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# Gender Roles and Attitudes towards Family Life and Paid Work in Romania

Andra-Bertha SĂNDULEASA<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam included the gender component in all European Community policies, establishing that the principle of equal treatment is a fundamental right. Since then, Member States formulated and promoted various policies and measures to combat inequalities. On the other hand, employment strategies in the European Union laid stress on the importance and on the need to increase labour market participation of women. Attitudes to gender roles are crucial in terms of women's participation in the labour market. European Commission reported that the attitudes of European families are sometimes positive, sometimes negative, and sometimes ambivalent in relation to policies on gender equality. A process of "re-traditionalisation" is also mentioned, especially in the case of post-socialist countries (European Commission, 2013). On the other hand, family policies have an important role in facilitating the growth of the employment rates among women, but they do not necessarily produce changes in attitudes to gender roles (Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008). The paper presents an analysis regarding the roles that Romanian men and women play on the social reality scene with regards to the attitudes and preferences towards paid work and family life.*

## Keywords:

*Gender roles; Attitudes; Work-life balance; Labour market; Family policies.*

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### **Introduction**

The condition of women in society has been intensively debated in the last decades (Sanduleasa & Matei, 2011). Since 1975, the importance given to ensuring basic human rights increased together with the development of directives that have supported the principle of equality between women and men in relation to working conditions, training and promotion, social security, access to goods and services, maternity protection and parental leave. In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam included the gender component in all European Community policies, establishing that the principle of equal treatment is a fundamental right. Since then, Member States have formulated and promoted various policies and measures to combat inequality, drawing attention to the importance and the need to increase female labour market participation rates. The European Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 shows that increasing female labour market participation helps to counteract the effects of population aging, and the Member States that have promoted policies to balance work and family life recorded higher labour market participation rates among both women and men, and relatively high birth rates also.

In Western Europe, the employment rates of women with young children have grown rapidly, and the trend was accompanied by a greater acceptance of non-traditional roles of women. In Eastern Europe, after the fall of socialism, there has been a downward trend in female employment and economic changes appear to have led to a revival of the traditional model in terms of gender roles (Motiejunaite & Kravchenko, 2008). In a report by the European Commission it is showed that the attitudes of European families are sometimes positive, sometimes negative, and sometimes ambivalent in relation to policies promoting gender equality. There is even talk about a process of "re-traditionalizing" especially if post-socialist countries (European Commission, 2013). Therefore, the extent to which reforms and institutions of European countries may contribute to increase the labour market participation rates among women is still under debate.

Some scientists argue that the behaviour of women between paid work and family life can be explained by the Welfare state policies such as public childcare provision (Siim 2000; Lewis & Astrom 1998; Morgan 2005). But cultural values also contribute to the explanation of the behaviour of women between family and employment, because culture

interacts with welfare state policies (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Family culture, by its values related to gender roles and the division of domestic work, the division of childcare provision and the degree of dependence or autonomy of the spouses, varies from a society to another and is subject to change. At The Employment Policy Conference Jobs for Europe in 2012, Professor Randzio-Plath from University of Hamburg argued that gender role models affect the balance between work and family life and despite the increase of female employment rates, gender gaps with regards to work life balance still exist.

As an eastern European country, Romania experienced a smaller gender employment gap during communism when the State encouraged women's participation on labour market. The post-socialist picture is very different with regards to women's participation on labour market in Romania, which conducts to the idea that the evolution of the gender gap in employment reflects the variety of socio-cultural, institutional and economic factors. Although the Romanian legislation includes provisions related to gender equality, women are majoritarian among the employed population with low educational level, despite the fact that most people of higher education graduates are female (Sanduleasa, 2009).

This paper uses analysis of official statistics regarding female participation on labour market in Romania. Moreover, using data from three waves of the European Values Study (1990, 1999, and 2008), the paper aims to capture possible variations in gender role attitudes regarding family and paid work, two aspects of life influenced by the changes in family culture. For the three waves of the European Values Study, representative multi-stage or stratified random samples of the adult population were used. The results were weighted to adjust the sample distribution by gender and age. Descriptive statistical methods were used, both numerical and graphical.

