

# Gender Disparities in the Romanian Society,

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## Abstract

*The lower status of women is universal [9]. According to Baunach [3], “no society has been found to date where women habitually dominate men; nevertheless, there is variation in the character and degree of gender inequality across different societies... but even in culturally egalitarian societies, ‘male dominance’ and ‘sexual antagonism’ can be found” (p. 61). Unfortunately, in most parts of the world women are still not “equal” to men in their rights and duties, nor in their achievable aspirations concerning their education, career, and family roles. Consequently, the research community should make efforts to document and analyze the phenomenon of gender inequality, with the goal of developing adequate programs and implementing social politics to reduce the gender gap.*

*This study aims to compare and contrast the existing data referring to the social characteristics of the two sexes in Romania. The goal is to provide a more clear image of the analogous situation of Romanian men and women in a variety of socio-economical instances, such as the demographic phenomena, life expectancy, health, education, the labor market, income, and internet usage.*

*The data presented in this study is representative at a national level in Romania and is the result of surveys created by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS).*

**Keywords:** gender issue, inequality, Romania, gender statistics

**JEL Classification:** J16, J71, I24, I14

## Literature Review: The concept of gender

The Oxford English Dictionary defines gender as "a euphemism for the sex of a human being, often intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological distinctions between the sexes" [1]. The American Heritage Dictionary (5th ed.), in addition to defining gender the same way that it defines biological sex, it also states that gender may be defined by identity as "neither entirely female nor entirely male" [2]. According to Fulcher and Scott [6], a person's gender is not merely an aspect of what one is

but more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently in interaction with others. Considering the complex biological, social, and cultural aspects that make up gender, the difficulty of arriving to a satisfactory definition the term should not come as a surprise.

There is currently some debate in the literature about the difference between the concept of gender and sex. The social sciences now make a distinction between biologically defined sex and socially constructed gender, although the term gender is sometimes used by specialists to refer to social gender as well as physiological gender. The social gender is a more fluid concept, and refers to the social differences between men and women; those differences are learned, and can change as time passes. It is an instrumental concept that helps us analyze the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and needs of men and women in a variety of contexts. Gender theories suggest that there are three main contributors to gender development: individual factors (thinking, learning experience, etc.), environmental factors (family, peers, culture, etc.), and biological factors (genes, hormones, the brain, etc.). A person's sex, on the other hand, is strictly biological, and it is not easily changed.

On the other hand, gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender, and it usually arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles [8]. Gender inequality has been widely discussed in the literature, and analyzed through different lenses: income disparity, occupational gender segregation, gender roles in parenting and attempts in equalizing household work [4], as well as gender differences related to technology usage.

According to Francis and Kaufer (2011), the current distinction between the concepts of sex and gender has been criticized as misleading and counterproductive, since it suggests that the behavior of an individual can be partitioned into separate biological and cultural factors"[7]. Because the official statistics in Romania produces indicators by sex, for the purpose of this paper, we use the traditional dichotomy of male and female to look at the characteristics of the population, while acknowledging that the concept of gender is far more complex and controversial than that. Thus, when we talk about men and women (boys and girls, males and females, etc.) we refer to the people's biological sex as registered in national databases (e.g. TEMPO database [10]).

## **Gender differences: An overview**

In their essence, men and women are not different in their cognitive abilities or the skills that they can develop through education and social interaction. Still, there are some certain physiological differences between the two genders, as well as differences created and propagated by socio-cultural norms that cannot be overlooked. Eliot [5] makes an in depth analysis of the scientific literature on gender development, and shows that there are only four domains in which men and women seem to be significantly different: verbal skills (women have better verbal skills), spatial skills (men have better spatial skills), math (men are better), and aggression (men are more physically aggressive).

However, according to Eliot, although biology plays a role in determining those differences, differences in behavior are also the fruit of social roles. Different social roles lead to different behaviors, which, in turn, lead to the development of different skills. Also, humans are social beings and thus they regulate their own behavior to align with their schemas of gender roles (self-regulation), and also expect others to act in accordance with gender roles (expectancy confirmation). In those ways, and many others, gender roles are propagated over time, and the gender gap is maintained across generations.

## Gender profile of Romanian resident population

Like most European countries, Romania is currently confronting the social and economic consequences of a population that is slowly, but continuously, aging. The change in couples' behavior when it comes to reproduction, the rise of mortality rates, as well as the increase in international migration have led to a constant reduction of the Romanian population.

