

LEGALITY OF EMPLOYMENT: PIONEERING WOMEN IN THE ROMANIAN CIVIL SERVICE (LATE 19TH CENTURY - 1923)

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Abstract Despite the prevailing legislation's stipulations, which rendered them ineligible due to the lack of two mandatory conditions - free exercise of civil and political rights and compliance with conscription laws – women began to be hired in the Romanian civil service in the latter decades of the 19th century. Apart from teaching and medical staff in Romania, the Directorate of Telegraph and Post Office became the first institution to pay women in public service. However, until 1923, the authorities did not explicitly define their status as civil servants. As the state became more bureaucratized, pressure grew on women to secure employment. Meanwhile, the state benefited from better-trained female candidates, who accepted lower pay and were more compliant than their male counterparts. This article explores the current state of research on the topic, highlights key milestones in women's employment as clerks in the Romanian state, traces the evolution of their numbers, and analyzes the discourse surrounding their roles, engagement, and visibility within the civil service.

Keywords Civil service, female clerks, feminization, typewriter, Romania.

Although gender studies in Romanian historiography do not enjoy the same success in terms of density and impact as in other countries, they have nevertheless gone beyond the pioneering framework, regardless of whether we consider older or newer periods. The themes, perspectives, and methods used have a diversified range. To our knowledge, however, there is no work analyzing the first female presence in public services in Romania, other than in the educational and medical systems. Furthermore, female educators or those working in the medical system are rarely studied from the perspective of whether or not they are considered clerks at the time. However, some studies make it possible to sketch this subject,¹ especially for

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¹ Alin Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea. Între public și privat* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2003).

Transylvania, a territory that was integrated into the Romanian state after World War I, having previously belonged to the Habsburg Empire.

There are several reasons for this historiographical silence. Firstly, for a long time, there was little interest in Romanian historiography regarding the history of the civil service and civil servants, except for certain categories of state servants, such as the teaching staff, gendarmes, etc. Even the references to the legislative framework concerning civil servants and the public administration are incomplete, and many are based on studies published before 1947. There are numerous positive exceptions, especially in public administration,² regarding civil servants³ who provide us with a first framework to study gender relations. Secondly, women civil servants and the feminization of the civil service were topics difficult to find in the scientific literature before 1989. Thirdly, Romanian historiography has referred to the period before 1948 more to the associations and organizations⁴ and to women who have marked history: who wrote diaries and memoirs, who had a professional ("first woman" doctor, lawyer, engineer ...), cultural or artistic activity, who had an influence in society and related to politically involved husbands or those who had a significant role in women's rights movements (and in this case almost exclusively from Romanian high society). Among these, we mention Calypso Botez, president of the General Association of Women Public Functionaries in the interwar period.⁵ Key contributions⁶ and collective volumes in gender studies that have appeared in recent decades⁷ address tangential

² Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice românești* (Bucharest: Hamangiu, 2006 [2005]); Manuel Guțan, *Istoria administrației publice locale în statul român modern* (Bucharest: All Beck, 2005); Mihai Ghițulescu, *Organizarea administrativă a statului român modern, 1859-1918* (Craiova: Aius, 2011).

³ The chronological list is incomplete, with the mention that even in this case Transylvania is better represented than the Old Kingdom: Ioan Chiorean, "Funcționările din Transilvania în perioada dualismului austro-ungar (1867-1918)," *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane "Gheorghe Șincai"* 5-6 (2003): 43-60; Andrei Florin Sora, *Servir l'État roumain. Le corps préfectoral* (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2011); Vlad Popovici, "Considerații privind funcționarii publici români din Transilvania. Studiu de caz: comitatul Sibiu și scaunele săsești care l-au format," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie 'George Barițiu' . Series Historica LV* (2016): 159-177.

⁴ Simona Stiger, *Asociaționism și emancipare în Transilvania până la primul război mondial* (Arad: Editura Fundației Moise Nicoară, 2001); or the editions of documents published by Anemari Monica Negru, *Din istoria Societății Ortodoxe Naționale a Femeilor Române* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2016); *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feministă din anii interbelici*, vol. I-II (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2019).

⁵ On the role of C. Botez in the interwar feminist movement (including women in public services), see: Alexandra Ghiț, *Loving Designs: Gendered Welfare Provision. Activism and expertise in Interwar Bucharest*, PhD thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2019), 172-177.

⁶ Ionela Băluță, *La bourgeoisie respectable: réflexion sur la construction d'une nouvelle identité féminine dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle roumain* (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2008); Ionela Băluță, *Du foyer au forum. Pour un sociogénèse du féminisme roumain au XIXe siècle* (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2014).

