



Does gender  
matter?



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# DOES GENDER MATTER?

## Study Report

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## Context

According to Romanian Constitution, "equal opportunities between women and men" means "taking into account the different abilities, needs, and aspirations of men and women and treating them equally." Romania has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework for gender mainstreaming, supported by dedicated institutions, but faces persistent implementation challenges, including political instability and limited enforcement tools. The Gender Equality Index published annually at European level, ranked Romania scores 57.0 points out of 100 in 2025. It holds the 23rd position in the E.U., below the EU average. Although progress has been steadily made, it has been slower than in other Member States. While progress accelerated during EU accession, gaps remain in tools like gender impact assessments and budgeting<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. Legal Framework in gender mainstreaming

The Romanian Constitution guarantees equality regardless of sex and equal pay (Articles 4, 16, 41). Law No. 202/2002 on equal opportunities defines discrimination, harassment, and positive actions, amended in 2015 to include gender budgeting. It aligns with EU directives and international conventions, covering employment, education, health, and politics.

Romania's 2022-2027 National Strategy and plan for promoting equal opportunities and combating domestic violence<sup>2</sup> faces significant implementation hurdles despite its comprehensive action plan with 8 objectives, 32 targets, and 75 indicators. Key gaps include weak enforcement mechanisms, limited resources, and persistent socio-cultural barriers.

The Senate approved a draft law in October 2025 to automatically extend provisional protection orders and raise penalties for violations, closing legal loopholes that favored aggressors. At the moment, it is under debate in the Chamber of Deputies. In January 2026, the "Romania without Domestic Violence" parliamentary committee endorsed a comprehensive anti-femicide legislative proposal defining the crime, mandating annual data collection, protecting orphaned children, imposing harsher penalties for gender-motivated acts, and integrating school education on equality and non-violence. Police data indicates criminal domestic violence offenses dropped 16-19% in 2025 to around 49,660 cases, potentially linked to expanded tools like electronic monitoring (used in 14% of cases), but total reported incidents remained alarmingly high at over 138,000—averaging 14 per hour—with breaches of protection orders rising to 6,337.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://romania.fes.de/ro/e/indexul-egalitatii-de-gen-cum-se-pozitioneaza-romania-comparativ-cu-tarile-uniunii-europene.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/262994>

### 1.1. Core Gaps in the institutional framework

There are no legal requirements for ex-ante gender impact assessments or enforced gender budgeting, remaining in early stages despite mentions in Law 202/2002, or Government Decision No. 443/2022 regarding<sup>3</sup> adoption of normative acts.

Frequent government changes disrupt continuity, lacking sanction powers for gender mainstreaming integration. There are ad hoc training for public servants and limited civil society consultation. Regional bodies like COJES play consultative roles only, with inconsistent local data collection. Public authorities like ANES or CNCD seem to be more active in advocacy, a role more commonly attributed to civil society organizations.

**The National Agency for Equal Opportunities** has an €1.8M budget from which only 5% is dedicated to projects; overall implementation hampered by fragmented public funding. Equal Opportunities leads policy development, harmonization with EU law, and gender perspective integration, with 53 staff in 2024 dedicating 25-50% time to equality.

The situation regarding the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) in Romania is currently defined by significant institutional restructuring and a push for legislative updates.

In a major administrative move, ANES has recently transitioned from the Prime Minister's Chancellery to the Ministry of Labor, Family, Youth, and Social Solidarity. The official purpose advanced by the government was to better align gender equality policies with labor market initiatives and social inclusion projects. At an operational level, this follows a 2025 reorganization that reduced the agency's staff slightly (from 56 to 50 posts) as part of a broader governmental effort to streamline public spending. International networks (like WAVE) and local NGOs<sup>4</sup> (FILIA, ANAIS, The Coalition for Gender Equality) have expressed concern that moving or merging the agency could dilute its specialized focus on women's rights, urging the government to maintain its independence<sup>5</sup>.

ANES continues to be the primary body implementing the National Strategy for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities and Preventing Domestic Violence (2022–2027). Current priorities include:

- Coordinating Romania's compliance with international standards for preventing violence against women under the "Istanbul Convention";
- Since February 2025, new methodology has been enforced requiring all employers (including private companies) to implement specific internal procedures to prevent sex-based and moral harassment;

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<sup>3</sup> Decision No. 443 of March 30, 2022 approving the content of the presentation and justification instrument, the structure of the report on the implementation of normative acts, the methodological instructions for conducting the impact assessment, as well as establishing the Advisory Council for the assessment of the impact of normative acts.

