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FAMILY LIFE. A SECONDARY DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS
IN THE ROMANIAN CONTEXT**

Maria SIMIONESCU (VLĂSCEANU)

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EXPLORING THE GENDERED DYNAMICS OF WORK AND FAMILY LIFE. A SECONDARY DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS IN THE ROMANIAN CONTEXT

Maria SIMIONESCU (VLĂSCEANU)¹

Abstract

This paper focuses on work and family life in Romania, with particular emphasis on gender, seen as a social structure. The methodology employs the secondary descriptive analysis of data drawn from NIS, Eurostat, and the European Value Survey/World Value Survey datasets. The findings show a Romanian work landscape with slow progress in embracing work flexibility, with considerably lower percentages of remote work and part-time employment compared to EU averages. A notable gender disparity exists in the professional sector. Women exhibit a 18.8% lower participation in economic activities compared to men, a gap that increases with the number of children. Moreover, 36.5% of women, in contrast to 2.7% of men, are professionally inactive due to familial responsibilities. These results align with Nancy Fraser's (2013) viewpoint on how the intersection between capitalism and patriarchy shapes women experiences. The lack of family-friendly work structures disproportionately impacts women, leaving them vulnerable professionally and financially. Family continues to be the most important institution for Romanians, with trends regarding age of marriage and child births mirroring previous years. While there's a gradual decrease in unpaid household and childcare activities, it is mostly due to technological progress (Popescu, 2009) while women still work "double shifts" (Hochschild, 2012). The paper's findings highlight that cultural norms and societal pressure compels women to prioritize family responsibilities. Creating "brave new families" (Stacy, 1990) or fostering "confluent love" (Giddens, 1992) requires post-modern cooperation between partners, backed by multi-level actions (Walby, 1989) at individual, organizational and societal levels.

Keywords: family life, work life, gender, household labour, work-life balance.

¹ University of Bucharest, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work. Bucharest, ROMANIA.

E-mail : vlasceanu.maria94@gmail.com; maria.vlasceanu1@s.unibuc.ro.

Introduction

This study conducts a secondary descriptive data analysis of work and family life in the Romanian context, with a specific emphasis on gender as a social structure. The literature review encompasses three main areas, gender, family dynamics and work life. Some of the key gender theories are the cultural creation of gender (Mead, 1961), gender performativity (Butler, 2004) and the institutionalized gender systems (Ridgeway, 2004). From the nineteenth century view about woman's role as the "angel of the house" (Lipovetsky, 2000) to Betty Friedan's challenge over the social pressure on women to find their fulfilment only within the household (Friedan, 1963) and the emergence of "brave new families" (Stacy, 1990), the paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the evolving role of women and the family dynamics. The study also considers the impact of societal pressures, such as the stigma theory (Goffman, 1963), and the labelling theory (Becker, 1966) on perpetuating gender norms.

The work life theory chapter delves into the evolving nature of occupational work, considering the shift to a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world (Johansen, & Euchner, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated changes in working patterns, in particular the predominance of teleworking. However, despite its potential benefits, studies reveal an inequitable division of household labour during the pandemic (Waddell, & *et al.*, 2021). The study acknowledges the low adoption of teleworking in Romania (Vasilescu, 2023) and raises questions about other forms of flexible working (such as part time working, freelancing). The paper takes into the account the work-life balance concept (Guest, 2002; Kalliath, & Brough, 2008), considering that individual social characteristics such as gender, number of children, professional status may influence the delicate balance between professional and family life.

Our motivation for this study comes from recognizing the importance of balancing work and personal life, not just for individuals but also for organizations aiming to boost employee motivation and retention. Considering the evolving nature of work and drawing from sociological insights, we are eager to understand the dynamics of gender, family, and work in today's Romania. Inspired by Risman's call to inform and transform society through research (Risman, 2004), through this paper we want to contribute to societal progress by shedding light on these issues.

This main goal of the research is to conduct a secondary descriptive data analysis of work and family life in the Romanian landscape with particular focus on gender, as a social structure. To achieve this aim, the paper has the following objectives:

O1: To describe how does the work life differentiate based on gender in Romania.

O2: To describe how does the family life differentiate based on gender in Romania.

To achieve this, we've undertaken an extensive literature review followed by setting-up the methodology for the study, and the descriptive data analysis in the chapter dedicated to findings, drawing from NIS (National Institute of Statistics), Eurostat, and the European Value Survey/World Value Survey datasets.

Literature review

Gender Theory

This study explores the concept of gender theory from a sociological perspective. It delves into the gendered nature of household labour and childcare role, examining how societal structures such as family or occupational work environment contribute to shaping and perpetuating gender roles and identities. The paper emphasizes how gender is socially constructed and highlights the ongoing impact of traditional gender norms on individual lives and societal structures. We attempt to provide a context for the current understanding of the gender roles, family, and work life patterns mentioning some of the foundational feminist work.

First, we will start with the anthropologist Margaret Mead's (1961) work that prompted one of the first discussions on the cultural creation of gender, as gender is not based on biological gender differences but reflects the norms and values of the reference culture, varying from one culture to another. Continuing the study of gender and the feminist movement, Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (Butler, 1990) kindles deeper exploration of how gender identities are shaped in both professional and personal realms. Butler (2004) considers that gender is a repetition that is not based on an original as people behave according to specific cultural expectations (what clothes, gestures, behaviours do women versus men exhibit). These expectations come from the way most people behave or from the representations of the gender appearances presented through cultural values. In this way, this cycle of imitation is reiterated and embodied continuously, and the femininity and masculinity performed by the members of a generation will be passed on to the next generations, through the socialization process.

