

COMBATING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN ROMANIA: LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AND JUDICIAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT: *Gender discrimination remains a persistent issue in Romania despite comprehensive legal frameworks and policy measures. This article provides an academic analysis of gender discrimination, outlining its conceptual definitions and prevalent forms - especially direct and indirect discrimination - and reviewing the legal framework at both European Union (EU) and national levels. It presents empirical evidence of gender inequalities in Romania using the Gender Equality Index and Eurostat data, highlighting significant gaps in employment and other indicators in comparison to EU averages. The article also examines institutional responses, including a comparative case analysis of *Emel Boyraz vs. Turkey* and *SC Terapia SA vs. CNCD (Romania)*, to illustrate the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in practice. The findings reveal that while Romania has aligned its legislation with EU standards, challenges remain in effective implementation. The conclusions offer policy implications, identify current gaps - such as cultural stereotypes and enforcement difficulties - and propose recommendations to advance gender equality.*

KEY WORDS: *gender discrimination, equal opportunities, gender equality index, employment gap, anti-discrimination law.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *J16, J71, K38.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Discrimination refers to the unfavourable or unfair treatment of an individual or group based on their membership in a certain category or class. Sociologically, it involves behaviours by which a person or institution restricts the rights and opportunities of members of the targeted group. Legally, Romanian law defines discrimination in broad terms as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference” based on criteria such as sex, race, religion, etc., that has the purpose or effect of impairing equal recognition or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In essence, discrimination can manifest in various forms and domains, including

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employment, education, access to services, and social life (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

Direct discrimination occurs when one person is treated less favourably than another in a comparable situation specifically because of a protected characteristic (e.g. gender). For example, a rule or decision explicitly denying a promotion to a woman because she is a woman would constitute direct gender discrimination. By contrast, indirect discrimination involves practices or criteria that appear neutral but disproportionately disadvantage a particular group. An example is a requirement or policy that is the same for everyone but in effect places women at a significant disadvantage, absent a legitimate and proportionate justification. These two forms are the most common mechanisms through which gender inequality is perpetuated, and both are prohibited by law. Other related forms include harassment (unwanted hostile or humiliating behaviour) and sexual harassment, as well as multiple discrimination (intersectional disadvantage based on several criteria, e.g. being a woman from an ethnic minority). All such forms contribute to psychological, economic, and social harm for those affected (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

Despite legal protections, gender-based discrimination persists in Romania's society and labour market. The following sections discuss the legal and institutional framework established to combat gender discrimination, present key quantitative indicators of gender inequality, and analyse how institutions respond to discrimination cases. Through this analysis, we aim to assess the effectiveness of current measures and identify areas for improvement in addressing gender discrimination in Romania (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY

As an EU member state, Romania's approach to gender discrimination is grounded in European legislation. The EU has developed a robust body of law to ensure equal treatment for men and women. Early measures included Council Directive 75/117/EEC (1975) on equal pay for equal work and Council Directive 76/207/EEC (1976) on equal treatment in employment, vocational training, promotion, and working conditions. These were foundational in eliminating explicit gender discrimination in hiring and workplace practices. Over time, EU law expanded to cover social security (Directive 79/7/EEC on equal treatment in social security) and protections for pregnant workers (Directive 92/85/EEC on maternity health and safety). A major consolidation was achieved with Directive 2006/54/EC (the "Recast" Directive), which unified and updated previous directives on equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in employment. This directive clarifies the prohibition of both direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace, including in pay, promotions, and working conditions, and it explicitly allows positive actions to promote gender equality. Another important measure is Directive 2004/113/EC, which extends equal treatment requirements to the access to and supply of goods and services. More recently, the EU adopted Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and caregivers, which introduced modern provisions for paternity leave, parental leave, and flexible working arrangements to better balance family and work responsibilities. These EU

directives set minimum standards that member states, including Romania, are obligated to transpose into national law. (Council of the EEC, 1975) (Council of the EEC, 1976) (Council of the EEC, 1978) (European Council, 1992) (European Parliament & Council, 2006) (European Council, 2004) (European Parliament & Council, 2019)

Gender equality represents a fundamental principle of the European Union, enshrined both in primary EU law and in a complex body of secondary legislation. The legal foundation of gender equality at EU level can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome (1957), which introduced the principle of equal pay for women and men for equal work, later reaffirmed in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

The first binding legislative instrument explicitly addressing gender-based pay discrimination was Council Directive 75/117/EEC, which obliged Member States to eliminate all forms of direct and indirect discrimination regarding remuneration (Council of the EEC, 1975). This directive clarified that equal pay applies not only to identical work, but also to work of equal value, thus laying the groundwork for later jurisprudence and legislative developments (Council of the EEC, 1975).

