

SHADOW REPORT

Voluntary National Report Romania

Executive Summary

This report provides an independent account of the government's progress in achieving three key Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets: Target 3 (healthcare and well-being), Target 4 (education and inclusivity), and Target 5 (gender equality and empowerment). The findings and recommendations presented in the report are summarized as follows:

- 1. Target 3.3 Reduce the prevalence of maternal and infantile mortality and the incidence of breast and cervical cancer, and teenage pregnancies, with the primary focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups-** Women encounter many barriers in accessing their sexual and reproductive rights: the majority of the public hospitals no longer offer the option of abortion on request while the anti-abortion organizations have become increasingly prominent in the public sphere in recent years; the access to free contraception is not guaranteed by the state in order to limit unplanned pregnancies (especially teenage pregnancies); HPV free vaccination programme is not efficient, because of the lack of training for family doctors and lack of communication campaigns for the large population; the screening programme for detecting cervical cancer is not properly budgeted whereas there is no screening programme for detecting breast cancer. There is a high infantile mortality rate in poor segregated Roma communities due to living conditions, lack of basic products needed for the babies and lack of access to medical care and post-natal healthcare support.

Recommendations: (a) Improvement of data collection system in the URHR and broaden it to the private health sector.(b)The vitalization of the family planning network. (c)Raise awareness among the female population regarding the importance of screening and vaccination in preventing cancer, but also to properly budget it. (d)ensure healthcare professionals working in the most underprivileged communities that would monitor the pregnant women, the babies and provide guidance and basic care.

- 2. Target 4.4 Emphasize the role played in the educational process by civic education, by the principles and notions relating to a peaceful and inclusive sustainable society, the values of democracy and pluralism, the values of multiculturalism, the prevention of discrimination and an understanding of the point of view of the “other”, and the importance of eradicating violence with a focus on the phenomenon**

of violence in schools and gender equality. (1) Romania has witnessed conservative voices and groups advocating for the removal of gender-related topics from schools. These voices argue against discussing topics related to gender identity, gender roles, gender violence and LGBTQ+ issues within the educational system; (2) Sexual education in schools has also been a topic of debate and has faced challenges for years. Sexual education in Romanian schools is not comprehensive, is not available for every child, but only offered as an optional and accessed in less than 5% of the schools, and lacks standardized curriculum or guidelines. Also access to sexual education in school is conditioned by parents consent which brings an important limitation.

Recommendations: There is a great need for (1) comprehensive teacher training for both raising awareness and providing them more inclusive pedagogical and gender sensitive pedagogical tools, (2) evidence-based curriculum development that is inclusive from a gender perspective, (3) developing and implementing active policies for raising awareness monitor and addressing gender based violence in schools - by creating guidelines at national levels and commission at school level (4) develop policies to ensure that sexual education in Romanian schools addresses the holistic needs of students, including their sexual and reproductive health, relationships, rights and prevention of .abuse (5) access to sexual education is a child's right and should not be conditioned by parents consent

3. **Target 5.1 (Continue to reduce the gender pay gap)-** Economic gender inequalities are the biggest in Europe. One category dominated by women is that of unpaid family workers and women occupy feminized branches which are paid less than male-dominated ones. During the pandemy women faced an increasing burden of care that translated into lower access in the labor market and increased economic vulnerability.

Recommendations: The Government must address through specific policies the problem of the scarcity of public creches and kindergartens and insufficient funding in the area of public care.

4. **Target 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in both the public and private sphere, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation-** (1) There is a high prevalence of intersectional violence against Roma women and girls caused both by patriarchal rooted systems and institutional racism. (2) Romanian Police doesn't collect disaggregated data regarding sexual violence or any other gender based violence crimes outside family relationships, even though these crimes are highly present in Romanian society. (3) The budgeting for survivors of GBV are provided through projects funded by European funds. Regarding Romanian's Government target for 2020, to organize informative campaigns regarding preventing and combating sexual abuse, there have not been such campaigns, nor other national campaigns on gender based violence.

Recommendations: (a) Professionals working with survivors of GBV should be continuously trained in order to offer real and coordinated support for victims, to deconstruct their own racist, classist and sexist prejudices and to understand the dynamics of sexual and GBV; (b) Collecting disaggregated data regarding all forms of GBV for providing a better understanding of the phenomenon in order to improve the current legislation and adopt new policies in this field; (c) Local and central authorities should allocate adequate funds and continuous financial support for services for survivors of DV in order to ensure access for adult-victims of GBV; (d) train professionals that have good access to large population (educational system and healthcare) to recognise GBV, provide prevention and address it, as well as providing methodology at institutional level in addressing GBV.

- 5. Target 5.3 Ensure the full and effective participation and equal opportunities of women when it comes to employment in management positions at all levels of political, economic and public life** - Women's political representation remains of the most urgent concerns. A study by FES Romania¹ is showing the lack of gender awareness, small percentages of women in executive positions, small chances of being granted eligible positions, a highly misogynistic party culture, patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes. Also, the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2022 puts Romania on the worst ranking in Europe, together with Greece and Cyprus. The overall gender gap score is placing Romania 90th out of 146 countries. The areas that need improvements are economic participation of women (rank 63) and political empowerment (rank 122).

Recommendations: (a) mandatory gender quotas in electoral legislation is required and the political parties should be encouraged through different methods to adopt quotas.

(b) the revision of the legal frame and the inclusion of more specific details regarding the implementation of equal chances in the electoral process and sanctions if not done.

(c) more systematized data collection on women's political representation.