On January 1st, 2016, the Romanian population was of 19.76 million citizens (48.8% men and 51.2% women).

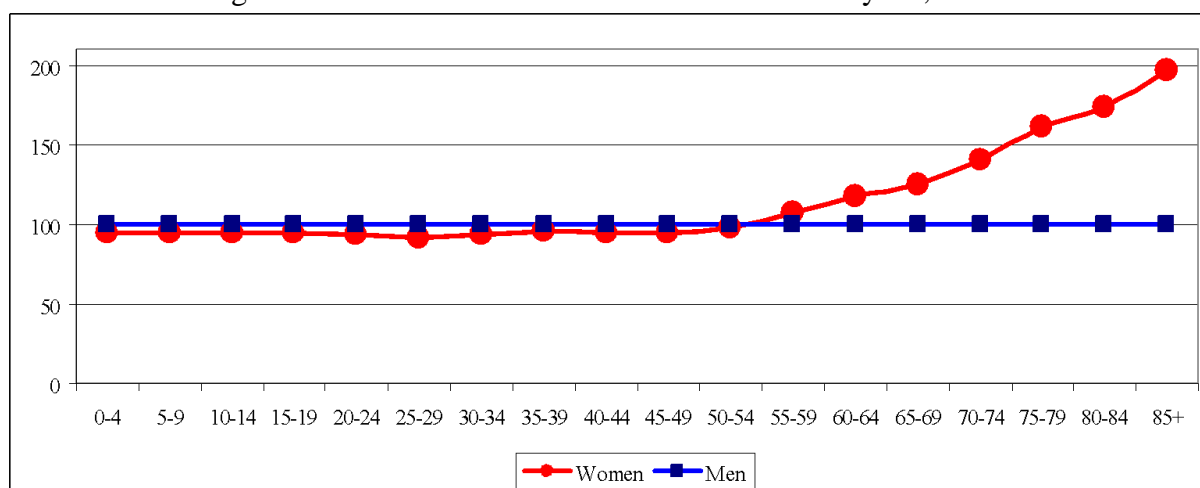
Table 1. Romanian residents in 2008-2016  
(thousands of people)

	Total	Male	Female
2008	20635.5	10049.2	10586.3
2012	20096.0	9777.1	10318.9
2013	20020.1	9761.5	10258.6
2014	19947.3	9746.0	10201.3
2015	19870.7	9707.1	10163.6
2016	19760.0	9652.7	10107.3

Source: NIS, Demographic Statistics

In the Romanian population, as a total, the number of female residents exceeds the number of male residents. The same applies to the group age 50 and older, and it is accentuated for residents who are 85 years or older. The problem of the aging population is not only of demographic nature, but it also has economic, social, cultural, medical, and moral implications. For this reason, the phenomenon ought to be studied through an interdisciplinary approach. Demographic aging is a phenomenon of real character that is produced independently as a result of the social and economic conditions of a society within a limited timeframe.

Figure 1. Number of women to 100 men on January 1st, 2016



Source: NIS, Demographic Statistics

The population in the rural area is older than the population in the urban area. On January 1st, 2016, approximately 19.9% of the rural population was older than 65. Additionally, from the total female population in the rural area, the old women represented

almost 23.7%. Among the residents that were 65 or older, the number of women was 1.5 times greater than the number of men both in the rural and urban areas. The average age of the population has increased from 39.6 years (2008) to 41.5 years (January 1st, 2016). This standard characterizes countries with an “adult” population. The female population, with a median age of 43.1 years, was older than the male population in 2016.

The life circumstances and lifestyle of the Romanian population have changed during the last decades: there has been an increase in life expectancy, as well as in the average household income. However, the need to access higher education and professional qualifications to obtain stable jobs has also increased. These factors, among others, have determined the Romanian youth to postpone marriage more often than before.

Although, in the Romanian society, the predominant form of union continues to be the legal marriage, during the last years the phenomenon of delaying marriage has intensified. Still, in 2015, the largest number of marriages (18,2% of the total number of marriages) were among men and women between 25 and 29 years, which represented an increase from 2014 (18,0% of the total number of marriages). Although the probability of getting married young has been decreasing, most people still marry for the first time before they turn 30.