⁷ Ghizela Cosma and Virgiliu Țărău (eds.), *Condiția femeii în România în secolul XX. Studii de caz* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002); Ionela Băluță and Ioana Cârstocea (eds.), *Direcții și teme de cercetare în studiile de gen din România* (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2002); Alin Ciupală (ed.), *Despre femei și istoria lor în România* (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2004).

and valuable themes relevant to the legal, political, and social status of women, being less related to the subject of this paper, and primarily cover the period after 1944.⁸ A positive feature after 1989 is the openness to publish collections of edited sources on women's history, but as mentioned in the case of historiography, women in public office rarely appear.⁹ This is partly because primary sources concerning women's employment in public administration are difficult to find. Not only are there deficits in conserving some archives of public institutions and ministries, but the male perspective prevails in many cases, such as archives, press articles, memoirs, journals, pamphlets, and literature. As Alin Ciupală pointed out more than two decades ago, this is a general problem found in other countries, which "contrasts with the abundance of discourses on women produced by legislators, moralists, pedagogues, doctors, and politicians."¹⁰

Legislative framework

Significant reforms occurred in the Romanian society in the second half of the 19th century, and legislative transplantation from Western Europe prevailed. Equal rights (declared but not absolute) for Romanian citizens (men) were one of the pillars of the first Romanian Constitution, adopted in 1866 (Article 10). Article 132 of the same constitution expressed the wish that "special laws shall be made as soon as possible," concerning, among other things, administrative decentralization or "on the conditions of eligibility and advancement in the functions of public administration."¹¹ Until the *Law on the Statute of Civil Servants* was adopted in June 1923,¹² there was no unified legislation on the conditions of eligibility, duties, and rights of this professional group. Without statutes and laws common to all state agents, the public administration in Romania has functioned through various organic laws on ministries, local administration, and other institutions of public interest, as well as ministerial circulars and internal regulations specific to each institution. The primary characteristics of public servants were that they were paid from the state budget (voted by Parliament), their service (neither political nor judicial) was for an indefinite period, and their offices were established by law. In a

⁸ Claudia Septimia Sabău, Oana-Ramona Ilovan (eds.), *Gender and Development. Perspectives on Gender in Romania* (Cluj-Napoca and Târgu Mureș: Cluj University Press and UMFST University Press, 2022).

⁹ Ștefania Mihăilescu (ed.), *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte (1838-1929)* (Iași: Polirom, 2002); Ștefania Mihăilescu (ed.), *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Studiu și antologie de texte (1929-1948)* (Iași: Polirom, 2006); Alin Ciupală (ed.), *Istoria femeii din România în documente* (Bucharest: Bucharest University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească*, 12.

¹¹ "Constituția din 1866," Gheorghe Sbârna (ed.), *Constituțiile României* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 165-166.

¹² For more information about this important law and the context in which it was adopted, see the volume of documents: Florina Sas and Andrei Florin Sora (eds.), *Lungul drum spre primul statut al funcționarilor publici din România: deziderate, (ante)proiecte, legislație, opinii și dezbateri, 1918-1923* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2019).

broader sense, those who performed public services also included the military, teachers, and the clergy, but these categories had a *special status*. Moreover, the unequal pay, complained about by many civil servants, was the most apparent proof of the lack of codification applicable to all civil servants. From the 1870s, the governments began to use more as a solution to the employment of contract staff with neither stability nor pension, named “diurnists” (“diurniști”), the term meaning administrative day laborers.¹³ In Romania, the “diurnists” were appointed by ministerial decree and, in many cases, held office for several years, thus performing a permanent public service. They were not sworn in and did not receive a salary, but only a per diem, were not entitled to a pension, and their seniority was not counted. The reasons for creating the “diurnists” positions were to avoid Parliament's control over the number of employees and to ensure the smooth running of an administration when these functions did not exist in the laws. In addition to permanent clerks and “diurnists,” there were many auxiliary staff (“auxiliary”): janitors, ushers, cleaning personnel, etc.¹⁴ They were not civil servants and had no permanent status or pension rights, but their positions were often mentioned in the various regulations.¹⁵

Despite all the modernization and Westernization of institutions and social norms, women in Romania remained “second-class citizens.”¹⁶ They did not enjoy political rights, and their property rights and ability to represent themselves in court were limited.¹⁷ Instead, they benefited from educational opportunities, including the establishment of primary and secondary schools for girls and access to enroll at the two Romanian universities by the end of the 19th century.¹⁸ Moreover, women's admission as enrolled students, even in small percentages, was a significant victory for those who advocated for emancipation from the traditional status of women being legally dependent on men. The aims of the feminist movement in Romania were primarily focused on educating young girls, but from the 1890s, demands for educational and professional equality also began to intensify.

The delay in adopting a uniform civil service framework resulted in substantial differences in recruitment, payment, and service obligations among public institutions, sometimes even within the same ministry. Uncertainties in the legal framework allowed women to be employed in the civil service, even before 1923, in posts where the conditions of eligibility were evident and where it was not permitted to hire people who did not enjoy civil and political

¹³ See: A.F. Sora, *Servir l'État roumain*, 117-123.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁵ Even after the law adopted the civil servants' statute in 1923, its status remained ambiguous; its members were not included among civil servants or mentioned among the excluded categories.

