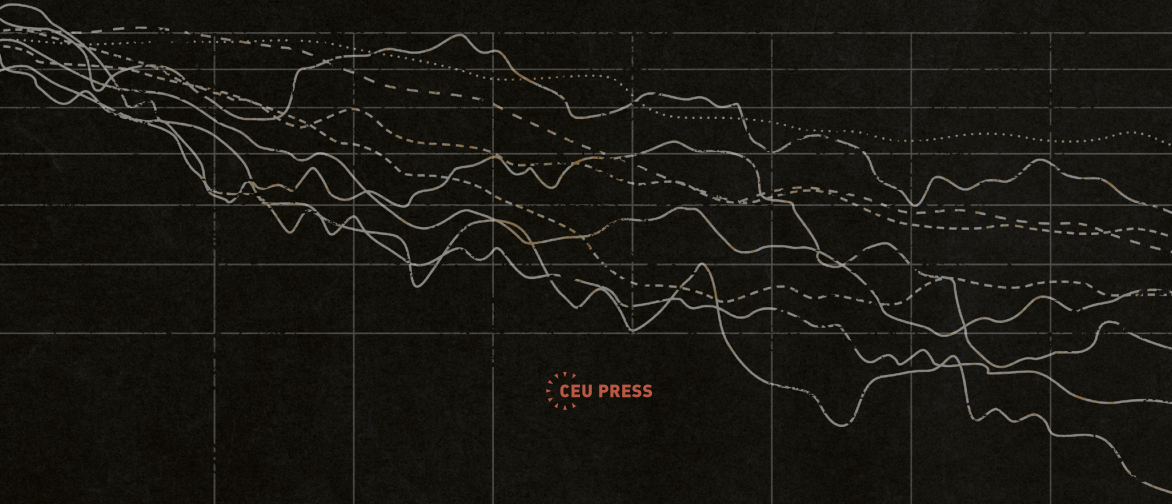
THE GREAT DEPRESSION
in Eastern Europe

Edited by

Klaus Richter, **Jasmin Nithammer**, and **Anca Mândru**



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Chapter 9

ROMANIA

SERVING FEWER BY DESIGN: AUSTERITY WELFARE POLITICS DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION[1]

Alexandra Ghiț

In the interwar period, Romanian statesmen were at first unwilling and then very much unable to steer the priorities of domestic politics toward social rights. In the 1920s, National Liberal Party governments reluctantly expanded employment-related social entitlements—which Linda Gordon termed the "first track" of welfare—as a way of minimally keeping up with international commitments.[2] In 1929, politicians opposed to the Liberals' capital-friendly approaches won elections based on a promise to create policies that were more supportive of peasants and workers. The progressive platform of the 1929 National Peasant government was undermined by the economic crisis and the Peasantists' own authoritarian turn by 1932. This political shift is how, at the peak of the crisis, increases in social spending became explicitly prohibited as part of internationally agreed austerity packages accompanying foreign loans. Social assistance policies, "the second track of welfare," meant to support those who could not benefit from contributory schemes, also became stingier.

The world crisis arrived in Romania on the coattails of an already present agrarian crisis. Like its other agrarian neighbors, Romania began experiencing a drop in revenues from its raw material exports,

1 This chapter develops on and integrates two sections in chapter 2 of my PhD thesis, Alexandra Ghiț, "Loving Designs: Gendered Welfare Provision, Activism and Expertise in Interwar Bucharest" (PhD diss., Central European University, Vienna, 2020). Part of the work on this chapter was done while the author was a fellow of the Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena in January–June 2022.

2 Linda Gordon, *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

primarily grain, before the crash of autumn 1929. Like Hungary, Bulgaria, or Yugoslavia, between 1926 and 1928, the country borrowed increasing amounts.[3] Similarly to Hungary, the country's economy and the stability of its banking system became bound to increasingly fickle financial markets.[4] Romania would continue to borrow throughout the crisis. The 1931 failure of the Viennese Credit-Anstalt generated capital flight throughout Europe, including from Romania. Whereas many Western European countries departed from the Gold Standard and allowed their currencies to devalue, Romania—and many other Eastern European countries—did not, possibly to avoid further increases in the costs of external debt servicing.[5] In fact, Romania was one of the last countries to depart from the Gold Standard, in 1932.

The crisis arrived rather quietly, in 1929. It was felt by all in 1931, reached its nadir in 1932, and lingered into 1934. The prices of stocks at the Bucharest stock market were already declining in October 1929. However, neither economists nor politicians seemed to be aware yet that the kind of depression occurring in Germany and the Netherlands would be reaching Romania,[6] even if newspapers noted the steady rise in desperate job seekers, especially in the more heavily industrialized Western part of the country. Yet a little over one year later, in 1931, the value of plant-based agricultural production was less than half of its 1928 value; by 1933, plant-based agricultural production had declined to a little more than a third of the 1928 value. Prices for oil and coal, important sources of revenue for the state, fell even more dramatically, with the noticeable

3 Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe since 1918* (London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995), 56.

4 Richard S. Grossman, "The Shoe That Didn't Drop: Explaining Banking Stability during the Great Depression," *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 3 (1994): 678.

5 Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change*, 65.

6 Anca Mândru, "From Far Away to Closer to Home: Early Perceptions of the Great Depression in Romania—The Liminality of Failing Democracy: East Central Europe During the Interwar Slump," Project Webpage, *The Liminality of Failing Democracy: East Central Europe During the Interwar Slump* (blog), February 15, 2022, https://blog.bham.ac.uk/interwarslump/2022/02/15/from-far-away-to-closer-to-home-early-perceptions-of-the-great-depression-in-romania/.

drop beginning already in 1929.[7] Urban living conditions worsened quickly due to a decrease in the nominal value of wages and because of unemployment. In the countryside, conditions became dire.[8] As this chapter will show, government relief did not arrive. Whereas neighboring countries began combating unemployment first through unemployment aid and, from the mid-1930s on, through public works schemes, such central-government-managed schemes never quite arrived in Romania, despite promises.[9] On the whole, the economy picked up once Romania could resume its exports to Germany and could engage in a politics of rearmament, the latter from 1935 on.[10] In cities, the situation began to improve somewhat from the second half of 1934. In the countryside, recovery was much slower, partly because the price of wheat for export remained low; in 1937 it was still slightly lower than in 1929.

In recent scholarship on policy directions in interwar Romania, the focus is on state expansion or state intervention in the economy, rather than the lack of intervention that became highly visible during the crisis. A recent account of the emergence of the welfare state in interwar Romania claims that these interwar welfare policies emerged as part of a cross-ideological process of building up a "missing [middle class] core," itself integral to a broader agenda of nationalizing state-building.[11] Other scholars of the interwar era have stressed in their accounts the Romanian state's drive toward economic development after the mid-1930s, particularly its political orientation toward economic dirigisme. For instance, Grama argues that the 1920–30 period saw a kind of capital-friendly state expansion: "an explosion of labor legislation," albeit one that neutralized social conflict and kept the cost of labor low. Grama stresses

7 Nicolae N. Constantinescu, *Situația clasei muncitoare din România, 1914–1944* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966), 222.

