

EMPOWERING THE WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. A PUBLIC POLICY PROPOSAL FOR IAȘI COUNTY

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Abstract

This public policy proposal highlights the challenges faced by women in Iași County, including violence, teenage motherhood, issues related to women working abroad, poverty among women, and their underrepresentation in local politics. It outlines a general action framework involving various stakeholders, such as public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and professional groups. The proposal sets goals and objectives aligned with the principles, norms, and values of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The public policy proposal is organized into five sections. The first section introduces gender issues in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the European Strategy on Gender Equality 2020-2025, Romania's Sustainable Development Strategy, and the National Strategy for promoting equal opportunities and treatment for women and men and for preventing and combating domestic violence for 2018-2021. The second section provides an analysis of the most severe issues facing women in Iași County, including various forms of violence, teenage motherhood, women working abroad and leaving children behind, how poverty affects women, and their underrepresentation in political decision-making roles. Section three outlines the proposal's goals, general and specific objectives, and identifies the direct and indirect beneficiaries. Section four discusses potential solutions to the identified problems, using SWOT analysis for each proposed option, and presents the rationale for selecting the implementation option, including an assessment of its economic, social, and environmental impact. Section five suggests a consultation framework for adopting the public policy proposal, and summarizes the post-adoption measures.

Keywords: public policy, politics, sustainable development, violence, teenage mother, poverty, migration.

Résumé

Cette proposition de politique publique met en lumière les défis auxquels sont confrontées les femmes du comté de Iași, notamment la violence à l'égard des femmes, la maternité chez les adolescentes, les problèmes liés au travail des femmes à l'étranger, la pauvreté des femmes et leur sous-représentation dans la politique locale. Il décrit un cadre d'action

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général impliquant diverses parties prenantes, telles que des institutions publiques, des organisations non gouvernementales et des groupes professionnels. La proposition fixe des buts et des objectifs alignés sur les principes, normes et valeurs de l'Agenda 2030 pour le développement durable. La proposition de politique publique est organisée en cinq sections. La première section présente les questions de genre conformément à l'Agenda 2030 pour le développement durable, à la Stratégie européenne pour l'égalité des genres 2020-2025, à la Stratégie de développement durable de la Roumanie et à la Stratégie nationale pour promouvoir l'égalité des chances et de traitement entre les femmes et les hommes et pour prévenir et combattre violence domestique pour 2018-2021. La deuxième section fournit une analyse des problèmes les plus graves auxquels sont confrontées les femmes du comté de Iași, notamment diverses formes de violence, la maternité adolescente, les femmes travaillant à l'étranger et laissant leurs enfants derrière elles, la manière dont la pauvreté affecte les femmes et leur sous-représentation dans la prise de décision politique. les rôles. La troisième section présente les buts, les objectifs généraux et spécifiques de la proposition et identifie les bénéficiaires directs et indirects. La quatrième section discute des solutions potentielles aux problèmes identifiés, en utilisant l'analyse SWOT pour chaque option proposée, présente la justification du choix de l'option de mise en œuvre, y compris une évaluation de son impact économique, social et environnemental. La cinquième section propose un cadre de consultation pour l'adoption de la proposition de politique publique, et les mesures post-adoption.

Mots-clés : politique publique, politique, développement durable, violence, mère adolescente, pauvreté, migration.

Rezumat

Această propunere de politică publică evidențiază provocările cu care se confruntă femeile din județul Iași: violența asupra femeilor, maternitatea mamei minore, problemele legate de munca femeilor în străinătate, sărăcia femeilor și subreprezentarea lor în pozițiile de decizie politică la nivel județean și local. Propunerea de politică publică descrie un cadru general de acțiune care implică diverse părți interesate, cum ar fi instituții publice, organizații neguvernamentale și grupuri profesionale. Propunerea stabilește scopuri și obiective aliniate cu principiile, standardele și valorile Agendei 2030 pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă și este organizată în cinci secțiuni. Prima secțiune prezintă problemele de gen în conformitate cu Agenda 2030 pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă, Strategia Europeană pentru Egalitatea de Gen 2020-2025, Strategia de Dezvoltare Durabilă a României și Strategia Națională de promovare a egalității de șanse și de tratament între femei și bărbați și pentru prevenirea și combaterea violenței domestice pentru 2018-2021. A doua secțiune analizează cele mai grave probleme cu care se confruntă femeile din județul Iași: aspecte legate de violența asupra femeilor și fetelor din județul Iași sub toate formele, maternitatea adolescentină, femeile care lucrează în străinătate și problemele cu care se confruntă copiii lăsați acasă, modul în care sărăcia afectează femeile și subreprezentarea acestora în politica locală. A treia secțiune prezintă scopurile, obiectivele generale și specifice ale propunerii și identifică beneficiarii direcți și indirecti. Secțiunea a patra discută soluții potențiale la problemele identificate, folosind analiza SWOT pentru fiecare opțiune propusă, prezintă rațiunea alegerii opțiunii de implementare, inclusiv o evaluare a impactului economic, social și de mediu al acesteia. Secțiunea a cincea propune un cadru de consultare pentru adoptarea propunerii de politici publice, precum și măsurile care trebuie promovate după adoptarea acesteia.

Cuvinte cheie: politici publice, politică, dezvoltare durabilă, violență, mame adolescente, sărăcie, migrație.

Public policies are strategies, programs, laws, and regulations that those in power control the allocation and spending of public resources and promote to solve the problems faced by society, cities, communities, groups of people, and citizens. A public policy is everything that a public authority does or does not do (Parliament, Government, county council, county council president, local council, mayor) in response to social, economic, and environmental issues in the field of national security and defense, in the external relations of the state (Dye, 1984).

Through public policies, the Government fulfills the program for which it receives the investiture vote from the Parliament. Whether it acts directly through regulations and institutions within it or indirectly through agents (Peters, 1986), the Government's actions produce changes in society and the economy (Collins & Crăciun, 2008). Similarly, at the local level, the decisions of public authorities with executive functions (the president of the county council, the mayor) shape the lives of the local community, carrying out the decisions adopted by the deliberative bodies (the county council, the local council). In others word, the public policy refers to the actions or inactions selected by government officials in response to a specific issue or group of related topics (Mungiu-Pippidi, Ioniță, 2002).

Public policy is not a single action, but the sum of the actions or inactions of a public authority. It is a multifaceted approach to problem-solving, addressing areas of activity in which it has competencies provided by the legislation in force (Anderson, 1990; Santo & Verrier, 1993). It is a tool for improving the living conditions of citizens for economic growth (Profiroiu, 2006), and for satisfying citizens' preferences (Andrei, 2007). It involves interrelated decisions that propose objectives, identify means and resources to achieve them (Jenkins, 1978; Miroiu, 2001; Moraru *et al.*, 2019), bringing together the decisions aimed at obtaining specific results, including the options and resources appropriate to achieving the proposed objectives (Thoening, 1989; Popescu, 2006).