Subsequently, Council Directive 76/207/EEC significantly expanded the scope of gender equality by introducing the principle of equal treatment between women and men in access to employment, vocational training, promotion, and working conditions (Council of the EEC, 1976). This directive marked a decisive shift from a narrow focus on pay equality toward a broader understanding of structural discrimination affecting women's professional trajectories (Council of the EEC, 1976).

Over time, EU gender equality legislation evolved to address specific vulnerabilities, including maternity and social protection. Directive 92/85/EEC introduced protective measures for pregnant workers and women who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, while Directive 79/7/EEC extended equal treatment principles to statutory social security schemes (European Council, 1992; European Council, 1978; Council of the EEC, 1978; European Council, 1992).

A major consolidation of EU gender equality law occurred with the adoption of Directive 2006/54/EC, commonly referred to as the "Recast Directive". This instrument unified previous directives and explicitly prohibited both direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and sexual harassment, in employment and occupation (European Parliament & Council, 2006). Importantly, the directive allows for positive action measures, recognizing that formal equality alone is insufficient to address persistent gender imbalances (European Parliament & Council, 2006).

More recently, EU policy has shifted toward addressing the structural causes of gender inequality, particularly the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers introduced minimum standards for paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave, and flexible working arrangements (European Parliament & Council, 2019). This directive reflects the EU's acknowledgment that gender equality on the labour market cannot be achieved without redistributing care responsibilities between women and men (European Parliament & Council, 2019).

National Legal Framework: Romania's Constitution guarantees equality for all citizens without discrimination. In addition, several key pieces of legislation form the

national anti-discrimination framework. The primary law is Government Ordinance No. 137/2000, concerning the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination. This ordinance (as amended by Law 324/2006) defines discrimination in line with EU and international standards and establishes that discriminatory acts (including those based on gender) are violations subject to legal sanctions. It provides for remedies and assigns enforcement to a specialized agency. Government Ordinance No. 137/2000 provides a comprehensive legal definition of discrimination, covering any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on sex or other protected characteristics, which results in the restriction or annulment of the exercise of fundamental rights (Government of Romania, 2006). The ordinance explicitly recognizes direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and multiple discrimination as prohibited forms of conduct (Government of Romania, 2006).

Another fundamental act is Law No. 202/2002 on Equal Opportunities and Treatment between Women and Men, which specifically addresses gender equality in all spheres of public and private life. Law 202/2002's purpose is to promote equal opportunities and eliminate gender-based discrimination, and it explicitly states that maternity cannot be a ground for discrimination. For instance, any less favourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity leave is deemed discrimination under this law. Law 202/2002 also transposed various EU gender equality directives into Romanian law, ensuring alignment with European standards (such as those on social security, workplace safety for pregnant workers, equal access to goods and services, and equal treatment in employment). The Romanian Labour Code likewise prohibits discrimination in employment on grounds of sex (among other criteria), reinforcing these principles in labour relations (Government of Romania, 2002) (Government of Romania, 2003).

Law No. 202/2002 constitutes the cornerstone of Romanian gender equality legislation. Its objective is to promote equal opportunities between women and men across all areas of public and private life, including employment, education, health, political participation, culture, and access to goods and services (Government of Romania, 2002). Article 10 of the law expressly stipulates that maternity cannot constitute grounds for discrimination, and that any less favourable treatment related to pregnancy or maternity leave represents discrimination *per se* (Government of Romania, 2002).

The Romanian legal framework has been progressively strengthened through a series of legislative amendments. Law No. 178/2018 introduced the legal definition of gender-based violence and regulated the professions of gender equality expert and technician, thereby enhancing institutional capacity (Parliament of Romania, 2018a). Law No. 232/2018 reinforced sanctions for harassment and sexual harassment, including fines applicable in both public and private settings (Parliament of Romania, 2018b). Institutionally, the enforcement of gender equality norms in Romania relies on several key actors (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

- The National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), responsible for investigating complaints, issuing binding decisions, and imposing administrative sanctions (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024);

- The National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES), tasked with coordinating gender equality policies;
- Labour Inspectorates, which oversee compliance with employment legislation;
- Judicial courts, which ensure judicial protection and compensation for victims.