<sup>4</sup> <https://ongen.ro/2025/10/13/pozitia-coalitieii-pentru-egalitate-de-gen-privind-comasarea-anes-anitp-si-impactul-asupra-egalitatii-de-gen/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://asociatia-anais.ro/anes-nu-s-a-mai-comasat-dar-s-a-subordonat-am-evitat-un-dezastru-dar-n-am-scapat-complet/>

- Implementing EU directives regarding gender pay gaps and leadership diversity in listed companies.

While the agency remains active, it is at the center of several national debates. ANES has been vocally advocating for the official definition and criminalization of "femicide" in the Romanian Penal Code, following high-profile cases of gender-based violence in 2025.

The agency continues to manage several **essential public services**:

- The 24/7 free emergency line for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking (0800 500 333). ANES collaborates with NGOs like „Sensiblu Foundation”, and „Necuvinte” to train local specialists, develop unified methodologies for legal guidance, and create data tools analyzing county-level trends, services, and protective measures.
- Distributing financial support (vouchers) to survivors of domestic violence to assist with immediate needs. However, access to these vouchers seems overly bureaucratic. ANES website contains PDF documents with procedures and rules for victims, instead of being directly accessible<sup>6</sup>. The process needs to be simplified.

**The independent National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD)** handles investigations and sanctions, spending 10% of its €20M budget on gender issues. Interministerial National Commission (CONES) and 41 county commissions (COJES) coordinate locally, alongside a parliamentary Equal Opportunities Commission.

Action plan relies on qualitative indicators without robust public reporting; institutional scores declined slightly vs. EU average by 2025.

While the CNCD is a relatively effective "quasi-judicial" institutional model, the "weak monitoring and evaluation" (M&E) criticism stems from several long-standing and recent issues, such as weak sanctioning mechanism (according to critics from civil society, in many cases involving vulnerable groups most sanctions are verbal warnings or minimal fines and a lack of evaluation and monitoring (for example, follow-up measure to see if these minor sanctions actually change the behavior of the offenders, especially when the offenders are public institutions or high-ranking politicians). As of the 2024–2025 activity cycle, the CNCD has publicly noted an "acute shortage of human resources" having impact on monitoring and evaluation, as the staff are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of new petitions and current cases. Under these circumstances, the institution cannot focus on strategic approaches or on monitoring, evaluation, or impact measurement. Unlike equality bodies in some other EU nations, the CNCD does not have a strong mandate to monitor the positive duties of public authorities. While it can punish an act of discrimination, the institution has weak tools to evaluate whether a Ministry or a public authority is proactively *preventing* discrimination.

Two projects implemented by public authorities are worth mentioning in this context, as part of efforts to promote gender equality:

„DEBUTING” is an Interreg Europe project where the Regional Development Agency (RDA) North-West, Romania is a partner. The partners will assess policies, inventories good practices, and identifies

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<sup>6</sup> <https://anes.gov.ro/asistenta-pentru-victime/vouchere-pentru-victimele-infractiunilor/>

funding for gender integration. It will also prepare a Gender Equality and Inclusiveness Matter in the Business Context (a regional analysis).

„Gender Equality Plans” (2021-2024; 2025-2028) developed by the national research agency UEFISCDI in order to advance quotas for women speakers, e-learning on intersectionality.

Among the remarkable projects dedicated to promoting gender equality which had a national impact, without the involvement of public authorities, the following are worth mentioning:

#ICanDolt (#SieuReusesc) is the largest community of survivors of violence in the country, coordinated by the A.L.E.G. association which is active in Sibiu and at national level in the field of combating and preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality.

„The Coalition for Gender Equality” was created within the EGALIS project (“Gender Equality through Social Change and Education”) implemented by the Partnership for Equality Center (CPE), in partnership with the Feminism Romania Association, the AnA Cultural and Scientific Society for Feminist Analysis (AnA), the Action Center for Equality and Human Rights Association (ACTEDO), the PLURAL Association, and the SEX versus BARZA Association, with financial support from the Active Citizens Fund Romania, a program funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway through the EEA Grants 2014-2021. The coalition aims creating favorable conditions for the development and strengthening of the capacity of non-governmental organizations active in the field of gender equality to promote and integrate the principle of equal opportunities between women and men in all areas of public and private life.

### **1.2. . Lack of Centralized Data Collection**

A problem for both key institutions also noted in some independent reports (including recent OECD and ECRI assessments) is that Romania lacks a robust, unified system for monitoring discrimination trends. While the CNCD tracks its own petitions, it does not effectively integrate data from the court system or labor inspectorates. This makes it impossible to evaluate the true scale of discrimination in Romania or the long-term impact of the Council's decisions. In the same line, ANES cannot track a victim's journey through the system as there is no central database that links police reports, hospital admissions, and social service interventions. It is publicly assumed that the official numbers are often 10 times lower than those in countries with integrated systems (like Spain).

