THE SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S INTERESTS IN THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT.
2012-2016 AND 2016-2020 LEGISLATURE

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Abstract: *This study examines the substantive representation of women's interests in the Romanian Parliament during the 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 legislatures. It explores how the increased presence of women parliamentarians influenced legislative initiatives related to improving birth rate. The analysis reveals a shift from financial incentives to measures promoting work-life balance, reflecting a greater focus on reconciling women's professional and family lives during the second legislature when the descriptive representation of women parliamentarians almost doubled. Using content analysis and logistic regression models, the study highlights the correlation between descriptive and substantive representation, emphasizing the need for policies that support women's autonomy and gender equality. The findings suggest that while the increased presence of women led to more legislative proposals adopted, the political affiliation with National Liberal Party and initiation during the second legislature, in conjunction with the mandate of Social Democratic Party-Alliance of Liberals and Democrats Government led by a woman, are significant predictors for their adoption. Although the presence of women in Parliament is crucial for improving the substantive representation of women's interests, it does not guarantee legislative success. Further studies should analyze, using complementary research methods, what factors blocked the adoption of these initiatives and how the transformation of initiatives that promote women's interests into laws can be facilitated in the future.*
Keywords: substantive representation, descriptive representation, legislative initiatives, political parties, women's interests, work-life balance policies, women-friendly policies

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Introduction

Women have been historically assigned to the domestic sphere, responsible for household chores and child-rearing, while the public sphere of work, politics, and decision-making was a male-dominated field. Early feminist writings (Astell, 1700; Wollstonecraft, 1792) advocated for women's right to equal education as men, believing that this would facilitate women's access to professions and occupations in the labor market. As socio-economic inequalities remained unchanged, during the 19th century women sought to obtain the right to vote and be elected so that they could include their voice in shaping history and contribute to changing practices that oppressed them. Political rights were acquired by women in most countries at the beginning of the 20th century, but their progress towards gender equality in political participation is still limited. Currently, only 6 out of the 193 countries for which data is available have parliaments where women represent at least half of the total number of parliamentarians, while only 15 out of 193 states have gender-balanced governments and only 26 states are led by a woman (CFR, 2024).

Although the gap between women and men in terms of education has narrowed, this has not led to a decrease in the income gap between them. Even in the 59 countries where women are more educated than men, the average income gap is 39% in favor of men, these disparities being correlated with deeply rooted social norms and gender stereotypes that suggest women should dedicate more time to childcare and domestic work than men (PNUD, 2023). Thus, regardless of the level of education, in countries with a low tendency towards prejudice, the time spent by women on unpaid care work is twice as much as the time allocated by men, and as the bias increases, women in these countries allocate up to six times more time than men (PNUD, 2023). Family responsibilities can also be an impediment to women's access to political positions, being a criterion in the selection of female candidates for parliament by political parties and their voters, those with more traditional values considering marriage and children an advantage for men and a disadvantage for women who are expected to be more involved in childcare (Norris, Lovenduski, 1993) and, therefore, to have less time for work outside the household.

Romania ranks 117th out of 193 states in the women's power index (CFR, 2024), while the gender social norms index reveals 85.84% of Romanians

with bias, men in a higher proportion than women, 51.71% of Romanians consider men to make better political leaders than women, and 53.49% believe men make better business leaders than women (PNUD, 2023).

The literature on women's political representation shows, however, that their presence in decision-making forums leads to the adoption of measures that prioritize women's economic, social, and personal interests (Celis, 2009; Wängnerud, 2000), a higher proportion of women in decision-making bodies constituting the premises for adopting policies that promote women's interests, including the reconciliation of women's professional life with family life.

This study aims to analyze the legislative proposals initiated by the Romanian Parliament in the 2012-2016 legislature compared to those initiated in the 2016-2020 legislature, when the number of women parliamentarians increased by 8% compared to the previous legislature in which they represented only 11% of the total parliamentarians (MPs), in order to find out to what extent this increase in women's political participation influenced a better representation of women's specific interests relevant to increasing birth rate, such as childbirth and childcare, by bringing women's experiences to the agenda of theoretical debate and political decision.

The paper is based on content analysis of legislative proposals initiated in the two legislatures, following the link between the type of support measures proposed with impact on birth rate and the gender of their initiators, as well as the entire legislative process of the respective initiatives. The results show that the increased presence of women in the second analyzed legislature shifted the focus of birth rate stimulation policies from offering financial incentives, which discouraged active involvement of mothers in the labor market, to promoting measures that encourage work-family balance and allow parents to remain active in the labor market.

This paper consists of four sections. The first section presents the theoretical framework of the paper, explaining the connection between women's political representation and the type of measures proposed by politicians to support birth rate. The second section describes the data and methods used, and the third introduces the results of empirical analysis. The final section is dedicated to conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

Theoretical Framework

Most theoretical and empirical studies on women's political representation have their roots in Hanna Pitkin's fundamental work, *The Concept of Representation* (1967), which identified four distinct dimensions of representation: formalistic, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic, without establishing a correlation between them and without considering gender. If formalistic representation, which refers to the formal authority given to an individual to act on behalf of others, is problematic because all actions of representatives are considered representation, regardless of their quality, symbolic representation reflects a more generalized sense of representation, based on the attitudes and beliefs of those represented. Descriptive representation refers to how a representative stands for the represented by sharing similar characteristics, but Pitkin views this concept as limited because it focuses more on the composition of the political institution than on its actions. Substantive representation, defined as "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209), is considered the most important by the author, as it emphasizes what happens in the representation process.

