

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS REGARDING GENDER EQUALITY IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS IN DIFFERENT DOMAINS

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Abstract. *In recent decades, women have become increasingly present in management positions, and their opinions have begun to be taken into account in both sports and other domains. We believe that participation in decision-making is a significant indicator of gender equality in a society and we hope that our analysis will highlight the current situation in Romania regarding this important topic. The present paper aimed to analyse women's participation in decision-making at national level by comparing sports with other domains. To achieve this, we retrieved and analysed data from statistics compiled by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) for seven life domains: sports, science and research, social dialogue, business and finance, judiciary, public administration and politics. We also aimed to compare the participation of women from Romania and the European Union in decision-making in the sports domain. We considered it necessary to conduct this analysis because participation in decision-making is one of the areas in which Romania's scores are low in terms of equal opportunities for women and men (according to the data provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). In the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, the European Commission (2015) claims that promoting equality between women and men in decision-making should be an EU priority.*

Keywords: *gender equality, decision-making positions, sports management.*

Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental right and an integral part of universal human rights, as several authors have pointed out (Shameti, 2016; Bericat & Sánchez-Bermejo, 2019). Achieving gender balance in the decision-making process should be an important goal for sports organisations in Romania because, in our opinion, this is a significant indicator of gender equality in a society. "Gender equality is defined as a prerequisite for European integration" (Arapi et al., 2017, p. 15). The *Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015* (European Commission, 2011) described key actions for five priority areas, including equality in decision-making. Rudik (2013) highlights that the European Commission is "constantly looking for new ways to improve the effectiveness of EU gender policy in this area" (p. 11). On the other hand, Profeta (2020) believes that, despite the formal European Commission's engagement to improve gender imbalances, progress towards gender equality in terms of wealth and pay has progressed at a discouragingly slow pace in recent decades. Profeta (2017) also emphasises that "gender equality and diversity are recognised to have beneficial effects on organisations, institutions and the overall economy" (p. 34). However, women are still underrepresented in decision-making positions at both national and European levels.

Usually, women's path to top management positions is presented in the literature as being paved with glass. The "glass ceiling" phrase is the most common concept used to express the

opportunity for women to advance in management positions only up to a certain point. Profeta (2017) thinks that “removing the glass ceiling [...] may produce not only more equality but also substantial efficiency gains” (p. 34). According to Rothstein (2021), “a substantial number of studies show that increased gender equality is one important factor behind getting corruption under control” (p. 97), adding that “impartiality in the exercise of public power has a powerful effect on lowering corruption and meritocracy and gender equality will increase competence in the public administration” (p. 97).

The research conducted by Tominc et al. (2017) suggests that “female managers perceive gender equality in organizations in general to be significantly lower than males” (p. 132). Arapi et al. (2017) notice that women’s “participation in decision-making positions in institutions and public life is still below the satisfactory level” (p. 26). Hindman and Walker (2020) have found that “women remain the minority in sports organizations, particularly in leadership roles” (p. 64). Fröhlich and Baudisch (2016) state that “a gender-equal organization of institutions requires adequately qualified women to be equally present on every hierarchical/functional level” (p. 305).

A common measure to address women’s underrepresentation has been the introduction of gender quotas at different managerial levels. Adriaanse and Schofield (2014) found that “a quota of a minimum of three women was a first condition to advance gender equality in governance. It needed to operate, however, in conjunction with other gender dynamics to move toward equal participation by men and women in board decision making” (p. 485). Therefore, the simple introduction of gender quotas in organisations is not enough to achieve gender equality in the decision-making process.

Stojanović et al. (2019) made an interesting observation: “when women achieve leadership positions, their educational attainments often outstrip those required for the positions” (p. 2). According to Kara et al. (2016), women often think that they have to work harder to get promoted. Profeta (2017) believes that “the beneficial effects of gender equality and diversity are even clearer when we concentrate on decision-making positions” (p. 34).

Hejase and Nohra (2017) state that the female workforce is considered to be a competitive advantage to most of the economic sectors with high representation in the lower ranked jobs but not in higher ranked jobs. Moreover, “even in countries in which women participate in the labour market in high numbers, only a minority make it to the highest positions” (Profeta, 2017, p. 34).