### **1. Labour market experiences of Romanian women**

In order to better understand the situation of females on labour market, female employment rates must be analysed by age groups, educational levels and also in relation to family situation (presence of children).

### 1.1. Europe 2020 targets in employment and educational attainment

In the area of tertiary education, the Europe 2020 Strategy set as headline target that at least 40% of persons aged between 30-34 years should have a tertiary or equivalent qualification by 2020. Figure 1 shows the position of Romania in relation to the European Union target and the EU28 average with regards to tertiary attainment rate among population aged 30 to 34 years. Although Romania has one of the lowest targets in EU (26.7%), the share of population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education in 2013 is below the national target, meaning that efforts need to be done in order to meet the national target by 2020. To be noticed that the total share is lowered by the share of men aged 30-34, in which case only 21.2% completed tertiary education in 2013.

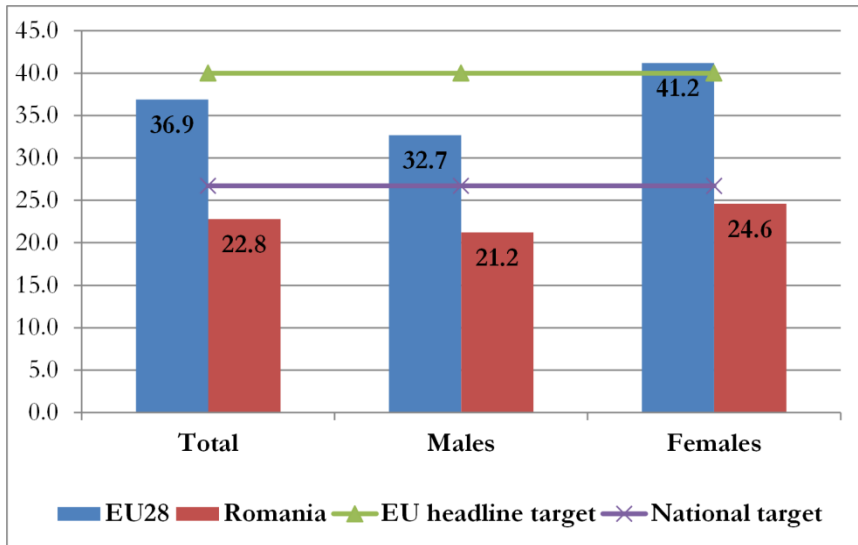
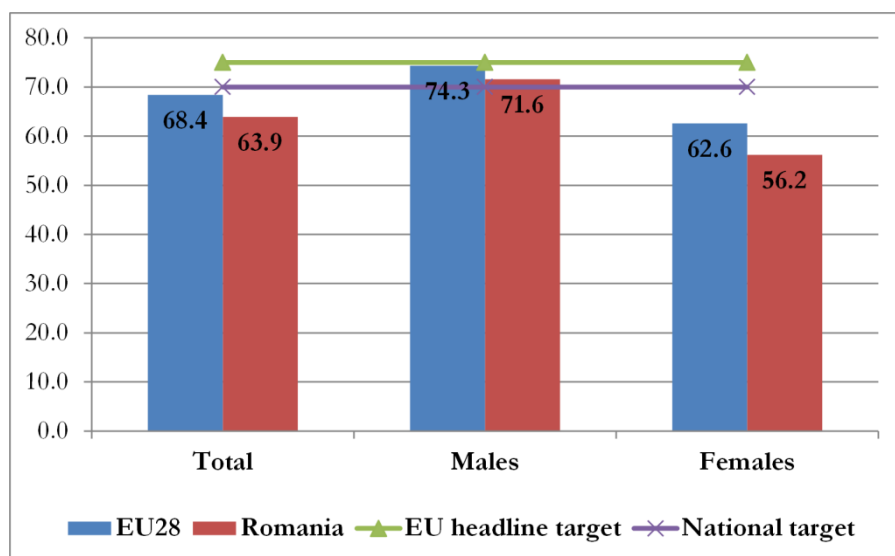