(d) awareness campaigns regarding the importance of political representation for women, encouraging women's active citizenship and explaining notions like quotas or glass ceiling would improve the political representation of women

(e) mandatory responsible person for equality between men and women in public institutions with more than 50 employees.

Overall, the report highlights the need for significant improvements in healthcare access, education inclusivity, gender equality, and women's political representation in Romania. The

¹ Political representation of Romanian women, 2021, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung:
<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/18818.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1HO3dlgB5ti4GerKdi7IJLWkcnonEYvyC9ypAk33ZIMSfmoRYeFDm4KI>



recommendations aim to address these challenges and promote progress towards achieving the SDG targets.

Introduction

The Romanian Network for Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women is an informal structure comprising various organizations dedicated to advancing women's rights, safeguarding victims of gender-based violence, and combating gender-based discrimination. Although it does not possess legal personality, the network serves as a platform for collaboration and coordination among these organizations. Its primary objective is to address and prevent violence against women in Romania through collective efforts, sharing resources, exchanging information, and advocating for policies and initiatives that promote gender equality and protect women's rights. By uniting diverse entities working in this field, the network aims to create a more comprehensive and effective response to the challenges faced by women affected by violence and discrimination.

The Romanian Coalition for Gender Equality was established in 2014 by five NGOs dedicated to women's rights. The coalition's mission is to create a conducive environment for the development and enhancement of the capacities of non-governmental organizations working in the field of gender equality. It aims to promote and integrate the principle of equal opportunities between women and men in all aspects of public and private life. By bringing together these organizations, the coalition strives to strengthen their collective impact and effectiveness in advocating for gender equality and combating discrimination. Through collaboration, sharing of knowledge and resources, and joint advocacy efforts, the Romanian Coalition for Gender Equality aims to drive positive change in society and seeks to advance the cause of gender equality by working towards the elimination of gender-based disparities and empowering women to participate fully in all spheres of life.

This shadow report addresses the implementation and progress made for the 5th Goal: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls as well as other goals related to gender discrimination by analyzing the Voluntary National Review, Implementing the 17 SDGs in Romania 2023 and the Strategy for Sustainable Development, especially the goals set for 2020.

While progress has been made, challenges and gaps remain. Gender inequality persists in various aspects, including violence against women and girls in both the public and private sphere, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation; women's access to reproductive and sexual health; representation in leadership positions, unequal pay and cultural norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes.



Rețeaua pentru
prevenirea și combaterea
violentei împotriva femeilor



According to EIGE's Gender Equality Index (2022), Romania ranks 26th in the EU (with 53.7 out of 100 points). Its score is 14.9 points below the EU score². **Ongoing efforts are needed to further advance gender equality in Romania, aligning with the broader objectives outlined in the SDGs.**

In Romania, the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development is responsible for coordinating and overseeing the implementation of the national Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The committee operates under the presidency of the Prime Minister. This Committee consists of representatives from various ministries, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. Its primary role is to facilitate coordination and collaboration among different sectors and entities to advance sustainable development in Romania. Regarding the monitoring and evaluation, according to the strategy, it will be supported by the Department for Sustainable Development should work closely with The National Institute of Statistics and will report to the EU the progress made by Romania towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda³.

The acknowledgment of the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by political leaders in Romania, including the President and the Prime Minister, is a positive step towards prioritizing sustainable development and aligning national strategies with the SDGs. However, the slow progress in reaching the targets is indeed a matter of concern. Achieving the SDG targets requires more than public recognition - there is need for comprehensive policies, sufficient resources, effective monitoring mechanisms, and strong commitment from all sectors of society. For example, on the occasion of March 8, 2023, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Marcel Ciolacu, made a public statement about the fair representation of women in politics. He stated that although women make up 51.5% of the population, they are significantly underrepresented in the upper echelons of Romanian politics. He emphasized that it is time for at least 30% of the positions on candidate lists to be allocated to women in local, parliamentary, and European parliamentary elections, as well as in the boards of public enterprises! However, he failed to mention the political representation of women at the executive level, such as ministers, secretaries of state, or heads of government agencies. At the ministerial level, there are 24 dignitaries with the rank of minister, including the Prime Minister, 21 ministers, the Head of the Chancellery, and the Secretary General of the Government. A minimum of 30% would mean at least 8 women in Ciolacu's Cabinet. Out of the 9 portfolios that were assigned to the Social Democrats in the rotation, Ciolacu appointed only one woman as a minister.

² EIGE, Gender Equality Index, Romania in 2022 edition:
<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/country/RO>

³ According to Chapter III pp. 107-109 of the Strategy:
<https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Strategia-nationala-pentru-dezvoltarea-durabila-a-României-2030.pdf>

In November 2022, FILIA Center launched the Informal Group for Supporting Women's and Girls' Rights and Freedoms, with the support of the German Embassy in Bucharest. This is the first group of its kind ever created in Romania. The purpose of this group is to encourage dialogue among representatives of political parties in Parliament in order to find the best legislative solutions in the field of women's and girls' rights.

Regarding significant reforms or advances in the fight for gender equality in the past two years: (1) Romania adopted the National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2020-2025 but it was a long and difficult process and it was delayed a lot; (2) a project initiated in 2019 to punish individuals who distribute, for the purpose of revenge, photos in indecent poses has been adopted by Parliament this year (2023) after four years.

In terms of civil society participation to actively engage in SDGs monitoring, on one hand there is limited institutional support - there are no formal channels or platforms for civil society participation, limiting our ability to contribute effectively; on another hand, civil society has limited resources, especially funding, and this can hamper our ability to actively engage in monitoring efforts. Last but not least, due to resistance to change, many of our initiatives face opposition as we describe in this report.

