

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS IN THE COMMUNITY. COMPARATIVE STUDY

Maria-Ana Georgescu*

DOI: 10.62838/amsh-2024-0024

Abstract

Our study allows us to have an image of the European realities on gender issues regarding women's active role in the community, through their participation in the decision-making process in public life and in international voluntary organizations. The data series we have selected and analyzed are the most recently published by official bodies.

We found, as positive aspects, the fact that Romanian women occupy much more seats, than men, at the Supreme Court of Justice and are well represented in decision-making positions in the Public Administration. As negative aspects, the low participation of women in Romania in the bodies of political power; we even noticed an opposite trend in our country, compared to the European trend, namely the reduction of female representation in the political arena over the years. In contrast, within Rotary International volunteering, the percentage of women in District 2241, including Romania and Moldova, has gradually increased.

Keywords: *women; active role; public life; decision-making positions.*

1. Introduction

With regard to the active role that women could play in the community through their involvement in the decision-making process in public life, in economic life and in international volunteer organizations, such as Rotary, this paper seeks to paint a picture of the shifting gender realities in Europe and around the world.

As conceptual boundaries, to mark the distinction between the biological and the social condition of human beings, two terms are used in the specialized literature: “sex” and “gender”.

As meanings: *sex* is a biological category while *gender* is a social category¹. In other words, *sex* represents the biological differences between men and women; *gender* – the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women.

* Professor, Ph.D., George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and, Technology from Târgu Mureș, maria.georgescu@umfst.ro

¹ Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd, “Introduction”, in Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd editors *Sex and Gender, a Contemporary Reader*, Routledge, London - New York, 2023, p. 1.

“Sex is an evolved mechanism of reproduction, fundamental to the existence of almost all complex life and forming a biological pattern... The phenomenon of sex is rooted in reproduction, the process by which new individuals are produced by parents.”²

It is not this aspect, nor the theories related to the term *sex* that concern us, but aspects related to the concept of *gender*, respectively to the aspects of socialization. Sex and gender are interrelated in the sense that certain gender constraints are imposed on individuals depending on their sex.

Sex roles represent the actions that representatives of the two sexual categories can perform, exclusively based on biological attributes.³

Studies show that perceived pressure from the social environment has no direct link to internal satisfaction attributed to gender.⁴

In every society there are some stereotypes, as mental representations embodied in a list of characteristics that are distributed to the members of a group. Gender stereotypes denote general social views on people's behavior, sex, appearance, etc. Gender stereotypes do not take into account the individual characteristics of people, but force them to act inappropriately according to their real desires. They influence behavior, relationships between men and women even after marriage, etc. Sometimes, gender stereotypes can be dangerous, as they cause inappropriate behavior and give rise to discrimination.⁵

As Mihaela Miroiu, a well-known Romanian author in the field of gender studies notes, discrimination exists today, but it is more subtle than in the past:

“tacit elimination from professions or hierarchical positions that have high earnings, different practical and sports education for boys and girls, orientation of girls towards "feminine" professions, disregard for women's authority in various fields and even in

² Emma Hilton and Colin Wright, “Two Sexes”, in Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd editors *Sex and Gender, a Contemporary Reader*, Routledge, London - New York, 2023, p. 29

³ Alina Coman, *Stereotipuri de gen în discursul publicitar*, 2005, Editura Economică, București, p. 54.

⁴ Susan Egan and David Perry, *Gender Identity, A Multidimensional Analysis With Implications for Psychosocial Adjustment*, in “Developmental Psychology” 2001, 37(4), pp. 451-463, available: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.37.4.451>(Accessed: 25.11.2024).

⁵ Ina Crasnojon-Laba, *Stereotipia de gen – o problemă psihosocială*, în „Studia Universitatis”, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova, nr. 12/ 2012, p. 132.

private behaviors (for example, disregard for refusing sexual advances), use of degrading media images (the image of women is not that of the users' minds, but of the body, we are not interested in how a woman thinks, but how she looks).”⁶

Regarding the employment of women in various activities, this author argues that:

“It is enough for an activity to become feminized for it to quickly lose its privileges and diminish its importance. In this sense, we can operate more appropriately with the concept of discrimination.”⁷

Meanwhile, compared to the situation exposed by M. Miroiu 20 years ago, the policies of the European Union, of which our country is a part, assiduously promote gender equality and non-discrimination. However, a series of realities from social, economic and political life, which we will present, prove that a consistent effort is still necessary in the direction of bringing good intentions and policies closer together on the one hand and empirical data on the other, regarding the representation/underrepresentation of women.

