

MANAGEMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: EFFECTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Claudia PAU

Abstract: *The management of gender equality in education is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. Effective policies and practices are essential to address and eliminate gender disparities. Key strategies include the development and implementation of non-discriminatory curricula, teacher training programs that emphasize gender sensitivity, and the establishment of safe and inclusive school environments. International frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration, have significantly influenced national policies. However, challenges remain in the consistent application and enforcement of these policies. Successful practices involve comprehensive approaches that integrate cross-government cooperation, adequate funding, and community engagement. Addressing issues such as school-related gender-based violence and early pregnancy is critical. By promoting gender equality through education, societies can ensure that all students, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed and contribute to their communities*

Keywords: *gender equality, inclusive education, non-discriminatory curricula, gender sensitivity, teacher training, safe school environments, international frameworks*

1. INTRODUCTION

To ensure gender equality in education, it is important to implement comprehensive and well-structured policies. Training teachers and administrators in gender equality is essential to identify and combat gender stereotypes and discrimination. The inclusion of gender equality issues in school curricula, including health education and mutual respect, requires the appointment and training of gender equality officers in each school to monitor and manage situations of gender discrimination and violence.

These measures can make a significant contribution to creating an equitable and inclusive educational environment.

The European Parliament has adopted several resolutions and strategies to promote gender equality in education, particularly in science,

technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). These initiatives have included mentoring programmes and campaigns to encourage girls to pursue careers in these fields. The establishment of inter-ministerial working groups to integrate gender equality concepts into school curricula and the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the National Agency for Gender Equality (ANES) have been important steps in promoting gender equality in education.

Gender equality policies in education are essential to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning environment by training teachers and administrative staff in gender equality in order to be able to identify and combat gender stereotyping and discrimination (Brătucu et al., 2018). The integration of gender equality themes in the school curricula, including health education and mutual respect, together with the appointment and training of gender equality officers in each school to monitor and manage situations of gender discrimination and violence is an important desideratum for the implementation of gender equality.

2. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The persistent gender inequalities that currently exist around the world, whether in developed or developing countries, are receiving increasing attention from economists, policymakers and the general public (Amirkhanyan et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that women's education and entry into the labour market contribute to social and economic well-being (Maceira, 2017), while their exclusion from the labour market and from leadership positions affects overall labour productivity and per capita income (Cuberes and Teignier, 2014).

The United Nations has selected gender equality, with a focus on women's education, as part of the Millennium Development Goals (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen, 2004) and gender equality in general as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030 (UN, 2015). The latter goals involve not only developing countries but all countries in order to achieve economic, social and environmental well-being.

As motivated by several of the SDGs, gender equality is still far from being achieved and persists in education, access to opportunities or presence in decision-making positions (Asadikia et al., 2020). As we enter the final decade for the implementation of the SDGs and grapple with global health pandemics, tense war situations and increasingly frequent natural di-

sasters, effective action is essential to achieve this ambitious goal.

Researchers have made tremendous efforts to understand gender equality, its determinants, its consequences for women and society, and appropriate actions and policies to promote gender equality.

Many topics have been addressed, ranging from women's education and human capital and their role in society (Kang et al., 2020) to their appointment to top positions in companies (Smith and Parrotta, 2018) and the impact on performance. Despite some attempts, the literature provides a narrow view of these issues, limited to specific topics - e.g.:

- Gender inequality in education (Minasyan et al., 2019),
- Gender pay gap (Bishu and Alkadry, 2017),
- entrepreneurship (Prashar et al., 2018),
- presence of women on boards (Kirsch, 2018), etc.

Thus, a comprehensive view of gender-related research is lacking.

Romania faces a complex landscape when it comes to gender equality in and through education. While Romanian education legislation and policies, such as Law 202/2002, ensure equal access, challenges remain today, almost 30 years after the abolition of the communist system and the establishment of the democratic system.

The curriculum must include content that promotes gender equality and challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Furthermore, safe spaces must be established where students can discuss gender issues and report any incidents of discrimination or harassment.

