

# **Ageing in digital societies: enablers and barriers to older persons exercising their social rights**

**Romania**

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# 1 Legal and policy framework

## 1.1 National legislation on digital public administration

In Romania, the Emergency Ordinance no. 49/2009 concerning the freedom of establishment and provision of services by electronic means establishes the general legal framework for providing digital services by both public and private providers<sup>1</sup>. The subsequent Government Decision no. 922/2010 regulates the operation of the Electronic Point of Single Contact<sup>2</sup>. The Title II, Transparency in the administration of public information and services by electronic means of the Law no. 161/2003 on measures to ensure transparency in the exercise of public dignity, public office and in the business environment regulates the objectives, principles, terms and conditions of use of the electronic procedure for accessing and providing public information and services<sup>3</sup>.

None of these acts provides any specific measures or provisions to ensure equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation, and they are not addressing or mentioning the specific needs of older persons and any other groups at risk of digital exclusion.

On 15 March 2022, the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization (*Ministerul Cercetării, Inovării și Digitalizării*) has proposed for public debate the draft law on the exchange of data between digital systems and the creation of the national interoperability platform<sup>4</sup>. The draft bill stipulates, among the eight fundamental principles of the future national interoperability platform, the principle of non-discrimination, defined on three dimensions (Article 5 of the draft bill):

- public institutions and authorities will take measures to make available the electronic media services for people who rarely or not at all use the online environment, providing them with additional methods of access to public services;

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<sup>1</sup> Romania, Emergency Ordinance no. 49 of May 20, 2009 on the freedom of establishment of service providers and the freedom to provide services in Romania ([Ordonanță de Urgență nr. 49 din 20 mai 2009 privind libertatea de stabilire a prestatorilor de servicii și libertatea de a furniza servicii în România](#)), 20 May 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Romania, Government Decision no. 922 of September 1, 2010 on the organization and operation of the electronic point of single contact ([Hotărâre de Guvern nr. 922 din 1 septembrie 2010 privind organizarea și funcționarea Punctului de contact unic electronic](#)), 1 September 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Romania, Law no. 161 of April 19, 2003 on measures to ensure transparency in the exercise of public dignity, public office and in the business environment, the prevention and sanctioning of corruption ([Lege nr. 161 din 19 aprilie 2003 privind unele măsuri pentru asigurarea transparenței în exercitarea demnităților publice, a funcțiilor publice și în mediul de afaceri, prevenirea și sancționarea corupției](#)), 19 April 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization (*Ministerul Cercetării, Inovării și Digitalizării*), Draft bill on the exchange of data between digital systems and the creation of the national interoperability platform ([Proiect de lege privind schimbul de date între sisteme informatice și crearea platformei naționale de interoperabilitate](#)), 15 March 2022.

- institutions and public authorities will take measures to digitally assist persons who rarely or not at all use the online environment to facilitate the delivery of the digital public service;
- public institutions and authorities will rethink the sizing and preparation of human resources interacting with those in need of digital assistance, including recognizing their critical role in delivery of a quality public service.

After the draft bill will be adopted, the subsequent norms are to be adopted to provide how these principles will be operationalized.

## **1.2 National policy, strategy or action plan on the digitalisation of public services or digital inclusion**

On 3 June 2021, the Government adopted the Public policy proposal in the field of e-government 2021-2030<sup>5</sup>, the top policy document for the digitalization of public services. The policy document does not address the issues of digital gap or equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation, thus it does not include any specific measures to address these issues.

The only reference to vulnerable groups is made in the impact assessment section of the public policy proposal. The Government estimates that the implementation of the proposed measures will facilitate the access to public services for approximately 200,000 adults with locomotor disabilities (p. 89), while „for other categories of vulnerable groups, the types of impact identified will be the same as those applicable to the general population, without being able to identify a differentiated impact” (p. 88). The document also notes that „the mandatory use of electronic public services will force the development of digital and financial skills of the population” (p. 87), concluding that the overall social impact will be positive.

## **1.3 National recovery and resilience plans covering the digitalisation of public services**

One of the priorities of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan<sup>6</sup> is the *digital transformation*: 21% of the plan’s total allocation for reforms and investments supports the digital objectives, including a broad range of key investments, such as the development of the governmental cloud, the digitalisation of health, the judiciary, the environment, employment and social protection, public procurement, non-governmental organisations, connectivity for white areas,

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Romania (Guvernul României), Public policy proposal in the field of e-government ([Propunere de politică publică în domeniul e-guvernării](#)), 3 June 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Romania, National Recovery and Resilience Plan ([Planul Național de Redresare și Reziliență](#)), 21 October 2021.

ensuring cybersecurity for different structures and increasing the skills both in cybersecurity and for civil servants and the population at large. Digital measures are also mainstreamed across the Plan.

