago?

13: no, we never heard about it.

14: no.

Q: does your University use a neutral language in its official communication?

13: some professors do. They use the asterisk or other methods but others just use the masculine first and then the feminine. Very few of them use the feminine first.

Q: so it depends on the professor?

13: yes, there are no shared guidelines.

Q: do you know if there is an officer you can talk to in case of discrimination?

13: no, I don't know if there is someone you can go to for this specific problem.

14: no, I have no idea.

Q: have you ever been a victim of discrimination at your University?

14: no, it never happened at the university.

13: no.

Q: what's your opinion on universities officially joining events such as the pride or the women's rights march?

13: that will be awesome but I don't think they will ever do it. I don't want to be negative but I don't think they will ever do something like that. I mean, they could have done before if they wanted to. Is not like they didn't have chances before. Since they already share and supports a lot of bullshit, they could do it also for more important stuff. I'm not saying that they are not doing anything important, but some minority groups are never included.

14: I have the same opinion. I don't think that there is any real obstacle, is just that they don't want to do it. I think that here in Italy it is very difficult for something like that to happen.

Q: did you ever received any official communication about events such as the international day against the homolebbitransphobia?

13: I never received any email. I saw some Instagram posts but never an official email

14: I neve received any official communication from the University.

Q: if you must search for information on this kind of events, where would you look?

13: Instagram.

14: yes, Instagram or maybe the University official website.

Q: what's your opinion on European exchange programs such as the Erasmus + program? Do you think that the increased mobility of students and researchers influenced the policies of the University on diversity and inclusion?

13: I think that it did, because even small changes can make a difference. The more you know about a topic, a person, a situation, the more you can put on this person shoes and the more able you are to help others.

14: I think that the Erasmus program helps you to expand your world and open your mind. Knowing different people and situations helps for sure. Is the lack of knowledge that segregate you in your small corner of your own little world.

Q: are you planning to be part of the Erasmus + program?

13: yes. On March I would like to ask to go to Spain.

14: I'd love to do it but I'm already far from home... is like doing a tiny Erasmus.

Q: keeping in mind all the chances for students and researchers to go to universities in different countries, do you think that it is useful that universities communicate information about their policies on diversity and inclusion towards minority groups?

14: definitely. They should advertise these pieces of information on their official web pages and they should give these information to the Erasmus + students.

Q: did you find these kind of information when you were gathering directions about the Erasmus + program?

13: no, when I looked for information last year there was a list of universities but there was no other information. At least this is what I saw. They give you guidelines that are not really helpful because then you have to look for all the pieces of information you need by yourself.

Q: what do you think about the university organising training courses on diversity and inclusion for professors and admin personnel?

(both laugh)

13: I don't think that they could possibly have any negative effects, quite the opposite actually. Positive effects could be being more inclusive towards transgender and non- binary people, because of a better understanding of these people. I think that with a proper training people will be more respectful.

14: it will be a big step forward on a communication level.

Q: do you think that the way University communicate can influence the institutional environment?

13: yes, of course. Because if there is communication there is dialogue and if there is dialogue there is a better comprehension among people.

14. exactly.

Q: do you think that one of the problem in communication between students and professors can be the lack of a shared language, for example because they belongs to different generations?

14: I don't know if it is a question of different generations, to be honest. I just think that it would be amazing if they could use a more respectful language.

Q: can you give me an example of a more respectful language they could use?

14: just the way they talk to the students during the exams, or when they answer to our emails. And be more updated on the modern world.

13: for example they could tr to use the right pronouns when they write you an email. The majority of people do not care about it but there are minorities inside the University for whom something like a wrong pronoun can be very harmful.

14: maybe they just do it because they don't know, I'm not saying that it is made on purpose or in a mean way. That's why I said that they need to update their knowledge, because maybe lots of professors will stop doing that if they know that it is wrong. They don't do it because they are mean but because they are ignorant.

Q: what's your opinion on giving space, for example during a lesson, to a student from a minority group to talk and educate their peers on their situation?

13: I agree that the members of social minority groups should be the ones who speak.

14: I think that it will be wonderful to have people talking about their personal experiences.

Q: did something like that ever happen at your University?

13: it never happened with transgender people from the University. But it happened for other topics. For example on female genital mutilation.

14: it never happened to me.

Q: have you noticed if any of your professors added their pronouns in their email signature, or in their zoom name?

14: no, never.

13: I never saw it at the university.

Q: do you think that it may be useful to do it?

13: yes, because inclusion can be built also though small things. It can be a way to teach something to others.

14: I think that people who need it should do it.

Q: do you know if your University has an ALIAS career for transgender students?

13: yes, I know what it is and I know that we have one at our university.

14: I don't know what is this ALIAS career.

Q: it is the possibility for a transgender person that hasn't updated their documents yet to be registered with their chosen name and gender.

13: one of my friend is trying to understand how it works since more than one month. The problem is that he never received any real information on how to obtain this career. There are no clear information on who to contact.

Q: in general, it is difficult for you to get the information you need from the admin offices?

13: yes, it is very difficult. It is difficult to understand how the website works. It is difficult even to have the simplest information, for example to know which office you have to contact. Sometimes even obtaining the email of the office is hard.

14: it is particularly difficult when you have to do something online.

Q: do you think that thin kind of inefficiency penalises some kind of people more than others?

13: yes, when you look at it, it is a form of discrimination. For example, this is a small thing that happened to me last year. When I had to register to the university they messed up with my ISEE because I'm a foreigner student and so the automatically assigned me a ISEE without using the one I gave them. So I ended up being registered with an ISEE that is different from my real one. I took weeks to solve that problem, going from one office to the other, calling lots of different numbers, sending faxes and emails etc. During those weeks I wasn't officially registered to the University because I haven't paid the taxes because of a problem they caused to me. And this year the same thing happened to one of my friends from the second year. These are small things, but they contribute to messing up with people life.