Review

A. Target 5.1 Continue to reduce the gender pay gap

Economic gender inequalities in Romania are the biggest in Europe, with no improvements in sight. The percentage of women active on the labor market was 42.6% in 2020, one of the lowest in Europe, caused by women being the main providers of care work and domestic work. Women are not only underrepresented in the salaried population (43.7% in 2020, less than ten years ago), but also as a self-employed population or entrepreneurs. One category clearly dominated by women is that of unpaid family workers, whose situation is by far the most precarious⁴. Also, women occupy feminized branches such as hospitality, social care, education, which are paid less than others where men dominate in numbers. Although Romania has good economic growth, this is not transferred to women, which remain economically vulnerable and with a high risk of poverty. Moreover, during the pandemic women faced an increasing burden of care that, in the absence of care policies, translated into lower access in the labor market and increased economic vulnerability. Public care provision in Romania is very scarce- according to UNICEF Childcare

⁴ Data from the study: Economical Gender Inequalities in Romania, 2021, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/18613.pdf?fbclid=IwARlowf55JROwYNrNBOC_qLm66Got1L3oWfTEZ17LaWbBNpk5KB6v5TekcrI

in high-income countries report, parents of more than 50 percent of Romanian children rely on informal care, provided by relatives, friends, or neighbors⁵.

Given the role of domestic care in increasing economic vulnerability for women, we strongly recommend addressing the problem of the scarcity of public creches and kindergartens and insufficient funding in the area of public care.

B. Target 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in both the public and private sphere, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation

Violence against women and sexual violence is a widespread phenomenon and should never be justified by culture, education, religion, social or economic status. But at the same time our experiences show that violence affects differently women and girls from ethnic groups, LGBT community, disability or of a social/economic status. There is a high prevalence of intersectional violence against Roma women and girls caused both by patriarchal rooted systems and institutional racism⁶.

Romanian Police collect disaggregated data only regarding domestic violence (DV), under Law No.217/2003, when the victim and the aggressor are family members or have similar relationships as family members. In 2022 the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police (GIRP) registered 90174 cases of domestic violence. The Police issued 12972 temporary protection orders (TPO) and the court 11082 protection orders (50% out of these protection orders come from TPO). As far as the sexual violence on minors is concerned (crimes taking

⁵ UNICEF, 2021, Childcare in high-income countries report

<https://www.unicef.org/romania/press-releases/childcare-high-income-countries-report-romania-ranks-high-maternity-leave-low-early>

⁶ One such example is the case of Florica Moldovan (2019), a Roma woman from Zalău with multiple vulnerabilities (native Romani speaker, single mother, poor, illiterate, homeless), beaten by a bus driver (former policeman), then cursed, discriminated against and humiliated by the 112 operator proves once again that acts of violence in public space against Roma women are motivated by racism, sexism and classism. Even worse is that the justice system in Romania is elitist and inaccessible to Roma women and faithfully mirrors the discrimination and prejudices against the Roma minority existing at the Romanian society level. After 3 years, the case reached a first sentence: Florica Moldovan was found guilty of disturbing the peace and public order and was sentenced to pay a fine of 1,800 lei, converted into 180 days in prison in case she won't pay. In addition, Florica must also pay 800 lei as court fee, but the aggressor of the Roma woman escaped only with a suspension, and the facts of discrimination do not exist, they are "mere speculations, not based on factual elements" - this is the motivation of the magistrates. It should be noted that this case ended up in court thanks to some individuals and non-governmental organizations. Usually, women like Florica Moldovan do not have access to justice, and such cases do not end up in court.

<http://www.errc.org/news/romania-what-kind-of-justice-romani-woman-publicly-beaten-by-minibus-driver-gets-fined-for-disturbing-the-peace>

place outside family relations), according to GIRP there are 869 cases of rape, 694 cases of sexual aggression and 2024 cases of sexual act with a minor.

GIRP doesn't collect disaggregated data regarding sexual violence or any other gender based violence (GBV) crimes outside family relationships. The same year, GIRP registered 275 cases of rape, 147 cases of sexual aggression and 257 cases of sexual act with a minor. Although these crimes represent 33% of the total crimes of rape, sexual aggression, or sexual act with a minor, GIRP doesn't collect disaggregated data.

From the total number of resolved cases regarding rape, sexual assault and sexual act with a minor, registered in 2021 by the Prosecutor's Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice (POHCCJ), 75% of the cases were resolved by closing them during investigation (e.g., lack of evidence, lack of information regarding the criminal behavior) or because there was no public interest to continue the criminal investigation⁷.

We recommend to all the responsible public authorities for preventing and combating DV and violence against women **to collect disaggregated data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention**, regarding gender, age, relation between the victim and the aggressor, where the crime took place (urban, rural, home, school, university, workplace, foreign country). We recommend the Prosecutor's Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice (POHCCJ) to collect disaggregated data on types of closing reasoning or types of reasoning considering a case not of public interest, **at regular intervals on all forms of gender based violence**. For the Courts, the types of the information should be divided by considering the types of the solution pronounced in each file e.g. conviction, renunciation or postponement of penalty, acquittal and termination of the criminal trial. Also, taking into consideration that for acquittal and termination of criminal trial there are several reasons listed in the law, a subdivision should be made for each reason.

Without disaggregated data, there is no other way to understand the phenomenon of gender based violence. At the same time, this should be the basis of framing the intervention of the authorities, the resources, the need, and the implementation of GBV campaigns.

