

WOMAN'S ECONOMICAL STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract:

In most countries of the world, but especially in Europe, the women's participation in the labor market has increased considerably in the last few decades. Currently, however, female labor force becomes more and more attractive. At the same time, the world population is aging, which results not only in the growth of women population, but also in a bigger share of the women in the employed population, considering that the life expectancy is longer for women than for men. Nevertheless, the cleavage that occurred since the moment when women began to be employed in factories, between the work of men and the work of women in terms of sectors that are better suited for each category, the cleavage of the income disparities and, implicitly, of the social evaluation of the labor of the two groups continues up to this day. The relationship between macro-economic policies and the improvement of women's economic status continues to be very complicated, which is why the research in this direction should be intensified both for economic and ethical reasons.

Key words: *economical status, women, labor market, demographical evolutions*

JEL classification: *B54, J16*

Introduction

In the traditional type society, in the gender dichotomy of space, the public is generally assigned to the man and the private to the woman. The evangelists claimed that the man must deal with the public life and the woman must take care of her home and family, as the two were created to deal with different spheres. This could be also a nature rule, confirmed by customs and conveniences. Each gender, naturally, has its own qualities and each escape from his/her sphere is doomed to failure. The biological constitution itself of each gender was considered the expression of destiny difference; for a woman, searching success in the same sphere with the man, represented abdication from the tasks that God made her for. The man, with a superior physical strength and strong spirit, could assume the difficult task of acting and persevering. The woman, weaker, had to be submissive and obedient. Even though evangelists firmly believed in everyone's right to salvation, this equality in front of God didn't imply also social equality. Separate spheres of the masculine and the feminine, "the small circle" occupied by the woman, all these refer to the necessity of female subordination towards her spouse.

In the rural environment, even today, man's work runs outside: in the field, respectively in the yard. Moreover, in the past, in some moments, a woman's presence was absolutely forbidden; when seeding, for example, women's impurity would have been harmful. Instead, other agricultural moments, like harvesting, imperiously claimed women's presence, as it was considered a fact with sexual and maternal connotation.

Woman's work, on the other hand, took place, predominantly, in the private space where, for free, she served family members, took care of the children, of the sick, did the housework, manufactured textiles etc. The woman did not have any monetary means, the little money which the man was directing to the household chores had to be

well spent, money saving being, in many cases, the main way of "house supporting" (Aries, Duby, 1992, p.245-246). For generations, it was ideal for a woman to stay at home and take care of the household (working outside the home being a clue of a severe poverty state). The man had to earn a "family wage", an amount sufficiently large of money to maintain the entire family. The ideal of a unique masculine wage, like the female dependence one, well established in the bourgeois environment, will find echo in the workers' environment, too (Ștefănescu, 2003, p.248-249). Nowadays, international documents state gender equality, and nationally, social and economic policies aim at providing a better socio-professional situation for women. This means visibility, autonomy, responsibility and equal participation of both genders in all spheres of public and private life. (Council of Europe, 1998)

While social policies (mother and child care, health improvement, promoting women's participation in education and training etc) have direct consequences upon women's status, the economic ones reflect indirectly on this. Thus, infrastructure investments (household connecting to water, sewerage, electricity, road infrastructure) have eased women's work in the household, reducing even the necessary time to meet domestic tasks, fact that allowed them access to paid jobs outside the home and, thus, economic independence in relation to man and reduction of poverty for them and their families. To these policies there have been added consumer and investment loans granted also to women, which allow mitigation regarding familial consumption and even the development of economic activities by women within small and medium enterprises.

This does not mean that there still aren't, even in everyday life, many gender stereotypes, respectively organized systems of beliefs and opinions related to women and men characteristics, including attitudes towards each gender roles and the perception of self, as person of a certain gender.

The feminist movement in the seventh decade of the twentieth century proposes a distinction between sex and gender, that is, sex is biological, and gender is a social construction, a distinction "that reproduced the oppositional dichotomy nature/culture, that is, the natural is fixed, and the cultural ...is permanently subjected to change. Thought in particular in relation to employment, gender equality, as a structured policy approaches time and other social issues: violence towards women, education and culture, access to decision making, women traffic etc. "(Anemțoaicea, 2009).