By addressing these key areas—policy development, training, inclusive curriculum, safe environments, community engagement, and collaboration—schools can foster an environment where all students, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed and thrive. This comprehensive approach ensures that gender equality is integrated into every aspect of the educational experience, promoting fairness and inclusivity for everyone.

According to a UNESCO report, education ministries have sponsored laws promoting gender equality in 50% of countries and issued policies to that effect in 42% of countries¹. Additionally, 46% of countries have legislation and 58% have policies promoting gender equality in education under other ministries' leadership.

UNICEF reports that only 49% of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education. This percentage decreases at higher education levels, with 42% achieving gender parity in lower secondary education and only 24% in upper secondary education

Gender equality in Romania has seen some progress, but there are

still significant challenges to overcome. Romania ranks 25th out of 27 EU countries on the Gender Equality Index, with a score of 54.5 out of 100. This is significantly lower than the EU average. Romania has the highest gender gap in labor force participation rates in the EU. Women are under-represented in entrepreneurship and on the boards of large companies. The gender pay gap is lower than the EU average, but women still earn less than men. Gender gaps exist in education, particularly in early childhood education and secondary school completion rates. Early school leaving is a concern for both girls and boys, with teenage pregnancy being a significant factor for girls.

Women face challenges in accessing healthcare and experience higher rates of unmet medical needs. The adolescent birth rate is relatively high, and there are barriers to accessing reproductive health services. Women's representation in the Romanian Parliament is below the EU average, with only 19.2% of seats held by women as of February 2024.

Traditional gender norms are deeply rooted, with a significant portion of the population believing that women's primary role is to care for the home and family. Gender-based violence remains a critical issue, often underreported and not adequately addressed. Despite these challenges, there is potential for improvement. Efforts to close gender gaps could significantly boost Romania's economy and improve overall social outcomes. Continued focus on policy implementation, education, and cultural change is essential for advancing gender equality in Romania.

Romania's performance in gender equality, as measured by the Gender Equality Index, shows that it lags behind many other EU countries. Romania ranks 25th out of 27 EU countries with a score of 56.1 out of 100 in the 2023 Gender Equality Index. This is significantly below the EU average of 70.21. The leading countries in the EU for gender equality are Sweden (82.2), the Netherlands, and Denmark. These countries have made substantial progress in closing gender gaps across various domains.

Romania scores relatively low in the domain of work, with significant gender gaps in labor force participation and employment quality. The gender pay gap in Romania is lower than the EU average, but women still earn less than men. In knowledge field, there are disparities in educational attainment and participation in lifelong learning, with fewer women engaging in these activities compared to men. Women in Romania spend more time on unpaid care and domestic work compared to men, which is a common issue across many EU countries.

Romania has one of the lowest scores in the domain of power, re-

flecting the underrepresentation of women in political and economic decision-making positions. Romania performs relatively better in the health domain, but there are still challenges in access to healthcare and reproductive health services. Romania needs to focus on increasing women's participation in the labor market, improving access to quality education and training, and enhancing women's representation in leadership roles.

In Romania, 75% of teaching and administrative staff in the education system are women, and the biggest gap is in pre-primary and primary education, where there are almost no men: less than 1% of male staff in pre-primary education and less than 10% in primary education, according to data published by the Ministry of Education. This is not only the case in Romania: at European level, 4.9% of staff in pre-school education are men. (Caprile M. et al 2015).

These comparisons highlight the areas where Romania needs to make significant improvements to achieve gender equality. Continued efforts in policy implementation, education, and cultural change are essential for closing these gaps.

3. MANAGEMENT OF THE GENDER SEGREGATION IN EDUCATION

Gender segregation in education is a constant challenge for the Romanian educational environment, resulting in a serious stagnation of gender equality in learning. One indicator used by the EIGE is the number of students opting for a study profile related to the arts and humanities - where the future education workforce is prepared: the gap in Romania is 30% male students compared to 17% male students in the humanities (Lee et al., 2021).