We find very useful to analyse the relation between stigma theory (Goffman, 1963) and the undoing gender theory (Butler, 2004) on how social norms and expectations come with associated wishes that, even if they do not arise from our internal personhood, seem to be strongly connected with our personal success, precisely because individuals do not want to deviate from the pre-established social norms that govern our conduct. This relation is extremely important for this paper because it can represent an explanation of why women and men might be guided to perform the gender roles learned through the interactions with others.

Looking at gender from a wider angle, Ridgeway (2004) in particular emphasizes that gender is not just a childhood taught identity, or role enacted within family relations, but an institutionalized system creating distinct categories of men

and women, organizing social relations with built-in inequalities based on this difference. The author provides two examples demonstrating how gender beliefs contribute to workplace gender inequality: the glass ceiling referring to women that often don't reach top positions despite being midlevel managers, and the challenges faced by working mothers, where cultural expectations clash with job demands, emphasizing motherhood's impact on performance beyond gender alone.

But how can we address gender-based inequalities? Barbara Risman's proposal offers a relevant solution. She advocates for transitioning to a post-gender society (Risman, 2009), emphasizing the decreasing relevance of binary gender norms, and calling for an end to socially constructed distinctions for a more just world. Risman (2004) argues that simultaneous efforts, including reforming child socialization, men's roles, and responsibilities in family work, and creating family-friendly workplaces are crucial for achieving feminist social change.

Family Dynamics – From Friedan's Second Shifts to Stacy's Brave New Families

The historical and cultural perspective over women's role evolved over the recent centuries. In the nineteenth century, the prevailing view was that of women as the "angel of the house" (Lipovetsky, 2000). This traditionalist viewpoint of family aligns with Parson's functionalist perspective, which assigns gender-specific roles within the family structure (Parsons, 1955). The stereotyped mother - housewife model associated with this view was challenged by Betty Friedan. Through her influential work, Friedan (1963) made a significant contribution to feminist literature, highlighting societal pressures on women to find fulfillment solely through home and family. As women struggled to transcend the traditional housewife role and entered the workforce, the power dynamics within families reflected those found in the occupational sphere, leading to what Hochschild terms the "second shift" (Hochschild, 2012) for women. This term encapsulates the additional unremunerated workload of housework for the household members added after performing remunerated work, as observed during author's interviews with women.

In accordance with the second shift, Delphy's materialist feminism argues that both capitalism and patriarchy exploit women (Delphy, 1978), and we suggest that contemporary work structures, like teleworking, may intensify this dual oppression. Nancy Fraser's work builds on Delphy's ideas, exploring the intersection (Kimberle, 1989) of capitalism, race, and patriarchy in shaping women's experiences, particularly in care work, and advocating for a transformative approach to address inequalities (Fraser, 2013). In this regard, it is important to mention Connell (1987) and her perspective that structural inequalities and power dynamics influence the gendering process. While we agree with Fraser in advocating for a transformative approach to overcome inequalities, as highlighted by Connell, the structural inequalities pose challenges to its implementation.

Discussing about how patriarchy exploits women, we believe it is crucial to discuss about Ann Oakley (1974) and her work in the sociology of household labour. Through her work, she brought light on how historical gender roles and societal expectations have shaped the unequal division of household labour. She challenges stereotypes suggesting women are naturally better at specific tasks like ironing, emphasizing that such skills are not inherently gender-based but influenced by socialization and cultural norms. Oakley's research underscores the importance of recognizing individual abilities and choices, asserting that both men and women can equally perform household chores, debunking gender-based assumptions about domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, of relevance to this paper is Scott Coltrane's research that involved interviews with 20 dual-earner couples. The author reveals that when domestic responsibilities are shared equally, fathers may adopt a "maternal thinking" (Coltrane, 1989), thereby aligning with Oakley's perspective on reshaping the social significance of gender from individual traits to social interaction dynamics.

The Parsons's functionalist family is juxtaposed with the emerging ideas such as "brave new families" (Stacy, 1990) advocating fluid family structures that reject the relevance of gender-based role divisions. The "confluent love" (Giddens, 1992) is portraying an egalitarian relationship where partners continuously choose to stay in a romantic couple. These ideas are specific to postmodern family (Popescu, 2009, 2022) and are the relationships that manage to negotiate their roles and build strategies adapted to fulfil the needs of both partners. But what does it take to become a "brave new family"? Stacy (1990) advocates for women to challenge patriarchal power dynamics at individual, interpersonal, and societal levels, promoting equality. While we agree with this feminist perspective and with the deconstruction of patriarchal structures, we wish to highlight the potential consequences of individual change, particularly in relation with the societal pressure to conform to norms.