Across the description of the various measures on digital transformation, the Plan does not directly address the risk of digital exclusion. The Plan identifies groups at risk and it is constantly acknowledging the risk of digital exclusion, and the need to ensure equal access to public services undergoing digitalisation. The mentioned groups at risk are: persons with disabilities, older people, and persons with limited digital skills. The Plan itself does not include specific measures for these groups, but such measures are expected as part of the implementation of the various components.

## **2 Programmes and practices aimed at ensuring equal access to public services in the digital age**

In Romania, in the last few years, a growing number of local initiatives are aiming at bridging the digital gap for older people, usually through a mix approach of training and support to access digital services. In most cases, the initiators are local public authorities in partnership with local NGOs and the local business community. Such examples are:

- In Bucharest, the association ECDL Romania developed the training program "Digital Citizen", targeting older persons. The program combines training of digital skills with support to access some services that local authorities are now offering online. In 2021, the program was offered for free, first in partnership with the 2<sup>nd</sup> District City Hall (*Primăria Sector 2*)<sup>7</sup>, and then with the Seniors' Center of the Bucharest Municipality<sup>8</sup> (*Centrul pentru Seniori al Municipiului București*), an institution under the Bucharest City Hall (*Primăria București*).
- In Prahova County, in the context of the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and in particular the condition to present a Covid-19 certificate when entering certain spaces, the Ploiești City Hall (*Primăria Ploiești*), County Library „Nicolae Iorga” from Ploiești (*Biblioteca Județeană „Nicolae Iorga” din Ploiești*) and Culture House „Geo Bogza” from Câmpina (*Casa de Cultură „Geo Bogza” din Câmpina*), all public institutions, started a program to help senior citizens, without digital skills and/or smartphones,

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<sup>7</sup> ECDL Association (2021), '[Primul program Digital Citizen de educație digitală a vârstnicilor. Digitalizarea nu trebuie să lase pe nimeni în urmă!](#)', 8 April 2021.

<sup>8</sup> ECDL Association (2021), '[Primul program Digital Citizen de educație digitală a vârstnicilor continuă](#)', 20 September 2021.

to access and use their Covid-19 certificates<sup>9</sup>. The two cultural institutions also offered basic digital skills training for those willing to learn.

- In Oradea, in the context of the project eDigiStars, financed by the European Union in the framework of the Interreg Danube Programme, the local company RomMarketing offered digital skills training and workshops for older people (50+). Representatives of the local public institutions – County Agency for Labour Force Employment Bihor (*Agenția Județeană pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă Bihor*), and County Pensions House Bihor (*Casa Județeană de Pensii Bihor*) participated to the workshops to present their digital services<sup>10</sup>.
- In Cluj-Napoca, the Association Simplon Romania, in partnership with the business association Transylvania IT Cluster, and with the support of the Cluj-Napoca City Hall (*Primăria Cluj-Napoca*), developed and delivered a digital skills training for the beneficiaries of two public day-care centers for older people from the locality<sup>11</sup>.
- In Tulcea, the social economy enterprise Senior Delta Grup, which is usually offering home-care services and active aging services, contracted by the Tulcea City Hall (*Primăria Tulcea*), developed a digital skills course for its beneficiaries, which includes basic notions on how to access digital public services<sup>12</sup>.

### **3 Research and data focused on equal access to public services in the digital age**

In 2021, the National Council for Combating Discrimination (*Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării*) registered 47 complaints of discrimination on the ground of age. Nine of these complaints were made in the context of access to public services (gender data not available), but the report does not include information if the complaints are related to the digital transformation or not. From the 47 complaints, the Council issued warnings in seven cases, fines in three cases, and recommendations in 4 cases, and it rejected the remaining petitions (data not available on the specific cases related to access to public services)<sup>13</sup>.

Relevant research studies identified:

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<sup>9</sup> Adevărul.ro (2021), '[Codul QR, enigmă pentru vârstnici. Instituții care îi ajută pe cei fără acces la internet](#)', 4 November 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Bihon.ro (2022), '[Au învățat notiuni digitale la peste 50 de ani](#)', 16 May 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Simplon Romania (2020), '[Seniori în era digitală](#)', 22 June 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Senior Delta Grup (2021), '[Seniori digitali](#)', 9 September 2021.

