

# GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ROMANIAN LOCAL PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS\*

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## Abstract

Gender equality in public institutions is a sensitive topic considering the vast efforts of European countries to overcome the problems raised by gender inequality, gender segregation and gender discrimination in the labor market. In order to measure gender equality in public institutions and to identify the most important gender related organizational issues a questionnaire was built, tested in 2010 in one public institution, and then applied at national scale to public servants (both women and men) from local public institutions. The questionnaire focuses on gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, gender discrimination (in hiring, promotion, pay and benefits, evaluation, promotion and task distribution practices in institution) and occupational mobility.

**Keywords:** public institutions, gender equality, discrimination, organizational culture, gender stereotypes, occupational mobility.

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## 1. Gender equality at the workplace

Gender stereotypes are general beliefs regarding characteristics attributed to men and women in society. A growing body of literature research suggests that managers and other organizational agents have stereotypes associated with gender and once the perceivers have developed such stereotypes, they will use them to categorize continuously (some researchers suggested that this is quite an automatic process).

There is an overwhelming amount of research regarding gender stereotypes in different cultures. Some studies based on women's and men's characteristics showed that they are quite opposite. Williams and Best (1990) found in their study that women are perceived as superstitious and sentimental in all 25 countries they studied, while men are forceful, independent and adventurous.

Regarding women managers, Vincenza Priola (2004) concluded in a study based on interviews with managers and academics that there are some stereotypes associated with women managers' activities: care and support, communication skills, multiple tasks commitment, and team work predilection/bias.

Unfortunately, people are not aware of their stereotypes, so they do not accept that stereotypes may affect their decisions. According to Fiona Wilson (2005) women do not necessarily feel that they are appreciated differently but men consider them as having different and sometimes inferior qualities. Women are seen as something else when they are "measured" against male norms and standards.

The two groups are supposed to have different (but complementary) types of values. Marshall identified two male and female values groups that define the organizational cultures and these values are qualities to which both men and women have access to, even if, through social learning and social roles, the two groups of values are gendered (Marshall, 1994, p. 351). Male values are self-assertion, separation, control, focused perception, classification, rationality, trusting out, contractual arrangements and female values – interdependence, merging, acceptance, awareness of patterns, wholes and contexts, emotional tone, personal perception and containing.

Another issue refers to gender segregation in employment – horizontal, vertical or hierarchical. Horizontal segregation represents a predisposition to occupy positions in different sectors (an under or over representation of one group in various sectors) while vertical segregation refers to a predisposition to hire women and men in different positions in the same sector, which may lead to an under-representation of women in management positions (hierarchical segregation). According to the study "Evolution of Occupation on the Romanian Labour Market in a 2010 Perspective" (Pirciog *et al.*, 2006) 35.9% of Romanians connect their occupation with gender (industry is considered a masculine sector while services are considered feminine), stereotypical assessments being made by women and men, no matter what their positions are (executive or management).

Occupational segregation leads ultimately to differences between women's and men's remuneration; feminine occupations are less paid than masculine occupations and even during the last years there has been a sensible diminution of these gaps (between 1994 and 2004 from 21% to 14%).

In 2004, 66.4% of women had less than average earnings due to their jobs in specific “feminine” sectors. In state sectors, in predominantly masculine areas (police, army and transport) the salaries are higher than in feminine areas (health, education and public administration). At EU level there is still a gender pay gap (in 2007 – 17.6%) whilst in Romania, this gap has been changing between 2002 and 2008 (2002 – 16%, 2006 – 7.8%, 2007 – 12.7%, and 2008 – 9%). This gender pay gap was larger in financial intermediation (32.2%) and health and social works (24.3%), and smaller in transportation, storage and communications (9.9%) and construction (5.5%). In the sectors with larger pay gaps, the workers are predominantly women and in sectors with smaller gaps, the workers are mainly men. In 2008 the smallest pay gaps were in Italy (4.9%), Slovenia (8.5%), Belgium (9%) and Romania (9%); also Portugal, Poland and Malta had small pay gaps. On the other hand, the countries with the highest pay gaps were the Czech Republic (26.2%), Austria (25.5%), Germany (23.2%) and Greece (22%).