As we will see in the present case, the public policy proposal for empowering the role of women in sustainable development describes the problems they face in Iași County (violence against women and girls, teenage mothers, issues of women going to work abroad, the poverty faced by women, the underrepresentation of women in local politics), proposes a general framework for action, involving several categories of stakeholders (public institutions, non-governmental organizations, professional groups), has goals and objectives that are formulated according to certain principles, norms, and values, such as those stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1. Introduction to the issue of gender equality

Promoting gender equality, as well as strengthening the role of women in the context of sustainable development of communities and cities, is a task that must be assumed not only by Romania, as a country that has signed the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development, but by all stakeholders in the field from counties and localities. Gender equality is a fundamental value of the European Union, included in all EU treaties, being a distinct objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - the aim of sustainable development (SDG) no. 5. Gender equality starts from the idea that humanity can reach its full potential only through taking into consideration all its talents and diversity.

Women's potential in society enhances employment by creating new jobs and boosting productivity. Empowering women and improving their socio-economic status could increase the EU's GDP per capita by 6.1% to 9.6%, translating to a rise of 1.95 trillion to 3.15 trillion euros (EIGE, 2023). The European Union leads globally in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Among the top 20 countries worldwide that have achieved the best results in promoting gender equality, 14 are EU members (EM 2030). This ranking is based on the 2019 EU gender equality index, where member states averaged 67.4 out of 100 points, with Sweden achieving the highest score and Romania scoring 54.5 points. The EU's dedication to gender equality is further highlighted by adopting six directives, which have set legal standards for all member states in areas such as workplace equality, access to goods and services, and family leave.

The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 coordinates the European Commission's efforts on gender equality, aiming to create a European space where gender-based violence, discrimination, and structural inequality are relics of the past. This strategy supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and seeks to make gender equality a central priority across all sustainable development goals. Additionally, it reinforces the EU's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. For the timeframe 2020-2025, the Strategy proposes to reach the following objectives:

- to eliminate violence and stereotypes against women and girls;
- to prosper in an economy based on gender equality;
- to have management positions occupied both by men and by women, in all sectors of society;
- to integrate gender mainstreaming and intersectional perspective in EU policies;
- to finance actions aimed at making progress in the field of gender equality in the EU;
- to address gender equality and the emancipation of women worldwide.

Romania has a National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) at the central level. Also, there is the National Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (CONES), an inter-ministerial working group, which aims to identify the best solutions for developing and implementing ANES public policies and to promote equal opportunities for women and men in all areas of public life. It comprises representatives from ministries and other central public administration bodies under the Government or autonomous administrative authorities, as well as from nationally representative trade unions

and employers' associations, and recognized non-governmental organizations active in the field, selected by consensus (Iftimoaei & Gabor, 2021).

ANES is implementing the National Strategy on promoting equal opportunities and of equal treatment of women and men and preventing and combating domestic violence for the period 2018-2021. The national strategy stipulates that inequalities between women and men are a consequence of a long history of asymmetric power relations between women and men, which led to discrimination against women in society, to the partial exploitation of the potential of women and girls. The partial use of human capital represented by women and girls, in the conditions of current demographic, social, and economic changes has effects that are reflected in the evolution of statistical indicators that describe the level of well-being of a society.

This public policy proposal constitutes the first exercise of localizing the objective of sustainable development no. 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, corroborated with its associated targets from the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania (SNDDR, 2018), for Iasi County. The Strategy recognizes that, despite recent progress in the field of gender equality, there still are problems related to the population's preconceptions about the role of women in the family and community, the under-representation of women in leadership and political decision-making, gender pay gaps in specific economic sectors, but especially the issue of violence against women and girls in all forms.

SNDDR focuses on preventing and combating violence against women and girls, ensuring the balanced and effective participation of women in all areas of social life, and encouraging their involvement in leading positions in companies and political and administrative structures at the central and local levels. Although the pay gap between women and men in Romania is low compared to other EU member states, the Strategy aims to identify areas where pay disparities persist. Another goal assumed by SNDDR in the perspective of 2030 is the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation. The third target proposed in the SNDDR aims to ensure women's full and effective participation at all levels of political decision-making, encouraging them to occupy leadership positions in companies, organizations, and institutions in the private and public environment (DDD, 2018).

Within the Prefect's Institution of the Iasi County functions the County Commission for equal opportunities between women and men, constituted through the order of the Prefect and in accordance to Law no. 202/2002 on equal opportunities between women and men with subsequent amendments and completions, namely the Government Decision no. 1054/2005. The composition of the County Commission was updated by the Order of the Prefect no. 136 / 2017. On the website of the Prefect's Institution of Iasi County, there is no report on the activity of the County Commission for equal opportunities between women and men. Issues such as domestic violence, discrimination against women in the labor

market, under-representation of women in political decision-making bodies, and reproductive health for women are not addressed in the context of gender equality. Still, they are the object of activity of public institutions under the coordination of separate authorities or non-governmental organizations (COJES, 2017).

2. Reasons for initiating the public policy proposal

From the perspective of the 2030 Agenda, the worst issues of women in Romania, including in Iasi County, are the violence against women in all its forms, maternity of teenage mothers, women working abroad with children left at home, women affected by poverty, under-representation of women in politics, at the level of Parliament, county councils and local councils.

2.1. Violence against women

Domestic violence is one of the most serious issues faced by women and girls in Romania, including in Iasi County. According to the latest national study on domestic violence conducted by ANES, 6,731 victims were reported in the first half of 2019, with 4,167 (61.91%) being females and 2,564 (38.09%) males. Nationally, the distribution of family aggressors by gender and area of residence is as follows: 4,143 family aggressors, of which 1,555 (37.53%) are females and 2,588 (62.47%) are males (ANES, 2020).

Domestic violence against women is more prevalent in rural areas, with 2,291 female victims (54.98%) compared to 1,876 female victims (45.02%) from urban areas. Out of the total 6,731 domestic violence victims, 5,343 were underage (79.38%), including 2,852 girls (53.38%) and 2,491 boys (46.62%). The counties with the highest numbers of female domestic violence victims are Constanta (488 cases), Galati (454 cases), Timis (236 cases), Gorj (226 cases), and Maramures (193 cases). Social services provided to family aggressors during the reported period included psychological counseling (1,047 cases, 34.96%), counseling for social and occupational reintegration (96 cases, 3.21%), legal counseling (284 cases, 9.48%), counseling and family mediation (1,542 cases, 51.49%), and support for access to treatments (26 cases, 0.87%) (ANES, 2020).

Statistical data from the Iasi County Police Inspectorate show that there has been a continuous increase in the number of victims of domestic violence in Iasi County for the past three years. If, in 2017, there were a total of 1923 cases, the number of victims increased to 2054 the following year. By the end of September 2019, statistics showed that the total number of registered victims was already 1700 people (adult women and men, as well as minors). The cases registered by the Iasi County Police Inspectorate highlight the fact that crimes of domestic violence registered in urban areas exceed the number of cases registered in rural areas (Mărgineanu, 2020).