8 Constantinescu, *Situația clasei muncitoare*, 227–48.

9 Aldcroft and Morewood, *Economic Change*, 69. Between 1928 and 1931, the Ministry of Labour asked various local authorities to open roadworks (especially) in several counties most affected by unemployment – this depended on local resources available. Gheorghe Banu, *Şomajul în România* (Bucureşti: s.n., 1931), 23–25.

10 Constantinescu, *Situația clasei muncitoare*, 278–81.

11 Sergiu Delcea, "A Nation of Bureaucrats or a Nation of Workers? Welfare Benefits as Nation-Building Modernization Tools in Interwar Romania," *Journal of European Social Policy* 32, no. 1 (2022): 75–90.

that employers' dissatisfaction with the mildly interventionist labor laws of the late 1920s paved the way for Romania's embrace of economic nationalism after the mid-1930s.[12] Certainly, for most of the 1920s and again after 1932, Romanian governments pursued economic nationalism policies, which included placing limits on certain kinds of imports, introducing exchange controls, and controlling (but not limiting) the influx of foreign workers.[13] But this was not the case during most of the Great Depression years.[14] And, in general, economic nationalism did not translate into redistributive policies—neither in the 1920s nor after the middle of the 1930s, when a modicum of prosperity returned. As Murgescu has shown, Romania's social indicators were consistently the lowest in its region.[15]

A steady topic of inquiry in historical production during the state socialist period in Romania, the Great Depression, its social toll, and its political aftereffects has been left unexplored in recent scholarship. This chapter's analysis of changes in social insurance and social assistance between 1929 and 1933 will show that new labor laws and welfare laws passed during this period were designed around the goal of limited coverage. The tendency toward limiting, rather than expanding, welfare can be detected in politicians' statements of intent, but most often in policy design and the nitty gritty of new laws and regulations.

In his historical study on social spending in Malawi, Luke Messac argued that the notion that resources for welfare are scarce is a political construction, with colonial authorities and, more recently, international organizations fostering the idea that economic development and higher social spending are mutually exclusive in practice.[16] Despite international constraints, Romanian politicians had,

12 Adrian Grama, "The Cost of Juridification: Lineages of Cheap Labor in Twentieth-Century Romania," *Labor* 17, no. 3 (2020): 37.

13 Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010)* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2010), 256.

14 Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010)*, 255.

15 Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010)*, 219.

16 Luke Messac, *No More to Spend: Neglect and the Construction of Scarcity in Malawi's History of Health Care* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

in principle, greater space for political maneuver than that available in colonial and postcolonial settings.

How did actual and constructed scarcity shape the emerging welfare state in Romania? This chapter argues that Romania's welfare politics during the world economic crisis was defined by a politics of austerity. Drawing on critical analyses of the welfare state, I look at how welfare policies from the late 1920s until the middle of the 1930s were primarily shaped not by ideologies of development but by medium- and short-term policymaking oriented toward cost cutting.

In the first section of the chapter, I discuss the budgetary austerity measures adopted by Romania's governments. I show how a social-spending austerity principle linked to "open door" economic policies led to politicians downplaying or outright denying the scale of urban unemployment and stalling the creation of government-level relief and public works schemes for the jobless. This, in turn, opened the door for various municipal-level assistance schemes and, eventually, a desperate struggle for funds for relief. In the second and third parts of the chapter, I widen the frame, probing into some of the broader causes and effects of the government's attitude toward the crisis. Thus, in the second section of the chapter, I show how the government's capacity to be a direct provider of social assistance had been reduced by successive rounds of cuts to the budget of the Direction of Social Assistance, while in the third part of the chapter, I discuss the drop in living standards in the period 1929–33, emphasizing the massive scale of the crisis in the already very poor countryside. In the fourth part of the chapter, I provide a gendered analysis of key welfare and health-care laws adopted during the Great Depression, showing—with particular reference to maternity benefits—that for most citizens these laws had few effects due to austerity-based design principles as well as implementation issues.

9.1 Misconstruing Unemployment

The commitment to economic orthodoxy in Romania sprang from the National Peasant Party's (NPP) out-of-step embrace of "an open

door" trade and customs policy in early 1929.[17] After a decade of economic nationalism, as other countries were beginning to protect their economies, the Romanian government encouraged foreign direct investment and strengthened financial ties with banks abroad. During most of the Depression years, Romania was governed by the NPP and its electoral coalition partners. After running on a progressive platform "to end the misery of the population," in both national and local elections of 1928–30, the NPP governed in an austere manner in the years that followed (1928–31; 1932–33).[18] Originally, the NPP was a center-left group created in 1926 through the fusion of the regional centrist Romanian National Party from Transylvania and the more radical agrarianist Peasant Party originating in the Old Kingdom. For the 1928 campaign, the new NPP concluded electoral alliances with conservatives and social democrats, among others, as part of an intense opposition campaign against the Liberals (NLP). In 1930, Prince Carol, in exile since 1925 when he refused to break off a love affair, returned to the country. With the support of key politicians and public personalities, the Prince was crowned King Carol II that year.[19] Notably, the NLP opposed the "restoration."[20] In the first 2 years after his coronation, Carol II's policy preferences aligned with the priorities of the Peasantist governments and of a short-lived "government of technicians" led by veteran politician Constantin Argetoianu and prominent historian Nicolae Iorga. In 1932, the National Peasantists were recalled to government. Notably, the party was now electing prime ministers from among their more conservative leaders.

As outlined in the introduction, starting in 1929, the NPP government contracted sovereign loans from the Banque de France,

17 Dietmar Müller, *Agrarpopulismus in Rumänien. Programmatik und Regierungspraxis der Bauernpartei und der Nationalbäuerlichen Partei Rumäniens in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, vol. 1, Rumänien-Studien (St. Augustine, FL: Gardez! Verlag, 2001), 124–29.

18 Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Partidului Național Țărănesc*, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994); Simion Cutișteanu and Gheorghe I. Ioniță, *Electoratul din România în anii interbelici: mișcarea muncitorească și democratică în viața electorală din România interbelică* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1981).

19 Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866–1947)*, vol. III: *Carol al II-lea* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 7–70.

