

## INVOLVEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTING ASSOCIATIONS IN PROMOTING GENDER DIVERSITY

**Gastone Teodora-Denisa<sup>1</sup>, ORCID ID: 0009-0005-7088-8732**

### ***Abstract***

*In recent years the topic of gender diversity has been debated in an increasingly rigorous way in many fields. Drawing a parallel from the labour market to the business environment, the accountancy profession plays a key role in interfacing with them, and deserves a prominent place in gender diversity research. One of the organisational structures within which the subject under study is analysed is professional accountancy associations. As they are active both internationally and nationally, their level of involvement in gender diversity is a starting point for understanding the phenomenon, which can be assessed at both macro and micro levels. This paper aims to analyse professional accountancy associations through the lens of the means of promoting gender non-discrimination, ultimately generating comparative results that mirror the extent of their involvement. Through the study of documents published by the associations and their content analysis, the results of the research show that the subject is much more widespread among international professional accountancy associations through the multitude of means of promotion found, coming lately as an innovation also at the national level and in the countries of the European Union, gender equality becoming an increasingly debated phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** *Gender equality, Professional associations, International, European Union, Romania*

**JEL codes:** **M41** - Accounting; **M42** - Auditing; **B54** - Feminist Economics

### **Introduction**

Professional associations are a key point for any profession, regulating the framework behind it and creating a bridge between the organisations and individuals involved. In addition to the rules they admit, they also take various actions in guiding companies and members working in a particular field. The topic of gender diversity can be discussed from many perspectives, but in order to analyse this phenomenon within the accounting professional leadership, the analysis of the associations' policies regulating these areas is paramount and is the starting point towards the adoption of non-discrimination practices across the field.

The analysis of how and to what extent professional accountancy associations are involved in promoting gender diversity, by identifying the actions taken by them and analysing the policies

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<sup>1</sup> Doctoral School of Economics and Business Management BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA

Tel: +40.264 41 86 55 <https://www.econ.ubbcluj.ro/>

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adopted is the main objective of the study. It is divided into specific objectives that answer the research questions, in the form of analysis of the dynamics and degree of concern of the associations with regard to the subject under study, as well as analysis of documents and identification of the means of promotion specific to each association. The paper aims to achieve the objectives by finding answers to the following research questions: "Are the professional associations subject to this research concerned with promoting gender diversity?"; "How do the documents published by the associations indicate their concern on this topic?"; "Comparing the international and national environment, where is the degree of involvement of the associations more intense?"; "What has been the dynamic of the degree of involvement of the associations on the topic of gender diversity?"

The research methodology consisted of document study and content analysis, and the main results of the research show that several means of promotion are adopted in international professional associations. The associations that provide in their policies and actions in a broader scope the topic of gender diversity and not only, are the most prestigious in the field of accounting and auditing. However, the vast majority of the associations analysed include the subject of gender equality in their policies, which illustrates the innovation of the field in this area and the global scope of the phenomenon.

The research in this article has contributions for managers of accounting and auditing firms and beyond and for women's rights and non-discrimination advocates, providing a source of information on the involvement of professional associations and its dynamics over the years in maintaining non-discrimination in the accounting profession.

### **Professional accounting associations in the world and in Romania**

Discrimination against women has existed for years around the world, with women being questioned about the essential role they play in business and beyond. In accounting leadership, various studies have shown the major contribution that women make, although their promotion to leadership positions has been, and still is, a long road fraught with obstacles in the form of stereotypes about women. Professional associations guide the accountancy profession through policies set at national and international level, so the subject of gender equality is one of the pillars they should take into account. Thus, measuring their concern about non-discrimination in the profession is a means of researching the implications they have on this topic.

There are a number of professional accountancy associations at international, EU and national level. Within these I have also selected audit associations, considering the accountancy profession as a framework that combines the two and adopting rules and policies of the same nature. In the research I identified 8 major associations at international level, the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA), the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA), the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance (AFWA). IFAC<sup>i</sup>, which stands for the International Federation of Accountants, is the global organisation for the accountancy profession, which began in 1977 in the United States of America (USA). IFAC currently has 180 member countries, representing over 3 million accountants. The AICPA<sup>ii</sup>, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, covers certified public accountants in the USA and was founded in 1887 to set ethical and auditing standards. It has 428,000 members. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)<sup>iii</sup>, is an organisation that supports both chartered accountants and students of the profession globally, founded in 1880 in England and now has 166,000 members. The Chartered Certified Accountant professional qualification worldwide is

