

# Civil Service Reform – Expectations Related to the Implementation of The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)

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## Abstract

*In various analyzes of the European institutions, including in the document related to the European Semester 2020, it is found that the progress in the reform of the public administration in Romania is limited in terms of the decision-making process, the quality and the effective use of the evaluations of the impact of the regulations. Also, an effective framework for strategic and budgetary planning in the field of public administration has not yet been created. Frequent reorganizations and the excessive use of temporary management instead of contests for the appointment of managers hinder the independence of the administration. Excessive bureaucracy and diminished possibilities for providing high-quality public services negatively influence the life of the citizen and the business environment. All these aspects highlight the need for a genuine reform of the civil service. The purpose of this paper is related to the study of the expectations generated by the civil service reform in the context of the implementation of the NRRP.*

**Key words:** public administration reform, public service administration reform, National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), objectives, directions of action, result

**J.E.L. classification:** D73, H83

## 1. Introduction

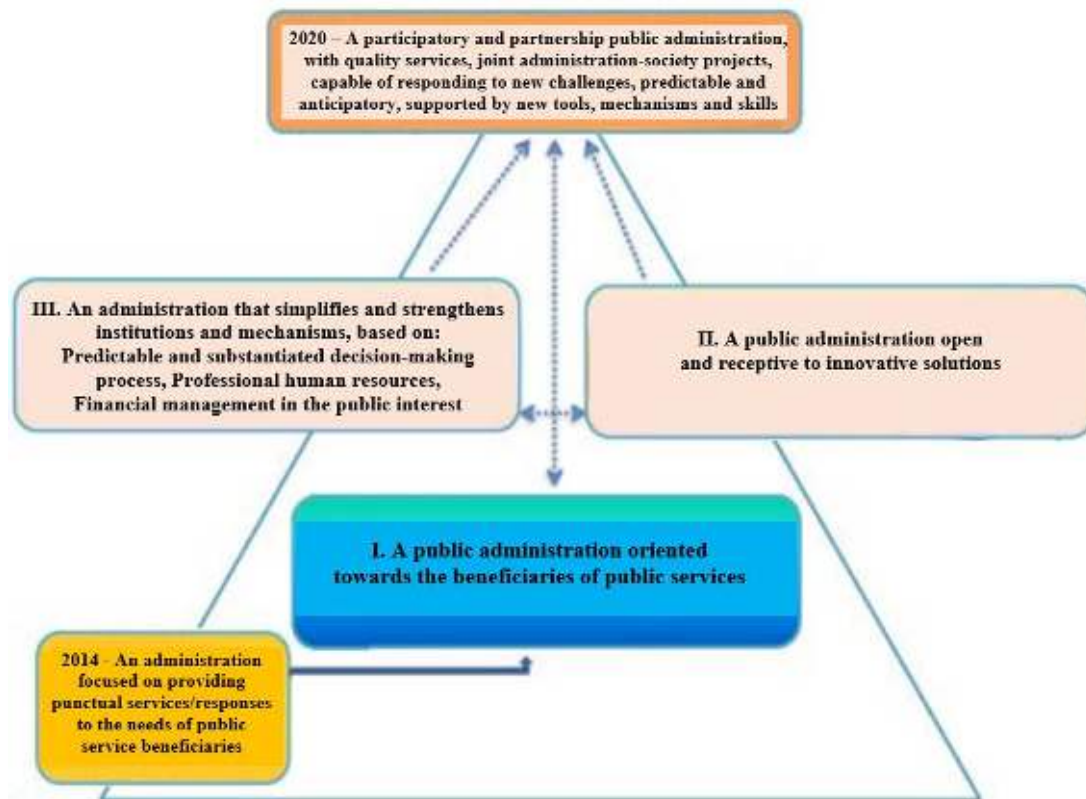
The national states aim for institutions and administrative systems to become as flexible as possible in order to adapt to the multiple transformations that have been manifested in the last period, knowing that "in the new geopolitical context, the central and local public administration have become defining factors in the economic competitiveness of a country or economic region" (Profiroiu et al., 2006).

It has long been established that "the values underlying the development of administration are transparency, professionalism, predictability and responsiveness/responsiveness, all subordinated to the public interest." (Filip&Onofrei, 2004).

In any country, the role of public administration is to provide high-quality services to citizens, promote economic growth in its area of responsibility, support the development of local potential and attract investors. At the same time, the public administration must be resistant to cultural and economic changes have solid capacities for managing European funds and implement public policies. It is essential to remain open and receptive to innovative solutions, having competent human resources in the team to efficiently manage public funds (Burciu et al., 2008; Onofrei, 2007; Morariu, 2007; Onofrei et al., 2022; Bostan et al., 2022).