Specifically, considering the theory of labelling, social institutions may label individual changes as deviant if the individual actions deviate from the social norms (Becker, 1966). For instance, a woman choosing not to cook or clean for the household, but study long hours might face societal labels and stigma, especially in a traditional society. The fear of consequences prompts conformity, as Durkheimian familial anomie creates conflict between individuality and societal expectations. Both partners face societal pressure to conform, with men shouldering the historical burden of traditional masculinity and women navigating the "feminine dilemma" (Dragomir, 2002) between personal aspirations and traditional family roles. To sum up our perspective, while we agree with Walby and Fraser's advocacy for transformation, we will also underscore that the perpetuation of gender roles can be explained by the socially constructed nature of gender roles (Connell, 1987) and by the labelling theory (Becker, 1966), specifically by the choice of individuals or families to comply with the social norms rather than taking the risk of being labelled and stigmatized for deviating from societal norms.

Work Life in a VUCA World

Until recently, the occupational work model was only represented by the on-site working, respectively in factories, offices, or any other kind of administrative units. Currently, “the pace of change has been steadily increasing” (Vlăsceanu, 2011) and thus, due to the progress in technology, communications, and transport, we can say that today we are part of a global society. Organizations are expanding their borders, from national to global, and with these changes, the model of occupational work also finds itself in a continuous transformation. We are finding ourselves in a stage of society named “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000), a stage characterized by the fluid, unpredictable nature of social change, also known as VUCA world (Johansen, & Euchner, 2015) in the today’s business sector. VUCA world is referring to an environment described as volatile, unstructured, complex, and ambiguous.

The changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic in this work segment were numerous and had different impacts over people’s life, from unemployment, reduced wages to teleworking policies during the pandemic for employees. Even after the pandemic risk passed, organizations continued to offer teleworking options, in various forms or policies. Moreover, these work type options are more of an aspect related to the job specialization or the organizational policies, hence having various implications on the work - personal life balance. The teleworking model, although not entirely new, gained prominence during the pandemic and continued to be a solution, especially in the context of the VUCA world.

Teleworking was initially seen as a potential solution for better work-family time management, and early studies anticipated a reduction in gender stratification as fathers became more involved in domestic labour (Osnowitz, 2005). While the efficiency of teleworking is evident in the elimination of commute time, offering potential benefits for balancing career and family life, the question remains on how the partners would choose to spend this gained time. As a potential answer to this question, we find useful to mention a study regarding the relationship implications during COVID-19 lockdown in New Zealand. The study’s results show that women took on more parenting and housework, while men increased their involvement in paid work and personal time, leading to an acknowledged but inequitable division of household labour (Waddell *et al.*, 2021).

However, examining the teleworking landscape in Romania, Vasilescu (2023) reveals that Romania has one of the lowest levels of teleworking in Europe, attributed to a dominance of low-qualified and manual labour and a scarcity of high-skilled professionals. Other explanations about the low level of teleworking in Romania are related to the limited preferences among employees for this work type (Suciu, & Petre, 2022). While teleworking presents advantages such as business continuity and job preservation when disruptive situations appear, it also poses challenges, particularly concerning mental health, workload, and family duties, especially for women (Vasilescu, 2023). The study underscores the

nuanced impact of teleworking on achieving work-life balance in the evolving landscape of remote work.

In order to understand the work life environment, we find useful to mention “the illusion of choice” (Burawoy, 1979) theory, as it plays an important role in understanding the connection between individual workload and work-life balance. This theory highlights that the employee, when accepting additional work tasks, experiences a combination of spontaneous consent and the constraints tied to the consequences of their choice. Accepting tasks can lead to favourable outcomes like higher salary, job security, professional success, and accomplishment, while refusing tasks, even with valid reasons like a heavy workload, may have detrimental consequences.

Burawoy’s theory underscores how choices in the workplace are shaped by the cultural dynamics of organizational work, aligning with Boudon’s perspective that advancing in the organizational ladder involves adhering to the rules of the organizational game and constraints of the professional environment (Boudon, *et al.*, 1997). This paper asserts that there is substantial influence of individual social characteristics, such as gender, the number of children, worked hours, professional status, and occupational group, on advancing within the organizational hierarchy. It underscores the added complexity introduced by familial obligations in the delicate balance between professional and family life.

When discussing about work and family life, the concept of work-life balance takes centre stage. Guest (2002) defines it simply as the equilibrium between paid employment (work) and activities outside work, such as family or leisure time. In a more detailed perspective, the work-life balance refers to an individual’s perception that work and non-work activities align with current life priorities (Kalliath, & Brough, 2008). The debate on who holds the main responsibility for maintaining this balance arises, involving multiple levels, such as the individual, family, employer, or community (Guest, 2002). While some argue for individual responsibility, others advocate for enhancing the organizational policies (Smithson, & Stokoe, 2005). Oberman (2013) challenges the possibility of achieving this balance, emphasizing that the changing nature of life makes women struggle and then feel frustrated by the impossibility to reach that state. Ultimately, we agree with the answer offered by Guest, considering that preventing the imbalance is key.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight the evolving nature of occupational work in a VUCA world. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the predominance of teleworking as a solution, but its impact varies, as seen in studies showing an inequitable division of household labour. Teleworking has a low adoption rate in Romania also, due to low rates of high-skilled professionals. Understanding this environment involves considering “the illusion of choice” (Burawoy, 1979) based on the fact that workplace decisions impact work-life balance and vice-versa. The study emphasizes the nuanced challenges of teleworking, particularly for women, and underscores the importance of individual social characteristics and

familial obligations in navigating the complex dynamics between professional and personal life.