provided by ACCA<sup>iv</sup>, a global organisation of chartered accountants founded in the UK in 1904, which currently has 122,000 members and 325,000 students. Another body that is responsible for accounting policy is NASBA<sup>v</sup>, the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy, this is an association dedicated to serving the 56 state boards of accountancy, the boards that regulate the accounting profession in the United States. It was founded in 1908 and is actively involved in gender equality, conducting online training and providing information on implementing practices in state accounting that promote gender equality. IMA<sup>vi</sup>, the Institute of Management Accountants, is a professional organization of accountants founded in 1919 in the USA. In the field of auditing, at the international level IIA<sup>vii</sup>, the Institute of Internal Auditors, is an international professional association founded in 1941 in the USA. It provides educational conferences and develops standards, guidance and certifications for the internal audit profession. It currently has 230,000 members. The latest international organisation to study gender equality in accounting is AFWA<sup>viii</sup>, the Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance, which is more of an alliance with a direct focus on women in accounting to enable them to reach their full personal, professional and economic potential.

At EU level there are also national organisations, present in the member countries, organisations that have implications either only at national level or at international level, as is the case with organisations in the UK. Accountancy Europe - 2024<sup>ix</sup> presents the map of Europe from the perspective of accountancy organisations. However, in the following lines I will only present accountancy organisations present within EU countries in order to draw a parallel between the International (associations with global implications), EU and National level.

As in other EU member countries, Romania has a professional association representing accounting and auditing professionals. CECCAR, the Romanian Association of Chartered Accountants and Certified Accountants<sup>x</sup> is the professional body that manages the accountancy profession in Romania, from its foundation to the present day, which has undergone several stages of development. The auditing profession is monitored and regulated by the Chamber of Financial Auditors of Romania, CAFR<sup>xi</sup>, founded in 1999, which also has an international visibility.

Having thus presented the research objectives and the associations under study, an analysis of how they are involved in promoting gender equality can be captured through a detailed analysis of the means of promotion. This objective answers the question of whether the professional associations analysed are concerned with gender equality. This analysis should look at how these means show the concern that the associations have, through an evaluation of the documents on display. Identifying the degree of involvement on the three levels and the comparative analysis answers the question: „At which level is gender equality more important for the associations”. Following the achievement of these objectives it is also important to analyse the dynamics of these implications that exist, answering the research question” What was the period in which these implications developed most?”.

### **Theoretical grounds and research methodology**

Starting from the idea that professional associations, particularly those in accounting, serve as a bridge between the educational system and the profession, I have selected three feminist theories to guide my analysis of the literature. Liberal feminist theory is one of the most commonly applied in professional contexts, as it addresses persistent inequalities in access to education and career opportunities. These inequalities often lead to discrimination in the professional advancement of women in accounting, as described by Lehman (1992). The core values of the accounting profession, objectivity and rationality, are considered by Cooper (1992) to be inherently masculine, which fed the radical feminist theory, suggesting that discrimination is embedded in the very nature of the profession. From this perspective, real change must begin with a transformation of the

policies and practices implemented by professional bodies, an issue explored in depth in this study. The third theoretical perspective is that of postmodern feminism, which, as Haynes (2017) highlights, focuses on the role of professional discourse and how it contributes to gender-based discrimination.

Focusing specifically on the accounting profession, a key point in understanding gender inequality is the phenomenon identified by Lehman (1992), namely the restriction of certification opportunities for women, which results from broader societal practices, particularly at the educational and economic levels, that disadvantage them.

Also within the theoretical framework, my study incorporates two frequently used metaphors to describe the barriers faced by women in career advancement: the glass ceiling and the labyrinth. Dambrin and Lambert (2008) describe the glass ceiling as a form of vertical segregation, in which women are discouraged from pursuing leadership roles and often leave the profession due to traditional social expectations (such as the perceived role of women in the home). On the other hand, Eagley and Carli (2007) refer to the labyrinth metaphor as a form of horizontal segregation, arguing that women's career paths often resemble a complex and winding maze, rather than a straightforward progression.

Thus, the theoretical framework presented above provides clear lens to understand the focus of this research, by drawing a connection between existing gender issues and the actions taken by professional associations to address them. The study analyzes the policies and initiatives implemented by these associations to promote the inclusion and advancement of women in the accounting profession, while also examining the potential influence of international standards and practices on national-level efforts.

The paper adopts a qualitative approach using description, classification and analysis as levels of research. Document study and content analysis were used as research techniques. The documents analysed were the internal rules and regulations and the articles published on the website of each association on gender diversity, reflecting their policies and practices, identifying at the end of the paper where these can be found.

