

# CONTENT

THE MATRIX ORGANIZATION. CASE STUDY IN A ROMANIAN PROJECT-BASED NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION .....	3
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Lucian SFETCU

WHAT IS PREVENTING SUCCESSFUL IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES? .....	14
---	----

Nina MIHOLJICIC

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – GROUP EXPOSED TO THE RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION: BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT HINDERS THEIR CONDITION IN THE SOCIETY .....	25
--	----

Ionela IONESCU

WOMEN CIVIL SERVANTS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN BANGLADESH: DISCRIMINATED OR FAVOURED? .....	43
--	----

Mohammad Rezaul KARIM

PARADOXES OF PARTICIPATION OF THE WOMEN LEADERS IN THE UNION PARISHAD IN BANGLADESH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS .....	58
--	----

Mizanur RAHMAN

WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE .....	74
--	----

Gabriela MOTOI

<i>BOOK REVIEW</i> – HIROSE NISHIHARA, A., MATSUNAGA, M., NONAKA, I., YOKOMICHI, K. (EDS.): KNOWLEDGE CREATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND JAPAN, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2018, P. 236 .....	83
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Vlad I. ROȘCA, Cristina Veronica PARTENIE

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Rea, A., Tripier, M. (2008). *Sociologie de l'immigration*. Paris: La Decouverte

Koh, H. K. (2010). A 2020 vision for healthy people. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 362(18), 1653–1656

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# THE MATRIX ORGANIZATION. CASE STUDY IN A ROMANIAN PROJECT-BASED NON- GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

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Lucian SFETCU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *This article analyses a project-based organization's structure in the context of a variable availability of funds and, consequently, a variable number of projects from one year to another, that translates in constant expansions and contractions of employees' numbers and department sizes. The organization's structure started as a number of project teams that expanded until the need for horizontal structure was obvious and departments were implemented, composed of employees with similar positions in different project teams. This matrix structure allows the organization to be flexible with projects being implemented at the same time, the departments growing or contracting in direct correlation with the number of projects.<sup>2</sup>*

**Keywords:** *organizational development, organization matrix, project-based organization*

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## Objectives and theoretical framework

In Romania, for most non-profit organizations in the social field, the last years have been characterized to a great extent by the European Social Fund (ESF) funding through the Operational Sectoral Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013 (POS-DRU 2007-2013) (Sfetcu, 2012, 2013), the Operational Sectoral Programme Human Capital (PO-CU 2014-2020) and, to a lesser extent, the grants offered by the European Economic Area (EEA), the Norway grants, the funds offered through cross-border cooperation programs, etc.

This wave of funding for non-profit social organizations arose a series of challenges for organizations that applied for and received funding, such as the need for a more rigorous general and financial management, a rapid increase in the number of employees, the need for more efficient document management, the need to meet strict terms and conditions in relation to the funders, a good coordination of different teams

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<sup>2</sup> The paper is part of the author's PhD Thesis

and departments, etc. A viable option, which was supported by ESF in different ways and with substantial funds, but has not yet had the expected success in Romania, is the growth of auto-financing of non-profit organizations through the social economy (Cace, Cace, Cojocaru, & Sfetcu, 2013; Cace & Sfetcu, 2014; Cojocaru & Sfetcu, 2013; Cojocaru, Stănescu, & Sfetcu, 2013; Sfetcu, 2012).

In order to analyse this issue of on/off funding, to assess how do organizations manage to deal with multiple projects that begin and end at different times, I studied a specific organization with the aim of finding out what is happening in practice, how the external factors influence the organization in terms of general management, human resource management or project management.

The traditional purpose of project management is to successfully manage individual projects so that project processes are well planned and organized, team members are well motivated and coordinated, the requirements of the beneficiaries and suppliers are met. Project-based organizations are those organizations that create temporary systems to perform certain tasks (DeFillippi, 2002). Project-based organizations can circumvent traditional barriers to organizational change and innovation because each project is viewed as a temporary, relatively short fact.

On the other hand, the goal of a project-based organization is to provide the ideal conditions for running projects, ensuring that projects have well-qualified managers and staff, that projects have all the resources they need to reach their goals. This type of organization allows for non-expensive experiments inside the organization because projects can be developed without involving the entire organization but only a certain number of people and resources and, if they are successful, can then be implemented on a wider scale, even to the entire organization. From the human resources point of view, more than the development of individual competences, a project-based organization needs to be inclined towards learning, institutionalizing knowledge management practices that are essentially a collective learning system.

If the projects are temporary systems for carrying out certain tasks (DeFillippi, 2002), their management being also temporary, project portfolios are permanent and require permanent management, which implies a greater degree of attention and involvement in human resources management. Since projects have a limited duration, the resources allocated to them can be easily redirected to other projects when this need arises.

One of the main dilemmas in project-based organizations sits at the intersection of the autonomy required for project members to carry out their tasks, and the organization's need to control employees' work, routines and procedures, although the projects in which they are engaged may require unique procedures that are not part of the entire organization's normal routines.

The success of many project-based organizations therefore depends to a large extent on the level of decentralization and autonomy offered to project managers (O'Dell & Grayson, 1998). Coordination within organization is, however, necessary in order to ensure that the knowledge gained in projects can be used in future projects, the procedures learned or refined in some projects can be further refined and used if the context requires it.

Another dilemma that occurs within project-based organizations is found at the intersection of immediate performance and long-term performance. For the success of certain projects, some tasks can be done immediately, without taking into account procedures, because the project so requires, but without taking into account the opportunity to learn from them or to disseminate how certain tasks are done, could mean that in future projects the procedure must be learned again. In this respect, some authors consider that the temporary and possibly unique nature of the projects does not require the creation of routines regarding the practices used in them (Hobday, 2000). On the other hand, Davies and Brady (2000) argue that learning procedures and repeating them can lead to increased efficiency and effectiveness with which the organization can support a larger number of projects at the same time.

The matrix design combines two or more different designs for the organization to benefit from both or all of them at the same time. The matrix organization is that in which there is a dual or multiple managerial accountability and responsibility. The usual chains of command in a matrix organization are the functional one and the project/product/client one, more being possible such as geographic location for example (Stuckenburk, 1979).

The matrix structure developed naturally to answer the need for organizations to be capable of managing large and complex problems, projects or programs while having access to limited resources. The limits of the hierarchical organizational structure have become more and more apparent as the problems the organizations had to resolve became more complex. The effect of a matrix structure is to delimitate some of the organization's activities into projects that can last from a few weeks to several years. The traditional organizational hierarchy still exists and provides the regular work group for an employee, while he is also assigned to a temporary hierarchy of employees as part of a specific project. As the project ends, those assigned to it are moving back to their permanent assignments in the traditional departments or are assigned to other projects. Employees can also be assigned to more than one project at a time.

Even though the matrix organization structure has applications beyond those of project management, this paper considers it from the perspective of project management. In a matrix organization, each department and project have a manager, each employee is a member in a department and at least one project. This double role of the employees means they answer to at least two supervisors, one in the department and one in the project team.

According to (Davis & Lawrence, 1997), a matrix organizational works best when these three conditions are met:

- There is external pressure for a dual focus, that is when there is a need for the organization to focus on responding to multiple external factors and to internal operations;
- There is a need for high information-processing capacity;
- There is a pressure for shared resources.

Although it is more complex, the matrix organizational structure is used because it's teams are focusing on a single project, permitting a better control of time and costs; in repetitive projects, its members gain experience and the relationship between them strengthens over time; being more flexible and open than the traditional hierarchical organizational structure, it handles better the changes and challenges that occur in complex projects.

When implemented in a large organization, the matrix organizational structure creates cross-functional teams. These teams consist of members from different departments, with different specialities, that are called *cross-functional groups*. These groups pose specific problems in becoming true teams because of their increased diversity (Newstom, 2011).

## Methodological framework

The data and the conclusions in this article are part of a larger research that I conducted for my PhD thesis. The study did not start from a hypothesis or from a set of hypotheses, instead I took a descriptive approach, one that would help me increase the level of understanding of how NGOs working in the field of social work in an unstable environment in terms of availability of funding, which has forced large variations in human and material resources within it during the past years. Although the results of this research cannot be generalized, they can be viewed as a starting point for further research and serve as an example for other organizations that are confronted with similar situations or who want to implement organizational development processes.

The research is descriptive, the results of which cannot be generalized, but only used as a starting point for possible broader research. The general research is a case study in a social focused organization that has to deal with the same challenges faced by many other similar organizations, some with more success, others with less. In order to obtain the data necessary for the organization analysis, I used semi-structured interviews, participatory observation and documentation. My approach seeks to find out what this organization did right and wrong over the last few years, given the relatively unstable context in which it operates. This study is an applied research that aims to study how a non-governmental organization has evolved over time in a very dynamic context in terms of the type and availability of funds.

I chose to undertake a case study approach because this is an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its own context using multiple data sources (Yin, 2005). Although the case study is used by researchers in different fields, both in qualitative and quantitative research, there is a set of characteristics that define it regardless of the area in which it is used (Hatch, 2002).

An important feature of case study research is that the phenomenon, organization, individual, etc. undergoing a case study is researched in its natural environment. The context is an essential feature of the case study, both in an individual's research and when a phenomenon, event, situation, organization, or other subject of interest is investigated. Another defining characteristic of the case study is its descriptive character. It uses keynote quotes, anecdotes, interviewing and other literary techniques

to create mental images that bring to life the complexity of the many variables inherent to the phenomenon studied (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Carrying out a case study research means identifying a subject that lends itself to in-depth analysis, in a natural context, where several sources of information are available.

Choosing the interview as the main data collection tool also involved identifying the people to be interviewed. So, I chose to interview people with different positions within the organization, from the president, project managers and experts to members of the administrative staff. I conducted semi-structured interviews, which are mainly used in case studies because they provide a minimum structure but also flexibility for the researcher and the respondent to engage in a discussion on the questions asked, the respondent being free to present her own points view of the topic of the discussion.

To conduct the interviews, I chose the headquarters of the organization as location, each of the interviews being conducted in the interviewee's office without the presence of other colleagues. The recording of the interviews was discussed with the participants and was beneficial for the research because I could analyse the entire discussion later, not just the marking of important ideas during the discussions.

Most of the time, researchers undertake, in case study research, a documentation that can be done by going through the existing documents of interest for the study, or by completing and requesting the completion of a form with the information of interest for the study. I chose to collect some of the important data for this study through documentation in order to make sure of its authenticity. Data collected through documentation was used to best describe the facts reported in the interviews and to be integrated into the analysis. At this stage, I mainly focused on collecting quantitative data on the organization, projects, number of employees or quantity and type of resources. I did not register any of the employees' names, former or current, payroll data or other personal or confidential information that is not subject to this study.

A third mean of data collection commonly used in case study research, that I used in this research as well, is the participatory observation. This data collection technique can provide information with a higher degree of objectivity than interviews, but the involvement of the researcher is greater and more important. During the years 2014-2018, years in which I developed my PhD thesis, I spent several months in the association, both as an expert, working with the association in several projects, but also as a researcher and observer of this organization.

## **The context**

The Association for Socio-Economic Development and Promotion Catalactica is a Romanian, apolitical, non-governmental and non-profit legal entity with an open structure, founded in 2001. In 2002, Catalactica Association establishes a subsidiary in Teleorman County, which will manage local and regional projects related to the area.

Since its first years of operation, the association has sought to achieve its goal by developing and implementing intervention projects. To this end, the organization actively seeks funding in its area of expertise funding programs. The hired staff and the

collaborators of the organization develop projects in line with the available funding programs and constantly submit applications for financing.

In its lifetime, the association implemented a series of community development programs, environmental protection or educational programs for youth, provided social services in partnership with local or national government institutions, provided consultancy and evaluation services for social programs, services training for social workers, local governments and NGOs.

The president of the NGO is heavily involved in organizing its policy, planning its activities at the macro level, coordinating departments, including those involved in project writing and implementation, and being the main representative of the association in relation to other organizations, institutions and financiers. The president is not involved in the day-to-day activities of the association, the project managers being those who have the necessary autonomy to coordinate these activities, but he supervises and is consulted by managers when important decisions that may have considerable consequences for the organization, are necessary.

Project management is the central management strategy of Catalactica. By initiating, implementing, and finalizing projects, it strives to strike a balance between goal fulfilment, social service delivery, human resource development and organization development.

## **A project-based organization**

This NGO implements projects with both permanent staff and temporally hired experts either for the implementation of the whole projects or for certain activities within them, for which the organization does not need permanent employees.

All projects proposals and grant requests are written and developed within the association, without external consultancy from specialized firms, by teams of several employees and / or collaborators of the organization. Project writing teams are tailored to the expertise of each individual, each of whom is often engaged in writing multiple projects, possibly within multiple writing teams. Decisions on programmes for which project proposals are written are taken by all members of the association, including the president, who often comes up with ideas or information on new funding opportunities. The president is often directly involved in proposal development by leading the teams and writing and developing projects himself alongside employees.

The activity of writing and developing new projects is a common and almost permanent activity within the NGO, this responsibility being shared between most of the organization's staff. The activity is often a team effort and is coordinated by the organization's president or some of the project managers who have more experience in this domain. For the writing of project proposals, the research department is also involved and information about the potential beneficiaries is considered. The writing and development of new projects is done in accord with the specific programme indications and rules, that are used and respected. Collaboration in the project writing teams is done both physically by way of meetings in the meeting room of the



association, and online. Each proposal has its own online shared space where information is gathered, and everyone involved in writing that proposal contributes.

When projects are funded, their teams are set up primarily from permanent employees that are not involved in too many other projects, and then, if there are empty slots, collaborators are asked to join the team or new permanent employees are hired. At the start of each funded project, the team lays out its details in a Gantt diagram that details every activity and its timeframe at a weekly level. The Gantt chart tell each team member the timeframes of their activities, with whom they will directly collaborate in each activity and who is their superior if different than the project manager. This planning ensures that the project manager does not need to coordinate each team member daily, and that everyone knows what is expected of them and when. Project implementation planning may undergo changes during its life, changes that need to be justified by the project team and manager. Changes to the implementation chart must not affect the achievement of the project's objectives or the objectives themselves.

All the association's projects are part of it, and the NGO is basically composed of these projects. This condition is essential for the implementation of funding proposals and, in particular, for the approval of their funding by the financiers, verifying each time the compatibility of the proposed project with the purpose of the organization proposing the project.

## **From projects to departments – the matrix system**

The main coordination relationship is that between the organization's president and the project managers who, in turn, coordinate the project implementation teams. The project teams are hierarchically structured, starting with the project manager and continuing with the financial manager, after which there are experts in procurement, project implementation, attracting and managing the target group etc.

At the project level, each team aims to successfully implement the project for which they are working. In this respect, the project team members pursue their objectives as a priority but also contributes to the development of the organization as a whole by working on organization-wide tasks like proposal writing and developing new projects. Within the organization, project management is, to a great extent, decentralized and project managers have the necessary authority to perform their tasks and manage their teams without daily supervision from the organization's president. Within projects, decisions are taken to a great extent by project managers, in consultation with subordinates, in a manner similar to that used by the association's president when he consults with the project managers. They consult with the people involved in the project teams before making decisions. Project managers have the freedom to organize their teams and activities as they see fit and they are not influenced by the association's leadership in this regard.

*"Q: The decisions are taken only by the president?*

*A: No, he consults with employees. And within the project, the manager consults a part of the team." (R2)*

This autonomy is a good success indicator of the organization (O'Dell & Grayson, 1998). Specific activities require experts with specific competencies, so there are trainers, evaluators, researchers, mentoring experts, etc. in every project, depending on its nature.

All projects need some administration, so an administrative department exists that takes care of the whole organization and all the projects. This department is composed of employees that are also assigned to specific projects as their main task. This system was the first step in creating a matrix organizational structure as we will see in the following paragraphs.

Work relationships within the Catalactica Association are organized both vertically, through co-ordination relationships, and horizontally through collaborative relationships across projects and employees that shared the same or similar positions in different project. This type of work relationship approach became more obvious and more needed as the organization begun implementing more projects at the same time.

*“As more projects were implemented at the same time, it became obvious that some tasks and activities across projects were bound to repeat either exactly or in a similar fashion, thus the idea of collaborating across projects” (R1)*

The second dimension of this organization's structure is represented by departments. They were created as a way of employees with similar tasks in different projects to collaborate and to learn from each other. This organizational structure allows for uniformity and efficiency of work in all its projects and departments. This approach is not traditional for organizations, that usually are made up from different departments at first and then members of these departments are assigned to different projects. Here the projects are forming the main structure and from them the departments are created and modelled in time depending on the number and composition of the projects the NGO implements at every specific time.

Although departments are fixed, their dimensions and staff are dependent of the number of projects the organization implements at any certain time. They are formed by employees with similar attributions from all or most of the projects that are being implemented by the NGO. The main departments of the association are research, development, procurement, economic, advertising and the administrative department. Unlike project teams, departments are not strictly hierarchically structured, but usually the person with the highest experience is considered the head of the department. This person has the ability to carry out tasks in their own projects and to coordinate and verify the work of their colleagues for other projects. These department coordinators are generally subordinated to both project managers and the president of the organization. Inside the departments, employees work together to be more effective in fulfilling tasks that are necessary for every project, with the person involved in that certain project being, of course, the most involved one.

In the advertising department, for example, each employee works for their own project, providing information materials, presentation websites, press releases, etc. but although each member of this department is working on their own project, they consult, support and verify each other. The person with the most experience agrees on what everyone

else is doing, even if that person is not involved in that project. This model is largely similar in all departments.

*"There was a time when there were many projects, there were larger departments of accounting, procurement, archiving and everything, that still exist now but smaller (...) In principle they had a coordinator, but he was not named, he was somewhat the person who he had more experience in the field who was better off." (R2)*

The association is practically structured in a matrix type system with several permanent departments and a variable number of projects, depending on the available funds. The number of people working in the organization and in each department are strictly related to the number of projects that the organization implements at any certain time.

The organization's management structure can be ranked by Gemünden, Lehner and Kock (2017 2017), namely: 1 – individual project management; 2 – management of a project portfolio and 3 – management of a project-based organization.

In this NGO, I found this hierarchy in a different way, that is to say, I distinctly found the management of the organization carried out by its leader, but the management of project portfolios was carried out by people who were also project managers with more experience that allowed them to manage their own projects and to supervise other project managers. In some cases, one person was the project manager of multiple projects (2 or 3) and sometimes almost the same team had a 2 or 3 project portfolio.

A clear situation in this respect is described by one project manager who, during the period 2014-2015, coordinated a team with a three project portfolio in a different office space than the rest of the organization and was doing so almost completely independently, the sole link between this team and the rest of the organization being mainly its president.

*"Those who worked on the projects I managed, did this from another location. This situation put us in the position of not always communicating with the main staff of the organization." (R5)*

During these periods, when there are many projects under implementation at the same time, it is necessary to employ a large number of new people to fill up newly created positions. This infusion of new staff has, in the past, generated dissatisfaction with old employees who felt threatened and bothered because the new staff came with new procedures and not always learned the procedures used in the organization. Moreover, some of the new employees had significantly more experience than the existing staff so they have been appointed to some of the departments' co-ordination positions, either formally or informally, fact that generated dissatisfaction with the old employees and led to conflicts within the organization. Although this issue of new and more experienced employees is marginally related to the subject of this paper, it is important in a way that, if the departments had not existed, and every new employee had to work on his project or projects and not coordinate with existing employees with similar positions in different projects, these problems might have not existed, but given the department organization, they were expected to work together and do things in the same way across all the projects even if this was not a mandatory requirement by those

which financed these projects. The organization aimed for unity in their procedures across different projects, but the employees were resistant in learning new and maybe improved procedures.

The association has an organigram, but it is mainly only on paper, the hierarchy within the organization seeming to be broadly consisting of the president, the project managers and the rest of the employees. Hierarchies are preserved, however, within each project the association implements. However, the organization operates in optimal parameters when the number of employees is lower to medium. As the number of employees increases, as it was in 2014-2015, disputes begin to arise between employees and many of them shift responsibilities to others that are newer or less experienced, in a way that is not always reasonable or responsible.