Methodology

The methodology employed involves the longitudinal descriptive analysis of secondary data using SPSS 26 and Microsoft Excel tools. The study focuses on data about Romania and has a comparative approach to the European average, as a wider reference standard. The resulting findings are presented and conveyed through descriptive narratives and informative tables. The analysis performed uses data available from two types of databases. One that offers data only for Romania, NIS (Romania's National Institute of Statistics) and two more with data from European surveys, Eurostat and European Value Survey/World Value Survey aggregated, from which we were able to filter data for Romania and for the European average. These datasets were chosen to fulfil the aim of this research, respectively offering information about family and work life in Romania. The datasets were filtered on the research dimensions and indicators, which in turn answer the research questions, as mentioned a bit below.

Having in mind the primary objective mentioned in the introduction chapter, we have formulated the main research question "What are the gender disparities in work and family life within the Romanian context?" and the following secondary research questions:

Q1: What are the gender disparities in the realm of working life, and how do factors such as employment status, professional inactivity, working hours, and teleworking differentiate between men and women in Romania?

Q2: What are the gender disparities in the realm of family life and how do factors such as age at first marriage, single parent households, time spent on unpaid household and childcare activities differentiate between men and women in Romania?

Having in mind the research's objectives and questions, below are presented the research dimensions and the indicators of the research.

Table 1. Research dimensions and indicators

Research dimensions	Indicators
Work Life in Romania	Weekly work duration
	Full-time and part-time workers
	Secondary work activity
	Employment rate
	Employed adults working at home
	Inactive population because of familial responsibilities
Family Life in Romania	Importance in life of Family, Work; Friends, Leisure time, Politics, Work, Religion
	Family dynamics: age at first marriage, age at first childbirth, single parent households
	Time spent on unpaid household and care activities
	Women vs men who take care of their children every day
	Women vs men who take care of housework and cleaning every day

Regarding the selection of indicators, we would like to provide the following clarifications. Firstly, as emphasized in the gender theory review, this study views gender as a social construct. Given the diverse implications of gender in both individual lives and society, it remains a central focus throughout the entire analysis. Secondly, the choice of indicators related to work and life comes from the primary research question, which aims to investigate gender disparities by these aspects. These indicators, such as employment rate and working hours, are chosen to enhance understanding of Romanian working patterns. Similarly, indicators related to family life, including the significance of family, family dynamics, and time spent on household and care activities, are also considered, all through the lens of gender.

The analysis spans over the period 2012 to 2022, with a primary focus on the most recent years, 2019 to 2022 with particular emphasis on the year 2021, since it was the year for which the most relevant data could be identified successfully. The chosen 10-year timeframe arises from the unavailability of recent pertinent data for certain indicators, such as the proportion of time allocated to unpaid household and care activities based on gender in Romania. When we encountered difficulties in obtaining current data for the 2019-2022 period, we chose to extend the timeframe to incorporate a broader range of years. Whenever a dataset aligned with the study's indicators and research questions emerged, even if not entirely current, we made the decision to incorporate it. This approach allowed the study to present a comprehensive context, if not a strictly contemporary one. Bearing in mind the

inherent limitations in obtaining current data, particularly on the gendered division of household labour, and care activities in Romania, the study acknowledges its inability to provide a real-time snapshot of this indicator. Nevertheless, by presenting a broader context, the research contributes with valuable insights for the cultural and historical contextualization of the gendered division of labour practices in Romania.

Research Findings

Work Life Patterns in Romania

To grasp an image of the work life in contemporary Romania, we started by analysing the gendered distribution of the employment rate. We have found that in the EU, the employment rate of people aged 18-64 was higher for men (76%) than for women (65 %) in 2020 (Eurostat, 2023b), while in Romania the numbers are even more unequal. In 2022, in Romania, the occupation rate for the age group 15-64 years was 66.8 %, with an occupation rate of 76.1% for male population and with an almost 18.8% lower occupation rate of women (NIS, 2022). Only 57.3% of the female population was engaged in economic activities in 2022 (Figure 1). When inquiring in-depth smaller age groups, we see that there is no age group in which men and women have a similar occupational rate.

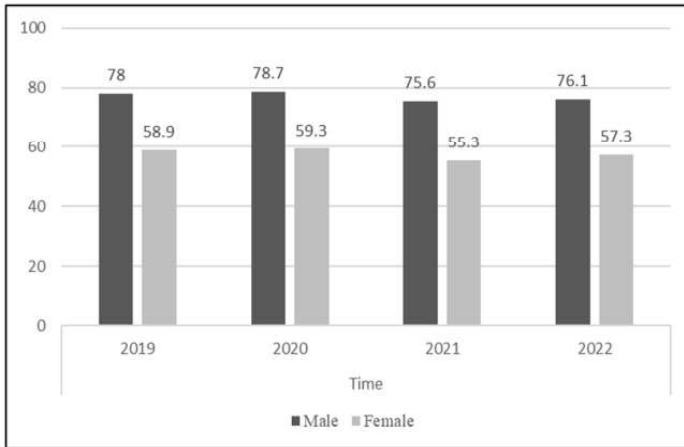


Figure 1. Percentage of employment and gender (source NIS)

The difference between the employment rate of men and women increases with the number of children they have (Eurostat, 2022). The data on Romania, from 2021, shows that for people aged 24-49 years that had one child, the employment rate is 60.8% for women and 81.9% for men, while for those who have two children, the proportion of employment increases for men (82.6%) and decreases

even more for women (55.4%) (Eurostat, 2022). Even if it would have been very useful to analyse the same timeframe as presented in the figure 1, the dataset from Eurostat on employment rate, gender and number of children covers only the year of 2021. As asserted in the work life theory chapter, one's participation or progression within the organizational hierarchy is closely tied to making specific choices (Burawoy, 1979) and adhering to the established rules (Boudon *et al.*, 1997). This process is significantly impacted by individual social characteristics, such as gender or the number of children an individual has.