Despite this robust normative and institutional framework, multiple studies indicate that enforcement remains uneven, and access to remedies is often limited by lack of awareness, fear of retaliation, and procedural complexity (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024). To implement and monitor these laws, Romania has established dedicated institutions.

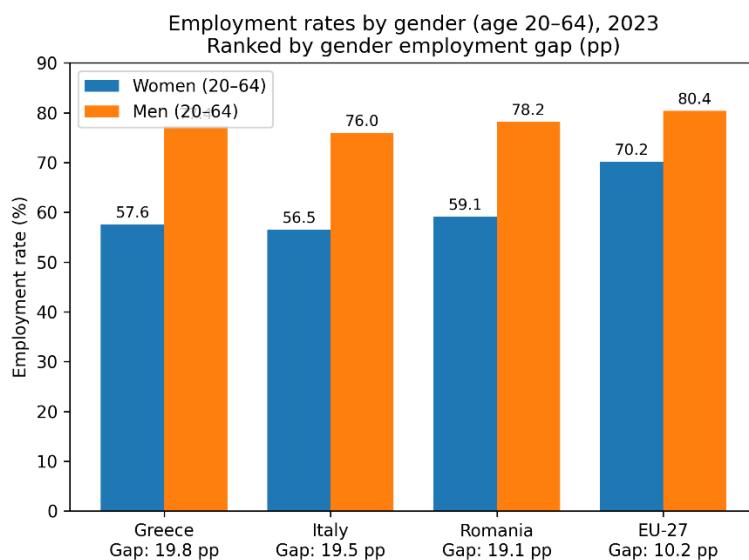
The National Council for Combatting Discrimination (Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării, CNCD) is an independent body created under OG 137/2000 that is empowered to investigate discrimination complaints, issue findings, and apply sanctions (usually fines) for discriminatory acts. The CNCD operates as a quasi-judicial administrative body and has dealt with numerous gender discrimination cases in employment and other fields. Romania has also set up the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (Agenția Națională pentru Egalitate de Șanse, ANES), which is responsible for formulating and implementing gender equality policies. Under Law 202/2002, an inter-institutional commission (CONES) was created to coordinate gender equality measures across ministries and local authorities.

Overall, Romania's legal framework is largely harmonized with EU directives and international conventions such as CEDAW (UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). On paper, direct and indirect gender discrimination, harassment, and unequal treatment in virtually all areas of public life are prohibited. The challenge, however, lies in implementation. The mere existence of laws is not always sufficient; their effectiveness depends on awareness, willingness to enforce, and individuals' readiness to assert their rights. Indeed, Romanian legislation meets European standards (for example, reflecting the principles of Directive 76/207/CEE on equal treatment), but its application often depends on the vigilance of employees and the courage to report abuses. This suggests a gap between formal legal equality and actual practice, a theme further explored through empirical data and case studies below (Council of the EEC, 1976).

3. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN ROMANIA

The gender employment gap - the difference between the employment rates of men and women - is especially high in Romania. As of 2023, Romania's employment rate for women (ages 20-64) was about 59.1%, compared to 78.2% for men. This is a gap of roughly 19 percentage points, nearly double the EU's overall gender gap of 10.2 points (EU female employment 70.2% vs. male 80.4%). In fact, Romania is among a handful of EU countries with the largest gender employment disparities - alongside Italy and Greece, which have similarly large gaps around 19-20 points. Such figures imply that a significantly smaller proportion of working-age women are in paid employment compared to men in Romania. The underlying causes include both demand-side and supply-side factors: women often face barriers in the labor market, including discriminatory hiring practices and a lack of support for balancing work and

family duties, and many women are effectively excluded from the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities (Eurostat, 2024).



Source: Eurostat and EIGE. (EIGE, 2024) (Eurostat, 2024)

Figure 1. Employment rates by gender (age 20-64, 2023) in the EU average and selected countries (Italy, Greece, Romania)

The chart highlights Romania's large gender gap in employment, with women's employment rate lagging far behind men's (Eurostat, 2024).

The persistently wide employment gap is closely linked to traditional gender roles in care work. Romanian women spend more time on unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks, which affects their labor market participation. A considerably higher share of women works part-time or step out of the workforce to care for children or elderly family members, whereas men's employment patterns are less affected by caregiving. EU-wide data show that women are much more likely than men to be outside full-time employment for care reasons. This pattern holds in Romania as well. Women's overrepresentation in unpaid care work leads many to accept reduced working hours or career interruptions. Notably, working part-time does not equate to working less overall - many women devote those "missing" work hours to family duties. The economic cost of the gender employment gap in the EU has been estimated at around €370 billion per year in lost productivity and income. Romania's under-utilization of women's talents contributes to this loss (Eurostat, 2024).

