

GENDER EQUALITY IN ROMANIA. STATISTICAL DATA AND CULTURAL NORMS

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ABSTRACT

The article presents shortly women's involvement in the major sectors of social life (labor market, political involvement and decision making, educational system, domestic tasks) in Romania, both from the point of view of the official data as well as from people's opinions and perception in regard to this.

Some of the indicators taken into consideration (such as employment and unemployment rate, political representation, etc.) are analyzed on a longer period of time in order to see the changes that occurred and also, when available, comparison with data available at EU level is performed.

Another aspect approached is related to violence against the women in Romanian society, especially that related to domestic violence. The paper brings in discussion the perceptions in regard to this phenomenon, the beliefs and norms that regulate the conduct within the family, the incidence of violence against women and the efforts made so far in order to eliminate it.

Keywords: gender, equality, labor market, culture, violence.

INTRODUCTION

Despite progresses registered lately all over the world, gender equality remains a topic of interest for scientist as well as a goal still to be achieved. No doubt many steps were made in order to assure a better representation of women in society and to stimulate their equal participation in all sectors of life both at European and at national level. This took mainly the form of legal acts that were adopted and of formal institutions that were created in order to decrease the disparities between women and men and to offer women equal chances.

These positive changes at legal and political level were overshadowed by the fact that opinions and mentalities regarding women's abilities and roles did not change. Nevertheless all activism in the area, values and believes that regulate

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people's conduct in report to women rest a step behind. Gender stereotypes are frequent in most societies and women, despite their abilities and education, still have a peripheral role in society and are affected by negative perceptions. They are victims of gender discrimination and in a higher proportion are affected by violence. All over the world they are less present in management position, they fight with poverty and are often more involved than men in domestic chores and even, in some social strata, considered the only ones responsible for taking care of the household.

Gender inequality is a reality that women must face in their everyday life and Romanian society makes no exception from this situation. Despite the efforts which were made until now and the progresses registered at present women do not participate to the same extent as men in some of the most important social sectors and differences between women and men are frequent in regard to the activities they are involved to, the amount of money they earn or the responsibilities they must fulfill in the private life.

This paper aims at presenting women's integration in the Romanian society. In order to accurately present their situation in different areas, such as labor market, education, decision making, poverty, victimization, will be taken into consideration. In the analysis attention will be paid not only to rough statistical data that show women's situation in comparison with men, but also to cultural aspects that have to be analyzed.

LABOR MARKET

Integration on labor market is one of the indicators commonly used in regard to gender equality. The employment rate shows some significant differences between women and men. As the graphic below shows, in 2012, the rate of female employment is only 52.6% in comparison with 66.5% in the case of men (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 96), which means a difference of more than 10 percents between the two genders. In addition to that, data prove that no significant improvement was achieved in the last years.

More details related to gender are offered by the structure of employment. A first image about the differences between men and women in this field is given by the status of employment. If the percentage of women and men that are employees is similar (67.1% of men and 67.4% of women are employees), the percentage of employers is double among men (1.6% of men are employers in comparison with 0.8% of women). The statistics also show a lower percentage of women that are self-employed and members of an agricultural holding or of a co-operative (12.3 of women and 24.3 of men). The status of employment that is more frequent among women than among men is that of contributing family worker (19.5% of women in comparison with only 7% of men) (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 92).

