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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

**Gender inequalities in academic  
management. A comparative approach:  
Romania versus Denmark**

(Abstract of the doctoral thesis)

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## 1. Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this doctoral thesis was to identify strategies and propose best practice models for increasing the number of women in Romanian university management, through comparison with a different university system. Although research on gender equality has started to gain popularity, most studies focus on identifying forms of discrimination and challenges women face. Additionally, in Romanian public administration, especially in the academic environment, there is a gap in the literature regarding this phenomenon. Therefore, this paper contributes to the field by identifying good practices that could help create more equitable and inclusive university environments.

To achieve this goal, a set of seven specific objectives was proposed, which, through a combination of theoretical, legislative, and empirical studies, allowed a better understanding of how the academic environment functions, of the main existing problems, and the identification of best practices models that have worked in Denmark. These models were then adapted to the needs of the system in Romania, based on the information identified from teachers and researchers. The seven specific objectives are:

Objective 1. Analysis of how gender stereotypes influence women's careers in higher education in Romania

Objective 2. Identification of a country in the European Union that is a model for Romania, in terms of practices to guarantee gender equality

Objective 3. Identification of the problems faced by women in higher education institutions in Denmark, compared to those previously discovered in Romania

Objective 4. Analysis of the strategies implemented since 2010 in Denmark to promote gender equality

Objective 5. Comparative analysis of the needs of teachers and researchers in the Romanian academic environment

Objective 6. Analysis of the university career of women in senior management positions

Objective 7. Formulation of best practices models for reducing gender segregation in Romanian university management.

Romania is a country where the number of women professors (the highest academic degree) is approximately equal to that of men, a performance at the European level, where the average of women with this title is only 30%. However, invisible barriers seem to exist in the ascent to management roles, as there are only 10.3% women as leaders of academic institutions, placing the country at the bottom of the European rankings (European Commission, 2025).

The paper identified differences in needs, motivators, and obstacles encountered by women and men throughout their academic careers in order to be then able to create gender-sensitive policies. Best practices recommendations for creating more inclusive environments must take into account the differences between the two genders to avoid creating new unintended forms of indirect discrimination. The research introduced a comparative perspective between the experiences of women and men, to propose improvements to the national and local framework applicable to all teaching and researching staff in Romania.

## **2. Structure and content of the thesis**

To achieve the previously proposed goal, the paper employs a combination of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, with the collected results being analyzed and interpreted throughout eight chapters, followed by six annexes and bibliography. The first chapter presents the purpose of the research, along with the seven specific objectives, derived objectives, research questions and hypotheses. They follow a logical structure that ultimately leads to the identification of best practices models applicable in Romanian universities.

The first chapter also explains the research methods selected to achieve each of the seven specific objectives, combining theoretical, narrative, and systematic analyses with empirical research methods. These include two sets of interviews and a questionnaire with employees from the academic environment. Like any research paper, this one has certain limitations given by the chosen research methods, which are detailed at the end of the first chapter.

The second chapter begins the theoretical analysis, focused on problems of discrimination present in Romania's academic environment. In this section, a systematic review of the literature was carried out to identify the challenges that women face in academia. The systematic analysis was carried out using the PRISMA criteria (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), and the entire strategy for searching and selecting relevant articles is described in the chapter. This section is important because, depending on the problems identified during the search, a comparison country will be later identified to serve as a model of best practices.

Chapter three examines the situation of European countries in regards to gender equality to identify the best model of good practices. It analyzes the situation of several countries, compared to Romania, using both international indexes and national statistics. Additionally, understanding the cultural values present in each country, how they've evolved over time, and the events that shaped and changed these values is important. Since gender is a social construct, gender stereotypes are deeply embedded in a country's culture and influence how society perceives the importance of gender equality and measures that promote it. The final section of chapter three compares the functioning of the university systems in Romania and the comparison country. As this paper aims to find strategies to increase the number of women in university management and identify models of best practices, it is essential that universities in the comparison country function similarly.

Chapter four carries out a new systematic review of the literature, this time on the chosen country of comparison, precisely Denmark. Starting from the problems previously identified in Romania, this analysis aims to draw a comparison between the two countries. The chapter presents the selection and analysis criteria, and then the results obtained are interpreted through a comparative lens with Romania. For the fairness of the comparison, the same PRISMA criteria and databases as in the first study were used.