Regarding **the budgeting of the services for survivors of GBV**, The National Agency for Equality of Opportunities between Women and Men (NAEO) has implemented several projects funded through European funds to develop the national infrastructure of shelters and services for victims of DV. However, given the fact that this budgeting is through external funds, our main

⁷ FILIA Center - What does the phenomenon of sexual violence look like in Romania in 2022?
<https://centrulfilia.ro/date-statistice-la-nivelul-parchetelor-pentru-anul-2022-privind-unele-infracțiuni-contra-libertății-si-integrității-sexuale/>

concern is that all the infrastructure created and developed to support survivors will disappear without adequate and continuous public funding from local or central authorities. In the provisions of Law No. 217/2003 on domestic violence, public funding from local councils and county councils is mandatory, however this provision is not enforced and respected. FILIA Center conducted in 2019 a research in Bacau county regarding the budget allocated by the mayor's office to DV social services. The high majority of them did not finance any social, health or protection services for victims of DV. We recommend the development of multi-annual national programs specifically designed to financially support the national network of integrated protected houses and programs for survivors of DV, funded through the state budget.

Professionals responsible for preventing and combating DV continue to have racist, classist and sexist statements in meetings, workshops and training organized by members of VAW Network. These kinds of prejudices and attitudes are present in different rural or urban communities. The racist beliefs that DV is prevalent in Roma communities, the negative attitudes toward Roma people, the lack of proper intervention, based on their own prejudices that GBV is cultural are clear signals that Roma women survivors of DV have to face multiple obstacles to access services and justice. Furthermore, traditionalistic, and sexist beliefs are still present among these professionals - like the fact that DV is a private matter or probably the victim did something to provoke the aggressor. The working experience of members of VAW Network directly with women from rural communities (Roma and non-Roma) showed that women's complaints regarding domestic or sexual violence are not officially recorded by police officers and in many cases police officers and social assistance try to mediate the conflict between the victim and the aggressor instead of acting according to the law.

The Electronic Monitoring Information System (SIME), with a delay of 2 years since it entered the legislation, is working in the capital and 3 counties in Romania, as a pilot program. However, the NGOs that provide services for survivors of GBV noticed a high reluctance from the survivors to accept the electronic bracelets. Unfortunately, the implementation of SIME has not been followed by a national informative campaign.

55% of Romanians believe that rape is justified in certain situations - if the victim was scantily clad, if she agreed to accompany the aggressor home or if she consumed alcoholic beverages or drugs^[i]. These biases were confirmed by the Judicial Inspection Report^[ii], which shows numerous examples of rape of 10-12-year-old minors being classified as consensual sexual acts with adult men, justifying this classification by the fact that the minors consented to the sexual acts by the way they were dressed, physical development and behavior, assuming that if they didn't tell anyone what they experienced, the act didn't exist, or justifying these acts as culturally associated.

In conclusion, the training program from the National Institute of Magistrates should introduce programs to address dynamics of GBV to better understand different types of victims and aggressors behavior, with a focus on sexual violence against minors. The training program should include deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes about different identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability etc). Local and central authorities should allocate adequate funds and continuous financial support for services for survivors of DV, based on international recommended standards, in order to ensure access for adult-victims of GBV. **Professionals working with survivors of GBV should be continuously trained** in order to offer real and coordinated support for victims, to deconstruct their own racist, classist and sexist prejudices and to understand the dynamics of sexual and DV.

Regarding Romanian's Government target for 2020, to organize informative campaigns regarding preventing and combating sexual abuse, there have not been such campaigns, nor other national campaigns on gender based violence.

C. Target 5.3 Ensure the full and effective participation and equal opportunities of women when it comes to employment in management positions at all levels of political, economic and public life

Romania ranks poorly in international assessments of women's rights. The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2022⁸ puts Romania on the worst ranking in Europe, together with Greece and Cyprus. The overall gender gap score is placing Romania 90th out of 146 countries. The areas that need improvements are economic participation of women (rank 63) and political empowerment (rank 122). The latter registers the most severe gap, with women being very discriminated against in political participation, which in turn generates a low representation for women's specific needs in public policies and budgeting. Even when gender balance is required in nominating professionals for leadership positions, such as in the case of nominating candidates for the position of Romania's judge at the European Court of Human Rights, the Government disregards such requirements, putting forward all-male lists of candidates.⁹

⁸ Global Gender Gap Index 2022, World Economic Forum, Romania profile, p. 300:
https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf

⁹ In 2022, a group of civil society organizations petitioned the Council of Europe to urge it to ask Romania to resubmit a list of candidates for the role of judge at the European Court for Human Rights, that respects the principle of gender balance. They argued that no exceptional circumstances could be invoked by Romania for bypassing the gender balance principle, given that it is one of the countries with the highest number of female judges in Europe, and that the Government had already identified two qualified women who were added to the reserve list.
https://aleg-romania.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Website-_Letter-to-the-Advisory-Panel-of-Experts-on-Candidat-es-for-Election-as-Judge-to-the-European-Court-of-Human-Rights-_March-2022.pdf

Women's political representation remains of the most urgent concerns. Although Law 202/2002 regarding equal chances between men and women is stating that political parties need to ensure a fair representation of women in electoral lists and to implement positive actions, Romanian political parties are ignorant about this matter. A study by FES Romania¹⁰ is showing the lack of gender awareness, small percentages of women in executive positions, small chances of being granted eligible positions, a highly misogynistic party culture, patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes. The Coalition for Gender Equality has made an official complaint¹¹ to the Anti-Discrimination Institution that political parties are not respecting legal provisions regarding equal chances for women in the electoral process, for direct and indirect discrimination against women: not being present on electoral lists and not being voted into political power, women remain an under-represented social category in Romania.