## **2. Gender equality in Romania**

Beverly Dawn Metcalfe and Marianne Afanassieva (2005) consider that political and economic transition is a re-masculinisation process in which gender hierarchies and gender power relationships in Central and Eastern Europe private and public sectors are reaffirmed.

Romania’s country profile regarding gender equality and attitudes shows us a contradictory picture. UNDP’s Gender-related Development Index 2009 shows a very low gender disparity in basic human development (women reaching 99.9% of the general achievements); thus Romania came fifth in the world. UNDP’s Gender Empowerment Measure 2009 – a measure of the degree to which women take an active part in economic and political life – places Romania only 77<sup>th</sup> out of 155 countries. A conservative gender view (according to the World Values Survey 2005), is that Romania is closer to traditional values than most other European countries and furthest from a culture of trust and tolerance, which is very likely to explain the contradictions. We know little about the way in which this view is translated into barriers towards women empowerment.

There are four major ways in which people are gender discriminated at the workplace, namely hiring, pay and benefits, promotion, and firing. According to the Euro Barometer – Discrimination in the EU (2006), 23% of Romanians and 33% of the European citizens (EU 25) consider that being a woman represents a disadvantage. In the same study, 40% of Europeans and 32% of Romanians think that there is gender discrimination. What is important is that a small part of the respondents considered discrimination to be more important than in 2001 (27%, respectively 26%). 72% of Romanians consider that we need more women in leading positions (77% in the EU) and more women Members of Parliament (64%, 72% in the EU). There are still 11% of Romanians and 16% of Europeans that are against specific measures for implementing (gender) equality of opportunities at work.

The level of discrimination in Romania is very hard to assess. Different researches provided different results. When individuals are asked about their own experience with discrimination, the rate of discrimination is rather low. According to the European Working Conditions Survey 2010, only 4.0% of men and 5.6% of women in Romania were discriminated at work<sup>1</sup>, better figures than that of the average for the EU (5.6% and 6.9%). A study conducted by a Trade Union (Universitatea București, 2010, p. 15) found that 9% of the employees have had an experience of being discriminated<sup>2</sup>. Another estimate is that 3.8% of employees and 7% of the total number of women were discriminated (Blocul Național Sindical, 2009, p. 33).

The results are different when we take a look at the general perception. 49% of employees and 37% of the employers believed that discrimination is fairly common at workplaces (Universitatea București, 2010, p. 6), the most common being against women and women with small children, and mostly related to program hours and payment. Public institutions are in a slightly better position than private companies due to the fact that working hours and payment are more strictly regulated. Yet, the perception about discrimination is higher than that of those coming from the private sector (81% compared to 42%) and 29% of the public sector employees declared that they witnessed cases of discrimination at their workplace compared with only 9% of those coming from the private sector. When discussing about gender discrimination (Blocul Național Sindical, 2009, p. 39) 21.3% of the workers considered that women and men are treated equally (women tending to agree with this statement more than men and people from the public sector more often than those from the private sector) and that gender discrimination, even if in a much lesser degree than discrimination based on age and health status, is frequent (9.27%) or seldom (38.44%), 52.29% considering that it never happens.

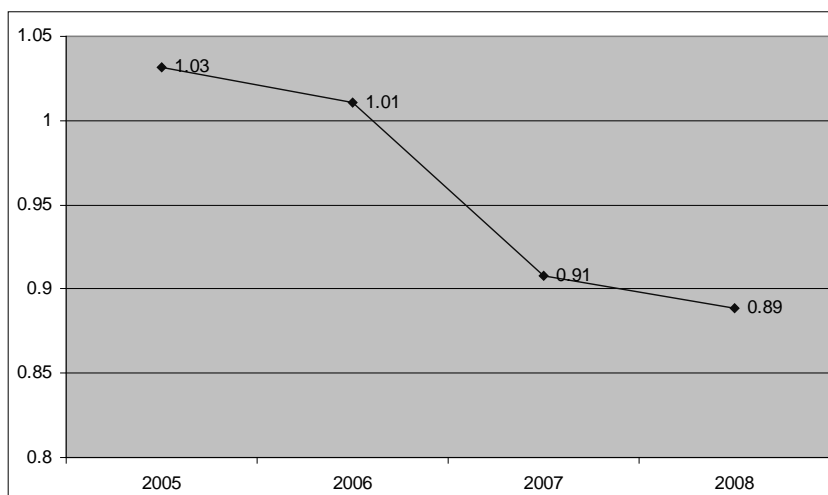
The most common way to assess gender inequality is to analyze the income gap. In the case of Romania the data from the 2009 Statistical Yearbook shows that women situation has improved in the last years. Starting with a very low gap (men gaining 1.03 times more than women), since 2007 they are in the lead, in 2008 men gaining only 89% of women's income. This is in line with the existing literature on the differences between public and private wages which shows that women are better paid in the public sector than in the private one (Fernández-de Córdoba *et al.*, 2009).