One relevant indicator is related to the teleworking in Romania. The Eurostat data confirms the literature discussed in the teleworking subchapter (Vasilescu, 2023; Suci, & Petre, 2022). As seen in Figure 2, the percentage of Romanians working from home before the pandemic is far lower compared to other EU countries. The reason of showcasing a 5-year trend in teleworking in Romania was to highlight that it had been on the rise even before the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. Despite a marginal increase of 0.1% between 2017-2018, there was a notable doubling of teleworking between 2018 and 2019 in Romania, indicating a growing interest in adopting this work model. The pandemic further accelerated teleworking, with a significant increase observed in all 27 countries surveyed by Eurostat, including Romania. However, it's important to note that despite these increases, overall, teleworking in Romania remains at a relatively low level.

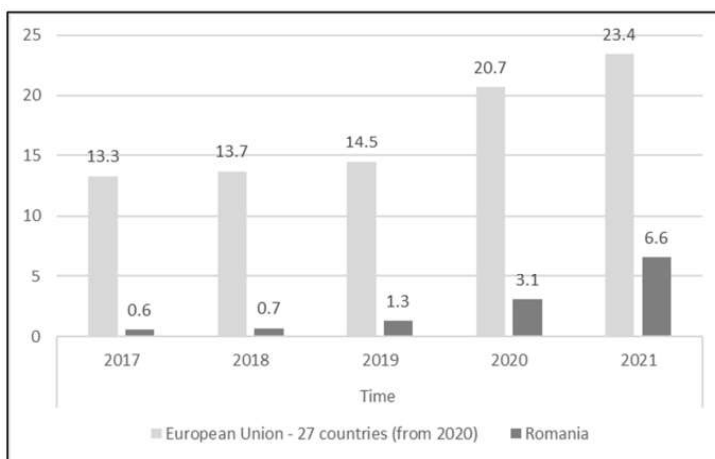


Figure 2. Percentage of employed adults working at home (Eurostat, 2023b)

Going into a more layered approach, as the tables 2 shows, in 2021, men were less teleworking compared to women in all EU 19 area, and especially in Romania. Moreover, as one or more children appear in one's life, the probability of working from home increases, especially if that person is a woman, both before and during the pandemic (Eurostat, 2023b). The increasing trend of women

working from home may suggest that they also face drawbacks associated with this work arrangement, notably concerning mental health and the amplified workload encompassing both paid work tasks and unpaid responsibilities like household and childcare duties (Vasilescu, 2023).

Table 2. Percentage of employed adults working at home, by gender and number of children (Eurostat, 2023b)

Number of children		Total	No children	1 child	2 children	3 children or more
European Union – 27 countries (from 2020)	Total	23.4	22.7	21.9	27.5	26.7
	Males	22.4	21.7	20.9	26.4	25.3
	Females	24.5	23.8	22.9	28.7	28.6
Romania	Total	6.6	6.5	6.8	7.3	3.8
	Males	5.1	5.3	5.1	5.1	:
	Females	8.8	8.3	8.9	10.4	7.7

Connecting the dots even more, we have analysed another important indicator related to work life balance, the part-time working. This type of work is not equally spread between women and men or between countries across Europe. In the EU in 2021, there were 28.7% of employed women working part-time, compared with 7.9% of men. Romania is at the end of the list when it comes to part-time working, as in the same year there were only 4.1% of men and 3% of women who worked part time (Eurostat, 2022). This small percentage can likely be attributed to the policy of overtaxing part-time work contracts, in order to reduce informal employment but, unfortunately, it had unintended consequences as well, impacting both the labour sector and families. Moreover, putting on the gender lens, out of the 4% of part-time workers, men are more present in the occupational labour force, compared with women, with 64% male population engaged in part time working, compared with only 36% of the female population (NIS, 2022).

Another relevant indicator related to the work patterns of the occupied population is represented by their weekly work duration. Almost 88% of the full-time workers in Romania, work the usual 40 hours per week, while there is another almost 7% of full-timers that work 46 hours and more weekly (NIS, 2022). Gender wise (figure 3), there is a larger number of men working above the 40 hours compared to women, as 73% out of the full-timers that work 46 hours are men. A third of the part-timers work with a flexible schedule and can't identify the usual work week duration. Another third of them work between 25-30 hours weekly, while 20% of them work between 11-20 hours (NIS, 2022).

Looking at the first three types of weekly work duration of part-timers from a gender perspective, we can observe again an inclination of men towards working more hours, compared to women (figure 4). Furthermore, based on NIS data, men are more likely engaged in a secondary work activity, no matter their age group (NIS, 2022). These findings reinforce the ideas presented above, that the men in Romania are still more oriented towards the external, professional segment, compared to women.