According to the data presented in the VNR, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in the period of 2016 - 2022 appears to be consistent. In reality, in 2022 Romania had a percentage of 17% of women in the Parliament - compared to 19% in 2016. We therefore can notice a decrease of 2 percentage points in women's representation at parliamentary level, which at first sight might not seem as an issue, but taking into consideration the beforehand tendency of increase in the percentage, we see it as an alarming point in the fair political representation of women. Moreover, compared to the average percentage of the European Union, Romania amongst the countries with the lowest percentage of women in the national parliament.¹²

Thus, for a better political representation of women, mandatory gender quotas in electoral legislation is required. Moreover, the political parties should be encouraged through different methods to adopt quotas (this can be a criterion for receiving state funding, for instance). We also recommend the revision of the legal frame and the inclusion of more specific details regarding the implementation of equal chances in the electoral process and sanctions if not done.

Furthermore, more systematized data collection on women's political representation, including at the level of the Electoral Authority which doesn't currently have segregated data and awareness campaigns regarding the importance of political representation for women, encouraging

¹⁰ Political representation of Romanian women, 2021, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung:
<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/18818.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1HO3dlgB5ti4GerKdi7IJLWKccnonEYvyC9ypAk33ZIMSfmoRYeFDm4KI>

¹¹ Petition to the National Council for Combating Discrimination: the underrepresentation of women on electoral lists constitutes discrimination
<https://ongen.ro/2022/07/24/petitie-la-cnccd-subreprezentarea-femeilor-pe-listele-electorale-constituie-discriminare/>

¹² Eurostat 2021 1 in 3 parliament and government members are women
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210307-1>

women's active citizenship and explaining notions like quotas or glass ceiling would improve the political representation of women.

One objective from the National Strategy for Sustainable Development is to regulate the occupation of experts in equal opportunities between women and men and promote hiring such an expert in all state institutions, as well as in private companies with over 50 employees. This legal provision is stated by Law 202/2002, which regulates equal opportunities and treatment between women and men in our country. The state doesn't communicate on its implementation, there is no data and no reports on these experts' activity.

Moreover, the occupational standards of this position are old and not updated to current legislation, as well as to existing European recommendations. The Coalition for Gender Equality organized discussions with state representatives¹³ in order to initiate the formal procedure of revising and professionalizing the current occupational standards. NGOs research shows that current occupational standards are not focusing on gender equality and equal chances at the intersection of different inequalities such as disability, race, religion, sexual orientation. The official curricula for training for this expert position is insufficient, not providing enough information that would allow a good understanding of the causes and prevention of gender inequality, as well as leaving out details on how to implement equality action plans and programs in the workplace. We note the openness of state institutions to improve the standards and professionalize gender equality expertise and we are waiting for the official announcements regarding the new changes.

D. Target 4.4 Emphasize the role played in the educational process by civic education, by the principles and notions relating to a peaceful and inclusive sustainable society, the values of democracy and pluralism, the values of multiculturalism, the prevention of discrimination and an understanding of the point of view of the “other”, and the importance of eradicating violence with a focus on the phenomenon of violence in schools and gender equality

Civic education plays a vital role in shaping active and responsible citizens within a democratic society. It aims to educate individuals about their rights, responsibilities, and participation in public life. Civic education fosters an understanding of democratic values such as freedom, equality, justice, and respect for human rights. It helps individuals develop a sense of civic duty and encourages them to actively engage in democratic processes. Then, gender equality education focuses on raising awareness about gender roles, stereotypes, discrimination, and the

¹³<https://ongen.ro/2022/03/24/discussions-with-the-representatives-of-anes-and-anc-regarding-the-occupation-of-expert-technician-in-equal-opportunities/>

importance of equal rights and opportunities for all genders. It is crucial because it can challenge the traditional gender roles and biases by promoting the idea that all individuals should have equal access to education, employment, and social opportunities. It helps break down gender-based barriers and encourages individuals to pursue their aspirations regardless of their gender. By educating individuals about the principles of equality and respect, gender equality education helps prevent discrimination based on gender identity or expression. It aims to create an inclusive environment where everyone is treated fairly and with dignity. Moreover, gender equality education empowers individuals to recognise and challenge gender-based violence, harassment, and unequal power dynamics. It equips them with the knowledge and skills to advocate for gender equality, fostering a more just and inclusive society. Last but not least it helps individuals building healthy relationships as it should include discussions on consent, healthy relationships, and respect for boundaries. By promoting mutual respect and empathy, it helps create safer and more supportive environments, contributing to the prevention of violence and abuse.

Both civic education and gender equality education are essential components of a comprehensive educational system. They work hand in hand to cultivate informed, engaged, and responsible citizens who actively contribute to democratic processes, advocate for social justice, and foster peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

Romania has witnessed conservative voices and groups advocating for the removal of gender-related topics from schools. These voices argue against discussing topics related to gender identity, gender roles, and LGBTQ+ issues within the educational system. The opposition stems from various reasons, including cultural, religious, and traditional beliefs. Conservative groups in Romania often hold strong cultural and religious beliefs that emphasize traditional gender roles and norms. They view the inclusion of gender education as a threat to these traditional values, perceiving it as an attempt to undermine traditional family structures and religious teachings.

