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Using ESG paradigm as a basis for social reporting in nonprofit organizations: evidence from cases in healthcare

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**Using ESG paradigm as a basis for social reporting in  
nonprofit healthcare organizations**

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Using [ESG paradigm](#) as a basis for social reporting in non-profit healthcare organizations

## Does the ESG framework matter for drawing up the social reporting for non-profit healthcare organizations?

### ABSTRACT

#### Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to understand whether and how the [ESGsESG framework-paradigm](#) can be useful in social reporting for nonprofit healthcare organizations. In other words, the study deals with non-financial reporting and information, allowing external stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate the organization's performance and behavior.

#### Design/Methodology/Approach

The authors used a case study approach investigating four cases among nonprofit healthcare organizations. Analyses of available primary sources have been conducted, followed by semi-structured interviews. Interviews were then transcribed and coded in a joint blinded process by all authors. Three areas have been investigated:

- (1) Factors motivating the development of non-financial disclosure practices.
- (2) The rationale behind the organization's decision to include specific topics.
- (3) Their perspective on the future of non-financial disclosure within their specific sector.

#### Findings

[ESGsESG](#) may serve as a suitable framework to create comparable documents that can act as benchmarks for similar institutions. However, while [Nonprofit Organizations](#) (NPOs) can draw inspiration from [ESGsESG principles](#), the utility of these criteria should be thoughtfully tailored to align with the organization's mission.

The use [ESGsESG](#) as a general guide, instead of implementing it as a real tool to assess performances, [considered by all interviewees emerges](#) as a positive practice. [NPOs should not focus on fulfilling ESG requirements, bur rather take inspiration from them. Otherwise, the risk is an excess of focus on the formal aspect rather than on its content.](#)

#### Originality

The study contributes to a better understanding of social and [sustainability ESGsESG'](#) reporting activities and approaches in the healthcare sector by describing some case studies and the effect of sustainability in the social reporting of nonprofit healthcare organizations.

## Keywords

ESG, Non-profit organizations, healthcare organizations, non-financial disclosure

## Introduction

Nowadays, ~~the globalization and internationalization processes are pushing businesses from different sectors, to develop sustainable strategies and solutions that could positively influence the management of healthcare sector. M~~many healthcare systems all over the world had to clearly identify the “environmental-social-governance” concept (ESG), even before identifying it as a standard framework for their organization processes. While on the one hand the social role of the healthcare organization is simple to understand as allowing equal access to healthcare services, ensuring the well-being of individuals, and the creation of social value are all integral elements of the mission of a healthcare organization (Eggleston and Finkelstein, 2014; Belle-Isle et al. 2014), on the other hand, identifying the environmental and governance dimension is a complex aspect. However, healthcare organizations, due to their size and type of services provided, can have a very significant environmental impact.

Indeed, hHealthcare organizations are large users of energy and natural resources, as well as large producers of waste, representing one of the most polluting sectors in the world (Cimprich et al., 2019; MacNeill et al., 2021). Greenhouse gas emissions from healthcare sector represent a significant share of the CO2 footprint (Pichler et al., 2019). These CO2 emissions are generated by the production of goods and services necessary for the functioning of the healthcare organization (Eckelman and Sherman, 2016). Furthermore, the consumption of electricity, methane, water, and the production of special waste determine the environmental dimension which plays a fundamental role within the activity of a hospital.

Instead, with reference to governance dimension, it is possible to observe a growing awareness for healthcare organizations. Taking into account the complexity of the healthcare system and hospital organization, it is necessary to implement a good, efficient, and effective governance system useful for achieving strategic objectives and creating long-term sustainable value (Forbes et al., 2007). When considering the development of a such governance system for healthcare organizations within the ~~ESGs~~ESG paradigm, it’s fundamental to take a holistic approach that encompasses various dimensions of governance (Sánchez and Merino, 2021).

Firstly, green governance involves managing the environmental impact of healthcare operations. This could entail implementing sustainable practices. For instance, adopting renewable energy

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3 [sources, reducing the use of single-use plastics, and implementing eco-friendly waste management](#)  
4 [systems are all steps that the governance of healthcare organizations should take into account to](#)  
5 [improve this aspect of their governance \(Hart, 2016, 2020\). Secondly, social governance focuses on](#)  
6 [ensuring the well-being and engagement of stakeholders, including patients, employees, and the](#)  
7 [local community. In this sense, healthcare organizations should prioritize social governance by](#)  
8 [fostering a culture of inclusivity, diversity, and equity within their workforce, as well as actively](#)  
9 [engaging with the community to address healthcare disparities and promote health education](#)  
10 [initiatives \(McGahan and Hart, 2017; McGahan, 2019\). Thirdly, technical governance pertains to the](#)  
11 [practice management and oversight of organization's technical processes, including its leadership](#)  
12 [structures, decision-making processes, and accountability mechanisms. Healthcare organizations](#)  
13 [can enhance their technical governance by establishing clear policies and procedures, promoting](#)  
14 [transparency and integrity in financial reporting, and fostering a culture of ethical behaviour among](#)  
15 [leadership and staff \(Berendt and Rossi, 2019; Werner and Paul, 2018\).](#)

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27 [Upon closer inspection, it is necessary to adopt a streamlined organizational model that aims to](#)  
28 [simplify as much as possible the decision-making processes capable of ensuring effective](#)  
29 [governance, in compliance with corporate values, institutions and regulations, which is sustainable](#)  
30 [towards all stakeholders. The clear and formalized articulation of tasks and responsibilities](#)  
31 [constitutes an important tool for transparency, classification, and balancing of powers within the](#)  
32 [organization.](#)

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38 [Despite the existence of the elements just described, in](#) a healthcare organization, the ~~ESGs~~ESG  
39 concept is still seen as the “new paradigm” since it has been little deepened. It is mainly recognized  
40 as a method to follow for carrying out management processes to guarantee quality and coverage of  
41 the care service at a reasonable cost (Galli and Torelli, 2021). [Sustainable management](#) and their  
42 processes are proposed to improve the quality of life, progressively affecting the employees,  
43 managers and professionals' reading about the ~~ESG~~ESG conception (Baines and Hager, 2023). In this  
44 way, the ~~ESG~~ESG meaning has constantly improved the re-assessment procedures of the  
45 relationship between environment, social context, and governance development within a  
46 healthcare organization (Grossi et al., 2022; Lai, 2021).

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54 Over time the ~~ESGs~~ESG ~~concept~~-[paradigm](#) is posing several challenges to the healthcare systems  
55 and the healthcare organizations have faced them by implementing the “managerial-rationing-way”  
56 [construct. According to Williams et al., \(2012\), it represents a guide to ensure the provision of high](#)  
57 [care services quality within an economically balanced framework.](#)  
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3 This approach emphasizes the efficient allocation of resources and the prioritization of care delivery  
4 based on evidence-based practices and clinical necessity (Williams, 2012). By adopting this  
5 construct, healthcare organizations can optimize resource utilization, enhance operational  
6 efficiency, and maintain a focus on patient-centered care. Additionally, the “managerial-rationing-  
7 way” construct encourages transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making, aligning with  
8 the ESGsESG’ principles and promoting sustainable healthcare practices. However, the  
9 implementation of this construct also raises ethical and moral considerations regarding resource  
10 allocation and access to care, underscoring the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among  
11 stakeholders to ensure equitable and effective healthcare delivery (Teisberg et al., 2017).

