

## **INTRODUCTION**

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### **Why a black book on equal opportunities between women and men in Romania?**

Why a Black Book on this subject? There is an Agency for equal opportunities, there are many women NGOs with various programs, women organizations in different political parties, a Publishing House collection (Polirom) dedicated to gender studies, MAs and PhDs on the topic, European laws, millionaire women, and enough men open to the idea of private partnership... What is so “black” in the equal opportunities domain in Romania that springs the need for a “black” book?

Are all these things so right that the book is not justified? Is the concept of equal opportunities between women and men one that has been assumed within the collective mental of the Romanians? A lot does not equal good. And good does not necessarily mean enough. Like many other problems, it depends on how you look at these issues. From one corner (the academic feminism) it seems O.K. From another corner, if we think at the number of domestic aggression victims or at the number of women in parliament, it seems different. So, there are several reasons we took up the issues and come up with this volume:

Because it could be a way of bringing, by a different type of approach, the equal opportunities subject in the Romanian collective mental.

Because, beyond many achievements of the women’s movement in Romania, there are still many unclear areas, many improvisations, uncovered aspects, marginalizations, self-marginalizations and lack of synchronizations within the field and the community.

Because, beyond institutions and documents, according to different statistics, there are women in Romania who are very poor and encounter specific health problems, earn less money than men, are victims of domestic violence and of human trafficking, only 10% represent us in the Parliament etc. Even more, there are relevant hierarchies and discriminations between women and between men. There are some specific women groups (Roma women, elder or rural women, women with disabilities, etc) who have to put up with even a harder life than other women (this is the same for specific male groups), who have specific gender needs and interests as women among other women!

Because the theory about the accumulation of disadvantages is confirmed in Romania! Maybe there are not a lot of major, explicit, visible gender discriminations, but there are for sure many apparently small things that maintain, in an unjustified (and old fashioned) way, gender discrepancies and even gender discriminations. Often the mechanism of combating gender discriminations has its faults that need also to be discussed.

Because a constructive critique (the book offers enough suggestions for possible solutions) can only be useful. We think it is a weak argument the argument that points out the fact that it is no good, not diplomatic to criticize an area that is already the victim of

prejudice. Having a critical eye on a domain proves the vitality of that domain, of the people working within that domain.

We wrote this book thinking of Maricica, the generic character invented by Mihaela Miroiu. Maricica is the “usual”/ average Romanian woman. If she feels discriminated and wants to solve her problem, what can she do? She calms down by taking advice from her friends and neighbors, she looks (often in vain) in the phonebook for numbers of women’s organizations, she discovers the governmental institutions and tries to address a complain... Meanwhile books are written and conferences are held about “Maricica’s discrimination”, but she becomes mother, gets old and does not solve almost anything of her concrete problems, needs. However hope does not die... thinking at this generic Maricica we tried to identify the weak areas and implicitly the aspects that have to be improved so that the equal opportunities between women and men will become a usual thing, something normal, a reality for usual people. In the hope that, if not Maricica, then her daughter will have more success, we worked on this volume.

It is a black book on equal opportunities between women and men presented, on purpose, in an unbalanced way. It speaks more about women, about the existence of discrimination against women. We approached the subject from this point of view because, beyond the political correctness, we have to report to realities: most of the times women, not men, have problems with gender discriminations. The gender differences affect in different areas more women than men (with some exceptions such as higher education where the balance is reversed: more women are going to have higher education degrees than men), men are in general a conservatory group when it comes to opening some opportunities towards real equality of women with men. This does not mean that we want “unequality”, just for some, in this case for women. It just means that, through this publication, we wanted to support especially the women movement and the related institutions in their actions to decrease the gender gaps, most of the times not in favor of women. We also strongly plead in this book for equal opportunities between women and not only for women.

It was not simple to design a structure for this publication that we wanted to be something different. We wanted it to be accessible for a wide but aware audience. We wanted it to be synthetically, ironical and courageous in verdicts.

We opted for this structure systemizing the information and grouping the white and black bullets around the problems regarding “Providers” and service “Beneficiaries” in the domain.

Legend:

- black bullets (for “bad” things)
- white bullets (for “good” things)

The premise from which we started is that we live in a gendered world, a world where each and all social institutions send permanent gender messages, a world where some define the territory, others intermediate the transfer of knowledge from institutions to

beneficiaries and others just live and have daily experiences with profound gender implications.

We chose formulas that speak for themselves: the open (quite long) list with women specialists in gender in contrast to the short one with men specialists; selection of “paper hangings” with gender messages transmitted by different social institutions or with updated statistical information that need no supplementary explications, as they indicate particular gender discriminatory situations or a series of authorized opinions. We gave uniformity to the volume with the illustrated story of Maricica.

In the end we selected a series of themes that, throughout the project, have been mentioned as priorities by those consulted by us and that we also considered to be less debated in Romania (like for example “Gender and Diversity” or the issue of multiple discrimination) or we came back pinpointing, emphasizing certain aspects considered as priority for Romania: gender and mass-media, gender and politics, the institutionalization of the gender issues, gender and health. These mini-studies have been completed by the members of our team, but also by specialists in the domain.

We are responsible and we assume our limitations. We had no purpose in making an inventory of all the subjects about equal opportunities between women and men in Romania. We have made a selection, which is of course a subjective one. It is a book of verdicts – formulated and assumed by people with experience and expertise in this domain. This offers the kind credibility we needed in reaching our goal. The rigorous and responsible documentation is also a guarantee for the quality of the content.

The volume is the result of teamwork: Ioana Borza, Laura Grunberg and Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu are the authors. Nicoleta Niță, which assured the specific documentation, and Vera Couțun which along with Elena Dima managed the secretariat helped also to finalize this work. The layout of the publication belongs to Mihaela Rabu and Dinu Dumbrăviceanu and Maria Plohotniuc designed the illustrations. As we have mentioned throughout the text, the book includes many opinions and studies from many people with expertise in the domain, which responded to our call and whom we thank.

Last but not least, we wish to thank the Dutch Embassy in Bucharest, who supported this project within the Matra program and especially to Ms Norma Nitescu our link to the Embassy. It was for us a good practice of collaboration in terms of flexibility, minimal bureaucracy and efficiency.

Even though it was an outgo critique, in the end we have a reassuring feeling. Putting together all the “black bullets” gathered by us, paradoxically, we reached the conclusion that the situation is... pink. Actually... if not Maricica, then surely her daughter will have a better life. She will live in a society where equal opportunities will be something normal, the afferent institutions being almost useless. We only need, as Caragiale said... just a little more patience!

*(Translation by Matei Lucaci)*