Chapter five contains a legislative analysis of gender equality regulations in Denmark. European directives are important because they set a minimum base that all Member States must respect. That is why, at the beginning of the chapter, the way in which Denmark has adopted the main European directives on gender equality into national legislation was analyzed. This section looks at one of Denmark's most important pieces of legislation, the Equal Employment Act. After identifying the laws and strategies that guarantee inclusion, applicable at the national level, the

chapter continues with the analysis of laws and strategies specific to the academic environment. The last section identifies patterns of local best practices, analyzing strategies from a gender perspective at the level of Aarhus University, a leading university in Denmark.

Chapter six contains empirical research, consisting of a pilot study and two other national studies. The chapter explains the need for studies from a comparative perspective, between the experiences of women and men, regarding the motivating factors that influence a person's academic career. The methodology used in each study is further detailed, starting from the pilot study and then explaining how it was extended into two different studies, one quantitative and the other qualitative. The online questionnaire allowed the identification of the perceived level of discrimination, as well as the situation in the departments, and the semi-structured interviews helped to identify more detailed variables in terms of motivation and obstacles encountered by women and men in the academic environment. In the end, the results were correlated with other findings in the literature. This chapter allows a current analysis of the needs and difficulties encountered by university employees, which will help in adapting best practices to the current situation.

Chapter seven continues with another empirical study, consisting of statistical analyses and structured interviews with women in senior management positions. The chapter starts with a current statistical analysis of the management positions and university senates, in the top 30 universities in the country, based on the ranking published annually by the Ministry of Education and Research. This analysis helped to identify the positions where the gender gap is the greatest, as well as to identify the people in the highest positions, the ones of rector and vice-rector. The results obtained for 2025 were compared with the results of two other studies, one from 2012 and the other from 2019, thus also allowing an analysis of the progress achieved over time. The qualitative part of the study is presented in the second part of the chapter. The research identifies positive and negative factors that have influenced the academic path of women vice-rectors, but also the main qualities that have helped them in the leadership roles in which they work.

Chapter eight makes a new legislative analysis, this time of the normative acts, institutions, and strategies for gender equality in Romania. The structure of the chapter is similar to that of chapter six, going again on three levels: the adoption of European directives, legislation specific to the academic environment, and local strategies. Each level also contains a recommendations

section. This chapter incorporates the results of the previous chapters, presenting suggestions for public policies and models of best practices that can be applied to increase the number of women in management positions.

The last section of the paper contains general conclusions, reflections, and recommendations for further research, followed by six annexes. They detail the search strategies used in the systematic reviews, the research tools used in the empirical studies, as well as the interviews' answers coded and sorted into categories. The paper ends with the bibliography, presented over 24 pages.

### **3. Research methodology**

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, the paper combines a series of qualitative and quantitative methods, which helps to better understand the phenomenon studied. As the ultimate goal of the paper is to identify strategies and best practices to increase the number of women in university management, this approach allows not only a more detailed collection and analysis of the data, but also a better limitation of research risks and an extrapolation of results at the national level.

In any study, the literature review is an essential step to understand how the studied phenomenon manifests itself, what the causes are that lead to its appearance, as well as which have proven to be the most effective research methods. Thus, for the phenomenon studied, gender inequalities in academic management, the literature analysis concentrated on identifying studies that focus on university employees, both in Romania and in the country of comparison. The literature review has made it possible to identify the problems of discrimination that have existed or are still present in both countries.

For a more detailed analysis of the obstacles encountered by women throughout their academic careers, a systematic analysis was chosen, instead of a narrative one, in order to identify patterns related to gender discrimination in public administration, with a focus on the university environment. Systematic analysis collects and analyzes all possible studies related to a particular topic, thus providing a detailed analysis of the phenomenon over the chosen period of time.

In the present paper, a systematic analysis was used to achieve two of the specific objectives, carrying out one analysis to identify discrimination problems in Romania and another to identify the same types of problems in Denmark. The PRISMA criteria (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) were used throughout the analysis, and the search for articles was carried out in four databases, chosen according to the number of publications related to gender issues. Additional searches were also carried out on Google Scholar to add articles from outside these databases as well. The analysis of the information from the selected articles was carried out using the triangulation method, which allows the corroboration of quantitative and qualitative data. Two of the seven specific objectives have thus been achieved, as well as a number of derived objectives from them:

Objective 1. Analysis of how gender stereotypes influence women's careers in higher education in Romania

OD 1.1. Identification of relevant databases for a systematic review of the literature on the phenomenon of gender equality in academia

