
STEREOTYPES ABOUT GENDER ROLES

Cristina-Mihaela GHENCIU*, Atalia ONIȚIU*

***West University of Timisoara, Romania**

Abstract: *Using a qualitative, exploratory design, the present study aimed to analyze the persistence of gender stereotypes, discrimination, and gender inequalities within the Romanian organizational environment, focusing on their influence on career choices, workplace experiences, and access to leadership positions. The study employed semi-structured interviews, complemented by a hermeneutic analysis of responses from 11 participants across various—often gender-segregated—sectors (such as police, construction, energy, and education). The results indicate that stereotypes persist regarding career choices and occupational distribution; women face greater pressure in traditionally male-dominated fields and encounter obstacles to promotion into leadership roles, particularly in academia. Different expectations regarding the workplace roles of men and women were identified, alongside instances of discrimination linked to maternity and gender norms. Participants recommended promoting merit-based recruitment, encouraging women to pursue careers in STEM and technical fields, implementing gender equality education programs, adopting organizational measures against discrimination, and fostering activities that facilitate employee collaboration.*

Keywords: *Gender. Stereotype. Society. Opportunities. Workplace.*

Contact details of the author(s): Email: cristina.ghenciu99@e-uvt.ro, atalia.onitiu@e-uvt.ro

INTRODUCTION

From a biological point of view, there are major differences between women and men, for example, only women are endowed with a reproductive system and can give birth, breastfeed and develop the maternal instinct, while men have been endowed with a greater capacity from a physical point of view. However, the identification of a person as a girl or a boy is done from the mother's womb with the help of the doctor who determines the sex of the child, thus placing a biological label of girl/boy (F/M) based on the external appearance of the genitals, being the first identity with which we step into the world, followed by a social label that includes the expectations imposed by society to correspond to social norms. Social norms emphasize more on the differences between women and men than on the similarities, thus attracting a series of rituals, behaviors, differentiated expectations from the family, church, school, society in general.



If you are born in Romania today as a girl, then you have a much greater chance of receiving, from the second day on, bows, pink lace stockings and dolls. To have your ears pierced for earrings and to have the role of future wife/mother instilled in you as the most important aspect of your life. Starting at the age of 2-3, most children acquire an understanding of gender stereotypes (Țocu, 2016, p. 675). From a professional point of view, society has also taken care to induce a series of professions that claim to be more suitable for women. You have a much greater chance of becoming a secretary, pharmacist, nurse, doctor, teacher, than an engineer, football player, president of the country. If you choose the modeling profession today, you will be paid on average better than a man who works in this field, because women represent the fairer sex and are much more sought after in this field. As a man, things are completely different. If you are born a boy, then pink is excluded from your everyday outfit, and you will not benefit, for example, from clothing and toys in colors or shapes prescribed for females. You will receive a masculine name and you will practice some sport from a young age, you will have greater freedom of movement than girls. You will not be allowed, and most likely you will not even know how to express your feelings, weaknesses and fears, because society encourages a man to be tough and more conservative with everything related to the emotional side. You will have a greater chance of ending up in prison or in management positions, and in case of divorce, you will lose custody of the child.

Therefore, we make daily efforts to correspond to the prescribed gender, we behave, dress, speak, move according to the standards of femininity/masculinity considered correct, appropriate, normal at a certain moment. These preconceived ideas by society, according to which women and men are different, having roles and characteristics determined and limited according to their gender, are called gender stereotypes. These stereotypes can have consequences leading to unfavorable attitudes towards the respective group and sometimes to discrimination. Some examples of stereotypes are: chromatic stereotypes, according to which certain colors, by their nature, are more suitable for girls than for boys (shades of pink, pale and warm, light colors). A boy will be the subject of jokes in his group of friends if he wears, for example, certain pink clothing items or accessories. Just as a girl will be called “boyish” or unfeminine if she opts for choosing dark colors of clothes or accessories, for example black, brown or khaki. The second category of stereotypes is occupational, through which jobs are categorized as suitable or unsuitable for girls and boys, more precisely certain jobs are not suitable for girls, being a tough field, easier to bear for a boy.

“It is known that resistance to changing stereotypical constructs depends on how deeply rooted they are in the collective mind” (Stănculescu, 2009, p. 213). Identifying and becoming aware of the dominant stereotypes in a society at a given time is a necessary step for any kind of change.

Since childhood, we are familiar with stereotypes regarding gender roles associated with gender traditionalism, such as: “The man is the pillar of the house” or “Woe to the house where the man is the woman”. A closer analysis of these popular sayings can identify the role of power that men have in society, but also the discrimination of men associated with the role of housewife, and why these genders are made to plot, as it were against each other. Moreover, we can admit that for balance, both parties are forced to contribute to society, especially in marriage: “Man and woman: nail and flesh”.

Preconceptions and prejudices related to inequalities between women and men, both in everyday life and the chances they have on the labor market, whether men are favored to some extent or vice versa and why these favoritisms occur, whether these gender stereotypes influence or affect in some way the perception of men, but especially the perception of women in society, will be analyzed in this endeavor. We will try to investigate how the image of men is interpreted compared to the image of women and whether they are put on an equal footing or not, whether there is discrimination based on gender and why these genders clash along the way; what individuals think

and how they currently relate to these gender discriminations, whether people support these stereotypes or on the contrary try to break down these prejudices

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender refers to the social and cultural norms that are representative of the sexes, based on which people are labeled as masculine or feminine. Thus, women and men have attributed qualities, roles and responsibilities in society. Therefore, gender is more of a symbol, a social construct assigned to individuals, through which the human body is defined, but especially differentiated in society (Grünberg, 2010, p. 4).

Stereotypes represent a sum of clichés and simplified opinions regarding the traits of individuals or social groups (Ferreol et al., 1998). From a psychosocial point of view, the stereotype is seen as a materialized mental representation, based on which characteristics and attributes are formed and then communicated to the social group, thus, being inevitable (Guțu, 2007, p. 132).