*"R: There is always an organigram that is more or less respected, but I would like to think things work in a pyramidal system.*

*Q: Is this hierarchy only within projects or in the organization?*

*R: It's no longer in the organization, but within projects it is still respected. "(R4)*

The way the organization is coordinated through projects, makes it difficult to carry out and maintain an organigram chart of the entire association, this being replaced in this case by the organizational charts of the projects under implementation. The only person who does not appear in these organizational charts is the president of the organization, but the rest of the employees are found in the staff schemes of the association's projects.

## Conclusions

This organization started by implementing individual projects and developed a matrix structure that is flexible and works well enough. Its departments are stable, but the number of employees differs in direct relation to the number of projects being implemented. This kind of structure allows for expansion and compression of the organization to different levels in relatively short amounts of time, if the organization's management team is rigorously organized and the procedures are well established and followed, with enough room for improvement.

In order to reduce the disproportions in allocating and evaluating employee tasks, the organization must implement a clear system of procedures and ongoing employee appraisal, a system that allows to circumvent personal relationships and evaluate each employee exclusively on the basis of the work she does. The employees or the management should agree on the procedures that are to be used in order to create unity across all projects. The tasks should be assigned formally and not by word of mouth, so that both the person who assigns tasks and the person that has to accomplish them to be held responsible in certain ways and to be correctly evaluated for them.

In smaller, more open organizations, assignments are given often out of the job description, overlapping tasks or their transfer from one employee to another for various reasons. For a large organization, these practices can be detrimental, and it is

preferable that every employee does what she mentions in her contract of employment and job description.

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# WHAT IS PREVENTING SUCCESSFUL IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES?

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the factors which prevent or considerably decelerate the process of immigrant<sup>2</sup> integration in the Central and Eastern European countries. In this research the CEE region includes countries that satisfy the two following conditions: 1. countries that are geographically within the Central-East Europe region; 2. countries that hold a membership of the EU.<sup>3</sup> The choice of criteria is based on common political tendencies and societal responses which are evident in selected countries as a result of the ongoing European migrant crisis. Preventing factors of immigrant integration are examined at political, social and economic levels. Both migrant perspective and the CEE countries' integration policies are examined in-depth, in order to reveal reasons for poor implementation of suggested quota system and less successful immigrant adaptation strategy in the CEE area. Since the integration of newcomers is a two-way communication, this study has to take into consideration not only countries' migration policies and openness towards newcomers but also readiness of refugees and asylum seekers to integrate and adapt into new environment.*

**Key words:** *immigrant integration; Central and Eastern Europe; far-right movement; post-Soviet nationalism.*

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<sup>2</sup> Immigrants, refugees and newcomers are all terms used interchangeable in the study in order to cover a broad range of migrants who want to settle in the countries of the EU from various reasons.

<sup>3</sup> The CEE countries included in this study are Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Although Austria stands out, especially in the economic area, from other CEE countries, the author deems necessary to include the country in the research because of alarming rise of nationalism and far-right movements in the Austrian society. Political factors strongly dictate the course of the Austrian migration policy and affects settlement and migrant decisions in Austria.

## Introduction

Recent immense influx of immigrants into the EU territory has drawn attention to a certain divide between Western and East-Central Europe in terms of different approaches in accepting and integrating newcomers. While Western Europe has a rich experience in accommodating immigrants, as it has been an attractive destination for numerous foreigners over many centuries, CEE lags behind considerably in this regard possibly due to the almost fifty-year long Soviet closed border policy. (Horn, 2015) Unexperienced in embracing people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, the CEE region shows signs of deeply rooted xenophobic and conservative narratives which have recently turned into strong anti-immigrant national policies. Schweitzer argues that the closed doors and barbed wire policy are common in the CEE countries because of preoccupation over their own poverty and fragile economic conditions that might have hardened people's feelings toward outsiders' distress. (Schweitzer, 2015) Indeed, many Central-East European societies still suffer from inferiority complex and struggle to achieve long-awaited economic and political stability. These societies compared to more developed Western Europe have to deal with slow economic developments and reinstalment of national and cultural identities that were to the higher or lower degree suppressed during the Soviet rule.

The analysis of migration issue is a multilayered study as migration affects political, economic, cultural and religious aspects of both transit and host societies. Immigrants' decisions regarding the final destination are partially influenced by the nature of feedback coming from different areas of would-be host societies. Potential hosting countries might be afraid of accepting foreigners for various reasons. The fear driven xenophobia has different backgrounds. For instance, *Cross-national measure of fear-based xenophobia* research includes 5-item hierarchical scale which measures fear-based reactions to immigrants and foreigners. This study has shown multidimensional nature of xenophobia which contains *personal fear* (the feeling of personal threat caused by the influx of newcomers), *fear of cultural change* (immigrants with different cultural background are seen as a threat to existing cultural set of values), *fear of identity loss* (interaction with immigrants might cause dilution of national identity and purpose), *fear of foreigners' disloyalty* (immigrants might disrupt already established societal patterns by refusing to obey entrenched rules of the host society), and *political fear* (fear of losing control over the political system). (Van der Veer, Ommundsen, Yakushko Higler, 2011) Migrants might be discouraged to integrate into societies that show higher levels of xenophobia whether that kind of prejudice is based on political, economic, personal, cultural or religious motives. Integration of newcomers is a two-way relationship that requires analysis of both immigrant and would-be hosting country perspective. Successful integration implies willingness to accept and readiness to adjust. However, the CEE region fails to accommodate newcomers while refugees and migrants perceive the region mostly as a transit part of their long journey to the Western Europe. Lack of interest coming from both sides undermines the concept of fruitful integration in the region. This study depicts the causes of poor integration of immigrants in the CEE societies (Table.1) taking into account multidimensional nature of migration and its consequences on different areas of affected societies.

**Table no. 1. Factors that prevent successful immigrant integration**

	<b>Immigrants</b>	<b>CEE Countries</b>
<b>Political Level</b>	Reluctant to apply for asylum in the CEE countries; these countries are seen mostly as transit countries and not seriously considered as a final destination.	Government policies have become significantly hostile towards migrants; rise of populist and far-right movements and parties across the CEE region.
<b>Economic Level</b>	Low economic incentives for migrants to stay in CEE; lack of job opportunities, lower standard of living compared to the Western Europe.	Struggling to provide good job opportunities even for their own nationals; indicators of less developed economies in the CEE region: huge emigration of both highly skilled and non-skilled workers to the Western Europe.
<b>Social Level</b> (Religion, Multiculturalism)	Less free to express their cultural and religious customs; feeling of isolation and alienation.	Not enough exposure to different cultures due to a half century long Soviet oppression; after the end of the Cold War, CEE finally had the chance to revive its own religious identity and still feels fragile and insecure when it comes to accommodating different religious practices (especially Islam).

## Rise of nationalism and fewer asylum applications

Recent elections across the CEE region have shown a concerning rise of the far-right and populist parties as well as the promotion of strong anti-immigrant political narratives among regional officials. It seems that the refugee crisis has been coincided with a serious political crisis within the EU. For instance, in 2017, Austrian far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) has managed to enter the national government by forming coalition with the center-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). FPO is very explicit when it comes to limiting immigration especially from the Middle East and shrinking welfare benefits to non-Austrians. (Aisch, Pearce & Rousseau, 2017) Now this party has got a real power to exercise its populist ideology and dissuade many refugees from seeking asylum in Austria. Unfortunately, Austria is not an isolated



example of the reviving far-right trend in CEE. Democracy in Hungary is experiencing accelerated deterioration and the anti-immigration campaign is only adding to already alarmingly increased Victor Orbán's authoritarian grip over the country. Decisively anti-immigrant, the Hungarian government built a tall fence on the border with Serbia confirming its stance as the toughest opponent to the German open door policy. (Postelnicescu, 2016) Croatia followed Hungary's example and closed its borders for migrants as well.

Many parts of the post-socialist Europe have become a firsthand hub for the new-right ideology. Maybe the most evident signs of rising European New Right are Hungarian and Bulgarian hostile border guards who prey migrants fleeing North. (Holleran, 2018) Resurrection of the radical right has gained a lot of popularity in the CEE region recently. The Visegrad group of central European nations – Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – has not stayed immune to the rise of nationalistic and xenophobic narratives. In 2017, the anti-Islam Freedom and Direct Democracy party managed to enter the Czech parliament with almost 11 percent of votes. Moreover, re-elected Czech President, Milos Zeman continues to attract attention with his strong anti-immigration statements and leanings towards Russia and China. (Muller & Hovet, 2018) Anti-immigrant or more precisely anti-Muslim narratives have been widely used by the CEE politicians ever since the refugee crisis hit the Union in 2015. Slovakia is also actively involved in the larger CEE anti-immigration campaign. Although Slovakian neo-Nazi People's Party underwent unexpected loss in the regional elections in 2017, still there is a harsh anti-refugee rhetoric coming from the highest political levels of the country. For instance, Slovak PM welcomed Italy's decision to reject entrance to a couple of hundred migrants rescued in the Mediterranean. (*Hungary and Slovakia back tough stance on migrants*, 2018) Poland has continued to fall further into conservative, less media and judiciary free society ever since the right-wing Law and Justice Party gained incredible 39 percent of the national vote in 2015. Polish PM Kaczynski saw a great potential in the unfriendly migration policy which resulted in more restrictive entrance measures for the Middle Eastern and North African refugees. Paul Waldie argues that the official Polish anti-immigration attitude has "found a receptive audience in a country that is almost mono-ethnic and has almost no experience with multiculturalism." (Waldie, 2018) Of course, the anti-refugee rhetoric has only been added to the already nationalist-orientated Polish government. One could argue that the right-wing politicians across the CEE region have found a *golden card* for gaining more votes and more political power by claiming the strong anti-immigration standpoint.

Germany was very disappointed when many of the CEE countries refused to accommodate proportionally assigned number of refugees. Such lack of solidarity has deepened further political instability within the Union putting the common European security agenda and migration policy under a lot of pressure. (Postelnicescu, 2016) It is surprising that this region was the source of emigration to the Western Europe just two decades ago, but now it is showing *compassion deficit* towards those who are simply

running from poverty and war. However, the reason behind such shortage in empathy might be found in different interpretation of the notion of nation. As Schweitzer notices “in eastern Europe, where borders were frequently redrawn, the nation is still widely seen as an ethnic/cultural entity rather than a political one, and cultural and ethnic homogeneity is regarded as an asset that helps to prevent the disintegration of the state.” (Schweitzer, 2015) Newcomers are seen as a threatening factor that could hurt restoration of national and ethnic identities in the region. After the end of Soviet oppression many CEE countries were left at an uncertain crossroad that has intensified the fear of losing national and cultural uniqueness again. In order to prevent such unwanted events, Central and Eastern European communities rushed into rebuilding nation-states and national sovereignty, the process that is rather based on ethnicity than citizenship in this region.

Political reasons for poor immigrant integration are also visible in refugee reluctance to apply for political asylum in the CEE countries. Majority of refugees does not consider the region as an attractive destination. The number of asylum applications is much higher in the Western Europe and the first admission states (Greece, Italy) than in CEE. In 2016, almost 60 percent of overall asylum applications were submitted in Germany that is approximately 750 thousand people. (Podgorzanska, 2017) Even though 2017 recorded a drop in asylum applicants within the EU-28 by 560 thousand in comparison to 2016, still the CEE region received far less applications than the Western part of Europe, Greece and Italy. In 2018, the trend continued where the number of first-time applicants across the EU decreased by 74 thousand and the main countries of destination remained almost the same (the five top countries for asylum applicants were Germany, France, Italy, Greece and Spain). Germany was again the most attractive destination accounting almost 30% of all first-time asylum applications in 2018. (Eurostat, 2019) On the other hand, Slovakia received only 155 applications last year. Surprisingly, Hungary experienced a severe decline in number of applicants from 3,115 in 2017 to almost five times less, only 635, in the previous year. Croatia recorded 675 asylum requests and the Czech Republic had around 1,300 applicants. Submitted applications did not exceed 2,000 in Romania, while Bulgaria and Poland had approximate number of people who applied for the first time not surpassing 2,500. (Eurostat, 2019) Even though Austria was highly ranked with almost 11 thousand asylum requests in 2018, still the number of interested immigrants applying for the asylum was more than halved compared to 2017. The newly elected Austrian right-wing government with a strong anti-immigration policy most likely discouraged many to consider the country as a new settlement destination.

GEO/TIME	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Total</b>	595,530	1,325,505	1,236,285	675,780	597,715
<b>European Union 28</b>	562,680	1,256,610	1,206,045	654,610	580,845
<b>Germany</b>	172,945	441,800	722,265	198,255	161,885
<b>France</b>	58,845	70,570	76,790	91,965	110,485
<b>Greece</b>	7,585	11,370	49,875	56,940	64,975
<b>Spain</b>	5,460	14,600	15,570	33,035	52,730
<b>Italy</b>	63,655	82,830	121,185	126,550	49,165
<b>United Kingdom</b>	32,120	39,720	39,240	34,355	37,290
<b>Netherlands</b>	21,780	43,035	19,285	16,090	20,465
<b>Belgium</b>	14,045	38,990	14,250	14,035	18,130
<b>Sweden</b>	74,980	156,110	22,330	22,190	18,075
<b>Switzerland</b>	21,940	38,060	25,820	16,615	13,465
<b>Austria</b>	25,675	85,505	39,875	22,455	11,390
<b>Cyprus</b>	1,480	2,105	2,840	4,475	7,610
<b>Ireland</b>	1,440	3,270	2,235	2,910	3,655
<b>Denmark</b>	14,535	20,825	6,055	3,125	3,465
<b>Finland</b>	3,490	32,150	5,275	4,325	2,945
<b>Slovenia</b>	355	260	1,265	1,435	2,800
<b>Norway</b>	10,910	30,470	3,240	3,350	2,530
<b>Bulgaria</b>	10,805	20,160	18,990	3,470	2,465
<b>Poland</b>	5,610	10,255	9,780	3,005	2,405
<b>Luxembourg</b>	1,030	2,360	2,065	2,320	2,225
<b>Malta</b>	1,275	1,695	1,735	1,610	2,035
<b>Romania</b>	1,500	1,225	1,855	4,700	1,945
<b>Czechia</b>	905	1,235	1,200	1,140	1,350
<b>Portugal</b>	440	870	710	1,015	1,240
<b>Iceland</b>	:	360	1,100	1,065	730
<b>Croatia</b>	380	140	2,150	880	675
<b>Hungary</b>	41,215	174,435	28,215	3,115	635
<b>Lithuania</b>	385	275	415	520	385
<b>Latvia</b>	365	330	345	355	175
<b>Slovakia</b>	230	270	100	150	155
<b>Liechtenstein</b>	:	:	75	145	145
<b>Estonia</b>	145	225	150	180	90

Source: Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex Annual aggregated data (rounded); updated March 3, 2019

## Lack of job opportunities and lower living standard

Since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the CEE region has made a slow economic progress, much less than it was hoping to accomplish after being freed from Soviet oppression and once becoming a part of prospective European economic area. East-Central Europe did not enjoy economic benefits from the large-scale immigration during 1960-70s, as the Western part did, because it was under tight Soviet control and was left out from colonialist experience. (Schweitzer, 2018) Colonialism was very lucrative, although controversial, policy of many Western developed economies that helped boost migration and trade flows from which benefited mostly colonial countries

of the West. Today, even though being part of the EU, the CEE region still suffers from fragile economic developments and struggles to provide prosperous job opportunities even for its own nationals. For instance, despite the fact that Poland has managed to profit from the EU membership and the Polish economy even recorded a growth of 25 percent in the period from 2004 to 2015, real income has barely seen any improvements forcing more than two million Poles to look for better work conditions in the West. (Waldie, 2018) CEE perceives newcomers rather as an economic burden than a valuable working force that can add to the national economic growth and the region is still looking for miraculous policy that could solve current economic instability and fix deprived labor market.

With the recent influx of immigrants, a widespread feeling of disappointment has overflowed CEE because many Eastern Europeans thought that joining the EU would resolve their economic crisis and that they will finally enjoy economic gains from promised tourists; instead they are left to deal with additional refugee emergency. (Krastev, 2015) In this region where many economic issues have not been resolved yet, immigrants pose a serious financial burden. Such economically insubstantial environments treat immigrants merely as receivers of support and not as the potential force that can improve the economy of the host countries in the long run. (Podgorzanska, 2017) Specific for the CEE counties is that they have to deal with their own emigration issue. While Western Europeans primarily worry over influx of immigrants and refugees, Eastern and Central Europeans are concerned with the opposite problem, which is how to prevent their own citizens from leaving. (Parikh, 2017) Although some CEE countries had tried with different anti-emigrant campaigns to prevent citizens from departing and attract those who already left, still these actions did not provide expected results.

The main indicator of Central-East Europe's poor economic development is a concerning rate of workers' emigration across the region. High rate of brain drain shows country's inability to provide productive and career driven working environment for highly skilled people which push away huge economic potential to more developed markets in the West. It is estimated that around 20 million of Central and Eastern Europe's most talented workers have left since the early 1990s and many of them have settled in the Western Europe. (Parikh, 2017) However, it is not just that the highly-skilled emigration troubles CEE, non-skilled workers are also attracted by better paid job in the Western part of the EU. Due to high levels of work emigration many CEE countries suffer from serious labor shortages. For instance, over fifty percent Hungarian based companies had trouble finding personnel in the period 2016-17. (Parikh, 2017) Moreover, average net salary is much lower across CEE region compared to the wealthy economies of Denmark, Germany or Sweden. The list of average monthly net wages in the EU for 2018 shows that Bulgaria is the poorest with only €457, Romania and Hungary follow with slightly higher number but not exceeding €650 per month. Almost all other CEE countries are in the lower part of the list. The only exception is Austria occupying the sixth place with average net salary of almost 2,400 thousand euros per month. (Fischer, 2018) It does not surprise the decision of many migrants to avoid the region and pursue their dreams and new life in more productive communities. If a country cannot provide for its own citizens it is less like

that it will deliver to newcomers like refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa.

Lower economic productivity, lack of job opportunities, lower standard of living compared to the Western economies are reasons that discourage many immigrants to consider the CEE countries as promising final destinations. Let us not forget that immigrants coming to the EU are mostly people in need who are either running from poverty or bloody conflicts. Those people are looking for perspective environments that can provide jobs and security. Many of them came to Europe with little or nothing and it is of essential importance for them to obtain at least minimum level of economic and social security. In most cases, newcomers want to develop their potential and exercise their talents once settled in a new environment. Jobs provide economic stability and a platform for future personal and professional development, which is why obtaining a job is so crucial for the majority of immigrants. That said, one might argue that the country with better economic conditions and employment opportunities is much more appealing to newcomers. Unfortunately, CEE still struggles to provide such conditions even to its own nationals, making itself a rather transit region for passing refugees than a seriously considered final settling destination.

## **Unwelcomed multiculturalism and feeling of alienation**

Due to the decades of the post-war communist rule, the CEE countries were to a higher or lower level unexposed to different cultures. Exceptions are Austria and Croatia, although the latter has had a fifty-year long socialist experience of ethnic and religious suppression as one of six former republics of Yugoslavia. After the end of the Cold War, CEE finally had the chance to revive its cultural uniqueness and religious identity. However, this process of cultural and national restoration has brought other negative consequences, mainly regarding the rise of nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments where the idea of peaceful coexistence of different cultures in one place has been almost completely denied in this region. As Schweitzer notices well “there are no Belgiums or Switzerlands in eastern Europe” and the only multinational country, Czechoslovakia, had a peaceful separation just “because its internal borders reflected Czech and Slovak ethnic division.” (Schweitzer, 2015) In the name of revival of strong nation-states where ethnicity plays the main role, multiculturalism and religious tolerance are sacrificed for the greater cause – ethnically and culturally homogenous countries.

In a homogenous society unaccustomed to different cultural, linguistic or religious practices, newcomers might experience a great deal of alienation and isolation. Less tolerant countries have highly exclusive mainstream cultural milieu where integration equals assimilation. Refugees from the Middle East and North Africa certainly come from very distinct cultural and religious background and to the unexposed region they might seem gravely alien. Many Central and Eastern European countries have restored their religious identities by turning them into an integral part of national and individual identities. Pew Research Center concludes that the reprisal of religion in the CEE countries, which once were controlled by atheist regimes, is outstanding although practicing religion is still at lower level in the region compared to other regions such as

Latin America, the US, Middle East or Africa. (*Religious Belief and National Belonging*, 2017) However, that does not change the fact that since the collapse of the Soviet Union many Central and Eastern Europeans have become more religiously devoted. Some differences in practicing between Catholic and Orthodox Christians exist, but overall, the region has experienced unquestionable religious revival. For instance, Catholics in CEE are more religiously observant than Orthodox, they attend church more often, and pray more often. On the other hand, Orthodox Christians see religious identity as strongly connected to national identity much more than Catholics in CEE. (*Religious Belief and National Belonging*, 2017) While the region is trying to reconstitute its religious identities it still feels very fragile and unwilling to accommodate different religious practices, especially Islam.