20 Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866–1947)*, 1–32.

granted in exchange for a commitment to keeping the state budget balanced.[21] The 1929 "monetary stabilization" loan was accompanied by the Rist technical mission—one of several "Money Doctor" delegations to Eastern Europe at the time—dispatched by the French bank to provide assistance to the Romanian National Bank.[22] The "Charles Rist mission" recommended public sector downsizing as one of the main measures to be taken by the government.[23] In Cornel Ban's recent assessment of this interwar situation: "Romania was, practically, in Greece's situation from 2010, with the French central bank playing the part of the IMF."[24]

The government dutifully applied the harsh and publicly very visible "sacrifice curbs [cuts]" required by the lenders as part of monetary stabilization programs. Three successive rounds of cuts (in January 1931, January 1932, and January 1933) reduced the salaries of all public employees by 50 percent. In addition, public sector pensions decreased by 33 percent in 1932. The cuts affected white-collar workers but also thousands of blue-collar workers employed by the railways and several state-owned enterprises.

In conjunction with cuts, the government engaged in early and sustained denial of unemployment. Articles construed unemployment as a problem of industrialization and therefore, not a possible issue in Romania, an agrarian country imagined to be inhabited overwhelmingly by subsistence farmers. The typical preamble of most articles discussing unemployment in state-supported publications in the early 1930s claimed that the lack of jobs had never

21 Dominique Torre and Elise Tosi, "Charles Rist and the French Missions in Romania 1929–1933. Why the 'Money Doctors' Failed?" in *Economic and Financial Stability in Southeast Europe in a Historical and Comparative Perspective (Conference Proceedings of the 4th Meeting of the South-Eastern European Monetary History Network)* (2009), https://www.nbs.rs/en/drugi-nivo-navigacije/publikacije-i-istrazivanja/seemhn/seemhn_conf/, 91–106.

22 The mission was considered a failure. Romania rescheduled payments in 1933 and officially defaulted on the loan in 1941. Rist complained that the stabilization loan was not used for its intended monetary policy purposes but rather to service existing arrears. Torre and Tosi, "Charles Rist," 7, 11.

23 Torre and Tosi, "Charles Rist," 5.

24 Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc* (Bucharest: Tact, 2014), 36.

been a genuine issue in the country and that the phenomenon had emerged recently due to global developments.[25]

In the beginning of a study on unemployment relief published in the government's Labor Bulletin (1932), social researcher Veturia Mănuilă argued:

> Although it was never an acute issue in our country, unemployment became a current issue as the international economic crisis deepened. As our country is overwhelmingly agrarian, 80% of the population was employed in work in the countryside. The rest of the population number is in all 3.600.000 souls, about 828.000 heads of families. Evidently, this number is much too low for all the non-agricultural occupations in the country, such that under normal conditions, it was not even possible to speak in Romania about unemployment. [. . .] However, the economic crisis determined a contraction of activity in the various commercial and industrial enterprises, and this reduction created a state of lack of work, which took both officialdom and public opinion by surprise; a social phenomenon that is highly familiar abroad has produced here such confusion that a significant part of public opinion does not recognize the existence of unemployment in Romania.[26]

This assessment was contradicted by a government publication which argued that unemployment was felt in Romania as early as 1927, when public works tied to postwar reconstruction ended. Written in 1930, at the height of Banque de France influence, by C. Stănescu, the director charged with managing unemployment in the Ministry of Labor, the text recognized that the government could not afford to become involved in public works, but that it had concluded a workers' exchange treaty with France (itself hit by unemployment). Congruent with the general government tendency

25 Veturia Manuilă, "Principii de organizarea ajutorării șomeourilor în sectorul I al Municipiului București," *Buletinul Muncii, Cooperației și Asigurărilor Sociale* 12, no. 10–12 (1932): 437.

26 Veturia Manuilă, "Principii de organizarea ajutorării șomeourilor în sectorul I al Municipiului București," 437.

of downplaying unemployment, even this more clear-eyed piece ended on the hopeful note: "It must be mentioned that lack of employment in Romania presents itself as something unnatural and passing. Both the density of the population and the development stage of our industry, which has so many still unexploited natural resources, confirm this."[27]

If some considered unemployment "unnatural and passing," other policy stakeholders had been pushing for systematic measures for combating growing unemployment since before the crisis. In 1927, representatives of the social democratic General Confederation of Labor (Confederația Generală a Muncii, CGM) had met with the Minister of Labor to propose measures for combating the rising unemployment level. Trade unionists Mirescu and Flueraș asked for controls on imports for goods that could be made in the country, mechanization credits for small producers and craftsmen, public works, bans on mass layoffs in the public sector, the reduction of working hours, emergency relief for unemployed workers and clerks, and the rapid passing of legislation on unemployment insurance (*alocații de șomaj*). A commission of specialists was created to study the matter the same autumn, but no nationwide measures were taken.[28]

Yet rather than setting up national-level unemployment relief schemes, from 1930 on, the government encouraged municipalities to organize such aid themselves (mostly in-kind food aid and soup kitchens [*cantine populare*]). Occasionally, the Ministry of Labor transferred small sums to various localities that simply could not shoulder the burden of too many unemployed. However, by 1931 the government had made it clear that municipalities were to collect their own funds for relief and, otherwise, push back to the countryside any nonresident job seekers. Cities organized charity balls and various other collections, but by 1931 a medium-sized industrial

27 C. Stănescu, "Piața muncii," in *Zece ani de protecție socială în România,* ed. Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale (Bucharest: Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale, 1930), 198.

28 Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (hereafter ANIC), Fond 3086- Amintiri și memorii (Collection 60), File 241/567 "Mirescu Ion, Vol II (1926–1932)," ff. 350, 386, 519.

city such as Cluj-Napoca announced that it could no longer provide assistance for any unemployed.[29]

In September 1931, the national government appeared to finally have a plan for the distribution of aid for the unemployed. Previously, in March 1931, the government had introduced a bill for a 10 million lei credit to the Ministry of Labor, for assistance toward the unemployed. Such assistance would largely be organized in accordance with the vision of State Undersecretary in the Ministry of Labor, Dr. Gheorghe Banu. In a brochure on unemployment published later that year, Banu legitimized the government's stance that far: the "truly" jobless were to be helped especially through in-kind aid (such as food and fire wood) and the existing local and regional committees were to research what kind of public works could potentially be opened in order to hire the unemployed.[30] In effect, the new plan continued the same practices, but switched some coordination tasks from municipalities to the central government.

In the March plenum discussion on the bill, social democratic MPs spoke against it, arguing that the 10 million sought were wholly insufficient and that the plan entailed the continuation of a form of distribution of welfare that treated workers in an undignified way. Rather than "charity," MP Mirescu demanded that unemployment be considered an issue to be dealt with through social insurance. In addition, since the beginning of the crisis, social democrats had also repeatedly demanded a ban on foreign "specialist" workers as well as a ban on the import of goods which could be manufactured in Romania. Minister of Labor Hațieganu and other supporters of the plan replied curtly that the issue of unemployment was being blown out of proportion in Romania and that the government had helped and would continue to help the unemployed.[31] Later, a 1932 plan proposed by social democratic MPs for the tackling of

29 "Cluj—Ajutorarea șomerilor," *Universul*, March 21, 1931.