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19 So that, tThe “managerial-rationing-way” includes different attitudes. They aim both to clearly  
20 identify a priority sets to consider during the decision-making process, and to change the supply  
21 care process by implementing an in-depth awareness and proper operations on the clinical actions  
22 with which managers have not encroach on (Kelly and Wanna, 2000; Lai et al., 2014).

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27 On the light of the developments of ESGESG assets and critically analyzing this construct, it is  
28 possible to argue that s, sometimes appears as a “greenwashing” matter (Demers et al., 2021), the  
29 achievements of “managerial-rationing-way” should be read with a converted emphasis and  
30 focused on the professional system in order to provide critical insights to the healthcare  
31 organization as a whole and to improve the relationship “managers-physicians” in dealing with  
32 these challenges (Fanelli et al., 2022).

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38 Management models may be useful in this perspective. According to recent studies, managers can  
39 act to develop a different value carried out by healthcare organizations (Fanelli et al., 2020; Thomas  
40 and Suresh, 2022). Relatedly, the action of the management defines the best practices to be as  
41 efficient and effective as possible in the application of ESGESG metrics.

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45 In the non-profit sector, to which many Italian healthcare organizations belong considering the  
46 nature of their mission, financial performance takes a back seat and objectives are more oriented  
47 towards the well-being of the community in which the organization is located. Transparency  
48 towards stakeholders represents a focal point of the nonprofit. Nonetheless, very often non-  
49 financial reporting for the nonprofit organizations (NPOs) does not take place in a systematic  
50 manner (for example, due to the costs of voluntary communication), and there is confusion on  
51 which contents to focus on and no homogeneity on the information transmitted (Kaplan and  
52 Ramanna, 2021).

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3 [In the light of the new reform that has redefined the topic of social reporting, sometimes NPOs find](#)  
4 [themselves confused](#) and in difficulty in finding all the information useful for the social reporting  
5 ([Light, 2011](#); Gestel et al., 2020). However, numerous organizations have been drawing up social  
6 ~~balance sheets reporting documents~~, producing non-financial documents and declarations for  
7 several years (the so-called “Non-Financial Disclosure”). These documents often refer to the typical  
8 logic of specific indicators ([like ESG indicators](#)), established by various international institutes which  
9 analyse the ESG orientations.

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16 ~~Due to the nature of their mission, a crucial role within the non-profit sector is covered by healthcare~~  
17 ~~organizations.~~ In the last years, interesting, but still limited evidence, has increasingly demonstrated  
18 that ~~ESGs~~ [ESG’ paradigm framework](#) does matter for addressing the social reporting also for the  
19 healthcare organizations ([Piechocka-Kaluźna et al. 2021](#); [Leung et al. 2023](#)).

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23 ~~In light of~~ [Considering](#) the features described above, healthcare organizations present a series of  
24 peculiarities for which they are involved in ~~ESG~~ [ESG](#) and sustainability logics, contributing to creating  
25 and further develop public value. However, among the sectors that seem indifferent to considering  
26 sustainability as a strategic asset functional to the survival and competitive development of the  
27 organization, healthcare is certainly one of the most exemplary cases of this unjustified lack of  
28 commitment. The growing attention to the topic of sustainability has affected the healthcare sector  
29 in an increasingly relevant way, since it is inserted in an extensive environmental, economic, and  
30 social perspective ([Tommasetti et al., 2020](#); [Rupley et al., 2017](#)).

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38 ~~As discussed in the literature, healthcare organizations have an important role in the broad network~~  
39 ~~of the healthcare system, since they are considered as active elements of society, influencing, and~~  
40 ~~being influenced by the surrounding environment from an economic, social, and cultural point of~~  
41 ~~view (AlJaberi et al., 2017);~~ In this regard, it should be remembered that to define a sustainable  
42 ~~healthcare organization it is necessary to refer to a global framework focused on the need to balance~~  
43 ~~economic, social, and environmental interests in a long-term vision (Fischer, 2014; Salvatore and~~  
44 ~~Fanelli, 2021).~~ Furthermore, Goal [no. 3](#) of the 2030 Agenda “Health and well-being” is also a  
45 demonstration to the growing importance given to the health~~care~~ [care](#) system as a necessary element  
46 to pursue sustainable development ([Menne et al., 2020](#)).

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54 To address the issue of sustainability within the healthcare organization, the ~~ESG~~ [ESG’](#) framework is  
55 adopted [as a paradigm comprising multiple dynamic dimensions rather than a static set of standards](#)  
56 to highlight the relevant aspects of each of the three ESG pillars and their implications within the  
57 organization. [On closer inspection, a model or a standard represent distinct concepts, and ESG, as a](#)

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3 paradigm, transcends both. It delineates the three primary dimensions of sustainability, embodying  
4 a conceptual framework rather than a prescriptive standard or model (Cavicchi et al., 2019).

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6 ~~Healthcare facilities must drive towards environmental awareness and protection. There are~~  
7 ~~ecological, economic, ethical, and social reasons to engage in environmentally sustainable behavior.~~  
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9 ~~Indeed, healthcare organizations are large users of energy and natural resources, as well as large~~  
10 ~~producers of waste, representing one of the most polluting sectors in the world (Cimprich et al.,~~  
11 ~~2019; MacNeill et al., 2021).~~ However, the core business of the healthcare organization is strongly  
12 oriented towards the social dimension, and this leads to considering environmental protection as  
13 still a marginal aspect in organizational management strategies (Weisz et al., 2011). Instead, as  
14 regards governance, the "One Health" approach identifies a cooperation strategy that can lead to a  
15 deferential development of the balance between the environmental, social and institutional  
16 domains and the needs of future generations (ASviS, 2020). Healthcare organizations should be  
17 increasingly careful to minimize costs and consequences on the territory while trying, at the same  
18 time, not to compromise the efficiency of the care service, the comfort and safety of patients,  
19 managers, and professionals of the healthcare organization.

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21 In this context, sustainability represents a topic naturally interconnected to healthcare.

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23 Based on these assumptions, the objective of this paper is ~~to~~ to understand whether and how the  
24 ESGsESG' paradigm framework can be useful in social reporting for non-profit healthcare  
25 organizations. ~~In other words, the study deals with non financial reporting and information,~~  
26 ~~allowing external stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate the organization's performance and~~  
27 ~~behavior.~~

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29 In other words, the study deals with non-financial reporting and information, allowing external  
30 stakeholders to comprehensively evaluate the organization's performance and behavior, by trying  
31 to reply to the main aim of the paper: how to use in the best possible way the ESGsESG paradigm as  
32 a basis for social reporting in nonprofit healthcare organizations (Cavicchi et al., 2019).