<sup>13</sup> National Council for Combating Discrimination (Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării), Annual Report 2021 ([Raport Anual 2021](#)), 1 April 2022.

1. Șandor, S.D., Creța, S.C., Fechete, T.A., Cotoranu, D., Zai, P., Antonie, R.I. (2020), '[Competențe digitale în rândul populației din România](#)', *Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative*, 2(47) / 2020, pp. 132-147.

The article is using secondary analysis of the data from National Statistics Institute and Eurostat. One of the main research findings is that, in Romania, the majority of the citizens are opting for the classic method of interaction with public authorities. The authors are identifying two major reasons for this behaviour: the lack of opportunities and the lack of skills. The study shows that there is an increasing digital gap between urban and rural areas, and also between younger and older people, without providing exact data for the age gap.

2. Ghența, M., Matei, A., Mladen-Macovei, L., Bobârnat, E.S. (2020) [Calitatea vieții persoanelor vârstnice dependente în România](#), Bucharest, Editura Universitară.

The book proposes a comprehensive framework to analyze and measure the quality of life of dependent older persons in Romania, living in residential centers or with their family. The authors use a mix of measures, including quantitative and qualitative tools, and adapting international models for measuring the quality of life of older persons. The last chapter of the book is presenting the results of the authors' research using the Policy Delphi method to generate relevant public policy proposal applied to the situation of dependent older persons. One of the top recommendations is related to improving access to health services through eHealth programmes. In this context, the authors note the relatively low number of older people who are familiar with the use of digital technologies. They recommend the use of telephones and computers adapted for older people, at the same time as the development of computer and internet skills. Another relevant and complementary tool is opening phone lines where older persons are informed about the services they can benefit from.

## 4 State of digitalisation of selected public services

		Selected public services relevant for older persons			
		Access to health records	Public statutory pensions	Social benefits	Other (as relevant in your context)
<b>Stage of digitalisation</b>	Not digitalised (Y/N)	N	N	N	
	Information is available online (Y/N)	Y	Y	N	
	Transactions are possible online (Y/N)	Y	Y	N	
<b>Recognition of groups at risk of digital exclusion</b>	Service specific regulation recognises barriers to digital inclusion / vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Y/N).	N	N	N	
	<b>If yes</b> , please list the barriers and groups that are mentioned.				
<b>Multichannel access options</b>	<b>Telephone service</b> (Y/N) <b>If yes</b> , please describe what kind of personalised services it provides.	Y General information about the persons' status in the public health system and technical support on how to access the information online or offline (in person). Medical data can't be retrieved over the phone.	Y General information about the persons' status in the national pensions system and technical support on how to access the information online or offline (in person). More detailed data can't be retrieved over the phone.	Y Information if the person is eligible or not for certain benefits, and information on what are the procedures/forms to actually access the respective benefits. The requests/forms must be submitted in person.	
	<b>Physical administrative access points</b> (Y/N). <b>If yes</b> , please specify the level of availability (local, regional, national), the opening days and hours.	Y At the County offices of the National Health Insurance House ( <i>Casa Națională de Asigurări de Sănătate</i> ), in each county capital-city.	Y At the County offices of the National Public Pensions House ( <i>Casa Națională de Pensii Publice</i> ), in each county	Y Depending on the type of benefit, either at the County General Social Assistance Direction (located in each county	



		Open daily, on working days, during usual working hours (9-17).	capital-city. Open daily, on working days, during usual working hours (9-17).	capital-city), or at the social service of the local City Hall. Open daily, on working days, during usual working hours (9-17).	
	<b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>offline</b> access to the service (Y/N) <b>If yes</b> , indicate the location(s). Please describe what kind of support is provided.	N	N	N	
	<b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>online</b> access to the service (Y/N). <b>If yes</b> , indicate the location(s). Please describe what kind of support is provided.	N	N	N	
	<b>Other</b> – please indicate any other access channels to the service.	In the general practitioners (GP) ( <i>medic de familie</i> ) office, assisted by the respective family doctor.	For the beneficiaries of the residential centers, some services can be provided, at request, in the centers.		
<b>Other forms of support for online use</b>	Please indicate any other <b>form of support to facilitate the use of the online service</b> for older persons such as easy-to-read versions, different language versions, etc.	The website of the National Health Insurance House ( <i>Casa Națională de Asigurări de Sănătate</i> ) has basic accessibility tools for visually impaired, but the eHealth portal ( <i>Dosarul Electronic de Sănătate</i> ) does not have such tools.	None available.	None available.	