Because monitoring is reactive (based on complaints at CNCD, ANES or police) rather than proactive, the evaluation of "progress" is often skewed, missing the vast majority of silent discrimination cases in rural or marginalized areas.

### **1.3. Socio-Economic Barriers**

Gender stereotypes, rural poverty, and work-life imbalances persist, especially in labor market access and decision-making. According to recent OECD reports, payment gaps (12-15%), low female

management representation (22%), and inadequate childcare hinder progress in strategy areas like employment and stereotypes<sup>7</sup>. Violence prevention sees gaps in local victim services.

Romania exhibits larger gender gaps in employment participation and rates compared to EU averages, though its pay gap is notably smaller. Recent 2023-2025 data highlight Romania's challenges in workforce integration for women, driven by rural-urban divides and care burdens, versus EU progress.

Romania's women's employment rate (ages 15-64) stood at 57% in 2023, lagging behind the EU average of about 65-70%; this gap is particularly stark for rural women at 44% compared to the EU's 65%. The gender employment gap reached 17-19% in Romania during 2023-2024—higher than the EU's 11-14%—with Romania's disparity even widening to 17% over 2000-2023 while the EU narrowed to around 14%. In contrast, Romania's unadjusted gender pay gap was a low 3.6-5.8% in 2021-2022, outperforming the EU's 12.7% and half the OECD average, largely due to sectoral employment patterns<sup>8</sup>.

These employment gaps arise from Romania's low female labor participation at 57% (versus rising male rates), hitting mothers hardest at 57% employed compared to 70% EU-wide, alongside rural challenges; EU countries have closed disparities more effectively through policies like expanded childcare.

The issue of underage mothers in Romania continues to rank among the nation's most urgent social and public health crises as of early 2026. The country still reports some of the EU's highest adolescent pregnancy rates—a trend NGOs label a "systemic national failure. Nearly 45% of all EU births to girls under 15 happen in Romania. About 1 in 10 Romanian children has a teenage mother. According to statistics, within this target group the pattern persists as 1 in 6 teens who give birth before 15 will have another child before 18. This problem is underaddressed by public authorities and NGOs (having limited instruments). There is a lack of projects and public policies focus on monitoring and rural areas. Around 80% of underage pregnancies occur in rural areas with scarce healthcare and family planning services. So there is an urgent need to address the education gap among young mothers as around 85% of minor mothers left school beforehand; lack of sex education. The course "Health Education" (from 8th grade) is still optional and needs parental approval (due to conservative and religious lobbies to block mandatory comprehensive sexual education). "Traditional unions" are still a problem and are tolerated rather than being approached as statutory rape or grooming by social workers.

## 2. Gender mainstreaming in youth work

In Romania, gender mainstreaming in youth work is currently navigating a gap between robust legislative commitments and varied practical implementation. As of 2026, the situation is characterized

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<sup>7</sup> OECD report [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-reviews-of-labour-market-and-social-policies-romania-2025\\_f0532908-en/full-report/empowering-vulnerable-households-through-social-support\\_0e647127.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-reviews-of-labour-market-and-social-policies-romania-2025_f0532908-en/full-report/empowering-vulnerable-households-through-social-support_0e647127.html)

<sup>8</sup> OECD report [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-reviews-of-labour-market-and-social-policies-romania-2025\\_f0532908-en/full-report/the-labour-market-and-social-situation-in-romania\\_0353986f.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-reviews-of-labour-market-and-social-policies-romania-2025_f0532908-en/full-report/the-labour-market-and-social-situation-in-romania_0353986f.html)

by a "top-down" push from the government, heavily influenced by EU standards, while the "on-the-ground" reality in youth centers often relies on individual NGO initiatives.

### **2.1. The Policy and institutional Framework (2024–2027)**

The landscape recently shifted with the adoption of the National Youth Strategy 2024–2027. In late 2024, the Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities merged into the Ministry of Labor, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity. The 2022–2027 National Strategy promotes equal opportunities and combats domestic violence across six areas: stereotypes in education, health access, labor market equality, work-life balance, decision-making participation, and gender mainstreaming implementation. Its action plan sets 8 objectives, 32 targets, and 75 indicators, building on prior strategies.

The National Youth Strategy 2024-2027 promotes inclusive education and employment for youth, implicitly supporting gender equality via anti-stereotyping efforts in education (strategy Area 1). Youth workers receive EU-funded training (e.g., Erasmus+) on gender equality and mental health to challenge stereotypes, as in "Open Minds Romania" initiatives reaching schools and communities. Gaps persist in explicit youth-specific gender mainstreaming, with broader challenges like rural access affecting young women.