¹⁶ Maria Bucur-Deckard and Mihaela Miroiu, *Birth of Democratic Citizenship: Women and Power in Modern* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 18.

¹⁷ Until 1932, married women in Romania could not own property, could not appear in court, could not engage in work, could not enter into contracts without their husbands' approval and could not act as guardians for their children. Theodora Eliza Văcărescu, “Contexte de gen: roluri, drepturi și mișcări ale femeilor din România la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea și la începutul secolului XX,” *Sociologie Românească* 12, no. 1-2 (2014): 94, 100.

¹⁸ See: Bucur-Deckard and Miroiu, *Birth of Democratic Citizenship*, 18-24.

rights. For example, the administration of the Ministry of the Interior, the most essential ministry and with the highest number of civil servants required candidates to be Romanian, under 21 years of age, to have passed the recruitment law, and to enjoy all civil and political rights (Law of April 19, 1892, art. 22).¹⁹ In addition to imposing an age limit, it was stipulated that the candidate had to have fulfilled the conscription law (not necessarily military service) and thus enjoy all political and civil rights. These eligibility conditions, therefore, kept women out of most (permanent) civil service jobs. However, the requirement to be at least 21 years of age and fulfill military obligations did not apply in other ministries or to all Ministry of the Interior services, such as the Postal offices.

The Postal, Telegraph, and Telephone Service

We cannot provide precise data on the entry of women into each branch of public administration. Still, it is later than in Western countries, and the first institutions were similar to those in other European countries: the Postal and Telegraph Service, from 1895 the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone Service (henceforth: PTT²⁰). At the same time, the presence of women in the Romanian civil service was not primarily due to economic concerns, as has occurred in France and other countries.²¹ Instead, the process can be explained by two interrelated phenomena: the development of education for young girls, including philanthropic efforts to support orphans, and the emergence of professions in which women's contributions were indispensable, and where, for various reasons, men did not want to apply for jobs. Both processes led to the emergence of educated people and a high demand. Gradually, with the positive example of women's presence in other countries (especially in France), in a first stage, as we will see, they began to work at the Posts, Telegraphs, and Telephones offices. Some directors of various institutions realized that women were better trained and more diligent in many activities, and they took on jobs often unwanted by men. Sometimes, they were even paid less than men for the same work. Opposition against the rise in the number of women hired in Romanian state institutions other than education and the medical service arose at the beginning of the 20th century, influenced by debates about the feminization of offices in France.²²

The increased presence of women in the public services in Western countries or their employment as workers in Romania's emerging industry - for example, in the State Monopolies (*Regia Monopolurilor Statului*) in the late 1870s, facilitated openness on the part of the state

¹⁹ *Monitorul Oficial* (April 19/May 1, 1892): 411.

²⁰ This abbreviation is the same in Romanian.

²¹ Jean-Benoît Albertini, *Réforme administrative et réforme de l'État en France. Thèmes et variations de l'esprit de réforme de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris: Economica, 2000), 28; Delphine Gardes, *La dactylographe et l'expéditionnaire, Histoires des employés de bureau, 1890-1930* (Paris: Belin, 2002), 70.

²² In France, the process of feminization (including the use of this word) in the public services began to be presented and sometimes denounced in the public arena at the end of the 19th century, Vida Azimi, "La féminisation des administrations françaises: grandes étapes et historiographie (XVIII^e siècle - 1945)," *Revue française d'administration publique* 145 (2013): 21.

and the political and administrative elites, as well as a greater acceptance by the population for women to also work in the offices of some public services in the PTT offices: as permanent employees, with an uncertain status that the authorities have not clarified, or as “diurnistes.” In the last two decades of the 19th century, in low-level permanent jobs in the public administration, it became increasingly difficult to find well-educated personnel who were hired according to the admission conditions and were willing to accept a salary considered even by the authorities as unsuitable for living and to preserve it for a more extended period. Moreover, there was a significant shortage of educated candidates in those public offices where opportunities for other benefits, including illicit profits, were scarce. One way to address this shortage in the central administration was to hire students from the University of Bucharest; however, this approach had several disadvantages, as they often had to take study leave, and student numbers remained low until the early 20th century. They typically left after graduation to find better job opportunities in public administration, trying to capitalize on the previous connections they had made. Another possibility considered, as the tasks of the state multiplied and the number of civil servants increased, was to hire young, educated women, especially for low-paid jobs that required more education and attention, and those that did not pave the way for advancement or networking. In addition, the number of women graduating from primary and secondary education also increased.²³ The positive consequences of modern legislation on girls' access to public education, primarily secondary education, became evident as early as the 1880s and 1890s.