By gender stereotypes we understand the attribution of negative characteristics to an individual as a result of belonging to a certain group or social category. Thus, gender stereotypes refer to the way an individual should be or behave depending on belonging to a certain gender (Despina, 2020, p. 210). Gender stereotypes represent the totality of shared opinions, related to the characteristics of women and men, which must define you as masculine or feminine, represented by the conduct of each in society. The way individuals relate to each other in a society, both the behavior of women and men, serve not only as a descriptive label but also as representative of beliefs and norms, thus stereotypes becoming a kind of calling card of the times. Gender stereotypes fit into a broader structure of gender-related values that instill wrong preconceptions about the two genders. These gender stereotypes are transmitted through the expectations of society, considering that attitudes towards the roles of each gender must be fulfilled and respected accordingly (Miroiu, 2002, p. 160).

Discrimination is any form of social exclusion that can lead to the elimination or rejection of minority individuals on the basis of race, nationality, gender, language, religion, under conditions of equal human rights enforced by law (Grünberg, 2018, p. 29). Gender discrimination involves the standards and behaviors of the community that disadvantage a person or social minority group by associating them with a certain sex or gender. This discrimination can be seen in different forms: direct discrimination and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination is visible and obvious, based on gender criteria, and indirect discrimination is based on neutral practices and provisions, being subtler, difficult to notice (Despina, 2020, pp. 2-3).

Regarding occupational differences by gender, these remain a common feature of labor markets. From an early age, these prejudices can influence the choices of both girls and boys towards making decisions to work in a certain field or to completely detach themselves from that field, examining how the different job attributes affect the occupational choices of men and women and the gender wage gap. Gender identity and social norms contribute to shaping occupational choices and preferences for different job attributes.

The latest reports on public perceptions of gender roles (Grünberg, 2018) show that women receive more credit for their ability to hold leadership positions - 57.2% of women and 44.8% of men believe that men are no more capable of leading than women. The perception of both genders therefore tends to consider women as confident in their own abilities and willing to take on greater responsibilities.

Gender stereotypes can have a negative impact on young people's attitudes and beliefs regarding their professional choices. During the period of identity formation and value development, young people are exposed to various social influences, including gender stereotypes promoted by



society, culture, the media and even in the family environment. These stereotypes can perpetuate the idea that there are specific traits or roles that women and men should fulfill. For example, a common stereotype is that men should be strong, not express their emotions, and be responsible for financially supporting the family, while women should be delicate, take care of children, and focus on their physical appearance.

Gender socialization and gender stereotypes are two factors that manipulate adolescents in their educational and professional choices. Therefore, cultural gender beliefs could influence the belief in the competences of boys and girls, which can lead to occupational gender segregation in the labor market.

A common stereotype is that women are more interested in starting a family than in a career, considering that 30.4% of men expressed this opinion, while for 39.4% of women career appears to be a priority. According to the Gender Barometer (Grünberg, 2018), both partners must contribute to the family income, and a woman's career is not an impediment to fulfilling her family duties. Another surprising thing among men is that the majority (53.3%) believe that women are no longer discriminated against in Romania today. The majority of women (54.1%) believe that most of the time they do not get good jobs due to gender criteria according to the same Gender Barometer (Grünberg, 2018).

The image of a boy is much more associated with STEM subjects, compared to the image of a girl who is associated with the humanities, which determines the manifestation of stereotypical attitudes regarding gender roles among children as early as middle school. Even before entering university, young people already have a stereotypical perception of gender, emphasizing the role of beliefs and students' self-assessment of their skills towards careers. Boys perceive themselves as mathematically competent or overestimate their abilities, being the most likely to follow a career oriented towards mathematics, science or technology. This may also be due to teachers who unconsciously guide boys to follow fields related to science and technology, even if the results obtained in STEM subjects do not have a maximum score. Unlike boys, teachers guide girls towards humanities fields, considered much more appropriate for them: social work, healthcare, education, etc. (Despina, 2020, pp. 2, 13).

Behavioral psychology argues that girls are less confident in their abilities in STEM subjects, not being supported by the external environment, because they feel much greater competition from boys. From this point of view, gender stereotypes are a problem, because they limit the academic and professional potential of students (Proca & Gall 2018, pp. 5-6).

These consequences lead to occupational segregation or gender segregation, which is the separation of the two genders from working in the same sector and having different occupations, therefore one of the genders dominating in a professional category. Thus, two types of segregation were born: horizontal occupational segregation, which consists of the predisposition to employ men and women in different fields; as a consequence of this, some fields can be considered feminized or masculinized. Vertical occupational segregation consists of the employment of men and women within the same professional field, but for different positions, most often men being in management positions. Underrepresentation at the top level on specific occupational ladders is a phenomenon known in the specialized literature as "vertical segregation", or more commonly as "hierarchical segregation" (Barbălată, 2013, p. 1).

Vertical segregation is also referred to as the "glass ceiling", which indicates the existence of obstacles that lead to a certain rarity of women in leadership and decision-making positions in public organizations, enterprises and also in associations and unions. The phenomenon of the existence of barriers that prevent women from rising is complemented by the concept of the "sticky floor". This



concept describes the forces that tend to keep women at the lowest levels in the organizational pyramid (HG 1547/2022, Annex 1, 4).

According to the Index of Economic Gender Inequality in Romania (Guga & Sindreștean, 2021) the main reasons for women's inactivity on the labor market are: family reasons (32.7%), studies (24.4%), retirement (13.2%) and health problems (7.7%).

Regarding the public perception of the fields of activity on the labor market, according to the Gender Barometer (Grünberg, 2018), a greater female presence is noted in the following fields: textile industry, public catering, tourism, trade, education, banks, health and public administration. In contrast, men are more active in fields such as: justice, army, extractive industry and metallurgy, construction, IT and agriculture. These data confirm gender stereotypes regarding occupational segregation, associating women with fields of activity such as services, care, education, and men with jobs that require physical strength and technical training.

It has been shown that women are disadvantaged in the labor market, due to income gaps and the large number of unpaid family workers. The more a work sector becomes feminized, the greater the risk of being paid the minimum wage in the economy (Guga & Sindreștean, 2021), with the exception of social assistance and healthcare, where things seem to be at a relatively decent level of women's income.