Towards the end of the 20th century, with the development of gender studies, political representation was analyzed from a gender perspective (Phillips, 1995), descriptive representation being regarded as a prerequisite for substantive representation. There are various studies that have analyzed whether descriptive representation influences substantive representation, and their results have been equally varied. While some studies have established a clear correlation between the numerical presence of women and the representation of their specific interests (Taylor-Robinson and Heath, 2003; Celis, 2006; Wängnerud, 2009), others have not revealed significant differences between the activity of women and men MPs (Weldon, 2002; Childs and Krook, 2009), arguing that the influence of descriptive representation on substantive representation is more probabilistic than deterministic, meaning that a larger number of women in the legislature increases the chances of achieving substantive representation of women, but does not guarantee it (Dodson, 2006; Phillips, 1995). An argument in favor of women's representation by women, despite the fact that they are driven by very different priorities and goals, is not based on the idea that women are defenders of a group identity or that they explicitly define themselves by gender identity, but on

the fact that it is impossible to escape the social processes that associate us with our gender (Phillips, 1995). In this sense, the motive why democracies need more women in politics derives from the belief that political reasoning is formed based on life experiences and that, in a society organized by gender, these experiences determine different perspectives, priorities, or goals (Phillips, 2002; Mateo Diaz, 2005).

Empirical studies have outlined women's interests in three main categories. The first one associates women's interests with concerns from the private sphere, according to traditional views on gender relations. These stem from exclusively female experiences related to reproduction, while predominantly feminine experiences include care, single motherhood, widowhood, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, pornography, prostitution (Miroiu, 2004). Another type of women's experiences, this time shared with other marginalized categories, results from subordination and discrimination. Molyneux (1985, p. 233) described them as "practical" interests that "are given inductively and arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labor". If discrimination manifests through lower access or lack of access to professional or political positions, to higher-paying occupations, to high-prestige positions, subordination manifests through placing women in lower-paid jobs or through double workdays (Miroiu, 2004). This feminist approach, which combines the private and public spheres, is based on recognizing women as a distinct social category, identifying power imbalances between men and women, and committing to promoting policies that increase women's autonomy (Wängnerud, 2000).

Recent empirical research has shown that, in developing countries, increased descriptive representation of women has led to better provision of public goods, especially in education and health, while in developed countries it has induced changes in parliamentary debates and the adoption of specific policies, such as improving the public childcare system (Hessami and Lopes da Fonseca, 2020). However, the success of substantive representation of women's specific interests depends not only on the number of women MPs but also on the ideology of political parties in parliament, the political balance of parties in that parliament, and the legislative seniority, women MPs with longer legislative experience having a security of their position that allows them to deviate from party

guidelines to support women's rights policies compared to more junior women MPs (Senk, 2023).

Perspectives on childcare vary depending on the political orientation of parties. Left-wing, social-democratic parties traditionally promote the benefits of a state childcare system, accessible at low costs for parents. In contrast, right-wing parties emphasize the right of parents to choose to stay home to care for their children, supporting childcare leaves that give mothers the opportunity to stay home with young children, and with the rise of right-wing populist parties, the traditional family has been reaffirmed as a major concern addressed to women (Kantola, 2006).

There is a vast literature on fertility in advanced societies, which have the option of birth control, trying to identify factors that influence the increase or decrease in fertility rates, ranging from economic trends and forms of employment or unemployment to social policies addressing the family, welfare regimes, changes in cultural values and attitudes, or new reproductive technologies.

Since family income plays an essential role in the intention to have children (Hanappi et al., 2017), periods of economic crisis create uncertainty, being associated with a decline in fertility through postponing pregnancy (Sobotka et al., 2010), especially in the case of the first child. Also, the intention to have a second child is lower in families with low income (Fiori, 2011). On the other hand, women with higher education levels and career-oriented tend not to have children more frequently in contexts where the childcare leave is less generous, or when part-time employment opportunities are limited, and men spend more hours in the labor market (Brini, 2020). However, part-time work, although it may facilitate the reconciliation between family life and remaining in the labor market, most often favors maintaining responsibilities related to childcare and household chores in women's charge.

Therefore, encouraging more egalitarian gender relations in private life, including paternal childcare leave, and the availability of affordable childcare services are the most important measures to reduce the double burden on women, without diminishing their involvement in any sphere of life, leading to reconciliation between professional and family life and, implicitly, to increased birth rates (Gomes et al., 2012), ensuring economic competitiveness by increasing the workforce and combating social exclusion and poverty (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

In the early years after the fall of communism in Romania, political parties, regardless of ideology, addressed the issue of declining birth rate through financial incentives, such as measures to increase child allowances, tax facilities based on the number of children in a family, or material support for families with many children, with liberal parties also proposing allowances for mothers and housewives who interrupted their activity to raise children, thus "encouraging the irreplaceable role of the mother through economic means" (Voicu, Voicu, 1999, p. 618). Additionally, an indirect measure found both in social-democratic and nationalist parties was the concern to solve the problem of "street children" by establishing shelters (Voicu, Voicu, 1999, p. 600, 651, 653).

The result of implementing these programs is highlighted by the analysis of childcare policies (Băluță, 2014), conducted before the increase in descriptive representation of women in the Romanian Parliament from 11% to 19% following the elections at the end of 2016, which revealed that they are built around a familialist perspective, emphasizing the mother's role in the early years of the child's life by encouraging extended childcare leaves of 1-2 years, mainly assumed by mothers.

Family policies in Romania before the increase in descriptive representation of women at the end of 2016 fall into two models of gender arrangement predominantly within a household, as defined by Pfau-Effinger (1998): the traditional model in which the man is the main breadwinner, while the woman does the care work, which applies to families with children under 3 years old, and the dual earner/state carer model, which applies to families with children over 3 years old (Cruşmac and Köhler, 2016).