In 2020, the Romanian Parliament adopted a legislative proposal that aimed to ban ‘activities aimed at spreading gender identity theory or opinion’ in ‘all educational entities and institutions and all spaces that are assigned for education and professional training, including entities that provide extracurricular education’¹⁴. The enactment of this legislative proposal would have banned any kind of educational activities and research on gender issues in Romania. In fact, the ban would have covered a plethora of activities, ranging from gender studies in universities to any other educational activities that touched on ‘gender’, such as activities meant to combat

¹⁴ Parlamentul României [Romanian Parliament], Lege pentru modificarea art. 7 din Legea educației naționale nr. 1/2011 [Law for amending and completing the Law on National Education no. 1/2011], Pl-x nr. 617/2019, 17 June 2020, <https://senat.ro/legis/PDF/2020/20L087LP.PDF>.

gender discrimination through education or gender equality training in the workplace. Notably, given the way it was framed, the ban could have also prohibited gender-sensitive research in any discipline, be it law, political science, sociology, history, or medicine. The proposal generated significant controversy and debate, with critics arguing that it violated principles of inclusivity and human rights. These attempts have faced strong opposition from civil society organizations, human rights activists, educators, and progressive voices¹⁵. Civil society groups, along with universities, claimed that the legislative proposal contravenes human rights and freedom of expression, and urged President Klaus Iohannis - who is on record as advocating equality and who must sign all bills into law - to send it for constitutional review. On 10 July 2022, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis submitted an appeal to the country's Constitutional Court. Ultimately, the Romanian Constitutional Court declared the law unconstitutional.¹⁶ Nevertheless, teaching topics related to gender equality, including LGBTQ rights and comprehensive sexuality education, remains a highly contentious aspect in Romanian society.

Sexual education in schools has also been a topic of debate and has faced challenges for years. On one hand sexual education in Romanian schools is not comprehensive and often lacks standardized curriculum or guidelines. The topic is generally approached with caution, and the level of coverage varies across schools and regions. As a result, there is inconsistency in the quality and depth of sexual education provided to students. It often fails to address broader aspects of sexuality, including consent, healthy relationships, gender identity, gender equality, sexual orientation, gender-based violence and the importance of respecting boundaries.

Romania remains the first country in UE with the highest rate of minor mothers¹⁷ and according to the Gender Equality Index it ranks 25th place making very slow progress promoting gender equality¹⁸. 745 minor mothers under 15 years old and 16.997 mothers aged between 15 and 19 years old were registered in 2021 (National Statistic Institute). Despite all of the above, there are conservative voices that still oppose the inclusion of comprehensive sexual education and argue that such education is inappropriate for young students or goes against traditional values and cultural beliefs between men and women. These voices have influenced policy debates and

¹⁵ Euronews, 2020 - Students slam new law as going 'back to the Middle Ages':
<https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2020/06/17/romania-gender-studies-ban-students-slam-new-law-as-going-back-to-the-middle-ages>

¹⁶ Constitutional Court of Romania, Decision 907/2020 published in the Official Gazette no. 68, 21 January 2021,
https://www.ccr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Decizie_907_2020.pdf. For a more detailed analysis of the law and the Court's judgment see:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-constitutional-law-review/article/nature-versus-nurture-sex-and-gender-before-the-romanian-constitutional-court/9B7E8D7E8138583D32AA0434FB86C730>.

¹⁷ Digi24, 2023, Romania has the most underage mothers in the EU
<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/romania-tara-din-ue-cu-cele-mai-multe-mame-minore-e-important-ca-in-scoli-sa-se-faca-educatie-sexuala-mi-ar-fi-prins-bine-2191645>

¹⁸ <https://ambadasustenabilitatii.ro/studiu-romania-pe-locul-25-in-ue-in-ce-priveste-egalitatea-de-gen/>

hindered the progress of comprehensive sexual education initiatives. On another hand teachers, nurses and doctors in Romanian schools often receive limited training and resources to effectively deliver sexual education. This can result in inconsistencies in teaching approaches and the inability to address students' diverse needs and concerns adequately.

In 2022, the Romanian Ministry of Education introduced health education classes as a compromise, covering topics such as nutrition, physical health, and personal hygiene. While this step acknowledges the importance of health-related education, it falls short of comprehensive sexual education. The law provides for the introduction of health education in schools starting from the 8th grade only with the written consent of the parents¹⁹.

Although the National Strategy for Sustainable Development mentions the importance of including the gender perspective in the school curricula, along with youth awareness campaigns regarding gender stereotypes, the Ministry of Education is ignoring this topic. Furthermore, when our NGOs requested the Ministry's support and involvement for providing an official public statement regarding the importance of gender equality education²⁰, we were met with silence. In February 2023, The Coalition for Gender Equality requested the support of the ministry for a better integration of the principle of gender equality in pre-university education, both in terms of the content of school programs and accredited textbooks, as well as the initial and continuous training on this topic for teachers in the whole country. In the context of a backlash by ultra-conservative groups that want to discourage teachers and schools from addressing topics related to equal opportunities and combating discrimination, it has become urgent and necessary that the Ministry of Education positions itself unequivocally in favor of gender equality and equal opportunities in education.

In 2022, NGOs from the Coalition for Gender Equality have launched a guide for teachers to encourage them to address gender equality in the classroom²¹. It includes theoretical foundations and concrete suggestions for activities in order to talk about gender equality in the classroom, from an inclusive and intersectional perspective. Shortly after its launch in September 2022, the guide became the target of attacks from some fundamentalist-religious conservative groups. The Ministry of Education didn't have a public statement on this topic, to this day.