The wage gap between women and men in the labor market also affects their standard of living, as well as their state of mind. Although it has been scientifically proven that women have a higher life expectancy than men, women are much more prone to the risk of illness and infections, due to their much more caring and empathetic nature, falling ill most often due to stress. However, men have stated that their health suffers due to stress caused at work (Guga & Sindreștean, 2021). INS data have shown that women are the most exposed to this risk. Moreover, they cannot always contact a specialist doctor due to limited financial resources, thus women's income represents an impediment (Guga & Sindreștean, 2021, p. 19).

Being born a woman in Romania still implies a higher probability of exposing yourself to risks, such as: physical abuse, verbal abuse, school dropout and wage inequalities; greater responsibility regarding the family, caring for parents in case of illness and limited access to certain areas of the labor market. Women who need a job but cannot take one due to the excessive demands imposed by society can be placed in these situations. Among the main problems contributing to gender inequality, there is an important indicator that has always remained constant to the disadvantage of women, namely the pay gap that contributes to maintaining economic and social vulnerability. Therefore, these gender inequalities seem to affect the female gender to a greater extent. Although from a legislative point of view there are rights and freedoms equal to those of men, in practice women do not fully benefit from the prescribed treatment of opportunities when it comes to economic, social and cultural life. Thus, women's successes and achievements are not valued as much, leading to disadvantageous conditions for them. If these gender inequalities were to decrease, beneficial effects on physical, psychological and economic stability would result, achieving a balance between personal and professional life (Guga & Sindreștean, 2021, pp. 1, 5, 12).

In Romania, gender inequalities still persist, especially in the economic field, where the pay gap between women and men is significant. According to the 2024 Gender Equality Index, Romania ranked among the worst in the European Union in terms of economic equity, coming in just behind Bulgaria. These disparities are caused by several factors, including professional segregation, limited access of women to leadership positions, and the persistence of gender stereotypes. However, although Romania is “surviving” and continues to make progress, the economic and social gaps compared to the West remain significant. For Romania, it is not gender inequalities that are an impediment, but inequality in general. For Romanian society, a small pay gap between women and



men represents an attempt at income equality on the labor market. Thus, gender gaps could be overcome in the distant future. According to the research from 2021, conducted by Guga and Sindreștean, which indicated how the rate of participation of women and men in the labor force has evolved over a period of approximately 107 years, it can be stated that the situation has become worrying. Women occupy jobs perceived as more suitable for their gender, traditional, such as: services, education, health, tourism, which bring a lower income, are less well paid, while the better paid fields, those related to technology and construction, remain fields intended for men (Guga & Sindreștean, 2021, p. 12, 16).

Women's labor market participation rates have fallen much more than men's from 1992 to 2020, with the highest levels between 1992-1996 and 1998-2000. The lowest levels were between 2004-2011. There are several possible reasons for this discrepancy. Gender stereotypes and social expectations can influence women's decisions about labor market participation. In many cultures, women are expected to play a predominant role in childcare and household care, which can limit their availability and options for careers and paid employment. It is therefore important to work towards eliminating these inequalities and to promote gender equality in all aspects of society. Changing stereotypes, combating discrimination and creating a fair working environment can help to increase women's labor market participation and promote equal participation in the labor market.

Equality of opportunity between women and men is a complex social process that requires time, but above all constant involvement. This process is reflected in the social relations between individuals, requiring measures to reduce gender-based discrimination. Gender equality is defined as equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities and chances, for both women and men. This vision of gender equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, it means that rights and responsibilities will not depend on the status of woman or man at birth. Equality of opportunity means the absence of economic and social barriers based on gender criteria (HG 1547/2022, Annex 1, 12, 13).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the present study is to investigate whether or not gender inequality and discrimination are still present in the organizational environment, but especially how stereotypes can influence the individual's occupational choices; the consequences of stereotypes and how they lead to occupational segregation. We will try to find out whether there is an observable power relationship between the genders, and whether or not equal opportunities are applied for harmonious coexistence in the public sphere; whether occupational barriers between genders could be overcome and whether the idea of gender inclusion could be embraced in areas that in previous years were perceived as being exclusively appropriate for one of the genders (predominantly the male gender).

The objectives that guided our research were the following:

- To analyze gender norms, present in the participants' experience of choosing a certain professional field.
- To describe how gender norms are behaviorally manifested in the workplace.
- To assess the impact of gender norms, implicit bias, and micro aggressions experienced by women in the workplace.
- To identify measures that organizations can or could take to minimize the negative impact of gender norms, bias, and micro aggressions from the outset in the workplace.

The research involved the analysis and assessment of participants' gender-related beliefs, values and expectations. An attempt was made to obtain as much information as possible about individual perceptions and experiences of gender norms in the workplace through the interview method and hermeneutic analysis of the responses. Specific behaviors and practices in the work

environment that reflect and perpetuate existing gender norms were analyzed. This included observing workplace interactions, analyzing organizational policies and procedures, and obtaining information about how gender norms are reflected in everyday workplace behavior. The research also aimed to assess the negative impact of gender norms, including gender discrimination, bias and micro-aggressions experienced by women in the workplace, analyzing respondents' suggestions regarding existing organizational practices and policies, and identifying potential strategies and interventions to reduce the negative impact of gender norms, bias and micro-aggressions.

The selection of subjects was based on the snowball method. The aim was to select participants belonging to both genders (male and female), across a wide age range (20-50 years), and, to the extent possible, to select both genders from the same field; in this way, the research results will be associated less with the specific attributes of a profession and more with the perspectives characteristic of each gender. The interview was thus applied to a number of 11 respondents, both female (6 people) and male (5 people), randomly selected from among people employed in fields recognized for their gender specificity (STEM, police, education, etc.).