The theories about social ties and relations between men and women in the labor market focus on the complementary tasks of the two categories, the teamwork, the expertise and professional roles reconciliation. These theories defend the traditional family model, in which women provide family functionality, or a model in which work and family life are harmonized. In these circumstances the woman is the one who decides to opt for part-time work, for a simple job that enables easy reconciliation of professional and domestic tasks, the latter still meaning household, childcare, elderly and sick. As for teamwork, despite the statistics, theories claim an equal social status between men and women (Hirata, 2002, p. 279). As for social relations between men and women, they continue to be perceived as power relationships, men's work is still regarded as superior to women's one, as the latter does not benefit from a significant social recognition.

Paper methodology

The paper proposes:

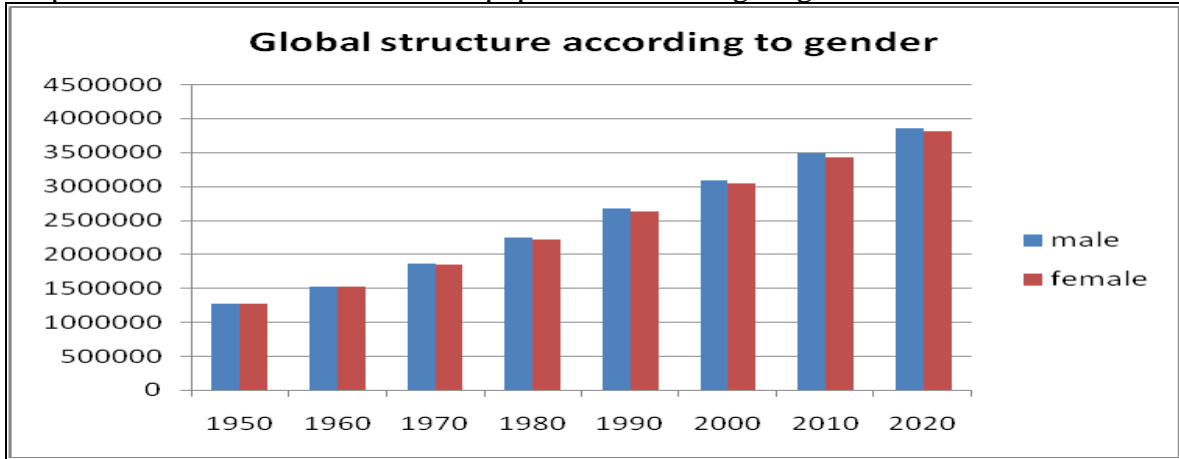
- to capture some demographic and economic aspects of the presence of women in contemporary society;
- to reveal the major changes that have taken place in women's status concerning participation in education and labor market;
- to highlight the persistence of gender stereotypes;

– to demonstrate the existence of differences in social status and pay between men and women. We used for this purpose a series of statistic data, studies and reports of national or international institutions.

Demographic issues

Tracking the evolution of population structure by gender, one can notice that, globally, the percent of male population is slightly higher than the female one.

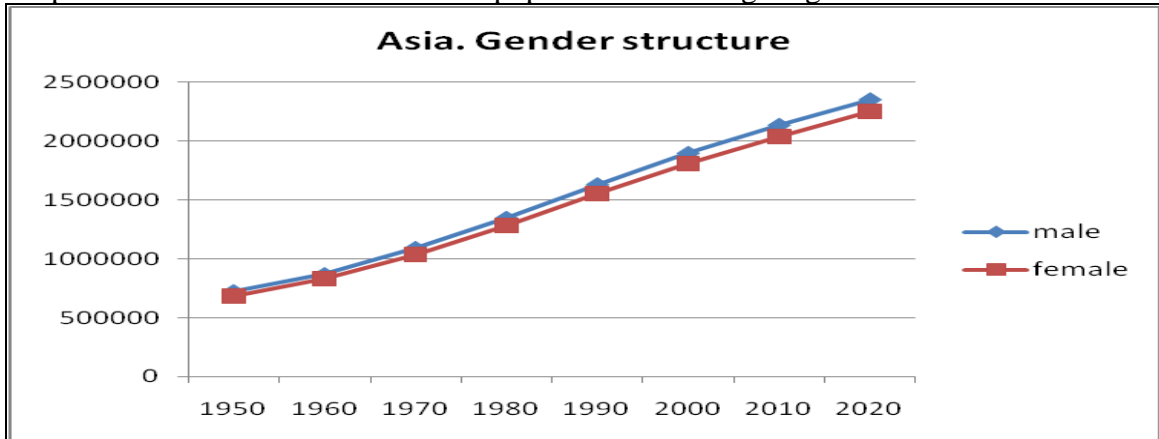
Graphic no.1: The structure of world population according to gender