Although they did not fulfill two mandatory conditions for becoming a civil servant, since the last two decades of the 19th century, women could be seen in various jobs, considered at that time as part of the civil service category. In this research stage, the first institution where we found women as permanent public employees was the Postal and Telegraph Service,²⁴ as in other countries, such as France or the UK.²⁵ In the United States of America, the first female clerks were hired at the Treasury Department (a federal institution) in what Cindy Sondik Aron appreciates as a “bold ‘experiment’” – an idea that was not only avant-garde but bordering upon scandalous.²⁶ A significant difference between the United States and Romania or France was that the members of the first generation of female clerks (in federal offices) were predominantly part of the middle class.²⁷ Although their number was limited and their status unclear during the revolutionary times of the late 18th century, several women in the public services can be assimilated as functioning, not counting those in the National Guard. In the 1840s, in France,

²³ The Instruction Law of 1864 provided for the establishment of rural and urban girls' schools.

²⁴ The Romanian press of the 1880s-1910s used the terms *funcționară* (functionary/clerk) and *amplo(a)iată* (employee) for the PTT women job holders.

²⁵ In the UK, women became civil servants in 1870, when the telegraph system (which already employed women) was integrated under the Controller of the Post Office. Hilda Martindale, *Women Servants of the State, 1870-1938. A History of Women in the Civil Service* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1938). 15.

²⁶ Cindy Sondik Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service. Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

women worked mainly in education and local postal administration.²⁸ Women entered the French central administration after 1865, initially as auxiliary clerks.²⁹

At that time, France was the main public administration model for the Romanian elites.³⁰ In the case of women clerks, the law projects, and the debates in the public sphere from France have corresponding consequences or are discussed in Romania. The Romanian law for the organization of the postal corps of April 12, 1880, mentioned women employed with "honorarium", in the same way as male civil servants,³¹ and not as "auxiliary clerks" or "diurnistes." According to this law, the condition for women clerks was to be between 20 and 25 years of age and graduates of the Central School or the "Elena" Asylum for exams up to the rank of officiant lower-class I (art. 9).³²

In April 1885, the Postal and Telegraph Service had no less than 105 female employees.³³ Even though the Liberal National Party was still in government, as at the time of the first women's entry into the PTT, pressure from male candidates and, most probably, mainly the patriarchal mentality of some politicians and senior civil servants led to limiting the number of places for women. Thus, the new regulation on the Post and Telegraph Service from February 1885 contained a paragraph, whereby women were to be recruited and could only apply for or advance to vacant posts for women.³⁴

Constantin Minescu estimated that, based on this change, special places were provided for females in the budget and personnel lists. As it was convinced that the places for female personnel should be reduced and filled with men, in 1887, there were only 90 female staff, and in 1888, their number was reduced to 84.³⁵ Minescu, a senior official in the Postal and Telegraph Service in 1916, viewed these measures as positive. In the law of organization of 1892, there were 20 posts of the inferior officer class III and an unspecified number of the 440 posts for

²⁸ On women's employment in the postal and telegraph services in France, see: Susan Bachrach, *Dames employées. The Feminization of Postal Work in Nineteenth-Century France* (Binghamton: Haworth Press, 1984); Dominique Bertinotti, "Carrières féminines et carrières masculines dans l'administration des Postes et Télégraphes à la fin du XIXe siècle," *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 40, no. 3 (1985): 625-640.

²⁹ Azimi, "La féminisation des administrations françaises": 17-21.

³⁰ At the end of the 19th century, T. Jerebie, an advocate and keen observer of Romania's public services, said: "The laws passed in France are perfectly imitated here." Theodor Jerebie, *Functionarii. Studiu Administrativ* (Bucharest, 1892), 42.

³¹ "Art. 14 - The salaries of telegraph-postal personnel shall be fixed as follows:

... Women will start with a salary of 80 lei and will be able to advance from grade to grade only up to that of 275 lei per month, equivalent to the grade of inferior officer class I; as for other rights, they will enjoy them equally with men ...," *Law for the organization of the postal corps of April 12, 1880*, in Constantin Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române. Originea, desvoltarea și legislațiunea lor* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1916), 391.

³² *Law for the organization of the postal corps of April 12, 1880*, in Minescu *Istoria poștelor române*, 390.

³³ Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române*, 411.

³⁴ *Change of Article VII of the law on the organization of the telegraph-postal corps*, January 22/, February 5, 1885, Article 5, in Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române*, 409.

³⁵ Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române*, 411.

pupils (grades I, II, and III).³⁶ In October 1903, women accounted for 20% of Postal and Telegraph Service employees.³⁷ Still, the authorities decided that women could no longer be employed until their percentage had fallen to 10%.³⁸ Demand from female candidates was very high, as laws governing the PTT imposed a maximum number of women who could be hired. In September 1915, when the maximum number of women in the PTT had been reached, 236 applications for employment were received from female candidates.³⁹ However, the PTT policy was that only women were to be hired for specific jobs.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the authorities attempted to reduce the number of women employed in the PTT, citing that they did not perform as well as men and that the population (expressly, men, referred to as “citizens”) was opposed.⁴⁰ There were periods, such as in the fall of 1907, when the Liberal government only considered “reducing the number of women and replacing them with men, who proved more sturdy in the accomplishment of the postal, telephone, and telegraph service.”⁴¹