14: there is a general lack of organisation, there is nothing much to say. Online everything is worse because you have to find out everything by yourself. Sometimes there are phone numbers but nobody answers. At least when you could go to the offices in person it was easier.

Q: if you were in charge for the official communication channels of your institution how will you use them to foster diversity and inclusion?

13: I'd put more information on the website.

14: there should be also clearest information. It should be more easy to understand who you should contact, without having to do thousands of phone calls, mail, videocalls. I would improve the organisation.

Q: how will you advertise the existence of the CTS?

13: through Instagram.

14: through Instagram and the official website.

13: yes, because not everybody reads the emails. Sometimes people just quickly look at them and then delete them. While Instagram is more accessible.

14: yes, everybody uses Instagram.

Q: is there something that you want to add to this interview?

14: I just want to say that it is nice that someone is interested in these topics.

15

Country of origin: Poland

Institution's country: Poland

Position: PhD student

As a first question I will ask you which pronouns do you use. I use he/him. Can you tell me a bit about your academic career and in which institution you are now?

Recently I was thinking about my pronouns. So officially I use she/her but was thinking about they/them lately. But officially she/her. I'm a PhD student at university of Warsaw and I study biology and more specifically fungi and their interaction whit bacteria. I'm mostly a bioinformatician and I mostly work with computer and I just started my fourth year so I'm trying to finish my PhD soon.

So this is your last year!

It should be but I think that there will be maybe two more years.

And do you want to continue with research or are you fed up and you want to do something else?

I'm not sure. I think that I would like to go for at least one postdoc because it is an opportunity to travel, to live somewhere else to see if it is better than where I am now. So I'm not sure about being professor but I would like to go somewhere.

Do you have some place in mind?

There are few places I was thinking about. The best match would be a place in the US but I'm not sure if i want to go there and recently I was looking into Austria because it is in Europe and it is closer. But I don't know yet.

Well, you still have time to think. Do you identify yourself as a member of one or more than one social minority? For example for your ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation?

Yes. I'm a memembr of the LGBT community. I identify as a lesbian. About the gender identity i'm not sure. But I'm also part of the majority because i'm Polish with a Polish background. And also in Poland the majority of people are catholics and I'm not but I don't perceive it like a problem and I do not feel like being a minority in this case.

What is your definition of diversity? Diversity among humans I mean: it always better to specify when you talk to a scientist!

Yeah, you're right. For example in my environment most of the people are the same: they have the same gender, ethnicity. I'm not saying that they are all the same but they have similar point of views and I think it's important to include other vision of the world because I cannot think what needs could have a black person, for example. And when we have to make some decision it would be better if there are more perspective.

So it is better to have more than one point of view.

Yes.

And when do you perceive that a place is inclusive?

Sometimes I just feel it. I feel that in some place I will be accepted and people welcoming. Sometimes they put poster with the rainbow on the wall. In this case I know that this place will be inclusive most of the time. So inclusion is related mostly to people and to what people say. But it is also up to the administration to encourage the people. For example with the program for international students, helping them. At my university, for example, it is a problem because they write everything on the website in Polish. So even though they encourage people from abroad to study there it is hard for them to understand everything.

So there is no English translation?

Some things are translated, but not everything. I think that that's a start for our country. An inclusive place should also show campaigns that will show that you can be a woman in science or that you can be gay and do science, everything that shows that you can be safe.

Do you feel that your university is an inclusive place? Do you perceive it as a safe place?

My lab, my group and my institute is really inclusive and everybody knows that there are LGBT people. And we have "you can come out to me" and there are many out people. But I know that it isn't like that everywhere, even in our faculty. Because there is faculty, department, and university level. And I think that the university is trying to be more inclusive. They have some programs, but our faculty doesn't and since there are professors that are more accepting, students will only go to them if they have problems with their supervisors for being gay, for example. It is not official, it is mostly whispering in the corridors: it is how you know which places are LGBT friendly.

You told me that the university was trying to do some initiative to be more inclusive, can you tell me more about them?

I don't know much about them because I never really looked into them, but I saw some posters from a campaign saying that we are all equal and it was just this equal sign and there was one person looking like from the Middle East and the other human was white. I saw quite a lot of these posters. There were also initiatives from the student group. There is an antifascist committee and they usually do stuff and they are officially under university, so they are an official group and they try to promote diversity and there are also other groups called "2queer" but they are just like a scientific interest group but they watch queer movies for example, with discussion after. Things like that.

And also the queer group is an official group from university?

Yes.

Cool! And what's your opinion on this kind of groups? Do you think that they are useful for people to gather? Or they will be just another barrier between the queer people and the rest of the students?

This is a discussion that has been going around for a while now. It's ten years now. I think that nowadays there are more and more young people that are queer. More than in older generations, I mean. In this group there are also professors and PhD students, they also do this sort of "queer adaptive days" in which they present these groups to the students. So I don't think that this kind of groups are alienating. I guess most of my friends will go to these groups and feel great. It feels nice.

Q: at least from the news we get in Italy, it seems that Poland is not a very LGBTQ+ friendly country. At least, it is how it pictured in our media. Is it true? And if it is true how does the situation of the country influence the policies of the University on diversity and inclusion and safety of LGBTQ+ people?

A: I think that Poland is moving towards becoming a very dangerous place for LGBTQ+ people, so there were recently there LGBTQ+ free zones that were recently lifted just because the European Union said that they were not going to give money to those places anymore. The currently minister for education is openly homophobic and there was also a recent change in our university management and I think that they are not openly homophobic but the people they invite to give speeches in special occasions are. So it's a situation that didn't give a good vibe. But on the other hand there is that polarisation in which we have very homophobic people at one end while there are very anti-homophobic people on the other end. I want to believe that things will be better in the future and that this will be a better country for me in the future but it is a hard topic to talk about. Also, our university is in one of the biggest cities in Poland so it is quite modern and liberal. I think that people here are trying to be less conservative.