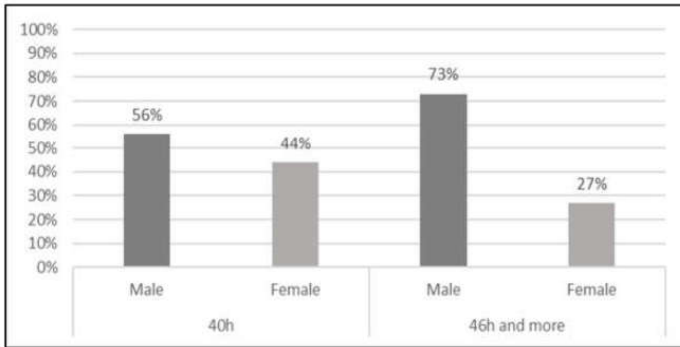


Figure 3. Percentage of the most common weekly work durations of full-time workers and gender (NIS)

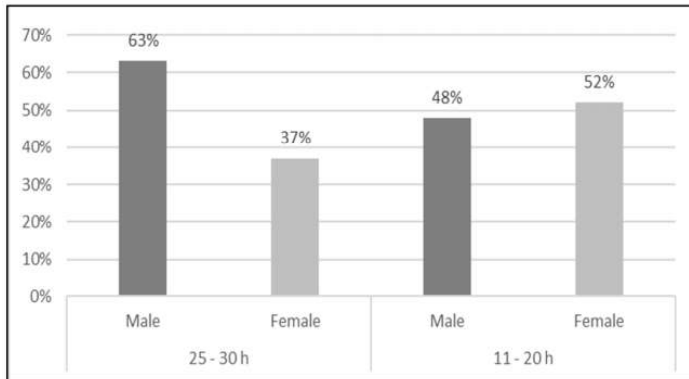


Figure 4. Percentage of the most common weekly work durations of part-time workers by gender (NIS)

Moving on and keeping the gender variable as the central one, we wanted to better understand the full-time occupations, so we have added professional status into the discussion. As figure 5 shows, most employed women and men are engaged in full-time work agreement. Out of the total number of full-timers, 88% are employees that work with individual work contracts in exchange for a salary and out of them, 57% are male. Moreover, there are also 8% freelancers, consisting

mostly of the male population (75%). The 2% unpaid domestic workers that work for a family member is represented mostly by the female population (64%), while 1% of the business owners are mostly men (76%) (figure 5).

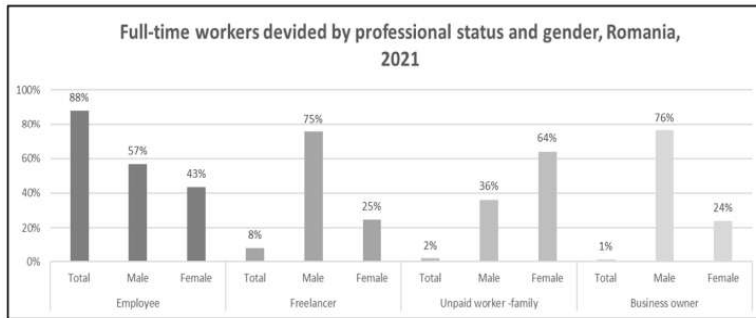


Figure 5. Percentage of full-time workers professional status and gender (NIS)

To sum up, women are present in a smaller number compared to men in all professional paths such as paid employment (working for a salary), business owning or freelancing, especially in the case of full-time work. However, there are more women compared to men engaged in unpaid economic activities for a member of their family business, as it can be seen according to the percentages for the category “Unpaid worker - family”, which, according to the NIS methodology, represents the category of workers who exercise their activity in a family economic unit led by a family member or a relative, and for which they do not receive remuneration in the form of salary or other in-kind payment (NIS, 2022). The small number of women owning businesses (24%), or freelancing (25%) are concerning and prompt questions about the career gendered choices.

Nearly over one third of managers in the European Union are women, accounting for 34.7%. In the case of Romania, the percentage is slightly higher, with 35.8% of women holding managerial positions (Eurostat, 2022). Even if the percentage is a bit above the European one, the percentage is still a low one, proving the “glass ceiling” (Ridgeway, 2004), with domains or positions well placed in the professional hierarchy in terms of salary or professional prestige, but with a lower representation of women. This observation is confirmed by the most recent Eurostat data on the pay gap between men and women. In the EU, in 2020, on average women earned 13.0 % less than a man when comparing their average gross hourly earnings (Eurostat, 2022). In this area, Romania has one of the smallest differences in earnings between women and men, a difference of 2.4% (Eurostat, 2022).

Looking at the inactive population because of familial responsibilities (taking care of children or incapacitated adults, or other familiar or personal responsibilities) presented in figure 6, we can see that there are considerably more women that are professionally inactive due to familial responsibilities, compared to men. Between 2018-2020, 36.5 % of inactive women were inactive due to the need of

taking care of familial responsibilities, while only 2.7% of the inactive men were inactive for the same reason. Another noticed aspect is that, looking at the yearly trend, we can see that once the pandemic hit, in 2020, the inactive percentage of women increased by 3%, while for men the increase was only by 0.1%, showing that women were more likely to end their professional activities once the need of taking care of home or children appeared.