30 Gheorghe Banu, *Șomajul în România* (București: s. n., 1931); For a slightly different reading of Banu's stance, see Dragoș Sdrobiș, "Elitele și universitatea în România interbelică," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie "George Barițiu"* 60 (2012): 13.

31 "Desbaterile parlamentare—Camera—Ședința din 24 Martie," *Dreptatea*, March 26, 1931, Arcanum Digitheca Online Database, https://adt.arcanum.com/en/view/Dreptatea_1931_03/?pg=92&layout=s.

unemployment as a social insurance issue, through a tripartite contributory scheme, did not pass.[32]

Reluctance to address unemployment was visible in the Romanian government's international dealings. At the 1932 conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Romania stood out as the only country represented that would not vote for a proposed "Resolution concerning action to be taken to remedy the present crisis."[33] Whereas the Romanian government had submitted to the International Labour Organization a list of public works it was going to open in the country, MP Mirescu was surprised when informed about them by ILO representative Staal in a postconference letter.

Reluctance to deal with unemployment was discernible in Romanian employers' reactions to even quite unambitious legal initiatives. A 1932 law introduced to Parliament by the municipality of Timișoara, which proposed that funds for local committees for unemployment relief be collected from workers' contributions and various local taxes, was opposed by employers' representatives across the country. In connection to that law, a memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Labor by various Chambers of Commerce and employers' unions emphasized that it was unfair that "those who do not work should receive, whereas those who do work should not receive."[34]

When not misrepresenting and denying unemployment during the crisis years, Romania's governments engaged in suppressing popular protests against austerity and immiseration. This violent tactic culminated in the 1931 bloody crackdown of a railway workers' strike in Bucharest, an event that outraged not only sympathizers of the left wing but also enthusiasts of the extreme right wing. In the short and medium term, the local fascist organization, the Iron

32 "Mirescu Ion, Vol II (1926–1932)," 567.

33 "Mirescu Ion, Vol II (1926–1932)," 575; see list of resolutions of the 16th International Labour Conference, Geneva 1932. "Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference (1919–2019)," accessed February 25, 2023, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/organigramme/jur/legal-instruments/WCMS_428590/lang--pt/index.htm.

34 "Mirescu Ion, Vol II (1926–1932)," 581.

Guard, stood to profit from established parties' repressive turn and seeming indifference to social demands.[35]

9.2 Central Government Frameworks for Social Assistance

By 1931, when the government was under increasing pressure to engage with growing unemployment and the immiseration of both urban and rural families, the capacity of the central government to act as a distributor of welfare had been curtailed. In fact, from the early 1920s founding of the Social Assistance Direction, the "second pillar" of welfare provision was only assumed to be a state duty in an indirect sense. Between 1921 and 1929, the official goals of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection's (hereafter MMSOS) Social Assistance Direction were to "organize, lead and supervise all actions related to mandatory social assistance."[36] The Direction's head, popular writer and social reformer Eugen Botez, explained that the office he led strove to "develop and support private initiative" rather than create new state-owned and state-administered institutions or programs.[37]

The goal of developing and supporting "private initiative" was achieved through the subsidies distributed by the Social Assistance Direction. To a lesser degree, the Direction was a direct welfare provider as well—in the middle of the 1920s, it maintained several "work colonies" meant to reform beggars and vagrants. During the Direction's first decade of functioning, "mandatory assistance" entailed indoor (in institutions like orphanages or homes for the elderly) and outdoor (cash and in-kind aid) assistance to those "in a physical, moral or material state of inferiority" who "could not

35 Marin C. Stănescu, *Stânga politică din România în anii crizei (1929–1933)* (Bucharest: Editura Mica Valahie, 2002), 46; Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso Books, 2019), 161.

36 Eugen Botez, "Asistența Socială," in *Zece ani de politică socială în România (1920–1930),* ed. Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale (Bucharest: Ministerul Muncii, Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale, 1930), 249.

37 Botez, "Asistența Socială," 250.

support themselves through their own efforts."[38] Within this definition, poor mothers and children, widows, the disabled, and the elderly were categories of special interest. Assistance could also be provided to "the valid indigents," that is, those capable of work who needed support in finding employment.[39]

In 1927, the Social Assistance Direction lost its budgetary autonomy and, as a result, much of its revenues. A year later, the ability of the Social Assistance Direction to fund and monitor private initiative social assistance, while also serving as a direct welfare provider, decreased further. During that year, the National Liberal government was dealing with monetary instability and increasingly strong opposition. In this context, according to Eugen Botez, the government's social assistance body had to deal with additional cuts:

> The critical situation in which the Assistance found itself [in 1928] only became worse as the cost of living became higher and instead of expanding, the Assistance had to limit its activity. It decreases and cuts aids and subsidies for charitable organizations, it halts the construction of institutions and even shuts down part of the existing ones, so that it could sustain the remainder.[40]

These 1928 second round of cuts, occurring soon after the 1927 reduction of revenues, managed to derail a post-World War I vision of social policymaking for various categories of "dependents" as having to occur, at least to a certain extent, at the level of the national government. Notably, this contraction of central state

38 This category included "poor new mothers and infant children," "poor and orphaned children, foundlings, the disabled, the morally-abandoned vagrants and those children whose poor parents are unable to work," the poor disabled and invalids, "the poor wounded, convalescents, and the ill," "widowers and old people who can no longer work, the blind and the deaf-mute, the abnormal and the feeble." Botez, "Asistența Socială," 229.

39 In fact, the Social Assistance Direction within the Ministry of Labor energetically took it upon itself (rather than leaving the task to private charities) to "combat and repress those who refuse work" and engage in begging and vagrancy instead. The law saw vagrants rounded up by police and interned into work colonies; it was only abolished in 1936.

40 Botez, "Asistența Socială," 252.

social assistance provision and policymaking did not occur against the backdrop of a severe economic crisis. Rather, the priorities of the NLP shifted away from social policy expansion likely due to mismanagement, the mounting costs of administrative unification, and the repositioning of foreign policy.

In late 1929, under the new NPP government, the Ministry of Labor's Social Assistance Direction became the Social Assistance Service. Eugen Botez commented bitterly that this was the culmination of a longer trend: "The Social Assistance Direction, which had been conceived in a grand spirit as a great autonomous house with juridical personality, for social aid, with certain revenues, ends up through successive transformations as a simple and rigid Ministry office."[41] None too pleased about the NLP budget cuts in the late 1920s, Botez was even more upset by the NPP's enthusiasm for downsizing.