Despite the fact that we have an overwhelming number of women in the education system, when we talk about leadership positions, it is considered normal for men to occupy leadership positions because „men are the best decision makers” (Caprile M. et al., 2012). The majority of general inspectors of schools across the country are still men. The glass ceiling effect that prevents women from accessing the decision-making process is therefore present even in a sector that is majority female (Alkhaled S, et al., 2018)

In terms of literacy rates, there is no serious gender gap in Romania (around 97% for both women and men), nor is there a serious gender gap in tertiary attainment rates (around 13.1%).

Apart from literacy and tertiary attainment rates, which might lead us to believe that women and men have equal opportunities, gender inequality is subtly manifested in different ways in the education system. Gender segregation is therefore a serious obstacle to progress towards gender equality in knowledge. One indicator used by EIGE (2022) is the number of students choosing humanities faculties as a specialisation, and Romania shows a significant difference: 30.1% of female students compared to 17% of male students choose humanities faculties (education, health, social work - fields of education, health, social work - fields).

The differences between men and women become very clear when we look at labour market data broken down by gender. 53.2% of women are in employment, while the rate for men is much higher at 69.5%². Moreover, women are more likely to be employed in the humanities than in the lower-paid technical sectors (education, health, etc.).

Romania has a high degree of horizontal occupational segregation compared to other EU countries, with women concentrated in traditionally low-paid occupations (such as services, education, health, social work, tourism), while men dominate technical occupations, construction and technology-related jobs.

According to data from the National Strategy to Promote Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and to Prevent and Combat Domestic Violence 2018-2021, the sectors where women outnumbered men in 2015 were health and social work (81.5%), education (74.7%) and hotels and restaurants (59.7%). Men outnumbered women in construction (93.6%), production and distribution of electricity, heat, gas and water (81.4%) and public administration and defence (58.5%).

Addressing the gender gap in education is crucial for several reasons. First, according to UNICEF (20/23), educated girls are less likely to marry young, lead healthier and more productive lives, and create more inclusive and resilient societies. Previous studies show that education is associated with men having more favourable attitudes towards gender equality (Levtov et al. 2014).

It is therefore important to analyse

- potential gender gaps across several dimensions, including pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment, educational attainment and performance. Previous research shows that there are significant differences in educational gaps across regions and social categories in Romania (Cismaru and Corbu, 2019);

- Potential factors underlying the observed (reversed) gender gaps in educational outcomes. To this end, we follow previous literature. According

to Rumberger's (2001) research, explanations for student dropout adopt one of two approaches: individual factors and contextual factors.

- Factors underlying high teenage pregnancy rates. Studies conducted in Romania have investigated the reasons behind the high teenage pregnancy rate and their impact on education. Stoner et al. (2019), (Imhoff et al, 2022) and Diaconescu et al. (2015) emphasized that teenage pregnancy frequently led to school dropout by students. In addition, Iorga et al. (2021) found that 7 out of 10 mothers of girls who experienced teenage pregnancy identified school dropout as the most prevalent consequence, followed by psychological trauma.



Fig.1 Author own work

4. GENDER INDICES AND GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Romania ranks second from bottom among EU Member States in the knowledge dimension of the EIGE 2022 index, indicating significant shortcomings in gender equality in Romania in the education sub-domain. Romania has only 52.2 index points - the second lowest score - in the knowledge dimension of the EIGE index, which measures tertiary attainment, participation in formal and non-formal education and training, and segregation, measured as the proportion of students in tertiary education.

This is 10.3 index points below the EU average and 22.4 index po-

ints below the best performing country, Sweden. Compared to the EIGE 2013, Romania improved by 5 index points, but lost ground compared to the EIGE 2021 (-0.6 index points).