The difference between the individual and the general perceptions of discrimination (in general or gender based) can be influenced by three different factors. First, there are problems in reporting discrimination, many people are embarrassed to recognize such problems. Second, the perception about discrimination might be formed indirectly, by hearing or witnessing such situations rather than being subjected to them. Third,

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1 Possible discrimination factors include age, racial, nationality, gender, religion, disability and sexual orientation.

2 Possible discrimination factors include age, racial, gender, small children, disability, physical aspect and political opinions.



**Figure 1:** Gross wage report (M/F) in the public administration and defense sector

people perceive discrimination in very different manners – they may not perceive a specific situation as discriminative while others will. People with more education perceive more discrimination than those with lesser education (which may explain also why employees from public institutions saw more cases of discrimination than those from the private sector).

### 3. Methodology

In order to identify the most important gender related organizational issues a questionnaire was built and applied in a public institution to public servants (both women and men). The questionnaire was divided in 5 dimensions, respectively:

- Stereotypes measured as the extent to which personal traits (27) are considered to belong to one category or another;
- Sexual harassment (from indecent comments to sexual favors demands);
- Discrimination (hiring, promotion, pay and benefits, evaluation, advancement and task distribution practices in institution). Another set of questions regards the individual perception of his/her position at workplace; and
- Occupational mobility.

The questionnaire was tested in 2010 in one public institution (Şandor *et al.*, 2010) and applied by mail at national scale in May-June 2011. Local public institutions (City Halls from the county seats, County Councils and Prefectures were addressed) to each of them a specific number of questionnaires (based on their size) was submitted. Out of 41 counties we got answers from 17 Prefectures, 19 County Councils and 14 City Halls – a 40.65% response rate from the institutions.

The total number of cases is 938, 41.4% from City Halls, 40.9% from County Councils and 16.7% from Prefectures. 27.1% of our respondents are men and 72.9% women; 9.1% are less than 30 years old, 31.6% are between 30-39, 36.3% are between

40-49 and 23% are over 50; 17.5% held managerial positions, 78.6% rank and file positions, and 3.9% other type of position; 25.3% were hired in the institution less than 5 years ago, 27.2% between 5-9 years ago, 23.7% between 10-15 years ago, and 23.8% work in the institution more than 15 years; 6.1% have a high-school diploma, 1.7% have a post-HS diploma, 35.1% are bachelors, 56.6% have a master degree and 0.5% a PhD; 18.6% have studies in Law, 26.7% in Economics, 10.6% in other social sciences, 29.1% technical, and 9.8% other type of studies.

#### 4. Gender equality in the Romanian local public institutions

Public servants admit that gender conditions differ in Romania. Most of them consider that men are faring better than women (more than half of them).