Nr. crt.	Initials	Gender	Field of activity	Age
1	F.V.	F	Police	23
2	P.D.	M	Police	24
3	B.A.	M	Electronics	26
4	F.R.	M	IT	23
5	S.B.	F	IT	33
6	G.C.	F	Social work	48
7	S.D.	M	Energetics	27
8	U.M.	M	Constructions	22
9	G.L.	F	Finances	23
10	L.D.	F	Commerce	22
11	D.M.	F	Education	46

Table 1. Characteristics of study participants

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, either by telephone or via the internet (Zoom platform). The data collection period was April and May 2023.

LIMITATIONS AND DIFFICULTIES

The present study encountered a number of difficulties in finding participants who were open to participating. There were a few cases in which people who were asked to participate in the interview refused. This refusal can occur for various reasons, such as lack of interest, distrust in the research or fear of sharing personal experiences. This can lead to difficulties in recruiting a sufficient number of participants. Another difficulty was the snowball method used for sampling. As the study relied on references and recommendations to recruit participants, there was a risk that they would be similar in certain characteristics and experiences, which is why an attempt was made to have



respondents from the same field be both male and female. The use of a qualitative research design and the small number of respondents clearly constitute a limitation; a quantitative or mixed-methods study - ideally with a representative sample - would be preferable. Despite these limitations, we believe the study has highlighted several aspects that future research could explore in greater depth.

RESULTS

The first aspect that we followed was related to the manifestation of gender stereotypes when choosing a profession. Only one respondent complained about certain attitudes that underestimated a girl's abilities to perform in a field of exact sciences: *"there was a kind of pressure, I don't know for sure if it was social pressure or pressure that I felt (...) that I might not be as good as the boys and then (...) I would have liked to choose the easier path and do a humanities field, literature or foreign languages or communication or other professions that did not require exact sciences"* (S.B.).

At the time of employment, most of the study participants denied confronting gender stereotypes. Respondents stated that the job interview focused on professional aspects, not on criteria that interfered with the gender of potential employees: *"no, there were no policies that I felt were based on gender stereotypes, the hiring was done following technical interviews in which my practical knowledge was evaluated. And then I think that regardless of gender the procedure was the same"* (S.B.); *"I did not experience corporate policies or procedures, it was a competition"* (G.C.). Even within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where in order to obtain a police officer position, for example, both men and women are required to perform the same physical tests during the recruitment competition, although it is universally recognized that men have a higher capacity for physical performance, for example, to be able to lift heavier weights, compared to women, respondents did not highlight the existence of gender stereotypes, not even in the form of positive discrimination against women: *"The only difference between the genders, that is, between a woman and a man, was perhaps in the sports test where the tests, although they had the same time, I think they were more difficult for a woman to obtain due to her physique because a man had more strength than a woman, this would be the only case"* (P.D.).

From the perspective of the preponderance of a certain gender within various professional fields, most respondents spoke about a balanced share of both genders in the composition of the workplace team: *"but in Timișoara here where I work at my workplace the number is quite balanced between men and women, we had, they try to equalize or balance the positions correctly, but what I have observed is that in other countries, for example Germany or France, the number of men is much, much higher than that of women"* (S.B.). *"At the moment, from my point of view, I think we are somewhere on an equal footing because in the last 5 years at least, since I can give my opinion, an approximately equal number of both girls and boys have entered the MIA schools"* (P.D.). *"At least in the local public administration there are both male and female people, there is not only male or only female"* (G.C.).

However, when it comes to the police, for example, the female perspective feels differently the pressure to perform a job in a field that men usually tend to opt for: *"there are more men in this field (...) it is masculinized (...) because (...) many see this job, a job that men do. And maybe that's why many girls, women don't want to work in this field because maybe they find it difficult, that they think they are not capable, but that's not really the case"* (F.V.).

In addition, there are still some areas that are not explored enough by women, either because these areas are not attractive in terms of the work to be done, such as overly technical jobs: *"there will be no female electricians"* (S.D.), *"there are still a somewhat larger number of men in the technical teams"* (F.R.), or because they exceed a woman's physical capabilities, as can be noted in the case of the construction field: *"I have not encountered any female colleagues (...) this field is a*

male one because it involves a lot of physical effort” (U.M.). Therefore, fields such as construction or energy seem to be mostly masculinized. However, it is important that expectations related to physical work capacity be established based on objective criteria and related to the real requirements of the job, and that hiring or promotion decisions be based on relevant professional skills and competencies.

The statement of the male respondent in IT: *“I have seen a greater inclination among men towards technical jobs than in the field of public relations and thus women are moving more towards the field of public relations than towards technical fields”* (F.R.) was, moreover, confirmed by the female respondent who works in public relations in the finance-banking field, where, this time, the situation between the two genders is completely reversed, with the female gender dominating: *“at our agency, at least, there are no men at all and you should know that no other agency. That is, in our retail area that we work on (...) there are no men. So I consider that a female majority”* (G.L.). Considering these aspects, one can notice a certain inclination of women to choose jobs in the humanities with predilection, and of men more in the technical field. There are also enough exceptions, with women reaching out to professions that were not previously pursued by female representatives, such as the IT industry or the police, but the pressures that belonging to the female gender exerts in these circumstances cannot be denied. Men tend to see things fairly in terms of exercising rights and sanctions at the workplace between women and men, while women still encounter some difficulties or feel external pressures generated by the collective mentality.

A gender discrepancy that was noted in the interviews is the fact that in many fields, leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men. *“I can say that at the level of Romanian society, university education is to a certain extent masculinized in the sense that leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men in universities and executive positions in comprehensive universities at least, such as the West University of Timișoara, the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj, the University of Bucharest, that is, universities that cover a wide area of scientific and study fields and, to draw a parallel, universities that are not comprehensive and that are delimited by a large scientific field, such as Polytechnic universities or Medicine and Pharmacy universities that do not cover other fields of research and study, in these comprehensive universities, women dominate in executive positions and men in leadership positions”* (D.M.).