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34 define how non-financial information is considered useful (or un-useful) by the management of the  
35 non-profit healthcare organizations in communicating with stakeholders and if ESGsESG may be a  
36 possible tool to be implemented in this type of organizations. In other words, the main research  
37 question seeks to answer the following: can the ESG framework be a useful tool for drawing up  
38 social reporting for non-profit healthcare organizations considering the new standard regulations?  
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3 By virtue of experience gained in social reporting, this research aims to investigate how the typical  
4 ESG logic can also be a useful tool for the NPOs and, more specifically, to understand which non-  
5 financial information is deemed useful by the top corporate management.  
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### 10 Theoretical background

11 The correlation between ESG~~ESG~~ paradigm and the healthcare organization is studied by numerous  
12 authors (Berry and Bendapudi, 2007; Ostrom et al., 2015; Benedettini, 2022), with the aim of  
13 identifying the factors that can support or hinder a sustainable approach in this sector. However,  
14 although health sustainability programs are increasingly encouraged, those proposed in the  
15 literature tend to be contradictory and fragmented (Pluye et al., 2004) and their empirical analysis  
16 is scarce (Gruen et al., 2008; Kalia and Aggarwal, 2023). Furthermore, in the literature there is no  
17 univocal definition of sustainability in healthcare organizations (Fischer, 2014; Braithwaite et al.,  
18 2019; Cimprich et al., 2019) as the available contents highlight an unbalanced sectoral to the  
19 detriment of the transversality inherent in the sustainability concept.  
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24 As previous introduced, the "managerial-rationing-way" construct, highlighted by Williams et al.,  
25 offers valuable insights into addressing the dual imperatives of quality care provision and economic  
26 sustainability within healthcare organizations. By employing this construct, healthcare managers  
27 can strategically allocate resources and prioritize interventions to optimize patient outcomes while  
28 managing business costs effectively. Importantly, the construct allows for the alignment of the ESG  
29 paradigm with the main mission of healthcare organizations. Through the lens of ESG paradigm,  
30 healthcare facilities can integrate environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and robust  
31 governance practices into their operational strategies (Ghosh and Kharbanda, 2017). This alignment  
32 not only enhances the organization's reputation and stakeholder trust but also contributes to long-  
33 term sustainability and resilience in the face of evolving healthcare challenges. By adopting the  
34 "managerial-rationing-way" construct within the framework of the ESG paradigm, healthcare  
35 organizations can strive for excellence in both patient care and financial stewardship, ultimately  
36 fulfilling their broader mission of promoting health and well-being in the communities they serve.  
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52 Mohrman and Shani (2011) assert that a sustainable healthcare organization should be more  
53 effective in preventing and minimizing the impact of diseases which not only depend on the care  
54 services provided within healthcare organizations, but also on the improvement of the community  
55 health. Lifvergren et al. (2009), instead, declare that sustainable health systems have to balance the  
56 long-term interests of stakeholders and have the capabilities for improvement, innovation, and  
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3 continuous development from an ESGESG viewpoint. Previously, Fruitman (2004), claims that a  
4 sustainable healthcare organization should both keep costs under control and provide adequate  
5 care services.

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8 Finally, according to Ulhøi and Ulhøi (2009), a sustainable healthcare organization should be based  
9 ~~on an interdisciplinary dialogue rather than on a highly focused approach.~~

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11 In line with the main considerations given by the scientific literature, in order for managers to be  
12 able to analyze the internal and external environment it is useful to adopt technical documents that  
13 deal with the Non-Financial Disclosure.

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16 ~~To this end, one of the most important technical documents that allow managers to better analyse~~  
17 ~~the internal and external environment in which the organization operates is the Non-Financial~~  
18 ~~Disclosure.~~

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21 Non-Financial Disclosure is a~~This document is part~~ of the non-financial information area included in  
22 the Management ~~Commentary~~Report, the report drawn up annually by the CEO of the hospital, in  
23 which particular attention is to be paid to information relating to the environment, social concerns,  
24 and governance issues (Silvi and Bartolini, 2011). The presence of this information area within the  
25 reporting systems finds consensus in the current trend of corporate doctrine to delve into issues  
26 related to social responsibility and sustainability which allow users to read company results by  
27 considering them in a broader meaning than the purely accounting one (Ginesti et al., 2017).

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30 In the literature, over the last twenty years, many authors ~~over the last twenty years~~ have explored  
31 the social role that the business has towards its stakeholders (Hristov and Appolloni, 2022; Lee,  
32 2017; Liu et al., 2020), communicating to them the ESGESG consequences resulting from the  
33 business organization and the entrepreneurial activity carried out. Actively involving stakeholders  
34 means allowing businesses to carry out their activities in a sustainable manner, respecting their  
35 current and prospective needs (Said et al., 2018).

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38 In consideration of these aspects, the Management ~~Report~~Commentary has included the  
39 communication function performed by the non-financial and extra-accounting ESGESG information  
40 areas; thus, satisfying the main stakeholders through which the corporate sustainability construct  
41 is identified. ~~In particular, stakeholders interact with the business almost daily based on their~~  
42 ~~different characteristics and, for this reason, their involvement is a main aspect of the development~~  
43 ~~of corporate sustainability policies (Said et al., 2018; Grossi et al., 2020).~~

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46 As proof of the importance attributed to the topic, all data relating to the ESGESG matter and the  
47 initiatives launched within the ESGESG metrics can be included in the Management

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3 [Report Commentary](#). On the other hand, the European regulation that regulates the contents of the  
4 Management [Report Commentary](#) does not force the inclusion of some information rather than  
5 others and, to the same extent, there is no precisely defined combination of information to which  
6 the managers and accountants must refer (Cavicchi et al., 2019). In this way, it is the [ESG](#) issues  
7 that most arouse the interest of the sustainability reporting drafters.  
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12 [The Non-Financial Reporting Directive \(Directive 2014/95/EU, "NFRD"\)](#) represents a "breaking"  
13 [regulation, as it introduces for the first time in the European context an obligation to report](#)  
14 [information relating to corporate social issues, giving formal importance to \[ESG\]\(#\) issues. In](#)  
15 [amending Directive 2013/34/EU, NFRD intended to fill the limits of the previous regulatory](#)  
16 [intervention. Specifically, the NFRD introduces the art. 19 bis, entitled Non-Financial Disclosure,](#)  
17 [and art. 29 bis, entitled Consolidated Non-Financial Declaration, by establishing the obligation to](#)  
18 [report \[ESG\]\(#\) information for large companies that constitute public-interest entities \(PIE\), which](#)  
19 [at the balance sheet closing date, have an average number of employees employed during the](#)  
20 [financial year of at least 500. It is also interesting to note that art. 19 bis introduced by the NFRD](#)  
21 [specifically identifies in the Management \[Report Commentary\]\(#\) the technical "container" into which](#)  
22 [the \[ESG\]\(#\) information is included. In other words, the European legislator has clearly identified](#)  
23 [the Management \[Report Commentary\]\(#\) as the suitable document in which to merge the information](#)  
24 [obligation of the non-financial disclosure with the related \[ESG\]\(#\) disclosures.](#)  
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36 [Therefore, European legislation provides for a specific request to integrate the economic-financial](#)  
37 [information typical of the financial statements with that of sustainability, which draws on the](#)  
38 [literature on corporate social responsibility and the increasingly widespread corporate practices for](#)  
39 [communicating \[ESG\]\(#\) performance, including the integrated report drawn up according to the](#)  
40 [logic of the Integrated Reporting Framework \(Hoang, 2018; Shoaf et al., 2018\).](#)  
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[In line with the NFRD directive, the recent Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive \(CSRD\) -](#)  
[2022/2464/EU, deals with corporate sustainability reporting and expressly aims to reduce the gap](#)  
[between the information needs of stakeholders and the sustainability information provided by](#)  
[companies, harmonizing sustainability information at European level. Among the updates](#)  
[introduced by the CSRD, it should be noted that the directive no longer speaks of "non-financial](#)  
[disclosure", a predominantly concept used by the NFRD, but rather of "sustainability reporting" or](#)  
["information on sustainability" \(Fiandrino et al., 2022\). The change is not merely terminological,](#)  
[since, as effectively indicated in Recital 8 of the CSRD, the expression of a "non-financial nature"](#)

could be misleading in implying that the information is not relevant on a financial level, whereas increasingly such ESGs ESG information is also financially relevant.