In the *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019*, the European Commission (2015) emphasises that “promoting equality in decision-making requires a better gender balance among executive directors of major listed companies and in the talent pipeline. These efforts should be complemented with data collection, action to tackle the over-representation of men in decision-making positions in research organisations and measures promoting gender balance in political decision-making and public life, including sports” (p. 14).

Profeta (2017) states that “a major concern when promoting gender balance in decision-making positions is that there are not enough women who are qualified to assume top positions. Thus, having more women in decision-making roles may translate into a generally lower quality of representatives” (p. 35). Most of the time, the problem is not that there are no competent or qualified women, but rather that they are discriminated against.

According to Elomäki and Ylöstalo (2021), “gender equality policy has been sidelined and instrumentalized to serve other government policy objectives; the scope of gender equality policy has been narrowed; and measures to promote gender equality have become increasingly aligned with the ideals and practices of managerial governance” (p. 741).

In the sports domain, women often experience difficulties during their managerial careers. According to the results of various research studies, some of the main obstacles and difficulties they face in their professional careers are: finding the right balance between family and professional life, preconceived ideas about women in leadership positions, gender discrimination, traditional social roles, sporting environment and organisational culture. Studies conducted in Romania in recent years have emphasised the high level of gender stereotypes existing in our society regarding leadership and management activities. In the last decades, women started to do sports that were originally masculine, which has led “to the slow transformation of the old-school thinking about the traditional roles of sexes” (Piroska & Géczi, 2017, p. 137).

Various studies have explored the effects of communism on gender equality in post-communist countries such as Romania. For example, the study by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017) showed that “to the extent that post-communist citizens held different attitudes toward gender equality from those of citizens elsewhere, they were likely to be less, not more supportive of gender equality” (p. 245). However, the above authors found some evidence that the effect of communist education might have played a role in inculcating pro-gender equality views in line with communist rhetoric. Current trends and international priorities are now aimed at improving women’s status in society and achieving gender equality in all domains, including sports where the concept of gender balance is increasingly used.

According to Adriaanse and Claringbould (2015), “gender in relation to sport leadership was mainly constructed on the dimension of production and power relations (more women in leadership positions) and symbolic relations (creating a sporting culture that values women’s participation at all levels). By contrast, the gendered dimension of emotional relations - collaboration between men and women - received limited attention” (p. 547).

Research purpose

This paper aimed to analyse women’s participation in decision-making at national level by comparing sports with other domains. To achieve this, we retrieved and analysed data from statistics compiled by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) for seven life domains: sports, science and research, social dialogue, business and finance, judiciary, public administration and politics. We also aimed to compare the participation of women from Romania and the European Union in decision-making in the sports domain. We considered it necessary to conduct this analysis because participation in decision-making is one of the areas in which Romania’s scores are low in terms of equal opportunities for women and men (according to the data provided by the European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Therefore, promoting equality between women and men in decision-making should be a priority for our country, given that gender equality is “an essential feature of the quality of our societies” (Bericat & Sánchez-Bermejo, 2019, p. 231).

Methodology

The research methods used for this analysis were: literature review, critical literature review, analysis and synthesis method, qualitative comparative analysis method, mathematical statistics method and graphical representation method.