Islamophobia has rapidly spread over Europe and refugees have become the number one security enemy. Political leaders across Central and Eastern Europe have openly spoken against Muslim immigrants and Islam in general. Czech President Milos Zeman described the influx of refugee as “an invasion, organized by thousands of people smugglers,” adding that the refugees are “Islamists who are coming to subjugate Europe.” (*The immigrants are islamists*, 2015) Slovakia’s Prime Minister expressed resentment toward Muslim refugees saying that “Islam has no place in Slovakia.” (Matharu, 2016) Moreover, Slovakia has banned Islam from the official list of state religions. This country has a small Muslim community, around 2,000 Muslim people, but there are no registered mosques. (Samuels, 2016) With no place to practice their religion and with hostile anti-Islam official policy, many refugees avoid seeking asylum here. Hungarian Prime Minister has recently depicted refugees as “Muslim invaders” and continues to advocate against immigration in the EU. (Schultheis, 2018) In Bulgaria anti-Muslim hate incidents are on the rise. Only in the first half of 2017 there were three recorded acts of vandalism targeting mosques and sites of worships across Bulgaria. (*Muslim denomination in Bulgaria*, 2017) It seems that the CEE countries are still not ready for multicultural and religious tolerant environment, rather they prefer culturally homogenous, purely ethnical and, if possible, anti-Muslim societies.

It is more likely that immigrants would feel less free to express their cultural and religious customs and suffer greatly from social isolation in a more xenophobic society. Majority of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa are running from political conflicts and economic poverty, they do not consider their cultural or religious identities as an issue and thus not something that is open for change. Moreover, newcomers also feel more comfortable in a country with already established familiar minority communities close to their own cultural affiliation. That is probably why Germany with more open immigration policy, huge experience in accommodating newcomers and established Muslim communities might be more attractive to the Middle Eastern and North African immigrants than any of the Central or Eastern European societies.

## Concluding remarks

Poor immigrant integration in the CEE region has exposed a multidimensional nature of migration issue. Political, economic and social reasons are all responsible for less

successful integration of newcomers in Central and Eastern European societies. However, blame is not only on the countries' unsuitable immigration policies and wide spread anti-immigrant sentiments but also on the unwillingness of refugees to adapt into new environment. Political factors depict an alarming rise of the far-right and populist parties across the region but also refugees' reluctance to apply for asylum in CEE which poses a great obstacle to fruitful societal integration. In the economic sphere, lower economic productivity, lack of job opportunities and lower standard of living compared to the Western economies are reasons which discourage many migrants to even consider the CEE countries as a promising settling destination. Additionally, the CEE region has to deal with its own emigration problem and how to create more effective national strategies to prevent citizens from leaving. Preoccupation over their own economic poverty and political instability has made Central-East Europe less interested in the integration of newcomers. Finally, at the social level, reasons such as not having enough experience with different cultures due to decades of long communist rule and the need for restoration of its own cultural and religious identities have made the region more hostile and closed-minded towards alien cultural and religious practices. On the other hand, the Middle Eastern and North African migrants are attracted by more tolerant and multicultural societies of the Western Europe, which further complicates the process of successful immigrant integration in the Central and Eastern European societies.

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# PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – GROUP EXPOSED TO THE RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION: BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS THAT HINDERS THEIR CONDITION IN THE SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** *This article focuses on a brief presentation / analysis of some factors that make it difficult to socially integrate people with disabilities. The social inclusion of people with disabilities refers to a process that seeks to provide the necessary support into realization of the potential for any person, regardless of the experience or circumstances in which they live their lives. Social exclusion of people with disabilities could cause long-term damage to living conditions, social and economic participation, sentimental life or health status for this category of people. The number of people with disabilities in Romania is steadily increasing, in order to support the active participation of people with disabilities in socio-economic, cultural and political life, opportunities for access to education, employment and decent living conditions must also be ensured. A continuous collection of statistical data specific about people with disabilities could provide: the number of people with disabilities in a particular place, the barriers they face and what policies/programs are needed to remove these barriers. In addition, disaggregating data by the type of disability is an important step in the inclusion of people with disabilities who face higher rates of death and exclusion from society.*

**Keywords:** *people with disabilities, social exclusion, exposed group, social needs, specific issues, education, labour market, accessibility, education, integrated data*

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## 1. Introduction

Social inclusion is a process that seeks to ensure the support necessary into achieving the potential of every person, regardless of experience or the circumstances in which

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they carry out their life. We refer here primarily, but not only, at a material level of inclusion and employment in the labour market. But inclusion at all levels of life is necessary, by reducing inequality and increasing social cohesion.

Disability issues are real and perceived as challenges affecting the whole of society at EU level. The problems for this group of people can be translated into permanent training and adaptation at all levels of society, for inclusion and maintenance of these people in the sphere of social life.

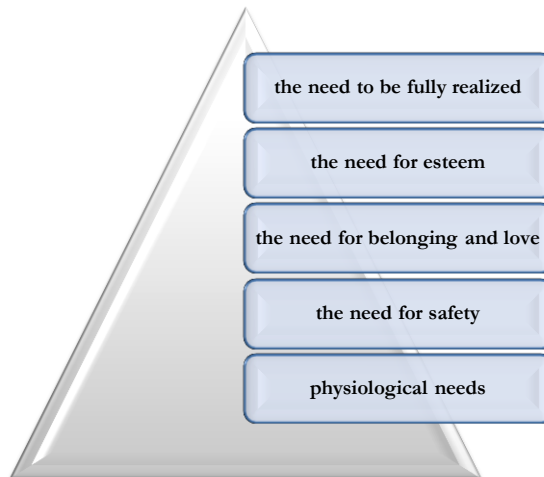
Social exclusion is a phenomenon that has impact on several life dimensions, on education, access to employment, on social networks and social interaction, etc.

From the sociological point of view, social exclusion "focuses on the difficulties, barriers that prevent the improvement of life circumstances for disadvantaged groups, leading to a perpetuation of social inequalities". (Moisă, F. 2012)

Social exclusion includes the poverty dimension, not only in terms of the economic deprivation of persons with disabilities, but also from a non-material point of view (e.g. recording the effects of education). As a result of this phenomenon, one can analyse the dynamics of social, economic, political marginalization.

According to Abraham Maslow, the author of the hierarchy of needs, in order to develop harmoniously, every human being needs -once satisfied his basics physiological needs- to fulfil the following needs: safety, social life, the respect of others and of himself and permanent adaptation<sup>1</sup>.

*Figure 1. Hierarchy of needs – Abraham Maslow*



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<sup>1</sup> Source: Vasile, C., 2003

Based on the above-mentioned, one of the definitions for social need, from a legal standpoint, the Law 292, Article 6, shows that this need represents :

*"a set of requirements indispensable to each person to ensure the necessary living conditions in order to ensure social participation or, where appropriate, social integration ..."*<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Brief presentation of the statistical situation of people with disabilities**

Romanian social system is aligned with the existing Community standards, but people with disabilities are still a segment that does not always enjoy the same rights as the rest of people from society.

Regarding the legal framework that is governing the situation of persons with disabilities in Romania, National Strategy "A barrier-free society for people with disabilities 2016-2020"<sup>2</sup> comes to ratify the Convention regarding the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>3</sup>. So, according to this strategy:

*"Romania is committed to mobilize the necessary resources in order to remove barriers so that no person with disabilities should be discriminated, marginalized, excluded or abused and its choices and aspirations be respected and supported, thus transposing the main priorities in the policies field of people with disabilities in the Governance Program, ensuring policy coherence in the field of disability as well as in between different levels and mechanisms of governance, but also their consistency with the principles and objectives set in the international treaties and conventions to which Romania is a party."*

In the following section, we will briefly present the statistical situation of people with disabilities from Romania.

According to the last statistical bulletin of the National Authority for Disabled Persons (we will refer to them, in this article, as ANPD), 812.594 persons with disabilities were registered in Romania on 30.09.2018.

The number of people with disabilities in Romania is steadily increasing, compared to 2016 the total number of people with disabilities<sup>4</sup> was about 780 thousand people (97.6% of them were non-institutionalized and 2.4% institutionalized – they were in residential social care institutions for adults with disabilities). The following figure

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Law 292, Article 6, the definition of social need also aims at ensuring living conditions that contribute to social inclusion of subjects <http://www.drmuncii.ro/dictionar.php?id=192>

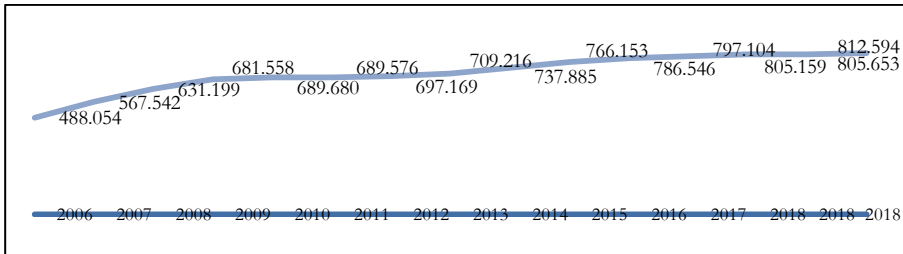
<sup>2</sup> Available online at: <http://anpd.gov.ro/web/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/MO-nr-737Bis-din-22-septembrie-2016.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Convention adopted in New York by the General Assembly of O.N.U. on 13 December 2006, opened for signature on 30 March 2007, signed by Romania on 26 September 2007 and entered into force on 3 May 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The figures were communicated to the Directorate for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, through the general directorates of social assistance and child protection, respectively, of the local sections of the municipality of Bucharest.

(Figure 2) shows the evolution number of persons with disabilities in Romania, from December 2006 to September 2018 (source: INS, TEMPO).

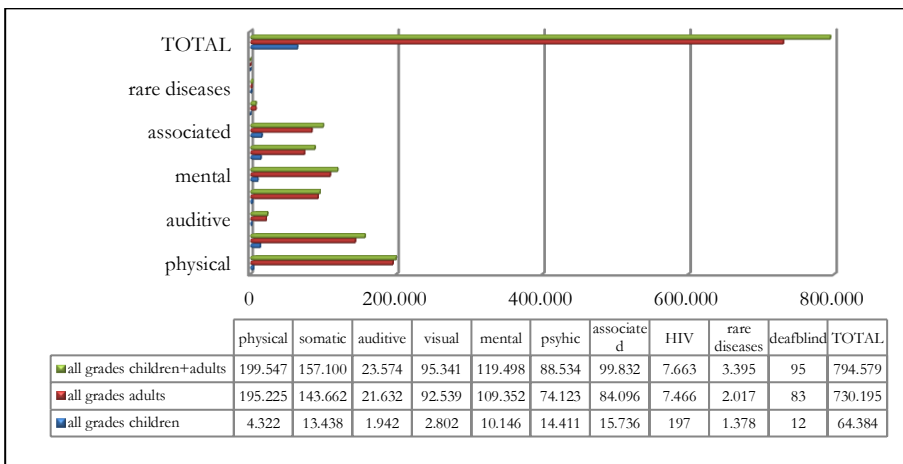
Figure 2. Evolution of the number of people with disabilities, December 2006 – September 2018



Source: INS<sup>1</sup>, TEMPO bases

From the total number of persons with disabilities in Romania, about 795 thousand persons with disabilities (as can be seen in Figure 3) were non-institutionalized and 18 thousand persons are in public centers for the adults with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 3. Number of non-institutionalized persons with disabilities -on 30.09.2018



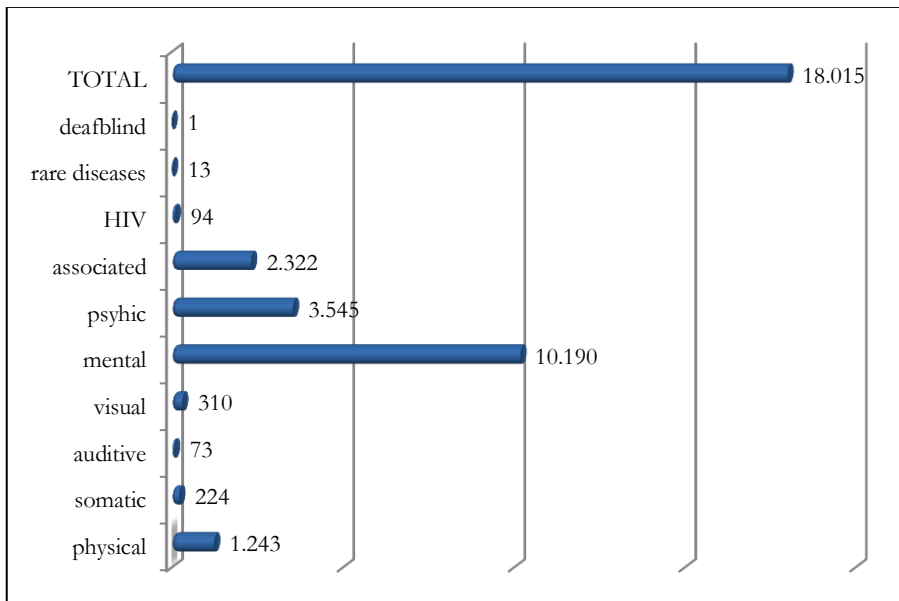
Source: The last statistical bulletin from National Authority for Disabled Persons, 30.09.2018

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Statistics, available on <http://www.insse.ro/cms/>

<sup>2</sup> The total number communicated to the National Authority for Disabled Persons within the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, through the general directorates for social assistance and child and county protection of the Bucharest municipalities, was 812,594 persons.

There are no significant changes in the percentages of non-institutionalized persons versus institutionalized persons, the proportions remain the same in 2018 (as can be seen in Figure 3). Among people with disabilities, those with mental disabilities find themselves institutionalized in public centers for adults with disabilities in higher percentage compared to other types of disabilities (a significant number of beneficiaries are in the 74 centers neuropsychiatric recovery and rehabilitation, respectively 6,327 persons -35.12%).

Figure 4. Number of adults institutionalized in public centers for the disabled adult on 30.09.2018 (on all grades, in number of persons)



According to INS, on September 30 2018, the rate of people with disabilities reported to the total population of Romania was 3.66% and the regions South-West Oltenia, South-Muntenia and North-West were the regions that recorded rates over 4% of people with disabilities by regions (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Persons with disabilities by development regions, children and non-institutionalized and institutionalized adults at 30.09.2018**

Geographic area	Total non-institutionalized			Total institutionalized			Total general Romania	The percentage of people with disabilities in the region in total persons with disabilities Romania	The percentage of persons with disabilities in the county total population per region
	CHILDREN	ADULTS	TOTAL	CHILDREN	ADULTS	TOTAL			
North-East	13,198	104,508	117,706	0	3,822	3,822	121,528	14.96%	3.09%
South-East	7,520	86,859	94,379	0	2,326	2,326	96,705	11.90%	3.38%
South-Muntenia	9,583	121,860	131,443	0	2,660	2,660	134,103	16.50%	4.14%
South-West Oltenia	6,998	90,489	97,487	0	1,723	1,723	99,210	12.21%	4.52%
West	5,949	69,112	75,061	0	1,449	1,449	76,510	9.42%	3.80%
Noth-West	7,859	104,503	112,362	0	2,394	2,394	114,756	14.12%	4.05%
Center	6,810	82,078	88,888	0	2,778	2,778	91,666	11.28%	3.48%
Bucharest-Ilfov	6,467	70,786	77,253	0	863	863	78,116	9.61%	3.11%

Source: INS, TEMPO ONLINE, Databases "Population by residence on 1 January 2017"

As far as it goes for the organizations dealing with the issues of persons with disabilities in Romania, there are a total of 489 functional, residential and non-residential, public centers subordinated to DGASPC (Directorates for Social Assistance and Child and County Protection) (of which: 427 residential and 62 non-residential ones – day ones). There is an increase of these centers, which implicitly provides a greater capacity for inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social protection system compared to 2016 when the number of public social assistance institutions for adults with disabilities was 420 (of which: 364 residential and 56 non-residential – day ones).

From the total functional, residential and non-residential centers, public ones, subordinated to DGASPC, we have the following distribution<sup>1</sup>:

- 427 functional, residential, public out of which:
  - crisis center (ccc): 2 functional with 24 adult beneficiaries;
  - care and assistance center (CIA): 118 functional with 6543 adult beneficiaries;
  - occupational therapy integration centers (CITO): 19 functional with 93 adult beneficiaries;
  - pilot recovery rehabilitation centers for persons with disabilities (CPRRPH) 2 functionals with 93 adult beneficiaries;

<sup>1</sup> According to statistics data giving by ANPD on 30.09.2018.

- independent living training center (CPVI): 3 functionals with 34 adult beneficiaries;
- recurrent neuropsychiatric rehabilitation centers (CRRN): 74 functional with 6327 adult beneficiaries;
- disability rehabilitation centers (CRRPH): 70 functional with 2916 adult beneficiaries;
- respiro centers (CRSP): 4 functional with 4 adult beneficiaries;
- protected homes (LP): 135 functional with 929 adult beneficiaries;
- 62 functional, residential, public centers of which:
  - Psychosocial counseling center / vocational guidance / prevention against poverty and marginalization of persons with disabilities (CCPS) / (CCAPS) 5 functional with 116 adult beneficiaries;
  - occupational centers (day center type) (cp): 2 functional with 65 adult beneficiaries;
  - ambulatory neuromotor recovery services centers (CSRNTA): 29 functional with 1278 adult beneficiaries;
  - day centers (CZ): 23 functional with 5 children beneficiaries and 488 adults;
  - mobile team (Home Assistance) (EM): 1 working with 23 adult beneficiaries;
  - Home Services (SD): 2 functional with 72 adult beneficiaries.

In order to provide a real support for people with disabilities in Romania, authorities should be involved in identifying and solving problems that this category of persons encounter in society, rather than making some of them dependents on social benefits.

### 3. Specific problems of people with disabilities

In the Law on Social Assistance 292/2011 as amended and supplemented, Chapter 1, Article 6, we find that **people with disabilities are defined as** *"those persons which are facing different barriers arising from the state, in which they are in a moment, and who can not enjoy full participation in all spheres of life and on an equal basis with others because of the different types of disabilities: physical, mental, intellectual or sensory shortcomings."*

The literature in the field highlights these issues, so in the World Report on Disability (2012) it is stated that *"many people with disabilities do not have equal access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities, do not receive specific services that they need, thus are excluded from everyday activities."*<sup>1</sup> Thus, people with disabilities are facing situations of isolation and social marginalization. Persons with disabilities are considered to be deprived of the fulfillment for their citizens' rights and obligations.

**Social exclusion of people with disabilities** could cause long-term damages to living conditions, social and economic participation, sentimental life or on health status for this category of vulnerable persons.

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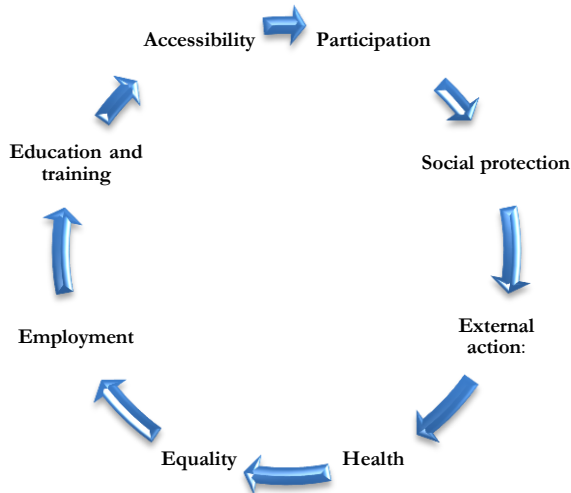
<sup>1</sup> According to World Report on Disability, available online at [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44575/9789730135978\\_rum.pdf?sequence=20](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44575/9789730135978_rum.pdf?sequence=20)

From a sociological point of view, social exclusion "*focuses on the difficulties, the barriers that prevent the improvement of the living conditions of disadvantaged groups, generating a perpetuation of social inequalities.*" (Moise, 2012)

At European Union level, the main determinants of social exclusion come from social inequalities, such as: obstacles to access quality education and training, adequate job security, discriminatory practices and attitudes, and also the existence of situations where they are subjects to exclusion based on residence and / or citizenship. (Paolini, G. 2014: 17).