When we talk about public administration reform, it includes "all aspects of state organization, each of which requires checks and adjustments to achieve the most appropriate combination of hierarchical structure and administrative capacity with managerial effectiveness and efficiency and the ability to achieve increased results and performance. (...)" (Profiroiu et al., 2006). In the same sense appears the vision of the Government of Romania regarding the public administration (Figure 1).

Figure no. 1. The vision of the Romanian Government regarding public administration – 2020



Source: (RG, 2014)

Obviously, in order to achieve the desired progress, it is necessary to develop the capacity of the public administration, acting in multiple ways, through increasing the level of training of public officials at the level of public administration institutions (Bercu, 2009; Morariu, 2008). In another expression, from one stage to another, the desire to record high-performance results in the activity of the public administration made the issue of reforming this sector always come into discussion, with an emphasis on the reform of the public function.

What needs to be mentioned is the fact that, in Romania, "Even if the government programs and reform strategies contained ambitious objectives, they were never fully implemented because there was no administrative capacity and coordination necessary to implement them. Most of the time, after each change of political coloration, the following governments have avoided continuing the steps taken towards a certain reform, even if sometimes it has been proven that the progress for the efficiency of the public administration and the increase of the satisfaction of the citizen were beneficial." (Dincă&Mihaiu, 2019).

It remains the task of the legislator or even the Executive to carry out "wide public consultations to determine which public office system best suits a modern Romania in the long term. Whether it is a career-based body of civil servants or a more flexible system, adapted to the demands of the labor market and built on the principle of open competition for each position" (RG, 2023a), full implementation and without avoiding procedures is essential, regardless of the solution adopted.

## 2. Theoretical background regarding public service reform

In the last 30 years, issues related to public administration reform have been repeatedly discussed in Romania, with several governments attempting such changes. These efforts included reforms designed to restructure the civil service, recognizing the importance of forming a body of politically neutral, professional and honest civil servants essential for the real transformation of public

administration in the country. This transformation involves significant changes in all levels of public administration, "both central and local, and in public services in general. (...)" (Dincă&Mihaiu, 2019).

Public administration reform is "a broad concept that includes all aspects of the organization of the public sector, among which stand out: the general architecture of ministries and agencies, organizations and institutions at the local level, systems, structures, processes, motivations, as well as the way of supervising them and periodic adaptation of the system. On the one hand, administration refers to the way in which the coordination of activities in the public sector is formally authorized, ordered and organized, and on the other hand, it refers to the administrative capacity (...)." (Profiroiu et al., 2006).

In order to improve the administrative capacity in accordance with the requirements of the reform in this area, a coherent series of measures in the sphere of civil service is necessary. They also aim at "creating a body of professional, stable and politically neutral civil servants (...)." (Dincă&Mihaiu, 2019). It should be noted that the Partnership Agreement with the EU for the period 2014-2020 highlights the main deficiencies that affect the public administration in Romania at the level of human resources management. Among them (according to the 2014 Agreement) appears "the lack of an integrated and long-term policy for a consistent and unitary management of human resources, as well as a high-performance management, starting from recruitment, evaluation, promotion and motivation".

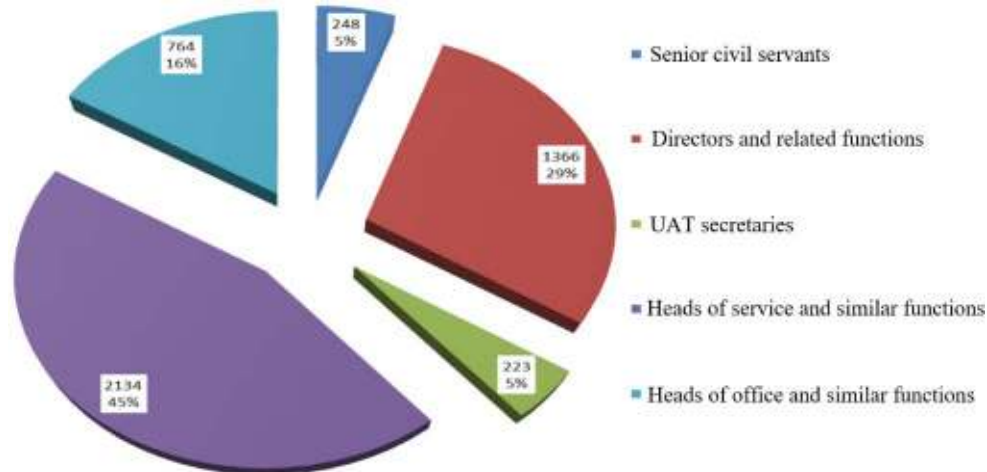
In the scope of the targeted analysis, the following were mentioned (Partnership Agreement România, 2014): the outdated organizational culture, which is based on the procedural and bureaucratic approach, ignoring the achievement of measured performance according to clear objectives and targets. Also, there is instability in the civil service and a rigidity of the mechanisms of selection, management, evaluation and promotion of personnel.