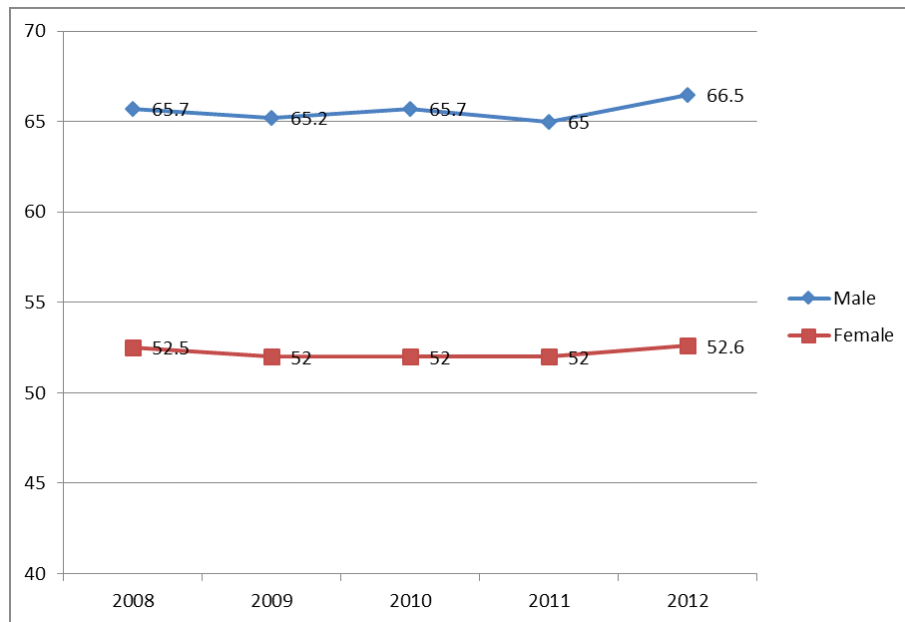


Figure 1 – Employment rate by sex.

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2013.

Taking into consideration another factor – the level the education – some interesting facts come into knowledge. The difference between the rate of employment of women and men is reduced in the case of persons with a higher level of education (83.9% for men and 79.3% for women with tertiary education) and much more pregnant in the other cases (70.6% of men and 54.8% of women with medium education and 48.2% of men and 36.6% of women with low education). The figures show a higher integration on the labor market of highly educated women that is no doubt not only the effect of their professional abilities, but also of a different perception about work that is characteristic of this social stratum in comparison with the others.

A positive aspect seems to be the incidence of unemployment among women that has a lower occurrence in Romania. At the end of 2014 the number of unemployed women was 199 885 (in comparison with 278 453 men) that correspond to a 4.73 rate of female unemployment, in comparison with a 5.78 rate of male unemployment (ANOFM).

The unemployment rate is influenced by education; the difference between women and men is actually determined by its incidence in the case of people with low education. The rate of unemployment is similar in the case of women and men with tertiary (5.9% and 5.3%) and medium (7.5% for both genders) education, but it is very distinct in regard of persons with low education (9.4% of men are unemployed in comparison with 4.3% of women).

The analysis of work sectors gives a further idea about the segregation of women and men and the persistence of gender differences since certain sectors are mainly occupied by men while other sectors and professions are rather 'feminine'. If we take into consideration the population occupied in non-agricultural sectors it can be noticed that men are involved in a higher percent than women in constructions (17.3% of men and only 2% women work in this sector) while it is obvious that women prevail in social services: 15.4% of men and 31.1% of women (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 93).

This assumption is confirmed also by taking into account the number and percent of women that work in the main economic activities. The official data show the great prevalence of women in certain economic activities: thus, 78.4% out of people working in health and social assistance are women while in education this proportion is 74.8%. Besides the economic activities that require physical force and where women are much under represented (8.4% of persons working in construction and 10.2% of those working in mining and quarrying are women), women count for approximately one quarter or even lower in: electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning production (20.5%), water supply; sewerage, waste management and decontamination activities (26.7%), transport and storage (17.6%) and activities of administrative services and of support services –26.7% (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 117).