Fig. 1 – Tertiary attainment rate 2013, Europe 2020 targets

**Source:** Eurostat Data Explorer, online data code: edat\_lfse\_07.

**Note:** Tertiary attainment rate represents the share of population aged 30 to 34 having completed tertiary education.



**Fig. 2 – Employment rate (20-64 age group) 2013, Europe 2020 headline target and national target**

**Source:** Eurostat Data Explorer, online data code: lfsa\_organ.

**Note:** Employment rate represents employed persons as a percentage of same age total population.

With regards to labour market participation, the Europe 2020 Strategy sets a goal of labour market participation of 75% for women and men aged 20 to 64 by 2020. The Romanian target regarding the employment rate for the population aged 20 to 64 years is of 70%. Romania has one of the lowest targets in EU regarding the employment rate also. Looking at the employment rate of male population aged 20 to 64 in 2013 (Figure 2), we could say that Romania already met the national target. Yet, the gender gap is high, which is why the total employment rate of population aged 20 to 64 is lowered by the reduced value of this indicator in the case of female population (only 56.2%).

## 1.2. Employment rates by gender and educational attainment

Employment rates are significantly higher among women with a tertiary education than among low-educated women, both in Romania's case and at European level (Table 1). This translates into a lower gender

employment gap in the case of women with tertiary education and a higher gender employment gap in the case of women with lower educational levels. Low-educated women from Romania have an employment rate slightly above 40%, which translates into an employment gap of 20 percentage points, compared to women with a tertiary education in which case the gender employment gap is only around 4 percentage points. This means that more needs to be done regarding the integration of low-educated women in the labour market, both in Romania and at European level. As seen in Table 2, the gender employment gap is generally more pronounced in case of age groups 30-39 and 50-59, both in Romania and at European level. Gender employment gap represents percentage point difference between the employment rates for men and for women.

**Table 1. Women’s employment rates (ER) and the gender employment gap (GG) by educational attainment in Romania and EU28, age cohort 15-64, 2013.**

	All ISCED levels		ISCED levels 0-2		ISCED levels 3-4		ISCED levels 5-8	
	ER	GG	ER	GG	ER	GG	ER	GG
EU28	63.9	11.7	42.7	18.9	65.6	11.6	79.4	6.7
Romania	58.6	15.4	44.6	20.2	58.7	15.8	82.0	3.7

**Source:** Eurostat Data Explorer -Labour Force Survey, online data code: lfst\_hheredch.

**Note:** 2011 ISCED levels: 0-2 - less than primary, primary and lower secondary; 3-4 - upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary; 5-8 - short-cycle tertiary, bachelor, master and doctoral or equivalent.

**Table 2. Women’s employment rates and the gender employment gap by age group in Romania and EU28, age cohort 15-64, 2013.**

	Gender Gap		Employment Rate	
	EU28	Romania	EU28	Romania
15-24 years	3.7	7.7	30.4	19.6
25-29 years	9.4	10.6	65.7	62.0
30-34 years	13.3	14.4	69.8	68.0
35-39 years	13.0	13.9	72.2	71.3
40-44 years	11.5	13.6	73.8	72.1
45-49 years	10.2	14	74.1	70.8
50-54 years	11.1	17.9	70.2	60.7
55-59 years	13.7	22.6	58.1	42.1
60-64 years	14.3	14.1	27.6	22.3

**Source:** Eurostat Data Explorer - Labour Force Survey, online data code: lfsa\_ergan.

### 1.3. The impact of parenthood on employment

The impact of parenthood on employment rates is different for women and men both in Romania’s case and at EU28 level. Women’s employment rates generally decrease, while men’s increase, as the number of children is growing. As a consequence, the gender gap in employment widens significantly as the number of children increased (Table 3). The data show that the traditional model regarding the gendered division of childcare still exists both in Romania and at EU level. Thus, the average gender employment gap in the EU28 area is of 7.9 percentage points for childless persons as against of 27.4 points for persons with three or more children. In the case of Romania, the average gender employment gap is of 13.8 percentage points for childless persons and of 25.5 points for persons with three or more children. To be noted that the gender employment gap is higher in the case of Romania as compared to EU28 for childless persons, while in the case of persons with 3 or more children the situation is reversed.

So, parenthood is one of factors underlying the gender employment gaps since women in Romania are the ones who generally



involve in childcare duties especially when care services are lacking or not meeting the needs of parents who are engaged in full-time paid work. Romania is present among the countries that experience shortfalls in the provision of formal childcare services and parents have to find solutions for the lack of full-time childcare facilities.