Q: yeah, so the situation is not very good but it is not desperate either. I'm sure that it will improve somehow. Do you think that for example the mobility of students and researchers can influence the policies of the university on diversity and inclusion?

A: mmh... I think that there are more people going outside than people coming to Poland. I think it is also because of our website being only in Polish, so the lack of communication may play a role in that. But I think that there is the a general trend of moving out from Poland. Some people may come back but I think that many people will just see that other countries are better, not only for science but also that it is nicer to live there. So I think that there will be more and more people that will leave Poland. Not only because the issues of this country with inclusion and diversity but also because there are not as much opportunities as in other European countries. Also it is possible that people who come back after seeing different realities and how things are done in different countries and they will bring those ideas back and trigger some sort of change.

Q: do you know if there is someone at the university you can talk to if you are victim of discrimination or harassment?

A: there is one person but recently there was this tragic situation in which a girl went to this person saying that she was raped. This person was supposed to start the procedures for this kind of episodes but the procedures never started and I think that two or three weeks later this girl went to the anti-fascist group at they said what happened out loud and finally her voice was heard. This girl was a PhD student and the person who harassed her was higher on the academic hierarchy.

So on paper there is this person you can talk to if something happens at the university but I'm not sure if I can trust them after what happened.

Q: you said that when the girl went to this anti-fascist group they were loud enough to gather the attention of the institution on what happened. But apart from extreme situation like this one, are there other official communication channels between the students and the university?

A: I'm not sure because I never had to use them. But the person from the university that is responsible for starting the harassment/ discrimination procedures is officially nominated by the university. I know that there are other people in my institution I can go and ask for help, but they are not officially nominated by the university. It is not like that I will not have any help if something happens. There is this non- official help group.

Q: will it be useful for professors and admin people to receive an official training on diversity and inclusion?

A: yes, for sure. However, I don't know it is a specific Polish problem, but when it comes to this kind of training people consider them a waste of time. But I think that it must be done. I know some people that would like to go to this kind of training and listen and learn but I also know people who will oppose this initiative. But I think that in the future there will be this kind of courses, I think that we are going in this direction because even if we have some problems we are still in Europe and we have to respect the European Union standards.

Q: what's your opinion on universities officially joining events such as the Pride or the women's right march?

A: it is a shocking idea for me! Of course I would be happy but I'm not sure, if they go officially for the pride for example, there may be other groups pretending to go also to right wing events. So I see lots of problems here. I will be happy if they would participate in Pride officially but I'm also afraid that far right groups may take advantage of it.

Q: do you know if in your university there is the possibility for transgender people to be registered with their chosen name on their badge or university email even if they haven't changed their documents yet?

A: I don't think that it will be a problem for the emails, I think that it will be possible but we have this digital platform for universities and recently another university in Poland that is known for being "the best university" in our country, they allowed students to choose their names in the system. We don't allow it yet in our system but this year for example I know that there were students emailing professors asking them to use different names and from what I heard those professor agreed on using the names the students asked for.

Q: so even if there are no official guidelines on that the single professor may allow it?

A: I think that in the future we will have this option for transgender people. I think that we are moving in this direction.

Q: is it a common practice in your university to add your pronouns to your signature in your official emails? Did you ever notice anybody doing that?

A: I saw it in the US when I was there two years ago, but I never saw anybody doing that in Poland. Maybe I should start doing it.

I think that it will be a useful thing to do so for example students don't have to write anymore emails specifying what their pronouns are or how they want to be addressed. I think that this option should exist directly in the system because recently there was this problem with a student that don't have a Polish name and the professor didn't know what was the gender of this person. So it would be nice

to have the pronouns directly in the system not only for transgender people. So maybe it will be easier for people to accept it if they see it that way.

Q: I must admit that I'm totally ignorant for what concerns Polish language. Is it a gendered language like Italian is? Do you have any neutral options? And if you do, are they used by your university in its official communication?

A: we have neutral in Polish but it is problematic because it is never used in first person and it is only used in third person when you talk about children for example. Some people started using it, though, because it is grammatically correct. We can also use the word "osoba" that means person, but it is longer so people do not like that, and we can say "person that is studying" for example. But it is longer than just saying students.

I never see that in official communication from the University. But at least they are starting to use the feminine version together with the masculine form. So at least they are doing that.

Q: do you think that maybe non- binary or gender non conforming people are left behind by this kind of communication?

A: well, as I said I never saw the neutral form used by any university or institutions but it is becoming more common and more and more people are starting to use it. For example it is very used in most leftie groups. Even in some official writing from the left party, not from the right wing one of course.

I think that it is the same in every language, at the beginning people do not like this new version and everybody says that it sucks. It is still hard to use the feminine version of jobs names for example. People only use the masculine version for everything and they argue that we don't need a feminine version. So we are just at the beginning of a more inclusive use of our language.

Q: well, we have the same problem in Italy. What's your opinion on women asking to be called with the male version of their jobs name?

A: I think that everybody should be addressed the way they like. So if a woman wants to be addressed with a masculine noun... I think that her preference for the masculine version comes from the same place of the dislike for the "new version", for example the usual argument is that the female version doesn't sound "as professional" as the male one. I don't agree, it shouldn't be like that but everybody has the right to choose the language they are talking. I think that it is more important to address people the way they want than to be correct.

Q: if you have to choose one or more than one official communication channel that the University can use to communicate their policies on diversity and inclusion, which one do you think will be more effective?

A: I think that universities should do this kind of campaigns, for sure. It should be visible, of course, but it will also be great if they can use subtle signs... for example departments can write in small letters that they are inclusive or they can put a rainbow somewhere... it is not a big thing but it will matter a lot for many people. Because of course, right now I'm finishing my PhD and I feel comfortable where I am, everybody knows about me, everybody knows my girlfriend and everything but in the beginning I didn't know if it was safe to be out. I knew that people seemed nice but you never know if it's going to be OK.