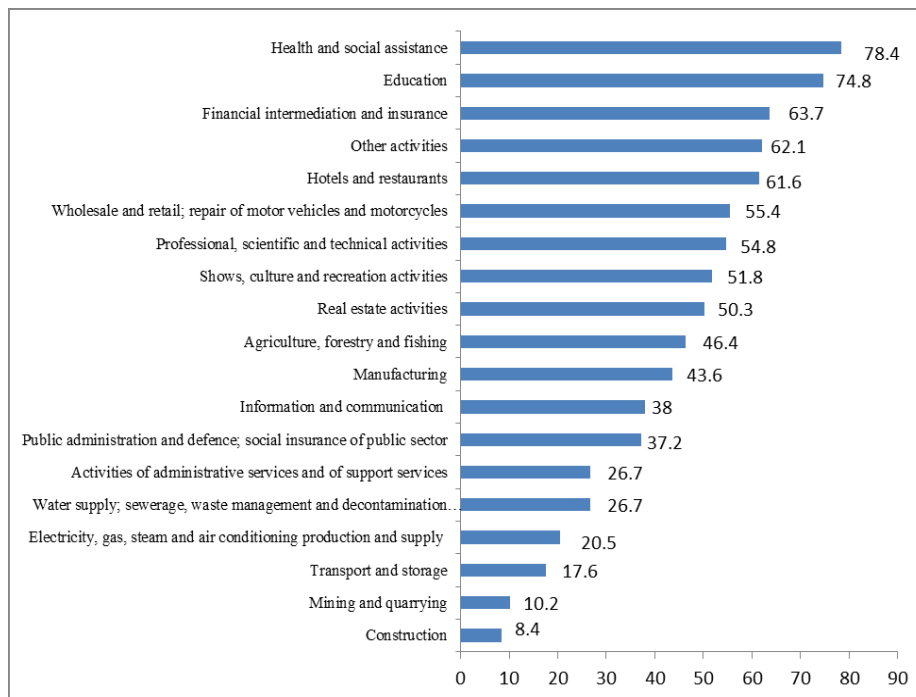


Figure 2 – Percentage of women out of total persons working, by activity of national economy.

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2013.

Data regarding employment also reveal that certain occupations are rather accessible to men than women. For example, only 31.5% of the members of legislative bodies of the executive, high officials of public administration, leaders and senior civil servants are women and 21.4% of the craft and related trades workers. At the same time, 66.2% of the civil servants and 62.1% of service workers are women ((National Institute of Statistics 2013, 105).

To assess gender equality not only integration into labor market is important, but also the level of incomes of women and men. On this indicator, European data places Romania among the countries with the lowest pay gender gap in EU as the graphic below proves (EUROSTAT, 2012).

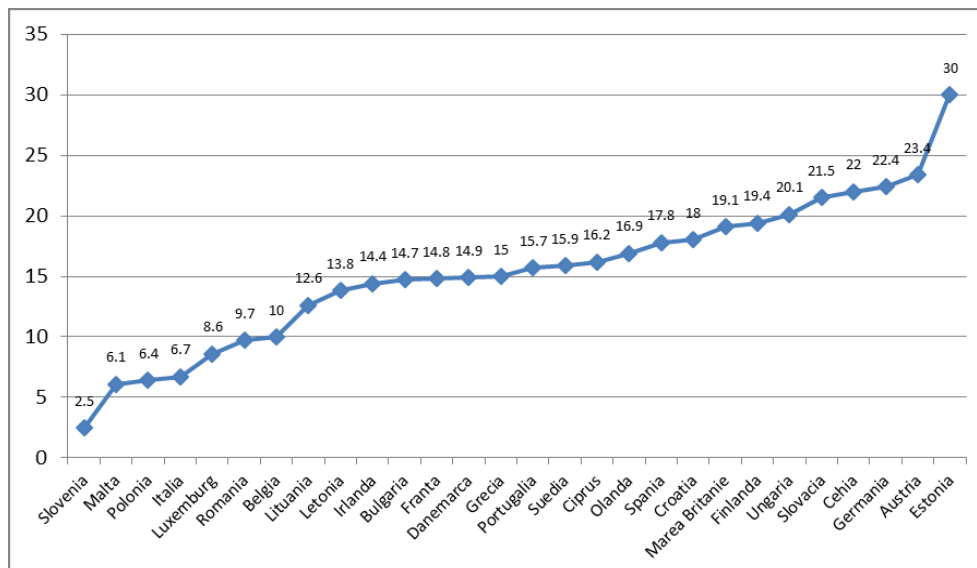


Figure 3 – Gender pay gap in EU.

Source: EUROSTAT 2012.