**Table 3. Women’s employment rates (ER) and the gender employment gap (GG) by presence of children in Romania and EU28, age cohort 15-64, 2013.**

	No children		1 child		2 children		3 children or more	
	ER	GG	ER	GG	ER	GG	ER	GG
EU28	62.1	7.9	67.7	13.7	67.7	19.0	54.0	27.4
Romania	55.0	13.8	63.8	16.0	63.4	17.0	47.7	25.5

**Source:** Eurostat Data Explorer - Labour Force Survey, online data code: lfst\_hheredch.

**Note:** Gender employment gap represents percentage point difference between the employment rates for men and for women.

In 2012, only 15% of children younger than three years and less than 60% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age were enrolled in formal care (Eurostat Data Explorer - SILC, 2014). These figures are far from meeting the Barcelona targets regarding childcare provision (33% coverage rate for children under three years and 90% coverage rate for children between three years old and the mandatory school age, by 2010).

## 2. Changes in gender role attitudes

Based on the data from the three mentioned waves of the European Values Study (1990, 1999, and 2008), the analysis is focused on three theoretical dimensions of gender role attitudes measured by items contained by all three survey questionnaires: egalitarian views on gender roles inside the house, measured by the item “*Important in marriage to share household chores?*”; egalitarian views on gender roles outside the

house, measured by the item “Both the husband and wife should contribute to household income”; impact of paid work on motherhood, measured by the item “A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work”.

Figure 3 shows that before 2008, the support for gender equality within the household was higher among the female population as compared to males, which means that women expressed more egalitarian views than men in the past. The longitudinal trends show that in the 2008 wave, the percentage of people considering that sharing household chores is *very important* is similar for Romanian men and women.

According to Figure 4, the majority of population supports the fact that both husband and wife should contribute to household income, in all three periods of time (1990, 1999, 2008). Overall, in 2008 around 87% of male population and 88% of female population considered that both spouses should have paid jobs, so the differences between the views of men and the ones of women were rather insignificant. Still, support for the dual earner model is higher among women as compared to men: almost 45% of women considered very important that both the husband and the wife contribute to household income, while the percentage of men with the same opinion was around 40% in 2008.

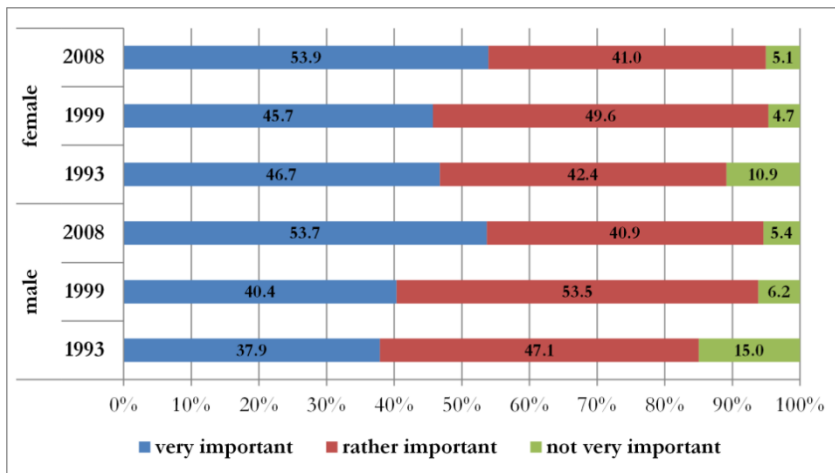
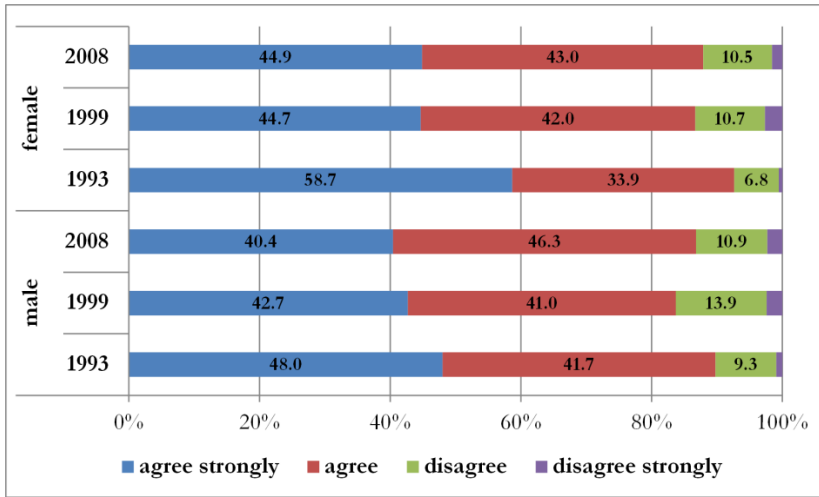


