

# The impact of Covid-19 on Italian Higher Education in the context of the European scenario

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## 1 Introduction

The Covid-19 emergency led most, if not all, higher education institutions around the world to move towards online learning. While there is a wide literature and a solid theoretical framework for online learning, including the active learning paradigm, the relevance of open learning resources, the key role of the Virtual Learning Environments and of the e-tutoring, most of the higher education institutions had to switch to some sort of emergency online learning suddenly, in many cases without consistent contingency plan [1].

A wide number of research has been published about the impact of covid-19 pandemic on higher education, some were focused on specific experiences of a course, an institution, or a country, whereas others are a reflection on online learning itself in the extraordinary condition of the pandemic lockdown or systematic review of the published papers on the emergency online learning in HE [2, 3].

Even the European Union released a report: “The impact of COVID-19 on higher education: a review of emerging evidence” [4] aimed at providing a synthesis of the emerging evidence on the impact of the pandemic disruption on higher education in Europe, the report focuses three thematic areas: teaching and learning; the social dimension of higher education (inclusion and vulnerable/disadvantaged learners); and student mobility. Based on survey report, paper and publications, the report synthesizes emerging evidence into three levels of impact: (1) immediate impact: how the pandemic affected institutions and learners in 2019/2020; (2) short-term impact: how the pandemic is affecting or is likely to affect the 2020/2021 academic year; (3) medium-term impact: how the effects of the pandemic are likely to affect higher education systems, institutions and students by 2025).

Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR) has made available the raw data of two questionnaires about the Covid-19 [5] emergency online learning response in Italian universities, published between 14 December 2020 and 8 February 2021, the first to the governance of Italian universities, the second to teachers and researchers involved in university teaching. The present analysis is intended to compare the outcomes from the Anvur questionnaires with the European framework pictured by the EU Report above mentioned.

## 2 Data analysis

Anvur developed two questionnaires: one for the university's governance and one for professors and lecturers. The target for the first questionnaire was the 85 Italian Universities (11 online universities excluded), of which 56 answered (about the 51%). The target for the second questionnaire was the about 56 thousand academic personnel in service (lecturers on contract not included), of which about 17 thousand answered (about the 29,5%). The EU report is based on 14 rapid-response surveys carried out in 2020 by universities, higher education organizations and single researchers, as well as over 50 papers, reports, and publications.

The results of the Anvur governance questionnaire in the first pandemic emergency lockdown are substantially in line with the data reported in the EU report. All the universities that replied to the questionnaire have activated remote teaching solutions, in most cases these are synchronous lessons respecting the planned schedule totally or in large part (more than 94%). In almost all cases, the solutions for distance learning were arranged centrally by the university (more than 96%). The training was carried out centrally, aimed at everyone and almost always in a way strictly connected to the emergency (more than 80%), with the definition of guidelines always at the university level (about 78%).

On the other hand, the prospect for the future differs, while the EU report highlights an interest in keeping distance teaching at least partly, Italian universities seem more oriented towards maintaining distance teaching solutions as an integration of face-to-face teaching (75% in synchronous mode and 65% in asynchronous mode) but not to activate fully remote courses. The online mode is instead considered as an improvement that will be maintained in the future in relation to teacher / student communication (94.6%) and administrative services for students (87.5%).

### References

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