Downsizing was visible in the 1930 reorganization of health and social assistance services. The so-called "Moldovan Law" was one of the key acts passed by the eugenicist Health Minister of the first NPP government. The voluminous, detailed legal document actually bore the official title of the "Sanitary and Protection Law" (M. Of. 236/July 14, 1930). It was rooted in two principles: decentralization (budgetary and administrative) and the primacy of certified experts' authority (doctors especially, but also statisticians and social assistants) over other categories of persons involved in welfare provision.[42] Maria Bucur suggests that the most striking feature

41 Botez, "Asistența Socială," 252.

42 The 572 articles of the Law detailed employment requirements and attributions for most positions within the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection involving sanitary intervention and social assistance. The act focused on preventative medicine, insisting on the combating of venereal disease. Through the creation of an autonomous Regie of the Sanitary and Protection Fund, the Law intended to safeguard a budget meant to cover health-care costs for the very poor. Parliament of Romania, *Legea Sanitară și de Ocrotire* [Sanitary and Protection Law]. In the version that was enacted, the Law also switched the regime of sex work from regulationist to abolitionist (through the banning of brothels). However, Lucian Dărămuș points out that the measure was tacked onto the Law during debates, likely at the separate insistences of hygienist doctors, clergy, and feminists. Lucian Dărămuș, "Prostituție feminină și heterosexualitate în România interbelică," in *Familia în România-Oincursiune diacronică pluridisciplinară*, ed. Anca Dohotariu (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 2017), 91–119.

of the Moldovan Law was its "combin[ing] a system of centralized decision-making by a group of elite technocrats—doctors—with a decentralized system of implementing these policies. [. . .] The law empowered local technical officials at the expense of the central administrative bureaucracy, while allowing the technocratic elite at the top of the ministerial hierarchy to retain control over long term policies."[43] The provisions of the law certainly aimed toward this change in legal oversight.

The new legal framework devolved most social assistance tasks from the national level to the municipal level. Consequently, the ministry-level Social Assistance Direction was replaced by the Service of Social Assistance, a strictly technical and supervisory body. The law now stated that the "Social assistance of individuals and families incapable of supporting themselves, and obliged to appeal to public support, falls to the communes, in collaboration with the private societies for social assistance" (Art. 466). At the same time, the state's authority over the voluntary welfare sector (dominated by women welfare workers) was to be expanded. The 1930 "Moldovan" Sanitary and Protection Law placed charitable associations under additional ministerial technical control and more stringent financial supervision.

The twist in the state's planned expansion of the municipal social assistance bureaucracy—as a way of controlling private initiative welfare provision—was represented by the massive budget cuts enacted in 1931. That year, the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection lost one-fifth of its funding. The two largest charitable organizations, as well as new institutions created for the training of certified social assistants, lost all their funding.[44] In an analysis of the slashed categories of expenses, a writer for the eugenicist publication *Revista de Igienă Socială* (*Social Hygiene Review*) blamed the retrenchment on the government's "sacrifice curbs": "In principle, cuts could have been made from anywhere else but from the miserable budget of the Ministry of Health. [. . .] This is a truth lost from

43 Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 198–99.

44 "Bugetul pe 1931 al Ministerului Sănătăţii şi Ocrotirilor Sociale," *Revista de Igienă Socială* 1, 1931, 65–71.

sight—whether with ill will or in good faith is of no importance—by the masters of balanced budgets, who slashed at random, left and right."[45]

These budgetary cuts impoverished private and public social assistance organizations in Bucharest when the inhabitants of the capital were experiencing the peak of the Great Depression. The Encyclopedia of Romania admitted as much 8 years later, stating:

> Social Assistance was included in the budget of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection, which we all know the hardships it went through [*sic*] and how many savings it had to make. When it came to such savings, the Social Assistance always came first. Because of the financial crisis the private initiative did not have a better situation in any way. Exactly at the time when it was entitled to greater support from the State Social Assistance, the latter was going through its hardest period.[46]

In 1931, the ministry's Service of Social Assistance had neither funding for direct assistance nor subsidies for private charities. Against the background of these 1931 massive cuts to the central budget, the legally emboldened Social Assistance Services of the Municipality further gained authority. However, even if these city and sector bureaus had greater coordination power, they could not implement many of their coordination initiatives, also because of a lack of funds.

For instance, besides unemployment relief, local budgets were meant to cover most or all the costs for indoor assistance institutions considered of "national importance" (large orphanages, schools for the deaf). However, the Direction reported that most cities and towns in Romania could not afford to do so, leaving these "nationally important" institutions' budgets to be provided by the central government.[47] By 1931, administrators quoted in the press

45 "Bugetul pe 1931 al Ministerului Sănătății și Ocrotirilor Sociale," 67.

46 Asociația Științifică pentru Enciclopedia României, *Enciclopedia României*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1938), 524.

47 ANIC, Fond MMSOS – Oficiul pentru Studii Sociale, File 79/1934 "România-Serviciile Sociale 1933 – Asistența Socială," vol. 2, ff. 74–80.

laid the blame for the situation on the central government. Popular NPP mayor Dem. I. Dobrescu complained that the central government effectively confiscated the revenues of most municipalities, leaving most cities in difficult situations when it came to organizing relief or providing longer-term social assistance.[48]

9.3 Without Relief: The Drop in Living Standards during the 1930s

Nationally, 300,000 individuals in urban and industrialized areas were laid off between 1929 and 1933. Articles published after 1945 pointed out that another 300,000 persons were let go from among the agrarian proletariat or were working in the private sector on reduced schedules and/or docked pay.[49] Small-scale social surveys from 1930s Bucharest confirm the tendency toward the de-regularization of employment during and after the crisis.[50]

The progressive deterioration of the situation of the workers in Bucharest since the beginning of the world crisis in 1929 was described by Veturia Mănuilă, head of the Superior School for Social Assistance, who was tasked by the city council with organizing unemployment relief in one of Bucharest's districts, in 1932:

> The economic crisis and lack of jobs have sensibly reduced the living standards of all the laboring classes. Among approximately 60% of our unemployed [assisted in Sector I Yellow] we could verify the gradual reduction of their earnings in the last 5–6 years. In 1925–26–28, a skilled worker had on average a wage of 5000–7000 lei per month. In 1930–31 monthly earnings have decreased to 3500–4000 lei, but most are around the 3000 lei limit. Fixed salaries have been

48 D. Dbr, "Congresul Uniunii Orașelor din România -Primarii orașelor cer ca statul să restituie fondul comunal pe care-l înstrăinează," *Adeverul*, January 27, 1931.

49 Teodor Necșa, "Date privind situația clasei muncitoare în perioada crizei economice 1929–1933," *Studii- Revista de Istorie* 9, no. 1 (1956): 108.

50 Gheorghe Banu et al., "Etudes concernant la situation de la femme ouvriere en Roumanie," *Revista de Igienă Socială* 7, no.7–8 (1937), 351–89.