The current strategy specifically lists "Gender Equality" as a cross-cutting priority, with a focus on "Empowering young women in leadership and entrepreneurship", „Bridging the gender gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)". Addressing the specific needs of rural and marginalized youth, where traditional gender roles remain most rigid.

### **2.2. Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps**

While the government provides the framework, the actual "mainstreaming" (integrating a gender perspective into all youth activities) is primarily driven by the NGO sector and EU-funded programs. Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps are the strongest drivers. In 2025 and 2026, projects like Equal Earth and Open Minds Romania have integrated gender awareness with other topics like climate change and mental health. There is an increasing effort to train youth workers to recognize "hidden" biases. For example, recent initiatives focus on breaking the "strong/silent" stereotype for boys and the "caregiver" expectation for girls, which are still prevalent in many Romanian communities.

### **2.3. UN Youth Delegate Program**

To set a standard for gender representation, the selection process for Romania's UN Youth Delegates (2025–2026 session) explicitly mandates a 50/50 gender split (one girl, one boy).<sup>3</sup> Key Challenges & Statistics Despite the progress, Romania still faces structural hurdles: There is a "gender Gap" Paradox as Romania often reports one of the lowest gender pay gaps in the EU, but this is largely due to high female participation in the public sector rather than systemic equality in the private youth/labor

market. According to 2025 EIGE reports<sup>9</sup>, women in Romania still perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work. Youth workers report that this often limits the time young women can dedicate to volunteering or non-formal education compared to their male peers. As shown above, while laws exist and the impact assessment grid for new legislative acts and public policies contains a section dedicated to fundamental human rights and equality, there is no mandatory ex-ante gender impact assessment for new youth policies, meaning some programs are designed without specifically analyzing how they might affect boys and girls/youth differently.

#### **2.4. The National Youth and Student Project Competition (CNPTS)**

The Ministry of Labor, Family, Youth, and Social Solidarity (MMFTSS) launches regularly the National Youth and Student Project Competition (CNPTS). The 2025 call for projects was organized based on Order No. 374/2025 of the Minister of Labor, Family, Youth, and Social Solidarity and Law No. 350/2005 on the regime of non-reimbursable financing from public funds allocated for non-profit activities. Among the priorities and measures for 2025, **there was none dedicated to promoting gender equality<sup>10</sup> or measures dedicated to at-risk groups, such as communities where underage mothers come from, which are a problem in Romania.**

On the other hand, at the 2025 Youth Gala, organized annually by the same ministry, in order to reward youth projects, young people with outstanding achievements, and organizations that bring added value to communities, the jury awarded first prize in the Rural section to the „Support Group for girls” developed by the Association for Active Development. In Romania, there is no national program or project run by a public authority (such as the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labor, Family, Youth, and Social Solidarity) dedicated to supporting girls in rural areas. Associations such as the Association for Active Development or the World Vision Foundation address socio-psychological and vocational issues, as well as the development of life skills that benefit from high school girls in rural communities. These projects do not have a national impact as they are carried out at the local level (in rural areas, with approx. 50 girls as beneficiaries).

### **3. Focus groups with youth workers**

No of participants: 9

Teodora Cristiana Akinola (female, youthworker), Georgiana Grigore (female, youthworker, manager), Petică Marius (male, youthworker), Emanuel-Ionut Zanoschi (male, youthworker), Maya Cristea (female, youthworker), Adriann Lorincz (male, youthworker), Sperana Anghel (female, public officer - coordinator of the National Internship program for youth, at the General Secretariat of the

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<sup>9</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025/RO>

<sup>10</sup> <https://mmuncii.gov.ro/proiecte-de-tineret/>

Government), Adriana Sauliuc (female, university lecturer), Iuliana Iliescu (female, youthworker, trainer, program manager at APD).

Moderator: Viviana Anghel (APD)

Date, location and duration of FG: 15/12/2025, 1 h 40'.

### 3.1. Key findings

→ **Have you had any projects in the past, which focused on gender equality as the principal goal?**

The APD representative (I.I.) presented the purpose of the current project and pointed out that the association had recently been a partner in a EU project dedicated to intersectional discrimination, which showed in a focus group with young people that, in addition to being young and female, women feel discriminated for the way they dress and wear makeup.

None of the focus group participants had a project directly dedicated to gender, but gender issues were incorporated transversally or as a condition for the balanced selection of target groups.

Non-verbal observations: All the participants listen and agree with the points raised.