The presence of women in the Romanian Parliament would be expected to determine the support of legislative initiatives oriented towards a family model that leads to the reconciliation of women's professional life with family life.

The main hypotheses followed in this study are:

H1: Greater descriptive representation of women in the Romanian Parliament leads to greater substantive representation of their specific interests regarding birth rate and childcare.

H2: Lower presence of women in the Romanian Parliament leads to measures regarding birth rate and childcare that reinforce the family model in which the man is the main breadwinner.

H3: Greater presence of women in the Romanian Parliament leads to substantive representation of their specific interests regarding birth rate and childcare oriented towards reconciling women's family life with professional life.

Data and Methods

The method used in this research to test, in a first stage, the 3 hypotheses is content analysis of the 3978 legislative initiatives registered by MPs in the 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 legislatures, available on the Senate and Chamber of Deputies websites.

The number of women MPs in our country has stabilized around 10-11% since 2000, when there was an increase in descriptive representation of women in Parliament due to preparations for joining the European Union. However, following the parliamentary elections in 2016, there was a significant increase, with descriptive representation of women reaching 19% of the total MPs. Therefore, we considered it appropriate to analyze the legislative initiatives registered in the 2012-2016 legislature in relation to those registered in the 2016-2020 legislature.

According to Krippendorff's (2004, p. 1) definition, content analysis is "an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent". Based on direct observations and concrete data, content analysis classifies existing information, aiming to discover patterns, themes, or correlations in the data, the ultimate goal being to anticipate trends, behaviors, or effects of the analyzed content. In legislative research, content analysis has been used to examine the characteristics of the legislature regarding party ideology, government positioning, parliamentary voting, constituency-based representation, policy agenda, quality of debate, or the role of the media in reporting MPs' statements based on ideological positions (Slapin and Proksch, 2014).

In this case study, content analysis is used to classify the representative sample of 3978 legislative initiatives registered by MPs between December 2012 and December 2020 to identify the sub-sample that is the main subject of the analysis of legislative initiatives that provided direct and

indirect measures to increase birth rate and the correlations that exist between the typology of supported initiatives and the gender of the initiators and their political affiliation.

Direct measures were considered family planning policies and access to medical services for pregnant women, financial incentives to have children, such as childcare leave, state child allowance, tax facilities for families with children, proposals to amend labor legislation by provisions that reduce the contribution period for women who have had multiple children or lifetime pensions for housewives with multiple children, state financial support for assisted reproductive techniques, proposals to increase childcare infrastructure in nurseries and kindergartens, or alternative childcare proposals in the absence of nurseries and kindergartens.

Given that Romania ranks first in the European Union in the number of minor mothers, aged up to 15 years, in the period 2012-2021 for which data is available on the Eurostat website (2023), we also included legislative proposals that support the introduction of health education in schools to prevent the increase in the number of minor mothers.

Indirect measures included legislative proposals for financial support for raising and caring for children in low-income families, proposals to facilitate adoption or family placement, as well as other facilities for children to support the family by reducing monthly expenses or supporting children with disabilities, measures that could influence the intention to have another child.

For the statistical analysis of legislative initiatives, we used the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. Depending on the type of legislative initiative, they were coded as proposals to amend already adopted laws and standalone legislative proposals. For the gender of the initiators, we used three variables: female, male, and mixed group (female-male). We considered the year of initiation of each legislative proposal so that a quantitative comparison could be made between the two legislatures, 2012-2016 and 2016-2020, and the year of the vote to correlate the duration of the legislative process with the stage of the legislative proposal at the time of this analysis, as well as the political affiliation of the government at the time of initiation and at the time of the decisive vote for the legislative proposal. The stage of legislative proposals was coded by four variables: rejected, adopted, unfinished

legislative process, and withdrawn. The variables used for legislative initiatives that proposed direct measures were "Financial incentives", "Child allowance", "Childcare leave", "Childcare infrastructure", "Assisted reproduction", "Free medical services for pregnancy", "Hot meal and after-school", "Health education", "Others". For legislative initiatives that proposed indirect measures, we used the variables "Allowance for the child with disability", "Services for the child with disability", "Day off for parents", "Facilitation of adoption", "Financial incentives to reduce education expenses", "Facilities to ensure livelihood", "Others".

A limitation in the operationalization of legislative initiatives is due to the fact that both on the Senate website and on the Chamber of Deputies website, in the electronic box of each legislative proposal, no distinction is made between the main initiator and the MPs who support the project by signature, the initiator being identified by accessing the registration address at the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate for debate or the statement of reasons which, usually, but without certainty, are signed only by the MPs who are the authors of the legislative initiative. Thus, legislative initiatives could be classified more accurately and analyzed from the perspective of the gender of the initiators and their political affiliation.

The analysis of this paper will focus more on legislative initiatives that propose direct measures to increase birth rate.

To test the correlation between the descriptive representation of women in the Romanian Parliament and the substantive representation of their interests regarding the reconciliation of family life and professional life, moderated by political parties, and to estimate the probability that the presence of women will influence the process-focused substantive representation by increasing the number of legislative initiatives or the outcome-focused substantive representation by adopting legislative proposals favorable to women, in the second stage of the analysis I used binary logistic regression models.

The dependent variables included in the logistic regression models are legislative initiatives that provide direct measures, legislative initiatives that provide direct measures to grant financial incentives, legislative initiatives that support direct measures for childcare infrastructure, and adopted legislative initiatives. The predictors used to determine the probability that MPs initiated these legislative proposals were the gender of the initiators,

their political affiliation, the political affiliation of the government at the time of initiation, and the legislature. The same predictors, to which I added the independent variable time which considers the influence of the legislative process duration on the adoption of the initiatives, were used to find out the probability that a legislative initiative will be adopted.