However, when it comes to the Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs), the use of ESG appears to be harder to implement. This is due to several factors, such as the orientation of ESG toward potential investors (Levmore, 2022), that goes in contrast with the nature of NPOs; the constant status of resources scarcity that characterises all NPOs (Fritz and von Schnurbeinm, 2015); or the NPOs stakeholders' needs which tends to be different rather than traditional for-profit companies (Chen et al., 2021).

Moreover, health-care organizations suffer even more these characteristics, as at the end of the day, their final goal is working toward clinical and organizational excellence and no board or executive group should want to settle for anything less: therefore, ESG may be unrelated to clinical outcomes assessment (Jamali et al., 2010; Russo et al., 2016).

On the other hand, considering its conceptual basis, according to Datsii et al., (2021) ESG represent a traditional dynamic model (Datsii et al., 2021) in which consistency with ESG pillars has to be assessed with regard to the different dimensions within the ESG paradigm, and not against specific standards. It is not appropriate to refer ESG as real "standards", like many authors do (e.g. Cadman, 2011; Cort and Esty, 2020) as the dynamic dimension associated with ESG does not allow for such a definition. Instead, we should refer to ESG as a framework to draw upon (Bose, 2020). Therefore, ESG become a contingent concept, a specific paradigm, which may find application to all sectors, even where there are no widely used best practices (Eccles and Stroehle, 2018).

In the case of our this study article, focusing on non-profit healthcare organizations, the framework is used to set a broad, dynamic context upon which the organization shall rely to achieve its sustainability objectives.

Thus, this research aims to find out if ESG, meant as a paradigm framework, can be a concept to be extended to this particular types of organizations: nonprofit health-care organizations. To the best of our knowledge, at this present time, no study had dealt with this issue. The results of this study, therefore, not only contribute to enriching the literature on the topic of non-financial reporting for the non-profit sector, but also provide useful suggestions to managers of healthcare organizations who want to adopt the ESG paradigm framework.

## Methodology

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3 To better understand if ~~ESG~~ESGs represent a suitable ~~framework~~paradigm for ~~non-profit~~  
4 ~~organizations~~NPOs operating in the healthcare sector, ~~we employ~~ a comparative case study  
5 approach encompassing four different nonprofit hospitals throughout the ~~national~~Italian territory  
6 ~~in Italy~~has been employed: Fondazione Sacrafamiglia, Fondazione Policlinico Gemelli, Fondazione  
7 La Nostra Famiglia, and Fondazione Poliambulanza. Table I shows the main characteristics of the  
8 healthcare organizations that make up our sample.

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18 -In the context of the recent reform of the third sector in Italy, as outlined in Legislative Decree  
19 117/2017, this research assumes particular relevance. The legislation, effective from the year 2023,  
20 mandates the non-financial disclosure for nonprofit organizations, placing specific emphasis on  
21 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the utilization of the ~~ESG~~ESG' Environmental, Social,  
22 and Governance (ESG) paradigm (Palmieri, 2023).

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27 Furthermore, the landscape of non-financial disclosure among nonprofit healthcare organizations  
28 in Italy is highly heterogeneous: some entities have been producing such reports for a decade,  
29 incorporating the ESG' paradigm, while others are just embarking on this.

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33 Given this diversity, it becomes even more relevant to ~~delineate~~outline the best practices that have  
34 been adopted ~~thus so far~~. This research aims, thus, to understand whether and how the ~~s~~ESG'  
35 paradigm can be useful in social reporting for nonprofit healthcare organizations in such a context,  
36 implying a qualitative approach. Marasca et al. (2020), in fact, pointed out the need to investigate  
37 the ESG context using a qualitative approach.

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42 To address this issue, ~~We we have adopted~~ the methodology proposed by Villani et al. (2017) has  
43 been adopted, which involves the identification of specific areas of analysis for a documentary study  
44 of available resources, as discussed by Pratici and Singer (2021). The primary sources of information  
45 used for this study were non-financial disclosure documents published on the organizations'  
46 websites, but also anything that was published on the organizations' institutional website has been  
47 considered for the analysis. The analysis of primary sources helped out in developing the interviews'  
48 framework. This also allowed to understand how organizations involved in the study were able to  
49 perform non-financial disclosure, however it only constituted the base on which developing the  
50 research. Thus, this approach allowed to refine ~~our~~the analysis and gain insight into the non-  
51 financial disclosure practices of these organizations. However,In order to properly address ~~properly~~

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3 the research question, insights from people operating within the organizations were deemed  
4 necessary and, as such, ~~we took~~ an additional step by conducting interviews ~~has been taken~~.

5  
6 Consequently, ~~we interviewed~~ individuals responsible for reporting non-financial information in all  
7 the organizations under analysis ~~have been interviewed~~. ~~In particular, 8 interviews in 4 different~~  
8 ~~entities were conducted, reaching the saturation level. Interviewees were subjects directly~~  
9 ~~responsible for the creation of non-financial disclosures. These interviews focused on three areas,~~  
10 ~~emerged from a focus group carried out with experts in the field:~~

- 11 1. Factors motivating the development of non-financial disclosure practices to highlight  
12 ~~environmental, social, and governance~~ ~~ESG~~ performance in each organization (Area 1).
- 13 2. The rationale behind the organization's decision to include specific arguments found in the  
14 analyzed documents (Area 2).
- 15 3. Their perspective on the future of non-financial disclosure within their specific sector,  
16 namely, nonprofit healthcare organizations, and whether ~~the use of ESG~~ ~~' reporting~~  
17 ~~framework~~ ~~paradigm~~ is a viable ~~approach~~ ~~method~~ (Area 3).

18  
19 ~~The focus group phase was designed to build up the content of the interviews . As such, it~~  
20 ~~allowed and to identify the three areas above mentioned. Focus group members were selected~~  
21 ~~among management scholars and needed to satisfy two alternative ~~criteria~~ ~~criteria~~ and one~~  
22 ~~mandatory ~~criteria~~ ~~criterion~~ (Pratici et al., 2023): The first alternative ~~criteria~~ ~~criterion~~ was being a~~  
23 ~~scholar in healthcare management issues; the second alternative ~~criteria~~ ~~criterion~~ consisted in being~~  
24 ~~an expert scholar that have published at least a one article in a Scopus indexed journal concerning~~  
25 ~~social reporting issues; the mandatory ~~criteria~~ ~~criterion~~ consisted in being currently a scholar~~  
26 ~~associated~~ ~~affiliated~~ to a research institute. ~~10~~ Ten participants were identified, 50% of which met  
27 the first alternative criteria and 50% met the second alternative criteria.