> reduced by 50% over three years. At the same time, rents have constantly remained at the same level.[51]

In the countryside, already low living standards plummeted. In party programs and during their first round in government (1928–30), the National Peasantists promised to support small and middling peasants, especially by encouraging the creation of rural cooperatives to help modernize the small plot subsistence agriculture which characterized most peasant households.[52] These ambitious plans were an ill fit for the actual circumstances of the Romanian peasantry and the other economic (monetary and fiscal) policies of the government.

In 1928, many peasants were already deep in debt to the state and private lenders. The 1921 agrarian reform had expropriated estates and distributed them as small plots (around 5 ha) to 1.4 million peasants.[53] Formerly landless peasants, now propertied, became taxpayers. They were also paying the state back for two-thirds of the total amount paid in bonds to landlords whose estates had been expropriated in the reform.[54] In 1929, peasants were permitted to sell the land received in the agrarian reform. As holdings of 5 ha and under could not provide the food needed in the average peasant household, owners sold their plots or incurred high-interest debts, generally used to cover basic household consumption, tools, or seeds.

In 1930, following an unfavorable Rist report spotlighting inefficient tax collection, the government "ordered that [peasants' unpaid taxes] be recovered 'at all costs', so the tax collector and the gendarme resorted to all kinds of pressures, including the auction sale

51 Manuilă, "Principii de organizarea ajutorării șomeourilor," 444.

52 Economist Virgil Madgearu, the architect of the NPP rural development platform, believed the Romanian peasantry had not yet been incorporated into world markets and considered the peasant household, based on the free labor of family members, economically self-sustaining and suited to peasants' individualistic mentality. Rural cooperatives were meant as an intermediary phase in Romania's small-scale agriculture's integration into world markets by ensuring that peasant households would not be affected by the process. Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 323.

53 Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947*, 323.

54 Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947*, 323.

of household items" during that year.[55] The measure was dramatic considering that peasants' homes were already generally sparsely furnished and more than half of Romanian peasants had no cows or other animals that could be confiscated.[56]

Despite belated government measures and some failed attempts at banning speculative lending, halving the land tax (1932), and attempting a rescheduling ("conversion") of agricultural debt, the crisis re-created a large group of landless, seasonally mobile agricultural workers.[57] Peasants with too little land hired themselves and family members as agricultural laborers on larger holdings. Thus, a 1937 questionnaire on women's work prepared for the ILO could report that the single largest category of paid women workers in Romania comprised the 4,181,000 individuals employed in agricultural work as "family auxiliaries."[58] Such circumstances also pushed some peasant families in poor conditions to migrate to cities, Bucharest foremost among these.[59] Likely, as in other places in Europe at the time, rural poverty also determined the rural-urban migration of great numbers of girls and young women, in search of domestic service or occasional employment in cities.

9.4 A Gendered Analysis of National-Level Social Policies in the 1930s

If social assistance, the "second track" of welfare, contracted, the "first track" of welfare, social insurance, expanded during the early 1930s, at least in a formal sense. This was because in 1933

55 Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866–1947), vol. al III-lea (Carol al II-lea)*, 112.

56 Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947*, 342.

57 Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866–1947*, 340, 353, 354.

58 Calypso Botez, "Răspunsul dat de Calypso C. Botez la chestionarul Biroului Internațional al Muncii referitor la condițiile de muncă ale femeilor în România," in *Din Istoria Feminismului Românesc*, ed. Ştefania Mihăilescu, vol. 2 (Iaşi: Polirom, 2006), 298.

59 National Statistical Institute director Sabin Manuilă made a harsh assessment of peasants who "sold everything" in the countryside and moved to Bucharest without means. Sabin Manuilă, "Importanța Recensământului populației pentru asistența socială," *Asistența Socială—Buletinul Şcoalei Superioare de Asistență Socială "Principesa Ileana"* 2, no. 1 (1931): 111–17.

the government managed the long-planned unification of the existing three regionally distinct, preunification systems of social insurance. However, in substance, the new laws were designed to explicitly exclude large categories of workers that should have been included—based on the ILO recommendations at the time—and to implicitly put others at a disadvantage. It fostered the continuity of a system of minimal social insurance and health-care provision. This section analyzes the Depression-era changes in social policy and its effects on public healthcare, focusing especially on how women (as workers or as the coinsured of insured men) were disadvantaged within the system.

The 1930s saw a process of administrative unification and cost cutting in the area of social policy. Most workers were not insured or insurable. For those insured and their families, in practice, all components of contributory social insurance offered limited protection against social vulnerability during the Great Depression. Women, be they insured as workers themselves, as the partners of insured men, or most often be they uninsured and uninsurable citizens, were affected by the stinginess and malfunction of the modern welfare policies introduced.

Categories of risk covered by mandatory insurance in the 1920s and 1930s included disease, maternity, death, and invalidity due to illness and (solely for public employees) old age.[60] Until 1933, "first track" policies functioned on the basis of laws passed in the different now-Romanian provinces by their respective governments before World War I. For instance, the more industrialized region of Transylvania governed insurance through Hungarian Law XIX from 1907, amended—significantly—in 1919 to mandatorily cover all agricultural workers, a massive expansion of the number of those technically insured. Until 1933, the Old Kingdom (and hence Bucharest) applied the 1912 "'Nenitescu' Law for the organization of crafts, credit and workers' insurance"; it insured disease, maternity, death, and invalidity due to illness and old age. In 1932,

60 Parliament of Romania, "Senatul: Ședința dela 17 martie 1933," *Monitorul Oficial* 34 (April 7, 1933): 1100, 1116; Sergiu Delcea, "The Welfare-State as a Means of Nation-Building in Interwar Romania, 1930–1938" (MA Thesis, Central European University, Vienna, 2014), 30.

Transylvanian agricultural workers' coverage was revoked by the central Bucharest government, leaving thousands uninsured.

Finally, in 1933, a Law for the Unification of Social Insurance was passed. Its supporters in government and parliament argued that although the economic crisis did not allow an expansion of insured categories, administrative simplification was going to translate into broader access and small increases in the levels of benefits for all those covered. The risks insured in the 1933 Law were the same as in the 1912 Nenitescu Law. Neither unemployment nor old-age pensions for nonpublic employees were provided under the new legislation. Whereas legislators admitted that both widows and orphans would have to become fully insured in a more prosperous future, agricultural workers received no mention and became (to be clear, purposefully) "locked out" of the emergent "welfare state."

