

March 2013

# Länderbericht

Country Office Romania



## On 8 March: Women's Day in Romania

**There is still a long way to go for equal opportunities and equal rights**

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Women's Day is traditionally celebrated in Romania on 8 March. The lack of equal opportunities and equal rights for women in Romanian society is a topic discussed on this day. In addition, this day is also celebrated as Mother's Day. Children paint, do handicrafts and sing for their mothers. There are flowers, chocolates and recognition from family, friends and colleagues. In our report, we focus on the socio-political aspects of Women's Day. Unfortunately, the situation of women in Romania is not rosy.

The [Gender Equality Index \(2022\)](#) of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) of the European Union describes how your life would be if you were a woman in Romania. The good news beforehand: your life would probably be 8 years longer than if you were a man. But, in your national parliament, only 18% of decision-makers would be women. True, your chance of graduating from university would be the same as a man's, at 14%. However, you would work 7 years less in your life than the average man in Romania and earn 27.3% less in your job. This would have a significant impact on your income and financial freedom. You would be 34 percentage points more likely to do the housework and cook every day than a man. And on top of that, you would live in a country where 32% of women have been sexually harassed.

This prospect would not excite you? It doesn't excite the women in Romania either. Therefore, a debate about the realities of women's lives is increasingly developing in the country.

### Strong inequality in resources

Although women in Romania achieve on average a higher level of formal education than men, they have a significantly lower working life and earn almost one third less than men. In other words, women are integrated into the labour market to a much lesser extent than men, or they work in much less consistent patterns. Women often leave the labour market or work part-time for several years after having children. Some do not return to the labour market. This corresponds to

the fact that childcare in Romania is very unequally distributed between women and men. In 2021, 61% of women and only 16% of men reported that they cared for and supervised children aged 0-11 years all or mostly themselves. The gender gap of 45 percentage points in the distribution of care and supervision of children is one of the largest in the EU.

Due to a glaring lack of childcare facilities and well-paid educators, mothers, especially of young children, often do not have the option of working at all in Romania at present. This not only weakens women's freedom of choice in terms of employment and financial independence, but also lowers family incomes and makes the decision to have children in low-income families a risk of poverty with a wide range of negative social consequences. A political demand that could be derived from these data would be a substantial promotion - if not a legal entitlement - to reliable, quality childcare following maternity or parental leave arrangements.

### Domestic violence remains a grave problem

According to the data of the Gender Equality Index, 32% of women in Romania report having already been sexually harassed. It must be assumed that the number of unreported cases is significantly higher. The extent of domestic violence in Romania is also extremely worrying.

While domestic violence was largely ignored during communist times, social and legal

attention to the issue has gradually increased, especially in the last two decades. The Criminal Code was first amended by Law No. 197/2000, which provides sanctions for persons who commit violent acts against family members and provides for harsher punishment in the case of rape of a family member. As the law recognizes that rape can be committed by a family member, with a spouse also being considered a family member, this had the effect of criminalising marital rape for the first time. Another important change in the rape law was the abolition of the provision that a perpetrator can escape punishment if he marries the victim after the rape.

Law No. 217/2003 on Violence in the Family was comprehensively amended in 2012, particularly with regard to protection orders. This law describes seven types of domestic violence: a) verbal violence (aggressive language, insults, threats, humiliation), b) psychological violence (inter alia. controlling behaviour, provoking psychological harm and tension in the victim, endangering animals, destruction of property, threats, display of weapons, excessive jealousy and other controlling behaviour), c) physical violence (several acts are described in the law, including hitting, pushing, poisoning), d) sexual violence (coercion into sexual acts, including marital rape. Marital rape is specifically listed as sexual violence); e) economic violence (including prohibition to work outside the home, withholding food or clothing from family members, and forced labour of a minor child); (f) social violence (includes isolating the victim, prohibiting him or her from meeting family members or friends, and prohibiting family members from attending school); (g) spiritual violence (preventing family members from pursuing cultural, ethical or religious interests, or forcing them to follow certain beliefs/spiritual practices). Although the law lists violent offences in great detail, the implementation raised questions. One year after it came into force, there were 1009 applications for protection orders. But in only 23 % of the cases did these end in criminal proceedings as intended.

In 2016, Romania ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul

Convention). Nevertheless, Romanian police data on domestic violence show that in the first six months of 2022, 18,507 women were victims of violence, including 18 cases of murder, 13 attempted murders and 12,801 assaults. Experts also argue that this data is not very meaningful because the statistics only refer to physical violence. The other types of violence against women, described in detail above, have not been taken into account. The collection of comprehensive data on domestic violence and violence against women is still problematic in Romania. However, accurate figures and data would be essential for effective policy measures. However, women politicians in Romania are fighting their very own battle with the numbers.

### **Weak political participation of women**

In 2022, only 18% of the members of the Romanian parliament were women. After there was initially only one female minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă, the number rose to no less than two female ministers after several resignations and new appointments: Family and Education are the portfolios filled by women. If the situation is bad with regard to parliament and government, it is catastrophic at the municipal level. Just about 5% of the city halls have a female mayor.

Although women are well represented in leadership positions in administration, justice, medicine, business and NGOs/think tanks, they are massively underrepresented in politics. If one asks why, one finds various reasons: Women politicians in Romania face a particularly high level of hate comments and verbal violence, especially in social media. Many women who would be promising political talents are simply not willing to expose themselves (and their families) to such an environment in order to run for office. Added to this: An "us" (men) versus "them" (women) attitude prevails in political parties. If a seat is given to "the women", this is actually seen as a "loss" or direct competition by quite a few men, who almost exclusively shape the party leadership of Romanian parties. Accordingly, women who have to be represented on electoral lists are relegated to the less

promising list positions. This is also reflected in the available figures: for the 2020 parliamentary elections, between 25 and 30% of the lists of Romanian parties included women. Among those elected, however, there are only between 10 and 24% women.

Currently, much political attention in Romania is focused on the introduction of a women's quota in electoral legislation. This is intended to encourage political parties to introduce internal quotas for women. In particular, the "zipper procedure" for drawing up electoral lists is being discussed here. Transparent internal party processes and work on a party culture that naturally perceives women as colleagues must dismantle the harmful "us vs. them" dichotomy.

In 2024, Romania will hold European elections, local elections, parliamentary elections and also presidential elections. Accordingly, 2024 will be a key year for political parties to involve women in the political process. Parties must be open to women as members. The litmus test for whether a party will give women an equal space is whether they place them on promising list seats. The litmus test for Romanian society is whether it then votes for female candidates or accepts again

almost without any comments a practically exclusively male cabinet.

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