According to the statistical situation of persons and crimes stipulated by Law no. 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence at the level of Iasi County, during one year (2017-2018), there was an increase in the number of crimes against adult women. If the registered number of assaulted adult men was

323 in 2017 and 332 in 2018, in the case of adult women, the number increased by 160 cases, totaling at the end of 2018 several 1303 of registered cases. Until September 30, 2019, in Iasi County, there were registered 1050 instances of violence against adult women.

The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the issue of domestic violence. The state of emergency declared in the spring of 2020 led to the implementation of sanitary measures such as home isolation, movement restrictions, and physical/social distancing. These measures had a psychological impact on couple relationships within families. Technical unemployment, job losses, reduced income from wages or other sources, and increasing prices for consumer goods and utilities heightened fear and anxiety among individuals and couples, further straining social relationships.

Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic crisis, many women were forced to live with their abusers. Home isolation served as protection against COVID-19, but for many women, it became a place of abuse. In March 2020, the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police reported a 2.3% increase in domestic violence cases compared to the same month in 2019. In April 2020, amid the pandemic, the UN urged governments worldwide to take measures to prevent and combat domestic violence. Throughout the pandemic year, the police issued over 6,500 provisional protection orders, with courts converting half of these into permanent protection orders—an increase of 10% compared to 2019. Considering that approximately 80% of domestic violence in Romania occurs at home, psychiatrist Cozmin Mihai (2020) noted that home isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue.

Domestic violence cases are underreported due to a lack of information, education, and awareness among women, particularly those who are unemployed, have dependent children, or are financially dependent on their partners. To raise public awareness about the consequences of violence against women during the pandemic, the Network for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women organized a public awareness event and protest on October 25, 2020, in University Square, Bucharest. The event was held under the slogan „Together we resist and fight back!”

2.2. Maternity of teenage mothers

The second problem that women face, in order of severity in Iasi County, is that of underage mothers. Adolescent motherhood is an issue that must be analyzed considering the level of education and training of families from which adolescent mothers come, their culture and standard of living, and the lack of health education, including education that can prevent unwanted pregnancies in adolescents. Maternity of teenage mothers is also a problem related to reproductive health. Teenage mothers do not have access to medical services such as conception, pregnancy monitoring, and postnatal health assessment. Most often, pregnancy of teenage mothers becomes an existential problem with a significant psychological and social impact.

According to data provided by Eurostat, 23% of mothers under 18 in the European Union live in Romania, our country ranking first in this regard among EU member states. Eurostat data also show that, in 2018 alone, 8621 girls became mothers before the age of majority (10-17 years), and 725 were in this situation before turning 15. According to sociological research conducted by the „Savați Copiii Romania / Save the Children Romania” organization, the problem of underage mothers is complicated by the fact that they did not benefit from any social assistance services.

According to statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics, out of the 10,579 live births recorded in Iasi County in 2018, 831 were to teenage mothers (up to 19 years old), accounting for 7.85% of all live births. Among these, 13 live births were from mothers under 15 years old. Additionally, out of the total live births in Iasi County in 2018, 7,902 were within marriage and 2,677 were out of wedlock. Of the live births outside of marriage, 913 were in urban areas and 1,764 in rural areas (INS, 2019).

In most cases, children who have teenage mothers are not recognized by fathers, who are also minors and do not work. This situation creates difficulties related to the cohabitation of the teenage mother with the child's parents/grandparents, and the care for the child. In addition to the economic problems faced by minor mothers, there are the issues related to not assuming the responsibilities arising from the „role of the mother” or „role of the father”, the inability of the teenage mother to cope with the situation, and the lack of emotional support. Teenage mothers face difficulties in vocational training and later integration into the labor market, challenges related to living standards, and a high risk of abandoning the child in residential institutions or placing him in the care of the extended family (Iftimoaei, 2020).

2.3. The women left to work abroad

External migration has multiple effects on the entire social system. If a significant segment of the active population leaves, the birth rate and fertility decrease, and mortality increases because the elderly population is left behind. The migration of the active female population also leads to a decrease in the labor force. Migrants increase the fertility rate in the country of destination, reducing that of the country of origin. These social, demographic and economic consequences of external migration are dealt with extensively in specialized literature (Iftimoaei & Baci, 2018).

Due to a low standard of living, poverty, and the precariousness of household resources related to the needs for education and care of children, many women go to work abroad. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics, there are 8711 people temporarily emigrated from Iasi County (for more than 12 months), and 3977 were women (46%). Of the 3977 women who temporarily emigrated, 2510 reside in the rural area of Iasi county (63%) (INS, 2020).

Women working abroad are affected by burnout, a state of physical or mental deterioration that occurs mainly in people whose activities involve frequent

interactions with other people. Romanian women who emigrated to Italy to carry out domestic activities, including personal assistants for people with various types of disabilities, are affected by a distinct kind of burnout, the so-called „Italian syndrome”. The media reported countless cases describing the situation of some Romanian women who were doing domestic work abroad and who suffered abuse. They were sexually harassed, as well as cases of women victims of rape and even deaths due to employer violence. Most cases of abuse occur in women who work without legal forms.

Romanians constitute the largest foreign community in Italy, representing almost a quarter of the country’s total foreign population (23.1%), while women represent 57.5% of the Romanian community in Italy. These data come from the report „The Value of Domestic Work. The Economic and Social Role of Families – Employers of Domestic Workers”, scientifically coordinated by Lawyer Massimo De Luca. Another study presented publicly by the Italian Assindatcolf Bureau shows that out of the 1.2 million „caregivers” (“badante” as they are called) in Italy, six out of ten work without legal forms (Stoica, 2020).

The issue of women going to work abroad, with or without legal forms, must also be analyzed, considering the children left at home in the care of spouses or relatives. According to data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, at the end of 2019, there were 86263 children whose parents had gone abroad, of which 15858 had both parents working abroad. The psychological and social problems of children with mothers left abroad to work determine consequences like children often being neglected, children at risk of dropping out of school, or even face the risk of being abandoned in residential institutions.

2.4. Poverty is a gender issue in Romania

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms and contexts (SDG 1). Currently, over 700 million people, approximately 10% of the global population, endure severe poverty and struggle for survival. Having a job does not always guarantee an escape from poverty; according to UN statistics, 8% of workers and their families worldwide are affected by severe poverty. Addressing another sustainable development goal (SDG 2) of the 2030 Agenda, efforts are directed at eliminating hunger. Despite Romania’s membership in the EU for more than a decade, the relative poverty rate has only marginally decreased, from 24.6% in 2007 to 23.5% in 2018.

In Romania, women experience higher rates of poverty compared to men. In 2018, the poverty rate was 22.5% for men and slightly higher at 24.5% for women, meaning one in four women in Romania lives in poverty. Before social transfers, excluding pensions, the poverty rate for women rises to 29%. This indicates that without government interventions such as child and family benefits, unemployment benefits, sick leave benefits, educational scholarships, support for people with disabilities, and other social benefits, the poverty rate for women would increase by more than four percentage points.