The 1933 Romanian Law for the Unification of Insurance (MO. 83/April 1933), which created uniformity in insurance among older and newer provinces of the country, included categories of workers that were previously uninsured in the Old Kingdom, such as craftsmen whose crafts occurred in clients' homes, within compulsory insurance for illness, maternity, death, accident, and invalidity.[61] As a result, self-employed persons carrying out a recognized trade in clients' homes became assimilated to entrepreneurs, while the many domestic servants working in Romania were implicitly demoted to a position of low-skill, nonartisan, home-based workers.[62]

Because insurance unification was both an opportunity to meet ILO standards and an occasion for the cost cutting made necessary by the Depression, precarious or "low-skill" workers, in effect most of the workforce in agrarian Romania, were excluded either explicitly or due to the cultivation of implementation faults. Thus, "employees of agricultural enterprises" were exempted from

61 Parliament of Romania, "Legea pentru unificarea asigurărilor sociale," *Monitorul Oficial* 83 (April 8, 1933), 2300

62 MMSOS, *Dare de seama asupra activităţii Casei Centrale a Asigurărilor Sociale pe anii 1912–1934* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Naţională, 1935), 59; Parliament of Romania, "Senatul: Şedinţa de vineri 17 martie 1933," *Monitorul Oficial* 34 (April 7, 1934): 1148.

insurance, ostensibly due to the protests of medics' associations who feared being overwhelmed by rural patients in city hospitals.[63]

Means-testing applied to some social insurance entitlements, such as the inheritance of a deceased person's invalidity or old-age pension by their legally recognized dependents. The persistence of means-testing procedures like pauperism certificates points to the convenient incorporation of the instruments that defined minimalist poverty policy in Western Europe into the austerity policymaking of the NPP in 1933.[64]

The 1933 Law for the Unification of Social Insurance provided that: "The legitimate wife or husband of a pensioner has the right to 50% of the deceased person's pension, when it is ascertained that she or he is unable to work and when the state of poverty is proven through a pauperism act (orig. 'act de paupertate') issued by the habilitated financial administration." Minor children could benefit from a third of the pension of a deceased person if they could prove pauperism through the same type of document, attesting to their lack of income and property and that they were devoid of means.[65]

Also beginning in 1933, morality-related criteria could be applied to deprive insured persons of benefits. According to an amendment introduced by Parliament to the original project presented by the government:

> The insured person who provoked their injury, purposefully or through serious oversight, by taking part in fights, or commission of a crime, or if the disease is owed to alcoholism,

63 MMSOS, *Dare de seamă asupra activității Casei Centrale a Asigurărilor Sociale pe anii 1912–1934*, 59.

64 James Midgley, "Poor Law Principles and Social Assistance in the Third World: A Study of the Perpetuation of Colonial Welfare," *International Social Work* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 21, https://doi.org/10.1177/002087288402700105; On the traditions of philanthropy in Valachia (later Kingdom of Romania), see Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi, *De la milă la filantropie. Instituții de asistare a săracilor din Țara Românească și Moldova în secolul al XVIII-lea* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2001); "Săracii din Țările Române la începuturile timpurilor moderne," in *Sărăcie și asistență socială în spațiul românesc sec. 18–20* (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2002), 11–60, http://www.nec.ro/data/pdfs/publications/relink/saracie-si-asistenta-sociala/Saracie_si_asistenta_sociala.pdf.

65 Senate of Romania, "Senatul: Ședința dela 17 Martie 1933," 1187.

> will not have the right to financial compensation [during illness]. If it will be proved that the family was being supported through the Labor of the insured person, in the cases specified in the previous two paragraphs, it will be possible to grant to the family up to 50 percent of the legal compensations and only within the limits of the family's needs.[66]

The amendment created a large loophole in workmen's accident insurance, guaranteeing that only those workers and families considered well-behaved in work discipline, personal morality and habits, or political convictions would have their needs recognized by the state in case of an accident.

The state-backed system for interwar health-care provision has been described as "heterogeneous."[67] In Bucharest, hospitals were maintained from the state budget. Specifically, in 1921, the state took over the public interest foundation which had administered the city's major hospitals since the nineteenth century (the Eforia [Foundation] of Civil Hospitals) and redistributed its considerable landholdings in that year's agrarian reform. Due to the Eforia's loss of income, hospitalization in Bucharest state institutions could no longer be free of charge for the neediest persons, as it seems to have been the case since the 1840s.[68] The system of workers' social insurance covered only professionals and skilled workers, who were a minority, even in the capital city. In addition, nationally, there were smaller associations and religious organizations that provided health-care services and maintained hospitals or sanatoria.[69]

Just how limited access to healthcare was made clear by pregnant women's difficulties in benefiting from any kind of medical assistance during this period, even in Bucharest and even when insured. Between 1931 and 1937, nationally, only 15 percent of births occurred in hospitals and 4 percent occurred outside

66 Senate of Romania, "Senatul: Ședința dela 17 Martie 1933," 1184.

67 B. Duțescu and N. Marcu, "Medicina în perioada dintre cele două războaie mondiale," in *Istoria medicinii românești*, eds. V. L. Bologa et al. (Bucharest: Editura Medicală, 1972), 302.

68 Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale, "Inventar. Eforia Spitalelor Civile. Centrala (1890–1948)" (Bucharest: ANIC, 2009), 1.

69 Duțescu and Marcu, "Medicina în perioada dintre cele două războaie mondiale," 307.

hospitals but with medical assistance, whereas more than half of women gave birth at home, at best assisted by midwives. By the late 1930s, Romania's European-high maternal mortality rate was visible in statistical data, referenced nationally and internationally. In 1932, a sanitary inquiry into one of Bucharest's districts noted that most births occurred at home, while in 72 percent of cases prenatal supervision had been nonexistent.[70] By 1936, Dr. L. Mavromati, director of the Center of Maternal Assistance functioning within Bucharest's Central Insurance House, described that the Center employed two doctors and fifteen midwives, working in ten dispensaries throughout the city.[71] Due to the lack of a maternity house run by the Insurance House, Mavromati encouraged home births by the well-prepared midwives working in the ten dispensaries, accompanied by improved prenatal and postnatal supervision.

In slashing the Ministry of Health's funding, the budgetary austerity of the 1930s enhanced the heterogeneity of the health-care system. The expansive 1930 Sanitary and Protection Law (MO236/July 14, 1930) created by the NPP government used the principle of decentralization in part to mask budget cuts.[72] Thus, decentralization of the sanitary system meant that hospital budgets were to be administered by hospital managers.[73] At the same time, decentralization meant a strong encouragement from the government for health institutions to secure their own revenues beyond the state budget.[74] In Bucharest's Eforia hospitals, the application of this principle led to the eventual forging of a partnership with the Superior

70 Ștefania Negrescu, "Date și concluzii din ancheta internațională asupra cauzelor mortalității infantile la copiii născuți vii, între 0-1 an, precum și asupra mortalității în circumscripția medicală X (periferică) din București pe anul 1931," *Revista de Igienă Socială* 2, no. 3 (1932): 279–90.