2. Methodology

We realised a study whose objective is to present aspects related to the gender balance, respectively the gender imbalance in obtaining and occupying top positions in the economic, legal, administrative and political life of Romanian society and in European countries, in order to change and improve women's activism.

These aspects are intimately linked to social roles considered as:

“the set of behaviors expected by others towards the individual with a determined social position, a social status. These are socio-culturally shaped”.⁸

Our methodology consists in quantitative approach and secondary analysis of the available statistical data related to the presence of women in decision-making positions in companies and

⁶ Mihaela Miroiu, *Studii de gen*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2004, p. 30.

⁷ Idem, p. 268.

⁸ Alina Coman, *Stereotipuri de gen în discursul publicitar*, 2005, București, Editura Economică, p. 55.

at the higher levels of the administrative and judicial system, as well as the comparative aspect of the presence of women in social life in Romania the situation in European countries.

The series of data we have selected are the most recent ones released by official body sources.

3. Women in economic life and management positions

Although women make up around half of the labour force in the European Union, they are still underrepresented in management/decision making positions.

In 2022, around 46 per cent of all employees in the EU were women. On average, only 35.1 per cent of managers, or in other words, only one in three managers was female that year.

The reasons for the gender gap in management roles are interesting to discuss. For management roles, women are neither less competent nor less suitable. Instead, women continue to struggle to succeed in a male-dominated world. This disparity is largely caused by social and structural impediments. It is debatable why there are not more women in management roles. According to a survey of almost 2,400 managers in the sector conducted by human resources consulting firm Odgers Berndtson, gender also influences role choice. Men and women attribute this to different factors. Men see the system and lack of childcare as the main causes of the unequal distribution of genders in management, while women tend to blame themselves for this.⁹

The most recent data provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and published in 2024¹⁰ reveal the percentage of positions held by women in top management in 2023, an aspect that can be seen in Fig. No. 1.

⁹ *Gender equality in Europe: Women only hold one in three management positions*, "The BDAE Journal" online, 2023, Available: <https://www.bdae.com/en/magazine/4095-the-proportion-of-women-in-management-positions-in-europe> (Accessed: 2.11.2024).

¹⁰ Eurostat, *Positions held by women in senior management positions*, 2024, Available: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_60/default/bar?lang=en (Accessed: 3.12.2024).

*Representation of Women in Decision-Making Positions in the Community.
Comparative Study*

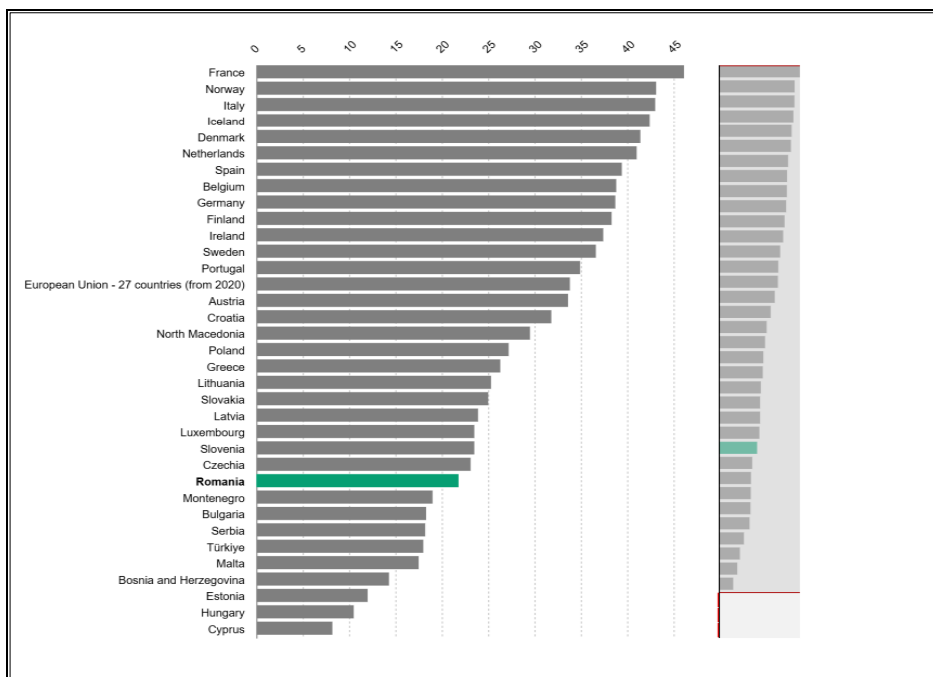


Figure No.1. *Share of women from EU countries in management positions – 2023*

Source: Eurostat 2024

In Romania, this percentage was only 21.8%, well below the EU level, which fell below 35% compared to the previous year’s data.