→ **If not or relating to daily work and/or other projects. Please think about how your regular work day looks like. On your regular day, in what ways do you think about gender in your work**

Overall, the respondents said that they integrate gender approach daily to promote equity and align with EU standards on mainstreaming - as a consequence of the financing and implementation rules.

Female (G.G.) affirmed that setting gender indicators for balanced outcomes is a method that the organization has become accustomed to regardless of whether or not it is an official/formal requirement.

T.C.A. (female) emphasized the need for an inclusive approach for achieving balance in youth activities, managed by a good specialist

S.A. (female) affirmed that women are well represented in Romania's public sector, but some programs from public funds dedicated to young people do not take into account the equal distribution of young women and men (when selecting the beneficiaries).

I.I. affirms that APD has had a gender policy in force since 201. It is published on the website and, although the organization has always had balanced representation in project teams and activities (or favorable to girls and women as a result of their greater involvement), it was adopted after it was found to be useful in European projects.

In conclusion, it appears that external funding rules have a beneficial control over the approach and distribution of gender in projects and activities.

→ **Could you provide any examples to a specific situation in which you think you had difficulties finding a way to integrate the gender perspective into your work / and a specific situation in which you think you did a good job.**

I.I. (female, program manager) said that teams can often be unbalanced in favor of women, as a result of the fact that the staff is predominantly female. When designing projects, the organisation experienced problems in presenting a team that was balanced in terms of gender distribution, and they had to propose an expert from outside the organization.

Based on their experience as youth workers, several respondents (G.G., I.I., M.P.) agreed that in many activities involving civic engagement and participation, young women tend to be more involved in the medium and long term. Therefore, there may be difficulties in achieving balanced representation.

G.G. (youthworker, manager) affirmed that teams struggle with insufficient budgets or training, making it hard to collect gender-disaggregated data or hire gender experts for youth workshops. In small NGOs, overburdening the few persons knowledgeable manifests on asking women to handle all committee. That dilutes efforts because women are not necessary gender experts. Usually, women are interested in gender approach. It would be a solution that more and more men take part in gender training courses, so that they can transfer this knowledge to their work with young people and ensure that activities are approached correctly from a gender perspective.

Professionals encounter resistance from youth or mixed groups viewing gender topics as irrelevant or politically charged, especially in conservative settings in rural areas, where stereotypes persist. Cultural concerns over mixed-gender activities can preempt participation, complicating civic engagement sessions. For example, M.P. related that in some youth activities, parents give their consent for their children to participate based on gender stereotypes: some agree if the youth worker/activity coordinator are male, others if they are female. By involving a man and a woman he tried to solve this problem so as not to compromise the activity. In any case, this is difficult due to the limited budget. In other similar situations, M.P. reported that girls' participation was reduced because the youth worker was a man (the girls' parents did not trust him).

A.S. (lecturer) and V.A.(moderator) agree that sensitive gender issues are not as interesting to young students women and young student men when the group format is mixed. Virtual formats limit rapport-building for gender-sensitive discussions. In one case, V.A.(moderator) had difficulties in discussing sensitive topics like the high rate of femicide in Romania, due to the easiness or lack of worry with which the young men treated the subject and the high level of emotion among young female students.

Non-verbal observations: All participants attentively follow the discussion without any objections. A few engage passively, likely struggling to identify relevant examples or insights on incorporating a gender perspective.

→ **Have you ever found yourself in a situation where: a) you realised gender discrimination is taking place or b) you have been alerted (by a colleague or a young person) that discrimination has taken place? If yes, can you share the example and also how you reacted to it.**

G.G. (female, youthworker) related that during a youth workshop she facilitated, gender discrimination arose when male participants repeatedly interrupted female peers during discussions, dismissing their input as "too emotional" while praising similar points from young men. This reinforced stereotypes and silenced some of the young women, reducing their engagement. As a reaction, she intervened immediately by pausing the session and warning about interruptions and ask them to ensure everyone speaks uninterrupted and reallocating time with a timer to equalize voices.

V.A. (female, moderator) gave examples of panel discussions with male experts to which she was invited as a participant in public. These cases are common, including on TV shows. As a matter of principle, several female professors or experts in the public sphere have refused invitations to conferences where the speakers are exclusively male or have publicly denounced them on social media.

S.A. (female, public officer) reported that in the public sector, there is a stereotype that female employees are responsible for tasks such as making coffee for meetings, so many men in positions of authority, when they enter an office, ask women for coffee even though there are also men in the office.

