

GENDER EQUALITY AND POWER IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: The present research investigates Romania's position in the Gender Equality Index and the progress registered by the country concerning women's representation in elected and appointed political positions in the 2003-2020/2021 period. The main objective of the study is to create a comprehensive picture regarding political leadership in Romania and the country's position and progress in the European rankings regarding gender equality in positions with high power of decision. The study revealed that regarding political power, in Romania, women continue to be underrepresented as ministries, deputies, senators, members of the County Councils and mayors. The gender balance is far from being achieved and Covid-19 pandemic might widen the gender gap which in this field, is already high. Men continue to be elected and appointed in these important positions and hold the real power of decision and the gender equality objective was not fulfilled.

Keywords: Gender Equality Index, power dimension, political power and gender

1. INTRODUCTION

In the European Union's countries, the adopted and implemented gender policies created the necessary legal framework for women to hold leadership positions that require high power of decision, in politics, public administration and private companies. Although, theoretically, these countries created the right environment for women to succeed, it could be observed that most of women still manage to occupy positions from middle and low levels of management and only a small part truly succeed to break the glass ceiling and occupy positions that require real power of decision, such as members of the European Commission, of the European Parliament, prime-ministers, deputies and senators, heads of regional assemblies, mayors or positions of leaders in the top management of the public and private companies (Cole, 2004). Progress have been made in all European countries, but in most of them, at a slow pace. Even so, it is important to observe the evolution regarding gender equality, not matter the rhythm in which change happens. Unfortunately, Covid-19 pandemic had negative impact on women's situation. Women around the world either lost their jobs, or lost their husbands or family members that brought the substantial incomes in the households and feminine working areas were the most affected by the pandemic (McKinsey & Company, 2020). In these conditions, the gender inequalities are expected to increase again and most of the effort made in past now will be slowed down. The pandemic affected gender equality and this will have negative impact over all the world, inclusively from the economic perspective.

The present research investigates Romania's position in the Gender Equality Index and the progress registered by the country concerning women's representation in positions with power of decision in politics in the 2003-2020/2021 period. The subject is important in the Covid-19 pandemic context and its impact on gender equality because, now more than ever, women must be very well represented in the institutions where the real power of decision is: Parliaments, Governments and regional/local assemblies. Using data available from the European Institute for Gender Equality, one dimension of the index, namely power, with one of its subdimensions- the political power, have been analysed for Romania and compared with the situation from European level as to observe Romania's position in the European ranking and its progress considering this important matter for gender equality. The main objective of the study is to create a comprehensive picture

regarding political leadership in Romania and the country's position and progress in the European rankings regarding gender equality in positions with high power of decision.

2. MAIN CONSIDERATION REGARDING COVID-19 IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Even if EU is considered to be a global leader in gender equality, not all Member States made the same progress. There are still millions of Europeans that cannot fulfil their dreams and achieve their full potential only because of their gender. If until before the pandemic, all the efforts made by the Member States had positive results, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to reduce much of the recent progress (Eurofound and EIGE, 2021). Ivailo Kalfin, Eurofound Executive Director, outlined that the impact of Covid-19 on economies might slow down the progress concerning gender equality in labour market and cause future disparities by widening the gender gap: „Gender segregation in the labour market has left women disproportionately exposed to the economic turmoil created by COVID-19. It is necessary to take action to promote participation of women in male-dominated fields such as STEM and ICT, as well as to bring more men into female-dominated areas, such as the education and care sectors - not just that labour market impacts are shouldered more evenly, but also to benefit from the economic dynamism and potential that this can create” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

Data from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2021) showed that in the last years, all Member States made more or less progress regarding gender equality and women's representation in positions with power of decision. Looking at the big picture, on a whole, in 2020 when the pandemic affected all the economies in the world, the European Union continued to progress at a slow pace in the gender equality field. The Gender Equality Index presented annually by the European Institute for Gender Equality showed that in 2020, for the whole EU, the index increased only with 0.5 points (National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, 2021).