According to Grant Thornton – *Women in business report - 2024*, we have a picture of the management/decision making roles held by women, globally, in Fig. No. 2. Regional variations can be observed, namely the fact that the average percentage of women in top managerial positions held by them in EU countries is similar to that in North America, but below the average in Latin America.

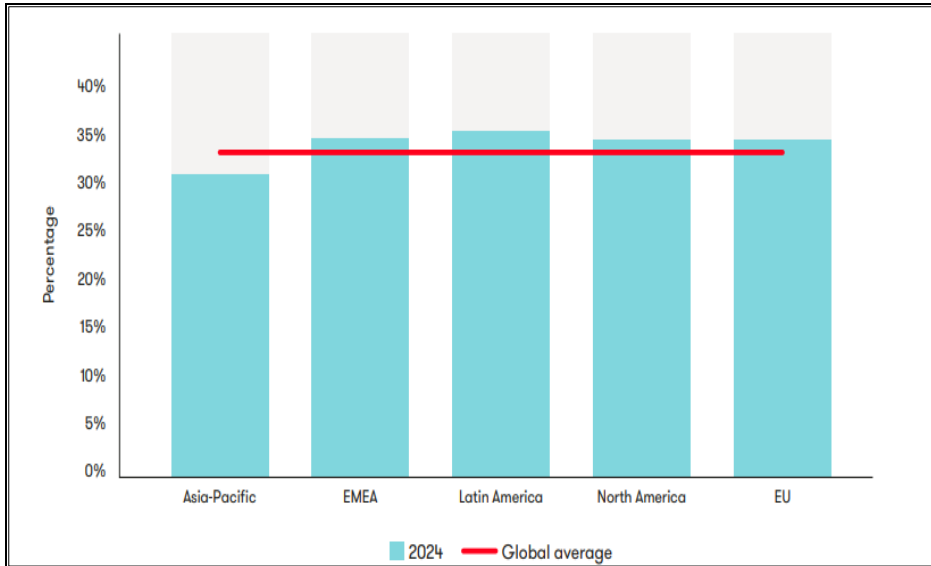


Figure No.2. *Share of senior management roles held by women, by region*

Source: Women-in-business-report-2024

An aspect worth commenting on regarding the realities of economic life concerns the existence of the pay gap between women and men, although in the EU the principle of equal pay has been enshrined in the European treaties (Article 157) since 1957.

But in fact, according to public data, in 2021 women earned on average 13.0% less per hour than men. The gender pay gap varies quite widely between EU member states. As a noteworthy aspect, the gap was very small, below 5%, in Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, Poland, Belgium and Italy. In contrast, the pay gap was over 17% in Hungary, Germany, Austria and Estonia.¹¹

To have an even more complex comparative picture, in the United States the gender pay gap has remained relatively stable over the past 20 years or so. In 2022, women earned an average of 82% of what men earned, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of average hourly earnings.¹² So, the gap was 18%, one percentage above the highest gap in EU countries.

¹¹ European Commission, *The gender pay gap situation in the EU, 2022*, Available: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en (Accessed: 4.11.2024).

¹² Carolina Aragão, *Gender pay gap in U.S. hasn't changed much in two decades*, in Pew Research Center, 1 March 2023. Available: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/01/gender-pay-gap-facts/sr_23-03-01_gender-wage-gap-2023_01-png/ (Accessed: 4.11.2024).

4. Women in Public Administration and in Top Levels of the Judiciary

The National Agency for Equal Opportunities has published a report on the Situation of women and men in decision-making positions in the central public administration in Romania. This gender distribution at the national level can be observed in Fig. no. 3, for a period of 5 years, namely the interval 2017-2021.