In 2015, 31.5 thousand divorces were registered, which represented 4.3 thousand divorces increase in comparison to 2014. The rate of divorce has increased from 1.22 divorces per 1000 citizens in 2014 to 1.42 divorces per 1000 residents in 2015. If we compare the rate of divorce with that of the year 2008, however, we can observe a decrease: in 2008, the rate of divorce was of 1.58 divorces per 1000 citizens. Thus, the relationship between the number of divorces and the number of marriages, as well as their pattern of development over time are not yet very clear.

Still, it is not difficult to observe that changes in matrimonial patterns have been reflected in the evolution of divorces. Gradually, late, delayed marriages have replaced early marriages and the habit of having children at young ages. This change has led to a transition in the average age at which people get divorced, as well. The average age at which people decide to divorce has increased for both men and women. Currently, the average age at divorce is 41.4 years for men, and 37.8 years for women, and the values are higher in the urban area than in the rural area.

### **Life expectancy differences between women and men**

The most frequently utilized indicator when it comes to characterizing demographic evolution and levels of development of a population is *life expectancy*. The evolution of the average life expectancy has been influenced over time by a complex set of factors, some of the most important being lifestyle, health, eating habits, level of sanitary education, as well as socio-economical conditions. As generations go by, the Romanian population lives longer. In 2015, life expectancy at birth in Romania reached 75.4 years, which is a 1.9 years increase since 2008 (73.5 years), and 0.7 years since 2012 (74.7 years). Life expectancy has remained constant since 2014.

In Romania, more attention is paid to the actual medical care as required by patients than to the preventive aspect of health care. In Romania, we tend to overlook the fact that effective prophylaxis could substantially reduce mortality rates, and consequently, significantly increase life expectancy. Consequently, although the Romanian population lives longer, it does not live healthier. The indicator called *healthy life expectancy* was developed to inquire whether an increase in life expectancy is followed by an increase in the quality of health. The indicator combines information about health and sickness prevalence among different age groups with mortality rates for the same age groups. In Romania, in 2014, the healthy life expectancy was of 59.0 years, with no gender differences.

## Education

Gender equality in education presumes giving value to an individual's aspirations, needs, and behaviors through equal access to all forms of education, disregarding the individual's biological or social sex. Through education, societies try to ameliorate, if not eliminate, the impact of social conventions that give rise to gender inequality. These conventions influence people at the individual level, as well as the societal structure as a whole.

In Romania, education is secured by law: educational institutes must provide equal access to education and examination. Statistical data confirm the fact that, in Romania, there is no gender inequality when it comes to education. That does not mean, unfortunately, that there is no gender discrimination in schools. Gender disparities exist, but they manifest themselves through other dimensions such as income inequality, children's residential environment, and other geographic and economic factors.

In general, school-age children are represented in equal numbers in schools throughout all levels of education. However, at the undergraduate level, the female population is slightly smaller than the male population: 48% female versus 52% male. For upper-level education the situation is different. For example, in the school year 2014-2015, 53% of the students graduating from colleges were female. Also, 55.7% of the total number of students enrolled for final exams in Masters and Doctorate programs were female.

Gender inequality manifests itself most evidently when we look at the discrepancy between developing regions and residential areas. Although Bucharest, the capital city, has the highest net rate of educational participation in Romania (91.0%), it is also characterized by the most pronounced gender disparity (10.1 percentage points in women's favor).

It is also important to note that the provisory data on the 2015-2016 school year show a decrease in the net rate of scholar participation to 62.5% (64.3% for women, and 60.7% for men). The lowest net rate of participation in education for both sexes is found in Ilfov district (39.0% for women, and 40.3% for men). The rates are also low in Cluj region, and in the rural area as a whole (34.3%).

Another important indicator when it comes to participation in education, or rather the lack of it, is dropout. In Romania, boys drop out of school prematurely and more frequently than girls do.

Table 2. Dropout rates on levels of education and sexes, 2014-2015 school year

	Total	Feminin	Masculin
Primary and Secondary	2.0	1.8	2.1
Primary	1.8	1.6	2.0
Secondary	2.1	1.9	2.4
High school and Professional	3.5	2.8	4.2
Undergraduate	10.7	9.8	12.4

Source: NIS. Demographic Statistics

In the school year 2014-2015, the school dropout rates were greater for the male population in comparison to the female population for primary and secondary education, as well as for secondary and postsecondary education. Girls' tendency to continue their studies within the national educational system manifests itself in colleges and universities, as well. From the total of students who graduated from college in the school year 2014-2015, 57.7% were female. Fifty-eight and three tenths percent of the college graduates of public institutions were girls, and 55.1% of the graduates from private institutions also identified as female.