DECISION-MAKING

Another topic that is analyzed in the debates regarding gender equality and that is considered crucial for further improvement in the area is related to women's access to power positions in society. Actually, as some specialists mentioned, women's lack of access to authority positions in society makes them unable to define what's harmful to them and to properly take measures against acts of violence they are submitted to (Kelly *apud* H Johnson *et al.* 2008, 3)

Despite important changes that took place in the last years, women's participation in political life is still very low in Romania. It was critical after the first elections following the dissolution of communism and it has begun to improve since 2000, a year from which the proportion of women in the Parliament varied around 10%. This figure places Romania among the countries with the smallest representation of women in the political field.

In addition, the low implication of women is confirmed by the small percentage of women involved in the 2012 election, when women represented approximately 14.17% of candidates (Ministry of Employment, Family, Social Protection and Elderly, 2). The situation is not unitary all over Romania, instead there are some important regional differences since the highest percentage is registered in the capital (where 22% of candidates were women) while in some counties the figures are very low: 11% in Banat, 9% in Maramureş and 11% in Moldavia (Idem, 3). An important fact that must be mentioned is that in the 2012 elections in 8 Romanian counties no woman was elected: Alba, Covasna, Harghita, Mehedinti, Mures, Salaj, Valcea and Vrancea (Ibidem).

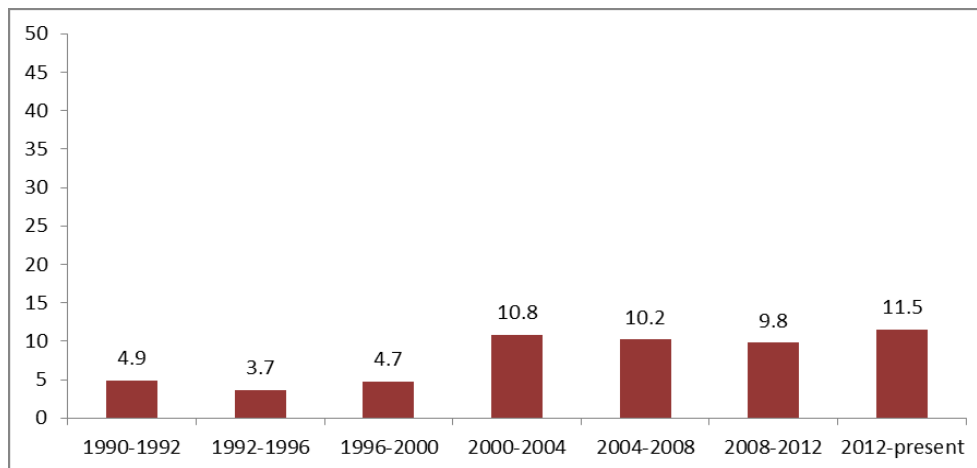


Figure 4 – Percentage of women within the Romanian Parliament.

Source: Permanent Electoral Authority 2012.

Women's involvement in the political life is also very low at local level, as statistics from the local authorities elections of 2012 prove. Thus only 5.15% of the candidates for the function of President of the County Council were women and no woman was actually elected (Idem, 2–3). A higher implication of women is related to the position of county counselor where 22.63% of the candidates and 14.22% of the elected counselors were women. Regarding the function of mayor, data show that 6.96% of candidates and 3.65% of the elected mayors are women (cf. MMFPSV, 6).

An important step towards women empowerment is represented by high level positions occupied by women within the private and public sector. The allocation of these top positions within the Romanian ministries shows a balanced division between the two genders. The statistics collected by the Ministry of Employment, Family, Social Protection and Elderly show that 101 women and 118 men occupied level 1 positions (secretary general, deputy secretary general, director general, deputy director general) at August 1, 2014 while the proportion of women in level 2 positions (director, deputy director) is even higher: 162 women in comparison with 121 men.

DOMESTIC CHORES AND CHILD CARE

The traditional patriarchal mentality considers women mainly responsible for domestic chores, taking care of children while man is the head of the family, the one who brings money to the family and provides for it. These traditional roles seem to perpetuate yet in the Romanian society.