In the last Gender Equality Index (2020) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020), Sweden ranked on the first place regarding gender equality and Greece had one of the worst performances because it struggled the most to catch up with the other Member States. Italy, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal registered a considerable progress because in their case, the Index increased by more than 7.5 points. Another state with impressive progress was Estonia because its index raised with 7.3 points. In the Central and Eastern Member States the progress was lower and several countries in this region such as Czechia, Hungary and Poland improved their performance at a slower pace than the EU average (Bissello, 2021, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

In these conditions, considering the progress registered before the pandemic, European officials declared that in this rhythm, gender equality in EU will be achieved in 60 years (National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, 2021). Taking into account the negative impact of the Covid-19 on gender equality (because the feminine working fields were more affected as the masculine working areas, women lost their jobs more than men and consequently, they lost their financial independence and the global GDP is expected to decrease due to the raise of the gender inequalities) (McKinsey and Company, 2020), new measures must be adopted and implemented as not to widen more the existing gender gap. The first woman president of the European Commission- Ursula von der Leyen made many speeches in which she outlined the need to lower the gender inequalities, to use an integrative approach of the gender issues in all the European policies and in all their stages as well as to treat women in the same manner as men (European Commission, 2021).

Covid-19 pandemic's economic and social impact might stop the progress registered by the Member States regarding gender equality. This could be a major setback because in this period of crisis, the gender inequalities rise, the gender pay gap increases and the gender balance is not in equilibrium. Even if the progress registered so far is slow, it brought major improvements in countries with low levels of gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). In this respect, the efforts made by the Member States must continue because the pandemic might cancel years of progress due to the problems created for women around the world that lost

their jobs and dedicated more time (unpaid time that is usually spent more by women) caring for their children (that learned in the online system) and for the elderly that were more vulnerable in face of the disease (Eurofound and EIGE, 2021).

3. ROMANIA'S PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY

The Gender Equality Index aims to measure the progress in EU Member States regarding gender equality by aggregating computed scores on gender inequalities in seven key areas: power, money, time, knowledge, violence, health and work (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

In 2020, Romania scored 54.4 points, 13.5 points less than the European average and with 0.1 points less than in 2019 (when it scored 54.5). This score ranked Romania 26th among Member States, 1 position lower than in 2019 (when it ranked 25th), revealing that Romania's progress on gender equality is lower than in other Member States (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019, 2020, 2021).

Romania registered the highest scores on health (71.2 points), work (67.6 points) and money (63 points) dimensions. Despite the high scores achieved, the country ranked low in all the three domains (on the last place regarding health, on 23rd regarding work and on 27th regarding money). The lowest scores were registered in power (37.5 points), time (50.3 points) and knowledge (52.4 points) dimensions. The power dimension measures gender equality in decision-making positions which require high power of decision in economic, social and political areas. Referring to politics, this dimension measures women's representation in Parliament, Government, regional and/or local councils. The low score achieved on the power dimension shows high gender inequalities and the fact that women do not have the same opportunities as men to occupy positions which require real power of decision. The score for this domain is the lowest compared with the scores achieved by the country on all the dimensions, but it placed Romania on a higher rank among Member States (19th place) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Also related to the power dimension, the data indicated a positive evolution for Romania regarding women's access to leadership positions especially in the public institutions (in the Parliament and Ministries), where women are better represented, compared to 2005. A decrease in the proportion of women in management positions in companies (from 25.8% in 2005, to 21.4% in 2017, respectively 20.5% in 2019) was also observed (National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, 2021).

Since 2010, Romania performed well in the power (+6.7 points) and knowledge (+5.2 points) dimensions where the scores registered the highest increases. The worst performance was observed in the work and time domains where Romania registered the highest decrease (-0.3 points in both cases). Since 2017, the score for the power dimension decreased with 1.3 points (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

4. GENDER EQUALITY AND POWER: ROMANIA VS. EUROPEAN UNION

In order to analyse Romania's situation regarding women's representation in positions with high power of decision in politics as members of the Parliament, Government, of the County Councils as well as mayors, an exploratory study using secondary data analysis have been conducted. In the study, the comparison between the scores registered by Romania in the Gender Equality Index for the power dimension are compared with the situation registered at European Union's level. The power dimension is formed by three sub-domains that measure gender equality in decision-making positions in the political, economic and social fields. In the present comparative analysis only political power is approached, the sub-domain that measures the representation of women and men in national Parliaments, Government and regional/local assemblies (EIGE, 2021). This comparative analysis shows Romania's position compared with the European Union's average, revealing also the impact of its gender policies. The comparison between Romania and EU regarding power dimension was conducted for 2013-2020 period considering the available data. The comparative analysis regarding the political power sub-dimension was carried out for the 2003-2020/2021 period (depending on the available data) in order to be able to capture Romania's situation before and after joining the European Union.