Content analysis and identification of relevant articles were based on the identification of keywords specific to the research: equality, diversity, gender, women, accounting.

In the first part of the research, I started with the analysis of the major international accounting organizations, then used the website <https://accountancyeurope.eu/> to identify the associations in each European Union country, and finally analyzed the professional associations in Romania. We made a breakdown for each organization and its means of promoting the concept of gender equality, then we made a comparative analysis between the international environment, the European Union and Romania, therefore, in order for it to be as objective and easy to analyze as possible, we tracked the diversity and type of means of promotion using Table no. 1.

## **Results and discussions**

In terms of gender equality, IFAC shows a concern in this direction online, with Elena Churikova (2020) on its website presenting her commitment to promoting gender diversity in the accountancy profession. The article illustrates the idea of increasing productivity due to gender diversity by attracting effective innovation. Through this article the IFAC initiative to increase equal representation in the top positions of the profession is presented.

In addition to articles and events encouraging gender diversity, IFAC is also addressing these issues internally, with 52% of the Board of Directors in 2020 being women; this is the first time this has happened since the federation was founded.

As part of the series of events to promote gender equality, in 2018 IFAC organised a webinar on ways to help implement gender equality in the accounting profession. The historic moment marking the achievement of IFAC's goal of gender equality, with a majority female board

membership, was marked by the organisation at the IFAC Annual Council Meeting held in Vancouver in November 2019.

In terms of gender equality policy, the second organisation reviewed focuses on a multitude of articles and studies that address the role and value that women bring to the accounting profession. The AICPA (2013) presents the Gender Issues and Business Case study which illustrates the decline in the proportion of women in the accounting profession over the last 20 years globally from 50% to 14.3% in senior management positions and 19% in executive positions. The AICPA's involvement in this direction has been illustrated by the creation of a working group, the Women's Initiatives Executive Committee (WIEC), with the aim of promoting a working environment in the accountancy profession that facilitates the advancement of women into leadership positions and the equal involvement of women and men. The means by which WIEC seeks to achieve these objectives are webinars, i.e. articles and research to promote specific concepts. In a more extended form, WIEC is presented in the article aimed at promoting gender diversity launched by the AICPA, Women's Initiatives Executive Committee, illustrating solutions to reduce the gender gap by examining the problems that exist and policies and programmes to develop organisational culture. The programme also aims to promote women by providing company-specific solutions to help with work-life balance. And within the Journal of Accountancy of the AICPA the WIEC programme is seen as a step-by-step plan to search and find talent to be harnessed at all levels of the hierarchy.

Among the webcasts supported through the AICPA is Gender Responsive Budgeting – A Different Way of Thinking About Budgeting, which encourages the promotion of gender equality in public financial management systems. Anita Dennis (2020) reviews the AICPA's 2019 survey of how and to what extent firms are implementing policies on gender equality, concluding that measures to retain and promote women in the accountancy profession have begun to emerge, and the results showed that firms that have adopted these measures have had visibly better results. Flexible working hours and teleworking have been tools that have helped to attract and retain workers. This study also focused on promoting, but indirectly, one could say, gender equality in this profession, as it illustrates the favourable effects that have emerged after the implementation of AICPA policies in this respect.

Gabriela Babic (2023) illustrates in her study, which looks at women in the accounting profession from the perspective of several professional organisations, that they have made significant contributions and held important positions. For example, In 2019, Elizabeth Smith became the first woman to lead the AICPA as Chair of the Board of Directors, and in 2017, Cathy Engelbert became the first female CEO of a major accounting firm when she was appointed CEO of Deloitte.

Gabriela Babic's article (2023), mentioned above, captures the fact that ICAEW has had several initiatives in promoting women in the accounting profession, such as the Women in Leadership Community, This project provides leadership development opportunities for women chartered accountants. A very important action of ICAEW in the idea of promoting gender equality is to request reports from accountancy firms capturing the gender pay gap, which has become mandatory in the UK since 2017. Internally ICAEW also promotes the employment of women in senior positions. According to ICAEW Insights (2023), 54.6% of leadership positions at ICAEW are held by women, an increase from 33.3% in 2017. This was one of ICAEW's commitments on the advancement of women, with an initial target of reaching 40% women in leadership positions by March 2020, but this has been achieved as early as 2019.