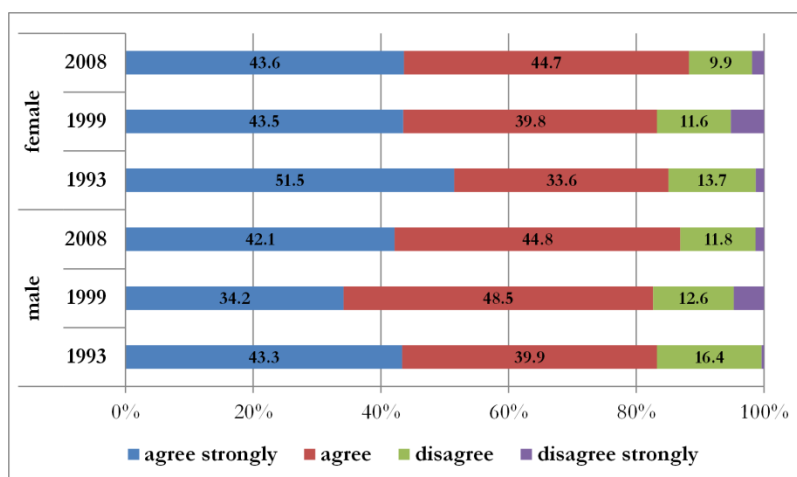
Fig. 3 –The importance in marriage to share household chores (%)



**Fig. 4 –Agreement with the statement: Both husband and wife should contribute to household income (%)**

The longitudinal trends show that Romanians lowered their support for the dual earner model between 1990 and 2008, especially in the case of women: 13.8 percentage point difference between 1990 and 2008 in the case of women and only 7.6 percentage point difference in the case of male population. This result converged with the ascending trend regarding the gender employment gap in Romania in the last years may suggest that the reduced female participation on labour market is also determined by their changing attitude with regards to the dual earner model.

Overall, the percentage of population who *agreed* and *strongly agreed* with the fact that a working mother is able to establish just as worm and secure a relationship with her children as a non-working mother increased between 1993 and 2008 both in case of female respondents and in the case of male respondents (Figure 5). When analysing separately the respondents who *strongly agreed* with the fact that a working mother is able to establish just as worm and secure a relationship with her children as a non-working mother, it can be seen that only 43.3% of men *strongly agreed* with the statement in 1993 as compared with 51.5% in the case of women, while in 2008 the difference between men and women reduced significantly due to the drop of the percentage of women who *strongly agreed* with the statement from 51.5% in 1993 to 43.6% in 2008.



**Fig. 5 –Agreement with the statement: A working mother can establish a warm relationship with her children (%)**

### Conclusions

This paper investigates the dynamics of women’s participation on labour market and three dimensions of gender role attitudes in Romania: egalitarian views on gender roles inside the house, egalitarian views on gender roles outside the house and attitudes about the effects of maternal employment. The results indicate that the Romanian population supports female employment even in the case of mothers. Over the three periods of time included in the analysis, results show that progress towards more egalitarian gender role attitudes has been made by Romanians, regardless of sex. Still, women continue to assume most of the responsibilities within the household, for which reason the impact of parenthood on labour market participation is different for women and men in Romania. The analysis on gender role attitudes will be further developed by exploring, in direct dependence of data availability, the relation between gender and other important variables such as employment status, level of education, marital status and presence of children in the construction and evolution of gender role attitudes.

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### **Biodata**



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