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision (data processing)*

An analysis on continents of the population structure reveals gender differences among three areas: *the two American continents and Europe*, areas where women's percent is higher than men's, *Africa and Oceania* in which equality is nearly perfect and Asia, continent where men dominate women numerically. Certainly, under these conditions, Asia, the most populated continent will also influence the global structure of gender, while without China and India, the planet would be in majority female.

Graphic no. 2: The structure of Asian population according to gender



Source: <http://esa.un.org/unpp/index.asp> (data processing)

Explanations of these differences arise even from cultural differences among certain parts of the world. Thus, in North America and Europe, the increased interest, not only of men but also of women, in the professional life in the detriment of family life, caused the decline in marriage and birth rates. Simultaneously, life expectancy increases, due to increased living standards in these areas.

The higher life expectancy among women, even if at birth more boys than girls are registered, makes the aging of the population to determine the change of the gender structure of the population in favor of the feminine one. In Europe, this phenomenon can be traced in its evolution, as since 1950 women have been more numerous than men

since the age of twenty, and in 2005 and 2010, since the age of forty (the numeric ratio between genders in 1950 is explained in the context of the postwar period).

Table no.1: Numeric ratio between genders in Europe

Year	Gender ratio(men to 100 women)
1950	87,4
2005	92,7
2010	92,9

Source: <http://esa.un.org/UNPP>

In Asia, especially in India and China, which represents 38% of the world population and one third of the total of births, the percent of men in the total of population is not just high, but even increasing. Nowadays, Asia is the most masculine continent, with 100 million women less than men. This situation is the result of selective abortions of feminine embryos, stimulated by the preference for boys (boys are an important resource of labor in families, whereas girls need a dowry, which is often difficult to offer, in order to get married), by the reduction of fertility and by the decreasing price of ultrasound devices, fact which facilitated the knowing of the child's gender even in the intrauterine period. Taking into consideration the evolution in perspective, Pisson noticed that if nowadays, when the ration between genders is of 105 men to 100 women, the rate of fertility which can ensure the simple replacement of generations is of 2,1 children to one woman, when the ratio between genders is 120/100 in favor of men, the rate of fertility will have to be of 2,25 children to one woman, but this trend is a decreasing one. (Pisson, 2004).

Characteristics of women's labor force

The problem of the women's representation in the labor market is strongly connected to other problems concerning equality of gender, poverty or the wellbeing of children, as long as the paid work of women permits a better valorization of women, their economic independence, the raising of the income of the family and the decrease of the risk of poverty for the entire family. In addition, the society itself cannot afford to renounce such an important and valuable resource of labor force, that of women. Of course, one shouldn't elude the other aspect, of the possibility of the decrease of child's wellbeing, subjected to the risk of neglect by the employed parents who are also involved in activities which do not include him/her (Kamerman et al., 2003, p.20-21).

At world level, ***the rate of the employment of the feminine adult population*** increased with 1.2% between 1998 – 2008, while, in the same period, that of the masculine adult population continued to decrease with 1.1%. The percent of women in the employed population continued to increase up to 40.4% until 2008 (1.2 billion women of the total of 3 billion employed persons) and up to 45% in many developed countries (Tendances mondiales de l'emploi des femmes, mars 2009, Bureau international du Travail – Genève: BIT, 2009, p.9-10).