In order to achieve the social inclusion of people with disabilities, the objectives of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 are pursued by actions in eight priority areas, ensuring that people with disabilities enjoy all benefits of EU citizenship, as seen in next figure.

Figure 5. The eight priority areas of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020



The process of social inclusion, according to the Romanian legislation meets the European priorities and it represents:

*"The set of multidimensional measures and actions in the areas of social protection, employment, housing, education, health, information-communication, mobility, security, justice and culture aimed on combating social exclusion and ensuring active participation of persons in all economic, social, cultural and political aspects of society. "*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Law on Social Assistance 292/2011, article 6, paragraph cc.,



In the current socio-economic context, the main reason for social exclusion of people with disabilities is the **lack of opportunities on labor market**, this implicitly means dependence on the social system in Romania. Lack of jobs, a problem reported by both authorities and members of the society itself, makes people with disabilities, especially those without experience on the labour market, become a more vulnerable category in Romanian society and very exposed to social exclusion.

**The socio-professional integration of people with disabilities** must be a constant concern for Romanian society, which must support the development of employment capacity, increasing the chances of finding a job, preventing all forms of discrimination, and reducing unemployment among people with disabilities in Romania.

Also, **both the employer and the persons with disabilities** have to know the legislation and **take into account the following Romanian legislative issues:**

- Working rights for persons with disabilities:
  - Legislation that regulates the right to work of people with disabilities,
  - The conditions for employment of people with disabilities,
  - Facilities to be offered to a person with disabilities at work,
  - The legal work program of a person with disabilities,
  - The vocational training rights of a person with disabilities,
  - The right to a leave of a person with disabilities,
  - Wage and other benefits of employed persons with disabilities.

- Law 448 of 2006, updated in 2016, provides us the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as the advantages offered by state to the employers of these persons. According to the law on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities no. 448/2006, persons with disabilities are those persons who, due to physical, mental or sensory disorders, lack the ability to carry out daily activities normally, requiring protection measures in support of social recovery, integration and inclusion. Also, people with disabilities have the same salary rights as people who do not have this status, but they do not pay tax on salary. -

- Employer's obligations with respect to employed persons with disabilities.

- According to law 448, public authorities and institutions, legal entities, public or private, with at least 50 employees, have the obligation to employ persons with disabilities in at least 4% of job positions from the total number of employees. If this condition is not met, organizations are obliged to give to the state budget a sum representing 50% of the gross minimum basic wage in the country multiplied by the number of jobs in which they have not hired persons with disabilities, or to acquire products or services from authorized protected units, on a partnership basis, in an amount equivalent to the amount due to state budget. -

- Employer's rights with regard to employed people with disabilities and the tax benefits which must be granted.

-According to the Tax Code, employers which have employees with disabilities benefit from several tax incentives. Those expenses are deductible from the calculation of taxable profit: expenses for the adaptation of the work place, the expenses incurred for

purchasing equipment and equipment used in the production process by the person with disability, the expenses incurred for transportation of people with disabilities from home to their workplace, expenses incurred for the transport of raw materials and finished products to and from the home of the disabled employed person with disability, hired for homework<sup>1</sup>.-

Also according to WHO report on disability (2011, p.255):

*"In the transition to the market economy, several Eastern European and former Soviet Union countries have introduced quotas to replace the former system whereby workers with disabilities were set aside. The fines for the non-fulfilment of these quotas have been paid for professional rehabilitation and on-the-job training programs."*

Also, any person with disabilities who wants to integrate or reintegrate into work has free access to professional evaluation and guidance, regardless of age, type and degree of disability.

During the last webinar organized by the International Alliance of People with Disabilities, it was stated that there is a **lack of statistical data specific to this group of vulnerable people, this statement also applies to Romanian society. If this lack would be addressed this** could help the professional integration of people with disabilities. The lack of data makes it harder for specific actions and for national programs and policies to address people with disabilities, according to the webinar "Disability Data and Sustainable Development Goals"

*"The first step was to identify people with disabilities as those who, due to health problems, have difficulty in basic activities. Then use the information gathered elsewhere than in the national statistical offices, for example in terms of employment and education, to determine whether there are limitations on participation in these functional difficulties. How big is this gap between those with difficulties and those without. And if it changes over time"*<sup>2</sup>

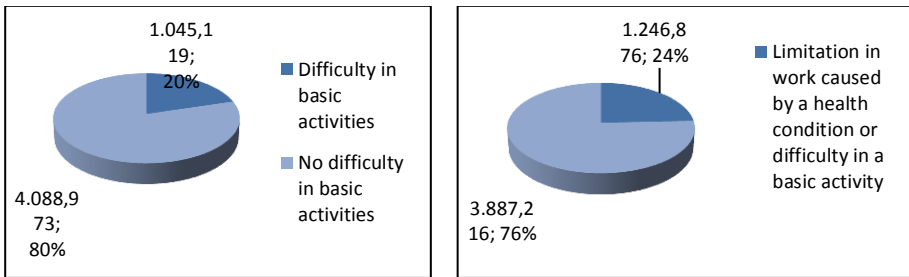
At the same time, according to EUROSTAT data, the number of inactive populations by type of disability, sex, age and the main reason for not seeking employment is quite high. Out of a total of 5,144,092 inactive people on the labour market, 20% said they had difficulty in basic activities and 24% said that they have limitation in work caused a health condition or difficulty in basic activity (as can be seen in figure 6). The reasons for inactive population by type of disability for not seeking employment were: own illness or disability, awaiting recall to work (on lay-off), other family or personal responsibilities, looking after children or incapacitated adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Government Decision 791/2010 amending and supplementing the Methodological Norms for the application of Law no. 571/2003 regarding the Fiscal Code, approved by the Government Decision no. 44/2004, as well as for the approval of the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of art. III of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 58/2010 for amending and completing the Law no. 571/2003 regarding the Tax Code and other financial-fiscal measures

<sup>2</sup> Available online at: <http://www.jurnal-social.ro/datele-privind-persoanele-cu-handicap-si-obiectivele-de-dezvoltare-durabila-webinar/>

Figure 6. Inactive population by type of disability – the main reason for not seeking employment (2011)



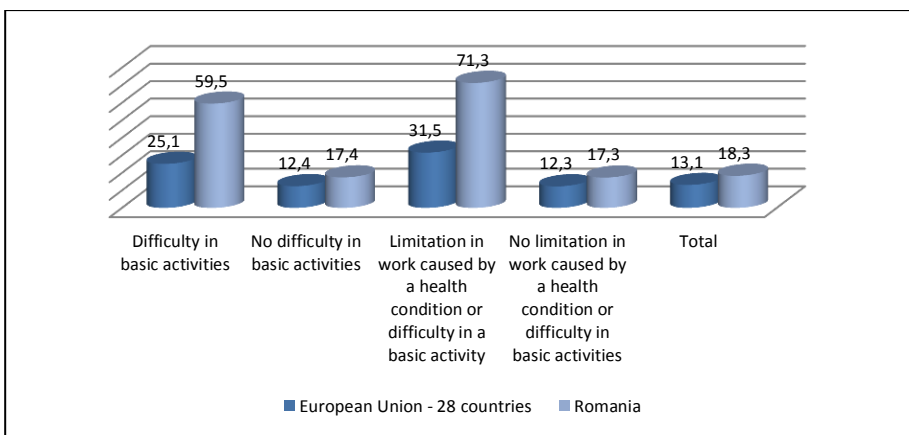
Source: Personal interpretations, databases available on the official EUROSTAT website

It can be noticed, once again, that there is no official centralized data at European level disaggregated by disability types, for people with disabilities.

Also, the **role of education** is seen as an extremely important one in the development of any society. According to the data presented in the Europe 2020 Strategy "a quarter of all students have poor reading skills, one in seven young people drop out of education and training too early. Approximately 50% reach an average level of qualification, but this is not enough to meet the needs of the market."

According to EUROSTAT, in 2011 Romania ranks second (after Bulgaria) in the early leavers category of education and training (age group 18-24) by type of disability, sex and labour status due to difficulty in basic activities (as can be seen in Figure 7). There is no official centralized data at European level by disability types at educational level.

Figure 7. Early leavers from education and training (age group 18-24) by type of disability, sex and labour status, 2011- in percentage (%)



Source: Personal interpretations, databases available on the official EUROSTAT website

Thus, at European Union level, investments in education, training and lifelong learning try to tackle poor results in education systems. The Romanian educational system is forced to become more involved in training people with disabilities for the labour market, especially for those types of jobs available on the labour market.

For all categories of vulnerable people, especially for people with disabilities, the funding of vocational training programs will increase the chances of integration into the labour market.

Achieving a qualification can increase a person's chances on accessing better paid and stable jobs, which would lead to the independence of people with disabilities from the social assistance system and could strengthen a more stable living.

**The disparity between qualifications / competences of persons with disabilities and those demanded by employers** is one of the reasons for the reduced access to the labour market among people with disabilities. The focus is on further harmonization of education with labour market requirements, developing internships / apprenticeships directly at employers, facilitating internship sites and other methods to develop the skills of people with disabilities.

The lack of opportunities on the labour market is interdependent with the role of education and the educational system in the qualification of persons with disabilities.

Although only around 2.4% of disabled people are institutionalized, another problem specific to people with disabilities is **institutionalization**, for most of them representing isolation from Romanian society. Institutionalization has negative consequences on people with disabilities, obviously affecting the process of social inclusion. *"Social participation development services are insufficiently developed and diversified"* (Popescu, R. Arpinte D. and Neagu, G. 2005).

Most people with disabilities that are institutionalized do not have family support, they do not have a specialization / qualification / profession and are facing a strong socialization deficit.

However, there is a category of institutionalized people with disabilities who have benefited from personalized assistance, by fitting them into assisted apartments. This category of people with disabilities (found in the care of foundations) represents a more protected category and social inclusion is facilitated by the services / support they receive, but the actual number of this kind of support for persons with disabilities is very low.

To support the active participation of people with disabilities in socio-economic, cultural and political life, the state must ensure equal opportunities for access to education, employment and decent living conditions. In support of this group, it is important that actions start from two areas of action for social inclusion of persons with disabilities in the areas of education and employment.

At both European Union and Romanian level, the problem related to lack of access to the labour market among people with disabilities is equally serious, which has led to the emergence of various funding programs addressing this category of people.

The Romanian educational system should be more involved in training people with disabilities for the labour market, especially for those types of jobs available on the labour market. The failure to have a practical educational system, facilitates the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market. Another aspect of Romanian legislation is the lack of a concrete system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of study programs offered to people with disabilities.

For integration into the labour market, WHO (2011, p.266) recommends:

*“Almost all jobs can be done productively by a person with a disability, and if they have the proper environment, most disabled people can be productive. But people with disabilities of the employment age face significantly lower rates of employment than people without disabilities. This is due to several factors, including lack of access to education, vocational training and rehabilitation, negative incentives created by disability benefits, inaccessibility at work and employer perceptions about disability and people with disabilities. Many decision makers have a role to play in improving the labour market opportunities for people with disabilities, including governments, employers, people with disabilities and trade unions. The Report's recommendations to improve access to the labour market for people with disabilities are presented here based on key actors”*

The main risk factor for people with disabilities is the lack of a job, and in the long run this factor threatens their social inclusion. And among the most important factors of vulnerability to social exclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, the following were identified: low qualification, labour market inadequacy, labour market passivity, poor financial situation, low level or lack of social support, insufficient or no institutional support.

In order to effectively prevent and remedy the risk of social exclusion for many persons with disabilities the determinants that generate social inequalities must be fixed.

#### **4. Case study – notification of violation for Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion the rights of persons with disabilities through the draft on State Budget Law 2019**

In Bucharest, in February, 2019<sup>1</sup>, around 250 people protested: adults with disabilities, personal assistants and parents of children with disabilities, as a result of unprecedented measures to allow local authorities to pay for social services on disability line and children from orphanages, contrary to the legal provisions and principles assumed by the Governance Program 2017 -2020. As we will see bellow, the reasons these people protested was because the burden of financial support would have passed on to the local authorities and the local authorities have limited available budgets and increasing financial pressure to cater for various social needs and benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Adults with disabilities, personal assistants and the parents of children with disabilities protested, on February 8, from 10-13 in front of the Antipa Museum in Bucharest

Participants in the protest promoted equity and social justice, and have expressed their disagreement with the Budget Project for 2019 and also have requested urgent amendment change of the provisions to the current budget.

The representative of one of the associations regarding persons with disabilities, also participant in the protest we are discussing about and a person with disabilities himself, pointed out the conditions of the people affected by these new budgetary regulations:

*"There were two degrees today, but I perceived it as a temperature of -5 degrees, since the house has adjusted the heat to 25 degrees. Thanks to the parents of children with disabilities who organized the protest, we gathered so many to express our pains. I thank my personal assistant for putting his life in second place to care for me, because he takes care of me for 24 hours, as he is paid for 8 hours, that he takes care of me on public holidays, when he has to be free, he cares for me and when he is on sick leave because the law does not provide any protection for me as a disabled person when my personal assistant is sick."(DT)*

What they specifically demanded was to comply with the Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, reverting to the provisions of the State Budget Project for 2019, the financing of the wage rights for personal assistants of the severely disabled and of the residential social services to be further ensured by the State Budget.

Failure to comply with the commitment of the Finance Minister on February 2, 2019 came as a confirmation of the fears of those who participated in the protest, all the more, so since their demands were independent of the remaining issues of the Budget Project, and they were strictly related to the observance of a principle assumed of this government: solidarity. Participants made an open letter to the Minister of Finance on this issue, as you can read in the following table:

**Table 2. Open Letter on Amendments to the Budget Law 2019**

*Diszabnet Federation – Network of Service Providers for Disabled People, Federation of Nongovernmental Organizations for Social Services – FONSS and Center for Legal Resources – CRJ notifies you of the serious violation of Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion regarding the rights of persons with disabilities through the draft of the State Budget Law 2019.*

*Thus, the Ministry of Public Finance through the Draft Law on the State Budget violates art. 40 (1), art. 51 (52) of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, art. 4 paragraph (2) of H.G. no. 978/2015 and art. 139 paragraph (3) of the Constitution of Romania:*

*1. The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities indicates that the amounts provided by the local authorities for the salaries of the personal assistants are allocated 90% of the state budget from the sums deducted from the value added tax. Or, in the draft of the State Budget Law 2019 on this chapter, the Ministry of Public Finance allocated zero lei.*

*2. Similarly to the issue of financing salaries for personal assistants and the financing of social assistance centres for 18,000 adults with disabilities, all the state budget is provided from the sums deducted from the value added tax allocated for this purpose in a proportion no higher than 90% of the needs established annually by the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, in the elaboration of the state budget, based on the calculated cost standards for beneficiaries / types of social services,*

*approved according to the law. Nevertheless, despite the legal provisions in force, the Ministry of Public Finance allocated zero lei to this chapter of the draft state budget law.*

*3. In 2018, the National Agency for Fiscal Administration collected about 500 million euros from private and public institutions for the non-employing persons with disabilities in their organisation. MFP had the obligation to complete the draft budget law 2019 with a chapter related to the Disability Employment Fund, thus indicating the destination of the amounts collected under art. 78 paragraph (3), thus complying with art. 139 paragraph (3) from Constitution of Romania. Currently, the Law on State Budget for 2019 does not include any provision in this regards, despite public pledges submitted by Minister of Public Finance Saturday, February 2nd c.a.*

*Thus, after a number of years when this problem of financing residential social services and support services provided by personal assistants functioned according to the legal norms in force, from the central budget (even with syncope), it is proposed to return to an old state in fact, has already demonstrated its chronic inefficiency. The fact that local public authorities are given the 100% use of income tax collections, one of which is used to pay personal assistants' wages and to support residential centres for people with disabilities, not only violates the provisions of the Law on the Rights of Individuals but in the conditions of the increased unemployment rate in some counties (eg Teleorman, Caraş-Severin, Gorj, etc.) will lead to a non-unitary practice in the field of social assistance payments.*

*The discretionary behavior of many mayors has been repeatedly signaled by people with disabilities, who are often forced to accept the salary of the personal assistant in the allowance, sometimes receiving salaries late for months, as presented to the Minister of Finance and at the audience on Saturday, 2 February 2019.*

*The lack of real guarantees offered by the state to all persons with disabilities, especially to those institutionalized or with serious disabilities, is well known: the petitions mechanisms are not adapted to their needs and the control structures of the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice have not excelled in sanctioning the violation of these rights, as it should have.*

*Our fears are also justified by the abuses recorded in the period before the economic and subsequent crisis, during which the salaries of the personal assistants were secured from the local budget and we were notified the next problems*

- delays in employing personal assistants endangering the lives of people with severe disabilities;*
- delays in payment of wages;*
- failure to respect the right of personal assistants to sick leave or rest leave;*
- massive layoffs during the economic crisis;*
- lack of information and prioritization at the social level of the right to human assistance for the inclusion in the community of persons with severe disabilities.*

*Thus, the current form of the state budget will endanger the rights of 800,000 people with disabilities, the 18,000 institutionalized adults and will directly affect the 3,000 local public authorities responsible for securing these rights.*

Source: Open Letter on Amendments to the Budget Law 2019, available on: <https://fonss.ro/scrisoare-deschisa-privind-modificarile-la-legea-bugetului-2019/>

The initiators of this open letter, as well as the protesters, requested the compliance with the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, returning to these provisions of the State Budget Draft for 2019. Also demanding that the financing of the wage rights for the personal assistants of the severely disabled and residential social services to be further provided by the State Budget, respectively to set up the Fund for the integration into the labour market of persons with disabilities.

It is considered that the introduction of legislative provisions in the disability sector is done without a detailed analysis of their impact, without assessing the side effects of these changes and without proper consultation of all the groups affected by the new legislative provisions: *"One and a half years after adoption in force of Government Emergency Ordinance 60/2017, all the positive assurances of political decision-makers were only groundless arguments and the fears of people with disabilities and their representatives were confirmed."*

This is all the more serious, as the February 2019 decision affects an even greater number of people with disabilities.

Even though the participants promoted equity and social justice by manifesting disagreement with the Budget Project for 2019 and requesting urgently modifying the provisions of the current budget, on 24.02.2019 this budget was not yet promulgated and did not include any changes after the protest. Thus, they informed the governors that if the Budget Project for 2019 enters this form in law, in violation of the legal provisions in force (40 paragraph (1), article 51 (52) of the Disability Act, Article 4 paragraph (2) of GD No. 978/2015 and Article 139 paragraph (3) of the Constitution of Romania, they will oppose by all existing legal means, including through new public protests.

## 5. Conclusions

The number of people with disabilities is constantly increasing in Romania, making the inclusion of this category of vulnerable people a very important problem to analyse and take into consideration. The main reason why policies should focus more on this aspect of inclusion is that the number of people with disabilities who are active in the labour market is relatively low.

Social exclusion is a phenomenon that impacts on many dimensions, such as education, access to labour market, social networks and social interaction.

Data is often missing by level of disability disaggregation in official statistics. Such a specific data collection would be very important because it could provide the number of people with disabilities in a particular place, the barriers they face, and what policies and programs are needed to remove these barriers. In addition, disaggregating data on the type of disability is an integrated step for inclusion of people with disabilities who face higher rates of death and exclusion from society.

In terms of institutionalized people with disabilities, as a global look, they have no means – financial, social, educational, cultural-symbolic – with which can improve / solve their situation.



The Romanian educational system is forced to become more involved in training people with disabilities for the labour market, especially for those types of jobs available on the labour market.

The authorities also have to play a key role in developing forms of incentives for employers to hire and retain employment of people with disabilities, so as to develop a market for the products made by the work of persons with disabilities.

To support the active participation of people with disabilities in socio-economic, cultural and political life, opportunities must also be ensured, alike, for access to education, employment and decent living conditions.

Well-targeted and comprehensive policy actions (more specific to each group of people with disabilities) are extremely necessary in order to make positive changes in the lives of persons with disabilities living in the European Union. In this respect, Romania has to move from the simulation phase of the various European programs to the implementation phase.