In 2021, there were 714 management positions (decision-making level 1 plus decision-making level 2) in the central public administration, of which 111 (15.5%) were vacant, the occupancy rate of the positions being 84.5% (603 occupied positions). Of these, 325 (53.9%) were held by women and 278 (46.1%) by men.¹³

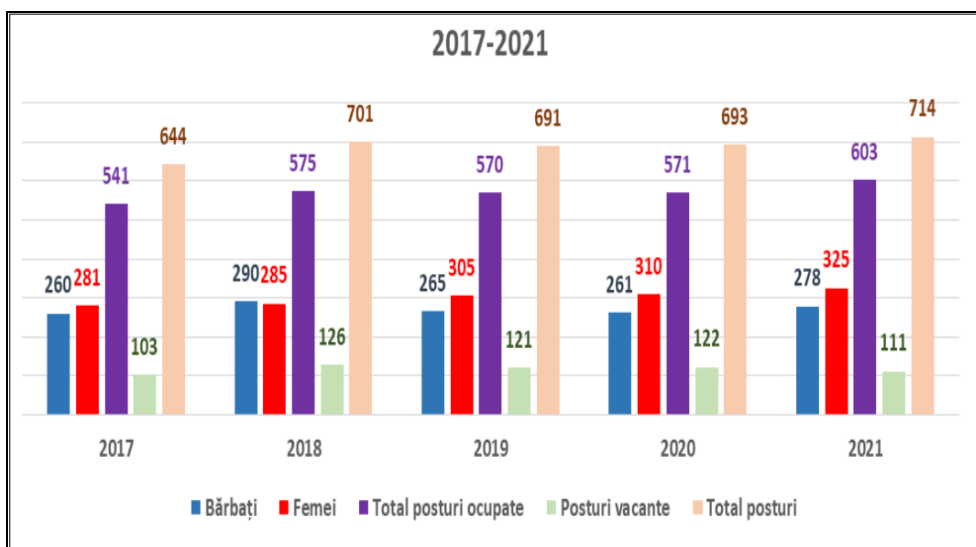


Figure No.3. *The evolution of women in administration decisional levels 1 and 2 in the Romanian Public Administration*

Source: ANES 2021

Regarding the evolution of percentages by gender, in the analyzed 5-year period, women had an advantage over men. The only year in which the percentage of women registered below 50 was 2018. Although in both 2020 and 2021 the female percentages decreased, they were still superior to the representation of men.

¹³ Agenția Națională pentru Egalitatea de Șanse între Femei și Bărbați – ANES, 2021, *Analiza 2021- Situația femeilor și a bărbaților în poziții de decizie în administrația publică*, Available: <https://old.anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Analiza-2021-Situația-femeilor-si-a-barbatilor-in-pozitii-de-decizie-in-administrația-publică-centrală.pdf> (Accessed: 3.12.2024).

Regarding the presence of women as judges in the supreme courts of justice, Romania ranks second after Montenegro among European countries, being in a leading position, which is a commendable aspect.¹⁴ In Fig. no. 4. the representation of women can be observed in yellow.

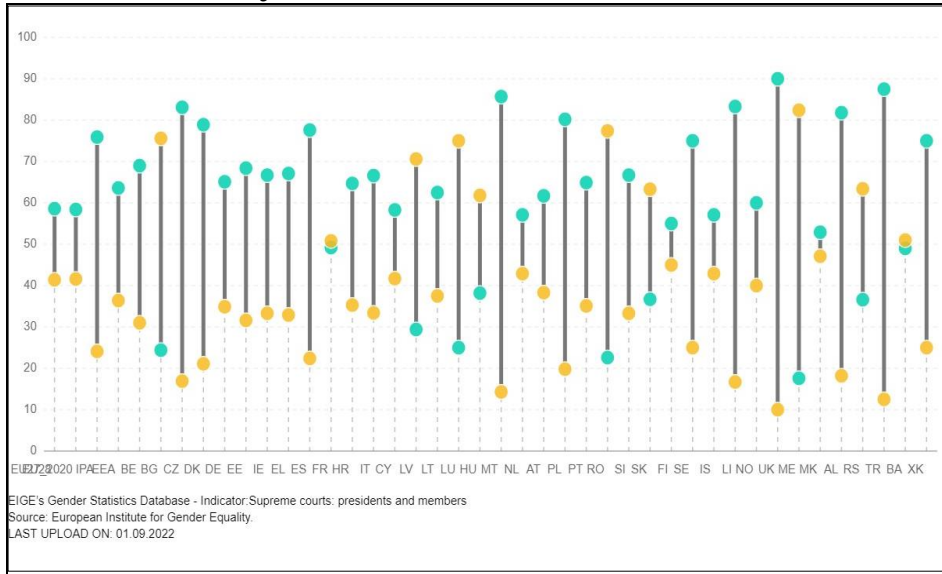


Figure No.4. *Share of women in Judges of supreme courts, in European countries*
 Source: EIGE 2022