MP (man, youthworker) said that in some environments he felt suspected from the outset of discriminating simply because he is a man. Sometimes men are also discriminated, therefore, at least in theory, such a possibility must be taken into account. V.A. (moderator) points out that the gender topic should not be approached from an ideological perspective, but strictly as fairness or a functional perspective over the organizational activities, or public policies in the public sector, and the overall efficiency of an organization or institution. If they fail to perform and do not ensure representativeness, it means that they are not being implemented optimally, and then perhaps a number of principles are not being applied correctly. One of these principles is gender.

Non-verbal interest: high degree of interest and agreement.

→ **When you have to report about project activities, do you report anything about gender?**

T.C.A. (youthworker) affirms that has become commonplace to report about gender in progress reports, or monitoring frameworks to ensure EU compliance

G.G. (youthworker) and V.A. (moderator) agree that at present you cannot apply for EU funding for a project unless you address the issue of gender and gender quota regarding the target group.

Moreover, collecting and reporting all activity data separated by sex (women, men, LGBTQ), such as participation rates in workshops or trainings have started to be encouraged by the EU.

Reporting include a dedicated matrix in reports, with columns for planned activities/targets (ex. "50% female participants in training") and achievements (ex. "achieved 52%, with sex-disaggregated outcomes: 65 women trained"). This enables quantitative evaluation.

"Disaggregated data is not collected at the institutional level" affirms S.A. (S.A., working for the General Secretariat of the Government). Although Romania has joined the Open Government

Partnership, which involves the publication of open data, data disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, etc. is scarce and is even blocked by some public authorities because it is considered to pose a risk (e.g., data from criminal proceedings or prisons).

M.P. (youthworker) affirms that from his experience, there are some workshops/training sessions with young people, there are topics that need to be carefully prepared, as they may be sensitive for girls or boys.

Non-verbal behavior: high degree of interest and agreement.

→ **Would you say that as a youth organisation, you have very good / good / moderate / poor knowledge about gender equality and gender mainstreaming?**

Overall, the subjects consider that they have satisfactory but not in-depth knowledge and that staff training on gender issues in terms of content and working methods (exercises) would be welcome.

One respondent (E.I.Z., youthworker) considers that gender is implicitly addressed within the organisation and that balanced recruitment is pursued, but not by any means, such as positive discrimination.

Another respondent (G.G. youthworker) considers that a training on youth would be useful towards skill development as it will equip fellows with tools for gender-disaggregated data collection and inclusive activities planning lead to better project design and monitoring in the organization's projects. V.A. (moderator) adds that a more in-depth training will also help members of organization to identify cultural prejudices and biases.

Non-verbal behavior: Everyone agrees.

→ **Are you aware of any toolkits / guidelines / national or EU level recommendations that can guide youth organisations in including gender into their work? What about games?**

G.G. (female, youthworker, manager) mentions SALTO Gender Equality Toolkit for activities and methodologies to fight discrimination in camps, especially for youth workers.

M.P. (male, youthworker) says that youth projects funded by the Erasmus program integrate EU Tools. In the context of the 2024 European Parliament elections, The Romanian Youth Council called on political parties in Romania to take more measures for inclusion and combating inequalities in a position statement. This included the political representation of persons belonging to minorities, supporting and protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, including by legalizing same-sex marriage and civil partnerships in all EU Member States and protecting the social rights of young people, including issues such as minimum income and the right of young people to decent housing.

Non-verbal behavior: Everyone is interested to hear the existent guidelines/framework.

→ **What kind of measures do you think your organisation would adopt with the aim of strengthening its commitment towards gender equality?**

Better reporting on gender-disaggregated data in order to conduct impact evaluation (G.G., female, youthworker).

A.S. (female, university lecturer) thinks that a possible measure in universities, which, although feminized (more women are professors), are run by men (the vast majority of rectors are men), would be training for decision makers, leaders and all the professors to be more conscious on bias and gender-sensitive approach, while mentoring women for advancement.

V.A. (moderator) added that she thinks the vast majority of university staff need such training, including with regard to perceptions on women's suitability for strategic leadership positions. Many educated people would not vote for or cannot imagine a woman in top positions such as rector. It is not the case for the schools and high-schools.

S.A.(public officer) gave the example of generals in the Romanian Army: from approximately 90 active generals (and about 1,000 retired generals), only six have been women since 1990. In her opinion, the public sector needs training on gender sensitive topics and bias at the top level (political leaders, institutional leaders).

M.C. (female, youthworker) highlights that the E.U. Pay Transparency Directive (2023/970) is a measure that benefits women, who are generally paid less than men for the same work. So the solution is to increase transparency in the workplace regarding pay, promotions, and rewards using performance-based indicators. On the other hand, flexible working (e.g., part-time, remote) would greatly assist parents with children and provide opportunities to work and compete for higher positions without having to be physically present at the office throughout the entire workday. MP (male, youthworker) agrees that it is a necessary solution.