Beyond employment rates, other inequality indicators reflect gender imbalances. For instance, Romania has a substantial gender pay gap (the difference in average earnings between men and women), though this gap is partly moderated by the generally lower wage levels and lower female labor force participation (meaning many

of the least economically active women are not included in wage statistics).

Additionally, women in Romania are underrepresented in senior management and decision-making positions, whether in companies or public institutions, which correlates with the low scores in the “power” domain of the Gender Equality Index. These disparities are compounded in rural areas and poorer regions of the country, where traditional norms often limit women’s opportunities. Indeed, regional data show that less developed areas have higher gender employment gaps than urban centers. For example, in some eastern regions of Romania, the gender gap in employment exceeds 20 percentage points, among the highest in Europe. Such intra-country variation indicates that national averages can mask even more severe pockets of inequality. (EIGE, 2024) (Eurostat, 2024)

Table 1. Female and male employment rates and gender gap in 2023 for EU countries with the largest disparities

Country	Female Employment (%)	Male Employment (%)	Gender Gap (%)
Italy	56.5	76.0	19.5
Greece	57.6	77.4	19.8
Romania	59.1	78.2	19.1

Source: Eurostat (2023) and EIGE calculations. (EIGE, 2024) (Eurostat, 2024)

The data illustrate that Romania is among the EU countries with the lowest female employment and highest gender gaps, comparable to Italy and Greece. (Employment rate is the percentage of population aged 20-64 in work) (Eurostat, 2024).

Labour market participation constitutes one of the most critical areas of gender inequality in Romania. According to Eurostat data, in 2023 the employment rate of women aged 20-64 was 59.1%, compared to 78.2% for men, resulting in a gender employment gap of 19.1 percentage points, nearly double the EU average (Eurostat, 2024).

Importantly, part-time employment should not be interpreted as reduced work effort. On the contrary, the data indicate that women perform a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care-related work, which remains largely invisible in economic statistics (Eurostat, 2024).

Despite some gradual progress (the overall gender gap in EU employment has slowly narrowed over the past decade), Romania’s improvements have been modest. According to EIGE’s analysis, only a few EU members had gender employment gaps larger than the EU average of 10.2 pp in 2023, and Romania was one of them. This signals that Romania lags behind in creating equal opportunities in the labor market. Structural factors - such as limited childcare services, persistent gender norms, and lower retirement ages for women - play a role in sustaining these gaps. The data-driven overview provided in this section underscores why robust legal protections and active institutional measures are necessary: without them, the inequalities evidenced by these indicators are likely to persist or worsen (EIGE, 2024; Eurostat, 2024)

Gender discrimination also manifests through increased exposure to poverty and economic insecurity. Between 2021 and 2022, the share of women at risk of poverty in Romania remained higher than that of men, particularly among older women aged 65+, where the gender poverty gap reached 8 percentage points (EIGE, 2024). Regional disparities further exacerbate gender inequalities. In less developed regions of Romania, particularly in eastern and rural areas, the gender employment gap exceeds 20 percentage points, reflecting structural disadvantages linked to limited infrastructure, reduced access to services, and traditional gender norms (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024; Eurostat, 2024).

4. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES AND CASE STUDIES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

To understand how the legal provisions translate into practice, it is instructive to examine specific case studies of gender discrimination and institutional responses. Two notable cases - one international and one domestic - illustrate the challenges and enforcement of anti-discrimination norms: (1) the case of Emel Boyraz vs. Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights, and (2) the case of SC Terapia SA vs. National Council for Combatting Discrimination (CNCD) in Romania. These cases highlight how legal principles are applied and the role of institutions in addressing grievances. (CNCD, 2022) (ECtHR, 2014) (Curtea de Apel Cluj, 2011).