With a focus on leadership, in 2011 the ICAEW launched the Women in Leadership programme, which supports women leaders and encourages them to put their own leadership style into action, thus encouraging the implementation and development of female skills and abilities. As future initiatives, for the year 2024 ICAEW has proposed a programme called Aspire, which aims to teach participants how to prevent and monitor the gender pay gap. The organisation is also

tackling the main issue facing women in their careers, namely motherhood. Flexible working has been implemented as part of policies to this end. ICAEW wants to expand with supporting female employees, not just for a specific age, but extending across multiple levels, which illustrates the significant commitment the organisation has to supporting women. Another webinar addressing gender equality organised by ICAEW is on the gender pay gap, a webinar designed to promote diversity by maintaining a step-by-step balance.

On the organisation's website, the Diversity and inclusion at ICAEW section states that a key pillar of its strategy is diversity and inclusion at work and offers a range of content to help and encourage companies in developing and implementing gender equality. FasterCapital published the article ICAEW: Empowering Women in the Accounting Profession in 2023 which highlights the importance of gender diversity in the accountancy profession, ICAEW's gender equality initiatives and future plans, the challenges facing women in the profession, collaborations with other organisations in this area and the organisation's role in building a more inclusive accountancy profession. And Accountancy Age published an article in 2023, ICAEW under pressure due to lack of board diversity, with the organisation being scrutinised for its board appointments, illustrating its penchant for diversity. It became the first professional body to sign up to the Charter for Black Talent in Finance and the Professions, signalling its commitment to increasing the representation of black professionals at senior levels. It can be seen from this article that the diversity that ICAEW focuses on is not just in terms of gender, but also ethnicity and other diversity, encouraging the development of skills and their promotion through the equal practice of work by all individuals.

Finally for ICAEW, the involvement in academia was marked by the article Diversity and the accounting profession, being a research based on an interview with 50 people in accounting firms, which aims to provide an insight into how accounting firms approach diversity in general.

Online, the ACCA organization features several studies and articles on gender diversity, with the female majority mirroring the organization's membership, with approximately 48% of ACCA members and 59% of students being female. Increasing gender diversity to boost performance published on the organisation's website in 2015, aims to help CFOs and HR professionals understand the importance of gender diversity both within companies and in leadership roles. ACCA's 2019 The battle for gender balance study captures ACCA's Executive Director Helen Brand arguing that efforts to promote women and maintain gender diversity should not be interrupted, even if the goals set in this direction end up being achieved. Work, engagement and advocacy in this direction should be ongoing. The 50/50 ratio in the Council also illustrates the internal balance of ACCA, with no discrimination against either women or men, to the detriment of promoting women.

The CEO Challenge 2014, a Conference Board report, illustrated the growing concern of business leaders about gender diversity, with human capital becoming the most important resource and receiving increased attention recently. The London School of Business & Finance published a study in 2019, Why ACCA has a remarkable number of female students, looking at the changing trend in the proportion of women in the accountancy profession and in senior positions, and what is causing it. In the article it is presented that due to technological development, flexible work is becoming easier to implement, which helps women to practice the accounting profession in an easier way, mainly at times that until recently were a real obstacle for them, such as the period and the phenomenon of motherhood.

Accounting and Business published the March 2022 article Gender on the Agenda to introduce the upcoming ACCA webinar, a global webinar addressing the fact that climate change is not gender neutral and that women's voices are not being heard enough. The article also notes that at the time of publication, more women are studying accounting and have joined ACCA than ever before. The ACCA webinar series on gender diversity in the accounting profession includes Have we reached gender equity in the accounting profession?, which aims to identify whether gender equality exists in the workplace, why there are few women in management positions, whether new

ways of working influence gender equality, why more women than men are attracted to the accounting field, how to ensure equal career progression as an accountant, and what different perspectives exist globally on this issue. The webinar supports the International Women's Day themes of #EmbraceEquity and DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality.

NASBA's governance focuses on equity more than equality for its members, intentionally addressing the inclusion of all members of their community in activities and opportunities to grow together. With the goal of promoting diversity and equality in the workplace, the association aims to maintain a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) program that ensures NASBA is open and inclusive to all people regardless of gender, ethnicity or any other consideration other than their qualifications and desire to serve, maintain open and transparent means for all volunteers to identify and engage in profession-specific job opportunities or active leadership and recruitment from underrepresented groups.

IMA also addresses diversity and equity in the accounting field, with a separate section on its website, IMA Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Commitment. The Association aims to support an active, diverse and equitable membership community, fostering a sense of belonging for all members, currently numbering 140,000. IMA embraces a culture of open-mindedness and encourages multiple perspectives to create and deliver value by collaboratively shaping innovative solutions and taking measurable action. It promotes various programs designed to bring gender diversity to the forefront of the profession and in leadership positions, such as the Women's Leadership Summit, DE&I Jump-Start Kit, Original DE&I Research, DE&I Resources, and Diversifying the Accountancy Pipeline Program in California.

