

Reform and Modernisation of the Romanian Public Administration in the Context of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan

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Abstract

The study aims to analyse, from a legal and administrative perspective, the processes of reform and modernisation of Romanian public administration in the context of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), considered the main instrument of institutional transformation after accession to the European Union. The overall objective is to assess the extent to which the measures undertaken through the NRRP – in particular the digitisation of public services, the professionalisation of the civil service and the strengthening of administrative accountability – have had a real impact on administrative practice. The research uses analytical-comparative and interpretative-normative methods, based on an analysis of the legislative framework (Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 on the Administrative Code), strategic government documents and recent case law of national and European courts. The results show visible progress towards making public administration more efficient, but also the persistence of systemic deficiencies regarding procedural deadlines and the application of the principle of good administration provided for in Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The implications of the study point to the need to consolidate a coherent administrative model focused on digitisation, transparency, performance and institutional continuity.

Keywords: administrative reform; NRRP; public administration; digitisation; good administration; institutional efficiency; Administrative Code; public accountability.

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1. The Context of Romanian Public Administration Reform Within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)

Over the last decade, the reform of public administration in Romania has become a strategic priority for the state, accelerated by the European framework provided by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). This initiative is not limited to post-pandemic economic recovery, but aims to profoundly transform the way

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public institutions operate².

The NRRP requires Member States to implement structural reforms aimed at ensuring institutional resilience, good governance and strengthening administrative capacity³. For Romania, this dimension is essential: public administration is often perceived as bureaucratic, slow and insufficiently adapted to the demands of the digital society⁴.

According to the national framework, Component 14 – Good Governance in the NRRP – provides for key reforms such as: modernising the civil service, implementing performance management, simplifying administrative procedures and developing digital infrastructure⁵. Thus, administrative reform is no longer a political option, but a legal and strategic obligation, assumed through commitments to the European Commission.

From a doctrinal perspective, Prof. Cristian Clipa emphasises that Romanian public administration "is in a permanent transition between the traditional bureaucratic model and the paradigm of participatory governance"⁶. This transition involves redefining the relationship between the state and the citizen, in which the administration becomes a partner of civil society and the business environment, not just a controlling authority.

In the same vein, Prof. Armenia Androniceanu considers that "the efficiency of public administration in European Union countries depends directly on their ability to implement sustainable, not temporary, reforms"⁷. The NRRP provides Romania with the financial and regulatory framework necessary for this transformation, making the allocation of funds conditional on the achievement of clear milestones.

From a legal point of view, administrative reform through the NRRP involves a review of the principle of good administration, enshrined in Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which establishes the right of every person to benefit from impartial, fair and timely administration⁸. In this sense, the NRRP is not only an economic document, but also an instrument for implementing

² European Commission, *Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation* (EU) 2021/241, Brussels, 2021, art. 4, OJ L 57, 18.2.2021, pp. 17–75.

³ Council of the European Union, *Council Implementing Decision on the Approval of the Assessment of the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania*, Brussels, 2021, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12319-2021-INIT/en/pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on 20 December 2025.

⁴ Alex Stimpson, Claire Moretti, Ellen Fobé, *The Role of Public Administration in Shaping EU Productivity and Competitiveness*, European Commission, 2025, p. 32, https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a6f1f9d5-2324-428d-9a30-12c81bee88e8_en?filename=EUPACK%202024_%20Comparative%20report_Final%20new%20template_clean.pdf, accessed on 20 December 2025.

⁵ Ministry of Investment and European Projects, *National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) – Component 14. Good Governance*, Bucharest, 2023, p. 5, <https://mfe.gov.ro/pnrr/>, accessed on 20 December 2025.

⁶ Cristian Clipa, *Fundamentele ideologice ale dreptului administrativ* [Ideological Foundations of Administrative Law]. Vol. II, Tom. 2, 2nd edn., Ed. Hamangiu, Bucharest, 2024, p. 118.

⁷ Armenia Androniceanu, *Sisteme administrative din state ale Uniunii Europene* [Administrative Systems in European Union Member States], Ed. Universitară, Bucharest, 2015, p. 43.

⁸ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Art. 41, Official Journal of the European Union, C326/391, 26.10.2012.

European principles of governance and administrative legality.

