



# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

## The Role of Men in Gender Equality Finland, 28-29 October 2014

### Comments Paper – Romania



*The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.*

*This publication is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).*

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in these fields.*

*The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-28, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.*

*For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>*

# The Role of Men in Gender Equality in Romania

Ovidiu Anemțoaicei,  
SC Ventis Global Consulting SRL

## 1. Introduction

In line with the framework of the European Union's accession process, under both the "pressure" and "guidance" of the European institutions and other bodies, on the one hand, and the internal efforts of the Romanian organizations for women's rights, on the other hand, gender equality became in the last decade a required item on the Romanian social and political agendas. The EU discourse of equal opportunities between women and men entered the Romanian political and academic spaces in the '90s through translations of Western scholarly works (especially from feminist literature) and EU documents, promoting the autochthonous productions of feminist academics and NGOs for women's rights, while implementing programmes and projects generally financed from international and European sources. However, the Romanian post-communist transition faced a so-called preventive anti-feminism and a pervasive neglect of women's issues in political terms, a neglect heavily endorsed by the Christian-nationalist discourses coming either from the Romanian Orthodox Church, the conservative groups of all the political parties or the neo-legionary offspring proliferated after the fall of the communist regime. Nevertheless, with the support of the European Union, gender equality agenda was imported and "tolerated" in the Romanian national programmes for obvious political opportunist reasons.

The slow and difficult legislative and institutional construction of gender equality framework, initiated in Romania around mid-90s but more visible starting with 2000s, took shape with the establishment of a specialized governmental agency. Integrated initially in the major legal instruments (i.e. the Romanian Constitution, the Labour Code, the Ordinance no. 137/2000 on preventing all forms of discrimination), the principle of equal opportunities between women and men was translated in **legislative** terms through the Law no.202/2002 on equal opportunities between women and men and, in **institutional** terms, through the creation in 2005 of the **National Agency for Equal Opportunities between women and men** (ANES in Romanian), at its beginnings a state secretariat subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. ANES' activity was complemented also by the **parliamentary commissions on equal opportunities for women and men**, in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, and by the **National Council for Combating Discrimination** (CNCD). Fragile even from its very inception with a low institutional capacity, a limited attention from the political class and modestly supported by the non-governmental organizations in the field, ANES lasted only 5 years being dissolved in the summer of 2010 and turned into an almost invisible directorate, later a department, on equal opportunities between women and men within the Romanian Ministry of Labour, in the context of the economic crisis and the subsequent public budgetary cuts. During its short existence ANES implemented the first Romanian strategy on gender equality, The **National Strategy for Equal Opportunities between women and men for the period 2006-2009**, and managed to have a second one approved by the government in 2010, namely **The National Strategy for Equal Opportunities between women and men for the period 2010-2012**, the

latter remaining only on paper, while the third one for the period 2014-2017 is still in the process of being approved.

According to the national official documents mentioned above, one among the objectives of the two strategies was the **(re)conciliation of family and professional lives (work-life balance)**. At the governmental level, men's issues and men's involvement in promoting gender equality had become relevant themes mainly in relation to this objective, gender violence and the labour market in the post-communist transition, however generally outside of a critical pro-feminist analytical framework. This is not surprising, since at the level of the state policies, academic and activist spheres, gender equality was conceived of having generally women as the main target groups and had been familiarised to the general public in the terms and limits set by the EU gender equality discourse. Consequently, an academic field of the studies on men and masculinities is almost absent, being referred to only in the works and research done lately by few scholars with a Western educational background in the field of gender studies (Laura Grunberg, Mihaela Miroiu, Liliana Popescu, Oana Baluta, Ovidiu Anemțoaicei, Ov Cristian Norocel, Bogdan Popa, Elena Pănican, Alexandru Dincovici). The absence of men as target groups in gender policies, on the one hand, and from academic critical analyses, on the other hand, is also closely related to how "gender" was conceptualized and theorized in the Romanian academia and how gender equality agenda has been institutionalised during the last 15 years. Basically, the knowledge production in gender theory went hand in hand with the Romanian gender equality institutionalization anchored in the European Social Fund/Structural Funds framework and neo-liberal agendas.