One of the reasons for this good presence of women is that recruitment for positions in these supreme courts of justice is done among judges, and in our country, they are mostly women. Obtaining a judge's position involves a difficult exam, but one that women successfully pass.

5. Female political representation

After the socio-economic changes in our country since 1989, a sensitive issue remains the political representation of women, an aspect considered

“one of the indicators of the quality of democracy where Romania is constantly in the last places at the European

¹⁴ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2022, *National courts: presidents and members*, Available: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_jud_natcrt_wmid_natcrt_supcrt (Accessed: 2.12.2024).

level. Women in Romania face the difficulty of being present in the electoral competition and the even greater difficulty of occupying eligible positions”.¹⁵

In Fig. no. 5, the presence of women in the national parliaments of each country can be observed, in Romania this being only 19.4% according to data published for 2023.¹⁶ Worryingly, in our country studies even reveal a decrease in the political representation of women along the last years.

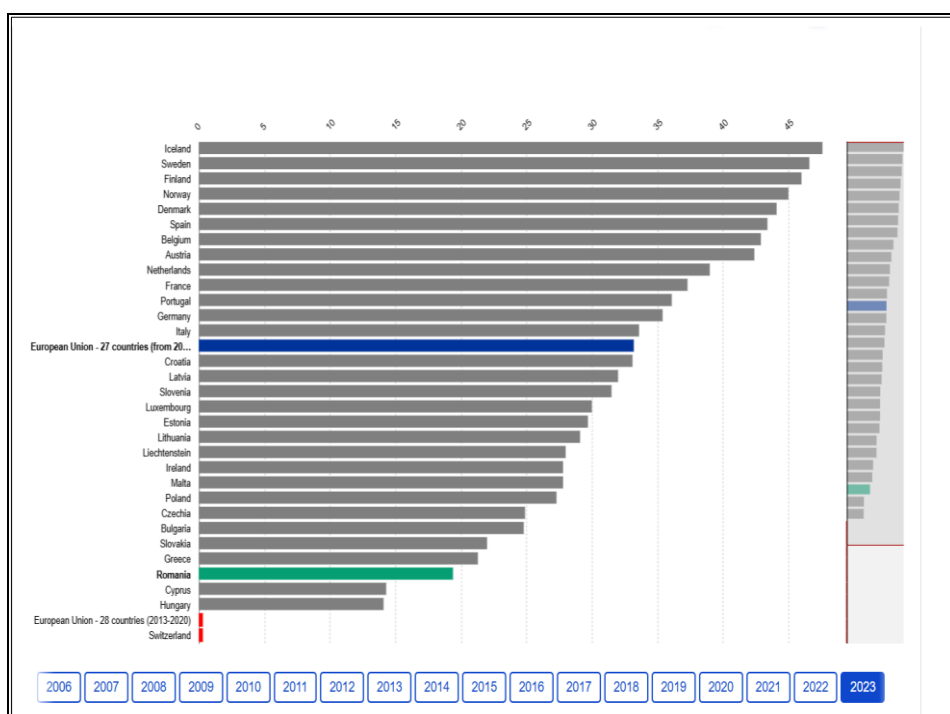


Figure No.5. *Share of women in national parliaments in European countries - 2023*