It should also be noted that this circumstance in which men find themselves in management positions is not related to a singular contextual framework, but rather is a rule that remains unchanged for a long time within many institutions, such as higher education, IT or the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI). *“No, since I have been working, for 10 years I have only had a male superior”* (S.B.). *“My direct superior is male and no, I have never had a superior of the opposite sex in my career. So they have always been heads of department, respectively heads of department, before they were not called departments, but chairs, it was a man every time and not a woman”* (D.M.). *“My superior is male and so far I have not experienced having a superior of the opposite sex”* (P.D.).

In an overview of the existence of certain stereotypes and gender differences in the workplace, most respondents did not identify major differences that are applied between the two genders. However, in university education, where the stakes of the activities undertaken to promote are very high, there may still be cases in which major differences between genders are noted: *“there is a differential treatment over time for male employees. In the sense that they are co-opted rather to be part of collaborative projects, they can express their preference for certain specializations, for certain courses, laboratories that they teach, for the curricular design of certain subjects, for certain courses. Male colleagues are co-opted for such activities, male in evaluation committees, for example of students, committee chairmen are usually male, rather than being women”* (D.M.).



In other areas, in the few cases where there were differences, they were minor, contextual: *"depending on the holidays, I noticed, of course, a difference between who organizes and who receives, such as Women's Day, and of course the men organized something for the girls in the company, but on Men's Day, as expected, the women also organized something for us men"* (F.R.), or differences related to the more developed social attributes of women: *"Yes, there were some differences, especially in explaining certain terms and in the way they behave with men (...) women are more open than men on certain topics"* (B.A.), attributes that can make women employees with higher interpersonal interaction capacities.

Regarding the distribution of tasks between the two genders, if the field of professional practice includes both male and female employees, most respondents stated that, at the level of experience they have reached, there is a balance: *"Currently yes (work and professional tasks are divided equally), because there is a context here, there is also a power relationship, in the sense that if you hold a high position you already have more power resources to negotiate these work tasks, how long they can last and how much time they can take up"* (D.M.); *"in the administration we each have different tasks and professional activities and we each do them at our workplace and there is no separatism between the genders"* (G.C.); *"I think that the tasks are divided equally. And I think it also depends a lot on people's personalities and how they relate to the work they do"* (S.B.).

The merits were found to be shared equally, in a fair way in most cases *"the merits are about the same"* (S.D.); *"each of us is put through the same filters and each one, as we have in computer science, each input has an output, so what we do is recognized equally"* (F.R.), with small exceptions such as those mentioned in higher education: *"Now the merits often arise from participation in these evaluation committees, from participation in research projects to which if you don't have the same access, if you don't have equal access then the merits obviously cannot be equal, because you are not co-opted into such an activity"* (D.M.).

The element for which respondents unanimously agreed that there are no differences between male and female genders at work is the respect given by the superior: *"In everything I have managed to interact with my superiors, I have noticed the same respect towards myself and towards my colleagues of the opposite gender and I have not felt inferior or superior to them"* (F.R.), *"there are no differences regarding the colleague of the opposite gender compared to the superior"* (G.C.).

Gender-specific expectations from the employer largely concern the attributes characteristic of women and men and do not necessarily fall into injustices directed at each of the genders. For example, there is an expectation that women will take care of organizing events and have a presentable outfit: *"there are also expectations, (...) which are not any kind of written rules (...) practiced in women's daily professional life, i.e. to prepare coffee, to take care of a good organization of an event, to dress nicely, in a skirt, so to speak, to look good, no, in events or activities in which they take part collectively"* (D.M.); *"in organizing events (...) girls were oriented towards organizing things, parties, activities"* (F.R.), and in the case of men, expectations related to their physical capabilities apply: *"in organizing events, of course men were oriented towards the practical things that had to be done that required strength, for example carrying heavier objects or things like that"* (F.R.); *"there were certain moments when I was given certain tasks (specifically masculine n.d.) that I had to complete"* (B.A.).

Regarding the behavioral manifestation of gender norms in the workplace, most respondents therefore stated that there is a balanced weight between men and women in the various professional fields in Romania. However, women feel the pressure to perform in male-dominated fields, such as the police, and some fields, such as construction or energy, remain predominantly male. There is also a tendency for women to choose jobs in the humanities, while men opt more for technical fields. In many institutions, management positions are mainly occupied by men, and gender stereotypes can



make women feel vulnerable. However, most respondents did not identify major differences between genders in the workplace, and the distribution of tasks and merits is considered fair.

The study further sought to identify certain acts of gender-related injustice within the various fields studied. Initially, the sanctions that employees suffered in circumstances where their conduct defied the usual norms specific to their gender were tracked. According to the respondents, such sanctions either did not exist or were minimal.

Sometimes there may be expectations from men in terms of physical endurance and the ability to carry out certain activities that involve physical effort at work. Expectations in this regard may vary depending on the nature and specific requirements of the job, such as in the construction field or electronics manufacturing: *“there were only few moments when I was taken the task, but not because I could not get things done (...) but because the bosses also have certain expectations from their employees”* (B.A.).

Women are expected to perform typical small gestures, which are very much related to organizational aspects at work, but not included in the job description, and which could attract sanctions if not carried out: *“associating the job of secretary with the activity of preparing coffee, tea and cookies for those who pass through the secretariat or for bosses, things that are not in the job description”* (D.M.). The consequences of non-compliance can be actual sanctions or a reprehensible attitude on the part of colleagues and superiors: *“this type of conduct is sanctioned, respectively rewarded (...) and if you don't comply with these unwritten rules somehow, yes, you can be sanctioned, but not formally, but through disapproving attitudes by those around you. If you have a strong stomach and don't care so much about disapproval and, I don't know, the little gossip behind you, then things are absolutely fine in the university environment”* (D.M.).