Due to the small number of adopted legislative initiatives regarding the granting of financial incentives and childcare infrastructure, it was not possible to determine the predictability of adopting these initiatives based on the gender of the initiators and political affiliation. Also, the different gender distribution within the political parties that are part of the legislatures, as well as the low percentage of women MPs represent another limitation in the use of logistic regression, gender being an insignificant predictor for process-focused substantive representation through the initiation of legislative proposals regarding the reconciliation of family life with the professional life of women. A descriptive representation of women parliamentarians that exceeds the critical mass of 30% of the total MPs could make the gender variable a significant predictor for the initiation of legislative proposals.
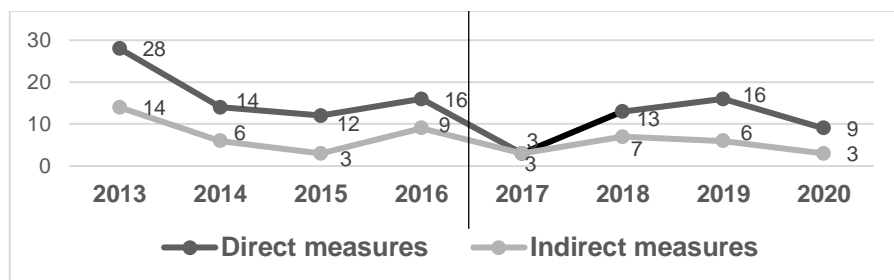
Results and discussion

Content analysis of legislative initiatives
regarding the increase of birth rate

Following the application of the classification criteria of legislative initiatives aimed at direct and indirect measures to increase birth rate on the representative sample of 3978 legislative proposals from the two legislatures, 2012-2016 and 2016-2020, a sub-sample of 162 legislative initiatives resulted, representing a percentage of 4.07% of the total registered by MPs.

As can be seen in the graph below (Graph 1), most initiatives, 102, were submitted in the first legislature, when women represented only 11% of the members of the Romanian Parliament, and especially in the first year, 2013, as a continuation of the policies to stimulate birth rate started in 2011-2012 by granting an allowance of 85% of the salary for the last 12 months to parents active in the labor market.

**Graph 1. Legislative initiatives to increase birth rate
in the 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 legislatures**

Source: Romanian Parliament.

The fewest legislative initiatives were registered in 2017, the first year in which the descriptive representation of women parliamentarians increased by 8% compared to the previous legislature.

In the first legislature, 70 legislative initiatives aimed at direct measures and 32 legislative initiatives regarding indirect measures to increase birth rate were initiated, and in the second legislature 41, respectively 19.

Only 29.01% of the total legislative proposals initiated are standalone proposals, the others being proposals to amend existing laws.

The distribution of legislative initiatives according to the gender of the initiators can be observed in the tables below (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Legislative initiatives that provide direct measures

	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total %	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total %
Women	11	1	5	0	**24**	1	3	5	3	**29**
Mixed group	3	2	1	1	**10**	0	1	2	1	**10**
Men	14	11	6	15	**66**	2	9	9	5	**61**

Source: Romanian Parliament.

Table 2. Legislative initiatives that provide indirect measures

	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total %	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total %
Women	4	1	0	2	**22**	1	3	1	0	**26**
Mixed group	2	1	0	0	**9**	2	0	0	0	**11**
Men	8	4	3	7	**69**	0	4	5	3	**63**

Source: Romanian Parliament.

Although the percentage of legislative proposals initiated by men MPs regarding both categories of measures is majority in both the first and second legislatures, we find that the percentage of legislative proposals initiated by women MPs is increasing in the second legislature, while the percentage of legislative proposals initiated by men MPs is decreasing. If we relate the percentage of legislative initiatives to the percentage of descriptive representation of women and men MPs, we find that although men were 8.07 times more numerous in the first legislature, they initiated only 2.75 times more legislative proposals that provide direct measures and only 3.13 times more legislative proposals that provide indirect measures than women, and in the second legislature, when they were 4.26 times more numerous, they initiated only 2.1 times, respectively 2.42 times more legislative proposals regarding the increase of birth rate.

28 of the 162 legislative proposals became law, 7 during the first legislature analyzed, 19 in the second and 2 in the 2020-2024 legislature.

5 of the legislative proposals registered in 2013 were adopted in 2014. 1 of the legislative proposals registered in 2014 became law in 2016. 2 of those registered in 2015 became law, 1 in 2016 and 1 in 2017. 1 of the legislative proposals registered in 2016 was adopted in 2017.

2 of the legislative proposals registered in 2017 became law, 1 in 2018 and the other four years later, in 2021. 7 of the legislative proposals registered in 2018 became law, 2 in the same year, 2 in 2019, 2 in 2020 and 1 in 2022. 7 of those initiated in 2019 reached the vote in the Chamber of Deputies in 2020 and were adopted, and 3 of those registered in 2020 became law in the same year.

In the last year analyzed, 2020, the smaller number of legislative proposals registered compared to 2018 and 2019 can be explained by the large number of legislative proposals that reached debate and were subjected to the decisive vote in the Chamber of Deputies, 12 of the total of 20 legislative proposals that became laws in the 2016-2020 legislature ending their legislative process this year.

The duration of the legislative process is generally one year in both legislatures, but, unlike the first legislature, 5 of the legislative proposals registered in the second legislature became laws in the same year.

The distribution of the number of legislative proposals registered each year from 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 legislatures, that became laws, is shown in Table 3 according to the gender of the MPs initiators.

Table 3. Number of legislative proposals that became law,
according to the gender of the MPs initiators

	Year of initiation					Year of initiation				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Women MPs	4				**4**		3	2		5
Mixed group	1				1	1	1	2		4
Men MPs		1	2	1	**4**	1	3	3	3	**10**

Source: Romanian Parliament.