Source: EC 2023

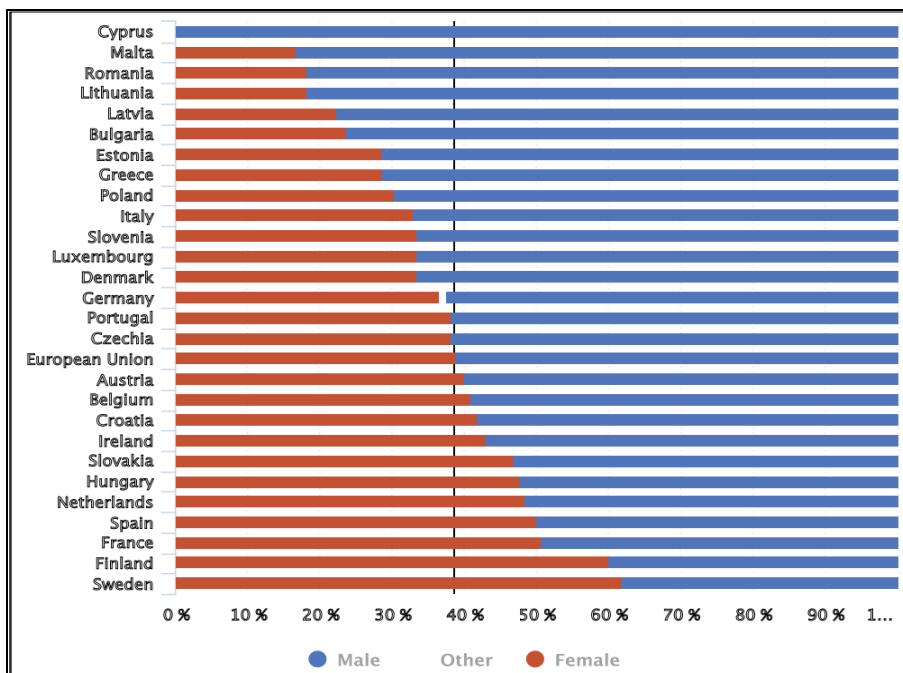
We are not doing any better with the representation of women in the European Parliament, as women have a percentage below

¹⁵ Ionela Băluță, Claudiu Tufiş, *Reprezentarea politică a femeilor în România*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Romania Office, 2021, Available: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/18818.pdf> (Accessed: 4.12.2024).

¹⁶ European Commission – EC, *Seats held by women in national parliaments and governments*, 2023, Available: https://doi.org/10.2908/SDG_05_50 (Accessed: 4.12.2024).

20% among Romanian MEPs, as seen in Fig. no. 6.¹⁷

There is a gender imbalance between women and men as members of the European Parliament (MEPs), in all EU states, the illustrative image for the year 2024 being in Fig. no. 6.¹⁸



Figurev No. 6. Gender balance between female and male Members of European Parliament
Source: EP Snapshot

In the particular case of Romania, the composition of MEPs in absolute figures was 6 women and 27 men. Our country is in a tail position from this point of view, unlike countries such as Sweden, Finland and France where the percentage of women MEPs is greater than or equal to 50%.

In Fig. no. 7 we can see the share of women, rendered in yellow, in local and municipal councils in EU member countries. Gender imbalance is also present at national level, with an average of 35.3% of women serving in EU regional assemblies in different

¹⁷ EIGE, *European parliament: president and members*, The Gender Statistics Database (GSD), 2024, Available: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_pol_parl_wmid_eurparl (Accessed: 11.12.2024).

¹⁸ European Parliament, *Snapshot 2024-2029*, Available: <https://facts-and-figures.europarl.europa.eu/snapshot/term-10/current> (Accessed: 12.12.2024).

states.¹⁹ The documents published by the EP show that while Sweden, France, Spain and Finland have over 40% of women on local and municipal councils, Romania, Cyprus, and Greece trail behind with under 20% of women councillors.

