

THE DIGITALIZATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ROMANIA: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

The digitalization of public administration in Romania represents an essential strategic process for modernizing the state, improving the quality of public services, strengthening the relationship between citizens and public institutions. The paper analyzes the state of digitalization in Romania based on recent official documents focusing on the European report State of the Digital Decade 2024, national studies on the benefits of digitalization, and the digital transformation guidelines developed at the institutional level. The analysis highlights both significant progress (high FTTP coverage, the development of public digital platforms, major investments in infrastructure) and persistent challenges – the low level of digital skills, system fragmentation, insufficient digitalization of public services and the shortage of IT specialist. This paper provides an integrated interpretation of these aspects and outlines the strategic directions necessary for accelerating the digital transformation of the public administration.

Key words: digitalization, digitalization of public administration, digital competences, digital changes, public services, Romania, Digital Decade.

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of public administration in Romania has become a strategic priority over the past decade, driven by the need to improve institutional efficiency, socio-economic pressures, the rapid development of information technologies, and the requirements established at the level of the European Union.

In the “*Report on the State of the Digital Decade 2024*”, published by the European Commission in July 2024 (<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/>), it is highlighted that Romania has “a performance that needs to be improved in order to contribute to the Digital Decade objectives”, and that progress in digitalization is visible but still insufficient to meet European targets.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization processes, driving public institutions to quickly adopt platforms and technological solutions that facilitated remote interaction and the efficient management of administrative workflows.

The European Framework and the National Context of Digitalization

Romania benefits from a considerable volume of European funds dedicated to

digitalization. According to the European report, “21.8% of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is dedicated to digitalization (5.8 billion euros)”, to which are added “3 billion euros from the

Cohesion Policy”. These allocations position digitalization at the center of the economic and administrative transformation planned for the upcoming period.

Despite these resources and the structural progress, the EC report highlights the persistence of major gaps: Romania faces difficulties in areas such as basic digital skills, 5G coverage, and the digitalization of SMEs. Additionally, only 59% of citizens consider that digitalization makes their lives easier, well below the EU average of 73%.

The digitalization of public administration in Romania must be understood within the broader context of the European Union’s strategy for digital transformation. At the European level, the strategic directions are outlined in the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030, which sets ambitious objectives in four areas: digital skills, secure and high-performing digital infrastructures, business digitalization, and the digitalization of public services. These objectives provide a reference framework for all Member States, including Romania.

According to the “*Report on the State of the Digital Decade 2024*”, the EU aims to meet targets such as:

- *100% gigabit coverage and 5G in all populated areas,*
- *80% of citizens having basic digital skills,*
- *each Member State developing fully digital public services,*
- *increasing the adoption of emerging technologies (AI, cloud, edge computing).*

The report highlights that, at the EU level, progress remains uneven: there are “major differences between Member States”, and the overall pace of advancement is slower than what is required to meet the 2030 objectives (European Commission, 2024).

Romania is among the states that needs to accelerate their pace in order to close significant gaps. According to the evaluation dedicated to Romania in the European Union’s Report, Romania “has made noticeable progress in the digitalization of public services and SMEs”, but continues to show major vulnerabilities in critical areas, such as:

a) The digital skills of the population

The report shows that over 72% of the population lacks basic digital skills, the highest percentage in the EU. This situation limits both the adoption of digital public services and the development of the digital economy.

b) The level of IT specialist

Romania only has 2.6% ICT specialists in the workforce, below the EU average (4.3%) and far below the European target for 2030 (approx. 10%).

c) The implementation of advanced technologies

Romanian SMEs show a low level of digitalization: only 26.8% of them have a minimum level of digital intensity, comparison to the EU average of 57.7% (2023). The adoption of cloud services, AI and data analytics is also under the European average.

d) Connectivity and infrastructure

Interestingly, Romania excels in the fields of connectivity:

- 95% FTTP coverage (second place in the EU),
- 94% of connections have speed above 100 Mbps (the highest rate in the EU).

However, the 5G coverage in Romania remains low (at 32.8%, compared to the EU average of 89.3%).

Also, in the “*Report on the Digital Decade 2024*”, in the section dedicated to Romania, it is noted that the digital transformation has gained “unprecedented political importance”, being supported by considerable funding:

- 21.8% of NRRP is allocated to digitalization (approx. 5.8 billion euros).
- 3 billion euros are allocated through the Cohesion Policy for the digitalization of public services, improving skills, and supporting the innovative ecosystem.

The investments target projects such as the governmental cloud, the national interoperability portal, the digitalization of regional and local services, modernizing educational infrastructure for the development of digital skills, expanding e-health services, and improving access to the electronic patient record.

The DESI indicators show that Romania remains significantly below the European average:

Indicator (2023)	Romania	EU
Digital public services for citizens	52,2	79,4
Digital services for businesses	50,0	85,4
E-health access (electronic patient record)	58,6%	79,1%

Source: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/report-state-digital-decade-2024>

The report highlights that, despite the investments and the ambitious projects, “the performance of public services remains low”, and progress is slow due to system fragmentation, the lack of interoperability, and the shortage of IT staff in public institutions.

A key factor in the digitalization of public administration is the development of digital skills among public servants. The INA document highlights the need for “investments in the professional training of human resources to manage complex infrastructures and adapt to rapid technological changes”.

At the same time, the European report draws attention to a major deficit: “over 72% of Romania’s population does not have basic digital skills”, and the percentage of ICT specialist is among the lowest in Europe — only 2.6% of the workforce.

Digitalization in public administration has become a fundamental pillar for modernizing public institutions, contributing to:

- operational efficiency and the reduction of bureaucracy;
- increased transparency and institutional accountability;
- quick and easy access to public services and information;
- increasing citizens’ trust in state institutions.