Even though women MPs in the first legislature represented only 11% of the total MPs, 4 of the legislative proposals initiated by them were adopted, equally with those initiated by men MPs and became laws. And in the next legislature, 2016-2020, when they represented 19% of the total MPs, 5 of the legislative proposals initiated by women MPs were adopted, also noting an increase in the adoption of legislative proposals that were initiated together with men MPs.

4 of the total legislative proposals initiated in the first legislature have not yet completed their legislative process. 9 were withdrawn by the initiating MPs based on Art. 63 (5) of the Romanian Constitution, at the end of the mandate, and all the others 82, except for the 7 that became law, were rejected. In the 2016-2020 legislature, 60 legislative proposals aimed at direct or indirect measures to increase birth rate were registered, 20 of which have not completed their legislative process, 9 were withdrawn at the end of the legislature, and 11 were rejected.
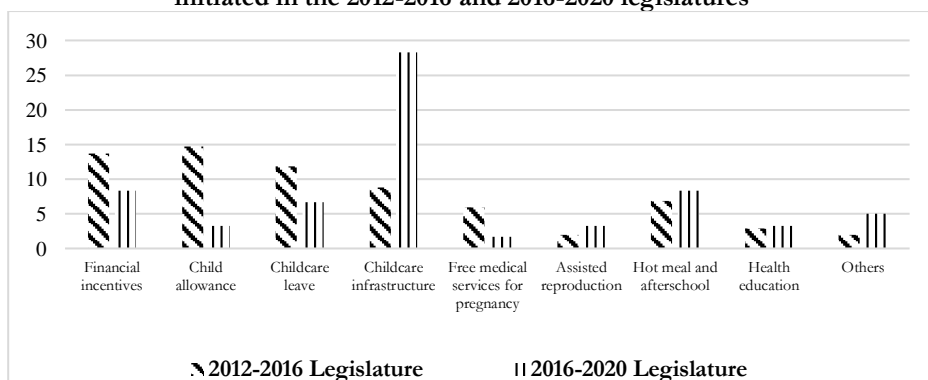
Among the most frequent arguments for rejecting legislative proposals, if the reasons underlying the rejection report are specified in the documents from the electronic box of the legislative proposal, are the lack of mention of the budgetary impact in the statement of reasons or the lack of correlation with the Fiscal-Budgetary Responsibility Law no. 69/2010, more precisely the lack of the financial sheet accompanied by the declaration that the increase in expenditure is compatible with the objectives and strategic priorities specified in the fiscal-budgetary strategy,

with the annual budget law and with the expenditure ceilings presented in the fiscal-budgetary strategy.

The content analysis of legislative proposals for direct measures to increase birth rate revealed that in the first legislature, 2012-2016, MPs gave more importance to proposals for granting incentives, increasing the state child allowance and modifying the childcare leave allowance, initiating fewer legislative proposals to improve the childcare infrastructure that could allow mothers to return to work more quickly and easily.

For clearer visualization, I illustrated in the graph below the legislative initiatives according to the categories of direct measures submitted in the two legislatures.

Graph 2. The share of legislative proposals for direct measures initiated in the 2012-2016 and 2016-2020 legislatures

Source: Romanian Parliament.

4 of the legislative proposals that provide incentives support the reduction of the pension contribution period. It is noteworthy that these proposals are initiated only by a man MP or by a group of men MPs, not by women MPs. The reduction period varies from one year to three years and from one child to at least three. One of the 4 legislative proposals was initiated as a measure to correct the injustice done to women in Romania who gave birth to three or more children before 1990, when there were no contraceptive methods or the legal possibility of having an abortion. Another proposal supports the reduction of the pension contribution period by three years only for mothers who gave birth to and raised at least one child with a disability until the age of 10.

Other types of incentives proposed through 3 legislative proposals initiated by a man MP, or a group of men MPs include the reduction or exemption of income tax for each child born and raised in the family. The lifetime annuity or allowance for heroic mothers who gave birth to and raised at least three children were each supported by a man MP. Also, the large family bonus of 15,000 lei at the birth of the third child and the large family allowance of 50% of the gross minimum wage were proposed by a man MP within the initiative entitled "Legislative proposal for the consolidation of the state through the support of demographic growth", which was subsequently withdrawn.

Noteworthy is another standalone legislative proposal, unlike most legislative initiatives which are, in fact, proposals to amend existing laws, entitled "Legislative proposal to support the increase of birth rate" and initiated by a group of women and men MPs from three political formations, the Conservative Party, the People's Party - Dan Diaconescu and the Liberal Democratic Party. It addresses, as argued in the statement of reasons, active families with low and middle incomes, supporting the exemption from paying income tax, but also the exemption from paying tax for a single property and subsidizing the interest for a single mortgage loan of up to 50,000 euros, the purchase of a house being considered a measure to encourage birth rate and support the family. Instead, this legislative proposal does not refer to childcare services for the first years of the child's life so that mothers do not have to be absent from the labor market for a long time and can benefit from the income tax exemption provided.

Regarding the improvement of childcare services infrastructure, 4 legislative initiatives were proposed regarding the establishment, operation and organization of nurseries, of which 1 was initiated by a woman MP to establish the age range in which children can benefit from the services of these public or private institutions between a minimum of three months and a maximum of three years. This proposal became law. The other 3 legislative proposals were initiated by a man MP, one of them supporting, given the insufficient number of nurseries, the priority acceptance of enrollment applications for children between 0 and 2 years old whose mothers return to work before the end of childcare leave, except for social cases. Unlike these, the other 2 provide for the establishment of new nurseries, one being a standalone legislative proposal called "Legislative proposal for the approval of the National Program 'Nurseries for the

children of Romania'''. This established the total number of nurseries based on the number of inhabitants, from one nursery for 10,000-15,000 inhabitants to 11 nurseries for over 360,000 inhabitants and provided a maximum implementation period of 4 years. None of these 3 legislative proposals were adopted.