2. The European Framework and Principles of Administrative Modernisation

The reform of the Romanian public administration must be viewed in the broader context of European integration, which promotes a common set of governance principles – the European Principles for Public Administration (EPPA), developed by OECD/SIGMA⁹. These principles include legality, transparency, accountability, efficiency, responsiveness and integrity of public administration¹⁰.

At the European Union level, the modernisation of public administration is associated with the concept of the European Administrative Space, which describes the convergence between national administrative systems around the values of good governance¹¹. This convergence does not imply standardisation, but rather harmonisation. In this sense, each Member State retains its own specific characteristics, but complies with common standards of performance and transparency.

In international doctrine, Sabino Cassese observes that modern administrations are evolving "from hierarchy to network, from authority to cooperation, and from control to responsibility"¹². This conceptual shift is also visible in the Romanian reform through the NRRP, where the emphasis is shifting from simple legal compliance to administrative performance.

At the same time, Paul Craig defines modernisation as "a process of integrating the principles of efficiency and accountability into traditional administrative law mechanisms"¹³.

Internally, the Romanian public administration has attempted a series of previous reforms – from the Strategy for an Efficient Public Administration 2014–2020 to the Administrative Code (Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019). However, implementation has often been fragmented¹⁴. The NRRP brings a new element: directly linking the reform to European funding and monitoring, which gives the process greater legal and institutional force¹⁵.

⁹ OECD/SIGMA, *The Principles of Public Administration*, November 2023, Paris, 2019, p. 9, https://www.sigmaweb.org/content/dam/sigma/en/publications/reports/2023/11/the-principles-of-public-administration_5e68f805/7f5ec453-en.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on 20 December 2025.

¹⁰ Paul Craig, *EU Administrative Law*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 36.

¹¹ Herwig Hofmann, Jens-Peter Schneider, Jacques Ziller, *La codification de la procédure administrative de l'Union européenne*, Ed. Bruylant, Brussels, 2016, p. 27; Cătălin-Silviu Săraru, *European Administrative Space – recent challenges and evolution prospects*, ADJURIS – International Academic Publisher, Bucharest, 2017, p. 15-48.

¹² Sabino Cassese, *Research Handbook on Global Administrative Law*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2017, p. 97.

¹³ Paul Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, *Strategy for Efficient Public Administration 2014–2020*, Bucharest, 2014, p. 6, https://sgg.gov.ro/docs/File/UPP/doc/_finale/strategie_adm_publica__1_.pdf, accessed on 20 December 2025.

¹⁵ European Commission, Romania Country Report – European Semester 2023, Brussels, 2023, p. 14, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/publications/2023-country-report-romania_en, accessed on 20

In addition, the European Commission makes the release of financial tranches conditional on the achievement of administrative reform milestones, including in the areas of digitisation, public ethics and simplification of procedures¹⁶. Thus, the Romanian administration becomes part of a process of real, not just formal, European convergence.

3. Reform of the Romanian Public Administration Through the NRRP

The reform of Romanian public administration through the NRRP is based on an integrated approach that combines the modernisation of the legislative framework, the digitisation of public services and the strengthening of institutional capacity. Component 14 - Good Governance aims at the structural transformation of the administration, while Component 7 - Digital Transformation supports the process through technological and financial instruments¹⁷.

According to the Civil Service Strategy for the Period 2022-2027, implemented within the NRRP, the administration must become more flexible, transparent and results-oriented¹⁸. The reform is based on several key directions:

- regulatory simplification, by reducing bureaucracy and unifying the administrative framework;
- professionalisation of the civil service through continuous training and performance-based evaluation;
- digitisation of public services as a means of increasing efficiency and accessibility;
- making authorities accountable by introducing performance indicators and independent audits¹⁹.

From a legal and administrative perspective, these measures are twofold: on the one hand, they are public management reforms; on the other hand, they represent legal obligations assumed by Romania through European Commission decisions²⁰.

According to the OECD Public Governance Review 2023 report, the Romanian administration has made progress in terms of transparency, but difficulties remain in implementing performance principles and inter-institutional coordination²¹. The lack of

December 2025.

¹⁶ Ministry of Research, *Innovation and Digitalisation, National Action Plan on the Digital Decade for Romania*, 2024, <https://www.mcid.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Plan-national-de-actiune-roadmap-pentru-publicare.pdf>, accessed on 20 December 2025.