28  
29 A general question was asked to focus group's participants: how ~~s~~ESG' paradigm can represent a  
30 basis to produce social reporting documents among health care nonprofit organizations. The three  
31 most emerging issues composed the three areas of investigation.

32  
33 At this point, the second phase of this research took place, which consisted in the interviews of  
34 people directly involved in the process of creation of non-financial disclosure. This choice relied on  
35 the privileged observer's ~~method~~ ~~technique~~ (Pratici et al., 2022; Della Porta, 2014). Interviews were  
36 conducted using a semi-structured approach, allowing respondents to raise issues or topics they  
37 deemed relevant. This flexibility was necessary due to the heterogeneous nature of the non-

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3 financial disclosure documents analyzed. Nonetheless, a general ~~framework~~paradigm for  
4 conducting interviews was followed, and is detailed in Table II.  
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9 --- PLEASE INSERT TABLE II AROUND HERE ---  
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11  
12 Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using a qualitative data management software  
13 application (Dedoose). A process of pattern recognition is used where emerging themes become  
14 categories for the analysis (Aberbach ~~and~~& Rockman, 2002; Della Porta, 2014; Price et al., 2020).  
15 The coding framework was developed by all authors with a joint process of blind coding (Price et al.,  
16 2020). The ~~framework~~paradigm made it possible to identify the flows of information, characterizing  
17 key elements highlighted by the interviewees, in both positive and negative meanings.  
18  
19 Finally, as a last step, the whole team discussed their interpretations of the transcribed data and its  
20 relevance, using an interactive and reflexive approach (Della Porta, 2014; Millward ~~and~~& Hopkins,  
21 1998; Pratici et al., 2022).  
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## 32 Results

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35 --- PLEASE INSERT TABLE III HERE ---  
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39 Table III reports results from the blind coding process conducted by researchers. The subsequent  
40 paragraph is reporting quotes and results from interviews. Column 1 reports major issues emerged  
41 by the coding process, while column 2 to 4 reports the single quotations of respondents. More  
42 specifically, six main items have emerged: accountability, collaboration, standardization,  
43 certification, mission, and guidelines.  
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- 48 • Accountability is meant as the importance of involving all staff in the process.
- 49 • Collaboration consists in the implementation of more bottom-up oriented approaches.
- 50 • Standardization consists in the creation of benchmarking guidelines able to make these  
51 documents comparable to others.
- 52 • Certification is meant the possibility of introducing a system that would certify the accuracy  
53 of non-financial disclosure, just like it happens with auditor for financial statements.
- 54 • Mission is meant as the importance covered by ESGs' ~~framework~~paradigm to constantly  
55 re-think and re-elaborate the organizational mission.  
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- Guidelines is meant the need to produce more specific –rules based on the type of organization producing a non-financial disclosure.

~~The~~ Table III also reports the frequency for each emerged issue related to the three areas highlighted in the methodological section retrieved from the focus group: (1) Factors motivating the development of non-financial disclosure practices to highlight environmental, social, and governance performance in each organization (Area 1); (2) The rationale behind the organization’s decision to include specific arguments found in the analyzed documents (Area 2); (3) Perspectives on the future of non-financial disclosure within the nonprofit health care sector (Area 3).

Frequencies refer to how many times the issue emerged in the blind coding process in each area.

The following statements refer to what emerged from interviews, and then, they are retrieved from the coding process.

In the explanation section it is described how the issue emerged: it may highlight the positive influence of ESGs/ESG standards in non financial disclosure but also several risks associated with the use of such framework.

The most emerging issue is “Collaboration”, as it is highlighted by respondents the collaborative nature that this document assumes. However, despite being cited 8 times by respondents, it is possible to appreciate how this concerns only area 1 and area 2, leaving “future perspectives” (area 3) out. However, despite being mentioned 8 times by the interviewees, it can be appreciated that this only concerns area 1 and area 2, leaving aside the “future perspectives” (area 3).

“Guidelines” and “Accountability”, respectively cited 7 and 6 times, are almost always meant as improving benchmarking opportunities. However, negative aspects of the ~~ESG~~ ESG approach are also highlighted. Among all, the risk of creating a mere obligation to fulfill, distorting the nature of the document.

Related to this issue, other emerging topics consist in “certification” and “standardization”. Standardizing these reports, implying the use of ~~ESG~~ ESG’s approach/framework/paradigm, is seen as premature and somehow not coherent with the purpose of this document. Having, for example, a third party certifying this document, as it happens with financial statements, is seen as counterproductive and risky, despite being widely anticipated for the forthcoming years by all respondents.

Results/Findings presented may suggest different points to be discussed. In the discussion section, what was learned from these results was better expressed. Also, rResults expressed/included in Table III are to be discussed in the following section.

## Discussion

In recent times, a noticeable paradigm shift is underway as organizations increasingly adopt the ESG framework to define their non-financial performance (Grossi et al., 2022; Lai, 2021), and this was known to all interviewees. This strategic move is driven by different objectives: first, it aims to aligning operational activities with the expectations of various stakeholders, and second, it aspires to adhere to different government regulations emerged (Kalia and Aggarwal, 2023). In response to this trend, NPOs on a global scale have mirrored this approach, undertaking productions of comprehensive Non-financial Disclosures. These disclosures are either initiated voluntarily through the proactive efforts of their management or compelled by legal mandates (Elmagrhi and Ntim, 2023). ~~ESG paradigms criteria have emerged as a potential universal framework, providing a means to compare existing documents and fostering possible benchmarking opportunities tailored with the characteristics of each organization operating in a different sector (Vannoni et al., 2020).~~

The ESG paradigm has emerged as a tool for comparing existing documents and facilitating possible benchmarking opportunities adapted to the characteristics of each organization operating in a different sector (Vannoni et al., 2020).

However, resistances to this disclosure approach and to the importance given to this type of document are frequent (Kinderman, 2015), especially in NPOs (Tanaka, 2016), and even more in the health care sectors, where sometimes other types of issues are felt as predominant (Sassen et al., 2022).

It is thus of greatest importance to recognize and address the inherent biases in ESG assessments when evaluating the non-financial performance of organizations (e.g., Cornell, 2021; Alridge and Martin, 2022). This realization is underscored by insights retrieved from interviews. Furthermore, the prominence of this issue is accentuated when considering nonprofit healthcare organizations (Filipiak and Kiestrzyn, 2021; Koh et al., 2019). Indeed, as articulated by several interviewees, these organizations “*prioritize different facets compared to for-profit firms and other public entities*” (interviewee #3, Fondazione La Nostra Famiglia). “[*They*] *operate within a sector characterized by a spectrum of scarce resources and frequent emergency situations*” (interviewee #1, Fondazione Sacrafamiglia). Therefore, “*ESGs shall be viewed as a tool to be considered but not entirely embraced, given their origins in a context primarily oriented towards satisfying shareholders’ desires*” (Interviewee #2, Fondazione Policlinico Gemelli).