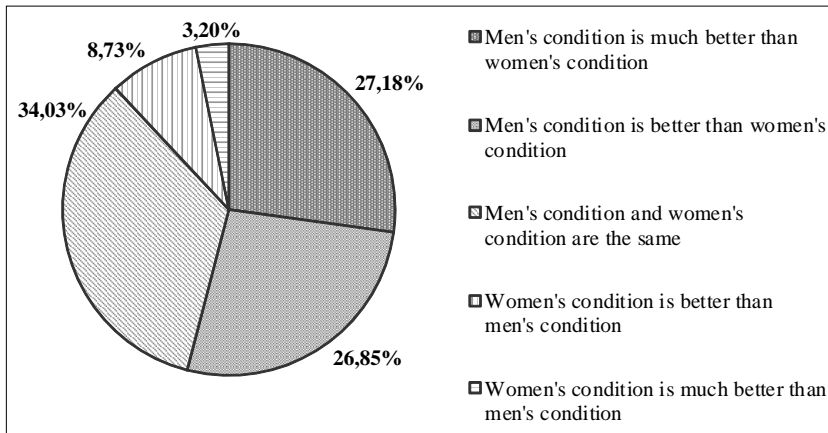


Figure 2: Gender differences in Romania

The situation is different when it comes to gender conditions in the institution – 25.30% think that men are faring better, 13.71% think that women are doing better, while 60.89% consider that both are doing the same. Women feel that they are doing worse than men, but this is not influencing the way in which they consider their own situation. We have here a situation in which there is a general perception of inequality in the institution not felt at the individual level. One possible explanation is related to the fact that the perception about inequality inside the institution is influenced by the perception of discrimination in Romania (the relationship is significant, Gamma=0.55).

#### 4.1. Stereotypes at the workplace

We tried to measure the existence of gender stereotypes in institutions indirectly (we did not ask about the exact work roles and positions of both sexes but asked their opinions regarding personal traits that belong either to men or women). The means obtained, in ascending order (the lower – belong to men, the higher – belong to women, 3.00 – belong equally to both sexes) show us that there are few traits reclaimed for a specific gender.

In the table below, the means of the values obtained for each gender are presented with the difference between male and female opinions and their level of significance.

**Table 1: Personal traits and gender**

	Personal traits	Mean	Difference (M-F)	Significance
1..	Physical resistance	2.38	-0.49	***
2.	Aggressive	2.46	0.23	***
3.	Authoritarian	2.59	0.08	
4.	Courage	2.66	-0.57	***
5.	Logical thinking	2.79	-0.50	***
6.	Individualism	2.83	0.15	*
7.	Objectivity	2.91	-0.26	***
8.	Good co-worker	2.93	-0.11	*
9.	Psychical resistance	2.95	-0.45	***
10.	Intelligence	3.00	-0.26	***
11.	Competitive	3.13	-0.31	***
12.	Kindness	3.25	-0.17	**
13.	Dedicated to work	3.25	-0.35	***
14.	Good subordinate	3.27	-0.37	***
15.	Goal oriented	3.36	-0.41	***
16.	Ambition	3.40	-0.21	***
17.	Perseverance	3.40	-0.33	***
18.	Empathy	3.43	-0.19	***
19.	Communication skills	3.47	-0.36	***
20.	Creativity	3.47	-0.76	***
21.	Prudence	3.52	-0.41	***
22.	Patience	3.62	-0.59	***
23.	Intuition	3.65	-0.61	***
24.	Conscientiousness	3.73	-0.50	***
25.	Dedicated to family	3.93	-0.42	***
26.	Pay more attention to details	3.97	-0.49	***
27.	Emotional	3.98	-0.18	***
28.	Sensibility	4.07	-0.25	***

\*- significant at 0.05, \*\*- significant at 0.01, \*\*\*- significant at 0.001

From this table we may conclude that men are considered to be more physically resistant and aggressive, and women are considered to pay more attention to details, more sensible, dedicated to family, conscious, intuitive, patient and prudent<sup>3</sup>.

We can see that there are significant differences between men's and women's perceptions, only the authoritarian is seen in the same way by both genders. The differences are bigger for traits like creativity, intuition, patience, courage, logical thinking and conscientiousness – traits which are claimed by each gender.

The larger number of women in our sample made many traits to appear more characteristic to women, so we tried to see how women and men see these personal traits<sup>4</sup>.