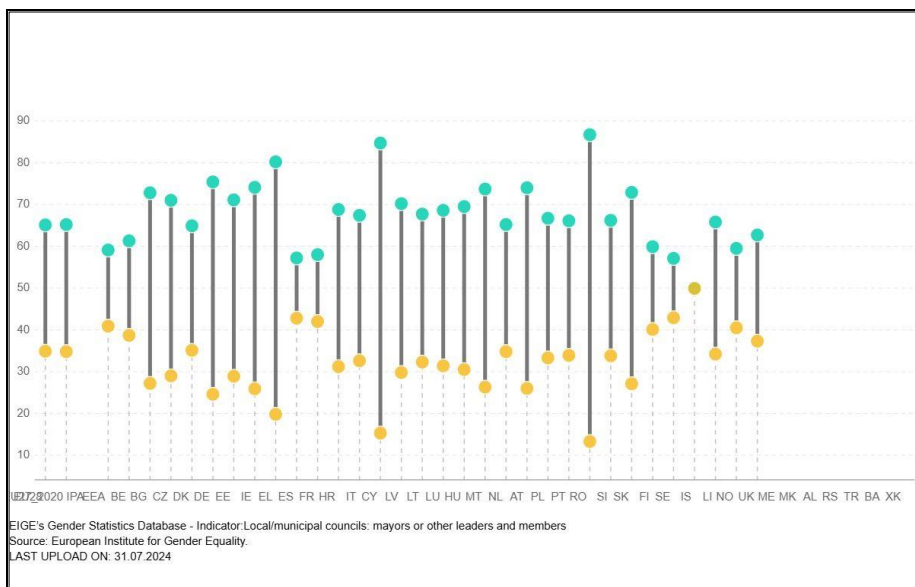


Figure No.7. *Share of women in Local/municipal councils*
Source: EP 2024

The aforementioned authors specify that the political representation of women is not limited to their number in political institutions, as many studies question the relationship between descriptive representation (the number of women in politics) and substantive representation, understood as political action in favor of women's needs, interests and aspirations, promoting a feminist agenda, and demanding gender equality.²⁰

6. Female presence in Rotary International Organization

Why did we choose this sequence? Because Rotary is a global organization, with great prestige and great power of action, but which until about 3 decades ago was exclusive. Therefore, it deserves a historical shield about the success of women in becoming

¹⁹ European Parliament, *Women in politics in the EU, State of play in 2024*, Available: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/760348/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)760348_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/760348/EPRS_BRI(2024)760348_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 12.12.2024).

²⁰ Ionela Băluță, Claudiu Tușiș, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

members of Rotary International (RI). From its founding in 1905 until the late 1980s, the RI Constitution stated that only men could be members of the organization²¹.

The first clubs mentioned with women were in 1911 in Minneapolis and in 1917 in Duluth, Minnesota, completely separate from the men's clubs and with unrecognized status.

In 1978, the Rotary Club of Duarte, California, invited three women to become members. The consequence: The RI Board of Directors revoked its club's status for violating the Constitution.

The opening of the organization or the Rotary “revolution” occurred when the 1989 Council on Legislation eliminated the “male only” provision for membership. This established equal membership rights. Since then, women have become members and leaders of clubs and districts around the world. In the 1990s, there were approximately 20.000 women in Rotary International clubs. By 2010, the number had exceeded 200.000, and in 2013, a woman became the first woman to serve on the RI Board of Directors and was a trustee of The Rotary Foundation - Anne L. Matthews.

In 2019, Brenda Marie Cressey began her term as the first woman to serve as vice president of The Rotary Foundation.

The remarkable year of 2022 - Jennifer Jones began her term as the first woman president of RI. There were still about 191 exclusively male clubs in that year around the world.

We will present membership statistics by gender, for the year 2022, for Rotary clubs in European countries²².

As can be seen from the data in Table 1, in countries that had long-standing Rotary clubs, where the old mentality was difficult to change, female representation is lower: Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Germany.

Table No.1. *Rotary membership statistics by gender in European clubs*

Country Name	Club Count	Female%	Total Members
Austria	165	13.95%	8507
Belgium	269	12.78%	9319
Bulgaria	90	22.24%	1875

²¹ Rotary *History*, Available: <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/history> (Accessed: 4.11.2024).

²² Rotary *Stats on Clubs, Districts and Countries*, Available: <https://rghf.org/rotary-in-figures/> (Accessed: 5.11.2024).

*Representation of Women in Decision-Making Positions in the Community.
Comparative Study*

Denmark	241	16.27%	8140
Finland	236	16.09%	7323
France	1086	23.92%	27790
Germany	1127	14.53%	57651
Greece	90	33.33%	1878
Hungary	56	19.75%	1195
Italy	934	20.69%	38134
Moldova	8	33.33%	117
Netherlands	481	28.58%	15134
Norway	270	20.68%	8862
Portugal	159	26.16%	3303
Poland	79	21.08%	1637
Romania	141	28.43%	3493
Spain	243	25.47%	4543
Sweden	412	28.05%	16551
Switzerland	221	14.48%	13189

Source: RI Stats on Clubs, Districts and Countries

On the other hand, in countries that have changed the totalitarian political regime, as in the case of the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria or in democratic states with a more flexible vision, as in the case of Greece, the Netherlands or Sweden, women are well represented.

RI is organized by districts and Romania and the Republic of Moldova are together part of District 2241. Membership statistics by gender between the years 2018-2023 in this District can be seen in Fig. No.8.