Data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS) show that women in the North-East region are most affected by poverty. In 2018, the poverty rate for this region, where Iasi County is situated, was 35,6%, decreasing by only one percentage compared to 2007, when it was 36.6%. Transfers from the state budget and investments with European and government funds have yet to lead to a significant increase in living standards, as shown by official statistics.

The National Institute of Statistics (INS) provides additional relevant statistics on the situation of women in Romania:

- 37.2% of single women are affected by poverty, compared to 23.5% of single men;
- 36.7% of single individuals aged 65 and over are affected by poverty;
- 41.6% of parents with at least one dependent child (single-parent families) are affected by poverty, with the situation worsening for women with dependent children.

Eurostat calculates the AROPE indicator, which measures the risk of poverty or social exclusion. This indicator includes people with incomes below the poverty line, individuals experiencing severe material deprivation, and those living in low-income households. At the national level in Romania, the AROPE indicator stands at 32.5%, with 31% for men and 33.9% for women. These statistics highlight significant disparities and challenges faced by women in Romania concerning poverty and social exclusion.

2.5. The under-representation of women in politics

On the one hand, the under-representation of women in political structures (Parliament, County Council, local town halls, and city halls) is instead an effect of the discouragement they feel concerning the quality of the Romanian political elite. On the other hand, the appointment of women to eligible positions on the lists of candidates is not encouraged by a mechanism for allocating positions, even though women represent over 51% of Romania's population.

Political parties play the most crucial role in nominating candidates for public positions. In this regard, a report by the European Institute for Gender Equality shows that men lead most EU political parties. The report points out that in 2014, women accounted for only 13% of leaders and 33% of deputy leaders of major political parties across the EU. Formal and informal networks within political parties are extremely important in the rise of political decision-making positions. The under-representation of women in politics is associated with gender-predominant stereotypes and the predominantly „masculine” culture of men-led political parties. The gender stereotypes are also reflected in the distribution of ministerial portfolios and administrative management positions within ministries. Men dominate portfolios related to essential state functions such as defense, justice, and foreign policy. At the same time, women are concentrated in socio-cultural ministries, reinforcing stereotypes that women are better suited in areas such as education, health, and culture (EIGE, 2020).

Professor Ionela Baluță at the University of Bucharest, an expert in gender equality, believes that „in the logic of democratic political architecture, based on representativeness and percentages, the actual number of women included in leadership structures of political parties, local political structures and especially in Parliament or in Government is a mandatory indicator”. The researcher also explains the refusal to establish „gender quotas” to increase women's representation in political decision-making structures by the persistence of preconceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that give women traditional roles, mostly household, in educating children and care for older people. Attempts to increase women's political representation are sanctioned as „Marxist, neo-communist and feminist, three ideological positions indexed in the post-communist public and political space” (Băluță, 2012).

During 1990-2020, the lowest share of women in the Parliament was registered in the 1992-1996 mandate, when only 3.7% of the total number of Parliament members were women, and the highest share of women in Parliament was recorded in the 2016-2020 parliamentary term when 19.3% of Parliament members were women. Increasing women's parliamentary representation by 15 percent is a visible step forward in their political participation. Regarding executive power, the highest representation of women in the Government was recorded during the so-called „technocratic government” 2015-2017, when women held 40.0% of the ministers' seats, meaning 9 ministerial positions occupied by women (Dalban, 2020). On January 29, 2018, the first woman-led Government in Romania was appointed. Women remain politically underrepresented at the local level, in the county and regional councils, and positions of president and vice-president of county councils, mayors, and deputy mayors, respectively. At the local level, the traditionalist / conservative approach to the role of women in local community politics is evident from the perspective of gender equality.

Romania does not have a problem regarding women occupying leading positions in public administration. In 2019, in the central public administration, for the 2 grades of decision-making positions (decision-making grade 1 (general secretary, deputy general secretary, general manager, deputy general manager) and decision-making grade 2 (director, deputy director), the positions were occupied by 265 men (46,5%) and 305 women (53,5%), placing Romania on the 4th position in the EU-28 ranking. Compared to 2018 2019, the percentage of women increased by 3,9 percent (from 49,6% in 2018 to 53,5% in 2019). The average at the EU-28 level for 2019 for the 2 decision-making degrees was 57,4% men and 42,6% women. Romania has a much higher female percentage than the European average (ANES, 2019).

Since 2000, gender studies have been included in the master's degree studies at Bucharest, Cluj, and Timisoara universities. In its somewhat conservative tradition, Iasi does not have such a study program, although academics are interested in the topic. Even though gender studies have claimed a place in university curricula, controversy over their academic status continues.