¹⁷ Ministry of Investment and European Projects, PNRR – Component 14. Good Governance, Bucharest, 2023, p. 6.

¹⁸ National Agency of Civil Servants, *Civil Service Strategy for the Period 2022-2027*, Bucharest, 2022, p. 10, https://www.anfp.gov.ro/R/Doc/2022/Propuneri%20legislative/Proiect%20Strategie%20Functie%20Publica%202022-2027_PDF.pdf, accessed on 20 December 2025.

¹⁹ OECD (2023), *Open Government Review of Romania*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ff20b2d4-en>, p. 13.

²⁰ Council of the European Union, *Council Implementing Decision on the Approval of the Assessment of the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania*, Brussels, 2021.

²¹ OECD (2023), *Open Government Review of Romania*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, p. 22.

database interoperability and regulatory fragmentation remain the main obstacles to achieving the objectives set.

In doctrine, Prof. Adrian Stoica points out that "the digitisation of law and public administration in Romania cannot be reduced to a simple technological modernisation, but must be seen as a complex legal process that redefines the administrative act and the relationship of authority"²². Similarly, Prof. Ovidiu Podaru considers that "administrative reform will not be real until the administrative act becomes an instrument of good governance, not just an act of authority"²³.

Administrative reform also includes a territorial dimension. According to the NRRP, it is planned to reorganise the decision-making process at local level through inter-community cooperation mechanisms, reducing territorial inequalities²⁴ and developing administrative capacity in rural areas²⁵.

At the same time, the Ministry of Finance – NRRP 2024 Report shows that over 73% of the milestones and targets related to public administration have been achieved, but there are delays in projects concerning the interoperability of IT systems and the simplification of public procurement procedures²⁶.

Thus, the picture of an ongoing reform is emerging, in which success depends on the coordinated implementation of institutional, technological and legislative reforms within a European governance framework based on good administration and public accountability.

4. Digitalisation and Smart Governance

Digital transformation is the most ambitious and complex dimension of the NRRP reform. The main objective of Component 7 – Digital Transformation is to create an efficient, citizen-centred administration by digitising public services, increasing interoperability and using emerging technologies²⁷.

To this end, Romania has committed itself, through the 2022–2026 Action Plan for Digital Governance, to achieving three major objectives:

1. developing public digital infrastructure;
2. interoperability of IT systems;

²² Adrian Stoica, *Digitalizarea dreptului si administratiei publice in actualul context pandemic [Digitisation of law and public administration in the current pandemic context]*, Ed. Universul Juridic, Bucharest, 2023, p. 77.

²³ Ovidiu Podaru, *Drept administrativ. Vol. I. Actul administrativ [Administrative Law. Vol. I. Administrative Act]*, Ed. Hamangiu, Bucharest, 2022, p. 52.

²⁴ For models of cooperation at local level that can reduce territorial inequalities, see Cătălin-Silviu Săraaru, „The European groupings of territorial cooperation developed by administrative structures in Romania and Hungary”, *Acta Juridica Hungarica*, vol. 55, issue 2, 2014: 150-162, DOI: 10.1556/AJur.55.2014.2.5.

²⁵ Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, Territorial Disparities in Romania. State of Territory Report 2024, <https://www.mdipa.ro/uploads/articole/attachments/68c7b1c16e72e612440999.pdf>, accessed on 20 December 2025.

²⁶ Ministry of Finance, PNRR 2024 Implementation Report, Bucharest, 2024, p. 9.

²⁷ Ministry of Research, *Innovation and Digitalisation, National Action Plan on the Digital Decade for Romania*, 2024, p. 12

3. creating a clear legislative framework for digital administration²⁸.

According to the eGovernment Benchmark 2024, Romania scored 67% of the European average, surpassing some countries in the region but lagging behind leading countries in digitalisation, such as Estonia and Denmark²⁹.

In doctrine, Prof. Vasile Baltac emphasises that "e-government must be understood as a process of institutional transformation, not just software implementation"³⁰. Similarly, Lips Miriam points out that modern administrations "must use digitisation to strengthen accountability and public trust, not just to automate processes"³¹.

In comparative terms, the examples of Estonia and Germany are relevant. Estonia, considered a European model of digital administration, has implemented the once-only principle, according to which citizens provide their data only once, and institutions automatically retrieve it through interoperability³². Germany, although a state with a complex and decentralised administration, adopted the Onlinezugangsgesetz in 2021, which requires all public authorities to provide standardised online services³³.