Additionally, the alumni from master's and other post university programs are also predominantly female. There are 50% more women graduates from master's programs than there are men. For doctoral and postdoctoral programs, the gender gap is smaller: 52,2% of the graduates are female, and 47,8% are male.

### **Labor inequality**

The gender gap in labor can be explained by the fact that, in Romania, women often have to choose between building professional careers and devoting themselves, at least for a limited time, to building a family and raising children. However, several factors might lead women to be more strongly represented in the working population now than they were before. Nowadays, women have access to child-care services, and they can negotiate more flexible work contracts. Also importantly, the presence of gender stereotypes when it comes to household activities seems to be slowly fading.

The total number of employed citizens in Romania was 8.535 in 2015. The percentage of the Romanian population older than 15 and younger than 64 years that was employed in 2015 is 61.4%. Out of the total number of employed citizens, 43.2% were female, and 69.5% were male. In other words, the employed male population was 16.3 percentage points higher than the female population that year. Moreover, although there are slightly more women than men in the age category of 15 years or older (1065 women to 1000 men) there is a significant gender gap in the workforce, with male citizens being overrepresented.

Not surprisingly, occupation among the Romanian youth (15-24 years) is much lower in comparison to the working-age population (15-64 years). Also, for the younger age group the gender gap is not as stringent. For example, in 2015, the percentage of male Romanian citizens between 15 and 24 years of age that were employed was 29.4%, while the percentage of female employed residents was 19.3%. Furthermore, 18.1% of the Romanian youth (15-24 years) were not employed in 2015, neither were they enrolled in the educational system. The NEET rate (Not in Employment, Education or Training) is higher for women than it is for men: 21.4%, and 15.0% respectively.

Still, women have precarious professional perspectives. Although the unpaid family workers represent only 9.6% of the employed population, they are preponderantly women. Statistical data shows that, in Romania, women do 67.4% of the total unpaid work in the household. Additionally, the greatest gender gap in labor is related to business ownership - the number of women business-owners in Romania is 2.9 times smaller than the number of men who own businesses.

In Romania, as in most other countries, occupations are gender-specific. Women are usually employed in economic sectors, and choose careers that are compatible with their familial responsibilities. Women dominate the workforce in domains such as health and social assistance (79.0%), education (75.8%), intermediary finances (65.1%), hotels and restaurants (59.9%), professional activities (55.7%) and commerce (54.7%). From all the people working in the agricultural sector in 2015 (25.6% of the total employed population), 43.2% were women.

### **Income inequality**

Gender equality cannot be achieved without income equality. The financial discrepancy, and the difference in wages in particular, strongly impacts women in Romania. The causes of the financial gap are complex and intertwined. However, it is important to keep in mind that, traditionally and historically, women have been employed to do activities that

are less well paid. Even in the domains that are dominated by women, female employees are underrepresented in leadership positions, especially at the highest levels. Those realities have an adverse impact on women's professional opportunities, as well as on their rights to pension and other social insurances.

In Romania, the causes of gender differences in income are mostly indirect, and thus we cannot easily argue the existence of sex discrimination in any domain of economic activity. Still, women's abilities and competencies are often underappreciated, especially in professions in which they represent the majority. Sometimes, women's income is affected by factors that reduce their capacity of payment or limit the complementary means of payment. For example, women's working time is, on average, reduced in comparison to men's working hours. Among the most frequent causes of the reduced economic activity for women is maternity leave and childcare. On the other hand, men work longer than the usual workload by accessing variable work programs or working overtime (working beyond the regular working hours).

In 2015, in Romania, the gross average wage income was 2,555 lei, and the net income was 1,859 lei. This represented an increase from 2008 for both men and women. The gender gap in monthly income, both net, and gross, invariably favors men. In 2015, men had a gross monthly income 193 lei higher than the women's income; their net income was 145 lei higher. Gender differences in wages on activities of the national economy are usually caused by different levels of training, hierarchical positions in the workplace that favor men, or the type of occupation. Regarding the causes, for most activities of the national economy, the differences in income (net and gross) are in men's favor.