3 We presented only those traits with values of at least  $\pm 0.50$  away from the theoretical mean (3.00).

4 We presented only those traits with values of at least  $\pm 0.50$  away from the theoretical mean (3.00).

**Table 2:** Personal traits as seen by each gender

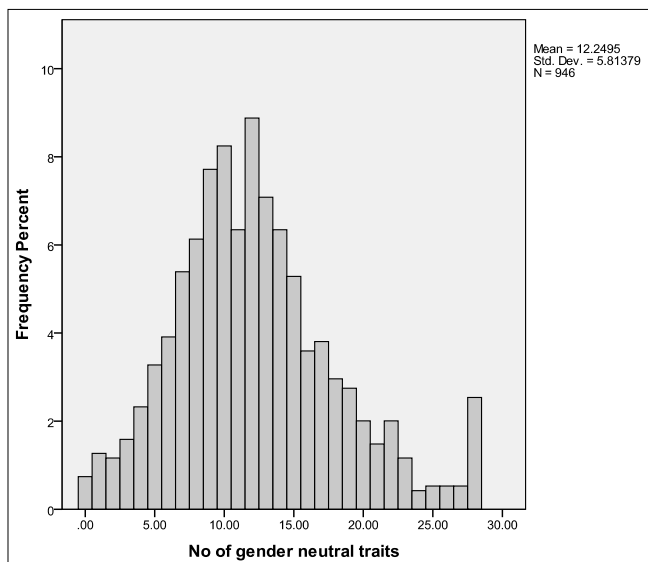
Personal traits according to men		Personal traits according to women	
Personal traits	Mean	Personal traits	Mean
Physical resistance	2.02	Aggressive	2.40
Courage	2.24	...	
Logical thinking	2.43	Communication skills	3.56
...		Prudence	3.63
Pay more attention to details	3.61	Creativity	3.68
Dedicated to family	3.63	Patience	3.78
Emotional	3.85	Intuition	3.82
Sensibility	3.88	Conscientiousness	3.86
		Emotional	4.02
		Dedicated to family	4.04
		Pay more attention to details	4.10
		Sensibility	4.14

Men seem to think that most traits belong equally to both sexes, whilst women claim more traits for themselves. Men stereotypes are fewer. They appear to think that courage and logical thinking are more common to men (better for leadership?), and also more physical resistant (maybe confounded with strength), women being more careful with details (more characteristic to routine work), sensible and emotional (maybe less fit for work under pressure) and dedicated to their family (lower commitment?).

Women see only one trait as specific to men – aggression. They see their gender with qualities needed to fulfill their duty (such as prudence, conscientiousness, patience, paying attention to detail), better in inter-human relations (communication skills, sensibility, emotional) but also fit for complex tasks (creativity and intuition). Dedication to family is another specific trait claimed by women.

In general we can see that women are more willing to claim some traits to their own gender (the average on all 28 traits is 3.03 for men and 3.35 for women), indicating that stereotyping might be more common to women than to men. Shared stereotypes are related to women being more careful, dedicated to family, emotional and sensible – with women tending to agree to that more than men.

Data showed us a high degree of gender equality in local public institutions. There is a clear different perception of each gender personal traits –



**Figure 3:** Gender stereotypes



27 out of 28 personal traits and their link to a specific gender being seen in a different way. Respondents saw an average of 12 traits as being not specific to any gender, 2.5% seeing all of them as being non-gender specific and 0.7% considering them all as gender specific.

#### 4.2. Sexual harassment

When asked if they have heard, in the last 5 years, of sexual harassment cases at their workplace our respondents answered as follow:

**Table 3:** Frequency of sexual harassment situations

Situation	Never	Very seldom	Seldom	Often	Very often
Some employees heard inappropriate comments coming from their colleagues.	41.6%	33.4%	17.6%	5.4%	1.9%
Promises were made to some employees in exchange for sexual favors.	92.8%	4.4%	2.5%	0.2%	0.1%
Superiors asked for sexual favors.	92.9%	4.3%	2.3%	0.4%	0.1%
Some employees have had to accept unwanted gestures.	82.2%	12.9%	4.1%	0.6%	0.2%
Some employees offered sexual favors in return for some benefits.	89.9%	6.4%	2.4%	0.9%	0.4%

The difference between men’s and women’s responses is significant but very small, men reporting more situations of sexual harassment. There is no significant difference between different institutions. The most common harassment situations mentioned refers to inappropriate behavior, comments or gestures, from some employees and the least is the situation in which a superior asks for sexual favors. Even if such cases seem to be rare, there are still practices of sexual harassment in institutions. According to our knowledge no formal complaints of such treatment were made, which may give some leeway for the continuation of such practices.

#### 4.3. Discrimination

We asked our respondents to tell us if they have heard, in the last 5 years, of any situations in which staff – men or women – were gender discriminated against in their institution.