OD 1.2. Identification and classification of articles relevant to the academic environment, related to forms of direct and indirect discrimination

OD 1.3. Analysis of the forms of discrimination present in the academic environment

Objective 3. Identification of problems faced by women in higher education institutions in Denmark, compared to those previously discovered in Romania

OD 3.1. Identification and classification of articles relevant to the Danish academic environment, regarding forms of discrimination encountered in Romania

OD 3.2. Comparison of existing problems in Danish universities with those in Romania

OD 3.3. Identification of relevant periods in which there were common problems with those in Romania

A narrative analysis was instead used to identify legislative measures, institutions responsible for promoting gender equality, as well as strategies implemented over time in both Denmark and Romania. It is not an exhaustive analysis of the entire legislation of the two countries, this being outside the author's expertise, as well as outside the scope of this thesis. The analysis

focused on identifying strengths and weaknesses in the main measures applied to increase female representation in leadership positions, with a focus on academia. This was done based on official documents from governmental and non-governmental institutions, as well as legislation at the European and national levels. Emphasis was placed on how the two countries managed to implement the European directives in national legislation, as well as the additional measures that were taken at the level of each country.

Thus, objective four was fully achieved, and objective seven was partially achieved, with the following derived objectives:

Objective 4. Analysis of the strategies implemented since 2010 in Denmark to promote gender equality

OD 4.1. Analysis of how European directives have been implemented at the national level

OD 4.2. Analysis of how national legislation identifies, regulates, and monitors gender equality issues.

OD 4.3. Analysis of academic-specific legislation to guarantee gender equality

OD 4.4. Identification of local strategies used at the university level to achieve gender parity

Objective 7. Formulation of best practices models for reducing gender segregation in Romanian university management

OD 7.1. Analysis of national legislation from a gender perspective

OD 7.2. Analysis of legislation and strategies applicable to the academic environment

OD 7.3. Analysis of local strategies for guaranteeing gender equality applicable in Romanian universities

The empirical studies of this work follow the same structure as the theoretical analysis and combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In order to identify the needs of teachers and researchers in Romania, so that the best practices recommendations are adapted to current needs, it was decided to conduct both a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was intended to be administered to a larger number of participants, in order to identify the

perception of discrimination, as well as the level of inclusiveness in the departments in which the participants worked. The study followed a comparative approach, with both women and men from Romanian universities being chosen to participate. The interviews, which were also addressed to both genders, aimed to identify in more depth the needs and motivating factors of women and men.

The dual gender approach fills an existing gap in the literature, as the vast majority of studies in the field of gender discrimination focus only on the female perspective. However, strategies to increase the number of women in organizations should take into account the needs, obstacles, and different approaches of each gender, precisely to guarantee a more inclusive environment for all employees. For example, the obstacles that women face could also be found in men's professional careers, but due to different approaches, the impact can be more or less felt.

These two studies helped to achieve the fifth specific objective, the objectives derived from it, as well as to confirm a series of hypotheses and identify answers to the following research questions:

**Objective 5.** Comparative analysis of the needs of teachers and researchers in the Romanian academic environment

This objective was achieved by the answer obtained to the research question *Q 5.1. How do elements of indirect discrimination present in the academic environment influence the careers of women and men?*

OD 5.1. Analysis of the perceived level of discrimination present in Romanian universities

H 5.1.1. Women are more aware of the presence of discrimination against them in academia than men.

H 5.1.2. Men recognize less than women the importance of affirmative actions in guaranteeing equal opportunities between men and women.

H 5.1.3. The level of inclusion in a department is higher if there is a woman as its head.

H 5.1.4. The level of inclusion in a department is higher if there are gender researchers in that department.

## OD 5.2. Identification of motivating factors to work in academia

Q 5.2.1. What are the differences between women and men in terms of motivation to work in academia?

Q 5.2.2. What are the differences between women and men in terms of the needs they have in academia?

Q 5.2.3. What are the differences between women's and men's views on the role and responsibilities of senior management in academia?

A final empirical study focused strictly on structured interviews with women in senior management positions, at the level of vice-rector and rector. The comparative approach was not necessary in this case, as the study strictly focused on the strategies used by women in navigating a strongly masculinized environment. This study led to the completion of the sixth and seventh objectives.

## Objective 6. Analysis of women's university career in senior management positions

### OD 6.1. Statistical analysis of positions in higher university management and the senate

Q 6.1.1. What is the percentage of positions held by women in senior management roles (rector, vice-rector, dean, vice-dean)?