Other legislative initiatives regarding direct measures to improve childcare infrastructure provide for the regulation of the profession of nanny – legislative proposal initiated by a woman MP and adopted –, granting a service voucher intended for the payment of domestic services at home and nannies, in the absence of available nurseries – legislative proposal initiated by a man MP and rejected by the decision-making Chamber –, allowance for grandparents who take care of children in the situation where parents return to work before the age of 2, respectively 3 years – legislative proposal initiated by a mixed group of conservative MPs and rejected by both Chambers –, and vouchers for the payment of afterschool services – legislative proposal initiated by a group of liberal women, which has not yet completed its legislative process.

Free medical services for pregnant women and health education to reduce the number of teenage mothers were submitted by the same man MP almost every year of the mandate, being each time rejected.

The reimbursement of medically assisted human reproduction procedures and medical services for in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer were initiated by a man MP, respectively by a woman MP, none of these proposals being adopted.

The 2 legislative proposals included in the category of other direct measures were initiated by a woman MP. The proposal registered in 2015 by an independent woman MP establishes a series of obligations and sanctions for non-compliance by specialized medical personnel or parents in order to reduce infant mortality. Unlike this, the legislative proposal registered by a conservative woman MP supports the pardon of pregnant women and women who are raising children under the age of 5, a provision that could influence the intention of women who are under the threat of being imprisoned for various criminal or corruption acts, to have a child or another child.

In the second legislature that is the subject of this study, 2016-2020, when the number of women in Parliament reached 19%, there is a reversal of

the initiatives submitted by MPs, the emphasis being placed, this time, on childcare infrastructure and less on financial or fiscal incentives, on increasing the state child allowance or on the childcare leave allowance.

Among the legislative proposals to expand childcare infrastructure are a proposal initiated by a man MP that regulates the sources of funding for nurseries, which became law, another legislative proposal submitted by a group of men MPs that provides tax incentives for employers who establish nurseries for the children of employees, also became law, as well as a legislative proposal registered by a man MP that has not yet completed its legislative process and which supports the exemption of companies with at least 30 employees from paying profit tax annually if the money is used for the construction and/or maintenance of nurseries or kindergartens for the children of their employees.

"The legislative proposal for the care and early education of children from active families", initiated by a woman MP and sent to the Chamber of Deputies for debate, provides for the organization of services for the care and early education of the children of their own employees in public institutions in Romania, partially or fully funded from the state budget, as well as in enterprises with majority or full state capital as a solution of the Romanian state to respond to the problem of declining birth rate.

Another solution proposed by a man MP was that, in the absence of nurseries, the age at which children can be admitted to the preschool system should be reduced to a minimum of 2 years. This legislative proposal became law.

Regarding the increase in extended family involvement, two legislative proposals have been initiated: one by a woman MP that stipulates that the childcare leave allowance be granted using the same calculation method to grandparents who are employed and decide to care for their grandchildren until the age of 2 or 3 years, respectively. The proposal initiated by a group of men MPs introduces a childcare allowance for grandparents, the monthly amount of which is equal to the insertion incentive during the period the insertion incentive is granted to the mother. Both legislative proposals have been sent to the Chamber of Deputies for debate.

For the acquisition of childcare and assistance services, the legislative proposal initiated by a man MP in 2019 provides a voucher worth 150 euros per month for each child up to 3 years old. This proposal has

been sent to the Chamber of Deputies for debate. In contrast, the legislative proposal initiated by another man MP also in 2019, for granting vouchers to parents who need childcare, and assistance services based on the income level per family member, has become law.

Another legislative proposal registered in 2018 by a group of men MPs supports, among other things, the granting of coupons for early education services, funding for hot meal programs and afterschool programs, funding for boarding schools, regulation of the nanny profession, and its inclusion in the auxiliary teaching staff. This proposal is currently being worked on at the permanent committees of the Senate.

The regulation of the nanny profession proposed by a woman MP in 2018 was rejected by both Chambers.

Another solution proposed by a man MP for childcare in the first 2 years of life was that mothers on childcare leave could take care of another child with the payment of a minimum wage. This legislative proposal has not yet completed its course.

To support parents active in the labor market, a woman MP proposed in 2019, before the pandemic, that employees with children up to 10 years old be granted days off when classes are suspended. The legislative proposal has been sent to the Chamber for debate. In the same year, another legislative proposal initiated by a mixed group of MPs, regarding the granting of days off to parents for child supervision in the event of temporary closure of educational institutions, became law. In contrast, the "Legislative proposal to support parents and private economic operators during the state of alert and suspension of classes", supported by a mixed group of MPs in June 2020, after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, is still in the legislative circuit.

The initiatives regarding direct measures included in "Others" classification criterion are part of a package of legislative proposals regarding breastfeeding, registered by the same man MP. The first such proposal, which targets sanctions for individuals who do not allow breastfeeding in any public space, an approach considered abuse and discrimination that would socially and professionally isolate mothers, has become law. The same package includes the "Legislative proposal for the classification of maternity hospitals as Child-Friendly Hospitals, to promote and support breastfeeding and reduce infant mortality and

morbidity", the "Legislative proposal for the establishment of the National Breastfeeding Commission", and the "Legislative proposal for the establishment of Breast Milk Banks", which, however, were rejected by the decision-making Chamber.