As far as we know, the telephone operator position was predominantly held by women at the beginning of the 20th century.⁴² There was a need for telephone operators, and for many women, employment in this service was essential, with the hope that some would even agree to work for free as trainees until a vacancy was filled. However, their pay and working conditions were criticized, and some journalists considered them poor.⁴³ In 1912, 125 women telephone operators at the PTT were divided into night and day shifts, known as “brigades.” Still, this number was expected to increase as a direct consequence of the expansion of telephone offices and subscribers.⁴⁴ Technical progress and the difficulty in finding capable employees who would accept the salary offered by the PTT were more important than the criticism of a part of Romanian society. The difficult working conditions of telephone employees often led to the identification of tuberculosis as one of the occupational diseases on the newspapers' pages.⁴⁵

Information on women's employment in public services other than education, healthcare, and the PTT is scarce. We are primarily interested in their employment in central public administrations (ministries, institutions such as the High Court of Accounts). Law professor Paul Negulescu estimated that in Romania at the beginning of the twentieth century,⁴⁶

³⁶ *Law for organizing the telegraph-post corps of 1 May 1892*, art. 3; Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române*, 453.

³⁷ Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române*, 571.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Decision no. 57514, September 12/25, 1915, *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 138, September 19/October 1, 1915: 5843.

⁴⁰ G. Rigo, “Reducerea angajatelor femei din administrația poștelor,” *Adevărul*, XX, no. 6523, October 21, 1907: 2.

⁴¹ *Adevărul*, XX, no. 6523, October 21, 1907: 2.

⁴² Besides, PTT, many women work as telephone operators in local administration and in other central institutions.

⁴³ O Telefonistă, “Din viața celor mici. Plângerile telefonistelor,” *Viitorul*, IV, no. 990 (September 5/18, 1910): 1.

⁴⁴ *Dimineața*, IX, no. 3003 (July 15/28, 1912): 3.

⁴⁵ Ecaterina Arbore, “Telefonistele și tuberculoza. O scrisoare a d-șoarei doctor Ecaterina Arbore,” *Dimineața*, VII, no. 2157 (February 27, 1910): 1.

⁴⁶ Paul Negulescu, *Tratat de drept administrativ român*, 2nd edition (Bucharest, 1906 [1904]), 158.

the number of civil servants was 102,560 people (excluding the military).⁴⁷ Between 3000 and 4000 women had been working in public services. This figure certainly includes the female staff of the PTT. Surely, the demand for public offices from female applicants was already high.

The situation was substantially different at the beginning of the 20th century for women pensioners, who benefited from this status because the legislation provided that widows of civil servants were granted at least half of the pension received by their husbands, this amount increasing according to the number of dependent children. Until 1902, a widow was also entitled to a pension if the marriage had occurred after the husband had acquired pension rights.⁴⁸ In 1913, there were only 9765 registered pensioners in Romania.⁴⁹ This figure is close to that recorded in 1903: 5,457 (civil and ecclesiastical pensioners) and 3,169 military pensioners.⁵⁰ In 1903, only 45% of the pensioners were men, while most women (55%) were widows of civil servants.⁵¹

Women in the public services. Contemporary views

The press of the time revealed a growing interest in society regarding the increasing presence of women in public services, the causes, and the technical innovations that facilitated this phenomenon, such as using telephone operators and typewriters in administration, which played a key role in women's employment. As a result, in many families, men no longer forbade their daughters, sisters, nieces, and others from holding positions in administration, teaching, and other fields, on the grounds of honoring them and dishonoring the family. Queen Elizabeth's consistent efforts to provide professional opportunities for the female graduates of the "Elena Doamna" Orphan's Children Asylum, particularly in the Postal and Telegraph Service and public education, also contributed to this. The opposition in Romanian society (primarily male, but not exclusively) to women working argued that women's roles were as educators of the family and the nation and caretakers of their family members. Furthermore, the issue of the morality of female employees in public services is a constant leitmotiv: both regarding an environment in which women from honorable families should not work and a space in which "dishonest" women work, directly or indirectly, the harshest accusations being that among the working, especially the clerks from the central Administration of the PTT, were dancers,⁵² women whose main objective was to seduce men, and even employees who, in their free time, practiced prostitution. These mostly false criticisms of a male environment also resulted in the PTT management adopting a dress code for female employees:

⁴⁷ *Statistica funcționarilor publici și a pensionarilor din România pe anul 1902-1903* (Ministry of Finance, Bucharest, 1903), I.

⁴⁸ Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească*, 22.

⁴⁹ *Statistica profesiunilor din România după recensământul general al populației din 1 ianuarie 1913 stil nou/Statistique des professions de la Roumanie d'après le recensement général de la population du 1^{er} janvier 1913* (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, General Directorate of Statistics, Bucharest, 1923), XX.

⁵⁰ *Statistica profesiunilor din România*, XXV-XXVI.

⁵¹ *Statistica profesiunilor din România*, XXV.

⁵² B.Br., "Funcționarele de la Poștă": 1.