71 He described that before his reorganization of the Center's functioning, "a midwife assigned to home births would be told 'you are a homebirth midwife in dispensary X'; fullstop. How she will function, how she will orient herself, how she will procure the medication and emergency instruments, no detail, no guidance concerning these issues." L. Mavromati, "Asistența Maternă la Casa de Asigurări București," *Revista de Igienă Socială* 6, no. 3 (March 1936): 175.

72 Parliament of Romania, "Legea Sanitară și de Ocrotire," *Monitorul Oficial* 236 (July 14, 1930), 5338–5398.

73 Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization*, 198.

74 Duțescu and Marcu, "Medicina în perioada dintre cele două războaie mondiale," 302.

School of Social Assistance (SSAS), a private but state-subsidized higher-education institution training women in social work.

In 1938, before the participants of the National Congress of Social Assistance, sociologist and social worker Xenia Costa-Foru explained the functioning of the "general social services" and the "special social services" functioning alongside various hospitals and clinics in Bucharest. Created in 1930 by the SSAS, mostly as a way of providing practical training for students, "the hospital social service" aimed to assist sick persons with "social matters," collaborate closely with all those involved in the care of a patient, and conduct research on "matters of social dependence" created or aggravated by disease. Costa-Foru reported that between 1930 and 1936, the assistants had created 10,938 patient fiches for only one of the four Bucharest major hospitals where assistants were present.[75]

However, the most important function of the SSAS's Hospital Social Services and the feature that made them first tolerated components and then essential parts of hospitals' administrations were assistants' investigations into the patients' ability to pay for healthcare. Because of the crisis and possibly due to the formalization of health-care provision through the 1933 law, healthcare was now offered free of charge only under increasingly stringent conditions.

The small scale of Romania's health and social insurance programs as well as lapses in implementation are abundantly evident in relation to care for recent mothers. Technically, insured employed women were covered for maternity along the lines of the 1919 ILO Maternity Protection Convention (C003) through the 1928 Law for the Protection of Minors' and Women's Work (MO 85/April 13, 1928).[76] This meant that, in Romania, women working in industrial

75 Over the course of 5 years (1933–38), volunteer assistants for the general social services had rendered the following services to patients: 777 job placements "with families" or establishments, 1,669 transportation of sick persons in the city and the rest of the country, 4,891 "correspondence services," 8,523 "connections to other assistance organs," 1,311 commitments to institutions, "material aid" for 7,497 persons and "incidental assistance services" for 4,564 persons. Xenia Costa-Foru, "Serviciile sociale generale și serviciile sociale speciale pe lângă diferite spitale și clinici," *Asistența Socială—Buletinul Asociației pentru Progresul Asistenței Sociale* 7, no. 2 (1938): 129–37.

76 International Labour Organization Convention C 3: Maternity Protection Convention (Convention concerning the Employment of Women before and after Childbirth)

and commercial enterprises were entitled to a maximum 6 weeks of leave before childbirth and a mandatory leave of 6 weeks afterward, for a full total of 12 weeks of leave; during this time they could not be laid off by employers and benefited from "an indemnity for her and her child's maintenance, as well as free medical care under the conditions established through the law on health insurance (Art. 31)."[77] However, eligibility for parts of this indemnity was not automatic. Access to benefits connected to maternity was conditional; employed women had to have contributed to insurance for a minimum of 26 weeks in the year before childbirth.[78]

The number of those insured for maternity was expanded in 1933 with the passing of a new general insurance law, which included all servants and other categories of "homeworkers." The nursing wives of insured men were also covered. However, from 1933 onward, only the wives of those men who had been insured for a longer period could avail themselves of this right. An insured man's wife could be coinsured and benefit from maternity healthcare if her legal husband had contributed for at least 52 weeks in the previous 2 years.[79] This placed the high number of women in common-law marriages, usually the most precarious ones, entirely outside coverage. The same category of insured men could receive, "when the financial situation of the [Insurance] House allows it, an amount of money for the wife and baby."[80] The condition of uninterrupted employment penalized most blue-collar workers, especially in times of economic crisis when stable employment was hard to come by. Furthermore, an aid in money that could be received by a nursing mother was conditioned upon her submitting to a doctor's advice on child-rearing, a measure considered to be in the woman's own best interest.

(1st Conference Session, Geneva, November 28, 1919); Parliament of Romania, "Lege pentru ocrotirea muncii minorilor și femeilor și durata muncii," *Monitorul Oficial* 85 (April 13, 1928), 3127–3132.

77 Parliament of Romania, "Lege pentru ocrotirea muncii minorilor și femeilor și durata muncii."

78 Parliament of Romania, "Senatul: Ședința dela 17 martie 1933," 1126.

79 Parliament of Romania, "Senatul: Ședința dela 17 martie 1933," 1187.

80 Parliament of Romania, "Senatul: Ședința dela 17 martie 1933," 1127.

Overall, the advantages of the formal existence of maternity insurance in Romania seem to have been minimal. Financial benefits associated with maternity leave received higher allocations in 1933, but the ineffectiveness of all "protective" labor laws in Romania radiated onto working women's entitlements to components of the social insurance system. A 1938 report by social democratic women in Romania stated tersely: "The employers do not respect the law which provides that women shall be paid their wages six weeks before, and six weeks after confinement. It is much simpler to give them the sack."[81] Similarly, a report submitted to the ILO Correspondence Committee on Women's Work by a liberal progressive group of women described the same situation: "In the great enterprises, women receive maternity leave. In the smaller enterprises, they show pregnant women the door, other women are employed in their place."[82]

9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to reconstruct the Romanian central government's policy and political response to the Great Depression's social effects, arguing that in the period 1929–33 the young welfare framework of the state did not see a substantial expansion, despite the adoption of key (and seemingly very comprehensive) welfare laws. Instead, I pointed out that the period was characterized by institutional downsizing, exclusionary policymaking, and a tendency toward denying the social cost of the crisis. The chapter reconstitutes a broad chronology of the evolution of the crisis in cities and rural areas, and the insufficient responses to the situation by the Bucharest-based central authorities. In particular, I have discussed the obstruction of systematic relief for the unemployed as being in part caused by political reluctance and in part by the institutional lack of capacity created by successive rounds of cuts. Also, I have analyzed how new laws on social insurance and healthcare

81 "Letter from Roumania," *International Information—Women's Supplement*, 1937. Courtesy Prof. Susan Zimmermann.

82 Calypso Botez, "Reponse au questionnaire du BIT sur les conditions de travail des femmes," in *Din Istoria Feminismului Românesc*, ed. Ştefania Mihăilescu, vol. 2 (Iaşi: Polirom, 2006), 301.

were designed to cover a limited number of beneficiaries and malfunctioned in practice. In particular, I have shown how maternity benefits and healthcare for expectant or new mothers—an area for which the legal framework had expanded continuously between the early 1920s and 1933—offered little meaningful protection.