As with the above organisations, the IIA is also involved in implementing and promoting gender equality and diversity at work, with a separate section on its website, Diversity & Inclusion. One of the IIA's strategic priorities is to ensure that all members have full and equal participation in the association through diversity and inclusion. It encourages the recruitment and retention of diverse members and motivates them in terms of promotion to leadership positions. It also considers it beneficial to educate members and stakeholders about the benefits of diversity and inclusion, and has a Statement of Commitment in which it takes responsibility for promoting an environment where individual talents, ideas and differences will not be ignored and will be valued.

The AFWA Alliance by its very existence to support women in the accountancy profession promotes in some direct or indirect form gender equality in both career and education in the accountancy profession.

At EU level, each member country has at least one professional accountancy association, which regulates policies on the proper conduct of the profession according to both national and international rules.

Ireland has two professional organisations, Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) and the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland (CPA). The CAI<sup>xii</sup> was established in 1888, representing a body of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and currently has 30,000 members. In terms of membership, the association has an almost equal ratio of women (48%) to men (52%). In October 2022, it published an article, Smashing the glass ceiling<sup>xiii</sup>, in which it introduces the concept of the glass ceiling and examines the extent to which it has become 'smashed'. CPA Ireland is the Institute of Chartered Certified Public Accountants in Ireland, established in 1926 in Dublin and currently has 5000 members and students. Donna Torres<sup>xiv</sup> illustrates in her article featured on the organisation's website that CPA Ireland has the distinction of being the first Irish accountancy body to achieve gender parity in its membership, with 58% of accountants being female.

Portugal has a professional organisation for statutory auditors only, namely the Ordem dos Revisores Oficiais de Contas (OROC)<sup>xv</sup>, the Order of Official Auditors. It was established in 1974, representing a professional accounting organisation for statutory auditors and statutory audit firms. F. David & R. Abreu<sup>xvi</sup> discuss the role of women in the Portuguese statutory audit profession and report that of the 198 statutory auditors registered with the OROC, only 2 are female. Both this

article and the lack of an existing gender policy within this organisation illustrate the weak concern about promoting gender equality in the accountancy profession in Portugal.

In neighbouring Spain, accountancy is regulated by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Spain, ICJCE<sup>xvii</sup>. Founded in 1942, it sets ethical standards, investigates and verifies compliance with professional discipline by its members, promotes the adoption and implementation of international standards, represents and promotes the auditing profession, develops training activities and promotes the improvement of professional practices, with a membership of 4760. IFAC presents the article *Toward Gender Equality: Attracting and Retaining Female Talent in Spain's Audit Profession*<sup>xviii</sup>, which concludes that the ICJCE is taking action on gender equality in the accountancy profession and has set up two working groups: one on gender equality and one focused on attracting and retaining talent.

In France the accountancy profession is regulated by 3 bodies, CNCC, Institute of Statutory Auditors, IFEC, The French National Institute of Accountants and Auditors and CNOEC France, The Order of Certified Accountants. The CNCC<sup>xix</sup> was founded in 1969 and is now an index of professional gender equality, an index aimed at eliminating the gender pay gap. IFEC<sup>xx</sup>, currently has 4000 members and was founded in 1979. It aims at gender equality not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of the institutional dimension. CNOEC<sup>xxi</sup> dates back to 1945 and is an IFAC member with 56 members. Its role is to represent, promote, defend and develop the chartered accountancy profession, both in France and abroad. The organisation does not present concrete information on gender equality policies, having a direct influence on institutions mainly with regard to the regulation of the accountancy profession.

The professional body of accountants in the Netherlands, NBA, Koninklijke Nederlandse Beroepsorganisatie van Accountants, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Chartered Accountants<sup>xxii</sup>, was founded in 2013 and currently has 22,000 members. The organisation shows its concern for the phenomenon of gender equality by publishing and promoting articles on the subject in the NBA journal - *Accountants in business*. One such article is *Women, Finance and Accountancy*<sup>xxiii</sup>, which presents gender diversity by promoting the practice of accountancy by more women.

ITAA, Belgian Institute for Tax Advisors & Accountants<sup>xxiv</sup> and IRE/IBR, Institute of Registered Auditors<sup>xxv</sup>, represent the professional organisations that regulate the accountancy profession in Belgium. The ITAA was founded in 1977, and today it encompasses a diverse membership through multicultural access to membership. From a gender equality point of view, no information or articles were found on its website. IBR-IRE is a mandatory membership organisation for auditors and audit firms in Belgium and is a member of ICAEW and IFAC. In the online environment, the organisation shows a male-dominated board composition, with no further details on the promotion of gender equality.