So if I had to choose two channels I will say campaigns and the subtle things, both of them are important.

Q: is there anything you want to add?

A: about the diversity training... maybe I didn't sound very enthusiastic at the beginning but I think that maybe... thinking about conservatives... maybe they are just homophobic but maybe they just don't have the knowledge or they don't know the right language. DFor example I know some people that are not very sensitive so even when they try to be kind to they don't know how to do it. So maybe these training courses are more important than I thought at the beginning.

16

Country of origin: Germany

Institution's country: Spain

Position: Erasmus intership

Q: Can you tell me a bit about your experience in the unviersity? What universities did you attended and what is your current stage in your academic career?

A: I finished my bachelor in geoscience at a University in Germany and now I'm taking a year break between my bachelor and my master and I'm now in Spain on Erasmus internship.

Q: Do you identify as a member of any minority group, for any reason like for example ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, anything?

A: Yeah, I'm transgender and I'm gay-ish.

If you think about the word "diversity", what do you think that it means?

Diversity is something that depends on the context, but I will say the embracing and celebrating of differences that are, in many cases, usually not celebrated but people are discriminated on the basis of these differences and their life is made harder because of certain aspects of people. I feel that diversity is often, like if you are like in a queer community, within a community that is diverse it can also be a second home because you can feel more free.

Where or are you still in any queer or LGBTQ+ group in your university?

I was very active in Germany, I was in a queer student group there.

And with your queer group did you organise events involving also the institution or the activity of the group were somehow a separated thing?.

So we will do both. Just like gay nights and stuff just for us, just to have space for our community and at the same time we also organised stuff at the university. So not specifically anything at the department but for example we asked for neutral bathrooms and we did a lot of outreach work like explaining to people why we wanted it. We acted to be visible. For example when it was still possible [before the pandemic] we went to the university cafeteria giving flyers and stuff like that.

So you were trying to involve people talking with them and giving them some informative material?

Yeah and at the same time we were trying to improve the life of queer people at the university. For example we were sitting in some roundtables where we advocated for diversity and helped people who wanted to include specifically queer people but didn't know how to do it. So we were able to talk on that topic.

If you think about the word "inclusion" how will you define it?

I guess it is important that people when they want to create an inclusive workspace they kind of step out of their own experiences because I think often people think OK, what do I need in a space and assume that that's what everyone needs but like certain groups have different needs in a workspace, So for a lot of the time a very big issue was the gender neutral bathroom which at least my university is only starting to slowly pick it up. And several times people didn't really understand why someone will need that until we will explain to them why and basically show them why it's necessary. Inclusion is basically just keeping in mind that there are people with different experiences and needs than you and being accommodating to that.

Did you have the feeling that people were able to understand when you explained them about the gender neutral toilets, for example? Did they change their mind?

When we were talking one to one to people they were very understanding. At the time I advocated for gender neutral bathroom at my department the person responsible for the diversity at the geoscience department was very understanding and we have a gender neutral bathroom in that building now. So when you talk to single people they often will be very understanding and see what they can do but we found that trying to implement big changes, like going top- down like going to the people in charge for the university and trying to get something official down there was a lot harder. Especially in the German University, they like to market themselves as very diverse but I often feel that they only do just enough so that they are able to print on their flyers that they are diverse and that's what is important and not the actual measures that they implement.

What's your opinion on university advertising them being diverse or inclusive through websites or flyers or other official channels?

I will be very cautious. That's the concept of thing- washing that what companies do and to some extent also what universities do. Sometimes universities only market themselves as queer-friendly without really caring about it, but it is also true that they to at least a minimum amount of work to achieve that label. If you are not inside that specific university, it is very hard to tell if their inclusiveness is real. If you are an outsider you won't necessary know if it is true that they do that or no. Obviously if it's a university I guess I would still have a better feeling about a university that advertise themselves as diverse and queer friendly then going to one that explicitly doesn't. It shows at least a bit of effort. But I'm just very suspicious of marketing.

Did you ever received any official communication form your university advertising for example some events about diversity and inclusion? For example for international days like the international day against the homobobitansphobia?

Not from the university. If something was done, it would have come from the queer groups I was a member of. We have an office called the bureau for gender and diversity and people working there are employed by the university and they helped us a lot. So at least is not just students that are fighting for that.

What do you think about organising training on diversity and inclusion for professors and administrative staff?

I would very much like that also because people often do not realise what their blind spots are and I think that is a good thing to make them aware about diversity and inclusion issues.

Do you know if there is a way a transgender person can have their badge, official email and other things at the university with their chosen name even if they haven't changed their document yet?

At the German university it is very easy. In Germany there is a thing called supplementary ID which is by an organisation for transgender people and you can order it online and it costs 20 euros and it's not a replacement for your ID but if you have that certificate or if you have a letter from your psychiatrist than the university will let you change basically everything in their record with the new name. I know that there are university specifically in the Bavarian area in Munich in which it is very very hard to do that. But the German university from that point of view is very good.

But you still have to provide a certificate to prove that you are transgender to have your name changed?

It's like a little ID, it looks like a normal ID and I already had it because it's very useful for basically everything. You can do everything with that little card except for opening a bank account. And it is very accessible to people. There is a thing that they say they are already working on but it's still not possible to my knowledge to have your gender changed in something other than male or female in the ID.

Did you ever noticed anybody writing their pronouns in their official emails or near their name in online meetings?

I know one person, the same that was in charge for the diversity and gender bureau in the geoscience department at the German University. The people from the gender and diversity bureau do it and I was in a meeting once- it was a roundtable on diversity- and they were telling people about their options and that may be a good thing. There was immediately two people- at the roundtable on diversity!- that were like "Oh no, you can't force people to do that!". And while this was a good idea, they just understood that it was going to be mandatory for everybody to do that. But apart from that, I saw just a few students and I think someone in a zoom meeting once writing their pronouns.