The study 'National Research regarding Violence within the Family and Workplace', 2003, carried out by Center Partnership for Equality on a sample of 1806 persons questioned Romanians about gender roles. Data revealed that 21% of respondents agree that «Woman is man's property». At the same time 58% of Romanians considered that 'it is more women's responsibility than men's to take care of the domestic chores' while almost 3 quarters agreed that 'it is more men's responsibility to bring money in the house' (Center Partnership for Equality 2003, 52).

Opinions on gender inequality are influenced by certain factors. The interpretation of the data allowed authors to identify three major categories: the patriarchal mentality that characterizes those who consider woman should take care of the household while man is responsible for bringing money and he is the ruler at home and outside it; the gender democrats that do not share gender stereotypes and do not believe in gender roles and a third category of people that are called 'neutral' – those who do not have a clear opinion or do not answer the questions. The researchers also tried to describe those typologies and to identify the factors that determine them. Their conclusions showed at the same time a transformation that has started: the patriarchal beliefs are specific to old people, widowers, retired and agricultures, people living in villages while the gender democrat opinion is more frequent among young, not married people, with a higher education (high school or tertiary level), students, white collars and people that live in towns and cities (Idem, 113).

One of the aspects that is traditionally attributed to women is related to child care, which in the patriarchal communities is considered to be almost exclusively woman's responsibility and one of her major tasks.

The Romanian legislation allows equal rights to both parents in regard to child care. According to OUG 111/2010, art. 8 any of child's parents is able to be granted child care leave if they meet the requirements foreseen (related mainly to their financial contribution prior to child birth). One positive initiative that conducts to a higher involvement of men in child care is the allocation through art. 11 of OUG 111/ 2010 of at least one month of the child care leave to the parent who did not claim it. In case this person does not claim this right the other parent cannot benefit from it. Practically since this moment the child care leave is divided to the two parents, fact that will give fathers a chance to be involved in child care.

EDUCATION

Another topic taken into consideration in the analysis of women's situation is related to their access to the educational system, especially since this was forbidden to them for a long time across the history.

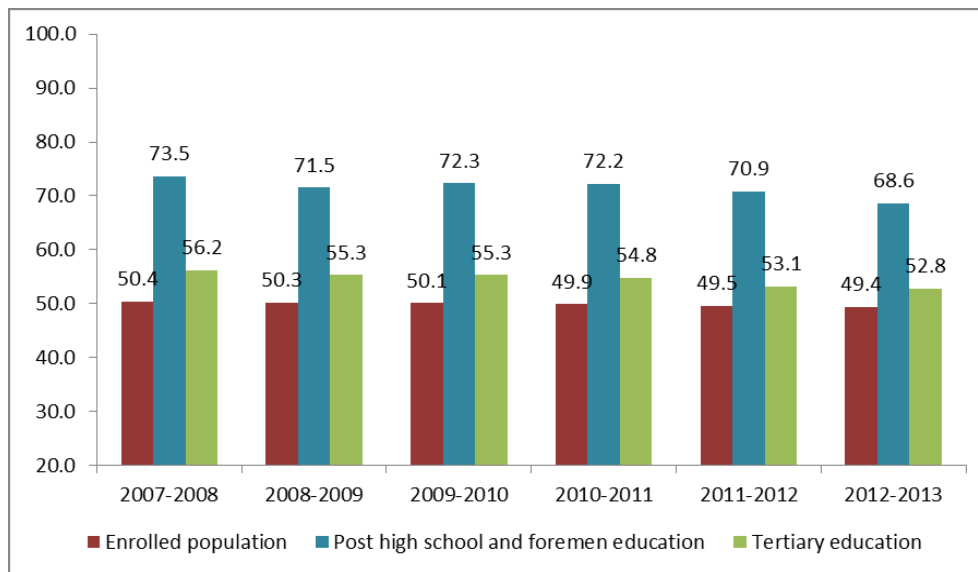


Figure 5 – Percentage of girls out of the total population enrolled in the educational system.