Summing up, when analysing the development stage of the programmes and policies concerning men's issues or their role in gender equality in Romania, one should take into account the current configurations of gender power relations, their roots in the communist egalitarian state policies and in the post 89' transition with its socio-economic restructurings, the revival of various conservative discourses and the institutionalization of the European gender equality framework (with its subsequent top-down measures). As far as the state gender policies are concerned, there is no coherent and explicit agenda on men's issues and men's role in gender equality, but rather modest and scattered initiatives related mainly to the labour market policies. In the context of the economic crisis, gender equality was completely marginalised and turned into a "tolerated" item on the current political agendas without financial or political commitment.

### **1.1. Men as part of the overall gender equality policy**

The central public administration (i.e. Ministry of Labour via the former National Agency for Equal Opportunities between women and men) expressed modest encouragement to increasing the presence of men in gender equality policies. On a quantitative note, the former National Agency for Equal Opportunities between women and men was officially represented on several occasions at the EU and other international events in the field of gender equality by 2-3 men employed in this ministerial agency. The subsequent Directorate of Equal Opportunities between women and men, which took over the agency's responsibilities starting with 2010, was run for a couple of years by a male director. Otherwise, given that no concrete and structured plan of involving men in gender equality policies has been carried out for the last 10 years, this issue was never an explicit item on the institution's agenda. The political life is unsurprisingly dominated by gender blind or gender

conservative both male and female politicians. However, some male politicians and activists made themselves noticeable for supporting gender equality actions explicitly and constantly in the public space: Péter Eckstein-Kovács, Asztalos Csaba Ferenc, and Remus Cernea are probably the most prominent figures. As far as the academic life is concerned, there are some few junior and senior researchers either working specifically on men's issues and/or men and gender equality from various interdisciplinary stances or they are just friendly and supportive toward the movement. At the NGOs level, things are going a little bit better given that there are more pro-feminist or/and gender sensitive men joining the organisations for women's right and gender equality, their programmes and projects (probably the best current examples are A.L.E.G from Sibiu and FILIA, from Bucharest, where several men are constantly and actively supporting the organisations' initiatives; there are also other NGOs modestly encouraging men's involvement in gender equality such as Equal Opportunities for Women Foundation and PRO Women Foundation in Iași). I would also mention AnA – Society for Feminist Analyses, probably the most active and powerful NGO for women's rights up until 2008, whose chairwoman, Laura Grünberg, often raised the issue of men and gender equality. Nevertheless, overall, these NGOs don't have any current explicit interest of focusing specifically on involving men in gender equality, even though they do acknowledge the need of such measure.

At the national level, gender mainstreaming strategy became an item on the agenda via the manuals and training sessions carried out by some of the non-governmental organisations working in the field of gender equality and equal opportunities (CPE 2004, FILIA 2007, etc.) and through the institutional mechanisms created as requirements for EU accession: the parliamentary commissions on equal opportunities between women and men (in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate); the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between women and men/ Department for Equal Opportunities between women and men; the National Commission in the field of equal opportunities between women and men (CONES) and the County Commissions in the field of equal opportunities between women and men (COJES), with representatives from the ministries, specialized bodies of central and local public administration, trade unions, employers' confederations and NGOs in the respective field. Under the coordination of the ministerial body on gender equality, they were having the precise goal of integrating the gender perspective in all the initiatives, measures and policies at all levels of policy drafting and implementation. In relation to men and gender equality, the strategies in the field promoted through these institutional mechanisms also stipulated the encouragement of fathers to get involved in raising and caring children through paternity and parental leave use, the development of community social services for child care and family dependents and promoting measures that enable more flexible working time.