Table 1. The public policy proposal: general and specific objectives

Name of the public policy proposal	Empowering the role of women in the context of sustainable development of the Iasi County
The goal of the public policy proposal	The Public policy proposes several measures to solve/improve the problems of women in Iasi County and increase their social and economic role in the context of the requirements for sustainable development of cities and local communities.
General and specific objectives	<p>General objective 1 To prevent and combat all types of violence against women, domestic violence, women and girls trafficking, sexual exploitation of women and girls, as well as any form of abuse.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific objective 1.1 – to create a unitary and integrated system for reporting, monitoring, and evaluating cases of violence against women from the Iasi County, through public-private partnerships among public institutions and non-governmental organizations activating the field of gender equality. ▪ Specific objective 1.2 – to develop a complex of social services focused on preventing and combating domestic violence, including establishing sheltered housing for victims of domestic violence in Iasi County. <p>General objective 2 To ensure the access of women and girls to services of information, education, and counseling about their sexual and reproductive health in the context of the increase in the number of teenage mothers and of the risk of child abandonment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific objective 2.1 – to create a center for social services to prevent unwanted pregnancies with teenagers and young girls for combating sexually transmitted diseases and to prevent child abandonment in governmental care institutions. ▪ Specific objective 2.2 – to develop information, awareness, and education campaigns about the risks of unprotected sexual relations, with multiple partners, or of unwanted pregnancies in teenagers or young girls. <p>General objective 3 To promote several measures for holding back women from the Iasi county exposed to the risk of external migration in order to prevent migration caused by a low level of living, and to encourage the return of women left to work abroad.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific objective 3.1 – to organize extended sociological research, both quantitative (based on a questionnaire) and qualitative (based on an interview) with the goal of identifying and analyzing the reasons for the external migration of women from the Iasi county – currently an insufficiently investigated phenomenon.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific objective 3.2 – to develop a center for monitoring and evaluating the situation of women from the Iasi county who have gone to work abroad and of women who have returned to Romania with the goal of developing needs-oriented social services. <p>General objective 4</p> <p>To increase the level of employment of women from the communities affected by poverty from the Iasi county, to combat employment without legal forms, to give more value to the work women are doing in their households, and to lower pay disparities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific objective 4.1 – to develop information, awareness, and outreach campaigns about women working without legal forms in the Iasi county and of women left to work abroad. ▪ Specific objective 4.2 – to increase the level of employment of women from the communities or areas at risk of poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion through services for assessing the social and professional situation, through counseling, orientation, mediation, and integration on the labor market, starting from the „no one left behind” principle. ▪ Specific objective 4.3 – to organize information, awareness, and outreach campaigns about the role of women in the sustainable development of cities and communities, including through lowering pay disparities in the economic sectors where such disparities still exist. <p>General objective 5</p> <p>To promote gender equality in public, political, and economic life, to increase the representation of women in political leading positions, to empower the role of women in the sustainable development of cities and communities from the Iasi county.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific objective 5.1 – to initiate conferences/workshops with the leaders of political parties in order to increase the level of political involvement of women and their representation in decision-making political structures, including through introducing political representation according to gender quota. ▪ Specific objective 5.2 – to create a multi-institutional work group to analyze concrete ways to stimulate women's involvement in the projects of sustainable development of the Iasi county.
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Beneficiaries	<p><i>Direct beneficiaries</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Women from Iasi County, especially from rural areas and from communities and areas affected by poverty, at risk of discrimination, marginalization, and social exclusion. ▪ Women victims of domestic violence, trafficked, or sexually exploited. ▪ Girls from poor families and poor communities, lacking means of education and information, lacking access to specialized services of contraception, sexual and reproductive health; teenage mothers from the Iasi county; single mothers with children from unwanted pregnancies and who lack financial means. ▪ Women from the Iasi county left to work abroad, with or without children left in the care of relatives, at risk of abandoning children in residential institutions. ▪ Women working without legal forms (undeclared workforce) in the Iasi county or abroad. ▪ Women working in the same positions as men, but unequally paid, economically discriminated against, and subject to different forms of abuse at the workplace. ▪ Household workers and the care and education of children, care for elderly or disabled people, not socially and economically recognized and recompensed. ▪ Women involved in politics, but who are insufficiently encouraged to obtain management positions in politics or administration. ▪ Any woman or girl in a vulnerable position due to discrimination, marginalization, or exclusion for gender criteria. <p><i>Indirect beneficiaries</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local cities and communities from the Iasi county involved in the process of sustainable development. ▪ The economy of the Iasi county may benefit from a substantial increase of workforce through women's employment, their empowerment, and entrepreneurial skills. ▪ Local families and communities at risk of poverty and social exclusion. ▪ Children from mothers left to work abroad, left in the care of extended families/relatives. ▪ Children of underage mothers, who do not benefit from support from their families and who are at risk of being abandoned in residential institutions, the mothers being at risk of school drop-out.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public institutions, non-governmental organizations, cities, and communities who, through empowering women in society and economy, increase their resilience to climate changes and requirements regarding environmental protection.
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3. Description of options for solving the issues identified in the research phase of the public policy

In order to solve the problems faced by women in Iasi County and to capitalize on their potential in the sustainable development of cities and local communities, the public policy proposal provides three working options:

- the first option is to solve these problems through an institutional formula offered by the Iasi County Council (ICC), based on the financial, logistical, and administrative key role in the socio-economic development of the county;
- the second option is that the Prefect's Institution of the Iasi County assumes to solve the problems described in the public policy proposal, institution within which functions the County Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (COJES);
- the third option aims to empower women in the sustainable development of Iasi County by involving the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Social Services (FONSS), which brings together non-governmental organizations providing social services for vulnerable groups in Iasi.

Option 1 – The Iasi County Council becomes a leader in empowering the role of women in the context of sustainable development of local cities and communities

The County Council represents the local public administration's authority, constituted at the county level, for coordinating the local councils' activity to realize the public services for the county interest. The County Council is the only institution in the territory that, through the attributions conferred by law, can decide the establishment or reorganization of institutions, public services, companies, and autonomous administrations.

The County Council authorizes the spending of budgetary funds. At the proposal of the president of the county council, the county council approves the county budget, the transfers of credits, the use of the budgetary reserve, the closing account of the financial year, contracts, and guarantees loans. This key institution for the sustainable development of the county has all the legal and administrative tools to promote strategies, forecasts, and programs for the economic, social, and environmental development of the county.

Based on the approval of the local councils of the administrative-territorial units, the County Council establishes the projects of organization and arrangement of the county territory, as well as of its general urban development and the

component administrative-territorial units; monitors how such proposals are carried out, in cooperation with the communal, city or municipal public administration authorities involved; approves the technical-economic documentation for investments of county interest, within limits and under the conditions of the law.

The County Council is the institution with the most significant legitimacy to perform public attributions. The president and the members of the County Council are elected by direct vote of citizens. Solving the issues regarding the sustainable development of cities and local communities depends mainly on the political will embodied by the County Council.

So far, the activity of the Iasi County Council has been coordinated based on the Strategy for the socio-economic development of Iasi County for 2014-2020, a document whose validity expires at the end of this year (CJI, 2020). For the next period, it is necessary to update this development strategy, considering the objectives of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania and the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of OPTION 1 – Iasi County Council

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key institution in the sustainable development of Iasi County; ▪ Institution with the highest level of legitimacy; ▪ Authorizes the spending of budgetary funds; ▪ Coordinates the activity of local councils; ▪ Has its departments working in the field of sustainable development; ▪ Can decide on the establishment or re-organization of institutions, public services, different entities, or autonomous municipal companies; ▪ Elaborates development strategies or growth programs; ▪ Allocates, accesses, and involves financial, personnel, logistical, and administrative resources in order to elaborate and implement projects; ▪ Can establish inter-institutional work groups for solving economic, social, and environmental issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The public consultation process is lengthy, and depends on the involvement of local public institutions; ▪ The analysis and approval in specialized committees of the County Council depend on how much county counselors know about the topic and the issues brought to discussion in the public policy proposal; ▪ Gender equality, promoting equal chances for men and women is a „sensitive” topic from political and social points of view, there is the risk of controversies that may lead to prolonging the process of consultation, analysis, and approval in the specialized committees of the Iasi County Council.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The pandemic crisis, followed by the economic crisis, was in itself an opportunity to change the world we live in through promoting projects, measures, and solutions for sustainable development which will lead to a balance between economic growth –social welfare – environmental protection; ▪ The coordination with the public policies of the Department for Sustainable Development within the Romanian Government and with the transfer of <i>know-how</i> from the governmental level accelerates the process of elaboration and implementation of local public policies in the field of sustainable development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementing the public policy depends to a large extent on the President of the County Council integrating and assuming it; ▪ Promoting projects of county decisions depends very much on the political will of county counsellors, and on their sensitivity to the issue of gender equality.

Option 2 – Capacity building of the County Commission for Gender Equality (COJES) in view of empowering women for the sustainable development of the Iasi county

The county commission is an inter-institutional structure with a consultative role, organized within the Prefect's Institution of the Iasi County, made up of representatives of public institutions coordinated at the county level by the Prefect's Institution by representatives of territorial branches of the leading national trade unions, as well as of leaders of non-governmental organizations in the field of promoting gender equality in the Iasi County.