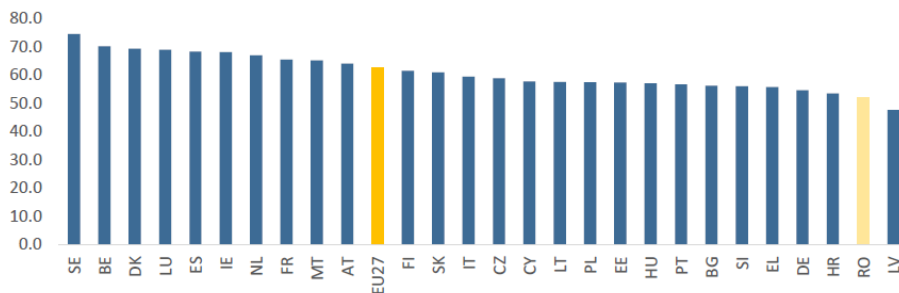


Fig. 2 Knowledge dimension index - EIGE 2022 index, Romania vs. EU Member States
Source: EIGE, 2022, www.europa.eu.

Girls perform better than boys on all dimensions of the World Bank's Human Capital Index (HCI), but overall the scores for both boys and girls are among the lowest in the EU and the Europe and Central Asia region, even when controlling for GDP per capita levels (Breda et al., 2020). For example, a girl born today in Romania will be 61 per cent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she had received a full education and enjoyed full health, while for a boy the figure is 56 per cent (Figure 3). For example, the number of years of schooling that a girl born today in Romania will have completed by the age of 18 is slightly higher than that of a boy (11.9 years compared to 11.8 years).

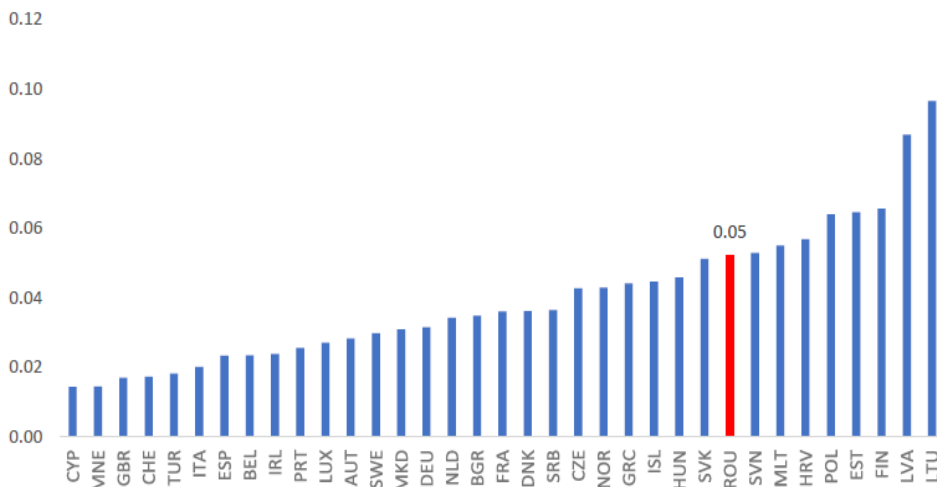


Fig. 3. Difference in UCI, girls vs. boys, selected EU and non-EU countries in ECA, 2020
Source: World Bank, HCI, www.databank.worldbank.org

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Romania has almost closed the gender gap in the education sector. Romania is assigned a 100 percent value on the education dimension of the Global Gender Gap Index in 2022 (World Economic Forum 2022). However, the index only takes into account the following four indicators: literacy rates and enrollment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education (OECD, 2022).

The education system is free and egalitarian and follows the French model. Compulsory education in Romania includes pre-school, primary, secondary and secondary education. In 2012, Romania introduced one year of compulsory pre-primary education (grade 0).

Evidence shows that this preparatory year has reduced dropout rates and disparities among students (World Bank, 2019). All children who turn six by August of each year must be enrolled in preparatory classes (OECD, 2023)

Romania has a well-established early education system that includes all children between the ages of zero and six in Romania (Robayo-Abril et al., 2023). Children from zero to three years of age attend the pre-school level, while children from three to six years of age attend pre-school education. The latter is divided into small, medium and large groups and takes place in kindergartens and schools. The former takes place in nurseries, kindergartens and day-care centers. There are private and public institutions in Romania, all respecting national standards and the same national curriculum (Law 198/2023). Gender differences in pre-school enrollment are small; however, access to pre-primary education remains low for boys and girls in Romania, compared to average access levels in EU Member States in general. According to administrative data, net enrolment rates are broadly similar for boys and girls in the age group eligible for pre-primary education, with about three out of four children enrolled (INS; 2022).