The pandemic also put these processes into the spotlight, while their implementation, for example through the aici.gov.ro platform, or the massive use of electronic signatures for processing documents, accelerated. Local administrations also generated innovations, like the platform solidaripentrusibiu.cjsibiu.ro, or the digitalization of internal procedures through the use of electronic signatures, in the Sibiu, Arad, Constanța and Olt counties.

The digitalization of the public administration is a key structural change, intended both to modernize the public administration and to re-conceptualize its relationship with the citizens. Digitalization is a process that is not only technological, but also strategic, having major economic, social, democratic and organizational implications.

Transparency is an essential condition for the legitimacy and accountability of the public administration. Digitalization, on the other hand, “increases the accountability of the authorities to the citizens”, making public information more accessible, or by allowing citizens to be able to follow up on the status of their requests or by providing tools that can be used to monitor the activity of the public administration.

Through digitalization, institutions can:

- publish budgets, decisions, reports, and investment projects in a transparent manner;
- facilitate public participation through online platforms, surveys, and consultations
- reduce the opacity of administrative processes;
- limit the risk of corruption by digitalizing internal workflows and electronically monitoring processes.

In the document “Digital Transformation in Public Administration – IT Solutions and the Role of Professional Training” (developed by the National Institute of Administration within the project titled “Developing Solutions for the Transition toward a Digital Public Administration in Romania,” SIPOCA Code 1276, SMIS Code 161684, funded through the Operational Program for Administrative Capacity and co-financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund), it is emphasized that digital transformation is “a way of building trust through the active participation of citizens, thus contributing to improving service quality and reducing corruption

risks” (p. 4 of the mentioned document), particularly through mechanisms such as online participatory budgeting or e-government platforms.

Access to digital public services has increased significantly in Romania over the last few years, turning them into a normal option for many citizens. Online payment, electronic appointments, and the submission of digital documents all cut down on geographic barriers and the amount of time required to interact with public institutions.

In the article “Digitalizing Public Institutions – A View Toward Romania” (<https://smartcitymagazine.ro/digitalizarea-institutiilor-publice-o-privire-spre-romania/>) it is shown that platforms such as ghișeul.ro, aici.gov.ro, or local electronical systems have begun to function as “normal means of interaction with the administration”, a phenomenon that accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when these became almost indispensable.

Digitalization contributes to the reduction of administrative exclusion, equal access to services for people living in rural or isolated areas, reduced dependence on slow bureaucratic procedures, and alignment of public administration with international standards.

The pandemic context brought to the fore the role of digitalization as a determining factor for institutional resilience. The pandemic "accelerated the adoption of digital solutions," generating systemic transformations in public administration, including the digitalization of internal workflows, telework, and the adaptation of procedures to the requirements of social distancing.

This experience has structured the following ideas:

- digitalization ensures administrative continuity in critical situations;
- reduces the need for physical presence;
- enhances the capacity of quick reaction of the institutions;
- simplifies interinstitutional communication.

Digitalization is not only a technological project, but also a mechanism for modernization and institutional protection in the context of future challenges.

The digital transformation of public administration generates positive effects on the economy. According to the European report, digitalization contributes to “competitiveness, resilience and innovation” through:

- reducing administrative costs for companies;
- accelerating authorizing, taxation, and compliance procedures;
- stimulating the start-ups ecosystem;
- facilitating the adoption of advanced digital technologies (AI, cloud, e-invoicing).

Public digitalization becomes a pillar of economic development and an essential infrastructure for modernizing the business sector.

Local Case Studies: Innovation as an Engine of Digital Transformation

Plenty of local administrations in Romania have shown that digitalization can generate immediate benefits. Some examples are:

- Cluj-Napoca – the implementation of the virtual assistant *Antonia*, which reduces by 40% the processing time of documents submitted by citizens;
- Ciugud (Alba) – the creation of a “digital marketplace” to support local producers;
- Sibiu, Arad, Olt, Constanța – the adoption of electronic signatures to streamline internal workflows;
- local online appointment platforms for passports, driving licenses, and urban planning services – now expanded across most prefectures and city halls.

These examples confirm that digitalization can produce rapid and profound transformations even in local contexts with limited resources.

Digitalization as a mechanism for improvement the state-citizen relationship

In the academic literature, digitalization is considered a tool for bringing the administration and citizens close together. The research paper “Digital Transformation in Public Administration – IT Solutions and the Role of Professional Training” (<https://ina.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Transformare-digitala-in->

administratia-publica_Solutii-informaticice-si-rolul-formarii-profesionale.pdf), developed by the National Institute of Administration, shows that

digitalization enables “an increase citizens’ active participation” by facilitating communication, public consultation and access to relevant information for public policy decision-making.

Digitalization does not only change the infrastructure, but also the organizational culture:

- stimulates an open model for governing;
- reduces information asymmetry;
- strengthens trust in administration;
- creates modern and efficient participatory channels.

CONCLUSION

Digitalization represents the foundation of a modern, efficient and democratic administration. Its benefits are multidimensional:

- **administrative** (efficiency, simplification, automated workflows),
- **economic** (competitiveness, reduced costs, stimulation of innovation),
- **social** (accessibility, transparency, inclusion),
- **democratic** (participation, responsibility, public trust).

In Romania, digitalization is not just an aspiration, but a necessary condition for administrative reform and a sustainable development.

The digitalization of public administration represents a vast and complex project, placed in a critical moment in Romania’s evolution. The analysis of official documents shows that the state has the necessary infrastructure and considerable resources, but needs to accelerate the digitalization of public services, the development of digital skills, the strengthening of cybersecurity and the improvement of interoperability between institutions.

Romania has the potential to become a regional model in digital transformation if it succeeds in making effective use of its existing resources in a coherent, strategic, and citizen-oriented manner.

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