Years	Power (Dimension)		Political power		Economic power		Social power	
	RO	EU 28	RO	EU 28	RO	EU 28	RO	EU 28
2013	30,8	41,9	23,5	47,2	28	28,9	44,4	53,7
2015	28,8	43,5	47,9	56,1	20,4	31,8	44,4	53,7
2017	33,2	48,5	50,7	55,6	21,4	39,5	51,8	55
2019	38,8	51,9	50,7	55,4	20,5	43,6	69,7	58,2
2020	37,5	53,5	52,2	55,4	21,5	46,8	59,3	57,6

TABLE 1: COMPARISON BETWEEN ROMANIA AND EU REGARDING THE SCORES ACHIEVED ON THE POWER DIMENSION AND ITS SUB-DIMENSIONS

Source: Authors, adapted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021)

Table 1 shows Romania's performance on the power dimension from 2013 until 2020. It can be observed that the scores have been lower than the EU's average on the whole studied period. Romania did not succeed in narrowing the gap with the EU. On the contrary, the differences between the country and EU's scores seem to be increasing during the years. In 2020 the score decreased compared with 2019 when at EU's level the score registered an increase. Regarding political power (the first subdimension) it can be affirmed that Romania recovered the differences to EU achieving in 2020 a score very close to EU's average. The scores show that Romania increased women's representation in leadership positions in politics- in Parliament, Government and Local Councils. The worst situation is observed regarding economic power. At the beginning of the studied period Romania situated on an equal position compared with EU's average but followed a downturn trend. In 2020, its score is less than half of the European average showing that the proportion of women members of boards in largest quoted companies, supervisory board or board of directors considerably decreased. Concerning social power, Romania's scores increased considerably, surpassing EU's average, which is a positive aspect.

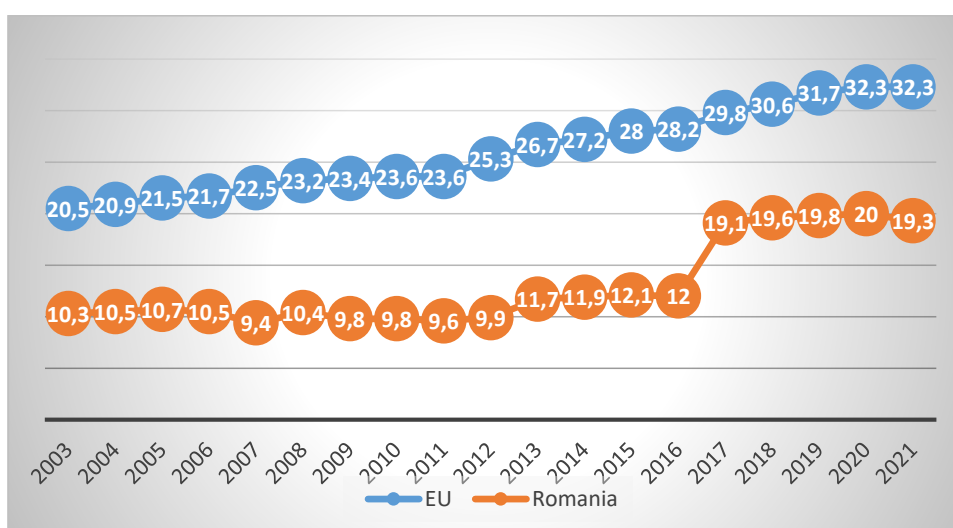


FIGURE 1: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT: ROMANIA VS. EU
Source: Authors, adapted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021)

Figure 1 presents the comparison between Romania and EU regarding women's representation in the national Parliaments, one of the items analyzed in the political power sub-dimension. There are European countries that adopted gender quotas to increase gender equality in policy-making and to achieve a balanced

representation in political positions and among elected representatives (European Commission, 2017). The countries that introduced these gender quotas registered significant increases in the representation of women in political positions, but none of them achieved the gender equality objective. Nevertheless, none of the European countries, with or without gender quotas managed to achieve this objective. Romania has not adopted gender quotas, but took measures with the purpose of increasing women’s representation in political positions (European Commission, 2016). As it can be observed in the figure above, women’s representation in the national Parliament (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) increased considerably compared with 2003-2016 period when the proportion did not surpass 12%. In this period women’s representation oscillated between 9% and 12%. Starting with 2017, women represent approximately 20% of the deputies and senators, but this proportion is still far below the European average that situates around 30%. However, it should be mentioned that in 2021, women’s proportion is with 10% higher compared with 2003, both at Romanian and European levels. This data reveal that Romania did significant progress regarding women’s representation in Parliament but is far from achieving a balanced participation of men and women and to fulfill the gender equality objective. At EU’s level the situation is similar, but because women’s proportion is higher, a balanced participation is expected to be achieved before it will happen in Romania.

