
International Women's Day: Gender diversity in the European accountancy profession

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Some countries are more diverse than others when it comes to women being part of the accountancy profession. This is what Accountancy Europe (formerly FEE - Federation of European Accountants) representing 1 million professional accountants, and the French certified public accountants' women on boards association (AFECA) found in a [survey](#) of 24 professional accountancy institutes in 22 European countries.

The results show the diversity of the profession in Europe: female accountants and auditors represent 20% of the total profession in Denmark, 19% in the Netherlands and 15% in Switzerland. At the same time, women represent 64% of the profession in Poland, 70% in Hungary and 77% in Romania.

But what could be at the basis of such strong variety in the presence of women in the accountancy profession across our continent? There appears to be a strong correlation with the political and cultural history of Europe. Almost a century ago, Central and Eastern European countries started to guarantee legal equality for women, including full citizenship, healthcare, education, access to economic opportunities and equal pay. This went hand in hand with transforming basic institutions governing family, marriage, childrearing, and the right of divorce. These and other radical changes had mixed results, one being a higher level of equality in education and employment opportunities in all sectors including the accountancy profession for women in this region than in most other European countries during the same period. Most of the other European countries started to catch-up (much) later, and run behind up to this day.

What to expect next? The inclusion of women in the accountancy profession is increasing overall but at different rhythms. The percentage increase ranges from 50% in Georgia to 1,6% in Portugal and is especially concentrated over the last three years, which is encouraging for the future.

The legislative environments for gender equality are also very diverse throughout Europe. Most countries (13) recognise the principle of gender equality in their law or even in their constitution with respect to rights, pay, and opportunities. Virtually all countries (19) have voted in measures to fight against gender-based inequality. However, it appears that the existence of hard law that favours professional equality does not guarantee a higher level of women in the profession, whereas soft law seems to be working in several countries.

At Accountancy Europe, we hope that the results of this study will enable each of our member bodies to situate itself in a European context with respect to parity and maybe draw lessons for their own strategies to benefit from a more diverse profession.