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3 It is clear that ESG<sup>2</sup> framework-paradigm is thus perceived as more of a general guideline than  
4 an all-encompassing *vademecum* (Fischi et al., 2020).

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6 Furthermore, in the realmcontext of nonprofit healthcare organization, despite the adoption ESG<sup>2</sup>  
7 paradigm has been prudently heralded by several scholars (Eccles et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021;  
8 Katsamakas et al., 2022;); as a progressive step toward holist sustainability, a closer look based on  
9 this research and other findings collected in the literature, may reveal that the application of the  
10 ESG paradigm 'isn't always the suitable solution for an increased performance in terms of  
11 sustainability.

12  
13 Recent findings, as a matter of fact, suggest a notable ambivalence among stakeholders regarding  
14 the relevance of ESG paradigm<sup>2</sup> in the context of health-care, and this is proven also by the  
15 interviews administered in this paperstudy. Three quarters of the interviewees, indeed, perceive  
16 these organizations as exempt from the sustainability performance measurement dynamics, given  
17 their engagement in emergency contexts, necessitating a different focus, primarily on crisis  
18 management aspects.

19  
20 Nevertheless, the literature highlights contrasting perspectives, with some regarding non-financial  
21 disclosure and ESG<sup>2</sup> paradigm utilization as a symbolic gesture, akin to a political statement by  
22 hospital executives. This is not directly referred by interviewees, but it emerges by reading between  
23 the lines: "Healthcare organizations [constitutes] a different case from any other type of  
24 organization, whether public or private [...] They operate in a context of constant resource scarcity –  
25 especially when they are NPOs – and constantly face emergency situations. [Their primary purpose  
26 when it comes to measurement] is achieving a standardization in outcome assessment, and that is  
27 already as difficult as it gets, let alone measuring sustainability practices! This does not mean that  
28 one should act in total disregard of these principles, but in the evaluation phase, it is necessary to  
29 understand whether it is truly possible to borrow something designed for companies of a different  
30 nature" (Interviewee #4, Fondazione Sacrafamiglia).

31  
32 Therefore, while ESG<sup>2</sup> paradigm undoubtedly offers a structured approach to sustainability, its  
33 imposition on healthcare organizations without due consideration of their unique operational  
34 challenges and priorities may result in superficial compliance rather than meaningful progress.

35  
36 Moreover, the potential for sESG<sup>2</sup> reporting to serve as a veneer for political motives highlights the  
37 need for transparency and accountability in governance structures within healthcare institutions.  
38 Instead of merely adopting sESG<sup>2</sup> as a checkbox exercise, healthcare leaders must engage in genuine  
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3 introspection to align sustainability initiatives with their core mission of delivering quality care to  
4 patients.

### 8 Reflections on the results

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10 Results of this analysis clearly indicates that the determinants of non-financial disclosure usage are  
11 multifaceted, with a primary focus on meeting the expectations of stakeholders. According to, at  
12 least, two interviewees ~~T~~this emphasis on transparency has created, according to at least two  
13 interviewees, a virtuous cycle wherein organizations are encouraged to disclose information that  
14 extends beyond mere financial metrics. Over the past decade, ~~t~~The evolution of this phenomenon  
15 over the past decade has been marked by a heightened awareness among the general public,  
16 fostering a collective consciousness that demands greater accountability from entities (either  
17 private, public, for-profit or nonprofit).

18  
19 While this trend has been pervasive across various industries, it poses distinct challenges for  
20 nonprofit healthcare organizations. In particular, these entities grapple with pressing issues, often  
21 centered around resource scarcity. This is confirmed by many strands of the literature, as the  
22 nonprofit sector is indeed somehow often more concentrated in finding resources rather than  
23 accountability issues (Fry, 1995; Bouek, 2018). The focal point of managerial efforts in such  
24 organizations frequently revolves around navigating the constraints imposed by limited resources,  
25 creating inherent resistance to the adoption of ~~n~~Non-fFinancial ~~d~~Disclosure practices (Arvidson,  
26 2014; Rees et al., 2024). The obligation to allocate resources judiciously often takes precedence,  
27 overshadowing the imperative for transparency, as confirmed by interviewee #4 (Fondazione  
28 Poliambulanza).

29  
30 Nevertheless, the landscape is shifting, as ~~n~~Non-fFinancial ~~d~~Disclosure has managed to permeate  
31 the consciousness of healthcare managers, propelled by a moral, if not legal, imperative for  
32 transparency within these entities.

33  
34 The 2017 reform, fully enacted in 2023, has played a pivotal role in steering nonprofit healthcare  
35 organizations toward embracing ~~n~~Non-fFinancial ~~D~~Disclosure (Fici, 2024). This regulatory  
36 framework has effectively catalyzed a paradigm shift, underscoring the importance of transparency  
37 in a sector where public trust and accountability are paramount. ~~T~~Therefore, the utilization of ~~n~~Non-  
38 fFinancial ~~d~~Disclosure is intricately linked to stakeholder expectations, creating a symbiotic  
39 relationship that fosters transparency.

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3 In this sense, corporate governance has to act not only to communicate its action, but also to  
4 implement and improve the diffusion of applied business sustainability practices. To be successful,  
5 this action should start from the strategic top and subsequently be mediated by the business's  
6 functional areas, preferably involving stakeholders so that the document is as widespread as  
7 possible. Furthermore, since the action of the business' strategic top management is closely linked  
8 to the policies, the ESGsESG' paradigm, seen as a "basket" of dimensions that dynamically act in the  
9 business, plays a fundamental role in the definition of these policies which allows it to confirm or  
10 do not confirm its role.

11 While challenges persist, especially within resource-constrained nonprofit healthcare organizations,  
12 a cultural shift is underway. The confluence of moral obligation, regulatory frameworks, and  
13 evolving societal norms is gradually paving the way for greater transparency and disclosure within  
14 the healthcare organizations, contributing to the overall advancement of non-financial reporting  
15 practices.

### **Contributions.**

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30 In the context of this research, the fundamental objective is to evaluate whether and how **ESGESG**  
31 criteria can enhance the **N**on-**F**inancial **d**isclosure practices of healthcare organizations.  
32 Exploring future perspectives on how non-financial disclosure should relate to NPOs is a pivotal  
33 consideration in understanding the expectations of these entities. The interviews have shed light on  
34 the crucial role that **N**on-**F**inancial **d**isclosure plays in stakeholder communication, yet there is a  
35 degree of skepticism concerning the potential standardization of these disclosures. Many, indeed,  
36 fear that *"standardization could lead to mere compliance in disclosing non-financial information"*  
37 (Interviewee #4, Fondazione Poliambulanza), echoing concerns articulated by various authors  
38 (Pollman, 2019; Kotsantonis and Sarafeim, 2019).