This spectacular increase had not been anticipated and cannot be stopped either by the lack of the places of work, or by the increase of unemployment. It is associated with the decrease of the marriages, of the rate of birth, with the entrance in the labor market of women with children, whose number has doubled, as a consequence of the measures of harmonization of the professional life with the family one (kindergartens, flexible, part time work, maternity leave etc), with the increase of the educational level of women and with the proliferation of domestic technologies which make free a portion of time necessary for women for the accomplishment of the domestic work. In Romania the rate of the employment for the population aged 15-64 years was in 2007, 52.8% among women, and 64.8% among men, being situated between the valid limits in the West-European countries (The Statistic Annual of Romania, 2008, p.138).

Even if ***the average rate of unemployment*** is higher among women (6.3%, in comparison with 5.9% among men), it has been noticed that at world level, in 2008,

6.3% of active aged women, but not employed, were looking for a place to work, in comparison with just 5.9% of men being in the same situation (Tendances mondiales de l'emploi des femmes, mars 2009, Bureau international du Travail – Genève: BIT, 2009, p.9).

While the rate of participation of men in the labor market decreases from up to 80% in 1970, to 60% in the present, the rate of participation of women increases, in the same period from 40-50% to 50-60%, an evolution in some way similar with the reorganization of the labor force in economical sectors, respectively the decrease of the percent of the population working in agriculture and industry, respectively the increase of the population employed in the domain of the services.

But there are *differences among the economical sectors* regarding the work force of women and of men. Many women work in agriculture and very few in industry (in 2008 just 18.6%, comparing to 26.6% men), but an increased number of women find a place to work in the sphere of the services, 46.3% women, in comparison to just 41.2% men. (Tendances mondiales de l'emploi des femmes, mars 2009, Bureau international du Travail, Genève: BIT, 2009, p.10).

Women continue to find themselves in the labor market in segments which, traditionally, attract especially the women's force of work, because they require increased attention, patience, care, eshtetic taste, understanding, generosity, increased responsibility, delicacy and sensibility in the resolution of the problem, a seventh sense, the power of sacrifice, the power of example, diplomacy and elegance: health (77.7%), education (70.2%), hotels and restaurants (56%), services and social work (54.2%), financial intermediery (52.2%). At the same time, they are very less represented in segments such as: constructions (8.6%), extractive industry (12.7%), public services, electrical energy, gas, water providing (21.9) (*Indicateurs Clés du Marché du Travail*, Genève, BIT, 2007).

There are also places of work which are only apparently for women, such as that of chef, and there are also places of work which are difficult to be accessed by women: „capital holders and bankers are in majority men” (*Alliance pour un monde responsable et solidaire*, 1999, p.2).

In Romania, the study „Perspectives on the dimension of gender in education”, realized by the Institute of Sciences of Education, shows that, there are „ jobs which, specifically, belong to girls, such as that of medical assistant and that of secretary, or there are domains to which both boys and girls are attracted, such as aviation; boys want to become aviators and girls flight attendants (The Institute of Sciences of Education, UNICEF, Perspectives on the dimension of gender in education, Bucharest, 2004, p. 103)

But the segregation does not consist only in the preponderant presence of women in certain segments of economy, but also in the **decreased valorization of the women's work** compared to that of men in the same segment or even in the same enterprise, thing that is reflected in the level of remuneration and in the position held in the working place. The table below shows that even at the EU level the differences between salaries are still rather increased.