Q 6.1.2. To what extent do the members of the Senate represent the academic community, from a gender perspective?

Q 6.1.3. What progress has been made over time in bridging the gap between the number of women and men in senior management positions?

### OD 6.2. Identification of strategies used by women in rector or vice-rector positions throughout their academic careers to achieve these positions

Q 6.2.1. What are the obstacles encountered in ascending to a position in senior management?

Q 6.2.2. What are the motivational elements that lead women to aim for management positions?

Q 6.2.3. What are the most useful personal qualities and resources in ascending to a management position?

Objective 7. Formulation of best practices models for reducing gender segregation in Romanian university management

OD 7.4. Identification of weaknesses in national and university strategies addressing gender equality

OD 7.5. Identification of best practices models by comparing the system in Romania with the one in Denmark at the national and university levels.

The combination of systematic reviews, narrative analyses, and quantitative and qualitative empirical studies has allowed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of gender equality in academia and the identification of new research directions.

#### **4. Main results obtained**

This doctoral thesis focused on identifying strategies and best practices models that would lead to an increase in the number of women in the academic management in Romania, using a combination of research methods, from systematic analyses to semi-structured, structured interviews and questionnaires. The analysis of the existing literature in Romania has highlighted a series of obstacles that women face in universities. At the same time, a gap in the literature was identified, to which this work tried to contribute. Existing studies are focused on identifying the obstacles and reasons why the number of women in leadership positions is low. But, in order to bring a change in society, it is necessary to identify models of best practices, models to be applied in universities to remedy the problems previously discovered by researchers.

The existing problems were initially identified through a systematic review of the literature, using the PRISMA criteria, on four popular databases in the field of gender equality. This analysis also led to the achievement of the first research objective, namely *Objective 1. Analysis of how gender stereotypes influence women's careers in higher education in Romania*. The study helped

to understand the causes of the current gender imbalance and to identify the effects of existing practices in universities. Most of the time, these practices are considered to be gender-neutral, but in reality, they can be blind practices, having different effects on women and men. This happens when the new policies and measures implemented do not take into account the different needs of women and men, leading, over time, to the disadvantage of women.

Existing problems in academia can be grouped into four categories, depending on the areas they affect. Thus, most problems of indirect discrimination arise in the recruitment and selection processes, promotion, evaluation, and collaboration with students, colleagues, or superiors. As gender is a social construct, cultural and social expectations influence how a person is perceived. Even though people may not be aware of them, these stereotypes affect a person's actions and how they perceive women's performance at work. The systematic analysis showed that over the past 15 years, there has been a trend for women to be selected for part-time/temporary jobs and be less likely to be appointed as project managers.

Also, several studies have found that women tend to receive more administrative tasks and have less time they can devote to research, compared to men. However, this can be a problem of the past or a problem of perspective. Through the empirical study carried out at the national level, including both women and men, we found that both genders have an equal contribution of the working time dedicated to administrative tasks, even if they all want to reduce it. In addition, women are currently devoting more time to research and want to be able to double this time, appearing to be more attracted to the field of research than men, who seem to be more attracted to teaching activities.

Precisely for this reason, objective five *Comparative analysis of the needs of teachers and researchers in the Romanian academic environment* was important, in order to understand the difference between the obstacles that both women and men encounter throughout their careers, but also the way in which they relate to and try to solve the problems encountered. Most studies in the literature have only female participants, but this approach can lead to the discovery of biased results, such as we found in the distribution of administrative burdens. This paper contributes to the existing literature by introducing a comparative perspective between the experiences of women and men, so that best practice models can be adapted to the real needs of all employees.

The systematic review of the literature helped to complete the third objective, namely *Identification of the problems faced by women in higher education institutions in Denmark, compared to those previously discovered in Romania*. The country of comparison, Denmark, was chosen on the basis of international rankings and existing statistics at the national level, so as to represent a model of good practices. Some similarities between the countries were also taken into account. Cultural elements and values that can influence gender stereotypes were analyzed, as well as the functioning of university systems, to ensure that the models taken over can be adapted in Romania.