The Commission proposes an integrated approach to equal opportunities for women and men. It does this by including the principle of gender equality in the development and implementation of sectoral policies through the institutions represented in COJES. As part of its activities, the Commission conducts a thorough assessment of the state of implementation and compliance with relevant legislation at the county level. It then develops recommendations for local public administration authorities, urging them to implement specific policies and programs to promote the principle of equal opportunities between women and men.

Through the contribution of the representatives of public institutions and the organizations that compose it, the County Commission elaborates reports on the concrete application of the policy of gender equality in different sectors of activity at the local level. These reports will be communicated to the National Commission for Equal Opportunities between women and men (CONES) and to central and local public administration authorities. At the same time, the County

Commission makes available to local media information on positive and negative experiences in preventing and combating gender discrimination and the application of the principle of equal opportunities between women and men.

Being a consultative body, COJES does not have its budget, cannot establish institutions or access funding for projects, and makes decisions only with consultative roles and addresses other public institutions or organizations not part of the commission.

Table 3. SWOT analysis of Option 2 – COJES

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ COJES offers an inter-institutional framework with informative and consultative roles; ▪ Members of the COJES include representatives of public institutions coordinated by the Prefect's Institution at the county level, partners of dialogue at the county level (main national trade unions and patronages); ▪ The Commission proposes an integrated approach to equal opportunities for women and men by including the principle of gender equality in the development and implementation of sectoral policies; ▪ The Commission functions within the Prefect's Institution, which represents the Government at the county level and takes care that legislation is respected, including in the field of gender equality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ COJES is a consultative body, does not have its own resources, can't access financing or establish institutions under its coordination; ▪ The decisions of the Commission are simple recommendations at the county level; ▪ Due to restrictions for physical distancing, the commission cannot meet during the pandemic crisis, does not develop activities, does not pass decisions, even the title of recommendations; ▪ The fact that the site of the Prefect's Institution of the Iasi County does not post reports on the activity of the Commission shows that before the pandemic crisis, COJES had not developed activities for promoting gender equality, compared to other institutional priorities at the county level.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information and outreach for the management of the Prefect's Institution of the Iasi County may create the proper environment for re-starting the activity of the COJES; ▪ The worsening of issues of women and girls throughout the crisis period may create a „window of opportunity” for analysis within the COJES and for developing recommendations in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At the county level, preventing and combating the effects of any crisis (pandemic, economic, war) at the county level is the responsibility of the Prefect's institution, through the County Commission for Emergency Situations, requiring considerable human, financial, logistical, and administrative resources, which diminishes receptivity to gender equality;

<p>the field of gender equality;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-starting the activity of the COJES, presentation in the media of activities for promoting gender equality may inform, outreach, and render the public opinion more aware of the issues of women and girls from the Iasi county. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The organization of elections was superimposed over the priorities related to managing the effects of emergencies and overloaded the work of the Prefect's Institution, creating the premises for inconsistent involvement in resolving gender issues.
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Option 3 – Empowering the role of women for the sustainable development of the Iasi County through the involvement of the Federation of Non-government Organizations for Social Services (FONSS)

FONSS is a federation of non-governmental organizations, established through the project „The NGO Voice for the Community!”, implemented in the North-Eastern region of Romania by a group of organizations led by the „Alături de Voi” Romania Foundation as Lead Applicant, „Alternative Sociale” Association, „Save the Children” Association from Iasi, The Centre for Social Development, the Caritas Diocesan Centre, the COTE Foundation, Iosif Foundation, Bethany Foundation for Social Services, „Star of Hope” Foundation and World Vision Romania Foundation (FONSS, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, FONSS publicly stood out by creating a Social Emergencies Centre (SEC) to provide psycho-emotional support, information, and counseling to people infected and affected by the new coronavirus infection. SEC also benefited from the support of the Voluntary Ambulance Service, Life Association, „Saint Nicholas” College, and the involvement of volunteers from the I.T. & C field and the local communities.

Since its establishment in 2014, FONSS has gained considerable experience in advocacy to strengthen the capacity of non-governmental organizations in the field of social services by involving them in the development and implementation of local, regional, national, and cross-border public policies aimed at developing social services and their participation in the sustainable development of cities and local communities. The local and national media present the activities carried out by FONSS; they benefit from visibility in the online and offline environment.

Table 4. SWOT Analysis of Option 3 – FONSS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FONSS is representative of non-governmental organizations providing social services at local, county, and regional levels; ▪ has considerable experience in <i>advocacy</i> for capacity building of non - governmental organizations in the field of social services; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The financing sources of FONSS are not constant, they depend on accessing public and/or private financing based on projects, on the <i>opening</i> of certain financing lines specific to social services; ▪ Within public institutions there is a residual perception according to which non-governmental

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FONSS has the capacity to mobilize quickly in crisis situations, as they proved during the establishment of the emergency situation when it set up the Social Emergencies Centre; ▪ FONSS has the capacity to develop and implement projects directly and indirectly through the collaboration of affiliated non-governmental organizations; ▪ The activities carried out by FONSS have a public impact, the media and social media are covered, and they raise awareness and reach the public opinion; 	<p>organizations act opportunistically, to solve short-term social problems, fully assuming the benefits in the public image;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FONSS advocates for capacity building of non-governmental organizations that provide social services, not having a strategic orientation aimed at promoting gender equality and solving the complex problems of women and girls in Iasi County, in the medium and long term.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic represented an opportunity for non-governmental organizations within FONSS to act in the field of sustainable development, assuming the implementation of the sustainable development objective no. 5 - Gender equality at the county and local level; ▪ An opportunity can be created by involving non-governmental organizations within FONSS in reactivating the County Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (COJES) and supporting the public policy proposal within this county commission within the Prefect's Institution of the Iasi County. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This public policy proposal aims at a strategic, unitary, and integrated, long-term action to solve the proposed problems, which implies constant activities and involves considerable human, financial, logistical, and administrative resources; ▪ There is difficult access (restrictive eligibility conditions for NGOs) to consistent financial resources for the implementation of the public policy; ▪ The refusal of public institutions to accept FONSS as a leader for the implementation of this public policy proposal.

4. Reasons for choosing the work option, identification, and impact assessment

From the three options / institutional formulas of the public policy proposal, I decided on *Option 1 – the Iasi County Council as a leader in empowering the role of women in the sustainable development of cities and communities, for the following reasons:*