For the last time, I hereby oblige the respective chiefs to inform the female civil servants that, as from the 20th of April this year, they will have to wear on duty a comfortable apron, gray in color, with wide sleeves and closed cuffs, which they will wear over their suit, which should be as modest and dark in color as possible.

It shall also be forbidden to wear extravagant hairstyles, costumes, and other exaggerated attire incompatible with the modest and serious demeanor that a woman employee is expected to maintain. For the execution of these dispositions, I hold all the control bodies and the respective chiefs responsible.⁵³

Other institutions and ministries adopted this dress code in the summer of 1916. It stipulated that female clerks should wear dark dresses to work and aprons while on duty, following the example of PTT employees.⁵⁴

Numerous articles - some of them under the heading *Investigations* - describe the complex life of women in the service (insufficient pay, working conditions,⁵⁵ unfair and unjust hierarchical superiors,⁵⁶ etc.), including the publication of testimonies - real or perhaps imagined by the editors.

The employment of women in public administration did not find favorable ground in Romania until the 1920s for two main reasons: there was still a pool of men willing to work in public administration, and the lower salaries paid to women were not yet a sufficient argument to reinforce the mentality of the time regarding the recognition of work. Even during the interwar period, divergent opinions persisted, including among women, who considered a career as a civil servant honorable, especially for unmarried and widowed women.⁵⁷ However, although some of the press saw women's employment in the administration as a social threat, this phenomenon was limited in scope. Society's criticism of unmarried women and those for whom this service was the only means of earning a living was less harsh. Moreover, married women needed their husbands' permission to work. Romania's entry into the First World War led to less criticism of women employed in jobs other than education or medical services, and the legal right (as a temporary measure) to work in various administrative services.⁵⁸ Beyond the peculiarities of each country, the similarities of feminization and synchronism with the West are sometimes striking. For example, Delphine Gardey observes that the change in the proportion of women in the office is reflected in the imagination of contemporaries

⁵³ Excerpt from a circular of Lieutenant-Colonel Verzea, Director General of the PTT, *Dimineața*, VIII, no. 2558 (April 21, 1911): 3.

⁵⁴ *Mișcarea*, VIII, no. 195, September 1/14, 1916: 2.

⁵⁵ A. Nora, "O zi la telefon," *Adevărul*, XXII, no. 7276, December 7/20, 1909: 2.

⁵⁶ The superiors were not only men: the first hierarchical head of the telephone operators was the female supervisor, "Martirele telefonului. Destăinuirii senzaționale," *Viitorul*, VI, no. 1511 (April 25, 1912): 1-2.

⁵⁷ There were also rumors that women employed in various public services were to be forbidden to marry (See: the Post Office women employees: *Adevărul*, XII, no. 3715, November 25/December 7, 1899: 3). PTT female employees could only marry officials of the same institution. See also B.Br., "Funcționarele de la Poștă," *Adevărul*, XXIV, no. 7766 (April 26/May 9, 1911): 1.

⁵⁸ See Văcărescu, "Contexte de gen": 105.

by the unusual presence of a bouquet, a feature also found in the notes of those who have described office life in Romania.⁵⁹

As we have already seen, in the absence of a law (possibly a *statute*) defining the term “civil servant,” and despite women still being considered “second-class citizens,” those who worked in the public services were referred to as civil servants. The reasoning for including them was that they fulfilled some of the attributes, in the absence of a legal definition, that jurists considered as a condition for an employee to be regarded as a civil servant: to be paid from the State budget, to perform a permanent public service (not the case for female journalists) and to represent the public authority.⁶⁰

The discourse about *civil service* and *government jobs* is also becoming a topic of discussion concerning women. One example is the imposition of a *numerus clausus* at the PTT. Moreover, there are many views against the feminization of public offices. Despite some shred of evidence, such as lower pay, greater job stability than men, and even better training, female clerks were blamed for the problems of the Romanian administration. One such entry was published in *Neamul Românesc* at the beginning of 1916, in which this was one of the two proposed solutions for future budgetary savings and, at the same time, salary increases:

By excluding women from employment, *except those in education, and replacing them with men in the ratio of one man to four running.*

The reasons are: a) *I believe women do not provide the same level of service to the State; they work slowly, distracting other civil servants from their work.* b) *By receiving women in the civil service, the State itself contributes to the destruction of the Romanian nation, the Romanian race, because the role of women is not to be clerks but housewives. Once a woman is given a position, she no longer thinks about marriage but gets used to the life of a civil servant and forgets her role in the world, and those who marry, as they find it a little tricky in marriage, divorce immediately, on the basis that they have a specific resource, the State salary, and they demand whatever the man wants from them.*

*These two reasons would concern the state, which could be based on reforms that would benefit the Romanian nation. The law could be adopted by parliamentary initiative, unless the honorable representatives of the country hold a different opinion.*⁶¹

The debates on the pros and cons of women's presence in public offices after World War I

Only 20 women lower-grade III officers of the Postal and Telegraph Office appeared in the first yearbook of the Ministry of the Interior in 1893. However, in the 1914 yearbook of the same

⁵⁹ Gardey, *La dactylographe et l'expéditionnaire*, 54.