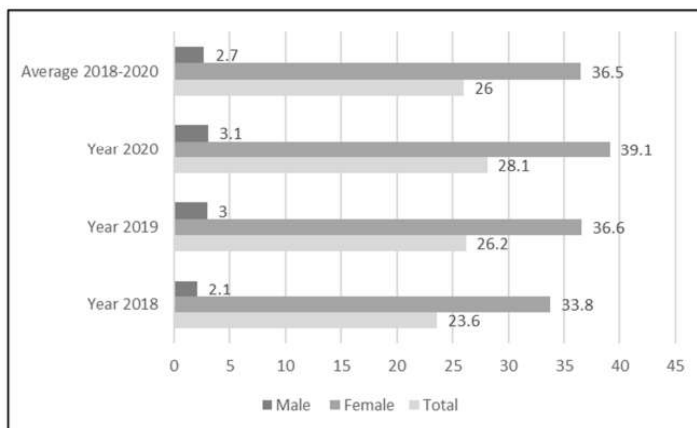


Figure 6. Percentage of inactive population because of familial responsibilities by gender (NIS)

The first research question delves into gender disparities in the working realm in post-pandemic Romania. Despite a gradual shift towards work flexibility and efforts to foster work-life balance, the data reveals lower percentages of teleworking (6.6% of the total occupied population) and part-time work (4% of the total occupied population) compared to other EU countries. We believe that this shortage of flexibility is linked to the gender gap in employment rates, particularly affecting women with increasing numbers of children. The data indicates an 18.8% lower participation of women in economic activities, a figure that rises with the number of children. Notably, 36.5% of women are professionally inactive due to familial responsibilities, compared to only 2.7% of men.

During the 2020 pandemic, the percentage of inactive women increased by 3%, while the male percentage increased by only 0.1%. This suggests that women were more likely to end professional activities than men when circumstances required. Conversely, men continue to be inclined and choose professional occupations, working longer hours, engaging in secondary work activities, and aspiring to managerial, entrepreneurial, or freelancing roles. These findings emphasize how the individual choices regarding work life are shaped by the individual social characteristics (gender, number of children) and, at the same time are shaping

the familial arrangements (who should end their professional activities and who should work more hours/jobs).

Family Life in Romania

As already known in the literature (Popescu, 2009), and confirmed now by the present analysis, it is a fact that in 2018 (the year when the EVS/WVS took place in Romania), the family institution continues to be considered as the most important, compared to work, or to other areas of one's life, like leisure time, politics, or religion, irrespective of gender. As shown in the Table 3, on a scale from 1-4, where 4 represents the most important aspect in one's life, Romanians consider family as the most important aspect in life, followed by work. It is important to mention that we reversed the EVS/WVS scale of this question, for better data interpretation.

Table 3. The importance in life of family, work, leisure time, friends, religion, politics and gender (EVS/WVS)

The importance in life of:						
Mean						
Sex	Family	Work	Leisure time	Friends	Religion	Politics
Male	3.9	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.1	2.0
Female	3.9	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.3	1.8
Total	3.9	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.2	1.9

As of 2021, marriage patterns and family dynamics in Romania present similar trends compared to the broader European context. The average age at first marriage in Romania is 29.9 years, with urban areas like Bucharest reflecting a higher average of 31.9 years (NIS, 2022), with women marrying at 28.3 and men at 31.6 years. This data reflects a notable rise against the data reported by Popescu (2022) for 2011, when the average age for women was 26.2 and for men 29.3 years. The average age for the first childbirth in the EU is 29.5 years, while in Romania, mothers give birth at 27.5 years, an average age that increases with 2 years for the urban environment and decreases with 2 years for the rural one (NIS, 2022). In terms of household types, as of 2021, in the EU countries, there were almost six times more women than men living alone with children (Eurostat, 2022). In Romania 3.1% of women aged 24-59 are living alone with children, while only 0.6% of men are living alone with children (Eurostat, 2022) emphasizing the predominant role of mothers in households.

In exploring family life, we've analysed available data on household labour division. Due to the lack of recent data, we've opted to perform the secondary analysis on the available information. Good premises arise when analysing how

NIS data on the division of household labour changed from 2000 to 2012. Despite the slow change, a trend towards more equity is seen in the proportion of time spent on unpaid household and care activities. As shown in Table 4, there is an overall decrease in the proportion of time spent on unpaid household and care activities, but there is a higher decrease of proportion of time for women, compared to men. Men in the urban residence are the only ones becoming more involved in the household and care activities, by slowly increasing their share of time spent on unpaid household and care activities by 0.4% in 2012, compared with 2000. The fact that there is a decrease in the share of time for women, and the lack of increase in the time spent by men led us to the same conclusion as Popescu (2022), that this downward trend is due most probably to the technological innovations in the household, the changes in the lifestyle and consumption patterns, and not due to men taking on the responsibilities.