The achievement of the third objective ensured that, although Romania and Denmark are two countries at opposite ends in the rankings of gender equality, there are or have been similar problems of discrimination in academia. Thus, starting from the four problem areas identified in Romania (recruitment and selection, evaluation, promotion, and collaboration), similar situations were searched for in Denmark, using the PRISMA criteria and the four previous databases. The analysis indicated that the periods with the most discrimination problems (calculated by the number of articles that collected data in those years) were between 2004 and 2015, with the most happening between 2009 and 2010. However, the problems of discrimination have not completely disappeared, with the literature still identifying obstacles that hinder women's career paths even in 2023. Despite the results, a mentality similar to the one present in Romania also exists there, considering that the differences between the number of women and men in management positions are the result of personal preferences, and gender equality is otherwise achieved.

Among the cases of discrimination identified in Denmark are the unequal distribution of tasks and the different ways in which women and men are assessed. Women are evaluated based on harsher criteria, and at the same time, they impose higher standards on themselves. However, based on the international literature, this could also be the result of observing the behaviors and expectations of the people around them, as well as a result of existing systemic discrimination (Nadal, et al., 2021).

In addition to the fact that the systematic analysis showed that there are similarities between the two countries, this also led to the identification of the most problematic periods, when we can consider that most problems of indirect discrimination were taking place. Thus, it was possible to outline objective four, namely *the Analysis of the strategies implemented since 2010 to date in*

*Denmark to promote gender equality*, which aimed to identify the strategies and measures implemented to solve the problems previously identified.

Denmark has implemented a series of legislative measures, starting from European directives and building on them. Among the most important, with an impact on gender equality, is the law on parental leave (LBK no 1069 of 2024) and the law on salary transparency (ACT no. 558, 17/06/2008). Unlike in Romania, where it is up to the parents how they will divide the parental leave, most of the time, the mother being the one who has the primary role, in Denmark, both parents are obliged to spend an equal number of weeks in this type of leave. This ensures equal involvement in the child's upbringing and reduces gender stereotypes and the chances of discrimination because of childbirth.

Although Danish legislation starts from the European directives, unlike Romania, they have not limited themselves to the minimum imposed by the European Union. The pay transparency law, for example, declassifies employees' salaries since 2019, regardless of the field, and already covers the new directive that was adopted in 2023 (Directive (EU) 2023/970). Other pieces of legislation, such as the Gender Equality Act, define the main institutions involved in guaranteeing gender equality in society and how they operate, as well as measures such as the use of gender quotas or gender mainstreaming in policy-making (LBK no. 1678, 19/12/2013). It is important to specify that in Denmark gender quotas are optional in the vast majority of areas, unlike their Nordic neighbors, which have imposed a quota of a minimum of 40% women in management positions in public and private institutions. However, the literature is divided on the effectiveness of these measures, with studies indicating that the level of inclusion decreases when the quotas are imposed (Furtado, et al., 2021; Kurtulus, 2015).

Denmark's progress in achieving gender parity is due to the existence of a system that implements and monitors strategies to reduce stereotypes and indirect discrimination. The Ministry of Gender Equality is the most important, monitoring the work of all other ministries to ensure that the proposed new policies are gender-sensitive and will not create new forms of discrimination. In addition, annual reports are made by public institutions (including universities) detailing the progress made in achieving gender parity, as well as the actions to be implemented further. Other organizations, such as the Gender Equality Committee and the Equal Treatment Council, advise the Ministry of Gender Equality in its work (Ministry of Gender Equality, 2010-2024).

At the academic level, universities enjoy autonomy in establishing and implementing development strategies. However, they are obliged to submit a development contract to the Ministry of Universities and Science every four years. The contracts have evolved over the years, in the past containing specific targets that have helped to increase the number of women in the most important positions in academia (management positions as well as the degree of professor), and now offering greater flexibility and helping to create more inclusive environments (LBK no. 391 of 10/04/2024).

National legislation sets the general framework for promoting gender equality, but most measures to increase the number of women in university management positions have been taken at the level of universities and faculties. An analysis of Aarhus University, one of the most important universities in the country, according to international rankings, shows that it has been implementing specific gender equality strategies since 2016. Among the most important measures implemented over the years are:

- Establishment of committees for diversity and gender equality at the university and faculty level, responsible for the development and monitoring of gender policies. These include both female and male representatives to ensure equal representation and have a more nuanced understanding of gender issues.
- Creating mentoring schemes, providing financial support for parents, offering flexibility in organizing tasks and work schedules, as well as supporting career continuation during parental leave. These are examples of indirect affirmative action, as they address both genders, but remove structural barriers faced by women and promote equal participation.
- Increase transparency in recruitment and promotion processes by establishing clear criteria, as well as the use of gender-neutral language. These measures have a positive impact on both the candidates and the members of the evaluation commissions.
- Organization of thematic sessions, among employees, and training sessions for those in management positions. The meetings help to raise awareness of gender stereotypes, as well as to identify the forms of indirect discrimination present in the organization, through interactive discussions.