⁶⁰ In 1904, the opinion of a journalist from *Adevărul* about the telephone operators was that they were only “intermediaries between the state, which offered this service, and the customers, and they were not a public authority, E.D.F., “*Domnișoarele de la telefon*,” *Adevărul*, XVII, no. 548, November 12/25, 1904: 1.

⁶¹ Nichita, “O propunere folositoare și funcționarilor și bugetului,” *Neamul Românesc*, XI, no. 1 (January 3/16, 1916): 3.

ministry, published after a 13-year interruption, women penetrated the local and central administrations.⁶² *The Ministry of the Interior's yearbook for 1923*, published before the Civil Servants Statute entered into force, shows a substantially different situation: hundreds of female civil servants employed as typewriters, permanent clerks (*impiegate*) class I and II, but also as deputy head of office (*șef de birou*) class I or II or in the position of head of office, mainly in the central administration of the Ministry of the Interior.⁶³ Even though the feminization of the civil service to a certain extent meant its devaluation and “proletarianization,” with men abandoning less prestigious and poorly paid posts,⁶⁴ In the most important ministry in Romania, the Ministry of the Interior, in 1923, Maria Paroșanu was a second-class head of service in the Communal Directorate, as was Viorica Burghel in the Secretariat and Personnel Directorate, and Eliza Bengescu was editor of the Press Service, the third most important position.⁶⁵ The situation was not much different in Bucovina and Transylvania, although women's emancipation had begun several decades earlier.⁶⁶

After the First World War, as the number of women in the civil service increased (as “diurnistes,” “auxiliaries” or for an indefinite period), the debates on women public servants intensified: their pay and training in relation to men, whether or not to impose a *numerus clausus*, the introduction of the condition that the status of a civil servant's wife should also mean her resignation from the civil service, etc. On the one hand, there was increasing pressure on women, especially young women, to have a job, and on the other hand, the employer—the State—was often more inclined to hire female candidates than men who wanted the same job. This issue is addressed in various drafts on the status of civil servants and in the contemporary press, including magazines dedicated to civil servants and written by them. In an article, which also emphasized positive traits (intellectual qualities, punctuality, attention to detail) and did not reject their presence in the administration, Mihai Voluță (Volutză), head of the office at the Iasi prefecture, criticized what he called “pseudo-functionary:”

...There are women who crave a public office only to create resources for themselves, eager for life, not for work, and without the slightest inclination for a career as a clerk. They obtain it by petty means, speculating on the good faith or favor of a potentate, or by putting into office the very thing of which she should not make a title, her feminine charms.

And these are the very ones who sneak more quickly through the strata of society, winning sympathies, those from whose souls no sincere burning desire is felt, and who make their faults the delights of life. The image that these pseudo-functionaries arouse in the life of the bourgeoisie is one of disgust and discouragement for all that is honest and hard-working.

⁶² *Anuarul Ministerul de Interne pe anul 1914* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1893): 4-8.

⁶³ *Anuarul Funcționarilor de stat ai Ministerul de Interne pe anul 1923* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1923): passim.

⁶⁴ Jean-François Kesler, *Sociologie des fonctionnaires* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 22-23.

⁶⁵ *Anuarul Funcționarilor de stat ai Ministerului de Interne pe anul 1923*: 14-15.

⁶⁶ Chiorean, “Funcționăria din Transilvania,” 50.

They face their colleagues with all the emphatic vanity of their vanity, missing for days on various pretexts, and at the office, wasting their time in sterile discussions extraneous to any service concerns, counting the minutes to end, often sacrificing a few hours of boredom...⁶⁷

In the next issue of this review, a reply to this article was published, signed by Elena Cristache-Măcin, "Deputy Chief of the Interior Ministry and Student of Letters and Law (Year III)." Her text can also be seen as testimony from inside the Romanian society and public administration:

...'The need for the equalization of the two sexes is felt everywhere,' and this need is all the more felt as the woman realizes that she is not made only to serve as an object of courtship for men, and men are convinced that they should not see in the female only a being adorned with ribbons and laces, but a companion in life...

...I have lived among them, and I can say that many deserve to stand alongside their male colleagues. Their number would be even more significant if more accounts were taken of the aptitude of each of them when they were appointed to their posts and if 'recommendations of all kinds' were not given precedence. Most girls do not get the fundamental education they need at home or school. When they enter society, they are poorly prepared and sometimes even unprepared.

Through circumstances unknown, the spoiled little girl becomes a clerk. She doesn't know; she doesn't realize that as soon as she steps onto the threshold of the salon, she no longer has to conform to the one she admired in some novel or fashion journal, that salon life is entirely different from the one she imagined.