**Table 4:** Frequency of discrimination situations by type

	Never	Very seldom	Seldom	Often	Very often
Hiring	79.9%	12.7%	5.4%	1.6%	0.1%
Tasks distribution	64.7%	21.9%	10.0%	3.0%	0.4%
Evaluation	73.3%	13.5%	8.9%	3.3%	0.9%
Advancement in rank	75.9%	11.1%	8.5%	3.8%	0.8%
Promotion	69.8%	13.9%	10.7%	4.6%	1.0%
Bonuses	67.8%	12.5%	9.7%	6.7%	3.3%

The situation seems to be quite idyllic, with most of the responses having no knowledge of any case of discrimination. Still, some discrimination was perceived and some respondents had heard about discrimination cases of every type. Hiring in public institutions is less perceived to be subject to discrimination because it is a formalized procedure (based on competition) and due to that our respondents obviously succeeded in getting hired. Bonus awarding is the most frequent type of discrimination due to the fact that it is a less transparent procedure, which may be subjective, and may easily generate suspicions. In 2010 due to budgetary constraints many types of bonuses were cut and in consequence the differences between discrimination regarding bonuses and that regarding promotion, tasks distribution, advancement and promotion are small.

Women and men tend to see the situation in the same way and the differences between responses are not significant. We also tried to check the claim by Opre and Opre (2005) that women are faring worse in men dominated environments. The gender of the supervisor influences only evaluation and bonuses, but in a small measure (Eta squared being 0.007 and 0.012). The composition of the office (mostly male, women or an equal distribution) is influencing advancement in rank and bonuses, but also in a small measure (Eta squared of 0.013 in both cases).

There are significant differences between different types of institutions; the prefectures report less discrimination situations than city halls and county councils, while public servants from city halls complain more about task distribution.

We tried to look at possible gender discrimination in another way, asking our respondents about their work relations and their perceived role in the institution and if there were some specific differences between men and women. We did not find gender based differences regarding most of the indicators – appreciation of work results, opinions, expertise, equity regarding rewards, work conditions, tasks distribution. There are significant but small differences regarding autonomy (men having more autonomy than women – averages of 3.63 and 3.36) and access to information (where women stand better – 4.09 compared to 3.81). These results may indicate that treatment for all employees is similar for both categories.

We found that there were discrimination cases (see Table 4) but we could see that our respondents considered themselves to be treated in a similar manner regardless of gender. There are two possible explanations for our findings – either they have just heard about such cases, or the victims are both men and women.

#### **4.4. Occupational mobility**

We asked our respondents to rate their chances of occupying different positions in institutions (horizontal or vertical mobility). Public servants are more optimistic with respect to their chances of horizontal mobility (74.8% consider that they may have a similar position in another office, and 68.4%, more important duties) compared with 53.9% who consider they have the opportunity to obtain a superior position. There are no significant differences between women's and men's perceptions of

their opportunities to change positions, indicating that women are not denied some occupations or that they are confronted with a glass ceiling.

## 5. Conclusions

Data showed a high degree of gender equality in local public institutions. There is a clear different perception of each gender personal traits – 27 out of 28 personal traits and their link to a specific gender are being seen in a different way. On average, respondents saw 12 traits as being not specific to any gender, 2.5% seeing all of them as being non-gender specific and 0.7% considering them all as gender specific.

The existence of such stereotypes may be the foundation for discrimination practices. The results of our research showed small amounts of cases of sexual harassment, discrimination in hiring, promotion, pay and benefits, evaluation, advancement and task distribution in the institutions or occupational mobility. The individuals' perceptions of their position at the workplace are not influenced by gender. Apart from gender stereotypes local public servants (men or women) see the dimensions of gender equality in a similar manner.

Some of the responses are hard to believe (like the large majorities who never heard of cases of discrimination<sup>5</sup>) indicating a possible social desirability bias. Further data analysis showed that men and women are seeing things alike for themselves – results hard to find in the case of one gender being discriminated. The fact that women earn more than men in public administration, even if it may be determined by the fact that in some well paid public institutions the percentage of women is greater, is also a good indication of gender equality.

The general climate of general gender equality is one that allows further improvement in this area. Specific cases of discrimination should be addressed and their number reduced, but this could not happen without a more thorough analysis of the existing laws and with the involvement of public servants. Having a good organizational climate based on equal treatment is the most important type of need public servants have (Creța and Șandor, 2010) and gender equality might influence the organizational climate in a serious manner.

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5 The results are similar to those from Universitatea București (2010).

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