In Luxembourg, IRE, Institute of Registered Auditors<sup>xxvi</sup> and OEC Luxembourg, Order of Chartered Accountants<sup>xxvii</sup> are the organisations that regulate the accountancy profession. The IRE was founded in 1984 and is headed by a woman. The OEC Luxembourg was founded in 1999 and is an organisation that gives membership to all chartered accountants in Luxembourg who are allowed to work in the profession. The websites of the two institutions provide information only on the composition of their committees, with no other information on gender policies.

Denmark has a programme dedicated to professional accountant training, FSR – Danish Auditors<sup>xxviii</sup>, which aims to certify people working in this profession. It does not present information on gender equality policies.

In Sweden, FAR, The institute for the accountancy profession in Sweden<sup>xxix</sup>, is the institute for the accountancy profession, based in Stockholm. It helps to develop professional standards, education and information for the accountancy profession, providing regulations for the profession. It actively contributes to the work of the International Federation of Accountants IFAC, the International Accounting Standards Board IASB, Accountancy Europe and the Nordic Federation of Chartered Accountants NRF. It was founded in 1923. The Institute does not report separately on



gender equality, but being part of the institutions listed above and operating in a country where women predominate in senior positions, I assume that this aspect is taken into account.

ST, Finnish Association of Authorised Public Accountants<sup>xxx</sup>, is a voluntary membership organisation that brings together authorised accountants, chartered accountants and public sector auditors in Finland since April 2014. Information about the organisation's membership and gender policies I did not find online.

In Estonia, the EAA, Estonian Auditors Association<sup>xxxi</sup> is a private network of auditors, with over 150 audit firms and 350 private auditors, networking and supervising the audit profession. It was founded in 1999, but does not provide information on gender equality policies. In Latvia LRGA, Association of Accountants of the Republic of Latvia<sup>xxxii</sup> and LZRA, Latvian Association of Certified Auditors<sup>xxxiii</sup>, are the professional associations for accounting and auditing. LRGA was founded in 1994 and currently has more than 800 members. LZRA dates back to 1994 and has been a member of IFAC since 2009, with the aim of facilitating the development of the audit profession at national level. The associations presented at Latvian level do not present information on gender equality.

In Lithuania, LAAA, Lithuanian Association of Accountants and Auditors<sup>xxxiv</sup> and LAR, Lithuanian Chamber of Auditors<sup>xxxv</sup>, regulate the accounting and auditing profession. The LAAA was founded in 1990 and has a woman on its board as president, while the Lithuanian Chamber of Auditors (LAR) is a public legal entity that brings together all certified auditors in Lithuania and is also headed by a woman. Apart from the composition and leadership of the boards of these organisations, other information on their membership was not illustrated, but the predominant gender within the leadership may also illustrate an openness to gender diversity.

In Germany, WPK, Chamber of Public Accountants<sup>xxxvi</sup>, regulates the accounting profession, while IDW, Institute of Public Auditors in Germany<sup>xxxvii</sup>, covers auditors and the audit profession. WPK dates back to 1961 and has been a member of IFAC since 1977. Comprising 12,979 members, IDW provides training and support for trainee public auditors and continuing professional development for qualified public auditors and was founded in 1932. The two organisations do not present policies or objectives on the promotion of gender equality.

CACR, The Chamber of Auditors of the Czech Republic<sup>xxxviii</sup>, was founded in 1993 with the aim of governing the audit profession in the Czech Republic. It has no gender policies.

In Austria, the professional organisations I am targeting are IWP, Institute of Austrian Certified Public Accountants<sup>xxxix</sup> and KSW, The Austrian Chamber of Tax Advisors and Auditors<sup>xl</sup>. The IWP was founded in 1952 to provide guidance to auditors and the KSW was founded in 1947 and currently consists of 7,865 certified accountants. As in the organisations in the above-mentioned countries, gender equality is not addressed by the Austrian organisations.

In Croatia, HRK, Croatian Audit Chamber<sup>xli</sup>, regulates the audit profession, founded in 2006 and member of IFAC since 2008. In the online environment, the organisation provides information only on its audit objectives, with no information on gender policy.

Neighbouring Slovenia has an organisation for the audit profession, SIZR, Slovenian Institute of Auditors<sup>xlii</sup>, established in 1993, which became a member of IFAC two years later. It, in turn, presents information exclusively from the point of view of the audit profession and its members.