Do you think it is something useful to do?

Yes.

And why do you think it may help?

Well, for example a lot of the time you cannot just tell people's gender from just the name. And even going away from transness, you can meet a person with a name you are not familiar with, maybe it's a name with is used in a different country. So that's make everything so much easier. If you are dealing with trans people, then a lot of people took sometimes before getting used to a different

pronouns and maybe they forgot or they are not sure anymore or they are not sure how to call you in a certain context if you are not fully out for example and it makes conversations a lot easier if it is clear.

For example, "Nicola" in Germany will be woman's name.

What do you think about universities trying to use neutral languages in their official communication?

I think that's very good. In Germany we have the concept of the gender star. For example in German student is "student" (the male form), often used for everyone, and "studentin" is the female version. With the gender star you will have student*in so the gender star is a rot of a placeholder for all the other identities. And often a lot of people don't like that because it is hard to speak with the gender star if they are not used to it and it doesn't feel natural. But neutral language kind of circumvented that problem because it still feel natural, it still have a flow while speaking and it accomplishes the goal of including everyone.

Is your university using this enough in their communication?

I'm not sure... I know that all the student's representation does. Let's me just check a random university email: yes, they do it. They used the gender neutral.... or at least they tried. Obviously, they do not do it always and often a lot of professors and staff don't. But at least if it is an official thing they try to do that.

What do you think about universities officially joining events such as the pride?

At my university it was organised that we, the queer representation, would go and at the beginning we were not allowed to use the official university logo but with time we ended up being the queer representation of the university at the pride march. I think that this is a god solution.

So now you are authorised to use the official logo?

Yes, basically we represent the university. I think that it make sense to have queer people representing the university at a queer event instead of having other people going.

Did you ever joined any event on diversity and inclusion organised by your university?

Well, we organised some but I never attended anything organised by the university. I don't think so.

So you only took part in the events organised by your group?

Yes.

Did you ever ask for a feedback from the participants to one of the events organised by the queer group? Formally, for example through a questionnaire, or informally.

Well, we never organised for example career advises for queer people, we organised events that were less informative or less workshops. Less to do with the university I guess.

Do you know if there is a person at the university in charge for discrimination episodes?

Yes, that would be the bureau on gender and diversity. Sometimes people come to us (the queer group) to report their problems and we forward their message to the gender and diversity bureau. But it didn't happen too often but there is a place we can send them, a place where people can go. I mean, few students know that but it exists and they are very inclusive and do a good work.

Maybe it is not very well advertised?

I'm not sure, I can't really speak about that because I don't know how it would have been if I wasn't in the queer group and had personal contact with them. But I think that if I had a problem it would have been easy to find them online.

Do you think that the increasing mobility of students and staff, fostered by the EU policies, will somehow change the approach of the university to inclusion and diversity issues?

When it comes to make the university inclusive to non- German speaking students or foreign students in general... I would hope so. I'm not sure. I mean, there are certainly programs that can be expanded, like buddy programs, but I don't know how the university handle that. I know what's going on the queer side but I don't know much about the other kind of diversity.

Imagine to be in charge of all the communication channels of your university for one day. How will you advertise that your university is a diverse and inclusive place? Which channel will you use? Imagine that you want to reach both people who are already part of the university but also future students.

It is important that how it markets look is authentic. Universities should think about what they could do for queer people and for diversity. They should give the opportunity to queer people to speak for themselves instead of speaking for them.

Maybe giving them room on the official channels?

Yes. Maybe advertise where are the queer groups and how to reach them and where is the Erasmus buddy program etc Just maybe highlight that over. I was also in the general student representation at FAU so I got to see the presentation of the university president for the new marketing scheme and they're terrible. They were like "oh, we are going to be so conscious about the environment" and in their next sentence they were like "collaboration with adidas is going to continue"... like what? I think that they should focus on authenticity instead of on what makes you look good. Just dot things instead of marketing.

17* translated from Italian

Country of origin: Italy

Institution's country: Italy

Position: communication office

I'm interested in researching the institutional communication on the topic of diversity and inclusion. I'd like to know your definition of diversity and inclusion.

This is a difficult question! So... diversity... we are talking about diversity among human beings, right? Not as an absolute concept.

Exactly, we are talking about diversity among humans and the human society.

I think that diversity is everything we are not familiar with and it is everything that seems far from our everyday experience. Inclusion is when we close this gap between what's perceived as diverse and what you are willing to let into your "bubble", into your everyday life. You should decide to do so, you need to have the tools and the knowledge to process it and maybe sometimes there is someone showing you the way. You get closer to what it seems to be very different from you.

Diversity is very subjective because maybe what's different for me isn't the same for another person but I think that it is how we perceive the world outside of ourselves. It is something subjective that vary from person to person.

If you think about your workplace, will you define it as a diverse environment? As a place where there is a high level of diversity?

Diversity compared to what?

Diversity according to the definition you just gave me.

The people I work with at the moment are different from the people I used to work with in the past. Firstly because of how they approach their working tasks... I also have to say that this kind of job is new for me, I started it only a few months ago. Before I worked in private corporations, this is my first time in a public institution. So, the approach to work is very different. If we talk about the composition of the workforce I am biased because I mostly saw them online, but even if I don't know them well yet, they seem to be very similar to each other. They also approach the job the same way, they are all very similar.

Since you worked both in private and public institutions, in your experience is there any difference in terms of communication guidelines? Particularly for what concerns diversity and inclusion?