Although models of good practices were identified for problems similar to those existing in Romania, the work did not stop there, because, despite the similarities between the two countries, there are also cultural differences. Thus, in order to be applicable in Romania, the best practices models must be adapted to the national and local context. Therefore, objectives five and six focused on *the Comparative analysis of the needs of teaching and researching professionals in the Romanian academic environment* and *the Analysis of the university career of women in senior management positions*.

These two sections helped in understanding the needs that employees in the university environment have, and allowed the comparison of the perspective of women with that of men, in order to identify the differences between the two genders. In addition, it allowed an up-to-date analysis of the main obstacles that employees have encountered throughout their careers, as well as the different ways in which they try to overcome them. Some of the problems identified correlate with other results in the literature, while others, as we saw earlier, seem to indicate a different picture, as a result of the comparative perspective between women and men.

Specifically, by means of two international scales (The Modern Sexism Scale (Swim, et al., 1995) and the Belief in Sexism Shift Scale (Zehnter, et al., 2021)), taken and adapted for the context of the Romanian university environment, it was identified that women seem to recognize the presence of discrimination to a greater extent compared to men. In addition, as evidenced by both questionnaires and interviews, women seem more willing to accept the need for affirmative actions in order to achieve gender parity. These results are in line with what was initially identified in the literature, indicating that a greater number of women in an organization will lead to an increase in measures to promote and guarantee gender equality (Holli & Harder, 2016; Dahlerup, 2018).

It was also found that the level of inclusion in a department is determined by the leadership style of the department head. A transformational style, which encourages collaboration between members and increases the level of transparency, fosters better cohesion among the members of the department, and women are no longer as isolated. As international studies indicate, the department head can act as an ally for women, helping to reduce stereotypes and create an open environment that encourages discussion and collaboration (Mosser & Branscombe, 2023).

This can also contribute to better access to mentorship and resources, areas where women tend to face more difficulties than men. The results of the research indicate that it is easier for men to form informal support networks, which correlates with international theories such as "brotherly trust" (Lorber, 1994, p. 231) or the men's club (Sunny, et al., 2011, p. 47). The implementation of formal mentoring mechanisms would reduce the existing imbalance between women and men in terms of access to resources and support, and would also help young researchers in accelerating their career development.

Among other changes that emerged from interviews, what women would like in academia, is greater support for parents, especially those with young children. Most of the time, young parents are also at the beginning of their careers, in the roles of assistants, lecturers, or even in temporary positions, and face several administrative responsibilities or delegated tasks that they cannot refuse. This is more common among women than men, and, in conjunction with home responsibilities, makes achieving a work-life balance difficult. That is why the women interviewed pointed out the importance of equitable distribution of redundant tasks and giving priority to parents in setting working hours and class schedules.

The difficulties faced by women in academia explain why, statistically, they are still in the minority in senior management positions. Based on the data collected from the universities' websites, at the level of vice-rectors, there are only 37.8% women, the percentage remaining similar to that of the 2015-2019 mandate. At the level of all teachers and researchers, the national average indicates parity between women and men, but the numbers differ from field to field. Technical fields are still strongly masculinized fields, here there are only 36.3% women as teachers, and only 20.6% of the positions of dean are occupied by women.

Interviews with women in vice-rector positions have shown that in order to reach such a position and be successful, the support received from mentors and colleagues throughout their careers is essential. Perhaps this is precisely why they also approach a collaborative leadership style, which helps to make decisions faster, but also to make more transparent evaluations. The literature indicates that there is a link between the gender of the person and the leadership style, the transformational style being more common among women (Paustian-Underdahl, et al., 2024). However, the style employed may be the result of social constraints placed on the shoulders of female leaders, who face greater pressure to excel both at work and in the family.

However, although throughout their careers they have found an inclusive environment and enjoyed the support of mentors and colleagues, one problem that persists is finding a balance between personal and professional life. Success in academia comes with sacrificing personal time, as evidenced by the interviews in chapter six. From the perspective of women vice-rectors, universities could build more support programs for parents. Some of those women even got involved in university development strategies to transform them into more inclusive environments.