In Slovakia, SKAU, the Slovak Chamber of Auditors<sup>xliii</sup>, has been an umbrella organisation for auditors and audit firms since 1992. It has 1062 members, but does not present gender policies.

In Hungary there is an organisation for auditors, namely MKVK, Chamber of Hungarian Auditors<sup>xliv</sup>, founded in 1997 and with over 5600 members. Gender equality is not illustrated as being promoted there either.

In Bulgaria the accountancy profession is regulated by ICPAB, the Institute of Certified Public Accountants<sup>xlv</sup>, which was founded in 1995 and supports its members by providing means of

training and dissemination of materials for certification exams and continuing professional development, as well as adopting and implementing professional guidance.

MIA, The Malta Institute of Accountants<sup>xlvi</sup>, provides professional guidance, technical support and continuing professional education to over 4000 accountants in Malta. The Institute has been commended for its initiative to take the lead on gender pay inequality, it has conducted a survey of its members to assess the gender pay gap in the accountancy profession.<sup>xlvi</sup>

In Greece, public accounting is supervised by SOEL, the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Greece<sup>xlvi</sup>, established in 1956. Kyriacou's (2016) paper presents the topic of gender equality from the perspective of the Professional Institute of Accountants of Greece.

In the last country surveyed at EU level, Cyprus, ICPAC, the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus<sup>xlvi</sup>, is the umbrella organisation for accountants in the country, having been established in 1961. It currently has 3,000 accountant members, 68% of whom are male and 32% female. Accountants in Cyprus claims that this percentage changes from year to year in favour of women.<sup>1</sup>

At national level, the main organisations dealing with the accounting and auditing profession in Romania are CECCAR and CAFR.

The CECCAR Association participates in the promotion of gender equality policies by highlighting this issue in its Rules of Organisation and Operation, stating that its Standardisation Committee is gender equality aware. Diversity is also found internally, with CECCAR's Board of Governors being headed by a woman and composed of 10 female members out of 18. The information presented in the following lines is taken from the online environment, from the platforms of the respective organisations and from their published documents. CECCAR dates back to 1921 and now has 40,000 members.

Through the publications of CECCAR BUSINESS MAGAZINE, the Romanian Association of Chartered Accountants and Certified Accountants has published two articles that present the topic discussed, namely Female entrepreneurship represents one third of the local business environment. In the case of chartered accountancy and accounting firms, 85% of all administrators are women and ACCES - facilitating access to the accounting professions by creating a functional system of internships - Pillar 1. Internationally, IFAC has publicised online the Women in the Accountancy Profession: Leadership, Opportunities and Closing the Gender Gap event which took place this year.

Gender non-discrimination is not only supported by studies and legislation, but also by professional organisations, especially those that analyse both the economic and labour markets, trying to promote the development of human resources regardless of gender in the areas with the highest share at national level. Thus, following an event that dealt with the subject of female entrepreneurship, CECCAR BUSINESS MAGAZINE supports the encouragement of this phenomenon due to the fact that in Romania in recent years economic competitiveness has developed through the increase in the number of women in management positions. This shows that women's entrepreneurial skills bring generous added value to the country's economy; thus, they should not be ignored by the stereotypes that have existed for a long time, and thus, a social and economic development can start from here.

As far as the accountancy profession is concerned, research for CECCAR BUSINESS MAGAZINE has shown that women in management positions account for 85%. In an attempt to maintain and even develop on this level, CECCAR has organised a project called ACCES - facilitating access to the accounting professions by creating a functional system of internships - Pillar 1 which focuses on students as developing human resources for the labour market, with the aim of facilitating equal opportunities between men and women. The main benefit of the project is to put into practice the information acquired by students by offering opportunities to collaborate during their studies with companies in various fields of interest, thus ensuring equal career opportunities. By giving students the opportunity to practice what they learn, gender discrimination

is avoided at an early stage in career development and can thus be a phenomenon that leads to the encouragement and development of non-discrimination and can bring more and more positive effects in the long term.

Through the programmes and themes discussed by CECCAR, the encouragement and involvement of the professional accountancy body in the development of the profession and the continued high level of female leadership can be seen.

As far as the CAFR is concerned, gender diversity is promoted and adopted internally within the association, with 3,174 women and 1,373 men in the category of individual auditors. On this topic Grosu et al (2022) capture the Influence of gender differences on the quality of financial audit engagements at the level of listed companies, with direct implication on the RFLC. In the Corporate Governance of the organization, especially on the role of the Audit Committee, it is stated that there should be an appropriate balance within the Audit Committee in terms of competence, experience, gender diversity, knowledge and independence of the members, enabling them to effectively perform their duties and responsibilities.