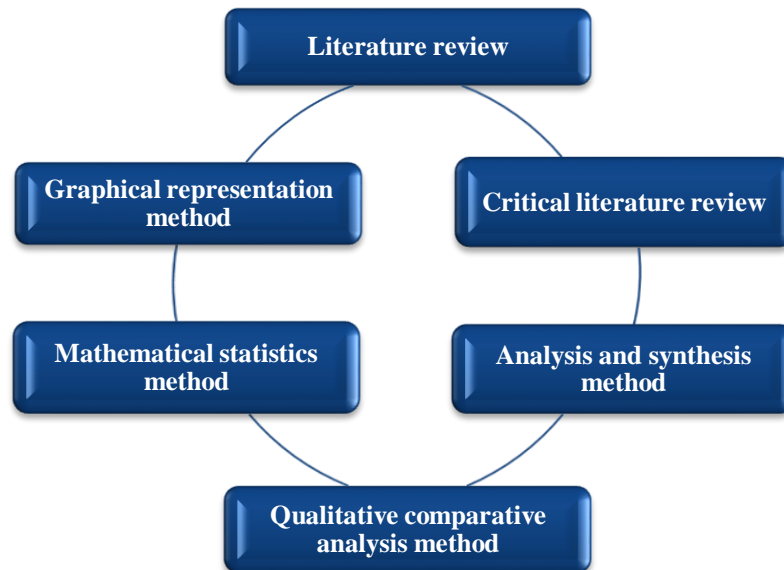
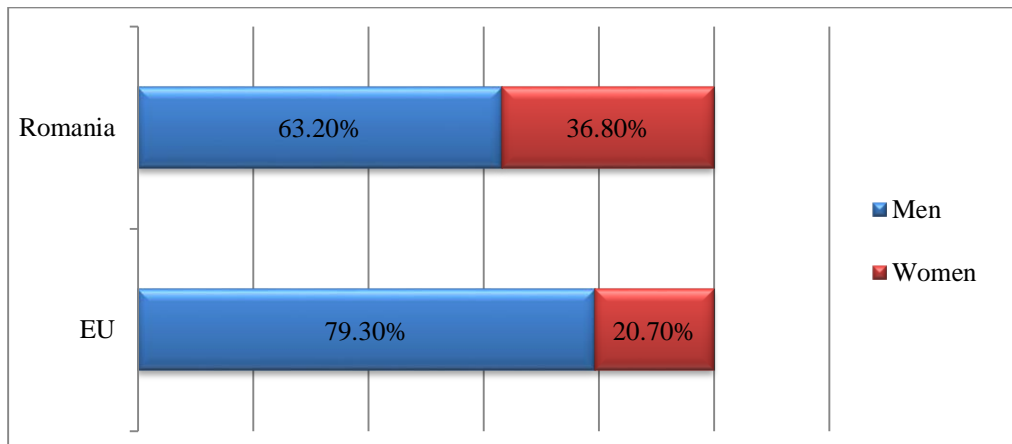


Figure 1. Research methods used

Results

First of all, we aimed to compare the participation of women from Romania and the European Union in decision-making in the sports domain. Sport has been dominated by men throughout history, but women's presence and involvement in this field is constantly growing. De Soysa and Zipp (2019) state that "the history, milestones and (sluggish) progress towards gender equality within the interconnected movements of sport, international development and human rights are reflective of the broader feminist struggle" (p. 1783). Analysing a series of documents, we have realised that efforts to achieve gender equality are being made at the organisational, legislative, social and humanitarian levels.

Regarding women's representation in the decision-making structures of National Olympic Committees in 2019, it was 36.80% in Romania, while the EU average was 20.70% (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019) (Figure 2). Although participation in decision-making is one of the areas in which Romania's scores are still low, it can be noted that, in the sports domain, our country is close to the European average and even exceeds it in some analyses.



Data source: EIGE

Figure 2. Membership in the decision-making structures of National Olympic Committees: A comparison between Romania and the EU average (2019)

It is worth mentioning that the International Olympic Committee has been governed only by men since its establishment (1894) until now, while in our country, only one woman has been president of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee since its foundation (1914) to date. Therefore, although it is obvious that women have started to be present in the governing bodies of the National Olympic Committee, this is especially true for middle and low management positions and less for top management positions.

In the decision-making structures of national sports federations for the Olympic sports with the highest funding (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021a), our country once again had a better representation of women compared to the EU average (Table 1). Regarding the indicator “Membership in the highest decision-making structure”, Romania had a women’s representation of 20.9% in 2018, while the EU average was 17.8%. For the indicator “Executive Director”, our country had a women’s representation of 40%, while the EU average was 23.6%. However, women were underrepresented (compared to men) in these organisations in both Romania and the European Union. Furthermore, in 2018, out of the 74 Romanian national sports federations, only 7 had women presidents.

Table 1. Women’s representation in the decision-making structures of national sports federations for the Olympic sports with the highest funding compared to the EU average (2018)

Indicators	Women	Men
Membership in the highest decision-making structure		
Romania	20.9%	79.1%
EU	17.8%	82.2%
Executive Director		
Romania	40%	60%
EU	23.6%	76.4%

Data source: EIGE

The situation was slightly different regarding women’s representation in the decision-making structures of national sports federations for the Olympic sports with the highest

popularity. For the indicator “Membership in the highest decision-making structure”, Romania had a lower women’s representation than the EU average, namely 12.2% compared to 16.1%. On the other hand, for the indicator “Executive Director”, our country had a higher score than the EU average, but only with 0.3 percentage points (Table 2). The list of federations for the Olympic sports with the highest popularity was also established by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021b).