Both the law no. 202/2002 on equal opportunities between women and men and the national strategies on gender equality for 2006-2009 and for 2010-2012, drafted and implemented by ANES, were explicitly setting gender mainstreaming as an objective to be pursued through the institutional mechanisms created. More, the first strategy (2006-2009) also included the objectives of involving men in promoting the principle of equal opportunities between women and men and that of promoting men's equal participation in childcare and family tasks, however without clearly mentioning the specific modalities and actions of intervention (the activities resume only to awareness campaigns and elaboration of information materials). Among other activities, was ANES' journal "R.E.S. Publica - Equal Opportunities Journal" as a means of public awareness on gender issues. The magazine survived only two issues, and public presentations were held in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Târgu

Jiu. In the second issue, the journal largely focused, in two of the articles, on the need to involve men in promoting gender equality and in equal sharing of family responsibilities, and on a good practice with a father who accessed the childcare leave. However, since the period the two strategies were drafted, gender mainstreaming, in general, and the measures targeting men and gender equality, in particular, remained just on paper.

## 1.2. Supporting men in taking up care responsibilities

In the context of pre- and post- EU accession, Romania aligned itself more or less successfully to the European standards concerning gender equality legislation and institutions. The major areas of interventions were, of course, the labour market, gender violence, trafficking, mass-media, education and political representation, reflected in the governmental strategies, on the one hand, and in the programmes implemented by various non-governmental organisations in the field, on the other hand. “Men”, as explicit target groups, as both “objects” of critical research and of gender policies, are almost absent and their issues are not thematized (Anemțoaicei 2006, 2009, 2010, 2013). The only areas where they became clearly “marked” are the work-life balance and the need to involve them in equal sharing of childcare and domestic work. Though the debates on men, organized under the umbrella of larger topics of the gender equality agenda by various research centres, universities, NGOs and public administration, are not missing, the proposed measures are lacking.

Yet, one example of best practice in the field of work-life balance is the programme implemented by the Partnership for Equality Centre (CPE) from March 2009 to February 2011 in partnership with Fundacion Mujeres – Spain.<sup>1</sup> The overall objective of the project was the promotion of policies and measures on flexible work practices and personal-life reconciliation in companies on the Bucharest-Ilfov radius (specific objectives: information and transnational best practices exchange; training for 100 managers on program flexibility measures and conciliation of professional and family lives; consulting for 10 companies and awards for those which developed programmes/policies/measures on flexibility and conciliation of professional and family lives; 2500 beneficiaries). Another organization to be mentioned is T.A.T.A which promotes fathers’ and their children’s rights, strengthening the relationships between fathers and their children, the awareness about the importance of parental equality before the law and combating social, legal or economic discrimination of fathers.<sup>2</sup> The organization’s understanding of the issue of fatherhood is, however, limited and pervasively gender conservative in its expressions and initiatives. Other NGOs like A.L.E.G.,<sup>3</sup> Pro WOMEN Foundation,<sup>4</sup> SEF,<sup>5</sup> FILIA,<sup>6</sup> which are working mainly on women’s rights, gender equality and equal opportunities, included men, though modestly, as a subject matter in relation to labour market and domestic work in their promotion of gender equality, development of support services and in their public awareness efforts. Many of the people active in these NGOs are also doing research at the academic level (in the universities of Bucharest, Cluj, Timișoara).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.worklifebalance.ro/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.t-a-t-a.ro/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://aleg-romania.eu/en>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.prowomen.ro/english/aboutus.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sef.ro/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.centrulfilia.ro/>

<sup>7</sup> Among them, there are both junior and senior female and male scholars who brought forward some of the themes related to men and gender equality and started to expand the still embryonic research

Otherwise, there are no organisations or networks working explicitly on men's issues from a critical pro-feminist perspective in line with that expressed in the programmes of critical studies on men and masculinities which can be found in some of the European universities (Linköping University for example).<sup>8</sup>

**Three kinds of mechanisms** can be identified in relation to the Romanian work-life balance measures: **financial transfers**, **alternatives** (family/relatives informal help vs. child care public services) and **workplace flexibility** (UNFPA, 2009: 36-40).