All this information then contributed to the completion of the last objective of this doctoral thesis, namely the *Formulation of best practices models for reducing gender segregation in Romanian university management*, and implicitly, of the purpose proposed at the beginning of the work. The models of good practices identified start from the existing gaps in the legislative framework in Romania, as well as those in the university development strategies, at the national level and at the level of university institutions. Thus, the main recommendations that emerge are meant to include the gender perspective in several national and local processes.

## 5. Main recommendations

The current legislation existing at the national level to guarantee equal opportunities between women and men is fragmented into several laws and decisions, and some of the information is only repeated. The most important regulations are found in the law against all forms of discrimination (Ordonanța 137/2000) and the law for equal opportunities (Legea 202/2002, 2013). They prohibit any form of discrimination, whether direct or indirect, regardless of the criterion, and regulate the functioning of key institutions such as the Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men or the National Council for Combating Discrimination.

At the national level, the main recommendations refer to strengthening the legislative framework by introducing a gender perspective in the policy-making processes. As noted throughout this work, the main forms of discrimination present in academia are indirect, generated by blind measures and policies, which do not take into account the different impacts that they might have on women and men. Compared to the system in Denmark, the introduction of a gender perspective in policy-making could be achieved by:

- The existence of a specific ministry for gender equality, responsible for monitoring and evaluating the new policies developed within the other ministries. This can be achieved through regular evaluations of the work of ministries and the creation of public reports showing the progress made in creating a more inclusive society. In addition, in Denmark, the Ministry of Gender Equality works with other institutions that have an advisory role.

Romania, on the other hand, has recently eliminated the department responsible for gender equality within the Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, following the latest restructuring (Ordonanța de urgență 153/2024). However, institutions such as the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men and the National Comission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men could contribute to the creation of gender-sensitive policies. For this, public activity reports are needed, as well as more reporting at the national level that includes the gender perspective. This also becomes an obligation following the sustainable development commitments to which Romania has adhered, the two institutions together with the National Institute of Statistics playing a central role in the collection and processing of data.

- In order to be able to track the progress made over time in achieving gender equality, as well as the impact of the policies and strategies implemented, the legislation must introduce mandatory reporting by public and private institutions to the previously mentioned actors. Currently, aggregated data by gender is scarce, in the academic environment, for example, few institutions have statistics divided by gender regarding their employees.
- A closer collaborative framework between ministries, non-governmental organizations, universities, the private sector, and citizens will lead to faster identification of the problems faced by society and the creation of more effective strategies. From the perspective of gender equality in Romania, this is important because the number of women in government and parliament is small and the results of the quantitative study and other studies in the international literature indicate that women are more aware of the presence of discrimination and the need for formal measures to achieve equality (Dahlerup, 2018; Holli & Harder, 2016).
- The process of creating a policy also includes the monitoring and control phase, in which the correct adoption and compliance with the new rules created is ensured. In this regard,

the National Council for Combating Discrimination plays a central role in Romania, but research indicates that the punishments applied in recent years are too light, not discouraging discriminatory behaviors (Centrul de Resurse Juridice, 2024). In addition to punishing the guilty, Denmark also provides compensation to victims of discrimination.

At the university level, the legislation does not contain additional references to gender equality, the only obligations of higher education institutions remaining those that exist at the national level. In the absence of legislative obligations, it is up to each university whether it is necessary to develop plans to achieve gender equality. The statistical data, as well as the results of the empirical studies in this paper, show that there are differences between the obstacles encountered by women and men throughout their academic careers, but remedying these inequities is not a priority in development strategies.

Thus, the legislation on university codes of ethics could be amended to include the obligation to create plans for gender equality, with specific actions, performance indicators, and actors. In addition, the national strategy for research and innovation should also include a section dedicated to gender equality and targets to be achieved related to the number of women in management positions (the most problematic area in Romania).

Regulations at the national level are intended to create a general framework for promoting gender equality. But most concrete measures must be implemented at the institutional level, precisely in order to be able to adapt the strategies to the needs of employees, as well as to the available resources. Thus, the following recommendations can be used to create initial plans dedicated to gender equality (as is the case with Babeş-Bolyai University) or to improve the current ones (in the case of the University of Bucharest).