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2013

Overall the percentage of women and men enrolled within the educational system is similar, but analyzing the level of education they are attending, different educational pathways can be identified. In the first years/level the population of girls is actually inferior 48.2% of children enrolled in primary and secondary

education in 2012–2013 and 49% from the high school population are girls. After this point, girls and boys choose distinct ways and the balance is compromised. The boys are those who mainly choose the vocational education (only 24.1% are girls) while the girls tend in a much higher percentage to proceed towards higher education 68.6% of persons enrolled in post high school and foreman education and 52.8% of those enrolled in the tertiary level are girls (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 277).

The girls are also predominant within the graduates' population from the high levels. While boys represent the majority within graduates of secondary and vocational education levels, girls represent more than 3 quarters of graduates of the post high schools and 57.6% tertiary level (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 278).

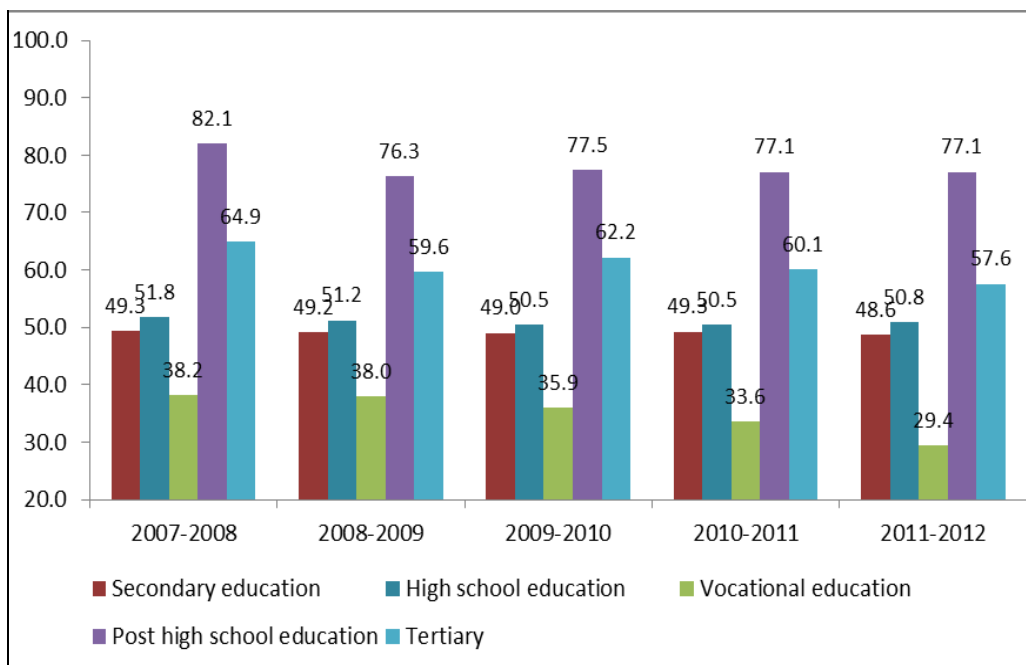


Figure 6 – Percentage of girls within the graduate population.

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2013

As mentioned before, the teaching staff is mainly composed of women – 75.1% of teachers in the school year 2012–2013, but the proportion of women decreased as we reach the top of the educational system. While at the pre-school level they represent 99.7% of the teaching staff, 77% at the primary and secondary level and 68.9% at high school level, they ending up by being minority at the highest level of the educational system: only 48.5% out of the teaching staff within the tertiary level are women. A positive fact is the slight improvement registered in

the last years: in 2007–2008 the percentage of women was 43.3% (National Institute of Statistics 2013, 278).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As it is mentioned in the Gender Equality Strategy 2014–2017 ‘the most pronounced expression of the uneven balance of power between women and men is violence against women, which is both a human rights violation and a major obstacle to gender equality’. At the same time, as it was pointed out ‘violence against women is a deeply entrenched problem in most societies because attitudes and practices that support violence are institutionalized in custom and law at all levels of society – marriage and the family, home, community and state’ (Holly Johnson *et al.*, 2008, 3).