Table 2. *Women’s representation in the decision-making structures of national sports federations for the Olympic sports with the highest popularity compared to the EU average (2018)*

Indicators	Women	Men
Membership in the highest decision-making structure	12.2%	87.8%
Romania		
EU	16.1%	83.9%
Executive Director		
Romania	20%	80%
EU	19.7%	80.3%

Data source: EIGE

Furthermore, the data provided by the EIGE statistics regarding membership in the highest decision-making structures of national Olympic sports organisations revealed that women were underrepresented in our country in all the years analysed, namely 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2020 (Table 3). It should be emphasised that Romania had a representation below the European average in these decision-making structures (Figure 3). For example, in 2020, women’s representation was 10% in our country, while the UE average was 17%.

Table 3. *Membership in the highest decision-making structures of national Olympic sports organisations*

	Romania		EU average	
	Women %	Men %	Women %	Men %
2020	10	90	17	83
2019	11.4	88.6	14.8	85.2
2017	10.6	89.4	13.6	86.4
2015	10.6	89.4	13.6	86.4

Data source: EIGE

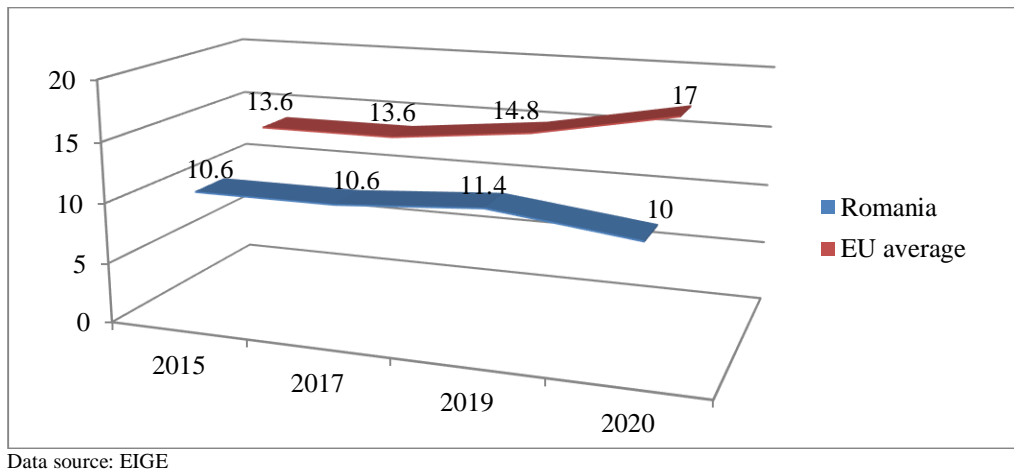


Figure 3. Women’s representation in the highest decision-making structures of national Olympic sports organisations (%)

Although the Romanian women’s participation in decision-making in the sports domain is close to the EU average, it should be noted that their representation in these decision-making structures is still far from that of men, which indicates that improvements are needed to achieve gender balance regarding participation in decision-making. Given these data, more importance should be given in our country to the issue of “gender equality in decision-making” in general but especially in sport, a field dominated by men throughout history. Romania had and still has valuable female athletes and managers who have contributed to the sports achievements of our country. Therefore, we cannot ignore the important contribution that this gender has made over time to promoting Romania worldwide.

Next, we conducted a comparative analysis between sports and six other domains to see women’s participation in decision-making at national level. Given that sport is often perceived as a male-dominated field, we wanted to find out about the Romanian women’s representation in decision-making positions compared to other domains. For this, we retrieved and analysed data from several statistics made by the European Institute for Gender Equality. Through the seven selected areas, namely sports, science and research, social dialogue, business and finance, judiciary, public administration and politics (Table 4), we tried to cover all the important life domains in our country with the purpose of making a complete and objective analysis.