Case 1: Emel Boyraz vs. Turkey (ECHR, 2014). This case concerned a woman, Emel Boyraz, who had been employed as a security officer at a state-owned electricity company in Turkey. After nearly three years of service, in March 2004 she was dismissed solely on the grounds that she was not male and had not completed military service. These criteria were imposed despite the fact that she had been initially hired knowing she was a woman and had satisfactorily performed her duties. Boyraz challenged her dismissal in the Turkish courts, arguing that the decision was purely based on sex and thus discriminatory. The domestic proceedings were protracted and ultimately unsuccessful for her, prompting an application to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The ECtHR examined the case under Article 14 (non-discrimination) in conjunction with Article 8 (right to private life) of the European Convention on Human Rights, since access to public employment was deemed to fall within the scope of "private life" in terms of one's career and livelihood. In its judgment (Emel Boyraz v. Turkey, Application no. 61960/08, delivered 2 December 2014), the Court found that Ms. Boyraz had been a victim of gender discrimination, in violation of Article 14 taken with Article 8. It noted that the sole reason for her termination was her sex - being a woman - and that the Turkish authorities had failed to provide any objective and reasonable justification for requiring the security officer post to be filled only by men. The nature of the job (involving night shifts, rural assignments, and potential use of firearms) was cited by the employer, but the Court reasoned that those conditions did not inherently necessitate a male worker and that the plaintiff had proven capable of performing her duties. Moreover, the ECtHR found a violation of Article 6 §1 (right to a fair trial) due to the excessive length and unfairness of the administrative litigation Boyraz endured in Turkey. This case underscored that

deeply entrenched gender stereotypes (in this instance, assumptions that only men could handle certain security jobs or must have military service) can lead to systemic discrimination. The fact that the ECtHR had to intervene shows the importance of supra-national institutions in upholding gender equality when national systems fall short. The Turkish state, as a result of this judgment, was held accountable for breaching its obligation to protect its citizen from discrimination and was required to compensate Ms. Boyraz. The broader lesson from Boyraz is that legal guarantees of equality must be actualized by all levels of national governance; failure to do so can result in international censure (ECtHR, 2014).

Case 2: SC Terapia SA vs. CNCD (Romania, 2010). This domestic case involves a Romanian private company (SC Terapia SA) and its treatment of a pregnant employee. In 2010, amid company workforce adjustments, Terapia SA put a number of employees on technical unemployment due to economic reasons. Out of 53 employees affected, one female employee - identified as D.A.V. - was the only one who received only 75% of her base salary and was denied meal vouchers, while all other (predominantly male) employees on technical unemployment continued to receive 100% of their salary plus meal tickets. The distinguishing factor was that D.A.V. was pregnant at the time. The company justified its action by citing the woman's pregnancy as a basis for altering her pay during the furlough. D.A.V. filed a complaint with the National Council for Combatting Discrimination (CNCD), claiming she had been subjected to unequal treatment on account of her sex (pregnancy). The CNCD investigated and found that the company's action indeed amounted to direct discrimination based on gender (pregnancy), violating her right to equal treatment at work. Romanian law explicitly protects maternity; under Article 10 of Law 202/2002, any less favourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity leave constitutes discrimination. Moreover, constitutional principles and labour laws guarantee the right to work and forbid disadvantageous treatment due to gender. CNCD's decision (Hotărârea CNCD nr. 302/2010) sanctioned the company for discrimination. The employer (SC Terapia SA) challenged CNCD's decision in court, but the case - registered at the Cluj Court of Appeal - confirmed the finding of discrimination. In Civil sentence nr. 197/2011 the Court of Appeal upheld CNCD's ruling, deeming the company's conduct abusive, illegal, and discriminatory, motivated exclusively by the employee's pregnancy. Importantly, the court highlighted the burden of proof rules in discrimination cases: according to Article 20(6) of OG 137/2000, once a complainant presents facts from which discrimination can be presumed, the employer must prove that its actions were not based on discriminatory reasons. In this case, Terapia SA failed to provide a credible, non-discriminatory explanation for why the pregnant employee alone was paid less; thus, the presumption of discrimination was not rebutted. The court also noted that the company disregarded specific legal protections for pregnant workers (including obligations under Government Emergency Ordinance 96/2003 on maternity protection, such as prior risk assessment and offering alternative work). By excluding the pregnant employee from benefits given to all others and reducing her income solely due to pregnancy, the employer violated her fundamental rights and dignity at work. The outcome of this case was that the discriminated employee's rights were affirmed, the discriminatory

measure was nullified, and the company faced legal consequences (Government of Romania, 2006; Government of Romania, 2002; Curtea de Apel Cluj, 2011; CNCD, 2010).