Romania has adopted similar approaches through the gov.ro platform and initiatives such as the Government Cloud, but unfortunately, the lack of a coherent legislative infrastructure and institutional resistance to change have slowed down the process³⁴.

Table1. Comparative table: level of digitisation of public administration (2024)

Country	Level of digitisation	Interoperability	Citizen access	Legislative framework	Comments
Estonia	Very high (over 90% online services)	Total	Single platform (<i>X-Road</i>)	Clear, comprehensive and predictable	Integrated digital governance model
Germany	High (over 75% online services)	Partially complete	Through the federal <i>BundID</i>	Coherent, but fragmented at the state level	Decentralised digital administration

²⁸ Idem, p. 15.

²⁹ European Commission, *eGovernment Benchmark Report 2024*, Luxembourg, 2024, p. 37, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-decade-2024-egovernment-benchmark>, accessed on 20 December 2025.

³⁰ Vasile Baltac, *e-Guvernarea. Transformarea digitala a administrației publice [e-Governance. The Digital Transformation of Public Administration]*, Ed. Pro Universitaria, Bucharest, 2024, p. 41.

³¹ Lips Miriam, *Digital Government: Managing Public Sector Reform in the Digital Era*, Routledge, 2019, p. 22.

³² Stephane Remy, Antoine Barde, *The Art of Digitalisation: A Dive into e-Estonia*, Asian Productivity Organization, 2024, p. 33. <https://doi.org/10.61145/IINI4552>.

³³ Thomas Unnerstall, *The German Energy Transition: Design, Implementation, Cost and Lessons*, Springer, 2017, p. 15.

³⁴ Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, *Report on the Government Cloud*, Bucharest, 2024, p. 8.

Country	Level of digitisation	Interoperability	Citizen access	Legislative framework	Comments
			portal		
Romania	Under development (~65% online services)	Limited	Multiple platforms (<i>gov.ro</i> , <i>ANAF</i> , <i>CNAS</i>)	Under harmonisation	Requires consolidation and real interoperability

Source: Summary based on data from eGovernment Benchmark 2024³⁵ and Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, 2024³⁶.

This comparison shows that Romania has made significant progress but is still in a process of technological and regulatory convergence. As Siim Sikkut, former Chief Information Officer of Estonia, notes, "the success of digitalisation is not just about technology, but about leadership, trust and institutional stability"³⁷.

In the same vein, Antoine Picon emphasises that "smart cities and administrations only become effective when digitalisation is accompanied by ethics, transparency and public control"³⁸.

In Romania, an important step forward is represented by initiatives on artificial intelligence in administration, recently analysed by Martin Ebers and Paloma Krööt Tupay, which highlight the need for clear rules on automated decisions and data protection³⁹.

Thus, the digitisation of Romanian public administration should be seen not only as a technological tool, but as a means of guaranteeing fundamental rights, transparency and good governance.

5. Professionalisation and Administrative Accountability

The reform of Romanian public administration through the NRRP is not limited to digitisation and procedural simplification, but also includes a profoundly human and legal dimension: the professionalisation of the civil service and the strengthening of administrative accountability.

According to the Strategy for the Professionalisation of the Civil Service 2022–2030, developed in the context of the NRRP, the main objective is to build an

³⁵ European Commission, *eGovernment Benchmark Report 2024*, Luxembourg, 2024,

³⁶ National Research Authority, *National Strategy in the Field of Artificial Intelligence 2024-2027*, <https://www.research.gov.ro/programe-nationale/strategia-nationala-in-domeniul-inteligentei-artificiale-2024-2027/>, accessed on 20 December 2025.

³⁷ Siim Sikkut, *Digital Government Excellence: Lessons from Effective Digital Leaders*, Wiley, 2022, p. 49.

³⁸ Antoine Picon, *Smart Cities: A Spatialised Intelligence*, Wiley, 2015, p. 101.

³⁹ Martin Ebers, Paloma Krööt Tupay, *Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Powered Public Service Delivery in Estonia*, Springer, 2024, p. 57.

administration based on competence, merit and ethics⁴⁰. Professionalisation involves not only staff training, but also a change in the institutional paradigm – a shift from political loyalty to administrative performance⁴¹.