The view that women are less capable of assuming a management position is at odds with the principles of equality and meritocracy. Although it would be essential that any person, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to advance professionally based on skills, performance and potential, women are sometimes disadvantaged, one of the causes being the likelihood of them becoming pregnant: *“there are expectations that a woman will advance at a slower pace because she is expected to take care of her family, have children, take care of them during postnatal care leave, (...) women in general do not take as many risks and then they will not be so eager to advance in the position. So these prejudices, stereotypes related to advancement or access to a higher position exist among women and men, among employees in general”* (D.M.); *“A colleague was promised that she would become a team leader and after she announced that she was pregnant and was going on maternity leave, she was told that she would no longer be given the position because they would be looking for someone else to replace her anyway and then it would make no sense to make her a team leader. And that is practically quite a big discrimination when you are not given a promotion because you are going to be on maternity leave”* (S.B.); *“in some companies, girls, women who are relatively newly married may have difficulty taking on important leadership roles simply because they are the most likely to get pregnant, so they go on maternity leave and the position they would receive becomes vacant again”* (F.R.). Sometimes, a deeply masculinized field ends up completely stifling women's ability to advance: *“being a field where men predominate, I don't think any female colleague is promoted or anything, and especially, you know their training”* (S.D.).

Most respondents did not have the experience of working in an environment where gender stereotypes or subtle gender-based discriminatory behaviors were common. However, in a highly competitive environment such as university education, such stereotypes can often be observed, and they are experienced mainly by women: *“when I was not married and did not have a family, other colleagues, men, said that they somehow had the right to priority in choosing certain extra work activities, for which they were paid extra to my detriment because they are the ones who provide for*



their families and I would have nothing to do with this extra money earned anyway or because a person (...) of the male sex, occupying a management position (...) would have priority over others in receiving benefits, material rewards, money, (...) to which they had access to the detriment of women who are less senior and (...) with less access to resources in the case of the university” (D.M.). This situation can be disappointing and frustrating, especially when certain gender-based insults are also applied: “I have witnessed such completely inappropriate events in which I have directly heard discussions about a colleague, the way I confessed to you earlier, how she looks, she is not sexually attractive to male colleagues or jokes about women, between our colleagues or between students, some situations, or that it is not appropriate for her to dress” (D.M.).

The other respondents did not report such situations at work and consider this type of environment unacceptable, which can create an unsafe and inappropriate atmosphere, negatively affecting employees, especially female employees who face discrimination. Most respondents denied the availability to work in a company or institution where gender stereotypes are present and a big difference is made between men and women: *„It would affect me a lot, although I repeat, now I am no longer in an end level position where I would be insecure and maybe always think let's find another job because it's not good here. I don't think I would end up working in such an environment because I learned from these experiences many, many years ago that I have to test the ground before entering such an environment” (D.M.); “it doesn't seem right to me. I mean, after all, some things that men do we can do too and vice versa. I mean, no gender should set limits on us” (F.V.); “of course not, even if this idea is circulating in other countries and on other continents, I believe that each of us has the right to have an equal chance, even if the tasks are divided fairly, so I wouldn't work in such a company” (F.R.); “I would not accept to work in an institution where differences are made between the male and female genders, I believe that everyone does their job and should be treated according to the job, not gender stereotypes” (G.C.). However, there are also exceptions: “I would not have any problem with that” (L.D.) or “I could still work in a company, but I think it would be difficult to adapt. I would not make any difference between men and women” (B.A.).*

Our research identified acts of gender injustice, and sanctions for violations of gender norms were either absent or minimal, according to respondents. Expectations for men often relate to physical endurance and physical capabilities, while women are subject to specific requirements and may face negative consequences if they do not meet them. Gender-based discrimination, especially sexism in the workplace, can negatively affect women's advancement and access to leadership positions, contradicting the principles of equality and meritocracy. Gender stereotypes and subtle discriminatory behaviors are more common in competitive environments, such as higher education, particularly affecting female employees. It is important to create a safe and egalitarian work environment by eliminating such stereotypes and discrimination.

When asked what they would change in their field to achieve a certain balance, most respondents did not have significant mentions of things that could be done differently. Among the proposed changes, actions such as positive discrimination in which women are given more opportunities, both in employment, but especially in advancement, can be mentioned: *“maybe just in the admission where it comes to the sports test, there should be a few things done to make it easier for both girls and boys of smaller stature, I mean, from a physical point of view” (P.D.); “I would go for positive discrimination of women for their access to management positions and resources of power because these have given good results in other countries, in other educational and university systems in the world, they have not brought any kind of prejudice as one would think” (D.M.), or the suggestion that women should also be encouraged to focus their studies on fields perceived as typically masculine, such as energy, IT or construction: “first of all, for women it is normal to work in this field (construction) depending on the project, as a designer or other positions that do not*



involve physical effort” (U.M.); “probably if women also chose to attend a specialized faculty (energy engineering) the parties would be balanced” (S.D.); “from middle school, high school and university onwards, (...) work should be done to popularize exact sciences among girls, to increase their confidence in them and to demonstrate to them that regardless of whether they are girls or boys, they can do those things and that it is only a matter of perseverance, studying and learning skills that, if a person puts in the effort, can acquire regardless of gender (...) teachers should somehow help in that direction, not discriminate, not make children feel that boys are better at math than girls” (S.B.).

Other suggestions regarding the possibility of improving the situation referred to the education received at home, education that has the potential to significantly influence the adult later on: *“and parents should somehow be educated in this direction, not to create such big differences between girls and boys, for example to dress their girls in pink and boys in blue, I think they should open up from when they are little and parents should not lump their children into certain stereotypes” (S.B.).*

Following the interviews, a situation was also identified in which gender stereotypes had a very negative impact on the female person who experienced them: *“I developed a self-defense system because of the experiences in my adolescence and then in my youth when I was the target of such unequal treatments and I developed a self-defense system. Now I am at the level where if I notice such things around me, I can take a stand even if it does not affect me directly” (D.M.).*

The direct recommendations of the respondents to the study to avoid such potentially traumatic situations included encouraging and supporting both genders, especially the female gender, in order to enhance self-confidence: *“My suggestion would be that when there is teamwork consisting of a man and a woman, their superior should observe and analyze what they did, congratulate them and where he notices a negative thing, not highlight it in a negative way, but tell them as advice, look, you as a man could let your colleague speak here, where there is a girl maybe he can gain her trust in some other way or maybe he has a greater influence on her” (P.D.), but also the implementation of gender-neutral hiring procedures, focused on meritocracy: “they should look more at the hiring process at the way the person in front of them expresses themselves, to see exactly where they are in terms of intellectual level, (...) to rely more on this than hiring a man or a woman. (...) They should look more at other things, not just that they are women or men” (G.L.); “in a company or institution, the skills and the way in which a person exercises their profession must be taken into account and then there should be objective methods to determine a person's performance, and these should be taken into account, regardless of gender or sex. And then, simply, everything should be based on the person's merit and abilities and not based on their origin or sex” (S.B.).*