The comparative perspective of these two cases is illuminating. In both instances, women were treated unfavourably solely because of their gender - one for not being a man in a traditionally male role, the other for being pregnant. Both cases highlight how gender stereotypes (women seen as unfit for certain jobs; pregnant women seen as “less productive” or an inconvenience to employers) directly result in career harm. However, the institutional responses differed. In Turkey, domestic institutions failed to protect the individual, and only the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights provided redress. In Romania, by contrast, the presence of the CNCD as a specialized equality body, and the willingness of the courts to uphold anti-discrimination law, meant that the issue was resolved within the national system. The CNCD and the courts served as a check on discriminatory practices by employers, enforcing the legal framework discussed in the previous section. These cases demonstrate the critical role of institutions in making rights effective. Where institutions are active and accessible (as with CNCD), victims of discrimination have a viable pathway to justice. Conversely, where institutions are slow or biased, discriminatory practices can persist until higher authorities intervene. (CNCD, 2022) (ECtHR, 2014)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis above reveals a nuanced picture of gender discrimination in Romania: strong formal protections exist, but substantive equality is not yet fully achieved. Both the empirical data and case studies underscore the gap between legal norms and on-the-ground realities for women. In conclusion, several key implications and recommendations emerge (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

Romania’s experience highlights that robust legislation, aligned with EU standards, is a crucial foundation but not a panacea. The fact that significant gender gaps in employment and power persist despite comprehensive laws implies that policy measures must go beyond legal prohibitions toward active measures. For instance, labor market inequalities suggest a need for policies facilitating women’s workforce participation - such as expanding affordable childcare, encouraging flexible work arrangements for both women and men, and incentivizing paternal involvement in childcare. The recent EU work-life balance directive (2019/1158) and similar measures should be fully implemented and promoted to change workplace cultures. Additionally, addressing the gender pay gap requires improved transparency and corporate accountability. The new EU directive on pay transparency (adopted in 2023) opens the way for Romania to mandate employers to disclose gender pay differences and justify pay structures. Such transparency can empower women and regulators to identify and correct unjustified wage disparities. (European Parliament & Council, 2019)

One of the continuing gaps is socio-cultural: deep-rooted gender stereotypes and traditional norms reduce the effectiveness of legal equality. As noted, both the Boyraz and Terapia SA cases reflected stereotypes (about women’s capabilities or

roles) that influenced decisions. Combating these attitudes requires education and public awareness campaigns to promote gender equality and share examples of women succeeding in all fields. Another gap lies in institutional enforcement. While CNCD has been generally effective, not all cases of discrimination reach its attention. Some women may be unaware of their rights or reluctant to engage in legal battles, especially in rural areas or marginalized communities. There is also variability in how employers implement equality obligations; some may lack clear internal policies on non-discrimination or may not invest in diversity training. Moreover, underreporting of discrimination is a persistent issue - many incidents likely go unremedied because the victims do not come forward, due to fear of retaliation or skepticism that anything will change.

To advance towards genuine gender equality, a multipronged approach is recommended. First, strengthen enforcement of existing laws: The capacity and visibility of CNCD should be maintained (or increased) so that it can proactively investigate systemic discrimination (not just react to individual complaints). Labor inspectors and equality bodies might conduct regular checks on employers' practices regarding gender equality.

The judiciary should continue to receive training on EU gender equality law to ensure consistent and effective rulings. Second, enhance support for victims of discrimination. This includes legal aid services for those who cannot afford to pursue claims, and perhaps expanding the mandate of ANES or NGOs to assist individuals in navigating the complaint process. A supportive environment can encourage more victims to seek justice, increasing the deterrent effect on potential discriminators. Third, promote gender equality in education and media to tackle stereotypes. Fourth, in the workplace, encourage best practices: employers can adopt voluntary measures like mentorship programs for women, transparent promotion criteria, and gender-balanced recruitment panels. Public recognition or incentives for companies that demonstrate exemplary gender equality records could accelerate change. Finally, policy-makers should address structural issues, such as improving rural infrastructure and access to education, which indirectly affect women's equal opportunities. (CNCD, 2022) (Government of Romania, 2002)

In summary, Romania has made important strides by building a legal and institutional edifice against gender discrimination, yet the lived experience of many women - evidenced by persistent employment gaps and cases of unequal treatment - shows that more must be done. Bridging the gap between formal equality and substantive equality requires sustained commitment: enforcing laws decisively, empowering those who are discriminated against, and transforming the cultural attitudes that underpin gender bias.

Only through such comprehensive efforts can the promise of a "union of equality" be fully realized for Romanian women and men alike cove.eu. Women should not be penalized for natural life choices or aspirations - be it motherhood or careers in male-dominated fields. Achieving this vision calls for continued vigilance, advocacy, and the collective will of institutions and society to uphold the principle of gender equality in everyday life (General aspects regarding discrimination, 2024).

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