As a result, the necessary measures and short-term directions regarding the reform of the public administration were identified, including those measures that refer to the professionalization of the administration (RG, 2015): (i) selection and evaluation based on individual skills and performance; (ii) creating a higher institution for public administration and supporting public career advancement through professional development programs; (iii) the development and implementation of a performance management system for public administration employees, including a differentiated remuneration system based on performance; (iv) implementation of programs to evaluate the professionalism and integrity of public administration personnel.

In the context of the need for "the development and adaptation of policies and the human resources system to the demanding objectives of a modern administration", the Strategy for the consolidation of public administration 2014-2020 (RG, 2014) aimed at an important objective related to the attraction of "professional human resources. Thus, the public administration was to recruit its staff based on professional and transparent criteria, offering them opportunities for growth within a modern organizational culture" and neutrality in the public office. The goal was to develop a body of employees with strong skills in quality service management and strategic planning, with a special focus on motivating human resources and continuous professionalization, constantly adapting to changes in society. Civil servants were encouraged to show initiative, be receptive to change and provide solid technical support in the decision-making process, respecting the principles of integrity and professional ethics. The selection was thought to align with the objectives and strategic directions of the public institutions.

However, despite the rigor and validity of the mentioned strategic documents, in terms of public administration, an effective framework for strategic and budget planning has not yet been achieved. Frequent reorganizations and excessive dependence on temporary management (appointing leaders without organizing the competition - Figura 2) prevented the independence of the administration. In addition, excessive bureaucracy and the inability "to provide quality public services have had a negative impact on citizens and the business environment"(NACS, 2023).

Figure no. 2 Positions of high civil servants temporarily held (number/%, 2022)



Source: (NACS, 2023)

To these aspects are added (NACS, 2023): the aging of the body of civil servants and the phenomenon of the "inverted pyramid in the structure of employment by professional grades, where more than 70% of civil servants occupy the highest available professional grade". Regarding the aging of the body of civil servants, in 2022, the phenomenon of the "pyramid" of the civil service remains fundamentally reversed (reflecting the trend from 2019-2021). Thus, 76.8% of the filled positions are at a higher degree, and the percentages for assistant and principal positions are relatively evenly distributed (9.5% and 11.7%); in addition, only 2% of executive positions are open to early-career individuals.

The number of vacancies, quantified in high (RG, 2023), almost 61% for public positions at the beginning of their careers, aggravates the situation to which I referred.

### 3. Research methodology

The approach of our research topic ["Civil service reform—expectations related to the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)"] is based on the analysis of a problem by investigating several specialized works of real relevance. For this purpose, we examined the official documents of the European Commission and the Government of Romania, as well as the materials issued by NACS, along with certain European/national normative acts focused on the subject of our research.

The investigation of the general objectives and directions of action included in the Regulation 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism called for the examination of the legislation aimed at reforming the recruitment and selection of human resources, including the rules or policies related to the competences of the personnel. We also base our research on some official reports of the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, the National Institute of Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity and other ministries.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Strategic objectives for the period 2023-2027 in the field of the public function