Table 4. Women's participation in decision-making in seven life domains at national level

Field	Women	Men
1. Sports		
- Membership in the decision-making structures of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee (2019)	36.80%	63.20%
- Membership in the highest decision-making structures of national sports federations for the Olympic sports with the highest funding (2018)	20.9%	79.1%
- Membership in the highest decision-making structures of national sports federations for the Olympic sports with the highest popularity (2018)	12.2%	87.8%
2. Science and research		
- Membership in the highest decision-making structures of science academies in Romania (2019)	0%	100%
- Membership in the decision-making structures of organisations for research funding (2019)	44.9%	55.1%
3. Social dialogue		
- Membership in the highest decision-making structures of employee organisations (2018)	14.7%	85.3%
- Membership in the highest decision-making structures of employer organisations (2018)	13.8%	86.2%
4. Business and finance		
- Proportion of non-executive directors in large listed companies (2019)	14.4%	85.6%
- Proportion of chief executive officers in large listed companies (2019)	6.9%	93.1%
5. Judiciary		
- Judges at the Supreme Court (2019)	41.9%	58.1%
6. Public administration		
- Representation in central public administration (2018)	41.7%	58.3%
7. Politics		
- Representation in Parliament (2019)	19.6%	80.4%
- Chamber of Deputies and Senate (2019)	14%	86%
- Representation in Government (2019)	26.3%	73.7%

Data source: EIGE

The highest women's representation is observed in the *judiciary* and *public administration* domains, with 41.9% and 41.7%, respectively. In the *science and research* domain, their representation in the decision-making structures of organisations for research funding is 44.9%, but women are not present in the highest decision-making structures of science academies in Romania. Regarding the *social dialogue* domain, the indicator "Membership in the highest decision-making structure of employee organisations", women have a representation of 14.7% and 13.8% for the indicator "Membership in the highest decision-making structure of employer organisations". In the *politics* domain, women's representation is 19.6% in Parliament, 14% in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate and 26.3% in Government. According to EU experts, we need 70 years to achieve gender equality in terms of payroll and 20 years for women to have a 40% representation in Parliament. In the *sports* and *politics* domains, women's participation in decision-making is lower than in the *judiciary* and *public administration* domains but higher than in domains such as *business and finance* or *social dialogue*. Analysing the data, the lowest representation of women regarding participation in decision-making is recorded in the *business and finance* domain. In the *social dialogue* domain, women's participation in decision-making is also low.

According to Constantin et al. (2020), even if gender equality in the EU has recorded a positive trend, the latest *Report on Equality between Women and Men in the EU* (European Commission, 2019) states that it is far too slow, and the disparities between men and women

are still pronounced. We should not neglect that sport itself can play an important role in women's empowerment and can be seen as a tool for improving gender equality.

Conclusion

Gender equality in decision-making, an aspect of today's society, is emerging as an important objective of any sports organisation. Today, we are witnessing a prioritisation of actions regarding gender equality in direct relation with the elimination of any form of discrimination. Remarkable progress has been made, and women are more and more present in various management and decision-making positions, but there are still many situations in which they are discriminated against.

Although women's participation in decision-making is an area in which Romania has low scores, it can be seen that their representation in decision-making in the sports domain is close to the EU average. We also emphasise that, at national level, women's representation in decision-making in the sports domain is higher than in other domains, but improvements are obviously needed. Women are still underrepresented in management positions and we will probably not achieve the gender balance mentioned by the European Union in the near future. Therefore, even if more and more women work in the sports domain, men continue to dominate at the management level. Stereotypes about the social roles of men and women as well as their involvement in traditionally male and female activities are still present in our country. It is true that eliminating these gender stereotypes is a long process, but it can play a key role in eradicating obstacles that limit women's access to decision-making positions in sport. Additional efforts are needed to reach a gender balance in management and decision-making positions.

Some measures that can be taken by sports organisations to improve gender equality in management positions and decision-making are: developing and implementing gender equality in the decision-making plan, including some provisions in the regulations and statutes of sports organisations to stipulate positive actions in favour of the underrepresented gender regarding decision-making, implementing gender quotas in sports organisations. At national level, no sports organisations have been identified to adopt gender quotas. In our country, the introduction of gender quotas has been discussed in recent years but especially for the political domain.

According to EU experts, achieving gender equality and increasing the presence of women in the decision-making process in the sports domain could also be promoted through a number of measures such as: public debates, staff training, mentoring programmes and policies to encourage young women to stay in the world of sport (after ending their sports careers). Thus, by including such measures in sports organisations in our country, women will be more likely to hold management and decision-making positions.

According to the *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019* published by the European Commission (2015), promoting gender equality in decision-making requires "measures to combat over-representation of men in decision-making positions in research organisations, as well as measures to promote gender balance in political decision-making and public life, including in the sports field".

In conclusion, taking into account all the information and data presented above, we emphasise that achieving gender balance in the decision-making process must be an important goal for sports organisations in our country.

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