- It is important that gender equality plans contain concrete measures, with performance indicators, actors responsible for their implementation and monitoring, as well as deadlines. In the absence of such details, the proposed measures, although beneficial, may remain only on paper or may be delayed in being applied, as was the case with Babeş-Bolyai University.
- The development of effective plans depends on the collection of data that reflects the reality faced by the institution's employees. This can be done through periodic debates with the institution's employees to find out the dissatisfactions and problems they face

in their daily activity, plus suggestions on how they would like the institution to evolve. Also, the involvement of gender experts in such debates can help to identify and raise awareness of hidden forms of discrimination. These debates must take place at the level of departments and faculties, not just at the university level, as is now happening through university senates.

- Prioritizing gender equality can be achieved by creating mixed (gender-parity-sensitive) teams responsible for developing and implementing gender equality plans. With dedicated employees and financial resources for gender equality, it ensures that these plans are translated into concrete actions. In addition, monitoring the implementation of strategies over the years, as well as assessing progress over time, can help adapt the strategies to reflect new obstacles that have arisen.
- The main problems that lead to situations of indirect discrimination in the academic environment are related to the recruitment, evaluation, and promotion processes. Establishing clear criteria and ensuring access to information for all employees can help increase the level of transparency in these processes.
- Gender quotas could contribute to a rapid increase in the number of women in management positions, but they can only be used as a temporary, short-term measure. In addition, in order to reduce the negative impact generated by them, such as reinforcing gender stereotypes (Furtado, et al., 2021; Kurtulus, 2015) and decreasing performance in both the majority and minority groups (Autin, et al., 2014), the measure must be corroborated with meetings and training sessions on gender equality. It is important for employees to understand what gender stereotypes are, their impact on a person's career, and the role of gender quotas in the organization.
- Collaboration and the existence of a support system emerged as the elements with a major impact on the university career, based on interviews with women vice-rectors in chapter seven. In addition, the semi-structured interviews in chapter six indicate that women deal with a lack of support from superiors and face feelings of isolation in the departments they belong to a greater extent than men. For this reason, creating collaborative systems that ensure equal access to resources can help create more inclusive environments for all employees. At the same time, these systems can lead to increased performance, encouraging the exchange of information and resources

between members. Formal mentoring programs and career development schemes can help shape collaborative systems.

- Encouraging research in the field of gender equality can help raise awareness of discrimination issues. Although the quantitative study in chapter six indicates that the existence of a gender expert in the department leads to a lower level of inclusion, it can mean that department members are more aware of existing problems, and the level of dissatisfaction increases if these problems are not addressed in development strategies. Research in the field of gender equality can be used as a starting point in the development of plans for gender equality.
- The changes to the existing processes presented so far must come from senior management, and this will depend on the extent to which they recognize that discrimination problems still exist in academia. The perception of the level of discrimination may vary depending on the number of women in management positions, but in Romania, women remain in the minority in these roles. That is why training sessions on gender equality are necessary for those in management positions, but also for members of the university senates. They need to understand how the two genders relate differently to academic life, because this influences needs, motivators, and career development prospects.

## 6. Possible future research directions

The present paper created a comparison between two countries at opposite ends of the international rankings on gender equality, allowing the identification of best practices models for Romania. The comparison of the systems employed in the two countries could be extended to other countries in future research. For example, a comparison between the countries of the former communist bloc with the countries of Western Europe could lead to the identification of cultural differences that have been preserved and influenced regulations on gender equality.

Other research directions can be drawn from the empirical studies of this work, starting from the limitations encountered. The choice of the snowball method for two of the studies facilitated the identification of new participants, especially after a low response rate to initial

invitations. However, this can reduce the level of generalization of the results, with the risk that the elements identified are specific to the professional networks used, in this regard, the majority of participants being in the field of public administration. Further research can diversify sampling methods and also compare the situation in private universities with public universities.

There is also a need for more research to compare women's and men's perspectives. The literature specific to gender issues often analyzes the situation only from the experience of women, failing to understand whether the problems identified are encountered only by women or are related to the different approaches used by each gender. This paper helps to fill this gap in the literature, and future research may expand the current approach, for example, by looking at the experiences of women and men in senior management positions.

In conclusion, research in the field of gender equality contributes by identifying the problems that women still face in society and by raising awareness of the differences between women and men. The results help create new public policies that lead to fairer societies, and universities play a key role in this process. It is precisely for this reason that achieving gender parity in universities is important, so that they can act as models for the societies in which they operate and guarantee a fair representation of academic communities. Gender equality in university leadership is not only statistically important, but it is a necessity to have an inclusive and high-performing environment.

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