Table 4. Time spent on unpaid household and care activities by gender (NIS)

Gender	Residence	% of time spent in household activities		% Change
		in 2000	in 2012	
Male	Urban	7.1	7.5	+0.4
Female		17.1	16.8	-0.3
Male	Rural	12.5	10.1	-2.4
Female		23.8	20.3	-3.5
Male	Total	9.6	8.7	-0.9
Female		20	18.3	-1.7

Despite the good premises, in 2016 the division of labour continued to remain unequal. Based on the Eurostat data, a much larger share of women does childcare, housework and cooking compared to men. According to this data set from 2016, in the European area, 93% of women aged 25 to 49 (with children under 18) took care of their children every day, compared with only 69% of men. In Romania the percentages were even more unequal, with 89% of women and 55% of men taking care of children under 18 years of age on a daily basis (Eurostat, 2023a). For housework and cooking, the differences are even larger. In the EU in 2016, 78% of women cooked and/or did housework daily, compared with only 32% of men, while in Romania 75% women and 41% men cooked and/or did housework daily (Eurostat, 2023a). A 2022 report from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) highlighted that 65% of women acknowledged that they managed household chores predominantly or entirely, while a mere 14% of men made the same statement (Equalit, 2022).

The data on childcare and housework from 2000, 2012, 2016 and 2022 reveals the reality of gender imbalances, as a much larger share of women perform

childcare, housework and cooking compared to men. Based on the unequal division of labour, Romanian women still perform second shifts (Hochschild, 2012). Moreover, Romania's gender equality continues to be more unequal compared to the European member-states. This result confirms that Romanian women are still attributed into the nineteenth-century role of the "angel of the house" (Lipovetsky, 2000), the stereotyped mother - housewife model, facing gender inequalities (Delphy, 1978).

This second research question explored gender disparities in family life. The secondary analysis confirms the prevailing significance of the family institution in Romania, as noted already in the literature. The trends in family life mirror those mentioned by Popescu (2009, 2022), with women marrying earlier than men, but with delayed marriages and child births compared to the 2011 data (Popescu, 2022). Men in Romania are still less involved in the family life (childcare, housework, cooking), compared to women. Aligning with previous studies on Romania (Voinea, 1993; Apostu, 2015; Popescu, 2022), we confirm that there are persistent challenges in achieving gender equality in the distribution of domestic responsibilities.

Conclusion

This secondary analysis aimed to delve into the dynamic work and family life patterns in contemporary Romania, examining various indicators such as the work hours, the professional inactivity, division of household labour and childcare and more others. The study navigates the socially constructed nature of gender roles, emphasizing the consequences of the gender roles performative aspects (Butler, 1990) and delving into the institutionalized aspects of gender, particularly within the context of the unfair division of household and childcare labour (Oakley, 1974), or workplace inequalities (Fraser, 2013).

The first research question delves into gender disparities in the working realm in post-pandemic Romania, revealing a persistent employment gap between men and women, with 18.8% lower participation of women in economic activities (NIS, 2022), a figure that rises with the number of children (Eurostat, 2022). Moreover, 36.5% of women are professionally inactive because of familial responsibilities, compared to only 2.7% of men (NIS, 2022). Although teleworking saw a notable increase, its adoption in Romania remains lower compared to other EU countries. Part-time work is infrequent, as men reflect the gender imbalances being predominantly occupied in full-time roles, freelancing or business owning. Despite being part of the liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), Romania's work life doesn't align with the evolving occupational work model specific to the VUCA world (Johansen, & Euchner, 2015). The study underscores the importance of flexibility and family-friendly work structures (teleworking, part-time employment), but not

without the cooperation between couple partners so both can be able to maintain their professional roles and financial independence.

The second research question, and the secondary descriptive analysis explore the gender disparities in the family life revealing the enduring significance of the family institution in Romania, as already mentioned in the literature by Popescu (2009, 2022). Notably, women marry and give birth later in life than in 2011 and men continue to be less involved in family responsibilities than women. This secondary analysis indicates a prevalent gender gap in childcare, housework, and cooking in Romania, a gap that is higher compared to the European level, underscoring the coexistence of modern values and traditional echoes in Romanian family dynamics (Apostu, 2015; Popescu, 2022). Bearing in mind that working women in Romania maintain a focus on household and family responsibilities, this secondary analysis suggests that the societal pressure for women to find fulfilment primarily through home and family (Friedan, 1963; Oakley, 1974) persists in the Romanian society.

We will conclude by answering to the main research question “What are the gender disparities in work and family life within the Romanian context?”. The data we came across regarding the two research questions show that Romanians have a gendered division of priorities, men prioritizing the occupational sphere by working longer hours, having secondary jobs, becoming business owners or freelancers and finally, not being professionally inactive due to family responsibilities. On the other hand, despite being present in the employment sphere, Romanian women work double shifts, at work and at home, while also being those that prioritize family when the situation requires.

Furthermore, echoing Guest’s perspective on work-life balance, the emphasis is not solely on determining the primary responsible party but rather on the actions taken by all involved entities to prevent imbalance (Guest, 2002). This is crucial because such imbalances can lead to diverse consequences at individual, familial, organizational, and community levels. In line with this understanding, the study underscores the pivotal role of multi-level actions. At the individual level, as other authors advocated, this involves reforms in child socialization and a redefinition of men’s roles (Risman, 2004; Oakley, 1974; Butler, 2004). At the organizational level, family-friendly work structures and policies play a significant role (Smithson, & Stokoe, 2005). On a broader societal scale, the proposed post-gender society (Risman, 2009) emerges as a potential solution. These measures collectively empower families to successfully navigate their professional and familial roles while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

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