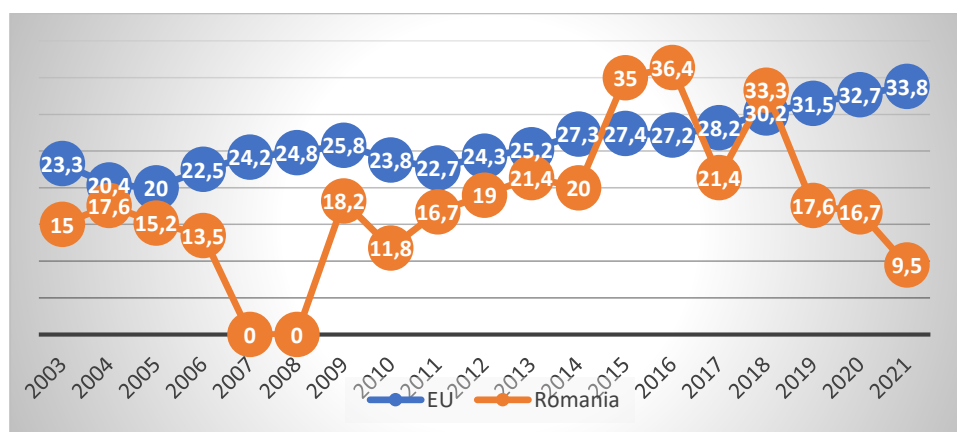


FIGURE 2: SHARE OF WOMEN MINISTRIES: ROMANIA VS. EU
Source: Authors, adapted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021)

Regarding women’s representation in the national Government in Romania and EU, it can be noted that our country had an oscillating trajectory in this field: from no women ministry (in 2007-2008) to proportions above the European average (in 2015, 2016 and 2018). At European level, a constant positive trend can be observed, from 20% to more than 30% representation. Romania does not follow the same positive trend, the situation being worse in the last three years of the analysis, when women’s representation decreased dramatically (to 9,5% in the last year). Our country is very far from achieving gender equality in this area and a balanced participation of men and women in positions of ministries. Women’s low representation in Parliament and Government show that in Romania, men are the ones’ who hold the positions that require real power of decision. Romania situates on higher places in the European rankings concerning other types of positions with power of decision, for example, in the public administration (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021), but it seems that in the fields where the real power is, such as politics, men dominate and gender equality is far from being achieved.

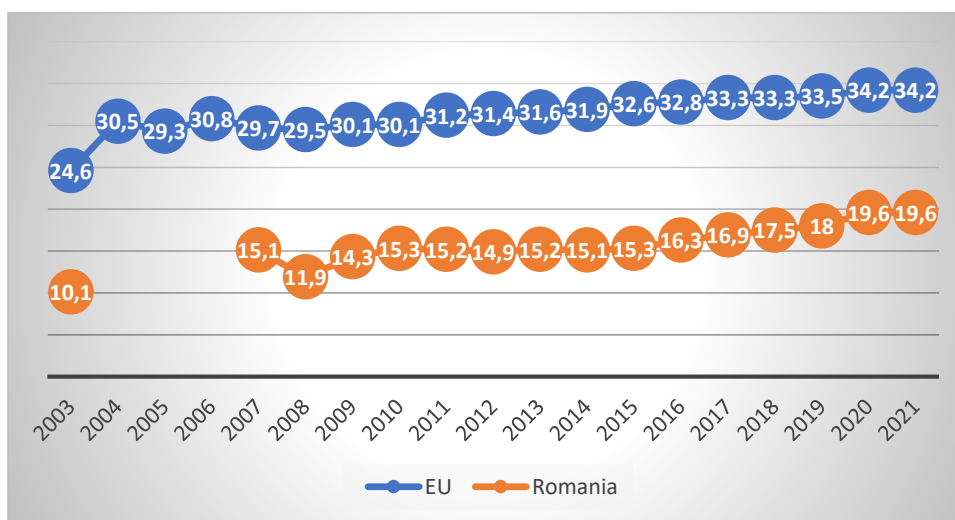


FIGURE 3: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES: ROMANIA VS. EU
Source: Authors, adapted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021)