I.A. (female, program manager) says that the organization has had a gender policy in force since 2016 and that it can be extended to the leadership level (board of directors), where quotas can be introduced, but that, given that members are no longer as numerous as they were 10 years ago (hundreds of members), it could be difficult and would complicate the task of the General Assembly to select the proper persons.

Non-verbal behavior: Some of the respondents begin to lose focus.

### **Perceptions on gender equality**

→ **When you think about gender equality, what comes to your mind?**

T.C.A. (female youthworker) made a correlation with double working day (office and home) and equal pay for equal work (in private sector).

G.G. (female youthworker, manager) says that in Romania, at this very moment, the first thing that comes to her mind regarding to gender equality is inequities in public sphere and violence prevention. She pointed out that Romania faces a severe crisis with femicide, marked by persistent high rates of women killed primarily by intimate partners. (e.g. Reports indicate roughly one murder of a woman per week, alongside systemic failures in victim protection). She also added that the society use double

standards for women and men in public sphere. Women's success in top public/political positions is often seen as being linked to help from men. Women are also criticized more harshly when they reach such positions and in ways that relate to personal attributes (how they look, how they dress, previous relationships with men). In this context, A.S. (female, univ. lecturer) said that she correlates women effort with loyalty and harder work than men.

Non-verbal behavior: high degree of reflection.

→ **Do you think that gender plays any role in your work? May it be for you, for somebody else in your organisation or for the work that you do with youth?**

Everyone agreed that it's important to integrate gender in youthwork as young people must be exposed to experience inclusion, stereotypes, and equal treatment and opportunities.

V.A. (moderator) concluded, in relation to the previous discussions, that gender perspective shapes program design, facilitation, and outcomes, especially in social and institutional contexts where traditional norms persist alongside EU-driven reforms (e.g. reporting disaggregated data, etc.). Because the rules on gender mainstreaming are mandatory, changes begin to be seen more quickly.

Non-verbal behavior: high agreement.

### 3.2. Brief analysis of the discussion group

- Participants rarely lead projects dedicated on gender equality but incorporate it transversally to meet EU standards, like setting gender-balanced indicators.
- Daily work in civil society organizations require gender considerations for equity, though some respondents noted challenges regarding unbalanced teams (often female-dominated), resistance in mixed youth groups to sensitive topics (e.g., femicide), budget limits for gender experts, and cultural stereotypes in rural areas.
- Participants agree that data disaggregated by sex shall not be centralized unless it is a mandatory requirement in European projects. The vast majority of public institutions are reluctant to centralize open disaggregated data.
- Discrimination examples discussed in the focus group include interrupting female participants while they are speaking, "coffee-serving" stereotypes for female public employees, and panel discussions with all-male experts. Apparently effective control measures involved interventions, timers for equal speaking, or boycott and public denunciation on social media.
- Toolkits like SALTO Gender Equality are known by all the participants. Training needs on gender issues should focus on biases identifying, data collection, and inclusive planning.
- External EU funding rules effectively enforce gender mainstreaming, leading to quicker changes despite persistent institutional or cultural norms and stereotypes (double standards for women and men in public roles, role assignment by gender, etc).
- Pay transparency (EU Directive), flexible work and men training on gender are expected to boost equality

## 4. Focus groups with youth

No of participants: 12. The participants were students aged between 20 and 23, 6 young men and 6 young women.

Moderator: Viviana Anghel (APD)

Date, location and duration of FG: Bucharest, 18/11/2025, 1 h 50'.

### 4.1. Key findings

#### Do you think the same rules apply to people of all genders?

G.M.C. (female, 20): „Sometimes, equal opportunities are just words because, in my case, I felt discriminated against because of my age, gender, and ethnicity when applying for a job. I feel discriminated against because, at 21, employers expect me to have experience, and because I don't, they use that against us to make us work harder or earn less.”

C.A. (male, 21) agrees and argues that equal treatment is not applied even though equal opportunities are guaranteed by law. For this reason, she gave up the idea of getting a job during college.

Non-verbal behavior: consensus.

#### Do you think there are roles that are more suitable for people with different gender identities?

The moderator explains to them that while some studies (in a biological approach rather than a social one) note average differences in traits like physical strength or risk-taking between sexes, but these are not confirmed in social studies. Therefore, biological traits do not dictate social/professional role suitability. The role performance depends mostly on individual skills, motivation and experience. Gender identities, including non-binary ones are not determinants for some activities or role performing.