Well, in my life I mostly worked in the private sector, so I have less experience in the public sector. For more than 10 years I worked in strict contacts with other private corporations and freelances and only recently I joined this big public administration reality. What I can say is that the topics of diversity, inclusion and diversity were more considered, discussed and researched in the private institutions' communication than in the public ones. I had more chances to think about inclusion when I was working for private institutions. I thought about language and its meaning together with other freelances. If you think about small activities like a publishing house, they think a lot about communication because they produce communication. In the University I currently work for, I know that there are guidelines and I read them but there was never any kind of induction or thinking on these topics. I know that at institutional level we have to stick to the official guidelines but we never really talked about them and there was no explanation given. To give you an example, we recently opened an official Instagram account and for a while we posted a lot about the researcher's night event since our office organise it since several years. Then I noticed that the program of the researchers' night was full of schwa, they were everywhere. So I thought if we were supposed to do the same with our Instagram account. The researcher's night is a European project, while the Instagram account is part of the University official communication channels. So I wondered if I was supposed to use the schwa in the Instagram account or trying to write in the more neutral possible way, trying to avoid all the gendered words. Even if I asked nobody was able to answer me and one of my colleagues didn't even know what a schwa was. From this experience I think that this is not a "hot topic" in my bureau. At least for the people I asked for help. I think that people just blindly follow the guidelines so you just write "Buongiorno a tutte a tutti" (Goodmorning to everybody) and that's it. I didn't feel a more deep thinking behind.

So when they give you these guidelines they just tell you to stick with them, without any further explanation.

Honestly, they didn't even give them to me, I looked for them by myself. Because since I have to produce the communication contents I need to know the official communication guidelines. Also, I know that the University is not still in the Middle Age regarding diversity and inclusion and language. I noticed that they have this kind of attention, for example in the emails they sent me. But despite this kind of attention they do not talk about this topic with the employees, at least for what I experienced until now.

In your opinion which could be a good way to introduce these guidelines to the admin employees?

At the moment I think that it is just a pdf file that you can download and read. Maybe when they first wrote these guidelines there was an official communication. I was the head of my bureau I would inform those who are in charge of creating contents for the University communication channels about the official communication guidelines, all of them, not only those about gendered language. I will be sure that all these guidelines are clear for all people working in the University communication bureau. I'm sure that there were some sort of general communications when the guidelines were firstly written. But you also must think that there is a turnover of people in the bureau, not as much as in private institutions, but it is necessary to update the employees and also to inform the new ones. Since we do communication we should stay updated and we should talk also among us, inside the single offices.

Do you know if there is a direct channel of communication with the students' groups? For example if they have something they want to inform their University about?

I have absolutely no idea, I'm sorry.

There is an officer for the personnel in case of incidents of discrimination or harassment?

I have some official contacts but I don't know if in case of discrimination or other incidents these are the people to contact. We never talked about that in my office and it never happened to me, luckily, also because we are all women in my office so at least some stuffs cannot happen. I can't answer this question, I'm sorry.

In several universities in Italy it is possible for transgender people to have their university badge, emails etc with their chosen name and gender on it (the ALIAS career). Do you now if there is something like that in your University and if yes, it is accessible also for the staff?

This is another question I'm not able to answer. I didn't know about this possibility for the students, so thank you for letting me know, and consequently I don't know if something similar exists for the personnel. But these are very technical stuffs that I can gather information about if you need them. Also, I have to say again that I have been here for a few months so maybe if I was there for a longer time I would have known. But I never get in touch with this kind of reality so I don't know if there is this kind of policy for the personnel.

Let's take a step back to the researcher's night event where there were "raining schwa", I imagine that trying to use a neutral language is time- expensive, it is more work than just writing without paying attention to this issue. Since you told me that you try to pay attention

to the use of language, how do you combine this extra effort in terms of time with the need, maybe, to be quick because you have to write lots of contents for the communication channels?

I think that language is very important, so it is important to spend time to find the best way to communicate in a neutral and inclusive way. However, we are not used to do so, at least I'm not. I don't like, for example, to always repeat the words twice, one for the masculine and one for the feminine form, especially for the social networks since they need a language that it is easy and quick to read. But there are ways to avoid this trap: you have to build your sentences trying to avoid to use words that needs gender agreement but it slightly changes the language. This is a personal observation, maybe also because we are getting used to it, but if you must put a special attention when you write or when you talk, I remember that when I started to work I did a stage in a radio that was particularly keen on this language issue, the radio doesn't exist anymore of course, and they always said "buongiorno a tutte le nostre ascoltatrici ed ascoltatori" (goodmorning to all our listeners). And it was something "difficult" to do at least at the beginning because if you are not used to do it you have to stop and think and it is the same when you write a text. To me this is something that has the priority, so it must be done and if you do it quickly because you have too many things to do the risk is that the text will be a bit ugly and poor or you can make some mistake.

For example when I asked my colleagues about the use of the schwa it was because I had just published a post in which there was no schwa, I just wrote "*venite numerosi alla notte dei ricercatori*" (come in great numbers to the researcher's night). After some hours I modified the second part of the text "venite numerosi" (come in great numbers), removing the "numerosi" so that the sentence could sound more neutral even if it was more poor. I couldn't write "numerosi e numerose" because I already wrote "ricercatori e ricercatrici" a few words before. These are small things and I think that in this situation the schwa is a way to solve the problem. It cannot solve the problem in the spoken language but it can do something for the written one.

How do I balance it with the need of being quick? I personally give priority to the use of a neutral and inclusive language, also because it is not too time-consuming in the end. I think that we are in a transition phase and we have to get used to this new way to use the language. This need for a more neutral language has been officially formalised recently, so we all need to get used to it.

Have you received any comment on your work for this reason, these comments being positive or negative?

No, it never happened. Probably because all this hype on neutral language is relatively recent so I never received any comment on that.

In your institution do you put your pronouns in the official email signature?

I saw it only on Instagram, but used by people way much younger than me. No, I never saw it used in the official emails.

Do you think that it is that can be useful to do?