The legislative initiative regarding health education in schools was also adopted in 2020 through the legislative proposal initiated in 2018 by a mixed group of women and men, which establishes the obligation of specialized bodies of central public administration, local public administration authorities, as well as any other public or private institutions with responsibilities in the field of health or education to take, under the law, all necessary measures for the systematic implementation in school units, at least once per semester, of life education programs, including sexual education for children, to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancies.

Regression analysis of legislative initiatives on increasing birth rate

Based on the political affiliation of the initiators, the parties that recorded the most legislative proposals were the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party, as shown in the table below.

**Table 4. Distribution of initiators by political affiliation
in both legislatures (%)**

Social Democratic Party (SDP)	30.2
National Liberal Party (NLP)	29.6
People's Party - Dan Diaconescu (PPDD)	13.0
Independent Parliamentarians	10.5
Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (DUHR)	8.6
Democratic Liberal Party (DLP)	5.6
Save Romania Union (SRU)	4.9
Conservative Party (CP)	3.7
National Union for the Progress of Romania (NUPR)	3.7
People's Movement Party (PMP)	2.5
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE)	1.9
Pro Romania	0.6
Liberal Conservative Group	0.6
Minorities	0.6

Source: Romanian Parliament.

For the logistic regressions used in the second stage of the analysis of the correlation between descriptive representation and substantive representation of legislative initiatives on increasing birth rates, the two political parties that initiated the most legislative proposals, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Liberal Party (NLP), and the Save Romania Union (SRU), a party founded from civil society, which, although it entered Parliament in the second legislature analyzed in this study, is the third party in terms of the number of women MPs, were considered.

Given the increased descriptive representation of women in the 2016-2020 legislature, it is expected that their increased presence will lead to better substantive representation of women's interests regarding increasing birth rate, on the one hand oriented towards the process by increasing the number of legislative proposals initiated compared to the previous legislature, on the other hand oriented towards outcome by increasing the number of legislative proposals adopted. At the same time, the increased presence of women in the second legislature should lead to the initiation and adoption of more legislative proposals that favor the reconciliation of family life with women's professional life by expanding childcare services infrastructure.

To verify whether better process-focused substantive representation occurred in the second legislature, we analyzed the effect of gender, political affiliation, and time variables on legislative initiatives that provide direct measures to increase birth rate.

Regarding the total number of legislative proposals that provide direct measures initiated, we did not identify statistically significant effects of the independent variables. Instead, the probability that legislative proposals regarding direct childcare infrastructure measures will be initiated in the second legislature is higher.

**Table 5a. Dependent Variable - Legislative initiatives proposed
for childcare infrastructure**

Step 1a	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
SDP	-0.171	0.603	0.081	1	0.777	0.843
NLP	1.109	0.508	4.762	1	**0.029**	3.031
SRU	-0.376	1.159	0.105	1	0.746	0.687

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
male	0.104	0.507	0.042	1	0.837	1.110
guv1	-0.422	0.711	0.352	1	0.553	0.656
guv7	1.373	0.509	7.274	1	**0.007**	3.948
Constant	-2.484	0.615	16.31	1	0	0.083

In this binary logistic regression model, affiliation with NLP and initiation during the SDP-ALDE Government (guv7) led by Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă are the independent variables that significantly influence the dependent variable. The affiliation of initiators MPs with NLP, a party in opposition in the first 3 years of the 2016-2020 legislature, increases the chance of initiating a legislative proposal regarding childcare infrastructure by 3 times, and the SDP-ALDE Government at the time of initiation increases the probability of such a legislative proposal being initiated by 4 times. The other independent variables, the gender of the initiators, affiliation with SDP or SRU, and guv1 - the SLU Government (SDP-NLP-CP-NUPR) led by Prime Minister Victor Ponta, are not significant.

Replacing the two governments with the variable legislature, we will find that the probability of these initiatives being initiated in the second legislature, which coincides mostly with the SDP-ALDE Government, remains.

Table 5b. Dependent Variable - Legislative initiatives proposed for childcare infrastructure

Step 1a	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
male	0.281	0.498	0.318	1	0.573	1.324
SDP	-0.239	0.588	0.165	1	0.685	0.788
NLP	1.104	0.501	4.860	1	**0.027**	3.016
SRU	-0.567	1.155	0.241	1	0.624	0.567
legislature	1.253	0.483	6.739	1	**0.009**	3.502
Constant	-4.047	0.891	20.653	1	0	0.017

Political affiliation with NLP increases the probability that legislative proposals regarding childcare infrastructure will be initiated by MPs of this party by 3 times, and their initiation occurs with a probability of 3.5 times higher in the second legislature.

In comparison, legislative proposals that encourage the traditional family model, by providing financial incentives for increasing birth rate, were initiated mainly in the first legislature.

For the initiation of legislative proposals that support financial incentives, the only significant predictor is the legislature, these being initiated more in the first legislature. Gender and political affiliation do not influence the probability of proposing this type of legislative initiative.

Table 6. Dependent Variable - Legislative initiatives proposed for providing financial incentives

Step 1a	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
male	-0.049	0.367	0.018	1	0.894	0.952
SDP	-0.128	0.390	0.108	1	0.742	0.880
NLP	-0.156	0.413	0.143	1	0.706	0.856
SRU	-0.553	1.141	0.234	1	0.628	0.575
legislature	-1.002	0.419	5.725	1	**0.017**	0.367
Constant	0.709	0.609	1.356	1	0.244	2.033

To determine the factors that could influence the adoption of legislative initiatives regarding direct measures to increase birth rate, we analyzed the effects of the independent variables of gender, political affiliation, and the duration of the legislative process, from initiation to the moment of voting in the decision-making Chamber.