Frequently the legal aspect regarding violence against women was approached by different international actors at worldwide or European level as well as in Romania. A significant number of acts that fight directly against this form of violence were adopted, and among these an important step forward was represented by the Istanbul Convention. In Romania the main resource in regard to violence against women is the Law 217/2003 on prevention and fight against family violence.

As its title suggests, the law deals with all types of violence committed within the family environment (whose victims are mainly women and children) and it foresees special procedures in these cases (a faster procedure, since 2012 the possibility of claiming a restraining order, etc.).

Data collected at European level show a high incidence of some forms of partner violence in Romania, especially in comparison with other states. Thus, the proportion of women that had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the 12 months before the interview by their current or previous partner was 6% in Romania, the highest value registered within the study, value that was also reported in 6 other countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia. In regard to violence experienced by women from a non-partner, Romania is at the end of the hierarchy, only 2% of women declared to have experienced this type of violence while the top incidence was in Denmark (8%), Finland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden (7%) (FRA 2014, 34).

Psychological violence is more spread between women, according to the same study 39% of Romanian women had experienced psychological violence during their relationships by current or previous partner, which places Romania in the middle of the European hierarchy (the biggest incidence being registered in Latvia and Denmark 60% and the smallest in Ireland 31% (*idem*, 73–74).

A positive fact is the low incidence of stalking in Romania in comparison with other states. Together with Lithuania, Romania is the European country with

the lowest incidence; nevertheless it is still a serious problem the fact that 8% of women in our country declare that they have been stalked during their lifetime (Idem, 83–84).

Other forms of violence, such as sexual harassment have also a lower incidence in Romania. Romania is, except Lithuania, the EU country with the lowest prevalence of sexual harassment (11% of women admitted confronting with this phenomenon in the 12 months before the interview in Romania, in comparison with 37% in Denmark, while the overall figure in the 28 EU countries is 21%. (Idem, 98–100). A topic that came recently in the attention is cyber harassment. Data show that Romania is the country with the lowest incidence of this type of violence (5% of women experienced this sort of behavior during their life, since the age of 15, in comparison with 18% in Denmark and Sweden and 11% in the EU (Idem, 105).

Studies carried out in Romania also show a high spread of the violence against women, especially within the family. Thus, the CPE 2003 study shows first of all a rather high tolerance towards this conduct. Thus a significant percentage of respondents consider certain aspects not at all serious/not too serious violent acts such as insult a woman insulted by her partner (25%), a woman threatened by her partner (17%), a man that screams a lot at her partner (23%), a woman slapped by a man (16%), a woman beaten by her partner (3%). It is important to notice that a higher percentage of respondents consider these acts non problematic if committed against a man.

The survey ‘Violence in the rural area. Attitudes, convictions and social control mechanism’, Institute for Crime Research and Prevention, 2008 (sample: 1186 adult persons from rural areas) shows that significant percentages of the inhabitants in rural areas consider that forms of violence against women are not a problem or are a minor problem, such as a woman beaten by her partner (12.3%), a woman slapped by her partner (27.2%) and a woman insulted by her partner (45%).

At the same time, respondents were asked to agree/disagree with certain affirmations that are related to gender inequality. The results confirm that Romanians still share the idea of an inferior status of women; significant percentages of the respondents totally agree or mostly agree that ‘The wife and children must obey the man in any circumstance’ (39.3%), ‘It’s better to accept the beatings than to humiliate yourself by getting divorced’ (16%), ‘For a child a family even violent is better than two separated parents’ (41.8%). At the same time approximately one fifth of respondents from rural areas consider that sometimes the hitting of wife is justified.

In conclusion, data show a high prevalence of intimate partner violence in Romania, especially physical violence, while the incidence of other forms of gender based violence (like stalking, sexual harassment) is rather low, in

comparison with other European states. Women are rather at risk of being victimized by their partners and this is still considered to be a private problem that must be solved within the family.

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