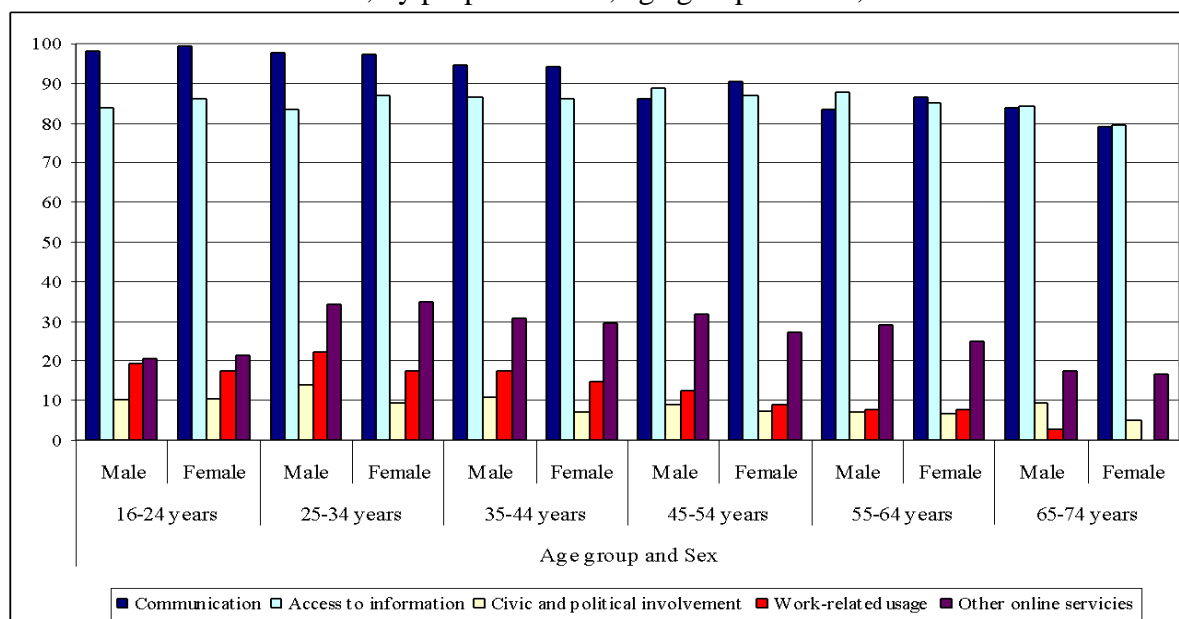
Nonetheless, the data shows that women who are employed in positions that are traditionally considered "masculine" benefit from greater wages than men. For example, in constructions, men had a monthly gross income with 404 lei smaller than women, and a net income that was 289 lei/month lower than women's. Also, in administrative and support services, women have earned on average a gross salary 399 lei higher than men's, and a net pay 284 lei higher. Another example is the extractive industry, in which women had monthly gross wages 337 lei greater than men, and net wages 234 lei higher. Still, there are huge discrepancies in men's favor, as well. For example, in financial intermediations and insurances, women earned a gross monthly payment 1994 lei smaller than men and a net salary 1475 lei smaller.

Overall, the pattern of earnings on the labor market in our country shows that women earn less than men in almost all occupational groups. The biggest sex difference between the average gross annual earnings in 2014 is registered in the panel of specialists in various fields, the difference is more pronounced in 2014 (7417 lei).

## **Internet usage**

Ninety-three and nine tenths percent of the people (16-74 years) who used the Internet in the last three months said that they used it during their free time mainly for communication purposes. Access to information was the second greatest reason for using the internet (85.8%), followed by other online services (28.3%) and solving problems related to work (15.5%). It's important to note that interest in using the internet declines with age, and it does so faster for women. Young people (16-24 years), in particular, use the internet for communication purposes. Both girls and boys participate in social networks (creating a user profile, posting messages or other contributions to Facebook Twitter, etc.) in an overwhelming proportion (over 90%).

Figure 2. Percentage of persons who used the Internet in the last 3 months for personal matters, by purpose of use, age group and sex, 2015



Source: NIS, Survey on the access to information and communication technology in households

Recently, there has been a growth regarding the use of internet for online commerce in Romania. However, there is still some reluctance to online shopping caused by people's preferences (for both men and women) to see the products before purchasing them. More specifically, Romanians have concerns related to the safety and confidentiality of online payments. Thus, 86.3% of women and 83.9% of men still prefer to go to stores to see products before making purchases, and do so out of habit or loyalty to physical stores.