- The Iasi County Council (ICC) is the key authority in developing the county, cities, and local communities. It has the institutional capacity to mobilize and access financial resources from its governmental and European sources. This financial prowess allows the ICC to effectively carry out the public policy proposal's general and specific objectives.
- The ICC is the county public authority that coordinates local councils' activities to ensure the development of public services within the county. The institution organizes and leads the public services of the county; analyses proposals concerning the environmental protection promoted by cities and communes; establishes the general organization and urban development of towns in the county; coordinates the public and private domain of the county; performs works and services for the county in association with other public institutions; cooperates with other foreign partners to fulfill its legal duties. ICC will elaborate a sustainable development strategy of Iasi County for the next period, integrating the sustainable development objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including SDG 5 - „Gender Equality”.
- ICC has a specialized Department of Sustainable Development and the Office for Governmental Programmes which manages programs and projects with government funding in Iasi County. It can offer know-how in implementing government projects that assume sustainable development objectives.
- The General Department of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) is also subordinated to the ICC and coordinates social work activities in the Iasi County. Within DGASPC Iasi functions an Office for Projects and Partnerships with NGOs through which are developed and implemented in public-private partnership, projects with county, governmental, European, and international funding (World Bank) in the field of providing social services for people in difficulty, with special needs, at risk.
- An inter-institutional Work Group for the Elaboration of the County Strategy of social work for 2021-2027 was recently established within the ICC. Law 292/2011 on social assistance stipulates that local public authorities have attributions in the „elaboration by national strategies and locally identified needs of the county and local strategy for the development of social services on medium and long term, after having consulted public and private providers, professional associations and organizations representing the beneficiaries and are responsible for its application”. This creates a window of opportunity for strategic planning for the social protection of vulnerable women in Iasi County.
- ICC is a partner in the project „Fair Cities: Integrating the 2030 Agenda into Local Policies during Migration and Refugee Flows”, together with BRCT Iasi and international partners, which, through the experience gained in the field of sustainable development, can assume the

implementation of this proposal of public policy, ensuring the sustainability of the results of this project in the field of sustainable development.

- Until the elaboration of the sustainable development strategy of the Iasi county, by the decision of the President of ICC, an interinstitutional working group can be set up to start consultations on the public policy proposal by co-opting the representatives of public institutions at the county level and non-governmental organizations. The group will examine this public policy proposal and will take the necessary legal and administrative measures to adopt it.

Table 5. Impact Assessment

General and specific objectives	Impact on the economy and on the business field	Social impact	Impact on the environment
General objective 1 – To prevent and combat all types of violence against women, domestic violence, women and girls trafficking, sexual exploitation of women and girls, as well as any form of abuse.			
<p>Specific objective 1.1 – to create a unitary and integrated system for reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of cases of violence against women from the Iasi County, through public-private partnerships among public institutions and non-governmental organizations activating in the field of gender equality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessing county, European or other international programs to finance this system involves the purchase of equipment, consumables, and maintenance services, contributing to the support of companies and the local and national business environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The creation of target groups made up of women victims of domestic violence, in accordance with the types of abuse to which they are subjected facilitates a targeted approach to the problems they face. ▪ The development of this unitary and integrated system in the already existing institutional framework contributes to the diversification and professionalization of social 	

		services, as well as to the multiplication of benefits for the target groups and to other categories of indirect beneficiaries.	
<p>Specific objective 1.2 – to develop a complex of social services focused on preventing and combating domestic violence, including establishing sheltered housing for victims of domestic violence in Iasi County.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The social services complex also includes sheltered housing for women victims of domestic violence, which means construction works, landscaping, and interior equipment, contracted by construction companies, which means a benefit for the business environment, in a time of economic crisis. ▪ Increasing the employment of women victims of domestic violence, through counselling, guidance, mediation, and socio-professional integration generates revenue for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing integrated social services aimed at solving/improving the problems faced by direct beneficiaries. ▪ Reducing the number of women victims of domestic violence through social, psychological, and medical assistance services, contributes to maintaining community peace and security in accordance with SDG 16 - „Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New construction works, interior design, and equipment are carried out with specialized approvals from the Environmental Agency, the State Inspectorate for Constructions, and other institutions with attributions in this field of activity.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the state budget. The development of the social services complex contributes to the creation of jobs for social assistance professionals. 		
<p>General objective 2 – To ensure the access of women and girls to information, education, and counselling services about their sexual and reproductive health in the context of the increase in the number of teenage mothers and of the risk of child abandonment.</p>			
<p>Specific objective 2.1 – to create a center for social services to prevent unwanted pregnancies with teenagers and young girls for combating sexually transmitted diseases and to prevent child abandonment in governmental care institutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decreasing the financial pressure on the social services system in Iasi County through activities to prevent unwanted pregnancies and/or social assistance for children born to minor mothers. Of the total budget of a county council, between 30 and 60% is allocated for social expenditures, depending on the complexity of the existing social problems and the degree of economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing the abandonment of children born to minor mothers in residential institutions or in the care of relatives means continuing the care of the child in the biological family, avoiding problems related to endangering his psycho-emotional balance. Preventing deviance and delinquency phenomena in children born to teenage mothers, who do not have educational resources in the family of origin. This specific objective contributes to achieving the targets in SDG 	

	<p>of the county. Preventing social and/or health problems is a less costly financial measure than effective combating, preserving budgetary resources that can thus be directed to finance public investment projects by contracting services provided by companies.</p>	<p>3- Health and Welfare of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p>	
<p>Specific objective 2.2 – to develop information, awareness, and education campaigns about the risks of unprotected sexual relations, with multiple partners, or of unwanted pregnancies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reducing the costs necessary to finance social and psychological assistance services, and medical services through preventive measures. ▪ Reorientation of the funds thus saved towards the financing of public investment projects that generate economic effects on the horizon, involving labor, equipment, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases, contagious diseases, and other types of diseases that can affect social relations and the health of couples, and the local community. ▪ Prevention of unwanted pregnancies also contributes to reducing the abandonment of children born to teenage mothers in residential care institutions. ▪ This specific objective 	

	and technologies provided by companies, which means supporting the private environment through public investments.	contributes to achieving the targets in SDG 3 - „Health and Welfare” and SDG 5 - „Quality Education” from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.	
<p>General objective 3 – To promote several measures for holding back women from the Iasi county exposed to the risk of external migration, to prevent migration caused by a low level of living, and to encourage the return of women left to work abroad.</p>			
<p>Specific objective 3.1 – to organize an extended sociological research, both quantitative (based on a questionnaire) and qualitative (based on an interview) with the goal of identifying and analysing the reasons for the external migration of women from the Iasi county – currently an insufficiently investigated phenomenon.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carrying out a procedure for the procurement of research services in the social field, according to ongoing legislation, by contracting a private provider. ▪ The dissemination of the research report to partners of social dialogue from the economic environment (employers, companies) to know the economic causes of external migration of the female labor force sensitizes the employment policy by hiring female 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowing the social consequences (family breakdown, child abandonment, placement in the care of relatives or social assistance institutions), as well as demographic ones (decreased birth rate and fertility in the country of origin) contributes to lower social costs. ▪ The development of social services aimed at solving the problems of women and girls brings benefits to local communities and other types of beneficiaries. 	

	labor in Iasi County.		
<p>Specific objective 3.2 – to develop a center for monitoring and evaluating the situation of women from the Iasi county who have gone to work abroad and of women who have returned to Romania to develop needs-oriented social services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting a set of measures to increase the retention of women at risk of migration by employment in the country of origin avoids the import of labor from abroad which involves higher costs for local companies. ▪ Increasing women's employment, and equal pay to men for similar positions contributes to economic development. ▪ Women working legally abroad send money to the country (remittances) that support domestic consumption and local production activities, which generate an economic impact in connection with achieving SDG 8 - „Decent work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This center for monitoring and evaluating the situation of women working abroad contributes to maintaining connections with children and families in the country of origin. ▪ The development of the center contributes to the diversification and professionalization of local social services. ▪ Remittances have a significant social impact on the well-being of the population in the country of origin, contributing to the achievement of SDG 3 - „Health and Welfare” of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ▪ External migration diminishes the pressure on the internal labor market, and increases employment in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preventing and combating illegal migration can have beneficial effects on the environment in countries of transit and destination; immigrants do not always have decent housing; and improvised homes and temporary settlements affect the quality of the environment.