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# WOMEN CIVIL SERVANTS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN BANGLADESH: DISCRIMINATED OR FAVOURED?

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**Abstract:** *This paper analyzes whether and to what extent women civil servants are discriminated in terms of recruitment and selection, appointment and placement, transfer, promotion and duty allocation in Administration in Bangladesh. This research applied a qualitative approach and an interview method was used for data collection. The research found that women faced differential treatments because of the nature of jobs and the lack of good working environment. Although there was no legal point for discrimination regarding HR practices, women were found fewer in number in some lucrative and challenging positions. The study revealed that they were not discriminated; they were rather favoured for their desired placements. They evaded some placements for the sake of household activities and childrens' wellbeing. The avoidance inhibited them to gain experiences that indirectly led to exclusion. The study recommends the clear career path, setting preconditions for promotion and arrangements of flexible working so that women can design their career and personal planning.*

**Keywords:** *woman civil servant, recruitment, placement, promotion, duty allocation, discrimination*

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## Introduction

There has been a significant increase of womens' participation in employment in the public sector since 1980's, after the enactment of law with a provision of inclusion in the recruitment of civil service. There are 3068 positions of different ministries, departments, autonomous bodies occupied by women civil servants (WCSs) that comprises of 9.35 percent of total employment in the civil service of Bangladesh (Afroza, 2008). They are recruited through different cadre services including an administration cadre that belongs to the Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA). A

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cadre is a specialized group of talented human resources with good opportunities for promotion, compensation package and other benefits both in cash and kinds. Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) (Administration) is an important cadre among 28 cadre services. This cadre occupies the most powerful positions in decision-making and implementation. 5966 civil servants including 1228 women of administration cadre work in different positions in different ministries. Women constitute 20.58 percent of this cadre. Although women's participation increased over three decades, their professional career is influenced by a myriad of factors such as policy provisions and practices, working conditions, organizational authority and power. Academics and researchers claim that women struggle through various seen and unseen obstacles and women are discriminated in terms of appointment, placement and promotion (Jahan, 2007; Jahan, 2010; Zafarullah, 2000). Civil servants suffer from a multitude of anomalies and deficiencies that include lack of human resource planning, inappropriate staffing policy, unplanned and unsystematic promotion process, unpredictable postings and transfers (Siddiquee, 2003). This paper is an attempt to analyze whether and to what extent women are discriminated in their professional career.

## Conceptual Framework

The policy issues regarding the recruitment and selection, appointment and placement, promotion, and duty allocation are the major areas where women can be treated differently. Factors of these human resource practices influence the careers of women and create discrimination. Conceptual frameworks cover the following areas:

**Recruitment and Selection:** Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) is responsible for recruiting civil servants through rigorous process. Recruitment and selection processes follow some steps for recruiting officials. MoPA sends a requisition to all ministries to send the number of officials is vacant which they need to fill in. With required number of officials intended by the ministries and other organization, MoPA sends it to the PSC for conducting examination for final selection. PSC conducts three stage-examination system for selecting the bright caliber students. First of all, PSC takes preliminary test for minimizing the number, then written examination of 1000-1100 marks on different 8 subjects of 800 marks and final step is the viva-voce of 200 marks (MoPA, 2018). This process takes about two years to complete. The recruitment ensures equality and diversity thus it is innate to have less emphasis on quality.

**Appointment and Placement:** After receiving the final list prepared by the PSC based on merit MoPA sends 27 other cadre officials (such as police, customs, taxation, foreign affairs, fisheries, agriculture etc.) to the concerned departments. Only members of BCS (Administration) cadre join the entry level post of managerial level job as Assistant Secretary in MoPA. They are placed at the field level. After the provision period (two years) of service and required training, they are placed either at the field level or in the ministry. Scope of placement widens after the service confirmation and promotion in the administrative hierarchy. Although some positions at the lower level like Assistant Chief, Chief Accounts Officer are filled by other cadres officials, most of posts of mid-level (Deputy Secretary) and above in the ministries are fulfilled by this group.

**Promotion:** The first promotion takes place after five years of the first appointment and then continues to the ladder of hierarchy following certain conditions. Promotion can be either vertical or horizontal. Vertical promotion happens from lower rank to upper positions with higher pay scale and added benefits. Horizontal promotion keeps ranks & pay scales unchanged and brings some extra fringe benefits. While considering the vertical promotion of officials, Annual Confidential Report (ACR) is considered because 85 percent marks in ACR for preceding some years is necessary. It is also compulsory to serve certain years of services to get the next promotion for example five for Senior Assistant Secretary, five years for Deputy Secretary, three years for Joint Secretary, two years for Additional Secretary, one year for Secretary and to be included as one of the eight senior most Secretaries to be promoted as the Senior Secretary.

**Discrimination:** The term '*discrimination*' refers to unequal treatment to the group having the same or similar qualification. Here discrimination means professionals are not posted in some positions although they have similar qualification, experience. The organizational issues tend to discriminate women professionals. Discrimination can be exercised in two ways: a) direct discrimination that means setting some conditions for one particular group and b) indirect discrimination is a means that organization does not show it in document but everyone is not treated equally for the same benefit. Indirect discrimination often happens due to the personal prejudice, social stigma, working environment and professional jealousy (Karim, 2013). Intentional and unintentional non-compliance of government rules and regulation inhibit employees to get the expected benefits.

## Research Methodology

The research question was to analyze whether and to what extent women were discriminated in their professional career. It applied qualitative approach and was conducted on the civil servants of MoPA. Thirty-one civil servants including 17 women were interviewed. Through the interview and secondary data, the researcher tried to identify the areas where women were treated differently to discriminate them directly and indirectly. Their views on appointment, placement, promotion and job allocation were considered in this paper. Respondents were selected purposively and snowball technique was followed to select the respondents (Babbie, 2013). It has merit in this research that qualitative sampling is "very different from conventional sampling. It is based on informational, not statistical, considerations. Its purpose is to maximize information, not facilitate generalization." (Eliason, 2006:10). The snowball sampling covered all ranks i.e. Assistant Secretary, Senior Assistant Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Joint Secretary, Additional Secretary. Access to the respondents was gained through the gate-keeper i.e. Senior Secretary of MoPA. I also took the help of insider.

All interviews were conducted between August and October 2014 and lasted minimum 15 minutes to maximum one hour. Interview took place in MoPA. I noted down relevant points while I was conducting interviews. Interview was also recorded which later transcribed verbatim. Relevant quotes were written down and marked important

matched with objectives. Data analysis was done thematically following the social constructivism approach (Creswell, 2013).

The age of Interviewees was between 28 and 58 years with an average of 49 years for male and 41 for female. Men were more experienced as they had average 22 years of service whereas women had an average of 14 years because men entered service before women. All respondents were highly educated having a Master degree. Respondents were managed through various techniques to find out organisational and policy issues that influence their professional career in creating discrimination.

## Results and Findings

Data show that WCSs face differential treatments because of variation or deviation of practicing the laws, rules and regulations of employment policy and practices.

### Appointment of Women Civil Servants

The enactment of law for inclusion of women in the civil service served as the legal ground for women. Any person meeting the qualification can apply and compete for the post. However, the 10 percent reserved seats for women served as positive discrimination for women to increase the number. It is proved that women joined the civil service by dint of their hard work and merit as it increased the number from two in 1982 to 1228 in 2018 (Afroza, 2008; Mahtab, 2007; MoPA, 2018). As women's inclusion in the civil service started in 1982 and more women in the lower level positions, they had gender pay gap (Table 1).

**Table 1. Number of professionals and salary they received**

Salary Grade	Salary Range in 2009 (BDT*)	Salary Range in 2015 (BDT*)
1	40000 fixed	78000
2	33500-39500	66000-76490
3	29000-35600	56500-74400
4	25750-33750	50000-71200
5	22250-31250	43000-69850
6	18500-29700	35500-67010
7	15000-26200	29000-49670
9	11000-14430	22000-53060

*Source: Government of Bangladesh, 2015*

*\*BDT stands for the Bangladeshi currency Taka. 1US-Dollar = 85 Taka.*

However, this pay gap did not exist within the ranks. There is no discrimination between men and women in same rank as their salary is fixed according to pay scale and positional ranks.

## Placement

Table 2 indicates that 5966 professionals including 1228 women of different ranks work in the administration of Bangladesh.

**Table 2: Male-female Ratio of officers at managerial level in MoPA (total, as on 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 and 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2018)**

Rank	Male 2014	Male 2018	Female 2014	Female 2018	Total 2014	Total 2018
Secretary	59	75	4	9	63	84
Additional Secretary	248	519	27	76	275	595
Joint Secretary	801	678	110	72	911	759
Deputy Secretary	1131	1511	162	329	1293	1840
Senior Assistant Secretary	1209	962	350	312	1559	1275
Assistant Secretary	823	983	312	430	1135	1413
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>4271</b>	<b>4728</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>1228</b>	<b>5236</b>	<b>5966</b>

*Source: Public Administration Computer Centre (PACC)-2014 and 2018, MoPA, Dhaka.*

Women can be posted in different places; firstly the MoPA, the mother ministry which is situated in Dhaka, secondly other ministries in Dhaka, thirdly subordinate offices of MoPA at the field level and fourthly other organisations. The first two categories of placement are of Dhaka based; third one is outside the ministry (mainly outside Dhaka) and fourth one can be either in or outside Dhaka. This placement greatly influences the professional's career and personal life as the benefits vary from one place to another. Lower ranked professionals can hardly work in first two categories which mean professionals can not stay in Dhaka even if they need for their family purpose. Dhaka is a factor as it is the capital and different facilities are concentrated here. A total of 112 professionals including 38 women work in different positions in MoPA in Dhaka in 2014 (Table 3). Although total number increased in four years time, women's placement did not increase.

**Table 3: Male-Female ratio working in MoPA, Dhaka**

Rank	Male (2014)	Male (2018)	Female (2014)	Female (2018)	Total (2014)	Total (2018)	Vacant 2018	Vacant Posts
Secretary	1	1	0	0	1	1		0
Additional Secretary	3	9	2	5	5	14	1	0
Joint Secretary	17	22	4	3	21	25	1	1
Deputy Secretary and equivalent officers	13	43	10	20	23	63	2	2

Rank	Male (2014)	Male (2018)	Female (2014)	Female (2018)	Total (2014)	Total (2018)	Vacant 2018	Vacant Posts
Senior Assistant Secretary and equivalent officers	21	9	16	6	37	14	1	5
Assistant Programmers and equivalent to AS	18	12	7	3	25	15	1	6
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>

Source: Public Administration Computer Centre, MoPA 2014 and 2018

Table 3 also indicates that 38% of women work in Dhaka around Dhaka which is double comparing to the percentage (20.58%) in total women's employment. One of the main reasons for being in Dhaka is specific office time for which women can easily go back home and perform household activities. Men also acknowledged this reason. Spouses of women work in Dhaka that also helps to manage posting in the ministry. A Joint Secretary (woman) mentioned:

*"I am lucky and privileged in terms posting as my husband is also a civil servant. After my posting in one place, I used to request the authority to place my husband in my working place or near. That's why I did not face any family dislocation."*

Although MoPA in Dhaka is the mother ministry and it has limited duty posts, professionals also prefer other organization because they can get extra financial benefit. If they work in training organizations (fourth category), they receive 30% extra with their regular salary and 20% in other organization as deputation (temporary basis) allowance (GoB, 2005; GoB, 2009b). This facility brings balance between work and life as they can stay in the capital with their family members and get more money. Fourth category placement also includes autonomous, corporation, UN bodies, embassies which have more diversity of work. Diversity of work may bring balance between work and life because of financial and non-financial benefits.

Placement in the central area (either in MoPA or other ministries or departments in Dhaka) and organisations outside Dhaka influences work and life of professionals. Officials working at the central area particularly in the ministries enjoy civic facilities of Dhaka city whereas officials working at the field level face more challenges. Some civil servants serve long time at the field level. They are posted in the ministry after promotion as Deputy Secretary or Joint Secretary (JS) and they feel deprived. Because opportunities come through MoPA in Dhaka and the first group is favored. The ministry now-a-days allocates some foreign training programs for field level administration. A group of officials try to manage posting in the ministry or in other organizations to stay in Dhaka. Less number of posts (580 out of 3477) in Dhaka is found vacant whereas a significant number (945 out of 2585) of posts are vacant at the



field that creates pressure on working officials (MoPA, 2018). Third group maintains extended hour that creates obstacles to spend time with family members for which this placement is usually avoided by women.

The question is who is favoured for posting particularly in lucrative positions like Secretary, Joint Secretary (APD), Divisional Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner (DC), and Additional Deputy Commissioner. These posts are considered as the main attractions of joining this service. Only 8 women hold the highest position of administration which ministries are not deemed as the powerful ministries.

A woman made the following comment:

*“[Usually] woman is not placed as the secretary, and you will find very negligible number of women as secretaries. You will not find any woman in the most powerful ministries like Ministry of Home, MoPA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Defense. If they are promoted and posted, they are in some less powerful ministries”.*

Women are discriminated in terms of attractive postings. Only one woman was found holding the position of DC of Manikgonj District and other 63 DCs were male in 2014 where six female DCs in 2018 (PACC, 2014; PACC, 2018). However, women are not posted in big districts. Similarly, JS (APD) is deemed as powerful position as he makes appointment, placement and deputation of all officials including senior officials to him. Woman was never posted in this position.

Women were found that they avoided HR jobs, Accounting and Finance where they need some expertise and some positions where they need quick decisions. Women are thought weak in some areas. Although society given role of child caring and household activities and lack of women-friendly working environment served as the obstacles for women, they also lack of skills to carry out these jobs.

A woman mentioned that:

*“I believe women cannot take much pressure for which they can't do better in personnel management, accounting. These jobs are avoided by them and assigned to male officials.”*

Placement of Project Directors (PDs) for various projects is another important issue for professionals. DS and above officials can be posted as PDs for the project period. A competent professional is supposed to be posted as the head of the project, which has a practical ground to show the performance. Project has extra facility like charge allowance, vehicle facility, internal and foreign tours etc. A woman is not generally placed as PD. Only two WPs were found whereas 100 PDs are men (Table-4). Two women are working as the PD of two projects namely ‘Women Empowerment to build Digital Bangladesh through ICT’ and ‘Economic Empowerment of Women Entrepreneur Project’, which are related to women. It is a praiseworthy decision that a woman can understand deeply to empower women that does not mean that they are not capable for other projects.

**Table 4: Project Directors of Various Project under different ministries**

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Deputy Secretary	23	0	23
Joint Secretary	71	2	73
Additional Secretary	6	0	6
Total	100	2	102

Source: Public Administration Computer Centre, MoPA, Dhaka. Accessed to <http://pmis.mopa.gov.bd/pmis/Forms/seclist.php> on 31.12.2014

**Table 5: PS to Secretaries, Ministers, Parliamentary committees**

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Assistant Secretary	2	0	2
Senior Assistant Secretary	87	2	89
Deputy Secretary	5	0	5
Joint Secretary	0	1	1
Additional Secretary	5	0	2
Total	96	3	99

Source: Public Administration Computer Centre, MOPA, Dhaka. Accessed to <http://pmis.MOPA.gov.bd/pmis/Forms/seclist.php> on 31.12.2014

Similar picture is found for the post of Private Secretary (PS) to the President, the Prime Minister, Ministers, State Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Chief Whip of the Parliament, Opposition Leader and Secretaries. Generally men are appointed as PS. Only four women out of 99 officials are holding this position where one woman (JS) is working as PS to Prime Minister (Table-5). The main consideration is woman as the Prime Minister is woman. Other two women were working as PS to secretary in two ministries which were headed by women. PS also has some attractive benefits and can exercise power.

## Seniority and Promotion

The merit list prepared by the PSC at the first entry is the main basis for promoting officials. Following it, a seniority list is prepared for promotion and is maintained every time, which becomes unchanged after new promotion. Stipulated years of experience are needed for next promotion. Promotion can be either vertical or horizontal. Vertical promotion happens from lower rank to upper positions with higher pay scale and added benefits. Horizontal promotion keeps ranks & pay scales unchanged and brings some extra benefits. While considering the vertical promotion of officials, Annual Confidential Report (ACR) is considered because 85 percent marks in ACR for preceding five years is necessary. Haque (2012) identified some disadvantages of ACR such as likelihood of bossism, flattering tendency among rates and highly susceptible to rater's (initiating or counter signing officer) biases for which it does not reflect the real performance of professionals. Women are fewer in upper positions which means they hold less power and authority and it is usually exercised by men (Table 1).

## Duty Allocation

Civil servants are assigned for job according to their ranks and are entitled to enjoy the benefits of assigned posts. However, some are not assigned any job. There are two distinct groups that one working group and other group members are called officer on special duty (OSD). Literally OSDs should be posted in some jobs where they need special support, expertise and they should be given special preference. In reality, the OSDs do not have work. They come to office and receive salary. Now the OSD is not term used as noun as identification rather it is used as the adjective to show the state of a person without job. It is derogative word in bureaucracy in Bangladesh. There are many reasons for making an employee OSD for example, study purpose, immediate after promotion, training, political reason, disciplinary. A person can be OSD for short and long term. Short term OSD is a regular process while long term OSD is deemed as punishment, if not for study or lien or training. The table-8 is of long term OSDs where no woman was found. All OSDs receive salary from the MoPA in Dhaka. There is a significant number of OSDs for a long time for which government is not getting service spending a lot for them. There are 163 officials mostly men found OSDs in the last five years (Table-6). Government had to spend 501058000 BDT (USD 6387988.44) (One taka= 0.013 Dollar, calculated on 25.03.2015) without getting any service from them. Long term OSDs are frustrated and deprived of service benefits. They have no power. However, women were found very few as OSD.

**Table 6: Number of OSDs and their reasons 2014**

	Male	Female	Total	OSD for Study	OSD for other reason
Assistant Secretary	44	12	56	24	32
Senior Assistant Secretary	105	27	132	93	109
Deputy Secretary	67	9	76	15	61
Joint Secretary	98	6	104	2	102
Assistant Secretary	21	1	22	0	22
Secretary	2	0	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	337	55	392	134	328

**Table 7: Expenditure for OSD (in Taka): 2009-2013**

Secretary	Additional Secretary	Joint Secretary	Deputy Secretary	Total
7810000	96614000	324184000	72450000	501058000

Source: Kawser and Islam, 2014

**Table 8: Professionals attached to different ministries**

Rank	Male	Female	Total
Assistant Secretary	14	9	23
Senior Assistant Secretary	4	0	4
Deputy Secretary	31	2	33
Joint Secretary	108	18	126
Additional Secretary	17	1	18
Secretary	1	0	1
Total	175 (85%)	30 (15%)	205

Source: Public Administration Computer Centre, MoPA, Dhaka. Accessed at <http://pmis.MoPA.gov.bd/pmis/Forms/seclist.php> on 31.12.2016

**Table 9: Frequency of Transfer of Professionals**

Gender	Level	Years of Service	No. of Transfer
Female	AS	3	5
	SAS	9.25	6.5
	DS	22.83	3
	JS	25	10
	Addl. Sec.	30	2
	Average (F)	13.94	4.29
Male	AS	0	0
	SAS	11	5.67
	DS	21	6.25
	JS	26	9
	Addl. Sec.	29	14
	Average (M)	21.92	7.83
All (Male and Female)	Average	17.55	5.75

The study found that MoPA promoted civil servants more than the vacant posts that created the problem of placement (Table 9). For this extra promotion, civil servants were found working in the lower desks or as attached officer in other ministries while they were receiving salary from MoPA. Women were less affected from this duty allocation as only 30 women were attached whereas 175 men faced this problem (Table 9).

## Discriminated or favoured?

It is no doubt women's participation is less in employment although that is strengthened by the positive discrimination through legal provisions. Women are

blamed that they came for quota. They proved their capacity in achieving the one-fourth of total employment.