According to a 2020 UNICEF survey the overwhelming majority of young Romanians (92%) believe that equal opportunities between girls and boys is a topic that should be discussed in the

¹⁹ <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/256905>

²⁰ <https://ongen.ro/2023/02/04/ngos-demand-an-official-statement-from-the-ministry-of-education-regarding-gender-equality/>

²¹ <https://ongen.ro/2022/09/07/ngos-have-launched-a-guide-for-teachers-to-encourage-them-to-address-gender-equality-in-the-classroom/>

school environment. Also, only 38% of students believe that the Romanian school promotes equal opportunities and treatment between girls and boys. The same study shows that young people would like the school to give them more information about recognizing situations of discrimination and harassment, about ways to promote gender equality and combat gender stereotypes, as well as to learn more about their health and the human body.²² In Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy, target 4.7 represents an important commitment to ensure that all students acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development. This includes education for sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity. However, if significant progress has not yet been made in implementing these goals, it is important to understand that implementing strategies and policies may require time, resources and commitment from authorities, educational institutions and civil society. In order to achieve target 4.7 and promote sustainable development in the context of education, it is important that authorities and decision-makers pay more attention and implement specific measures to support these goals.

There is a great need for continued dialogue, comprehensive teacher training, evidence-based curriculum development, and inclusive policies to ensure that sexual education in Romanian schools addresses the holistic needs of students, including their sexual and reproductive health, relationships, and rights.

E. Target 3.3 Reduce the prevalence of maternal and infantile mortality and the incidence of breast and cervical cancer, and teenage pregnancies, with the primary focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups

Women in Romania face numerous barriers in accessing on-request abortions in the public health system. The reason for this rise in unsafe abortions is that in recent years, more and more hospitals no longer offer patients the option of abortion on request. As shown in the research report of the FILIA Centre, carried out in 2020 - 2021, of the 171 hospitals that responded to requests under Law 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest, 51 hospitals cited religious reasons as justification for refusing to provide abortions on request, 20 hospitals cited ethical or moral reasons, and 9 hospitals cited reasons related to the SARS-CoV-2 crisis. Three hospitals stated that the decision not to perform abortions was taken by the management, with the agreement of the doctors.²³ Some hospitals have told us, in their official response to requests under Law 544/2001, that they offer the possibility of abortion on request without anesthesia,

²² UNICEF, U-Report survey on equal opportunities between girls and boys, 2020 - <https://romania.ureport.in/opinion/1784/>

²³ FILIA Center, Refusal to perform abortion on request in Romania, 2021, <https://centrulfilia.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Abortion-report.pdf>

which is a form of obstetric violence that affects the most vulnerable women, those who do not have the financial means to have a medical procedure where they can be treated with dignity.

Moreover, in the first six months of 2022, according to INSP data, 12 counties in the country reported no abortions on request (as opposed to 11 counties in 2021) and three other counties (Olt, Hunedoara and Vâlcea) where there was no access to abortion on request in either the public or private system. At national level, 6,728 abortions were performed on request, of which only 2,597 were performed in public hospitals, the other 4,131 being performed in private clinics and surgeries, where the price of abortion reaches up to 4,500 lei. Sometimes women, especially vulnerable ones, have no access to abortion, either because they live in a county where abortion on request is not available or because they cannot afford to pay for this medical service in the private system. In public hospitals, the price of abortion on request can be as high as 1,000 lei, and medical abortion pills cost up to 600 lei, while the net minimum wage in Romania is 1,524 lei. These costs are a major barrier to accessing abortion-on-request services.

At the same time, anti-abortion organizations have become increasingly prominent in the public arena in recent years. They often present themselves as an alternative to proper medical care offered in doctors' offices. Women who seek services provided by anti-choice organizations, anti-abortion call centers and pregnancy crisis centers are often exposed to traumatizing rhetoric based on medically false information.

The experiences of several women who have sought the help of NGOs specialized in sexual and reproductive health and rights show that, in cases where hospitals offered patients the option of abortion, medical consultations were dedicated to persuading the woman to continue with the pregnancy. During the procedure, some hospitals forced patients to listen to the sound of the embryonic heart putting even more pressure on them at a vulnerable time.

Neither free contraceptive methods or sexual education in the school system are accessible in Romania, as methods of preventing unwanted pregnancies. A legislative bill proposing financial coverage of abortions on request under the public health insurance for vulnerable groups was rejected in the Senate and will be subject to the final vote in the Chamber of Deputies.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, 15,811 girls aged 15 to 19 gave birth in 2021 - in 22% of these cases the father's age is undeclared and in 25% of these cases the father's age is between 25 and 49 years old. Also, 687 girls under the age of 15 gave birth in 2021 - in 21% of these cases the father's age is between 20 and 44 years old. The majority of pregnant minors drop out of school and are not reintegrated into the education system.

According to data from the National House of Insurance, the maternal mortality rate in Romania doubled in 2021, reaching 28.2, compared to the EU average of 8. The infant mortality rate reached 5.5 in 2021, compared to the EU average of 3.2. The number of pregnant women who benefited from free antenatal care was 2.6% in 2021.

In terms of practices associated with forced marriages, between 2015 and 2019, 2.775 underage girls were married compared to 40 underage boys²⁴. At the national level, the collection of this data is difficult and the debates about forced marriages and early marriages are filled with prejudices and generally associated with the Roma ethnicity although the phenomenon at the national level shows that it is a wider practice, culturally justified when a form of abuse occurs.

According to data provided by INSP, 1800 Romanian women die annually from cervical cancer and 3500 are diagnosed with the disease every year; from 2010 to 2020, 17 thousand women were killed by the disease (INSP, 2020). Also, breast cancer was the third most common form of cancer in Romania, with over 12,000 new cases in 2020. Even if it is estimated that screening programs would reduce breast cancer-related mortality, 79% of Romanian women declare that they never underwent mammography. Though these two types of cancer kill so many women in Romania, at the national level there is only one screening programme for detecting cervical cancer which is not properly budgeted and not accessible in the whole country. Thus women can wait a long time until they can proceed with this investigation without paying for it. This affects especially women with low finance possibilities who do not have the money to independently medical investigate themselves.