	and growth” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.	the destination countries, being a temporary measure to solve some problems related to the standard of living in the country of origin.	
General objective 4 – To increase the employment of women from the communities affected by poverty in Iasi County, to combat employment without legal forms, to give more value to the working women in their households, and to reduce the pay gap			
Specific objective 4.1 – to develop information, awareness, and outreach campaigns about women working without legal forms in the Iasi county and of women left to work abroad.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ According to the European Commission, increasing women's employment will lead to an increase in EU GDP per capita by up to almost 10% by 2050. ▪ Preventing and combating work without legal forms contributes to the increase of taxes and the state budget. ▪ Maintaining women in the country of origin contributes to increasing employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Declared work, taxed according to legal provisions, ensures women's access to social, medical, and retirement services. ▪ Working with legal forms prevents employers from abusing against women, both in the country and abroad. 	
Specific objective 4.2 – to increase the employment of women from the communities or areas at risk of poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion through services for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing the employment of women through professional training courses, and through the development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing the number of jobs for women leads to economic growth favoring inclusion and lowering 	

<p>assessing the social and professional situation, through counseling, orientation, mediation, and integration on the labor market, starting from the „no one left behind” principle.</p>	<p>of entrepreneurial skills contributes to entrepreneurship and business development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing women's employment and decent work contributes to achieving SDG 8 - „Decent Work and Growth” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 	<p>poverty, one of the major priorities of the 2030 Agenda.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing women's employment and decent work contributes to achieving SDG 10 - „Reducing inequalities within and among countries” of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 	
<p>Specific objective 4.3 – to organize information, awareness, and outreach campaigns about the role of women in the sustainable development of cities and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The estimated impact of increasing gender equality varies considerably from one member state to another, depending on the current level of achievement of this equality goal. Overall, the results are very good, with some countries growing by about 4% of GDP, in others exceeding 10%. ▪ Equal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities and lowering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lowering pay disparities is also associated with the implementation of flexible work regimes, favourable for family life. ▪ Improving the balance between professional and private life for those who have children or other people in care stimulates the creative potential of women, the participation in socio-cultural and educational activities, and strengthens the role of women in the local 	

	<p>wage disparities between women and men contribute to employment and economic growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eliminating the pay gap between women and men, and improving women's access to higher-paying jobs attracts women to the labor market. ▪ This specific objective contributes to achieving the targets of SDG 10 - „Reducing Inequalities” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 	<p>community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher wages can help women out of poverty and reduce the gaps between women's and men's retirement funds. ▪ This specific objective has a social impact on the development of cities and human settlements so that they are open to all, safe, resilient, and sustainable - SDG 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. 	
<p>General objective 5 – To promote gender equality in political and economic life, to increase the representation of women in leading positions, to empower to role of women in the sustainable development of cities and communities from the Iasi county.</p>			
<p>Specific objective 5.1 – to initiate online conferences/workshops (webinars) with the leaders of political parties in order to increase the level of political involvement of women and their representation in decision-making political structures,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The political involvement of women and assuming decision-making positions at national, and local levels contribute to increasing the quality of public policies and lead to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The social problems of women and girls, of mothers and children, of children in difficulty and vulnerable people receive adequate solutions by involving women in politics at the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing women's political representation contributes to achieving SDG 17 - „Partnerships to achieve the objectives” of the 2030 Agenda, by

including through introducing political representation according to gender quotas.	long-term economic growth.	national and local levels, straight from people who know these problems.	strengthening the means of implementing and revitalizing the local, regional, national, and global partnership for sustainable development, including environmental protection, increasing resilience against climate change, promoting the „circular economy”.
<p>Specific objective 5.2 – to create a multi-institutional work group to analyze concrete ways to stimulate women's involvement in the sustainable development of cities and communities from the Iasi county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender inequality directly affects the economic life of women, with indirect effects on the entire population, regardless of gender and age, with an impact on household consumption. ▪ Improving gender equality also contributes substantially to achieving smart, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth. ▪ Promoting gender equality has a positive impact on the production capacity of the economy, lowers prices, and improves trade balance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender inequality directly affects social life, children's access to education, access to health services, etc. ▪ Improving gender equality in education and labor market participation, together with a more balanced sharing of unpaid care work between women and men, could lead to increased fertility rates, according to recent research. 	

5. Consultation process, public policy adoption, and post-adoption measures

For the public and inter-institutional consultation process of the public policy proposal, the legal tools established by Law no. 52/2003 on decisional transparency in public administration, republished, will be applied. Following the

public consultation process, a report will be prepared and annexed to the public policy proposal. This report will include information on:

- The results of the consultation process with experts from the Department of Sustainable Development, Promotion and Project Guidance for the Local Councils within the ICC, and other departments with legal responsibilities in the analysis and endorsement of the County Council's draft decisions.
- The positions of other consulted public institutions, including the Prefect's Institution of Iași County, the County Agency for Benefits and Social Inspection, the Territorial Labour Inspectorate, the County Agency for Employment, the General Department of Social Assistance and Child Protection, Iași County Pension Department, the Immigration Services of Iași County, Iași County Directorate of Statistics, and Iași County Directorate of Public Health.
- The outcomes of the consultation process with non-governmental organizations, social dialogue partners (trade unions and employers), and other stakeholder categories.

After selecting the implementation option for the public policy proposal, it proceeds to adoption within the Iași County Council. The first phase involves obtaining expert opinions from the Technical Commissions of the ICC, where county counselors are active. Once all approval conditions are met, the process moves to the second phase, which includes debate and voting in the plenary session of the county council. Upon adoption, the public policy proposal becomes a county council decision to be executed by the president of the ICC, who represents the executive body of the ICC and has a specialized apparatus at his disposal. The effective implementation of the public policy involves ongoing consultation with all stakeholders (public institutions, non-governmental organizations, professional groups, the business environment, and direct and indirect beneficiaries). Additionally, implementation requires using a system of indicators to monitor and evaluate (both quantitatively and qualitatively) the activities and results, continuously comparing them against the proposed general and specific objectives.

Acknowledgments: This public policy proposal is part of the author's contract with the Regional Office for Cross-Border Cooperation Iasi Romania - Republic of Moldova (BRCT Iași), in which I acted as a research expert for the project „Fair Cities: Integrating the 2030 Agenda into Local Policies during Migration and Refugee Flows” CSO LA/2017/388-188, and is published with the approval of the project manager, r. Victor Poede, to whom I hereby thank. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of BRCT Iași.

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