Well, the first time that I saw it, it made me curious. The I understood the reason why people were doing that. I think that it is useful for the person who needs to specify their pronouns, it is useful to inform other people that these are the pronouns they use. I think that if it is important for that person,

it is also a politic thing, it is something that is going to become a habit that we didn't have before. Oh no, now I sound like a boomer and maybe I am one! It is a way to make explicit something that sometimes is not for most of the people. I think that this practice has a very high communication power. I think that people should feel free to do so if they need it and they also must pretend for other people to respect their pronouns.

Imagine to be the boss of your bureau at the University, to have all the power for one day. How will you advertise your University policies on diversity and inclusion? Choose the three communication channels that you think may be the most powerful.

Am I supposed to do marketing about that? Well, I will start by practical things. For example, electing a black, gay, woman as the head of the University, this is an extreme examples of course. But using only the communication will sound a bit fake to me, it will become a branding of a movement, this is a risk. I would like to make the idea of diversity and inclusion something ordinary, something that you experience everyday. So if you really are inclusive, you have in your office, in you University, all different kind of people, all the possible diversities. And these people should also be able to access to every position. If they belongs to everyday normal life, than there is also the chance for them to be in high positions. And it will also shows to people that this University is really inclusive. It is like symbology of a black pope or of the black US president. It is the same thing but for academic positions. The best advertisement for an inclusive environment is to be really inclusive. It doesn't have to only be a shining showcase. Like in politics, where there are almost no women. Or in the work environment in which women are paid less than men on average.

Of course every change take time, the selection of the personnel also depends on the surrounding environment. If you are the head of a university in a big city than you have much more chances to have a high rate of diversity in your institution.

I know that this strategy is not a very effective communication strategy, but if I had all the power in the university I will try to change things for real. To be really inclusive.

What's your opinion on universities officially joining the pride or the women's right march?

This is part of the practical actions I was talking before. There are public events that shows which side you are on a certain topic. A university joining one of those events is coherent with the idea of choosing and following a line of action. Of course the institutions have more bureaucratic boundaries than people. I think that it is a strong message for the universities and that it is a way to make a statement. I think that they should do it, just saying that you are not racist is not enough.

Did your University organised a special communication campaign for international days such as the women's day or the international day against homolesbobitransphobia?

We have a magazine that is the showcase of the press office but for some reason it is not connected to us, even if we are the ones doing the communication, and I was thinking if I saw something on this magazine.... no, or at least nothing that caught my attention.

18

Country of origin: Italy

Institution's country: Italy

Position: adjunct professor

Q: Can you tell me about your academic career, where are you from and what's your position now?

A: I'm 36, I was born in Italy and I did my Bachelor' degree in science and technologies for the art in Southern Italy. At that time, I was already working as graphic designer and I've been doing this work for 15 years. I had different jobs in the field of visual communication, from publishers to marketing agencies, events organisation and so on. I moved to Northern Italy in 11 years ago and 6 years ago I started a career as a freelance. I took this decision to have more freedom in choosing and managing customers and to be able to choose projects that were closer to mi ethics. In fact, the latter was a problem for me, especially for the marketing: I had plenty of dilemmas.

Aside of my freelance job, I teach since 4 years at an art Academy, as an adjunct professor. I don't have a stable academic position. Every year I have different courses for the Bachelor 'students. All my courses belongs to the field of brand design. I'm also responsible for one of the final thesis laboratory and every year I accompany 12 to 15 students to the end of their Bachelor's.

Q: do you identify yourself as a member of a social minority group?

A: quite the opposite, actually. I think that I'm part of the majority, or of the minority that holds the power. The only characteristics for what I consider myself as a member of a minority group is because of the fact that I'm from the South of Italy. Now is not like that anymore, but when I first moved to the north my origin was a source of diversity and sometimes people made bad comments or jokes about that. This is my only experience of discrimination as a member of a minority group. I was treated differently just because of the place where I was born. Today this thing is almost not happening anymore. I think that it is because I'm living here in the north since 11 years. But sometimes is still happens, some jokes about "terroni" (depreciative way to call people from Southern Italy). When it happens I usually stare at that person saying "What the fuck do you want?". It is slightly different if the joke comes from someone that I know... it is still unpleasant, though. If it is form someone that I know I usually just tell them that it is OK for this time, but not to do it again. But if it is from someone that I don't know I put them on my black list and I don't want to be their friend.

Q: when you spoke to the people about the fact that their jokes were hurting you, did they understand and change their behaviour?

A: with some of them we have a sort of inside joke, so they know that when they do that kind of joke i will answer with another one about them. In this case is a sort of exchange and it is a funny for everybody.

Recently it happened with a person I was very close in the past, but with I didn't have any close contact in a while. He did a joke about my origins and I said to him that it was OK but only for this time and only because it came from him. I think that he understood that I wasn't happy. But that's the only recent example I can think about because, as I told, it is something that is not happening as

much as 11 years ago. It is also true that when I moved to the north 11 years ago there weren't so many people from other regions in the city I currently live in.

Q: thinking about the Academy you teach in, will you define its environment as diverse?

A: yes. For instance, it is an international school, so there are plenty of students from other countries such as Turkey, China, East- Europe etc. This contributes to the overall diversity. Also, it is intrinsically a creative environment and it also attract diverse people. There are different classes for people with peculiar artistic flair. In our Academy we have people going around dressed in the craziest possible ways. I don't want to be the stereotype of the old man, but at the beginning I noticed that some people just seemed to be wearing pyjamas at the university. There were also goth people all dressed in black and other people dressed in a very crazy way, at least for my standards. If I were them, I would have never worn anything like that.

But even if at the beginning I was a bit shocked, then I understood that people feeling comfortable to dress as they like is a positive thing. I think that at the Academy we have a decent degree of freedom of expression in terms of dress code and behaviours. Also, there is a course of fashion design at the Academy, so I think that some students are just experimenting on themselves.

Q: do you think that the environment of the Academy is inclusive?

A: from the point of view of the freedom of expression and absence of prejudices yes. For example we have an alias career for transgender students and since the beginning of this year there is no need for a medical referral to get access to this career. Everybody can choose how they want to be called without any specific bureaucracy.