The appointment at the entry level is done by the PSC through open competitive examination where every candidate has equal chance for final selection. Less representation of women in the civil service requires the positive discrimination which is maintained through 10 percent reserve seats. Less representation is influenced by the late inclusion, the lower rate of higher education of women, traditional culture. Traditionally women are 'home centred' than 'work centred' (Hakim, 2000). Usually they prefer household activities even, women were found that they emphasized household activities than office work and professional development. Their learning about the household works came from the experience of childhood where they saw these were traditionally performed by the female counterparts of the family. Women emphasized their family responsibilities as they avoided training programs, foreign degrees, challenging jobs. Emphasizing household and performing family activities by women were guided by social norms and tradition that also forced them to be 'home centered' (Zafarullah, 2000; Hakim, 2000). As they accentuate family more than career, they avoid or they are avoided to place in some positions, it ultimately creates discrimination. On the other hand, avoidance of some jobs and stayed in Dhaka is considered as preference for which men are discriminated. Three women were found who never worked outside Dhaka whereas no single was found for men. However, those who were single, married but lived alone were found 'work centered' where reasons contradict with the preference theory as it happened due to the situation not for individual choices (Hakim, 2000).

This study shows that men constitute the majority in MoPA. However, women are favoured compared to men, especially in some cases such as transfers and placements. This contradicts male preference theory, which assumes that when working culture is dominated by male as individual preference, those are favoured by male (Crompton, 2006; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Zafarullah, 2000). The findings of the study, especially overrepresentation of women in MoPA contradicts this view. Women are privileged in terms of posting in MoPA or near Dhaka comparing with the field level. About 45 per cent posts are filled up by women among all who work in MoPA in Dhaka (Table-3). Studies show that, only 31% of females work in ministries or other organizations in Dhaka and offices near Dhaka which is double about (20.58%) and more than thrice (9.35%) compared to the percentage of women employment in MoPA and in the civil service respectively (Table 1). Men prefer challenging jobs, more work, spending more time with official activities whereas women prefer their house and do as the minimal work as they need to maintain in the office (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). That's why women prefer structured and stipulated time frame for work. It is one of the main attractions to be posted at the central level of MoPA or any ministry in the secretariat. It creates the difference in getting benefits. Professionals like to stay in or around the centralized power. It was evident that women were discriminated in terms of assigning some lucrative jobs which were favoured for men thinking that men are more capable of performing better (Crompton, 2006). Because of nature of works, women at the field level positions encounter more problems and challenges that create obstacles to balance between work and life (Jahan, 2010).

There were no formal flexible working arrangements in MoPA for which informal flexibility emerged. Informal flexibility acted as stronger work-life balance strategy at the workplace because it was practiced at the time of personal need (Holt and Thaulow (1996:83-85). The informal flexibility is enjoyed through mutual understanding and mainly by women for family purpose. A woman told that she had to take this informal flexibility for her child. This finding contradicts partially to the research findings as the previous research showed that men had the trend to utilise the informal flexibility keeping the good relation where women did not use it and worked more than women (Zafarullah, 2000). Informal flexibility happens sometimes forcefully due to external pressures such as traffic jam, unavailability of public transport, political demonstration on the street and habitual nature of employees (Zafarullah, 2000). MoPA practiced extended working hour at the field level. The extended working hour becomes the necessity for the workload and professionals who are single and living alone, can utilise their time and can get benefit in return. Those who spend more time have the opportunity to achieve professional development and trust of seniors that may count in future. Extended working hour creates negative effect on professionals and children which office does not take care of.

The consequences outside works happened due to pressure of work intensify negative issues for which women avoid some placements (Guest, 2002). This research found that factors related to career such as superseding (which means promoting juniors to a person who has fulfilled all conditions to be promoted), non-promotion, placement in undesired places served as the negative factors and permeate to family and create conflict between work and life. These negative issues affected the individual performance, harmony in the administration. Opportunities sometime intensify the problem particularly for women when they need to rearrange family activities because of training programs or tours either in country or abroad. It creates conflict as the non-support may come from family members particularly from in-laws. It becomes very difficult to break the invisible but strong boundary and enjoy the benefits (Clark, 2000).

Women avoid placement in some positions, which are in challenging in nature, dislocate their family, maintain longer working hour. Although this avoidance restricts them gaining experience of some jobs which result in some lucrative placements, it comes as positive effect for them. Lucrative and challenging jobs require political connection which they can easily avoid as this affect negatively later for promotion or placement when the government changes. The research found that men were superseded and made OSDs more in number whereas women were less affected by this bad culture.

Women prefer to stay in or around Dhaka and avoid posting outside Dhaka considering their family dislocation. They are favoured for their choices which are not usually favoured for men. It was found that average rate of transfer of men was about 8 times comparing to 4 times for women (Appendix-J). Men suffered for frequent transfer as it increased the cost of living maintaining two families in two different places.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Discrimination of women civil servants in MoPA in terms of appointment, placement, promotion, duty allocation depends on the nature of job and women's avoidance. This unintentional exclusion happens because of lack of women-friendly environment, structural indulgences, traditional role of household activities assigned for women. They also evade challenging jobs, which are mainly at the field level. Although this avoidance happens intentionally or unintentionally, it makes them less confident about the responsibilities. However, they are also benefitted from the placement and duty allocation because of fewer women in the civil service, lack of suitable facility for women. Lack of good working environment or adverse working environment not only creates obstacle to work in some positions but also serves as the positive factor because women can easily show this as the cause and get better placement in the capital or in other city areas according to their desire.

The scenario has changed than that of first recruitment. However, anomalies and discrepancies happen due to the lack of human resource planning, inappropriate staffing policy, erratic transfers and postings, unplanned and unsystematic promotion that may create discrimination for men and women (Siddiquee, 2003). MoPA can follow the steps stated below to reduce the discrimination:

- There should be compulsory service outside of Dhaka for a certain period time and earn points for each placement to be considered for next promotion. This can be in another way that everybody should start their job in the rural areas for three years and again after getting new promotion they will be posted in rural or hill districts. Benefits of serving in those less desirable areas will be added in ACR. If this rational system can be developed officials will plan their career and match with their family needs. Professional will know about the next posting well ahead at least one or two years ahead so that they can plan about their children. Transfer and placement can be made in line with the organizational needs and professionals' choices.
- Women-friendly working environment should be developed so that they don't avoid some placement. Work-life balance policies such as daycare center, flexible working time arrangements (FWTAs), and family leave can be introduced to attract for any placement. FWTAs may include annualized work, work from home through online, flexible time so that professionals utilize these options when they need for their family reasons. This can be a godsend to civil servants when they have young children or children with special need.
- Women professionals should also make plan for developing the career with the organizational policies so that they can attain training programmes, gain required professional experience. This plan needs to be matched with the personal planning of family formation, getting children and their well-being, getting households works done. WCSs should realize what they would emphasize to get benefits most without hampering either. They also can plan with their spouses if they are dual earners. This planning will ease the mental burden and reduce the work-life conflict.

It is claimed by the academics and researchers that women at the workplace in the public sector are discriminated directly or indirectly in terms of human resource practices such as recruitment, placement, transfer, providing congenial environment, delegation of power and duty allocation. There is no policy documents found that supports this statement rather they are favoured. Exclusion happens unintentionally because of external factors related to the social constraints, family issues and individual mechanism.

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# PARADOXES OF PARTICIPATION OF THE WOMEN LEADERS IN THE UNION PARISHAD IN BANGLADESH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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***Abstract:** This paper discusses obstacles of participation of the women leaders (WLs) in the grassroots based local government in Bangladesh, i.e. Union Parishad (UP). Since its inception (1870) till date (2019), local government of Bangladesh has a history of 149 years, but women's representation has been ensured since only 2 decades ago. After enacting reservation quota for women leaders in the sphere of Union Parishad (UP) in 1997, women leaders had to struggle hard to ensure their participation in the UP affairs. Within the span of 2 decades, WLs fails to ensure their effective participation because of some built-in problems of the UP. Against such a context, the paper is aimed at unraveling the research questions: What are the problems WLs are facing in ensuring their participation? The paper is based on phenomenological approach which was supported by case study, content analysis and observation methods. The findings of the paper revealed that women leaders (WLs) identified 3 major challenges towards playing their active role and participation in the UP such as i) patriarchy or male domination, ii) corruption and iii) faulty legal provision imposed upon them. All these problems are problems of local government in particular and Bangladesh society in general. Solution might be changing the legal and structural arrangements in the UP. Improving overall governance couple with reducing malpractices and corruptions can promote having women's rights and privileges better in the UP. More affirmative action such as education facilities should be expanded in the society to enhance women's participation and to modify value system as traditional values help perpetuate patriarchy and other social ills.*

***Keywords:** participation, women leaders, local government of Bangladesh, Union Parishad*

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## 1. Introduction

The Union Parishad (thereafter UP) is the lowest unit of local government (LG) in Bangladesh that began functioning in 1870, during the British colonial rule. Since the colonial era, until 1976, there was no provision for women representation in the UP in Bangladesh. In a real sense, women's representation in the UP was ensured in the LG Ordinance of 1997, which made a provision of reservation of one-third seats for women members. During the prolonged 144 (1870 to 2014) years of LG history, important development concerning women's representation took place within the last 17 years that spanned from 1997 to 2014. However, within these 2 decades, women leaders (thereafter WLs) tried to ensure their rights in the UP. Against such a backdrop this paper aimed at unraveling the grassroots realities of the problems of participation of the WLs in the UP affairs in Bangladesh.

The paper is based on qualitative method. It was deemed that by using qualitative methods, lived and rich experiences, multiple realities, diverse dimensions and dynamics of problems of participation of the WLs could be explored and thus to help unearth the research questions properly. To explore the major problems faced by the WLs, hermeneutical phenomenological approach was adopted. Phenomenology was substantiated by case study to enrich the findings obtained from interview. Author's own observation, gained through his prolonged (about 200 hours) field work, has also been incorporated to prepare this paper. Data were collected during July-December 2015. To support primary data, some secondary data were also used. For phenomenological analysis, data were thematically arranged. As soon as the same theme started repeating, data collection was stopped, but for checking regional variation, data were collected from 19 UPs covering different socio-cultural zones<sup>1</sup> of Bangladesh. Mostly, the WLs were interviewed separately, so that they can share their experiences and realities properly, whereas in few cases, some male members and some community members and leaders were also interviewed for having their perspectives and better understanding the problem. The whole discussion was recorded with the informed consent of the participants and afterwards transcription was prepared into English from Bengali. In line with the research questions, data were then organized into different thematic areas and afterwards, reducing data from 21 themes, 4 themes were finalized through a rigorous process. For analyzing the essence or meaning of the textual descriptions obtained from the participants, content analysis method was adopted using the relevant literatures from research reports, books, journal articles through a heuristic search from library materials and online both.

## 2. Women's representation in the local government in Bangladesh

The foundation of today's UP was laid down during the British colonial rule with the *Village Chowkidary Act of 1870*. The ending of British rule in India gave birth of two

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<sup>1</sup> There are 7 divisions, 64 districts, 507 Upazilas and 4498 Union Parishads in Bangladesh. The sampled 19 UPs were selected covering 5 divisions and 7 districts of Bangladesh i.e. Chittagong, Comilla, Faridpur, Sylhet, Barisal, Bogra and Gaibandha districts.

different states such as India and Pakistan in 1947. Afterwards, Bangladesh achieved its independence from the internal colonialism of Pakistan in 1971 and inherited LG systems from Pakistan with some modifications in its structure. Since from 1870 the functionaries of local government<sup>1</sup> were always in the hands of males (Chowdhury et al., 1994, p. 6) and rights to vote in the local bodies were dependent on the educational qualification, possession of property and tax payment etc. (Smock, 1977, p.117; Women for Women, 1992). However, women's representation in the political community was allowed through the Government of India Act in 1935 (Forbes, 2002) but based on the universal adult franchise, women for the first time took part in the election to the rural local bodies in 1956 (Rashiduzzaman, 1968; Inter Parliamentary Union, 1987) and thereby only one female candidate was elected in the UP election of 1956 and 1969 during the Pakistan regime. In the first UP election of Bangladesh in 1973, out of 4352 UPs, only one woman from Rangpur district was elected as the UP Chairman (Alam and Begum, 1974, p.38-51). Afterwards, women's representation to the UP was enshrined by two presidential ordinances namely through Local Government Ordinance of 1976 and Municipal Ordinance of 1977, which for the first time provided a provision of nomination of 2 women members in the UP. Remarkable development regarding women's representation in LG took place during the Ershad regime<sup>2</sup> through the Union Parishad Ordinance of 1983 that made a provision of nomination of three women members in the UP (Haque, 2003a; Khan, 2011; Khan and Ara, 2006). In 1993, three women members were elected by the 9 elected male members and the Chairman. A major breakthrough in the representation style of women in the UP was made in 1997, which provided one-third reservation for women. By the UP act of 1997, in each Union, three seats are reserved for a woman and accordingly, one woman is elected from three wards, whereas 9 male members are elected from 9 Wards through direct election in the UP.

### 3. Literature review

Bangladesh is predominantly Muslim and with a high degree of religiosity; it is one of the world's most impoverished countries, with more than half of its population living below the poverty line and more than a third (35%) living in extreme poverty (Chowdhury, 2005, p.22). Rural women in Bangladesh, remain the poorest of the poor; faring worse than men on almost every measure (Alam and Karim, 2007; Mahtab, 2007; Naz, 2006; Hasmi, 2000). Women wage earners in poor households consume on

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<sup>1</sup> Here in this paper local government connotes rural local government, more specifically Union Parishad, the oldest rural local government body in Bangladesh. Till 1983, the only local government in Bangladesh was Union Parishad. In the last 149 years that spanned from 1870 till 2019, UP has never lose its representative character and election was continued every 5 years alternate in UP unlike many ups and downs in Bangladesh society.

<sup>2</sup> Hussain Muhammad Ershad was one of the military rulers in Bangladesh. While he was the Chief of Army Staff of the Bangladesh Army, he declared Martial Law following a bloodless coup and became Chief Martial Law Administrator in 1982. Afterwards he became the President of Bangladesh from 1983 to 1990. During Ershad regime, following the suggestions of National Executive Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (NICARR), he undertook substantive reform measures in the sphere of civil administration and local government system in Bangladesh.

average of 1.3 meals a day, as compared to 2.4 meals eaten by men (Mahtab, 2007). Women are less educated, having a 48% literacy rate compared with 59% for males (United Nations, 2007). Women's medical expenditure in the typical household is 45% compared with 55% of men (Stalker, 1995). Furthermore, Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where women on average die younger than men (Mahtab, 2007). Although half of the population in Bangladesh is women, on an average, they do two-thirds of the total works, including household works and received only one-tenth of the world income (Huq, 1995; Hussain, 2002). Participation of women in higher professional and managerial position is very limited.

Critics argue that women's non-participation in political space is a consequence of a number of factors, including women's responsibilities for family and children, the negative attitudes and discrimination of political parties, conservative religious and cultural doctrines, discriminatory socio-economic conditions, electoral systems, the nature of the regime and financial barriers (Rule, 1994a, 1994b; Liswood, 1999; Harris, 2001). The reason behind women's low representation in public office is that there are obstacles to women's full, equal participation in politics. Many of these barriers are deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and attitudes and manifested in the structures and agenda of political parties, unfair electoral voting systems, high costs of elections, and lack of access to training and education (Reyes, 2001). Ensuring women's equal political and economic rights has seemed to cause controversy, disinterested, and denial everywhere (Giele and Asmock, 1977). Moreover, existing laws seem unable to protect women effectively from violence and economic deprivation. There is also very limited women participation in party hierarchical structure.

Against such a backdrop, women's representation in the local government institutions (LGIs) is essential from a political point of view as from the considerations of both equity and production (Quadir, 1993, p.25; Quader and Islam, 1987, p.4). Involvement of women in the LGIs creates a scope for familiarizing them with the democratic system, which acts as a training ground for political education. To develop political awareness and consciousness women should be involved in social, economic and political activities and participation of women in higher decision-making bodies will help them deal with women's issue more successfully (Siddiqui, 1995, p.271-272). In fact, the LGI is the closest and most acceptable level of government to women because it traditionally provides various social services such as electricity, waste disposal, public transport, water, schools, health clinics and other programs relating to poverty reductions and rural development. However, women's participation is ever more marginalized at the LGIs reflecting the social realities of women's subordinate and dependent status and the consequent invisibility of women in public space (Chowdhury, 1994, p.49). Women's participation in the political decision-making process at local level is marginal. In fact, the problems of women's participation are more of structural than organizational. Such structural problems are embedded in wide-spread illiteracy, confinement in household work, old tradition of subordinate roles, religious and cultural factors and lack of training and motivational facilities (Ahmed and Quader, 1993). Women members are excluded from the UP activities but women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and

more sustainable peace (Wollack, 2010). Women's political participation has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties and citizen's lives. As women can bring positive changes in democratic practices, therefore it is exigently essential to delve into the participatory politics of women in order to consolidate the grassroots democracy. Therefore, if women can effectively participate in the local government process, women leaders would help other village women to involve them in more income earning opportunities. Against the above backdrop, it is deemed through analysis of women's problems of participation in the sphere of grassroots-based local government in Bangladesh, this paper will help contribute to women's political participation in the UP, which in turn can strengthen local democracy and economy of the country.

#### **4. Problems of participation of the women leaders in the UP**

Women members identified three major problems in the systemic arrangements of the UP that blocked their participation, which were elucidated beneath one by one incorporating relevant evidences from other studies.

##### ***Women members encountering extremely male domination in the UP***

The problem of the male domination lies in the entire UP structure because an UP is composed of 9 male and 3 women members and a Chairman, who being a male promotes the cause of male hegemony in the UP. At the initial stage, the existence of women members was never accepted by the male members and still they are to face a constant male domination in every UP in Bangladesh. The major bottleneck, more specifically the number one problem regarding women's participation in the UP, is male domination, which can be called in terms of "patriarchy" and described in many different ways, but common terms include "*gender stratification, gender inequality, female disadvantage, sexism, and patriarchy*" (Chafetz, 1990). Patriarchy is a term used to describe the social system of male domination over females, where male domination is built into the social, political and economic institutions of society. Patriarchal societies are characterized by male control of economic resources, male domination of political processes and positions of authority, and male entitlement of sexual services. According to the feminist perspectives, though some societies are more patriarchal than others, all modern societies have a patriarchal structure (Paxton and Hughes, 2007, p.24). Male members never accept women as their colleagues but are rather obsessed with patriarchal beliefs and tenets; they always judge women and perpetually subjugate them to their wishes and demands, which is vividly reflected in the words of a male member. During discussion with the women members of the South Durgapur UP, an old male member, being seriously annoyed with the present author, observing that the entire discussion was going on with women members, and stated the following at the top of his voice:

*"It is the male members who brought you in the UP and gave rights to you. He warned the women members not to claim with their rights and said that if women further bother for their rights, they would take away women's right again"* (Male Member, South Durgapur UP).

The above quotation is an extreme opinion enunciated by an old male member. He viewed that instead of discussing with him, the whole discussion was going on with women members, who were talking about some important problems of the UP and at one point he made such a sweeping but bold utterance, which in fact was a true reflection of the attitude of male towards female members. When male members cannot win in depriving women of their due rights in the UP, they try to create problems using different means. Being obsessed and brought up with patriarchal norms and values, the male members' mental make-up is entirely textured by the domination over females, and these male members are never ready to relinquish an iota of power and or authority to the female members, a stance that they have enjoyed from the primitive colonial days to date, which began even before state formation, and the domination of males over female has been continuing without having any change in its forms or styles. It was learnt from one of the female politicians from Central America, that "the patriarchal ideology prevailing in the society is the biggest stumbling block towards participation of women" (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000, p.61). The same is the case in the UP in Bangladesh. This is evident from the following example of a woman member in Bethkapa UP, where having a female Chairperson in that Union, their Chairperson tried to distribute projects to women members there equally with the male members but the male members did not accept that and therefore the male members tried to impose their domination using unjust, cruel, and illogical means, which was vividly reflected in the following quotations from a female member, who stated that "*when the male members could not defeat or deprive us of our rights, then they tried to suit fake cases against us so that they could dominate over us*" (Female Member, Bethkapa UP).

In another case it was found that by struggling with huge male domination the women members were questioning the affirmative action of the government. During the author's discussion with the women members of the Garidaha UP, a female member, mentioned that some male members thought that there was no need of woman members in the UP and she stated the following: "*Government had created a problem for us by incorporating us in the parishad rather it was much better if government did not bring us here*" (Female Member, Garidaha UP).