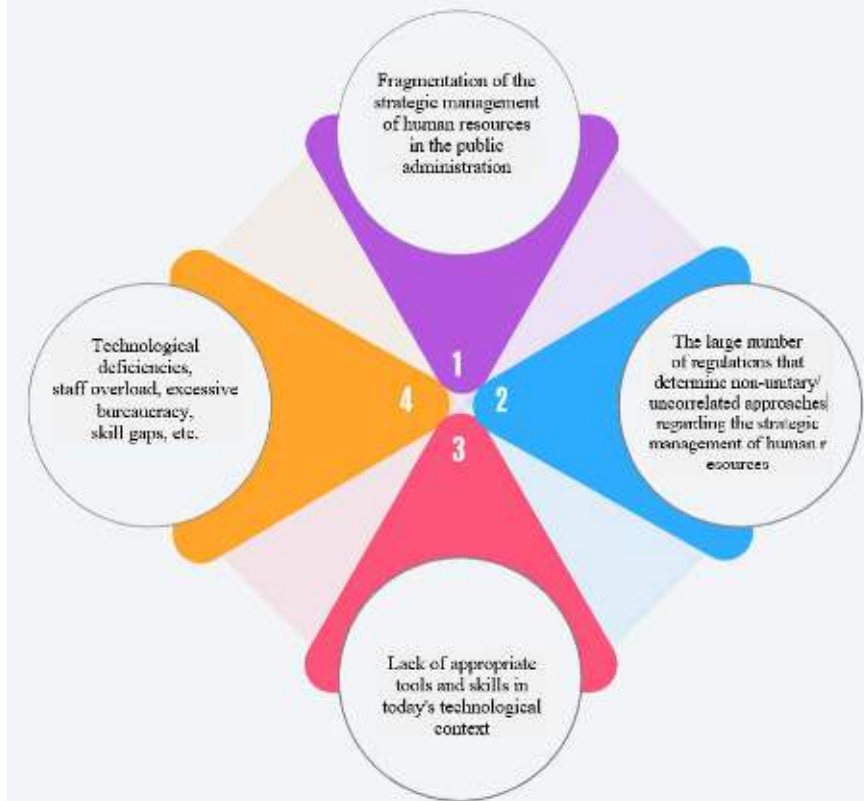
The recent reform measures in the field of public office - after the adoption of GEO no.57/2019 on the Administrative Code - aims at "the introduction of an objective and impartial model of recruitment in the public administration, by establishing a system of competitions that privileges the competence and integrity of civil servants, while also aiming to achieve performance" (RG, 2023b).

This objective was implemented (with the involvement of NACS/National Agency of Civil Servants) by developing and testing “a transparent and inclusive recruitment and selection process in the central public administration using recruitment competitions. The plan is to gradually extend this system to all categories of civil servants in the central public administration. It is important to note that within component C14 - Good governance, reform 3 - Performance management of human resources in the public sector (National Recovery and Resilience Plan/NRRP), Milestone 417 establishes the obligation for NACS to complete at least two national competitions for recruitment of civil servants for at least three categories/grades of public positions by the end of 2023” (RG, 2023c). The respective contests are based on the subsequent analysis of the pilot contest for the occupation of public positions, carried out within Milestone 416.

Among the responsibilities of the NACS is the facilitation of assistance from the specialized institutions at the central level for the local public administration in the adoption and application of recruitment tools oriented towards the competence and integrity of civil servants. Milestone 417 (NRRP) stipulates the implementation of contests for the occupation of public positions in both central and territorial public administration; however, the IT platform developed within this milestone, for now only supports the previously mentioned contests and not the contests for occupying public positions at the local level. Thus, supporting contests at local level in parallel with those for occupying public positions at central and territorial level is currently not feasible, because expanding the IT platform to include local contests would involve the allocation of additional resources, and the authorities would have to bear expenses additional for the assessment of specific skills and specialist knowledge. A phased implementation of the new recruitment methods is also being considered to avoid a negative impact on the entire administration (RG, 2023c).

Even if in recent years certain reform commitments have been fulfilled to an appreciable extent along the lines of strengthening the state administration and developing the public function, there are still some challenges that the national administrative system still faces (Figure 3).

Figure no. 3. The main challenges facing the public administrative system from Romania



Source: (RG, 2023)



Besides those captured in Figure 3, equally harmful are the problems related to the lack of correlation between institutional requirements, employees' skills, the system of career advancement and performance management, in terms of the application of reforms in public administration, in a marked context of technological, social, demographic changes, etc.

The deficiencies in question are to be reduced through the application of the Public Service Strategy (2022-2027), (RG, 2022, 2023), aiming at "the development of a unitary, strategic, transparent and fair management system of public functions for the Romanian administration, oriented towards performance, competence and results (...)".

All of this presupposes, in fact, the implementation of the reform measures established by the Administrative Code adopted in 2019 (EOG no. 57) and those assumed by Romania through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. With certainty, the tasks that appear now raise great difficulties, if we take into account the extent of the problem at the national level, which can only be intuited through the quantitative prism (Figure 4).

