Policy Brief Italy - Summary

The policy brief reports the results of the mapping and review of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) keys and dimensions in one Research Performing Organization (RPO) (the University of Padova) and in one Research Funding Organization (RFO) (Fondazione Telethon) in Italy. The national mapping shows that RRI has a limited presence in the Italian science policy debate. The absence of a specific national policy framework on this matter does not prevent, however, the implementation of individual, sophisticated initiatives in regional policy or industry. On the other hand, many aspects of RRI Keys are the subject matter of regulation and policies of more general validity, such as the laws on the prevention of gender discrimination, or the national evaluation framework of the Universities' Third Mission activities made by the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of University and Research Systems (ANVUR).

A research intensive higher education institution, the University of Padova sees knowledge production and research quality as two fundamental dimensions of the University's social responsibility. RRI as such has a limited diffusion and seems mostly confined to the individuals, groups, and structures more involved in EU programs. Fondazione Telethon is a private foundation performing and funding research on rare genetic diseases. Research excellence and impact on patients are the chief criteria Telethon has set to deliver its mission and, therefore, to be responsive to the community and to its stakeholders, such as donors, individuals affected by genetic diseases, and their families. Similarly to the University of Padova, Telethon was new to RRI, too. However, policies, programs and practices are in place and cover all RRI Keys. Interactions with European peers and US leading research and research funding organizations were crucial in developing the Foundation's policies, for instance on Open Access.

The policy brief emphasises two scalable best practices. For Research Conducting and Higher Education Organizations, it is suggested to make explicit the link between teaching/research activities and their contribution to solve societal challenges. In 2018, the University of Padova has made mandatory for the academic staff to explain the contribution of their courses to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. For Research Funding Organizations. Fondazione Telethon has institutionalized a number of instruments through which patient organizations interact with researchers and can influence the Telethon's operations and mission. Creating similar mechanisms to integrate issue-based civil society organizations into organizations' decisions might prove instrumental to build structures, and to make funding choices and, subsequently, research activities closer to societal expectations and needs.