Table no. 2: Differences of remuneration between genders in Europe

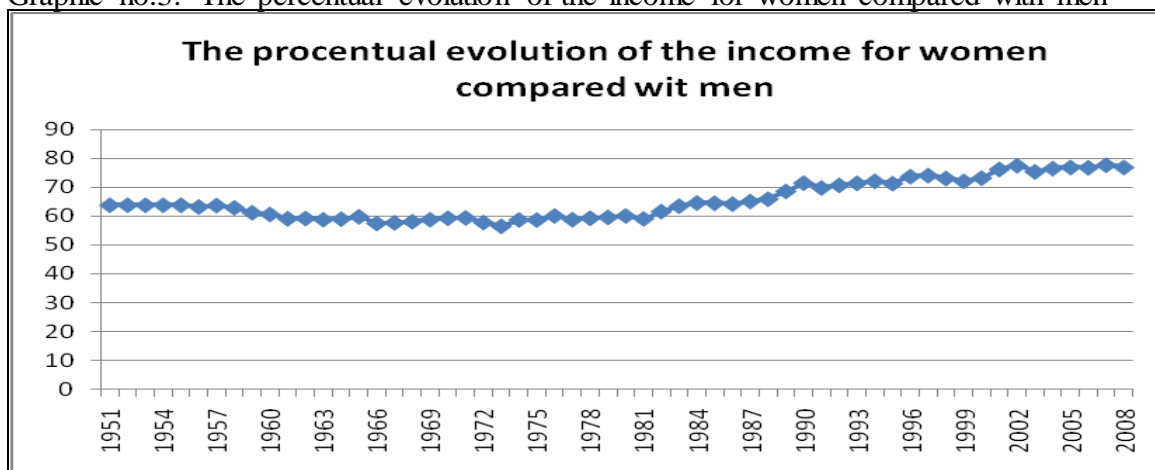
Country	Difference of remuneration between women and men	Country	Difference of remuneration between women and men
Belgium	9.1	Luxembourg	10.0
Bulgaria	12.7	Hungary	16.3
Czech Republic	23.6	Malta	5.2
Denmark	17.7	The Netherlands	23.6
Germany	23.0	Austria	25.5
Estonia	30.3	Poland	7.5

Ireland	17.1	Portugal	8.3
Greece	20.7	Romania	12.7
Spain	17.6	Slovenia	8.3
France	15.8	Slovakia	23.6
Italy	4.4	Finland	20.0
Cyprus	23.1	Sweden	17.9
Latvia	15.4	United Kingdom	21.1
Lithuania	20.0		

Source: The European Committee, key statistics regarding equality between women and men at the place of work taking as point of reference the difference of remuneration between men and women.

One can notice a difference of payment under the average level in countries such as Italy, Malta, and Poland in which the presence in the labor market of the unqualified or very little qualified women is reduced. The high differences of remuneration can be explained by the existence of a very segregated labor market (Estonia, Cyprus, Slovakia), or by the high percent of women who work part time (Germany, Holland, Austria, United Kingdom).

Graphic no.3: The procentual evolution of the income for women compared with men



Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0193820.html>

However, the difference of payment between men and women decreased in EU between 1995 and 2006 with 10% in Romania, Hungary, Lituania and Ireland, but increased in countries such as Germany, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden, in 2006, the differences being situated between 4% in Malta and 25% in Estonia . Much more dramatic is this situation in Russia and Ukraine where the difference of payment between men and women is 39%, respectively 28%, or in Turkey, of up to 100% . (Tendances mondiales de l'emploi des femmes, mars 2009, Bureau international du Travail – Genève: BIT, 2009, p.18-19).

Another aspect of economical status of women is represented by the **preference for working part time**, which, taking as point of reference the payment per hour, is less substantially paid than the full time one. For example, in EU, the percent of women who work part time, approximately 30 %, is higher than that of men, just 8 % (up to 80% of part time working places are occupied by women), the most frequent explanation being that of the necessity of harmonization of professional activity with family life (Elder, Johnson, 1999). The countries of OECD in which the proportion of women working part time is high are: Pays Bas, Australia, Japan, Switzerland, United Kingdom (40-54%), and those with a smaller proportion are: Oriental Europe, Finland, Korea. The option for part time jobs comes mostly from married women, the ones who have

children, whose husbands have high income and who have a low level of instruction. Portugal (Jaumotte, 2003, p.73-77).

The difference regarding *the rate of inactivity* between men and women continues to manifest, together with the perpetuation of the ideas which associate women with domestic tasks, which represents an important reason of women's inactivity. Nowadays we speak about an important and equitable division between men and women in what concerns life and family responsibilities, but this is not everywhere, but only in the countries with an authentic democracy.

Table nr.3: Reasons of masculine and feminine inactivity in EU.