However, there are gender differences in primary enrollment rates that disadvantage females. Gross enrollment rates are lower for female than for male students. We find reversed gender differences in this case in both rural and urban areas - by gender, rural and urban areas and income group (Figure 4).

For 2020, we find reversed gender gaps in secondary net enrolment rates for 15-18 year olds for rural and high-income groups, but positive gender gaps for those living in urban areas or belonging to the B40. After the first compulsory stage of secondary education (grades 5 to 8), children in Romania have the opportunity to go on to secondary school. During secondary school, children can specialize and develop key skills related to their preferred field and specialization.

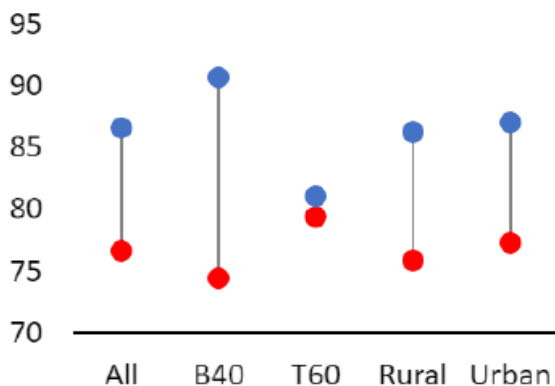


Fig. 4. Primary enrolment rates, 6-11 years, 2020.
Source: World Bank Data, www.data.worldbank.org

Among older age groups, there are reversed gender differences in tertiary education, with gross enrolment rates favoring girls; however, Romania lags behind the EU average. Figure 5 shows the gross enrolment rates for female and male students in tertiary education between 2013 and 2019 in Romania and the EU. The graph shows that although there were reversed gender differences in both the EU and Romania, students in Romania lagged behind in gross enrolment rates.

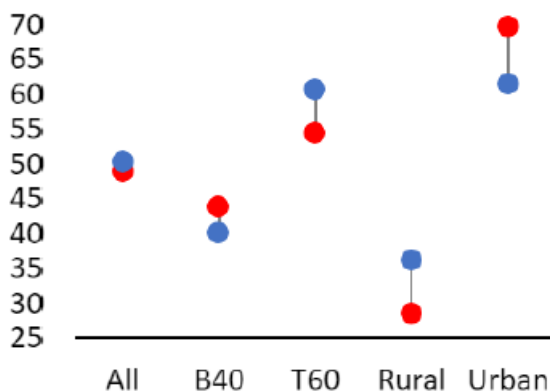


Fig. 5. Tertiary net enrolment rates by gender, 2020
Source: World Bank Data, www.data.worldbank.org

5. CONCLUSIONS

In 2019, Romania achieved gender parity in secondary enrolment, although levels are extremely low compared to the EU and have declined over time. Although secondary education in Romania is compulsory for grades 5 to 8, enrollment rates for pupils and students are below the EU average and have declined over time.

The management of gender equality in education entails the implementation and supervision of policies and practices that facilitate equal opportunities and treatment for all genders within the educational system. The formulation of explicit policies that advance gender equality is essential, including anti-discrimination policies, gender-sensitive curricula, and the guarantee of equal opportunities for all genders in school activities and leadership roles.

It is also crucial to implement a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure the effectiveness of these policies. This system should be designed to regularly assess the implementation of the policies and make necessary adjustments based on feedback and outcomes. It is essential to provide ongoing training for teachers and school staff on gender equality, including the recognition and addressing of gender biases and stereotypes in the classroom. School leaders must be equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge to promote and manage gender equality initiatives effectively.

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Notes on the author

Prof.univ.dr. Claudia Pau Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Political

Sciences Reşiţa claudia.pau@ubbcluj.ro