Passing from central to local level, it can be observed that the situation is not very different and it is not better at all. Figure 3 shows women's representation in regional assemblies (in EU's case) and County Councils (in Romania's case, where the regions do not have legal personality), institutions with high power of decision for regional/local level. It can be observed that in this case, Romania situates under the European average for all the studied period (for 3 years there was no available data), but the women's representation follows a positive trend, evolving from 10% (at the beginning of the studied period) to almost 20% (in the end of the studied period). It can be affirmed that Romania registered a significant progress regarding women's representation as members of the County Councils, but also in this case, the gender equality is far from being achieved. It seems that this field is also dominated by men and more significant efforts must be made as to achieve a balanced participation. Observing the situation from European level, women's representation followed a positive trend from 24% (at the beginning of the studied period) to 34% (in the end of the studied period). The representation of women in regional assemblies show that at European level the gender balance will be achieved much sooner than in Romania's case.

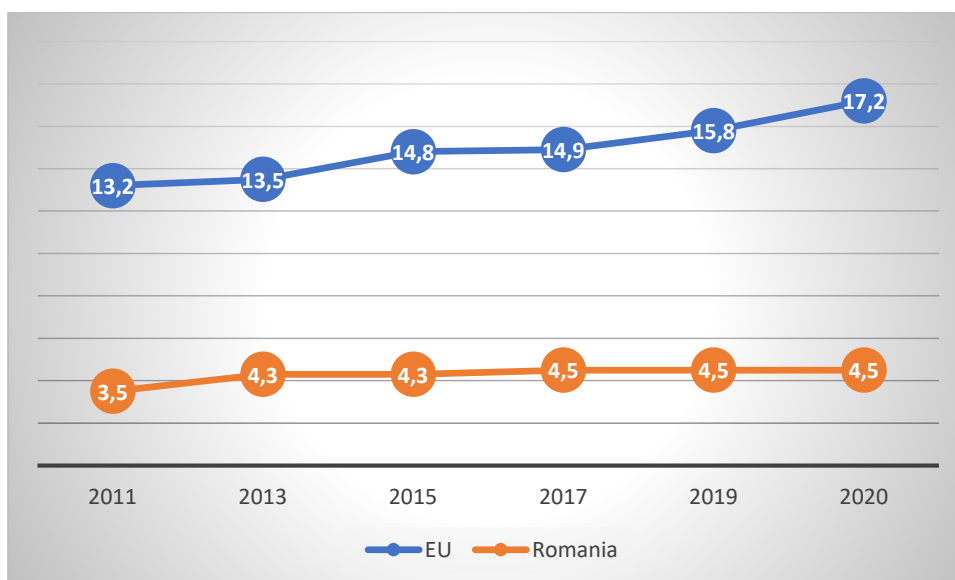


FIGURE 4: SHARE OF FEMALE MAYORS: ROMANIA VS. EU
Source: Authors, adapted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021)

Figure 4 presents the share of female mayors in Romania and at European level in 2011-2020 period (the data was available only for this period of time). The situation is concerning in both cases, because women are underrepresented in these elected positions at both Romanian and European levels and it seems that it will not improve in the near future. Romania presents a share of female mayors under 5%, while in Europe the situation is better, achieving 17% in 2020. In this case too, Romania is far from achieving gender equality.

Concerning women's representation in County Councils or as mayors, the situation can be influenced by two factors: either women do not want to candidate to the local elections, or people do not want to elect them because they are women and the gender stereotypes are still present. Either way, the analysis showed that the power at local level, continues to be held by men.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the study revealed that regarding political power, in Romania, women continue to be underrepresented as ministries, deputies, senators, members of the County Councils and mayors. The gender balance is far from being achieved and Covid-19 pandemic might widen the gender gap which in this field is very high. Men continue to be elected and appointed in these positions and hold the real power of decision. If in other domains, such as public administration, women's representation in management positions is high, in the case of elected and appointed political positions requiring higher power of decision, the situation is not in women's favour. The analysis revealed that in Romania, the gender policies did not have the desired impact and gender equality in politics is far from being achieved. The trend registered at European level is quite similar, but women's representation at European level is higher and in that case, gender equality is possible to be achieved in a shorter period of time as in Romania's case. Because Eu decided that the gender issue will be taken into consideration in all the policies that will be adopted so far, it is expected that this decision will have positive impact on women's representation in decision-making positions in Romania and in all EU's countries.

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