Figure no. 4 Teritorial profile indicators: number of civil servants, related to the number of inhabitants, employed in public authorities and institutions



Source: (NACS, 2023)

Important civil service reform measures - aimed, above all, at the recruitment and selection of civil servants, their training and development, as well as the evaluation of individual performances - can be found in the Government Program (2023 – 2024) (RG, 2023a).

The program proposes the implementation in the administration, for civil servants, of a new competence framework, a unified competence structure and clearer career guidance. By establishing the new skills framework, the aim is to define the set of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for filling positions in the public administration, supporting its professionalization and improving the quality of human resources in the public sector.

Regarding the human resources in the public sector the program aims to (RG, 2023a): (i) to completely adapt the administration to the needs of citizens and to be oriented towards achieving results, with the introduction of the evaluation of each institution and each official in relation to the performances achieved; (ii) developing the digital skills of public administration staff and ensuring the necessary human resources for the digital transformation process; (iii) implementing a robust training program for public administration management positions, focused on developing leadership

skills and managing team performance; (iv) creation and consolidation of a centralized "budgetary personnel record (e-budgetary) system for civil servants, contractual personnel in the administration and public sector employees". NACS is already working on some of these, and some of the measures are in the process of implementation.

In the same context, the revision of the career of civil servants is of particular importance, aiming to become more attractive, with a more extensive professional development, facilitating the evaluation of performances in order to orient civil servants towards achieving results and to impose on them a greater responsibility towards citizens and the business environment.

#### **4.2. The implementation of the NRRP and the anticipation of some results in the field of public function**

Obviously, those contained in the Governmental Program (2023-2024), which we referred to previously, have a counterpart in the strategy applicable to the public function related to the time interval 2022-2027, correlated in turn with the approved National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania by the EU Council.

Within the Strategy for the public function for the period 2022-2027 (RG, 2022), related to the implementation of the NRRP, a major priority is the "Digital transformation of human resources management in the public administration". Component 7 of the NRRP - Digital transformation - Investment 10 - addresses "the development and expansion of the management platform of civil servants - E-ANFP. This involves the design of an architecture for the management of the careers of civil servants at the central, territorial and local level", by expanding/developing existing functionalities (interconnection with collaborating institutions).

The same Component (7) also includes the development of the SIMRU facility for public administrations, addressing "HR" processes (personnel data administration, organization, time management, goal setting and reporting). This system manages multiple aspects of human resources - from recruitment and onboarding, to job descriptions, employee documents and career stages, etc.

The component (14 - Reform 3) also aims at the effective introduction of frameworks regarding competences in central public administration institutions and the proposal of a legislative act for a human resources management based on meritocracy. Also, the NRRP proposes the implementation of some solutions to increase the prestige of the public office, such as an integrated research on the management of human resources and the initiation of two normative acts for the management of the careers of civil servants and contractual staff.

Regarding the results related to the implementation of the NRRP in the civil service, partial results are already being recorded; some of the anticipated significant achievements refer to the normative framework for digitization and electronic systems for specific management - E-ANFP/E-NACS, SENEOSP /NESREPS (The National Electronic System for Recording Employment in the Public Sector), SIMRU/IHRMS (Integrated Human Resources Management System), a portal of the national competition. Also, the NRRP already contributes to the adoption of skills frameworks in the mentioned system (in standard job descriptions and in "HR" processes), to the transition to a performance management in the public administration and to a performance-oriented career system and results.

#### **5. Conclusions**

The objectives of the reform in the field of public function aim to establish a transparent, strategic and fair management system for the Romanian administration, focused on performance, competence and obtaining concrete results. The goal is to attract and retain the right professionals in the right positions to provide quality public services.

These objectives include: (i) development and implementation of information-based and results-oriented/future-oriented policies for public service human resource management; (ii) the digital transformation of this type of management; (iii) the management of those skills vital to the provision of high-quality public services and the achievement of a good work climate in the sphere of the public function; (iv) the professionalization of human resources management in public institutions; (v) promoting ethics, integrity, transparency and preventing corruption.

The actions planned for the period 2023-2027 in the field of civil service and the implementation of the NRRP provide solid foundations for making significant progress. Some steps have already been taken and significant improvements are expected in the normative framework adapted to digitization and in the electronic systems for the management of public administration personnel, through the SENEOSP /NESREPS projects and the digitized recruitment system.

Justified expectations are also related to the transition to a performance management in the public administration to a career system oriented to performance and results, as some benefits could also come from the adoption of competence frameworks in the said system.

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