C.I. (female, 23) says that in high school she wanted to attend military pilot school. Although she passed some simulated theoretical tests, she was discouraged to apply to admission exam by an aviation commander she interacted with at the pilot school. He told her that it would be difficult for a girl and presented the female menstruation as an argument. Her parents did not encourage her to continue pursuing her dream.

Some girls have self-esteem issues because they weren't encouraged to represent oneself but if they make it to college, things change for the better and the barrier is broken (C.I., female)

Non-verbal behavior: male students look surprised.

**Have you heard, at school / in youth organizations / from friends / in the family / on social media, what is expected of women, men, and non-binary people? How should they behave, what is expected of them, how should they look?**

Students say that there are family roles that women tend to take on more and others that men tend to take on more. This is the case in their families (G.B.I., female, R.G., female). Everyone agrees.

Furthermore, students say that there are family roles that women take on more and others that men take on more. This is the case in their families (G.B.I, female, R.G. female). Everyone agrees. Girls were told from an early age to play with dolls and were encouraged to engage in domestic games or activities (cooking, taking care of baby dolls). Boys and girls are taught to wear certain colors. Boys are encouraged not to cry, while girls are said to be more sensitive. A.C. replies and confirms that this is what he was taught.

Non-verbal behavior: The other students nod their heads.

**Which activities organized by the association do you like the most? Why do you like them? During these activities, do you think there are differences between the behavior of boys, girls, and non-binary people? Is everyone involved in the same way? Does everyone speak to the same extent? Who are usually the leaders of the groups?**

„I don't care about someone's sexual orientation or whether they are male or female. I get involved in the same way. We have some gay colleagues and I don't care.” (N.M. A. male, student)

APD is definitely a safe place for such discussions, as is the university. She would definitely trust the association to address or ask for advice if she felt discriminated against. (N.B.D., female)  
She said that based on her volunteering experience, NGO environment is a „politically correct”.

Volunteering activities offer the best opportunities to get to know others, and the National School for Democracy which is organized annually in August offers intensive training courses where they had the opportunity to reflect on gender issues (P.M.A., female). The Youth Parliament (organizes annually) has a committee on human rights and equal opportunities (P.M.A., female).

Non-verbal behavior: The participants (6) in the above mentioned programs agreed.  
The rest of the respondents listened attentively.

**Is there anything you would change in the association? Have you ever felt treated differently or discriminated against because of your gender? If so, did you talk to someone about it?**

„As long as everyone's work is evaluated using the same measure, there is no problem” (G.M.,male).

G.M. continues: There may be a problem not in APD but everywhere with too many women being promoted just because they are women. (e.g. positive discrimination). I don't want to feel discriminated against just because I'm a man and have to be eliminated in order for the quota to be applied.

This remark was followed by an explanation from the moderator showing why positive discrimination is necessary sometimes.

Note: APD has several women in key staff positions, including that of volunteer coordinator. Overall, it has always had balanced workforce: at the moment, the staff is dominated by women, while the Board of Directors is dominated by men (4 from 5) and, for the first time in 35 years, from 2025, is led by a woman (chair).

#### 4.2. Brief analysis of the discussion group

- There is evidence of perceived discrimination in the labor market against the respondents in terms of access and working conditions, and against women in terms of pay and promotion. In this context, participants expressed skepticism that legal "equal opportunities" translate to "equal treatment" in reality. There is a perception that employers use the young people's lack of experience as a tool to force young people to work harder for less pay;
- One female participant (20) reported feeling discriminated based on her age, gender, and ethnicity when applying for jobs (Intersectionality);
- Stereotypes regarding assigned social and professional roles discourage individuals from pursuing certain career plans. female participant shared that she was discouraged from becoming a military pilot by a commander who cited menstruation as a barrier. Familial support appear as missing factor for women pursuing non-traditional roles.
- Participants agreed that while some girls struggle with self-esteem due to a lack of early encouragement, the NGO and university environment often helps break these perceived barriers.
- There was a strong consensus that traditional gender roles are still prevalent in family structures and this perception is rooted in childhood conditioning. Girls were encouraged toward domestic activities (cooking, dolls), while boys were taught to suppress emotions ("boys don't cry"). There are expectations regarding the colors boys and girls wear, as well as behavioral traits associated with gender. For example, girls are more sensitive, and boys are not allowed to cry.
- The NGO environment and the university are generally viewed as "safe places" for inclusive discussion.
- It seems that programs with intensive training content (3-5 days) have an impact on participants. Programs like the National School for Democracy were highlighted as essential spaces for reflecting on gender issues or even where participants became more aware of it.
- There is a potential for greater concern over possible "positive discrimination" taken to extremes as a male participant voiced concerns regarding quotas, fearing that it might lead to qualified men being eliminated solely to meet gender targets.