As far as the financial transfers and the parental leave regulations are concerned, starting with 1st of January 2011, there are three options according to the Government Emergency Ordinance no.111/2010 regarding the leave and the allowance for childrearing: Parental leave for children under the age of one year and a monthly allowance, amounting to 75% of the average of net incomes achieved in the last 12 months. This cannot be less than 600 lei and more than 3,400 lei. Persons entitled to this benefit who receive income subject to income tax, before the child reaching the age of one year, are entitled to an incentive insertion of 500 lei per month for the period remaining until the child reaches the age 2 years. Parental leave for children under the age of 2 years and a monthly allowance, amounting to 75% of the average net incomes achieved in the last 12 months. This cannot be less than 600 le or more than 1,200 lei. For disabled children, the allowance is granted until reaching the age of three years, amounting to 75% of the average net incomes achieved in the last 12 months and cannot be less than 600 lei or more than 3,400 lei. Also recipients of this benefit are entitled to incentive insertion.

As for 2014, the parental leave allowance reached back 85% of the average net incomes achieved in the last 12 months.

When it comes about child care services, in general, both women and men may have access to some specialized services such as:

- Institutionalised childcare services (nurseries, home centres, day care centres, kindergartens, boarding houses, etc.): in 1990 there were around 840 nurseries; from 1999 to 2004, the number of nurseries declined with 99 units. In 1999 there were 388 public nurseries available, in 2000 there were 358, 2001 (348), 2002 (288) 2003 (294) and in 2004 reached 289. In 2005 there were only 290 with approximately 14.000 beds covering more than 600.000 children for the age group 0-3 (UNFPA, 2009:40). During 2005-2010 the number of units remained almost the same. In 2010 there were 288 units with 14668 beds (INS, Romania in numbers, 2011). For 2008, while for the age group of 3-6, the pre-school enrolment rate was around 75%, for the age group of 0-3 was less than 3% (UNFPA, 2009:39). Kindergarten situation is as alarming, considering that more than half of the units available in 1990/1991 (12,529) were shut up by 2004/2005 (5687). In 2010 there were only 1498 unities, of which 1276 were public and 222 were private kindergartens (INS 2011).

---

on men and masculinities focusing on topics from various interdisciplinary fields (i.e. masculinities and feminist philosophy; male bodies, men and sports; sociology of the body, anthropology of combat sports, etc.). The first collection to appear so far in Romania which includes several articles on men and masculinities is the volume coordinated by Laura Grünberg *Introduction to the sociology of the body. Themes, perspectives and embodied experiences* (2010).

<sup>8</sup> I would however mention a recent on-line article from 2014 presenting interviews with several feminist or pro-feminist self-identified men in Romania coming mostly from the leftist activist scene: <http://totb.ro/barbatii-feministi-sunt-cei-care-lucreaza-la-desfiintarea-propriei-dominatii-i/>.

- Individual paid services provided by nanny/baby sitter, etc.
- Help from the partner or other unpaid individuals: grandparents, relatives, neighbours, friends, etc., hence, the well-know “institution of grandparents” (Pop, 2002: 47).

Major difficulties in accessing these types of services occur to vulnerable individuals and marginalised groups (dissolved families, single parents, families with more than 2-3 children, poor families, child mothers, Roma groups, Roma women, etc.). One of the indicators that may reflect the father’s interest in the childcare is the two years childcare leave. The number of men who access this type of leave in Romania remain very low, i.e. 16, 73% in the first quarter of 2011. For December 2010, only 3.1% of men with children compared to 51.3% of mothers. The cases where the father decides to take advantage of this option are, however, more often determined by economic variables, i.e. the father’s lower salary compared to the mother’s. Therefore, the gender pay gap (12, 6 % for 2010; INS 2011) still remains one of the explanatory variables. Simply put, the Romanian fiscal policies do not encourage the development of private childcare services, the remaining alternatives, when parents returning on the labour market, oscillating between the paid individual services and the unpaid family support (UNFPA 2009). Institutionalized care services do not have a program correlated with the parents’ usual working hours program and are not available at certain times of the year (during school holidays, other holidays, etc.).