Table 7a. Dependent Variable - Legislative initiatives providing direct measures adopted

Step 1a	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
male	-0.673	0.698	0.931	1	0.335	0.510
SDP	1.408	0.79	3.179	1	0.075	4.088
NLP	1.802	0.772	5.443	1	**0.020**	6.061
SRU	1.498	1.421	1.111	1	0.292	4.472
time	-0.752	0.315	5.712	1	**0.017**	0.471
Constant	-0.941	0.788	1.426	1	0.232	0.39

In this logistic regression model, the effect of gender is not significant, but it suggests that being male could reduce the probability of initiating a legislative proposal regarding direct measures to increase birth rate that

will be adopted by 49%. Political affiliation with SRU is not significant, although it could increase the chance of adopting a legislative proposal providing direct measures initiated by SRU MPs by 4.47 times, which can also be explained by the existence of this political formation in Parliament only in the second legislature analyzed. Affiliation with SDP is almost significant, increasing the chances of adoption by 4.08 times. Significant is the affiliation with NLP, which has a probability of 6.06 times higher. Instead, time, also significant, reduces the chances of a proposal being adopted as the duration of the legislative process increases.

After eliminating the variable gender from the logistic regression model, time remains significant. For each additional unit of time, the chance of a legislative proposal being adopted decreases by 52.4%.

Table 7b. Dependent Variable - Legislative initiatives providing direct measures adopted

Step 1a	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
SDP	1.483	0.778	3.628	1	0.057	4.404
NLP	1.802	0.764	5.567	1	**0.018**	6.063
SRU	1.893	1.379	1.885	1	0.170	6.639
time	-0.742	0.311	5.68	1	**0.017**	0.476
Constant	-1.392	0.653	4.539	1	0.033	0.249

Although affiliation with SRU is not significant, Exp(B) suggests a large increase in the chances of adopting a legislative proposal (by 6.63 times) initiated by MPs from this party. Affiliation with SDP becomes more significant, potentially increasing the chances of adoption by 4.4 times, this difference probably due to the structure of the parliamentary group which has more women compared to other parties, in this case, the effects of gender and political affiliation variables overlapping. Affiliation with NLP is significant, increasing the chances of adopting legislative initiatives providing direct measures to increase birth rate by 6.6 times, indicating a strong influence of this independent variable.

To verify whether the increased presence of women influenced outcome-focused substantive representation, by adopting more legislative proposals, we controlled for the effect of gender and legislature on the

adoption of legislative initiatives providing both direct and indirect measures to increase birth rate.

Table 8. Dependent Variable – Total legislative initiatives adopted

Step 1a	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
male	-0.733	0.441	2.761	1	0.097	0.480
legislature	1.558	0.450	11.983	1	**0.001**	4.752
Constant	-3.456	0.787	19.283	1	0	0.032

According to this binary logistic regression model, it is more likely that legislative initiatives regarding increasing birth rate proposed by women will be adopted, and adoption will take place in the second legislature when the descriptive representation of women in the Romanian Parliament was higher.

After controlling for the effect of political affiliation, the effect of the gender variable diminishes due to the differences in the gender composition of the parliamentary groups of the political parties that make up the Romanian Parliament.

Conclusions

The increased awareness of declining birth rate, population aging, and massive migration after Romania's accession to the European Union led to the initiation of a series of legislative proposals in the two legislatures, 2012-2016 and 2016-2020.

Given the disproportionate percentage of women and men in Parliament, 11% women and 89% men in the 2012-2016 legislature, and 19% women and 81% men in the 2016-2020 legislature, we cannot claim that the number of legislative proposals for increasing birth rate initiated by women MPs should be higher or equal to that of proposals initiated by men MPs, although the quantitative analysis revealed similarities in many of the categories of proposals pursued. Although gender does not have a statistically significant effect in the case of initiation, even when the effects of political affiliation are eliminated, we find that the increased presence

of women in the second legislature led to the adoption of more legislative proposals.

Thus, we can conclude that the first hypothesis, H1: Greater descriptive representation of women in the Romanian Parliament leads to greater substantive representation of their specific interests regarding birth rate and childcare, is partially confirmed, through a greater substantive representation oriented towards outcome, but not towards the process.

As emerged from the content analysis of the legislative proposals initiated in the two legislatures, in the 2016-2020 legislature, in which the descriptive representation of women almost doubled, there was a reversal of the type of direct measures proposed, from financial incentives or reduction of the contribution period to the pension, increasing the state child allowance, the childcare leave allowance for a period of 2 years, measures that delay the return of mothers to the labor market, to measures to expand external childcare services.

Even if the logistic regression models used in the analysis of legislative proposals that can support the reconciliation of family and professional life of women revealed that the effect of gender is not significant for their initiation, but rather the political affiliation with NLP, an opposition party, and initiation during the second legislature, in which the presence of women parliamentarians was increased, in conjunction with the mandate of the SDP-ALDE Government led by a woman, are significant predictors for their adoption.

Therefore, we cannot exclude the influence of gender on the confirmation of the other two hypotheses, H2: Lower presence of women in the Romanian Parliament leads to measures regarding birth rate and childcare that reinforce the family model in which the man is the main breadwinner, and H3: Greater presence of women in the Romanian Parliament leads to substantive representation of their specific interests regarding birth rate and childcare oriented towards reconciling women's family life with professional life.

The results of this study reveal the existence of a link between substantive and descriptive representation of women, in terms of the type of measures proposed through legislative initiatives to increase birth rate, but only a limited number of these initiatives have materialized into laws adopted by

Parliament. Further studies should analyze, using complementary research methods, what factors hindered the adoption of these initiatives and how the transformation of initiatives that promote women's interests into laws can be facilitated in the future.

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