The Romanian state assumed monitoring legal provisions on sexual and reproductive health, but besides the elimination of virginity testing on request (in May, 2023) and the elimination of the technical requirements for the acquisition of contraceptive methods, **there was no progress registered in terms of legislative improvement and monitoring of the already-existing legislative background**. We are still facing the **lack of a data collection system in the SRHR area**, especially in the private health sector, which is not collecting and providing data about SRHR-related procedures. The doctor's refusal of abortion on request is not recorded anywhere, which complicates the process of finding out about the magnitude of the phenomenon. We also support the vitalization of the family planning network with a significant role in providing free specialized support to whomever needed it and free contraception. We highly **recommend the government to raise awareness among the female population regarding the importance of vaccination and screening in preventing cancer**, but also to properly budget the screening programmes so that women have a better chance to detect it and cure it on time.

²⁴ Data provided by the Ministry of the Interior at the request of the E-Romnja Association.

F. Target 3.4 Reduce maternal mortality and neonatal mortality to below the EU average

Romania has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the EU, the maternal mortality rate in Romania doubled in 2021, reaching 28.2, compared to the EU average of 8. The infant mortality rate reached 5.5 in 2021, compared to the EU average of 3.2.²⁵

In the last years the number of cesarean sections and teenage pregnancy has been alarming and no actions or measurements have been taken to reduce this, while both represent causes for complications and maternal deaths.²⁶

The baby friendly initiative was excluded from the governance of the Ministry of Health and no other program was not established for education and promotion of breastfeeding and best practices regarding maternal and neonatal care after birth. Romania doesn't use evidence based guidelines for maternal and newborn care and the last guidelines published in 2011 for neonatological care are outdated.

Antenatal care is not available in the public healthcare system, although it is included in the national fund for social health services. No policies for primary health care and for secondary care are in place to put into practice the universal access for antenatal care and in 2021 only 2.6% of the pregnant women have had access to antenatal care through the universal coverage, while 28% of the pregnant women never have been to a medical examination through the whole pregnancy.²⁷

Romania has a deficit of well trained midwives and a lack of universities that offer the training program. Midwives are able to prevent 67% of the premature birth, to save maternal and newborn lives and complications, to offer family planning but they are not paid by the health insurance fund and not able to work at their full scope of practice even in private.

Childbirth practices are not based on guidelines and evidence, laboring women are not allowed to have any support person in the public maternity hospitals in Romania and newborns are immediately after birth separated from their mothers in 100% of the cases. Hospitalization during

²⁵<https://insp.gov.ro/centrul-national-de-statistica-in-sanatate-publica-cnssp/date-statistice-pagina-de-descarcare/>

²⁶<https://www.medicub.ro/reviste-de-specialitate/ginecologia-ro/mortalitatea-materna-si-fetala-in-randul-pacientelor-adolescente-id-7387-cmsid-65>

²⁷<https://www.unicef.org/romania/ro/rapoarte/%C3%AEmbun%C4%83t%C4%83%C8%9Birea-calit%C4%83%C8%9Bii-serviciilor-de-%C3%AEgrijire-antenatal%C4%83-%C8%99i-rezultatelor-ob%C8%9Binate>

pregnancy is very often unnecessary, prolonged and the polypharmacy and wrong medication during pregnancy and after birth is common.²⁸

The audit for quality of care in health is mostly documented but not existing in practice and there is no transparency about the processes for audit or the maternity hospitals that present any concerns in regards to respecting the standards for quality of care. There are no clear pathways for patient complaints and there is no whistleblower mechanism in place for the medical or administrative personnel from primary health care or secondary and tertiary health care level.

Romanian civil society organizations that contributed to the development of this shadow report:

The Network for the Prevention and Combat of Violence against Women (V.I.F. Network)

that includes the following organizations:

1. Center for Curricular Development and Gender Studies: FILIA (FILIA Center)
2. Partnership Center for Equality Foundation
3. E-ROMNJA Association – Association for the Promotion of Roma Women's Rights
4. Association for Freedom and Gender Equality (A.L.E.G)
5. TRANSCENA Association
6. FRONT association
7. ANAIS Association
8. SENSIBLU Foundation
9. GRADO Association - Romanian Group for the Defense of Human Rights
10. Ioana's house
11. Inovatrium Association
12. Association of Women Against Violence ARTEMIS
13. East European Institute for Reproductive Health – IEESR
14. Center for Mediation and Community Security Foundation - CMSC
15. PAS ALTERNATIV Association
16. VIS Association
17. Society of Bukovinian Ladies

²⁸ <https://jogh.org/2023/jogh-13-04039>



18. ATHENS DELPHI Association
19. SPICC Association – Solidarity, Participation, Inclusion, Communication, Cooperation
20. Quantic Association
21. Association of University Women
22. Psychosphere Association
23. Association of Business Professional Women - Romania
24. SEVA Association
25. Szentkereszty Stephanie Egyesüle Association

The Coalition for Gender Equality that includes the following organizations:

1. Center for Curricular Development and Gender Studies: FILIA (FILIA Center)
2. Association for Liberty and Gender Equality (A.L.E.G.)
3. Center Partnership for Equality - CPE
4. Society for Feminist Analysis AnA
5. Front Association
6. E-Romnja Association
7. Center for Action for Equality and Human Rights (ACTEDO)
8. Plural Association
9. Ema Association
10. Center for Studies in Political Ideas (CeSIP)
11. Society for Contraceptive and Sexual Education (SECS)
12. SEX vs. Stork Association
13. Iele-Sânziene Association
14. Association of Independent Midwives
15. A.R.T. Fusion Association