In relation to **workplace flexibility**, part-time employment is well under the EU average (10, 4 % women and 9, 2% men; Eurostat 2006). 31% of women employed in the rural area are part-time and only 4% in the urban area. Of all employees who are able to vary the start time/end time of a working day for family reasons, only 8.4% benefit from this facility routinely whenever they need, without restrictions from the employer (INS 2011).

### 1.3. Combating segregation

The gender occupational segregation and concentration in paid employment is still a pervasive feature of the Romanian labour market, meaning that while in certain economic fields women are predominant (the feminized sectors), such as *health care system and social assistance, education, financial intermediation and insurance, real estate and hotels and restaurants services*, men are concentrated in *military, constructions, industry - mining and quarrying - transport and storage, electric and thermal energy, gas and water, information and communications, public administration and defence*. The configuration remained almost unaffected since the pre-accession period. There are no current detailed analyses on possible trends about men entering female attributed occupations, but rather few scattered statistical data. One article from a national online newspaper (EVZ), *Men in women’s jobs* (21.09.2009), which presents few short stories of men interviewed on how they came to take the jobs traditionally considered to be done by women, is worth mentioning.<sup>9</sup>

The analyses on occupational and educational orientation reveal that the belief that boys are better at mathematics, physics and other technical disciplines, and consequently that they have to go to specialized schools and universities and practice computer science, engineering, construction, is a widespread conviction.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/barbati-cu-joburi-de-femei-868467.html>



Girls opt in much larger percentage for theoretical fields, unlike the boys who are oriented mainly towards technological domains (IES and UNICEF Romania, 2004: 99). More, other studies (Ștefănescu and Miroiu, 2001, Miroiu 2004; Grunberg and Văcărescu, 2006) argue that school teachers tend to encourage the gender segregation in the private activities, meaning that boys should resume to extra-domestic tasks. Consequently, the current manuals and programmes still completely ignore the education for private life and for the partnership: the couple, the marriage, the parental responsibility, domestic work, self-care, childcare, care toward sick and elderly people, divorce, what it means to be a single parent (almost 90% women), widowhood (80% women) (Miroiu, 2011:7).

## 2. Policy debate

An important aspect to be taken into account is the uneasy relationship between the Romanian feminist or pro-feminist NGOs and the LGBTQIA organizations and communities. During the last decade their agendas were obviously quite different, even if, lately, temporary and focused coalitions are not missing, holding back however the possible emergence of a larger activist agenda and, at the academic level, of sexualities and masculinities studies.

Men and sexuality, as part of a broader, even political, debate on family was in the spot light in the context of revising the Constitution in 2014 with focus on the legal definition of family and marriage.

## 3. Transferability issues

Aspects for debate:

- Risks of reducing the agenda of men and gender equality too much to men and domestic and care work (and implicitly to labour market objectives).
- Possible implications of the focus on children as target groups when it comes to men and childcare.
- The class, race and heteronormative implications of the focus mainly on heterosexual and middle class couples or families. Need of more analyses on migrant, ethnic and sexual minorities (same-sex parents, partners, families or single gay and lesbian parents), etc.
- The problematic discourse of men's involvement in gender equality in terms of "rights", "benefits", "entitlements", "empowerment", etc., with possible victimising connotations.
- The relationship between parental leave take-up rates and the division of childcare (not only in temporal terms, but rather more in terms of the nature, types, and quality of shared tasks in order to evaluate if and how are valued in the case of men and that of women).
- More information on other related policies that could complement the legal and financial measures related to men and childcare.