But there are also less inclusive situation, for example students tend to create groups only including people with specific characteristics. For example the Chinese students usually create groups with other Chinese people only. Because of an agreement, we have lots of Chinese students coming to our Academy. The problem is that in most cases they don't know Italian language, not even when they have a certificate attesting their Italian level. For this reason it is hard for them to follow the lessons and also to make friends. This is a linguistic barrier that is not always possible to overcome. Of course, there are also positive examples of Chinese students very well integrated in our classes. My thought is that some of these Chinese students don't make any effort to learn Italian. They stay in our Academy for three- four year and they learn zero Italian, not even enough for basic everyday interactions. I think that some of them should make at least a but more efforts to learn the language of the place they live in. The environment is open and friendly, but they also need to do something.

Q: does the Academy offer Italian courses?

A: yes, it does.

Q: do you know if there is someone a member of the staff or a professor can talk to in case of discrimination?

A: I think that the answer is yes, even if I never did any research. We have a system that helps international students and there are specific people you can talk to get help for the ALIAS career. We also have a series of services of psychological counselling. There are several places you can go to ask for help and even if they are not the right office they can point you in the right direction.

Q: how can you contact these offices? Are their contacts on the Academy website?

A: No, but they are available on the Academy's online platform. It is a digital platform for students and professors. There are common sections and also sections that are only for professors. You can find all this information in the menu and I think that there is also a sort of induction for the students about the different services offered by the Academy. But I don't know how they are going to be introduced for the first time to our students.

Q: do you know if these services are only for students or if they are open also to professors?

A: I have no idea. I never looked for this information and I must admit that also the Academy never really introduced them to us.

Every 6 months we professors receive the list of students with learning disabilities so that we can plan a specific study plan with them and that's all. For example, I have a student with dyslexia and we found a way together to switch from a book in English to another one in Italian.

But I have no idea if we have this kind of services for professors because I never had the need to look for them.

Professors have also personal contact people such as the course leader, the area leader etc. I think that if I need something I can go and talk to them or with more experienced colleagues.

Q: how did you know about the ALIAS career?

A: there are regular youtube directs from the Academy director. Usually they are at the beginning of each semester and during the pandemic they happened more often. During these directs he talks about the news about the Academy.

There are directs for students that are open to everybody and there are directs for professors that are private.

During one of these directs he told us that from this year the ALIAS career is open to everybody. During these directs you can write any question you have in the chat and he will answer. Before the pandemic these kind of meeting were in person, but now everything is online for safety reasons.

Q: what's your opinion about those universities that officially joins event such as the pride march or the march for the women's rights?

A: I will be absolutely in favour if my Academy would do that, I don't see anything negative in taking part in these events. Quite the opposite, actually. This is a very strong statement for an institution, a brand, an organisation to make.

Q: do you receive any guidelines about the kind of language you are supposed to use during official communication and with the students?

A: no, no guidelines. I must say that I'm slowly getting used to a more inclusive language but more because I'm making a personal effort to change my behaviour than because I received any specific direction. To give you an example, until last year when I wrote to the student I always use only the masculine plural form ("carissimi"), but now I use the schwa. I try to be careful because my course is related to this kind of issues because it is about gender identity and diversity. It is harder when it comes to spoken language, but when I write I try to be careful.

Q: are you aware of any initiative from your Academy for special days such as the international day against homobobitransphobia? Or about any other event on diversity and inclusion?

A: honestly I have no idea, but since there are plenty of initiatives I cannot follow all of them also because in the end I'm not a full professor and I'm only there for the courses I teach. But probably there are initiatives like that.

Q: how are these events advertised? Through the Academy digital platform?

A: they are advertised both via digital platform and newsletter. Also, keep in mind that often our students do projects for ONG or similar organisations as part of their study, so I'm sure that some of the students did a project on the topic of diversity and inclusion.

Q: what do you think about the possibility for the Academy to organise diversity management training courses for professors and admin staff?

A: I think that they will be a good idea, but only if they will be well executed. Not like the training courses on the safety in the workplace that are very bad because their only goal is to give you a certificate at the end. They are incredibly boring and give you plenty of useless information since they are not specific for your kind of work. They just mix everything from offices to factories. If the diversity training courses are going to be like that then no thanks, we don't need them. But I'd love to have a good course on diversity and inclusion management. I'm interested in this topic. Of course, since I'm a man I'm not directly involved in this kind of problems and I never experienced any form of discrimination apart from the small episodes I told you about before. But I know people who were and are still discriminated and I think that it is important to know more about this topic, especially for those people who don't experience discrimination everyday and must learn to see things from a different point of view. If the Academy will do such a course I'll be happy to attend it.

Q: imagine to be able to use any of the communication channel of your Academy to promote a message about diversity and inclusion, which channel do you think it will be the most appropriate?

A: I will use the Academy campus, but not the inner part. I will exploit the outside wall. Inside our Academy the situation is quite good for our students, but it is a wall garden, a close space. That's why I think that it will be good to use all the walls that delimitate our campus. I think that it will be the best and most interesting place to talk about this issue. I think that we need to talk more about diversity and inclusion in the physical world. Of course, there are beautiful examples of social media campaigns, marketing and so on. But I think that the best way to talk about it is always one-by-one. I talk to a person about my experience and then maybe that person can understand me better because they could talk to me and see me. I think that it is more effective than just hearing my voice in a podcast or read an Instagram post. I think that this is the most effective way. At least until we are not going to have virtual reality experiences where we can really be in the other person shoes. Something like that already exists. For example there is a VR experience in which you could be a migrant on a boat in the Mediterranean sea for 10 minutes. You could see and feel what they see and feel and I think that after such experience you will be more sensible on that topic, at least a bit. I think that in the future immersive experiences like this one may help us to better understand people who live experiences that are far from our everyday life.