Being frustrated from struggling with her rights in the UP, she made the above utterance as she was not able to judge whether the government has blessed her with an opportunity or not. However, bereft of women's minimum rights and shares in the UP, she judged her existence in the UP as a "*problem.*" All over Bangladesh, there is perhaps any UP where such male domination is non-existent; rather, it is ubiquitous, which has been explicitly reflected through the utterance of a woman member from Suvapur UP, who noted the following:

*"Always problems occurred particularly with the male members. In Bangladesh there were hardly any UP where such problems were not prevailed. We want our shares and we will never give up our due shares"* (Woman Member, Suvapur UP).

Bangladesh overall is still considered as one of the countries with the highest level of gender discrimination and patriarchal structures, embedded at all levels of society. Women suffer from gender-specific discrimination, such as early marriage practices, gender-based violence, biased inheritance and property laws, restriction of mobility and

access to services, participation in public spaces, etc. (Sikder, Engali, Byrne, & Tabet, 2011). Inequality of women's representation in politics is also a consequence of a "number of factors, including women's responsibilities for family and children, the negative attitudes and discrimination of political parties, conservative religious and cultural doctrines, discriminatory socio-economic conditions, electoral systems, and the nature of a regime and financial barriers" (Rule, 1994a, 1994b; Liswood, 1999; Harris, 2001). The problem of male domination in the UP cannot be exaggerated. One woman, member from Gunabati UP added the following:

*"In fact, the root cause of all problems in the UP is the male members, the Chairman did not create much problem, but the main culprits are the male members. We are 3 female members, but they are 9 male members, so here lay the problem"* (Woman Member, Gunabati UP).

In a highly traditional socio-cultural structure and belief system, women's public political participation is not encouraged instead, women are encouraged to assist in the domestic activities and to be docile, tame and submissive. In most cases the elected women members are systematically discriminated by males, verbally abused, always assigned to a specific development committee, excluded from arbitration committee, etc. (ADB, 2001; quoted in Gani and Sattar, 2004). Due to male domination women leaders are excluded from important areas of participation in UP which include infrastructure, budget decisions, different Standing Committees and Project Committees on UP, social and child development, immunization and nutrition projects, education, health, agriculture, salish<sup>1</sup>, maintenance of law and order and their involvement is mostly informal and marginal and women opinions are not heard during decision-making, and male colleagues behave negatively toward them. (Gani and Sattar, 2004; Khan, 2008; Khan, 2009: 9, Begum, 2005; BARC Research Report, 2007; Khan and Mohsin, 2008; Shamim and Nasreen, 2002, p.52; UNDP, 2003). Empirical research findings have testified that women members were not considered capable political actors and reserved seats members were not treated/valued as general members in the UP (Begum, 2007, p.263-64) and the male's extreme disregard for women members' roles undermined the objectives of reservation and effectively neutralized the political empowerment of women (Panday, 2008; Begum, 2007). The Chairman is placed in a relatively powerful position, and often takes decisions in conjunction with a small circle of associates, from which female members, in particular, are likely to be excluded (Aminuzzaman, 2011, p.200). Male members think that women members have nothing to do with the development of the UP, which can be observed from the utterance of a woman member from Chadpur UP, who opined the following *"the male members deemed that in the UP the women members do not have any rights and obligations to do anything as they are only reserved members in UP"* (Woman Member, Chadpur UP).

During interview with a woman member in the UP, she opined the following: *"Women members were not given big projects rather they were provided with small projects and all the big projects were given to the male members, these were the general trends in most of the UP"* (Woman Member, Bijoypur Moddham UP).

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<sup>1</sup> Salish refers to informal local arbitration council for resolution of petty disputes conducted by the UP representatives.



Male domination is omnipresent in the family, society, and states where women have traditionally lower positions in all spheres. In the family, the husband or father occupies the leading role. In the society it is an entirely male paradigm, and the state, the highest organ, has the right to create all policies and programs that protect the rights of men whereas the women's role is acknowledged with only some affirmative actions. Sharing her grim reality and experience, one woman, member from the Wahedpur UP stated the following:

*“The women members need to be elected in the husband's residential area, so most of the women members dare to protest any wrongdoings of the male members due to their prestige concern and for avoiding criticism and for saving their due respect in the bridegroom's family”*  
(Woman Member, Wahedpur UP).

Obviously, no one ever thinks the above reality like the woman member of Wahedpur UP. Most of the women members in Bangladesh are married. In consonance with Bangladeshi values, norms, and cultural standards, it is considered bad when a woman is bold and courageous in establishing her rights and privileges in the family and society. On the other hand, the women that consume or subsume everything and just avoid all odds, injustice, violence, oppressions and tyranny without noticing the males, especially their husband, are deemed as an “*ideal*” woman in the society of Bangladesh. Again, its roots are deep in the patriarchy and paternalistic social structure. The whole social structure, the power relations and mechanisms through which society is governed are entirely male biased and ruled by patriarchal values and ethos. Therefore, women members position themselves in such a manner that they are simply innocent consumers and receivers of unjust oppression, wrongdoings, and massive tyranny towards them. They find no messiah to save them from such a draconian and devastating social enemy, which has been profoundly engrained and engulfed by patriarchy and which is deemed quite insurmountable by the women members. According to Khan (2008), monopolization of the use of power by the Chairman prevents UP members from playing their effective and rightful role in UP development. This dictatorial tendency of the Chairman also creates problems in decision-making, project formulation, and financial management. Evidence has shown that what people think about women and women's place matters in terms of women's ability to attain political power (Norris and Inglehart, 2001; Paxton and Kunovich, 2003). In Bangladesh, the average person has the same attitude towards women: from the birth to death, a male is born and brought up in those patriarchal values, which no one can easily change, and this male domination is perpetuated dynasty after dynasty, generation after generation without undergoing any change in it.

Women in local government in Bangladesh have bearing on the rural life where traditional values prevail and tend to inhibit social mobility. The age-long orthodoxy in traditions and rituals dominates the outlook and aspirations of the people in the villages (Solaiman, 1998). Values function as social structure (Jahangir, 1982) and provide a background to social integration by cherishing values as an instrument of social cohesion, preventing social disorder from growing (Mashreque and Amin, 1994a). The social order of the backward rural community in Bangladesh is characterized by kinship, factionalism, and elitism (Mashreque and Amin, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b, 1994b). With such patrimonial social characteristics, the culture of women's

participation cannot be thought of. In fact, the domination of male members is still taken for granted in the public world of politics. Moreover, these male members use their patronage networks to influence the decision-making process. The existence of “*de facto politics*” clearly hinders the meaningful participation of women in politics, despite the introduction of quotas (Vijaylakshmi, 2002; cited in Mukhopadhyay, 2005, p.31). Women’s vulnerability is aggravated by the practice of early and arranged marriage, polygamy, veiling or *purdah*<sup>1</sup>, and the seclusion of women, which restrict their mobility, public exposure and opportunity to improve their condition. Therefore, women are to face problems of their husband’s polygamous marriages, divorce, dowry demand and violence (Shamim, 2001; Shamim & Nasreen, 2002). Obviously, the culture of effective participation in formal community activities is still non-existent (Mohammed, 2010). Though NGOs have worked hard to develop some client-based community groups (some form of social capital), still they are more concerned with their own group interest, than visible community involvement (Sharmin and Aminuzzaman, 2006 quoted in Aminuzzaman, 2011, p.201). There is no denying the fact that women’s participation in local government has far-reaching ramifications for social mobility, acting on caste, occupation, sect, kinship and factionalism, which are responsible for the process of segregation and exclusiveness. The patriarchal social system runs on the recognition of male superiority and female subordination, and women are attached to low status and unequal sex relationship. The rural community in Bangladesh, therefore, is on the verge of threat of disequilibrium (Amin & Akhter, 2005, p.2).

## Extreme corruption plaguing women’s role in the UP

The second obstacle women leaders identified in the UP is corruption. The full verbatim of the prevalence of corruption in the UP are portrayed below with the textual narratives obtained from the women leaders in Bangladesh. Corruption is highly prevalent in most of the third world countries and Bangladesh is no exception to this case. Due to massive corruption these women leaders have miserably failed to adjust themselves in the UP. There are evidences that corruptions are galore in the spheres of the UP in Bangladesh. Transparency International, Bangladesh- (TIB) reported that since 1996, Bangladesh was the most corrupt countries in the world for the five consequent times. In TIB reports it was learnt that among many other state organizations, local government namely the UP was found severely involved in doing corrupt practices in Bangladesh, which corroborates the findings with the present study. In the following section, the way corruption takes place in the UP has been explained elaborately. In reply to a question, whether women members need to pay money, when they bring or get a project from the Chairman, one woman, member stated that:

*“You know that in Bangladesh everywhere there is an established system that we have to bring project fulfilling all the respective shares of Ministers, MPs, DC, UNO, Upazila Engineers and Upazila Chairman, which has become convention and Union Parishad has no exception to this”.* (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP).

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<sup>1</sup> *Purdah* is a Bengali word that stands for veil. Muslim women use it for performing their religious values and sanctity.

Through the above quotation, the prevalence of corruption in the sphere of the UP has been reflected well. The underlying meaning reveals that the whole Bangladesh is unfortunately involved in such a social evil that destroys country's development to a considerable level. The above women included the entire state machinery in the realm of corruption. The legislators, the administration and the public representatives all are epitomized as the influential parties involved in corruption in Bangladesh. It is very interesting to note here that being the chief executive of the UP, Chairman, also demands bribe from the members, which can be seen from the statement made by the women member of Khadimpara UP, who mentioned that *"when we finished our projects, sometimes we share profits through mutual understandings with the Chairman"*. (Woman Member, Khadimpara UP).

In order to have an in-depth understanding about the magnitude of corruption at the community level, the manager of a cooperative society was also interviewed in wake of the discussion and opined that *"no one could do work for the whole budget in UP. In most cases, 20-30% money is leaked out"*. (Manager, Hatigara Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative Society, Comilla). Furthermore, when I asked who were involved in such corruption, he answered that:

*"I did not know who were involved with it, but the UP functionaries must have this answer to them. If the members could do work with the full amount, the quality of the work would be much better because having less amount these members (meaning both male and female members) used very low-quality materials when they conducted a project"*. (Manager, Hatigara Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative Society).

Corruption is one of the most draconian enemies towards the development of Bangladesh society. Due to massive corruption, lion's shares of the public resources invested for development of Bangladesh are drained out otherwise. The worst victim of corruption is the poor people of Bangladesh. This was quite evident from the above utterance that due to corrupt practices, women members cannot deliver the best work for the local people and they are to suffer a lot because women tend to be honest in their activities but being compelled with the ground realities these women leaders have learnt to compromise with the practical situation. Corruption is endemic in Bangladesh. According to TIB (2008), it was found the local government was the second most corrupt sector in Bangladesh. Corruption takes place at the local government level due to the existence of patron-client relationship in the rural milieu<sup>1</sup>. The UP Chairperson and some dominant members tend to maintain strong patron-client relations with a section of rural community. Unfortunately, such clients are not necessarily the weaker or poorer section of the rural community. UP therefore tend to take some of its development management and distributive decision on the basis of such patron-client dependency syndrome (Aminuzzaman, 2011, p.204). Corruption is prevalent in distribution of social safety net benefits also. Most of the safety net programs and some

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<sup>1</sup> Findings of the study reveal that a powerful network termed as *dal chokera* (mediators) play important role at the local governance in Bangladesh. They play intermediary role between the villagers and the ruling party leaders and the civil servants. The study confirmed three categories of mediators. The first category includes the leaders of the ruling party and dominant opposition, student leaders and the UP chairman. The second category comprises local contractors, trade union (see Asaduzzaman, 2008).

development activities are designed and managed by the political workers/leaders of the ruling party under the administrative and political support of the members of parliament. UP has been kept in sideline in managing the projects (Aminuzzaman, 2011, p.206). The same phenomena are prevalent in distribution of VGD<sup>1</sup> cards (Asian Human Rights Commission-Hunger Alert Program Bangladesh, 2011).

## Empirical evidence of corruption

Here 2 cases of corruption in Chiora UP, Comilla were illustrated briefly with a view to unfolding the forms and nature of corruption practiced in the UP. During data collection, a woman member shared a case of corruption of the Chairman of Chiora UP which she experienced very recently. That woman member experienced this case of corruption when she came to know that she had given a project of one lack taka (1191 US\$)<sup>2</sup> which was obtained from 1% land transfer tax from Upazila Parishad. After getting the project Chairman advised her to sign a check and thereafter the check was cashed. As soon as the check was cashed, Chairman took away the whole taka from her giving 7000 taka (83 US\$) in her hand. Another woman member shared a case of corruption of the Chairman of Chiora UP with the author. She told that once the Chairman tried to pass few projects by the UNO office using fake signatures of woman members and having doubt about its authenticity UNO immediately probed it and he was caught red handed because it was completely concocted and fake. At that time UNO warned the Chairman that he would be suspended from his Chairmanship but anyhow now he has managed everything by obtaining a stay order from the high court.

## Faulty legal provision imposed on women leaders in the UP

The women members identified the reservation system as one of the formidable challenges towards ensuring their participation in UP. However, in developing women leadership some sorts of affirmative actions are needed from the government. Likewise, Bangladesh adopted the same strategy for bringing women into the public life. Evidence shows that many countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Jordan, Morocco, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Taiwan, Tanzania, and Uganda adopted reservation quota for women (Dahlerup and Nordlund, 2004). It is observed that where reservation

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<sup>1</sup> Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) is a food based Social Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh, sponsored by World Food Program. The target group of the program is landless women who are widowed, divorced, abandoned, having under-nourished children, lactating mothers and women with handicapped husband etc. The aim of the program is to enhance food and nutrition security of women and children through improved food consumption, education, skills development, livelihood diversification and risk mitigation. To achieve objective of VGD program, currently about 3.75 million beneficiaries from ultra-poor households are provided with the provision of monthly food ration of 30 kg of wheat or 25 kg of fortified wheat flour (*atta*, in Bangla) for a period of 24 months, and a package of development services for human capital development.

<sup>2</sup> One US\$=83.98 taka as of 14 March 2018. The figure is calculated more or less full digit deducting the fraction amount.

system has been implemented, the popular political culture has gradually become more accepting of women taking part in politics. In fact, enhanced political representation of women depends more on the political will of the government than on a nation's world economic standing or any other economic factor (Tripp, n.d., p.7). Considering the importance of women's political participation, the government of Bangladesh has made provision of 33% reservation quota for women member in the UP in 1997. In fact a strong network of women's organizations and NGOs, coupled with global women's movement and active role played by the donor agencies have helped develop the discourse of gender equality, mobilizing women at the local level, and funding their support and training (Goetz, 1996, 1997; Kabeer, 1994). Scholars opine that rather than national level, women's political participation at the local level is more important for the development of rural women. Evidence shows that women in Asia have achieved better representation at local level than that of national level<sup>1</sup>.

Goetz (2004) and Beall (2004) (quoted in Mukhopadhyay, 2005: 14) have noted that women's reservation in local government in many countries has been taken as an extra measure, rather than considering women as credible and legitimate political actors. In Bangladesh, Union Parishad Act of 1997 have helped ensure women's equal access in political power structures (Khan & Ara, 2006) but being directly elected in the UP, women members found helpless because during preliminary stage, women members were not involved in any activities of the UP. Thereafter, in a bid to strengthen women's role and participation in the UP the concerned Ministry made a legal provision in 2002 that empowered women members to enjoy few specific rights in the UP (Rahman and Sultana, 2005).

Still there are lack of clarity and vagueness in the legal provision regarding the roles and responsibilities of the women member in UP. In my analysis, the cardinal problem towards enjoying women's rights in UP is not the reservation quota rather it is due to the attitude of the male member, women are being deprived of their rights in UP. Labeling women members as the reserved seat member, male members propagate that as women are elected in the reserved seats, so they have nothing to do with the development process in the UP. A woman member from Chadpur UP commented that *"the male members deemed that in the UP the women members do not have any rights and obligations to do anything as they are only reserved members in UP"* (Woman Member, Chadpur UP). Another woman member from Alkora UP stated that:

*"In fact, the reservation system is problematic, if government changed this system, it would be better. That's why I wanted to contest election in the general ward. Without any bargaining we could not bring any project in UP"* (Woman Member, Alkora UP).

The underlying assumption of the above utterance is that women are to struggle immensely for establishing their due rights in the Parishad but being occupied absolute power and authority by the male Chairman, women are time and again neglected and

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<sup>1</sup> For details see Drage (2001) who found that in 2001, the Philippines had 16.5% women; Thailand 18.1%; China 22.1%; Nepal 24.1%; Vietnam 26.6%; India 33%; and Bangladesh 33.3% women in their respective local governments and on the other hand Sri Lanka had 2% and Japan had only 6.2% women in local government.

denied their enshrined rights and share in the UP. The provision of direct election contributed to increase women's motivation to contest in the UP election in huge numbers in 1997 but being failed to ensure their rights in the UP, the number of candidates contesting in the next election in 2003 drastically reduced<sup>1</sup>. The reserved seats female members virtually have no power in the decision-making process compared to the general seat members as they failed to obtain enough institutional status and support and are denied access to mainstream activities. Khan (2009, p.9) found that women are excluded from all important activities in the UP due to being elected as the "reserve seat members", which created un-clarity and vagueness in the existing law and provided scope for taking all decision by men. Out of 4498 UPs, it was found that there are only 24 Women Chairpersons and the rest 4474 UPs are run by the male Chairmen and the UP structure is structured in such a way that it has become a one man parishad as all powers and authority is vested on the Chairman. This Chairman is the bearer of important symbol of the male domination and patriarchy supported by other 9 male members in UP. Therefore, female members are deprived of their due rights and share in UP. However, after getting the legal provision of assigning one-thirds of the total projects, amidst fighting to establish their legal rights, a few women have become successful to get few projects. But anyhow while they implement projects, the male members of that ward sometimes create obstacle for her. Therefore, all women members have skeptical view about the reservation system in UP.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the available evidences, case studies and phenomenological analysis from textual descriptions of the women leaders in the UP it was paradoxically evident that the problems towards ensuring women leaders' efficacious role and participation are male domination or patriarchy, corruption and faulty legal provision practiced for the WLs in the UP. Unfortunately, all these major problems are in fact the problems of governance of Bangladesh society as well. To redress male domination and corruption, the UP structure should be rationalized, and women's reservation quota should be upgraded to 50% from 33.33%. In Bangladesh, women's role in the society is conditioned by various socio-cultural impositions such as patriarchy, *purdah*, religious superstitions, etc., so education facilities can be expanded, which can help in the transformation of traditional restrictive attitudes and modification of cultural norms and practices embedded in the social milieu. Orthodox cultural beliefs create problems for women in terms of taking part in political space, whereas liberal values facilitate

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the provision of direct election, it was observed that in the UP election of 1997, 85% women voted (Islam, 2000; Begum, 2002, p.101). But being deprived of their rights in UP, in the next election of 2003, in total 39,419 women contested for 12,669 quota seats, which represents the fact that number of women contested in UP election declined from 44,969 in 1997 to 39,419 in 2003, which is about a quarter (12.3%) and around half of women members (47%), who were elected in 1997 did not compete in the 2003 elections (Karmaker, 2006; Steps Towards Development, 2003: 7). In the 1997 UP election, 44,969 women contested in quota seats reserved for them, and of them, 13,437 women were elected. In the same year among 13,437 women members, 592 were elected unopposed and uncontested. In the 2003 UP election, 39,419 rural women contested in 12,669 quota seats in the UP (Islam, 2000: 112-13; Begum, 2002; Karmaker, 2006; Pandey, 2008; Islam and Islam, 2012).

women's political participation and education is perhaps the only mechanism through which value change occurs and society develops. Therefore, progressive and liberal thinking should be promoted through expansion of education facilities and democratic governance to strengthen women leadership in the UP and Bangladesh as well.

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# WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

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**Abstract:** *The women's political participation was a long way, which started at the beginning of the XXth century and especially at the end of the First World War. Whatever the country, women began to demand their rights regarding participation in political life and thus the right to vote when they considered that there was a chance they can get it. The reason why women could participate in political life earlier in some countries than in others refer to the fact that in those countries either did not exist or there were no significant tensions between social classes, either feminist movements that fought for this right were quite moderate.*

**Keywords:** *gender differences; political representation; women; European regulations; seats in Parliaments*

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## Introduction and context

The subject of this article is of particular sociological importance, given the massive volume of specialized papers dedicated to this problem, which highlight the fact that existing patterns of male/female interaction “must not be based on refusal of women's access to education, social and political institutions and functions, because this fact would indicate a facade democracy” (Kelly and Hanwkesworth, 2004, p.14). Women's ‘advocacy’ programs have long focused on improving the ‘status of women’ (Sen, 2000, p. 22), but in our days we may observe an expansion of the objectives towards taking into account their role in economic and social life.

