

Gender equality and the pandemic: an exploratory study in the Romanian public administration

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Abstract: Gender equality is a fundamental principle in modern society and its promotion is now the center of all the policies and practices of organizations and institutions, trying to outcome the negative impact of the pandemic on women's careers and lives. In Romania, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (ANES) plays a key role in achieving gender equality, being responsible for implementing and monitoring policies and programs that ensure equal rights and opportunities for all members of society. In this respect, the present research was conducted in ANES, in order to identify, the main issues that affected female civil servants in the pandemic, the level of application of the concept of gender equality within the institution, determine the level of awareness of gender equality issues among civil servants and management of the institution and the prevalence of any forms of gender-based discrimination and prejudice, inclusively during pandemic times. By understanding and analyzing these issues, the purpose is to design recommendations for the development of an inclusive and fair working environment within the institution. The study started with the following research questions: (1) What are the main problems encountered by female civil servants during the pandemic?; (2) What is the current level of implementation of the concept of gender equality in the institution and what were the changes caused by the pandemic?; (3) To what extent do civil servants and management understand the impact of gender bias and discrimination on workplace culture and productivity? and (4) How prevalent is gender discrimination within the institution and what forms does it take ? The research methodology consists of a survey based on a questionnaire designed by the authors. The study revealed that stereotypes and gender role biases are considered the main cultural or systemic barriers by female respondents. This indicates that there is an increased awareness among women of the impact of these stereotypes and prejudices on their career opportunities and progress. However, there are difficulties in implementing changes and adopting policies and practices that promote gender equality due to resistance to change from some employees or management. Through training and awareness-raising programs on gender equality, the institution can address resistance to change and differences in perception between men and women. In these programs, it is essential to facilitate open dialogue between women and men, allowing them to understand the negative impact of gender inequality and to identify and develop effective ways to prevent discriminatory situations. Both employees and management will be encouraged to reconsider their mindsets and behaviors, adopting more inclusive and equitable practices and policies.