- Examples such as Austria's "Daddy's Month" could easily be transferred to the Romanian case, especially if it would be a paid leave.
- Probably, the creation of a Department for Men's Politics (as in Austria) would be an interesting point to take into account in the future restructuring of the national body on gender equality.
- The interesting proposal to shift the perspective on gender and work from that of women's to men's point of view.

## References:

Anemțoaicei, Ovidiu. (2013) "Country Factsheet Romania". In Elli Scambor, Katarzyna Wojnicka & Nadja Bergmann, (eds.), *The Role of Men in Gender Equality - European strategies & insights. Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality*. pp 258-259. European Union.

Anemțoaicei, Ovidiu. (2010) "Masculinities, male bodies and the sexual (in)difference. A feminist philosophical reply to the sociology of the body". In Laura Grünberg (ed.). *Introduction to the sociology of the body. Themes, perspectives and lived experienced*, p. 57-87. Iași: Polirom.

Anemțoaicei, Ovidiu. (2009) "The minoritarian discourse of gender equality and the invisible men – minorities, institutionalizations and related meta-discourses". *The Sphere of Politics*, vol. Minorities, 138: 74-79.

Anemțoaicei, Ovidiu. (2006) „Bărbații și egalitatea de gen”. *RESpublica – Revista Egalității de șanse*, nr.2, ANES.

Băluță, Oana (coord.) Andreea Bragă, Alice Iancu. (2011) *Impactul crizei economice asupra femeilor*. București: MAIKO.

Băluță, Oana, Alina Dragolea and Alice Iancu. (2008) *Gender and political interests. Theories and practices*. Iași: Polirom.

Băluță, Oana (ed.). (2007) *Equal partners. Equal competitors: Integrating gender perspective in policy making*. Bucharest: Maiko.

Băluță, Oana (ed.). (2006) *Gender and power. Lion's share in Romanian politics*. Iași: Polirom.

Grünberg, Laura (ed.). (2006) *The Black Book of Gender Equality*. Bucharest: AnA.

Miroiu, Mihaela. (2011) *Equal Opportunities. The Gender Perspective*. Bucharest: SNSPA.

Miroiu, Mihaela. (2004) *The Road to Autonomy. Feminist Political Theories*. Iași: Polirom.

Popescu, Liliana. (2004) *The politics of the sexes*. Bucharest: Maiko.

Ștefănescu, Doina and Mihaela Miroiu. (2001) *Gender and educational policies*. Bucharest: Step-by-Step.

Centre for Partnership for Equality (CPE). (2009) *How to develop and implement work-life balance policies and programmes in companies*. Within the project "Be family friendly! Training and consulting for the companies in Bucharest and Ilfov", ESF, SOPHARD. Bucharest: CPE.

Centre for Partnership for Equality (CPE). (2004). *Gender mainstreaming. Methods and instruments*. Bucharest: Neva.

FILIA. (2007) *Equal opportunities through conciliation of family life and career*. Bucharest: Maiko.

The Institute of Educational Sciences, UNICEF Romania. (2004) *Perspectives on the gender dimension in education*. Bucharest: MarLink.

The National Centre for Training in Statistics – CNPS. (2009) *Study concerning the evolution of the single-parent families in Romania*.

The National Institute of Statistics. (2011) *Romania in numbers*.

The National Institute of Statistics. (2008) *Women and men: work and life partnership*.

The National Institute of Statistics. (2008) *Survey on household labour*.

The National Institute of Statistics. (2005) *Reconciliation of work life and family life*.

Open Society Foundation (2000) *Gender Barometer*.

Soros Foundation Romania. (2008) *Family life*.

Soros Foundation Romania. (2007) *Public Opinion Barometer - Couple Life*.

UNFPA Romania. (2009) *Family and gender policies in Romania*.

UNFPA Romania. (2007) *Generations and gender*.

UNICEF Romania. (2006) *Parental knowledge, attitudes and practices in Romania*.