To achieve better collaboration between the two genders, team building activities are also suggested, in which employees get to know each other better outside of the professional sphere. These activities can be extremely beneficial for improving collaboration between the two genders in a company and can lead to the development of closer relationships and mutual trust between colleagues: *“so that there is better collaboration between all people, whether male or female, in an institution, even spending free time together, some parties or some free time together, otherwise everything is fine” (G.C.), a situation that, if well organized by the institution or company, can lead to avoiding the negative effects of experiencing stereotypes regarding the female gender, in which women end up setting up barriers and isolating themselves: “among my male colleagues, there is no such barrier, it is not so well delimited and it has not been, neither in the past nor in the present, that is, they do not have a problem organizing a little weekend trip or even a vacation together or going out for, let me put it generically, a beer, a juice, a pizza with their colleagues or even with colleagues' families together, while I, as a woman, impose this kind of barrier on myself precisely so that I don't risk being the target of such stereotypes and unequal treatment based on my belonging to*



the female gender" (D.M.) or to situations of segregation of communication between the two genders: *"at our workplace there are always discussions even in which men and women don't really converse together, each one does everything according to their own way. And the lack of communication between the two (...) is not ok"* (B.A.).

If superiors are the ones who perpetuate gender stereotypes or are unjust, gender equality education courses can be implemented at the company level. These courses can contribute to awareness and correct understanding of the typical problems of each gender and can help create a more equitable and inclusive work environment: *"managers who reach positions that can influence career advancement believe that they should be taught and helped to make the right decisions, without discrimination"* (S.B.). When discrimination is propagated despite education in this regard, certain sanctions can be applied to remove it: *"if it is observed that a colleague or a manager discriminates because of sex, I believe that measures should be taken and I believe that these behaviors should be eliminated, so I believe that when discrimination or something like that is identified, it should be clear that discrimination will not be tolerated"* (S.B.).

In terms of the percentage ratio between women and men, there were two opposing perspectives among the respondents. The female perspective believes that there should be an equal distribution between the two genders, especially in management positions: *"I would go with the Icelandic system that says that at least 40% of management positions or university positions or pre-university education positions must be filled by men and at least 40% by women, and that solved the situation, starting from the country's government and parliamentary portfolios to any other field of activity, and the beneficial result was seen, (...) unequal treatment was completely eliminated from everyday life and from people's mentality"* (D.M.). On the other hand, the male perspective considers that an equal distribution of the two genders is unfair and that people's inclinations towards certain fields should take precedence, work out of passion: *"in civilized countries I would let men and women go for positions that they enjoy and in which they find themselves, because forcing men and women to work in positions in such a way that there is a balanced number between men and women would lead to a false image of reality, and as that person said study everyone who has the opportunity to move towards a field, there they could activate and bring the best report"* (F.R.); *"each company has its own policy, but I don't think it should affect the number of women or men in a workplace. Everyone has the right to choose what to do and choose their own field that they want"* (B.A.).

Ultimately, respondents suggest that if gender stereotypes are just isolated cases, they should simply be ignored, as the exhaustion of resources, especially emotional ones, to solve them is not justified: *"you can't change some of his conceptions if he was raised like that (...) in an institution it's harder because maybe many aren't like that and there are only 1, 2. And then it's better to leave them alone than, I don't know, to take them into account"* (F.V.), the mentality that there is an equal ratio between men and women being the predominant one: *"I honestly believe that both men and women should be equal, meaning that men should not be worse than women or vice versa"* (L.D.); *"my suggestion would be that everything should be divided fairly"* (U.M.); *"no one says that only a man can do a certain job. If you have the necessary skills and knowledge, you are accepted"* (S.D.); *"If you do your job well, it shouldn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. That's my point of view"* (B.A.).

The study thus identified several solutions for restoring gender balance in the workplace, such as positive discrimination in favor of women, encouraging them to move into areas considered masculine, and gender equality education. Other recommendations include supporting the self-confidence of both genders, implementing employment procedures based on meritocracy, and team building activities. Gender equality education courses and sanctions for discrimination can also



contribute to a fair working environment. There are different perspectives on the percentage ratio between women and men, with some suggesting having an equal distribution and others prioritizing individual inclinations and passions

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted several aspects related to gender stereotypes and discrimination in the workplace. In terms of choosing a profession, women may encounter stereotypes suggesting that they would not be suitable for technical or scientific fields. This may lead some women to move towards professions considered “easier” or more traditional from a gender perspective. However, most respondents in the study did not report experiences of discrimination in the hiring process, stating that the assessment was made based on skills and knowledge, regardless of gender.

It was highlighted that in the past, in the Romanian educational system, there were no policies or regulations that addressed these issues, even if gender inequalities existed. Regarding the physical criteria for certain jobs, such as construction or security services, there may be an expectation that men have greater physical endurance, but this aspect should not be a discriminatory criterion in the hiring process. Although there are biological differences between the sexes in terms of physical capabilities, performance evaluation at employment should focus on skills and abilities relevant to the job, without discrimination based on gender.

When analyzing the presence of gender stereotypes in the workplace, most respondents considered that there is a balanced share of both genders in the various professional fields. However, the female perspective in the police field feels a different pressure due to the predominant presence of men and gender stereotypes, which can make them vulnerable. There are fields in which women are underrepresented, either due to the lack of attractiveness of these fields, such as technical ones, or due to higher physical demands, such as construction. There is a tendency for women to choose jobs in the humanities, while men opt more for the technical field. However, there are also exceptions, and the pressures and difficulties felt by women in these fields cannot be neglected. In some fields, such as university education, there may be significant differences in terms of promotion and recognition of merit. In general, respondents consider that gender stereotypes and gender differences in the workplace still exist, which can affect equal opportunities and treatment between women and men. However, the sanctions applied for such behaviors are either non-existent or minimal.