For the theoretical part of this article, we chose to include and, implicitly, present three sociological perspectives to analyse women's participation in political life. First of all, we are talking about the theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain this in terms of

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gender differences, specific to societies that have a strong traditionalist character (Comte, 2004). In the twentieth century, these theories, based in particular on differences, appear in scientific papers under the titles of “the theories of gender realignment” or “cultural feminism”.

The second category we will address in this article is the perspective of “progressive liberal feminism” (Mill, 2013), a perspective that focused on the struggle to obtain equal political and economic rights in the context of capitalist society, with a special emphasis on special policies to achieve equal opportunities.

The third perspective is the conflictualist perspective, taken from Karl Marx and Max Weber, and developed, among others, by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2013), whose main purpose is to discover and understand the factors of domination, conflict and the means by which social order is preserved.

The second part of the article contains statistical data (including also data on the percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments or in the European Parliament) regarding women's political participation, during 2005-2015, in France and the United Kingdom.

## **Sociological literature review (Comte, Mill, Bourdieu)**

From a sociological point of view, the idea that men are different from women in terms of biological differences, and the psychological differences lead them to live in different worlds appears mentioned since 1840 in Auguste Comte's work (*Course in Positive Philosophy*), where the French sociologist speaks about the two types of existing subordination relationships within the family, one of them being the “gender dominant-subordinate relationship” (Comte, 2004).

The author bases this idea, arguing that between the two sexes there are both physical and moral differences, and “the ability to govern is the most foreign to feminine sex because it implies an overall view, impartiality, independence from passions, what usually involves the reason more than the affectivity” (Otovescu, 2003, p. 55).

In the paper *System of Positive Polity*, Comte considered that women bear more easily subjection than men, because they are much more dominated by feelings, than by rationality. At the same time, Comte advanced the idea that woman is equipped with a lower-size brain than that of the man, which necessarily leads to the development of a lower form of intelligence, based mainly on affections and less on reason. This idea has raised many criticisms among his contemporaries (an illustrative proof being the well-known *Correspondence* between A. Comte and John Stuart Mill), and among other sociologists, in later periods. For example, Gustave Le Bon recognized a woman's inferiority to a man, but he was considering it a kind of “charming weakness” (Le Bon, 1890, p. 451). Emile Durkheim did not deny the validity of feminism, considering women's mental simplicity as a virtue, but in the same time, he was promoting the idea that women “should seek equality in the functions which are part of her nature” (Durkheim, 1896, p. 391).

The views of Comte and Durkheim highlight the socio-cultural obstacles to women's participation in the political life of nineteenth-century society: a society characterized by severe gender disparities that discourage women from leaving the private sphere and moving towards the public one, considering that the woman's main goal is to give birth and to educate children, which is also their most important function in life.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in the United Kingdom, liberal feminism began to take shape, in 1851, with the public support by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, of the first plea on the right to vote of women, the two being inspired by the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention from the United States. In fact, in all his public speeches, in the *Correspondence* with A. Comte, and in the works that he will later publish, Mill argues that gender balance should be a pre-condition for researching the welfare of any society, not just the English society.

In *The Suggestion of Women\**, John Stuart Mill (2013) analysed on the struggle for equal political and economic rights, in the context of capitalist society, focusing on special policies to achieve equal opportunities. If we only analyse the title of the work, we could say that Mill is a follower of radical feminism, an orientation that “focuses on the oppression of women, only because they are women, regardless of class or race” (Inglehart and Norris, 2000, p. 93), claiming that the three elements that can explain the causes of subordination are sex, sexuality and gender.

But the thesis that the English sociologist supports in the paper mentioned above is that “if men and women are ontologically similar, men's rights must be extended, in order to include women” (Mill, 2013).

Basically, on the one hand, the whole paper is a critique of the injustice done to women in Victorian times and, on the other hand, a request for immediate reforms in the legal, social and political areas (Grunberg, 2002, p. 91).

In fact, John Stuart Mill published his autobiography in which he argued that he had never looked at women as a minority group but as a category of population that accounted for about half of Britain's population and, therefore, had to know and enjoy social and political emancipation.

In fact, this emancipation is one of the most important elements of the utilitarianism thesis, based on a *progressive feminism*, developed by Mill: “the improvement of women's conditions in a society contributes to the development of the human being because she transmit these new values and ideas through family education to its children, who live in a balanced family, due to the intellectual equality between man and woman” (Moller Okin, 1979, pp. 197-231).

Another theoretical approach on gender differences is the conflictualist approach, the conflictualist theories (in opposition to the consensual ones), having as main purpose to discover and understand the factors of domination, conflict and the means by which the social order is preserved.

Inspired by Marxist sociology (especially the theory of class conflict) or Weberian sociology (especially the concept of “habitus” encountered at Max Weber in 1913, introduced in sociology by Marcel Mauss and developed by Pierre Bourdieu), the

conflictualist approach substitutes the functionalist perspective of the horizontal structure regarding the social consensus with the vertical structure, in terms of the struggle for obtaining higher positions in social hierarchy.

Basically, the fundamental idea of these approaches is that men are exercising their domination over women in order to gain power and privileges, generating a kind of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu, 2013). This is also the orientation of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that “what is considered a natural difference between women and men is only the result of gender-based construction from a cultural model with masculine dominance” (Ștefanescu, 2003, p. 66). In its conception, women are predominantly shy, weak (in comparison to male gender), withdrawn and witty because of the model promoted through education. He also considers that “the one who is dominated will always agree with the one who dominates, since the dominated has no tools of knowledge other than those of his dominator who give naturalness to the domination relationship. The dominated participates in his own domination, this being the concrete form of symbolic violence” (Ștefanescu, 2003, pp. 66-67).

Thus, the woman will perceive herself as being inferior to the man, weak, submissive, having the obligation to take care of the household and the children as if these aspects were natural and not induced by a male model that influences the perception of the woman. Basically, till the end of the XIXth century, “women were not able to participate in decision-making either in the society they lived or in their own lives; this was happening in a society in which the gender theories were making a clear distinction between the public sphere – politics and culture and the private sphere – family and household” (Otovescu-Frăsie and Motoi, 2010, p. 12).

In post-industrial societies, things became to change, gender roles have undergone certain transformations due to the opportunities offered to women in education and in the labour market, to the characteristics of the modern family (where the division of labour and the distribution of family roles are no longer similar to traditionalist society), these major transformations having a big influence on the political behaviour of women and men

Thus, in some studies, we find the idea that the policy measures of economic development, the gross domestic product per capita, the increase of women's participation in higher education and their insertion into the labour market positively influence the number of women in national parliaments (Alexander and Welzel, 2007, p. 6). Also, according to other studies, women's access to the labour market has had a major impact on their electoral behaviour, especially regarding their political participation and their access to higher education, which has led them to have more liberal attitudes (Inglehart and Norris, 2000, p. 442).

Together with the globalization process, the gender gap analysis has changed. Thus, many studies have emerged, studies that analyse women's image in the media and how the media form the gender stereotypes (especially in relation to women's participation in political life). According to some authors, “the presence of women in politics can be considered ‘suspect’ through mass media representations that will focus on looks, clothes or will present women as incapable to deal with parliamentary politics and

pressure. Thus, the media representations will reinforce the prejudices about the presence of women in politics and their adequacy in this space and also they will deepen the distinction between men and women” (Băluță, 2015, p. 11).

As a matter of fact, women's representations in the media, especially in electoral contexts, were the subject of anti-discrimination reports, which analysed the differences in the average coverage of women candidates compared to male, reports that showed “a situation that is not at all favourable to the presence of women in politics; in other words, by promoting and consequently strengthening the traditional gender roles attributed to men and women, the media have an impact on the results of electoral campaigns and, implicitly, on how the political power is divided and exercised” (Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării, 2014, pp. 28-29).

As a way to correct these issues in a European Parliament Report from 2013, it is promoted the idea that “new media (social networks, on-line forums, web pages, etc.) provide an opportunity for policymakers, in order to express their interests, to make their career known and to sympathize with the public so they can fight” (European Parliament, 2013, p. 39).

## **A comparative analysis: France and the United Kingdom (between 2005 and 2017)**

Countries where feminist movements occurred earlier became countries that have a strong level of inclusion of women in political life, thus so numerous studies have shown that there is a positive link between early feminist movements and women's participation in political life.

In *France*, the minimum gender quota system is determined by the electoral law, the mandatory parity law at national level, and all electoral lists must include both men and women.

By quota we understand “a minimum percentage of women who are present in a government, electoral list or parliamentary assembly. Therefore, the quota system obliges political institutions to offer women the opportunity to participate in political life and to be elected” (Dahlerup, 2005).

Also, in France, by the Law of 6 June 2000 on equal access of women and men to electoral and elective offices, the political parties that do not have an equal structure of candidates by sex (50/50) are financially ‘punished’. However, a two percentage point difference (51 to 49) is allowed, but if this difference is higher, the parties lose a percentage of funding equal to half the percentage difference between female and male candidates. In 2007, this sanction was increased to 75% of the difference, with effect from 1 January 2008. The French law of 2000 can be considered an example of good practice if we take into account its positive effects, which we present below, in this article, in the form of several percentage data.

Following municipal elections in March 2001, the percentage of women elected to political positions in city councils has almost doubled – from 25 to 47% (Norris and Krook, 2011, p. 21). Following the Senate elections in September 2001, 42% of the

candidates were women, getting one-third of seats in the French Senate, 102 out of 321 (Sineau, 2004, p. 66). In 2004, women held 37.3% of regional vice-presidents, compared with only 15.1% in 1998 (Murray, 2010, p. 412).

The interest in women's representation in French politics increased even more in 2006, with Segolene Royal's 2007 French presidency bid. Being the first female candidate with a real chance to be elected, she received special attention that prompted the issue of gender role in the presidential election to be discussed more and more, with an unprecedented intensity until that time.

Although women were still considered “second sex” in French politics by 2010, they occupied positions in offices where the male presence was lower (e.g. municipal councils), following the 2010 elections, “women constituted 48% of local representatives at national level, demonstrating that laws and sanctions for disobedience are crucial to the success of legislative quotas“ (Hoodfar and Tajali, 2011, p. 122).

In 2013, a new electoral law changed how local councillors are elected (introducing a “mixed ticket”, a man/woman) and included cities with more than 1,000 inhabitants in the same election procedure as cities with more 3500 inhabitants. In 2014, an important part of the legislation tightened up the condition that the elected representatives should hold several mandates at the same time, thus increasing the presence of women in their elected offices. During 2013 and 2015, France's local electoral system underwent major changes, so that the changes to the electoral code related to the election of the department councils refer to the fact that the voters in each canton of a department have to choose two members, a man and a woman. As a result of this measure: following the March 2015 department election, half (2,054) of all counsellors (4,108) were women.

Regarding the representation of women from France in European politics, it should be noted that even before the adoption of the Parity Law, women held 40.2% (35/87) of France's seats in the European Parliament. In 2004, holding 43.6% of the seats occupied by women, the parliamentary delegation of France in the European Parliament was one of the most feminized.

In 2012, the National Assembly (lower house of the bicameral French Parliament) comprised 155 female parliamentarians, of whom 125 were part of the left-wing parties. These data confirm the theory that we find in many specialized studies that show that “left-wing parties are more willing to recruit women and develop strategies to increase their number in the political field, which allows them to be socially affirmed in politics” (Alexander and Welzel, 2007, p. 10).

Five years later, in the 2017 elections, the positive effects of a balanced gender policy were not delayed. Thus, following the September 2017 elections, of the 577 seats in the National Assembly, 229 were occupied by women, which means a 39.7% share of women; at the same time, of the 348 seats in the Senate, 112 were occupied by women, which mean a share of 32.2%. Following this elections, France has reached the world ranking of women in national parliaments, on the 16th position, overtaking the United Kingdom, who ranked 39th (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019).

In the *United Kingdom*, the electoral system is voluntary and is based on lists of candidates aiming at choosing at least 35% of women.

Following the 2010 parliamentary elections, the situation of women was the following: out of a total of 650 members, 144 were women (22%). According to the Centre for Women and Democracy (2015), the distribution of female parliamentarians, by political parties, is as it follows: out of a total of 256 labours members, 82 were women; of 306 conservatives, 49 were female and out of a total of 57 liberal-democrats, 7 were women plus 6 additional women, each from another party (Hoodfar and Tajali, 2011, p. 74).

Although, following the 2010 election campaign, the proportion of female candidates increased considerably compared to 2005, this was compromised by the fact that even in the fifth round of the general election, the leaders of the three main parties were male. However, this increase is significant compared to 2001 or 2005 and reveals that there are clear differences with regard to the distribution of the “weaker sex” within the three parties

The general elections that took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015 led to a significant improvement in the representation of women in the political field, namely in the House of Commons of the UK, with some interesting variations in the political parties, so that 191 women were elected in the House of Commons, reaching 29.4% in the national Parliament.

Thus, during the period 2013-2015, the Conservative Party reached a record level for the party, with 68 parliamentary women, their number rising from 49 candidates in 2010 to 170 in 2015. The labours had 99 women in Parliament, the percentage of women in this party present in Parliament, in 2015, being 43%, and of the total number of labour candidates in the election of that year, 212 were women. The Liberal-Democrats have lost all female parliamentarians and the Scottish National Party has managed to increase the number of female parliamentarians from 17% in 2010 to 36% in 2015 (Centre for Women and Democracy, 2015, p. 8).

As for the representation of UK women in the European Parliament, their share increased from 23.9% in 2000 to 25.6% in 2008 and to 33.3% in 2013 (Centre for Women and Democracy, 2015, p. 18).

Following the parliamentary elections in 2017, women managed to occupy 32.0% (208 seats) of the Lower House – House of Commons and 26.4% (208 seats) of the House of Lords, which means a lower position in world rank than after the previous elections and a much lower ranking than countries such as France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Denmark and others (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019).

## Conclusions

One of the conclusions of this article is that increasing access to educational and occupational resources, increases also women's chances of developing professionally, leading to as many women as possible who can benefit from the opportunity to access positions of power, for example, a function in the political area of activity.



Although gender equality in the field of political life is well regulated, the statistics show a low visibility of women in politics, which leads to their low interest in politics and vice versa.

The two parts of the article – theoretical and the case study part – highlight the main obstacles that limit women's participation in political life. First of all, it is about socio-cultural obstacles: in traditional societies dominated by the conservative spirit, the role of women is limited either to work in the household (implicitly to the education of children), or only to carry out activities in areas of activity considered exclusively feminine.

Secondly, it is about how political parties and electoral systems work in a society: we are talking about the lack of promotion of female candidates or the difficulty of women getting an eligible position on electoral lists.

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

**Hirose Nishihara, A., Matsunaga, M.,  
Nonaka, I., Yokomichi, K. (Eds.):  
KNOWLEDGE CREATION IN  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:  
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN  
SOUTHEAST ASIA AND JAPAN,  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 236**

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Vlad I. ROȘCA<sup>1</sup>  
Cristina Veronica PARTENIE<sup>2</sup>

Considering Nonaka's seminal works on Knowledge Management and the particular research interest that has been created thereupon, "*Knowledge Creation in Community Development: Institutional Change in Southeast Asia and Japan*" only comes as a natural addition to the existing scientific literature on the topic. Edited by a group of Tokyo-based scientists, the book is an interdisciplinary attempt to community development and quality of life issues.

To the editors, traditional approaches to the enhancement of quality of life were based on a business management pathway that has been continuously stumbled upon: human resources management, data management, corporate governance, accounting or financial management were considered as some of the tools that practitioners have been used to employ in their quest to improve social standards for the community. This book launches a challenge to consider extended options of solving social aspects and improving quality of life, by encouraging decision-makers to look at knowledge management as a useful means to reach social targets.

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The authors believe that public administration and NGO's can socially innovate when they manage to improve individual and collective mindsets. Changing mindsets does not simply occur by the use of traditional business management, but a deeper, psychological connection is needed: information has to be used as a tool to shift knowledge and thoughts, which will later result in improved habits of doing. Knowledge creation is regarded as a useful process for public or local authorities to ameliorate their problem-solving abilities and to enhance community development.

*“Knowledge Creation in Community Development: Institutional Change in Southeast Asia and Japan”* is a collection of case studies at community level in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan. These countries have been selected as examples since all of them have undergone major challenges throughout their histories, starting with twentieth century wars up to the more recent 1997 Asian or 2007 global financial crises, which (probably apart from Japan, which is considered separately from the rest of the Asian countries in the book) resulted in sharp double-edged societies: wealth here and poverty there. The book focuses on knowledge management-based social innovation in order to reduce societal gaps and improve living standards.

The book opens with an introductory chapter that aims to explain the main concepts to be used throughout the volume, leaving then space for local case studies. Interesting enough, the theoretical concepts such as ‘ba’ (Nonaka, Konno, 1998; Nonaka et al., 2000) or the SECI model are continuously relived throughout the book, in each case a connection being made between real life example and theory. Chapter 2 looks at how Joko Widodo, mayor of the Indonesian city of Solo, improved the efficiency of public administration by taking more time to listen to and discuss with people. While it might obviously seem like ‘the method’ to run a community, in many instances this is not yet the case, so it is worth to have a look at how Widodo has chosen not to use a coercive approach widely used in Indonesia, opting instead for recognition of opinions and ideas of people (p. 32), putting them together in a shared voice.

Chapter 3 tackles a challenging view on Thai public administration: while Thailand is recognized for its strong centralization pressures, the municipality of Yala has managed to reverse the situation and de-centralize its social management. This resulted in improved public services for people irrespective of their race or religion, in a restored public safety and in an environment where peace and reconciliation are promoted (pp. 49-51).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the historical case study of the Japanese City of Mitaka, whose belated post-Second World War reconstruction was a gift of four majors (starting with 1970) opening up for citizen collaboration and participation, accepting ideas from the inhabitants and putting them into practice. Chapter 5 looks at Da Nang City in Vietnam, which, similar to Yala in Thailand, used de-centralization as a tool for offering better care to the tailored needs of its citizens. Chapter 6 touches some bases with social entrepreneurship, as it presents how Antonio Meloto has empowered the poor Filipinos to change their lives. This has happened as a result of a change of mindsets: people were encouraged to commit more individually in order to create more value, to select integrity and honor instead of money (p. 126), to be good and kind to their fellow and to donate or at least offer a pat on the back in times of need (p. 115). The vision of

Antonion Meloto resulted in a strongly bounded civic community, always there to support whenever necessary. Chapter 7 as well finds joint arguments with social entrepreneurship when it looks at the case of Mr. Yokoishi, whose start-up has helped the local community even though it was treated with lack of faith in the beginning.

Chapter 8 looks at how Khun Chai created labor opportunities in Doi Tung, Thailand, developing the local coffee farms sector and improving the payment schemes (p. 172), which not only resulted in a higher social responsibility, but also in a move away from opium production. Chapter 9 sticks to Thailand, presenting how individual and collective thought can solve societal issues.

Chapter 10 presents the conclusions of the book, reiterating the main ideas of the case studies, focusing on the best ways of how to involve people in the community in the problem-solving process. The conclusions highlight that social innovation is made unique by the large array of stakeholders living within the same community, each of them having different demands and, thus, placing different types of pressure on the public authorities. These pressures can be challenged by bringing people together, listening to them and trying to find joint solutions.

Published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018, “*Knowledge Creation in Community Development: Institutional Change in Southeast Asia and Japan*” is one of the first books to look at community development from a knowledge management perspective. Thanks to its widely innovative approach, the book can be considered a road-opener. Moreover, starting from this book, the authors have produced a second volume, called “*Knowledge Creation in Public Administration: A New Paradigm for Innovative Governments in Asia*”, which also presents a new approach to management in local governments. Both volumes are clear indications that soft-power plays its role in community management. By undergoing devastating wars in their recent histories, South-East Asian countries have been used to rather patriarchal, dictatorial styles of management in the past half of the century. Under such circumstances, a softer approach to management, based on participation, information and knowledge-sharing, is regarded as innovative. If this innovation has produced positive results in the hard-power dominated South-East Asia, as the case studies show, then for sure it can be an eye-opener for public administrations in the rest of the world too.

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