...I have seen women who support large families on a modest civil servant's salary; I have known students who divide their time between university courses and seminars and their job in the public service, yet are poorly paid. I have met, with some regret, women who could be compared to the chaff in the wheat.⁶⁸

Conclusions

The employment of the first women in public services other than education and the medical system, and in later stages their increase in number and diversification of posts, were made possible by the intersection of the State's interests in hiring in certain posts and positions where there was no competition, mainly because of the payment, which was considered as unsatisfactory by men. We can add other causes that have led to this outcome: the need for some women to earn a living in the absence of different outlets, visible at the beginning in education and the medical system (professional midwives, nurses, nurses' assistants), the concern of associations or public bodies to provide a decent living for young women to ensure a decent existence until marriage, or for widows or divorced women without other sources of

⁶⁷ "Câteva cuvinte asupra rolului femeii ca funcționară de birou," *România Administrativă*, II, no. 11-14 (June-July 1921): 47-48.

⁶⁸ "Femeia ca funcționară de birou," *România Administrativă*, II, no. 15-18 (August-September 1921): 59.

income. As Alin Ciupală points out, at the end of the 19th century, “women's paid work was seen as proof of low social origin, downgrading or poverty.”⁶⁹ The gradual change was primarily due to the State's need to employ more women in jobs where there was little competition from men, who were also dissatisfied with their pay. This employment strategy offered more stability (and predictability) and better-educated candidates than their male counterparts. The changing mentalities of the time were also accompanied by changes in the labor market in Western countries, particularly France,⁷⁰ which Romanian society looked to as a model and was based on, as well as the United Kingdom⁷¹ and the United States.⁷²

Research on archives, the press, and specialized publications written by and for civil servants reveals that women's professional and social status in the civil service was not significantly different from that in other countries; many of the impediments women faced were similar. Although there were many voices against the presence of women in public services, we gradually find them in several institutions, particularly as copyists, telephone operators, typists, and from the end of the century as “impiegate,” the first grade in the civil service. Before 1923, the authorities did not explicitly state whether or not they were civil servants. In fact, this is also becoming the government's strategy to create a legal gray area, where it is no longer explicitly stated whether women are considered civil servants. However, society still had a long way to go to ensure that women enjoyed similar rights, at least in theory, in public services as men. As Cindy Sondik Aron notes for the United States, while government employment has created several opportunities for women and chances for a better life, the process has also raised several problems, not only for new hires:⁷³ changes in the space, the need to adapt and difficulties in making changes for both sexes, the fact that women can also perform activities that are specific to men (especially of an intellectual nature), the gradual shift in perception from mother, educator of children and mistress of the home to income producer and worker in a space where there are also male colleagues. In Romania, significant distinctions occurred between various state institutions, depending on the positions women held, their level of education, whether they were integrated into influential networks, and, last but not least, their age, marital status, and the presence of children. And everywhere, their social status was lower than that of men in the same jobs. The difficulty of co-existing family life and public service was an important topic of debate at the time, not only for women civil servants but also for men.

⁶⁹ Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească*, 45.

⁷⁰ For example. El. I Găvănescul, “Cultura profesională a femeii,” *Lupta*, IX, no. 1796 (August 30/September 11, 1892): 2. Also, in a short article, published in *Timpul* in 1893, the Romanians learned about the number of women working in various European countries, the first listed being France. A good part of the figures from other countries refer to female clerks at the Postal and Telegraph offices; in Romania, there were only 85 in this institution, and no other job was mentioned, *Timpul*, XV, no. 118 (June 2/14, 1893): 2.

⁷¹ *Universul*, X, no. 94 (April 24/May 6, 1892): 2; B. Brănișteanu, “Femeia engleză,” *Adevărul*, XII, no. 3676 (October 16/29, 1899): 1.

⁷² “Situățiunea femeilor în America,” *Românul*, XXVII (June 23/July 4, 1883): 559.

⁷³ Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service*, 7.

The conservatism of society is also perceptible among women civil servants. One such example, which is not unique, can also be seen in an article also published in *România Administrativă*, signed by a woman, Marcela Mateescu, an employee in the Ministry of the Interior, who wondered “where the role of married women begins and ends,” considering that especially if she had children, she should “stay at home, look after her children, her husband, and the household, and thus fulfill her social role better and make more savings than if she were to hold a job.”⁷⁴

The 1923 Statute Law on Public Functionaries explicitly stated that Romanian citizens could be civil servants regardless of gender. However, four years later, the law on the “harmonization” of the salaries in the public services stated that: “Women in the hierarchy of functions may occupy any rank” (art. 2), but at the same time, there were limitations: “in the administration proper, in each ministry directorate,” where they could not exceed 30% of the total number of civil servants (art. 3). There was no restriction on their number in teaching, medical and social work posts (art. 3),⁷⁵ where the presence of women was high, and in areas where men often avoided working in these fields, such as social work, nursing, and medical assisting. Despite these limitations, the number of women in administration grew steadily during the interwar period, with some occupying middle management positions, such as head of office. Women were often better educated than the male civil servants with whom they competed for identical posts.

⁷⁴ “Femeia căsătorită ca funcționară de birou,” *România Administrativă*, III, no. 2 (February 1922): 14.

⁷⁵ *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 118 (June 1, 1927): 7421.