In comparison with the international level, at national level, it can be seen that the organisations regulating the accounting and auditing profession have not yet developed specific policies in this respect. In an attempt to follow the model of international associations in the field, CECCAR and CAFR are gradually becoming involved in the issue of gender equality through means that have emerged with the development of the economic environment, by adopting measures internally and promoting them externally with the help of articles published in the specialist journal.

A final element worth comparing across the three structures analysed, international, EU and national, is the means of promoting gender equality, through which their involvement is illustrated. Along with this comparison, a concluding summary and a more succinct presentation on all levels is also made.

What can be seen from the table below (Table no.1) is that at international level there are more and more diverse means of promotion, with organisations trying to highlight non-discrimination through a variety of actions. At EU level, as organisations are less old and less transparent, the promotion of gender equality is only found in articles published through associations and their policies. It can be seen that unlike the EU, at the international level organisations do not promote gender equality through transparency of their objectives, but through other events, activities and only through their internal membership. In Romania, the publications, events and policies found within CAFR and CECCAR promote the concept of gender equality, but in a smaller number, one of the explanations being that this phenomenon is new at national level.

Professional organisation	Promotional article published	Events/programmes encouraging gender diversity	Gender composition of the organisation	Webinars	Gender equality policies
<b>International</b>					
IFAC	√	√	√	√	
AICPA	√	√		√	
ICAEW	√	√	√	√	
ACCA	√	√		√	
NASBA					√

IMA					√
IIA					√
EU organisations	√				√
National organisations	√	√			√

Table no. 1. Means of promoting gender equality in the organisations of the three structures;  
Author processing

In order to analyse diversity and gender equality in terms of the involvement of professional organisations in the final study, a comparison can be made between the national and international environment in terms of the measures and policies adopted and the internal composition. I have identified that unlike the accountancy profession, auditors have fewer organisations directly regulating the profession internationally, yet the IIA regulates gender diversity in the auditing profession in a variety of ways. As for professional accountancy associations, they not only present policies on gender equality, but are actively involved, through a multitude of activities, webinars, articles and actions in the implementation of diversity within firms. They are based on the premise that every member is entitled to equal opportunities in work and professional development, regardless of gender, ethnicity or age. Some associations also emphasise the promotion of values at different stages of life, supporting mid-life women as well as mothers. It could be observed that internationally some organisations have more techniques to promote gender diversity than others, but I can conclude that this aspect influences their prestige and activity, because if we look carefully, the most well-known organisations have the most means to support the concept of gender equality. Although they appeared at different years apart, in my study, the results showed that the professional associations analysed each adopt strategies in this direction, a sign of innovation and adaptation to the business environment, which also shows a commitment to the continuous promotion of women in this profession and towards top positions.

## Conclusions

Focusing on a comparison between the three structures, international, EU and national, I can conclude that at the international level, organisations are much more focused on gender diversity policies, actions and regulations. Being also much older than national organisations in the EU, those regulating the accountancy profession globally also have a much larger membership and some national organisations are included and take over the rules of the international ones. Thus, although at the level of professional associations in EU countries, gender policies are poorly reflected, given that most are also part of and work with international organisations, it is possible that there is an indirect take-up of gender diversity policies in perspective. At EU level, it could be observed that most organisations do not present articles or information on gender policies, but I can conclude that this is due to the fact that they do not have a very long existence. Ireland, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Malta, Greece and Cyprus are the countries where organisations provide some information on women in the accounting and auditing profession. Comparing with the international level, the EU level associations represented auditing in greater numbers, with some having no separate organisation regulating the accountancy profession and others having an organisation for both accountancy and auditing. At national level, in terms of dating, CECCAR is older than CAFR, but nevertheless gender policies are roughly the same in both.

Following the research questions I can conclude that most associations are concerned with the issue of discrimination, adopting policies and promoting gender equality. The documents

published by them show their involvement through the studies they present, the measures taken, and the events and programmes that are promoted within the associations. There is greater concern among international professional accountancy associations because of their age, but nevertheless, analysis of the dynamics indicates that it is only in recent years that the subject has received more attention among associations.

The research results have both economic and social implications, providing a solid basis for future studies on gender equality in the economic environment and the labour market. The author's personal contributions consist of researching association-specific documents, analysing them, classifying and examining the results in order to gain a broader understanding of the findings discovered, which will include future directions of interest in the subject of gender diversity in the accounting profession, particularly in management positions. My findings can offer insights into recommendations for professional organizations to improve their gender policies.

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