Reasons of inactivity (% of population total)	Total	women	men
Invalidity	6.5	5.8	7.2
Family responsibilities	6.6	12.6	0.6
Pensioners	26.4	25.7	27.2
The impression that there are no available jobs	1.5	2.1	0.9
Other reasons	6.1	10.0	2.1
Without reason	9.5	10.8	8.2
Totally inactive	56.8	67.1	46.1
Unemployment (this thing does not reflect the rate of unemployment; but rather the percent of unemployed persons in the total of the population of the same sex and age group)	2.6	2.0	3.3

Source: EUROSTAT <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

Other factors of women's activity or inactivity are connected to: family finances, the increase of the rate of tax in families with two employed persons; the subvention of expenses for child protection or services; parental holiday; the flexibility of work time, the possibility of working part time; the legislation against the discrimination regarding the differences between salaries or the possibilities of career development; the rate of unemployment; social transfers; the situation in the market of services (taking care of the children, of the elderly, of sick people); children's school program; fecundity; the level of education of women (Fl. Jaumotte, 2003, p.67-82).

In Romania, in 2005, the situation regarding the participation of women and men in household chores and in salaried work is the following:

Table nr.4: Time allotted to domestic activities and to family ones; differences on genders

2005	Women		Men		Difference	
	Domestic and family activities	Salaried activities	Domestic and family activities	Salaried activities	Domestic and family activities	Salaried activities
Average time allotted per week for domestic and paid activities	29.0	49.5	9.0	53.1	20.1	-3.5

Source: European Committee, *The employment, social policies and equality of chances. The situation in UE- Romania*

The difference, relatively very low, between men and women, in favor of men regarding the participation in salaried activities, of only 3.5%, is outclassed by the big difference, in favor of women, regarding the participation in domestic and family activities. The explanation could lie in the Romanian mentality regarding the role of men and women in family life, mostly in the case of families living in the country.

A privileged position is held by women under the aspect of *educational level*, the number of women with high-school or university studies being much more substantial than that of men.

Table nr.5: The gross rate of schooling in universities

Region/ 2008	women	men	Parity index between sexes
Central and Eastern Europe	72%	57%	1.28
Central Asia	27%	24%	1.10
North America and Western Europe	80%	61%	1.32
East Asia and Pacific	25% (2007)	25% (2007)	0.99
Latin America and the Caribbean	42%	34%	1.25
South and West Asia	11% (2007)	14% (2007)	0.74
Sub-Saharan Africa	5% (2006)	7% (2006)	0.67
Arab Countries	21% (2007)	22% (2007)	0.96

Source: UNESCO, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/>

As one can notice, except Southern and Western Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (where the rate of schooling is very low), in the other regions the percent of women is higher or equal with that of men. This aspect could be also due to the fact that intellectual work is more attractive for women, being considered easier, cleaner than the physical one.

There are also regions in which the women's participation in education is precarious. In Southern Asia for example, the gap of participation in primary education is of 87 girls to 100 boys, and in Sub-Saharan Africa it is of 93 girls to 100 boys, the difference increasing in these regions, in universities (UNESCO, 2010).

Beyond the numerical aspect of the participation of women in education, one can notice the structure and the types of schools attended by women. Because of traditions and stereotypes, girls choose or are guided to choose, certain specializations in school which lead them to specifically feminine careers. Even where the number of graduate university girls is higher than that of total graduates, the statistics show that at the specializations mathematics, informatics, engineering, women remain in minority, whereas in the case of specializations such as social sciences, economics and juridical sciences, women are more numerous.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Women are in expansion, both a numerical one, and also under the aspect of employment and education.
2. In the perspective of demographical aging, the increase of women's participation in the labor market can be a better alternative than the increase of the age for retiring.
3. The used statistical data show a constant increase of women's interest in the participation in the labor market, simultaneously with the increased opportunities of employment in the area of services.
4. The economical inequities between men and women continue to remain unchanged, in what regards the valorization of work, the differences between salaries and the association of women with certain segments of activity, especially the ones related to domestic tasks.
5. If the differences between men and women regarding the salaried activity are quite insignificant, the ones concerning domestic tasks continue to be considerable.
6. The policies in favor of family and child, as well as those regarding the equality of gender seem to be responsible for the changes in the economical status of women in the contemporary society, materialized in the increase of the level of school and professional training, the similarity of salaries with the men's ones or the access to better paid jobs.

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