Table 3. People who have used the Internet in the last 12 months and their reasons for not purchasing goods or services for personal purposes over the Internet, by gender, 2015

Reasons for not purchasing goods or services <sup>1)2)</sup>	Total	Men	Women
Lack of skills or knowledge	10.1	10.2	10.0
Delivery of goods ordered over the Internet	4.2	4.3	4.0
Issues of safety or confidentiality of online payments	11.8	12.3	11.3
Lack of confidence about receiving or returning goods, complaint / appeal	8.9	8.8	9.1
The lack of a card allowing Internet Payment	1.9	13.5	14.4
Foreign retailer stopped selling products in the country	0.3	0.3	0.2
Other reason	6.1	6.0	6.2

Source: NIS, Survey on the access to information and communication technology in households

Note: <sup>1)</sup> – multiple answers, <sup>2)</sup> – Total persons aged 16-74 years who have not ordered/bought goods or services for personal use over the Internet in the last 12 months



Of all male respondents (16-74 years) who used the internet to purchase or order goods and services during the last 12 months, 53.5% had finished secondary education and 38.0% were university graduates. In the case of women, 50.1% of those who bought or ordered goods and services over the internet had secondary education, and 42.0% had higher education.

Comparing people with different occupational statuses, we found that employees are championing online purchases, followed by students and pupils. Sixty-six and nine tenths percent of employees, and 17.2% of students and male college students used the internet to buy or order goods or services over the last 12 months. For the female population, the highest frequency of online shopping is also realized by employed persons (64.8%), but schoolgirls and female college students have bought products online in greater proportions than men (2.2 percentage points or 19.4%).

## **Conclusions**

Building upon existing studies in sociology and psychology looking at gender inequality around the world, this paper has tried to offer a more clear image of the situation of Romanian men and women in a variety of socio-economical instances, as well as to inquire into the extent to which gender inequality is a problem in Romania.

In our country, the participation of both sexes in the spheres of public and private life, as well as equal access to the distribution of resources between women and men are ensured. As shown by the official data from NIS, we cannot speak of gender inequality by itself in Romania, but about differences between Romanian men and women that are caused by a series of complex and intertwined factors.

While analyzing the data, we have to keep in mind the fact that in Romania, as in most parts of the world, men have traditionally benefited from a privileged status in the society, having more power, better opportunities, and better socio-economic perspectives. The privileged status of men has been and continues to be propagated and maintained due to loyalty to culture and traditions, as well as different social phenomena, such as the self-regulation and expectancy confirmation of gender roles.

The different social roles that Romanian men and women occupy have led to different behaviors, and to the development of different skills, which is reflected in the gender-specificity of occupations. Women are usually employed in economic sectors and choose careers that are compatible with their familial responsibilities. They also represent the majority of unpaid familial workers and do not own businesses as often as men do.

As generations go by, the Romanian population lives longer; the society is also slowly aging, which represents a problem that is not only of demographic nature, but it also has economic, social, cultural, medical, and moral implications. Although Romanians live longer, they do not live healthier lives, as suggested by the healthy life expectancy indicator. The Romanian female population is greater than the male population, and it also tends to live longer.

Although there is no inherent gender inequality when it comes to education in Romania, gender disparities still exist, and they manifest themselves through other dimensions, such as income inequality, children's residential environment, and other geographic and economic factors. Surprisingly, women are more strongly represented in most levels of education in Romanian public and private institutions and have lower school dropout rates than the male population.

There is a substantial financial discrepancy between Romanian men and women that has had an adverse impact on women's professional opportunities, as well as on their rights to pension and other social insurances. Traditionally and historically, women have been

employed to do activities that are less well paid. Even in domains that are dominated by women, female employees are underrepresented in leadership positions, especially at the highest levels. However, women employed in positions that are traditionally considered “masculine” benefit from greater wages than men.

When it comes to internet usage, the majority of Romanians claim to access the internet most often for communication purposes. Access to information was the second greatest reason for using the internet, followed by other online services and solving problems related to work. Young people are the biggest internet users; interest in using the internet declines with age, and it does so faster for women. Although there has been a recent growth regarding the use of the internet for online commerce in Romania, people have concerns related to the safety and confidentiality of online payments, and thus still prefer to go to stores to make purchases.

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