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47 **ESGESG' standard paradigm isare,** thus, seen as potentially useful if used as a contingent tool.  
48 However, given the fact that **ESGESG' paradigm have-has** a strong environmental nature, a  
49 surprising aspect noticeable consists in the apparent lack of emphasis on environmental concerns.  
50 None of the interviewees raised environmental issues, potentially conveying the notion that  
51 environmental considerations hold little relevance for healthcare organizations, despite compelling  
52 evidence demonstrating the sector's significant contributions to pollution (Cimprich et al., 2019;  
53 MacNeill et al., 2021). This lack of importance given to this aspect is mirrored by the content of  
54 analyzed documents, as only two of them dedicate a portion of their non-financial disclosure  
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documentation to the environmental disclosure, pointing out their compliance with [ESGsESG'](#) [frameworkparadigm](#) (Fondazione Sacrafamiglia and Fondazione Policlinico Gemelli).

Also considering this lack of importance given to different tools, despite the evident skepticism associated with the use of a standardized framework, some sort of standardization is more than deemed necessary, also according to three out of four interviewees (Fondazione Policlinico Gemelli, Fondazione La Nostra Famiglia, Fondazione Poliambulanza). [ESGsESG](#) may represent one of the different ways to obtain some grade of standardization, but perhaps not the best. However, general principles standing behind [ESGsESG](#) perspectives can still be valued. For instance, collaboration between internal stakeholder is a key element when it comes to non-financial reporting and value creation for any organization, and this is widely recognized by the literature (e.g. Lee et al., 2012; [Whitelock, 2015](#); Camilleri, 2018) as well as by all interviewees. Indeed, all interviewees put a lot of emphasis on the collaborative process leading to designing non-financial disclosures. *“Despite initial resistance in the early stages of implementation, a prevailing collaborative environment is now apparent”* (Interviewee #3, Fondazione La Nostra Famiglia). As articulated by several respondents *“non-financial disclosures should ideally follow a bottom-up approach and involve as many stakeholders as possible to reinterpret the organizational mission”* (Interviewee #1, Fondazione Sacrafamiglia), *“updating and ensuring clarity for all involved in the organization”* (Interviewee #2, Fondazione Policlinico Gemelli). This collaborative approach is underpinned by a consensus among scholars regarding the significance of collaboration among internal stakeholders (Arvidsson, 2011; Ahmetshina et al., 2018). Such a collaborative approach can contribute to enhancing the quality of non-financial disclosures and facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the organization’s performance (Levy and Brown, 2011). [ESGESG](#) criteria, in this matter, can help in defining a common approach universally shared by both internal and external stakeholders enhancing collaborative approaches (Becchetti et al., 2022).

### [Study key points](#)

To sum up, several key points emerged from this research:

- [ESGsESG standards](#) may serve as a suitable [framework-paradigm](#) to create comparable documents that can act as benchmarks for similar institutions. However, while NPOs can draw inspiration from ESG [principles standards principles](#), the utility of these criteria should be thoughtfully tailored to align with the organization’s mission and, so far, this has not been the case of non-profit healthcare organizations.

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3 - Despite the inherent heterogeneity in non-financial disclosures, they are recognized as  
4 valuable documents to be shared. Using [ESG/ESG' paradigms](#) as a general guide, [instead of](#)  
5 [implementing it as a real tool to assess performances](#), is considered by all interviewees as a  
6 positive practice, as it does not compromise the core purpose of [Non-Financial Disclosure](#)  
7 in this type of organization. The broad nature of [ESG/ESG' criteria-paradigm](#) may not  
8 effectively capture their intrinsic characteristics of [healthcare-nonprofit healthcare](#)  
9 organizations. Forcing the standardization may thus lead to the opposite purpose, making  
10 disclosure as a mere compliance matter.

11 Thus, if organizations are increasingly gravitating towards [ESG/ESG' - framework paradigm](#), it is  
12 essential to carefully interpret these principles to accommodate the unique requirements and  
13 missions of any sector. Mirroring positive behaviors typical of for-profit organizations does not  
14 always produce the expected outcomes, and ESG may be a clear example.

## 25 Conclusions

26 [The aim of this paper is to investigate on whether and how sESG' frameworkparadigm can be useful](#)  
27 [in social reporting for -nonprofit healthcare organizations. To address this issue, interviews to people](#)  
28 [actively involved in the creation of non-financial disclosures were carried out, where sESG' s](#)  
29 [framework paradigm is used to assess organizational performances.](#)

30 [The use of a multiple case-study allowed to sketch few points: first, NPOs active in the healthcare](#)  
31 [sector in Italy are often not enough mature to imply the use of the ESG/ESG't frameworkparadigm.](#)  
32 [Second, the heterogeneity that characterizes the Non-Pnonprofit sector cannot be taken into](#)  
33 [consideration if a unique frameworkparadigm – ESG – is used. Furthermore, in the healthcare](#)  
34 [sector, organizations are often under pressure, working with very limited resources and constantly](#)  
35 [dealing with emergencies. Nevertheless, i](#)  
36 [n recent years, most healthcare organizations have](#)  
37 [constantly tried to restructure their systems and governance following the “managerial-rationing-](#)  
38 [way” to achieve the sustainability objectives set by international entities and included in the 2030](#)  
39 [Agenda. NeverthelessHowever,](#) these efforts could be not sufficient unless they are supported by  
40 an efficient development of [ESG/ESG](#) and sustainability logics, contributing to creating and further  
41 develop public value.

42 [As mentioned, the Non-Financial Reporting Directive \(Directive 2014/95/EU\) and the Corporate](#)  
43 [Sustainability Reporting Directive \(Directive 2022/2464/EU\) have introduced significant innovations](#)  
44 [in the realm of corporate reporting and sustainability. Both directives, encourage the use of](#)

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3 [recognized reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative \(GRI\) and the Sustainability](#)  
4 [Accounting Standards Board \(SASB\) standards, providing a common framework for reporting ESG](#)  
5 [data. This standardization aims to improve comparability and transparency of ESGsESG information](#)  
6 [within the social reporting. The directives SASB and GRI directives](#), collectively, represent a  
7 significant innovation in corporate reporting by making [ESGESG](#) and sustainability reporting more  
8 standardized, comprehensive, and transparent. [Substantially, they align with global trends towards](#)  
9 [sustainable business practices, providing a foundation for informed decision-making by](#)  
10 [stakeholders and fostering a more sustainable and responsible corporate environment](#) (Singh et al.,  
11 2016).

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19 [In this context, it may arise the question: can the frameworks established by SASB and GRI be a](#)  
20 [paradigm to be used also for the non-profit sector in healthcare? The question, although it may](#)  
21 [seem trivial and somehow not completely related, is instead very centered on this issue and it may](#)  
22 [also imply a true cultural shift within this type of organizations. Healthcare organizations, forced to](#)  
23 [work in emergency phases often devote less time and fewer resources to sustainability aspects, as](#)  
24 [it emerges from interviews. However, having a guiding framework \(e.g. SASB, GRI\) could perhaps](#)  
25 [lead to a cultural change.](#)

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32 [In-Under](#) this aspect, the healthcare organizations are supported by the European directives for the  
33 implementation of [the ESGESG standards](#) into their social reporting.

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By providing an in-depth comparison of different case studies drawing up the social reporting, this  
study is highly relevant to understand how appropriate the [ESGsESG' framework-paradigm](#) is for the  
activities of managers, investors, and leadership of a healthcare organization.