Figure No.8. Gender trends in 2241 District
Source: EP 2024

The total adult membership in the district in 2023 was 3.610, of which 28.59% were women

The overall RI goal is to increase female membership to 30%.

7. The Global Gender Gap Index

This index is based on four fundamental categories (subindexes). The highest possible score is 1, which means equality and the lowest possible score is 0, which means inequality. Globally, since the index was launched in 2006, gender parity in the economic and political spheres has improved significantly since the beginning of the report²³.

We will present the indicator situation for our country, comparing the years 2023 and 2024.²⁴ In 2023, Romania ranked (R) 88 from 146 countries surveyed. On each sub-indicator the situation was as follows:

- Economic Participation and Opportunity, R=72, score 0,693;

²³ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2024*, p. 4, Available: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf (Accessed: 19.12.2024).

²⁴ Idem, p. 305

- Educational Attainment, R=36; score 0,999;
- Health and Survival, R=1, score 0,980;
- Political Empowerment, R=113, score 0,117.

The 2024 Index shows significant changes in the rankings. Among the five economies that improved their ranking by dozens of places was our country, along with Ecuador (+34, ranked 16th), Sierra Leone (+32, ranked 80th), Guatemala (+24, ranked 93rd), Cyprus (+22, ranked 84th), Romania and Greece (+20, ranked 68th and 73rd, respectively).

- Economic Participation and Opportunity, R=83, score 0,676;
- Educational Attainment, R=35; score 0,999;
- Health and Survival, R=1, score 0,980;
- Political Empowerment, R=79, score 0,213.

Despite all the substantial improvement, the worst sub-index of the Romanian *Global Gender Gap Index* is the *Political Empowerment*.

In this regard, we believe that the position expressed in the European Parliament should be mentioned, namely that:

“Women form half the population and deserve to be better represented in power structures.

There is now solid evidence about what hinders or enables women's participation and representation, with political parties and the media serving a dual role in this respect. The EU has committed to achieving gender balance in political representation and participation as a matter of justice, equality and democracy”.

Discussion and Conclusions

We consider the issue of women's representation in public life, but especially in decision-making positions, a topic of great interest and, indisputably, of great relevance. In general, the specialized literature and gender statistics reveal the aspects that need to be improved in the gender balance or the objectives to be achieved for a better presence of women. Our study allows a comparative vision of the situation of women in different countries and we will group the aspects identified for Romania into two categories, respectively positive and negative.

Positive aspects:

Romanian women are well represented in top levels of non political, administrative positions – decision level 1 and 2 - the

percentage recorded by our country being superior than the average percentage recorded in EU;

Romanian women occupy significantly more seats in the Supreme Court of Justice than men, our country being a leader in this regard.

The gender pay gaps recorded in 2021 were very small, even the lowest percentage-wise within European countries (3.6%),

Among the pillars of the general gender gap, namely Health and Survival, one places Romania in first place, and another, namely Educational Level, in 35th/36th place out of the 146 countries surveyed, aspects that are little-known and deserve to be known by the general public.

Within Rotary International volunteering, the percentage of women in District 2241, including Romania and Moldova, has gradually increased.

Negative aspects

Are related to women's participation in public decision making on the economic and political arena - it is very poor, placing Romania on a low position in some hierarchies such as:

- share of women of the highest decision-making body in companies,
- share of women in European Parliament,
- share of women in national parliaments,
- share of women in regional assemblies (president and members).

The major challenge for the Romanian gender's imbalance is to support the active role of women on the political arena by educating people.

As is well understood, the quantitative aspects of the presence of women in different socio-economic fields are not sufficient to solve the real representation of women's issues. But the weights or absolute figures matter a lot in an evolutionary process, it being recognized that only above a certain threshold do quantitative accumulations generate qualitative aspects. Therefore, I believe that a 30% quota of women's representation for the lists of candidate personnel for decision-making positions either in politics, in organizations, or in companies is a justified political vision promoted in the EU.

But first of all, the aspects regarding the representation of women in public life must be made aware at the level of the population, not only of researchers concerned with this topic.

In this sense, actions or conferences organized on such topics can bring an undeniable contribution. Such aspects could also be

addressed in mainstream education, not only within master's programs in gender studies.

We believe in friendship between women and men, in cooperation and sharing feelings and activities in a non-exclusive way, in mutual acceptance, respect and support.