There are different expectations for men and women in certain areas, such as physical endurance or carrying out organizational tasks at work. These expectations can vary depending on the nature of the job. For example, in the construction or electronics manufacturing sectors, there are specific requirements. At the same time, women are often asked to do tasks that are not included in the job description, such as making coffee or cakes for colleagues or bosses. Some of the gender injustices identified in the study are related to the different expectations between men and women in career advancement or obtaining a management position. There is a misconception that women are less capable of holding management positions, which is at odds with the principles of equality and meritocracy. There is a concern that women may become pregnant and be less willing to advance in their careers, which can lead to discrimination. Sometimes, in male-dominated fields, women face difficulties in advancing in their careers. For example, in the IT field where men are in the majority, women may have difficulty obtaining management positions. Most respondents did not report frequent experiences of gender stereotyping or subtle gender discrimination in the workplace. However, in the university environment, which is very competitive, these stereotypes are more common, affecting women in particular. Some people reported experiences of gender discrimination, including insults or inappropriate comments. Therefore, the interview participants mostly consider a work environment where gender stereotypes exist and differences are made between men and



1/2026

women unacceptable. They believe that each person should be treated according to their abilities and not gender stereotypes. However, there are a few respondents who would not have a problem working in such an environment.

Following the interviews, a series of solutions were identified to restore gender balance in the workplace. Among these, the following can be listed as proposed suggestions: positive discrimination for women in hiring and advancement; encouraging women to also focus on fields perceived as masculine, in the field of exact sciences, technical fields; popularizing exact sciences among girls at primary, secondary, and university levels; home education, through parents, to avoid gender stereotypes; supporting both genders; implementing gender-neutral hiring procedures, based on the principle of meritocracy; team building activities recommended to improve collaboration between genders in the workplace; gender equality education courses can contribute to creating a fair and inclusive work environment; in the event that superiors or employees maintain gender stereotypes, applying sanctions and eliminating discriminatory behaviors; from the female perspective, the suggestion of an equal distribution between the number of the two genders, especially in the case of management positions; from the male perspective, the equal distribution between female and male in the workplace is not fair, and individual inclinations and preferences should take precedence in choosing a job; gender stereotypes can be ignored if they are only isolated cases and do not require the exhaustion of resources to solve them.

Our research was guided by two research questions, namely: Are there stereotypes regarding gender roles in the public sphere? and Can we talk about a power relationship between genders in the labor market? It was confirmed that there are stereotypes regarding gender roles in the public sphere. These stereotypes refer to social expectations and norms regarding the behavior and roles expected of men and women in society. One can also speak of a power relationship between genders in the labor market. The study confirmed that men tend to have more power and influence in the professional environment than women. This is often a consequence of gender stereotypes, gender discrimination that impose certain structural barriers. Despite these conclusions, respondents are in favor of gender equality and believe that men and women should have the same opportunities and rights in the professional environment. They declare themselves in favor of avoiding stereotypes and generalizations regarding gender roles in the workplace. It is crucial to promote a culture of gender equality in the workplace and to focus on skills, abilities and performance, instead of limiting or assuming responsibilities based on gender. All employees should have the opportunity to realize their potential in any field and be evaluated based on their professional merits.



1/2026

REFERENCES

- Barbălată, Ș. (2012) *Segregarea orizontală și verticală pe piața muncii*, Bucharest, sector 2, Available at: Segregarea orizontală și verticală pe piața muncii | Profemin (spiruharet.ro). (Accessed on 28.06.2023).
- Despina, Diana Maria (2020). Și deșteaptă, și frumoasă, și ingineră IT? Studiu exploratoriu privind inegalitatea de gen percepută în mediul IT. *Revista Română de Sociologie*, 3–4, 209-228.
- Ermolenco Alexandra, Covrig, Natalia, Cojocaru, Cristina & Andronache, Alina (2024). *Indexul egalității de gen 2024*. Chisinau Publishing House in collaboration with the Partnership for Development Center. Available at: https://progen.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CPD_IEG-2024.pdf
- Grünberg, Laura, Drăgan, I., Ștefănescu, Poliana, Niță, Nicoleta, Povară, Alexandra, Ștefănel, Adriana, Ștefănescu, Livia, Todoran, Ileana, Velicu, Anca, Miroiu, Mihaela & Văcărescu, Theodora (2005). *Aspecte privind stereotipurile de gen în mass media din România*. Bucharest, Report prepared by the Feminist Analysis Society AnA in collaboration with the Center for Media Studies and New Communication Technologies.
- Grünberg, Laura, Rusu, Andreea & Samoilă, Elena (2019). *Barometrul de gen România 2018*. Bucharest: Hecate.
- Guga, Ș. & Sindreștean Alexandra (2021). *Inegalități economice de gen în România*. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/18613.pdf> (Accessed on 28.06.2023).
- Guțu, V. (2012). *Problema personalității în educație: specificul abordării și legitățile de formare-dezvoltare*. Studia Universitatis, Chișinău, Moldavia.
- EIGE (2024). *Romania*. Available at https://eige.europa.eu/modules/custom/eige_gei/app/content/downloads/factsheets/RO_2024_factsheet.pdf
- Miroiu, Mihaela (2002). *Convenio. Despre natură, femei și morală*. Gender Studies Collection. Iași: Polirom.
- Proca, Camelia & Gall, Eniko (2018). *Combaterea stereotipurilor de gen în educație și în orientare profesională*. Research conducted within the European GenderEd project. Available at: <http://aleg-romania.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Analiza-privind-stereotipurile-de-gen-in-Romania.pdf> (Accessed on 28.06.2023).
- Țocu, Rodica (2016). The dynamics gender role stereotypes: a study on children in Romania. *Scientific Research and Education in the Air Force*, 675-680