To this end, the managerial-rationing construct has been expanded, starting from being identified  
as one of the best solutions to guarantee the provision of high-quality care services in an  
economically balanced and sustainable framework, to using it to focus on an in-depth analysis for  
the drafting of the social reporting for nonprofit healthcare organizations. [By implementing the](#)  
[interview methodology and weighing the interviewees' evidence with the ESGsESG' paradigm,](#)  
[different conclusions can be drawn.](#)

The results suggest a clear convergence of opinions of the interviewees regarding the use of the  
[ESGsESG' paradigmframework](#), such that it is possible to identify some conclusions.

Firstly, the managers of healthcare organizations interviewed ensure that the [ESGESG' paradigm](#)  
[framework](#) is certainly useful since it gives a three-dimensional reference standard for corporate  
management but, at the same time, the framework is seen as risky for non-financial reporting. In

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3 essence, it is believed that the standardization of these criteria could distort the objective of social  
4 reporting; document mainly of an informative nature.

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6 Furthermore, given the peculiarity of the healthcare sector, the “Environment” section is seen as  
7 “lagging behind” and, for this reason, is more neglected. The healthcare organization always  
8 operates under an emergency regime and in conditions of scarcity of resources. For this reason, the  
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10 main concern is to ensure that the outcomes considered essential in a healthcare facility are  
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12 achieved. At the same time, ~~however~~, from the interviews it emerged that ESGsESG’ criteria  
13 paradigm can be useful if not framed exclusively as a guideline, but as a “source of inspiration” in  
14  
15 order to make social reporting as effective, efficient and easily usable as possible.

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17 What the ESGsESG’ paradigm can help with is certainly improving collaboration between internal  
18 stakeholders in order to eliminate any resistance and possible information asymmetries. Ultimately,  
19 one of the reasons why the ESGsESG’ paradigm is considered extremely useful in a healthcare  
20 organization is its bottom-up approach which allows to understand real critical issues and translate  
21 them into strategic improvement processes to be implemented.

22  
23 The results include a risk component. To our knowledge, this is the first paper to examine the scope  
24 of the ESGsESG’ paradigm for drawing up the social reporting for nonprofit healthcare organizations,  
25 through a structured method of interviews and case study analysis. The interrelation of these  
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27 methods is of particular interest to corporate management to which is required to identify more  
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29 recent and effective methods of selecting non-financial information to include in social reporting.

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31 Overall, based on what the findings provide, further research should investigate whether the  
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33 implications of the previous papers are robust considering the broader use of the ESGsESG’  
34 paradigm framework—to address the core function of social reporting in the healthcare  
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36 organizations. In this sense, future research could be very suitable to understand not only “if” but  
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38 also “how” management can be considered the “backbone” to pursue the sustainability of  
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40 healthcare organizations by improving their commitment to implement in a universal way ESG  
41 assets standards by what is proposed by ESG’ paradigm framework, identifying a decisive path of  
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43 lights for management.

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Table I – Characteristics of Nonprofit Hospitals of the sample

	<i>SACRAFAMIGLIA Foundation</i>	<i>POLICINICO GEMELLI Foundation</i>	<i>LA NOSTRA FAMIGLIA Foundation</i>	<i>POLIAMBULANZA Foundation</i>
<b>Where is it located</b>	Milan	Rome	Lecco	Brescia
<b>Bed capacity</b>	<b>1.556</b>	<b>1.661</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>668</b>
<i>General ward bed capacity</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>1422</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Day surgery center capacity</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>137</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Rehab capacity</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<b>Nr. of units</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Discharged patients</b>	<b>43.811</b>	<b>95.550</b>	<b>35.000</b>	<b>29.858</b>
<b>Nr. of employees</b>	<b>1.855</b>	<b>5.731</b>	<b>2.145</b>	<b>2.045</b>
<i>Physicians</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>1.153</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>449</i>
<i>Nurses</i>	<i>234</i>	<i>2.264</i>	<i>249</i>	<i>741</i>
<i>Social workers</i>	<i>821</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>1048</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Other health professionals</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>1.564</i>	<i>262</i>	<i>583</i>
<i>Administrative staff</i>	<i>318</i>	<i>750</i>	<i>481</i>	<i>272</i>
<b>Gender of employees</b>				
<i>Male</i>	<i>39,50%</i>	<i>36,80%</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Female</i>	<i>60,50%</i>	<i>63,20%</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>€ 89,339,000</b>	<b>€ 723,605,000</b>	<b>€ 105,500,000</b>	<b>€ 182,000,000</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>€ 131,711,882</b>	<b>€ 20,167,000</b>	<b>€ 71,364,000</b>	<b>€ 95,560,000</b>

Table II – Semi-structured interview track

AREA	Semi-structured questions posed
AREA 1	How did your organization take the decision of disclosing non-financial information?
	What people were involved in the process of disclosing non-financial information and what changed throughout the years?
	How non-financial disclosure was perceived by internal stakeholders?
AREA 2	What type of role does non-financial disclosure documents cover?
	What makes you choose what to include in such a document?
	Whose the main target for non-financial disclosure documentation?
	How do you promote the documentation regarding non-financial information?
AREA 3	What do you expect from the future of non-financial disclosure?
	Do you believe that your type of organization shall base its disclosure on different indicators rather the already existing ones?
	How do you think ESGs may impact on the quality of non-financial disclosure in non-profit health care organizations in the future?

Table III – Items emerged from the coding process with frequency per single area

<i>Item</i>	<b>AREA 1</b> <b>(What motivates organizations to disclose non-financial information?)</b>		<b>AREA 2</b> <b>(What issues shall non-financial disclosure address?)</b>		<b>AREA 3</b> <b>(What are the anticipated future perspectives of non-financial disclosure?)</b>	
	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Accountability	0	N/A	4	Importance of bringing out relevant themes in terms of corporate action	2	Possibilities of defining benchmarking activities
Collaboration	4	Bottom-up approach is universally seen as the only possible way to create the report	4	The drafting of the document comes to life through the collaboration of all parties. The ESG perspective must, therefore, be disseminated and accepted by everyone	0	N/A
Standardization	0	N/A	0	N/A	2	The use of standards can assist in benchmarking processes but runs the risk of distorting the purpose of the documents: one of the potential side-effects of ESG.
Certification	0	N/A	0	N/A	3	Although it may seem to be the future of social reporting, at least one organization out of the 3 that pointed out how certification is a relevant issue, believes certification is premature and risky for this type of statement
Mission	1	Adopting ESG framework in disclosing non-financial information is useful to make a re-evaluation of one's mission in order to make it accessible to all stakeholders	0	N/A	0	N/A

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Guidelines

The preparation of non-financial disclosure documents always starts with the reading of guidelines. ESG may represent a common indicator to base the document structure.

Guidelines are sometimes not suitable because they are too generic: they do not take into account the uniqueness of each individual structure and can be misleading

The development of drafting guidelines and standards must always take into consideration the specific nature of the activities, especially regarding healthcare organizations, which are less inherently related to environmental issues but are more anchored in social matters

Management Decision