In doctrine, Prof. Dana Apostol Tofan emphasises that "the civil service cannot be reformed without creating an organisational culture based on responsibility and accountability, in which civil servants are the guarantors of legality, not mere executors of their superiors' orders"⁴². This perspective is also reflected in national legislation, with the Administrative Code (Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019) enshrining the principle of professionalism and stability in the exercise of public office⁴³.

At the same time, Prof. Ioan Alexandru points out that "professionalisation cannot be achieved outside the ethical framework, as competence without integrity generates systemic dysfunctions"⁴⁴.

Administrative responsibility, which is linked to professionalisation, is regulated in Romania by a set of rules on legality control, disciplinary liability and administrative litigation⁴⁵. However, their application remains deficient, mainly due to the length of procedures and the lack of a culture of public accountability.

The OECD Public Governance 2023 Report emphasises that effective administrations are those that implement clear accountability and periodic evaluation mechanisms based on performance indicators and independent audits⁴⁶. In Romania, these instruments exist formally, but their practical application is uneven.

In addition, recent developments in European doctrine highlight the emergence of algorithmic responsibility – the responsibility of the administration for decisions generated by automated or artificial intelligence-based systems⁴⁷.

As Martin Ebers notes, this new type of legal responsibility is becoming essential in a digitised administration, where automated decisions can affect the fundamental rights of individuals⁴⁸.

Thus, administrative responsibility must be viewed as a dynamic concept that combines legal, ethical and technological dimensions, reflecting developments in society and modern governance.

⁴⁰ National Agency of Civil Servants, *Civil Service Strategy for the Period 2022-2027*, Bucharest, 2022, p. 7.

⁴¹ Cristian Clipa, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁴² Dana Apostol Tofan, *Drept administrativ. [Administrative Law]*. Vol. I, Ed. C.H. Beck, Bucharest, 2023, p. 211.

⁴³ Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57/2019 on the Administrative Code, Official Gazette No. 555/2019.

⁴⁴ Ioan Alexandru, *Administrația publică. Teorii. Realități. Perspective. [Public Administration. Theories. Realities. Perspectives]*, Ed. Lumina Lex, Bucharest, 2012, p. 96.

⁴⁵ Law No. 554/2004 on administrative litigation, republished in the Official Gazette No. 1154/2004.

⁴⁶ OECD (2023), *Open Government Review of Romania, OECD Public Governance Reviews*, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Diana-Urania Galetta, Herwig C.H. Hofmann, „Evolving AI-based Automation — Continuing Relevance of Good Administration”, *European Law Review*, vol. 48, issue 6, December 2023, p. 617-635.

⁴⁸ Martin Ebers, Paloma Krööt Tupay, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

6. Conclusions

The reform and modernisation of Romanian public administration through the NRRP represents a historic opportunity to strengthen the rule of law and increase citizens' trust in public institutions. The analysis shows that, although notable progress has been made in the areas of digitalisation and administrative efficiency, structural problems persist in terms of regulatory consistency, stability of the civil service and a culture of accountability.

The NRRP has imposed on Romania not only a reform timetable, but also a new administrative philosophy: the transition from reactive to proactive administration, from formal bureaucracy to performance-based governance.

For this transformation to become irreversible, several major directions are required:

1. Strengthening the regulatory framework – revising and clarifying *the Administrative Code*, adapting it to European principles of good governance;
2. Developing digital and ethical skills – training civil servants in new technologies and digital administrative ethics;
3. Accountability and evaluation – establishing a coherent system of public audit and institutional performance indicators;
4. Transparency in decision-making – implementation of digital public participation platforms;
5. Institutional continuity – avoiding fragmented reforms and consolidating an organisational culture based on stability and merit.

As Sabino Cassese states, "modernising the administration does not mean just legislative reform, but transforming institutional mentalities and rediscovering the meaning of public service"⁴⁹. In the same vein, Siim Sikkut observes that "effective digital administrations are not those that implement technology faster, but those that integrate it into the values of good governance"⁵⁰.

In conclusion, the NRRP has been a catalyst for the modernisation of Romanian administration. The challenge for the future will not only be to achieve the milestones, but also to maintain the coherence and sustainability of the reform, so that Romania can become a regional model of digital, transparent and accountable administration.

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⁴⁹ Sabino Cassese, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁵⁰ Siim Sikkut, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

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