THE USE OF DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES BY ROMANIANS, IN LIGHT OF THE DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET

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Abstract: The provision of online public services and citizens' participation at their use contribute to the consolidation and development of an efficient digital economy. The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) shows the digital gaps between Romania and the other EU member states, the last place ranks by our country in this hierarchy indicating the existence of fundamental problems. Thus, Romania's participation in the creation and development of the Digital Single Market is at the same time an opportunity, but also immense challenges determined on the one hand by the recovery of the gaps and on the other hand by the complexity of the digitization process. The main objective of this study is to analyze the current situation of one of the five dimensions of DESI in Romania, namely digital public services, in terms the interaction with citizens. Various sources of data were used for this research, such as: EU reports about e-government, IT portals, research papers and other official reports.

Keywords: DESI, eGovernment, digital skills, Romania, EU28

JEL classification: C20, H11, O38

Introduction

An efficient system of public services is fundamental to ensuring the socio-economic development of any country. Investments and innovations in communications technology pose great challenges to public administrations, which have to constantly adapt to the dynamics of information and communication technologies for the delivery of quality services.

The integration and use of ICT is done on the one hand in the internal organization of public administrations and on the other hand in relation with citizens and the business environment. In this regard, public administrations have actively engaged in digital transformation processes, including rethinking governance, allocating resources for retraining and adopting new technologies, as well as legislative and policy issues. (Scutariu & Bilouseac, 2016)

Member States of the European Union have committed themselves to building a Digital Europe, the main political initiatives are the Digital Single Market and the EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020.

The supporting of development of eGovernment tools, services and frameworks is ensured at EU level by ISA² Programme, it was adopted in November 2015 by the European Parliament and the Council of European Union.

The ISA² solutions used in Romania are:

a) **JoinUp**: European Commission created an interactive platform, called JoinUp to provide support for digital public services development in EU-28 and it is part of the ISA programme. This platform has created a community called ePractice, which provides services for practitioners in the areas of eGovernment, eInclusion and eHealth.

b) **NIFO** (National Interoperability Framework Observatory): This is an observatory where the latest Interoperability Initiatives at national levels from across Europe are discussed, shaped and published.;

c) **TESTA** (Trans European Services for Telematics between Administrations): its objective is to exchange data effectively between European and Member States administrations;

d) **eTrustex (**Trusted Exchange Platform**)**: This open-source platform offered to Public Administrations at European, national and regional level to set up secure exchange of any type of data between end-users or system-to-system;

e) **European Parliament Crypto Tool:** It is used to improve the mechanism preventing double voting in European Parliament elections.

Other ISA² solutions, which are used by member countries of the EU, are: DCAT Application Profile for data portals in Europe, Core Vocabularies, Asset Description Metadata Schema (ADMS), Core Public Service Vocabulary Application Profile (CPSV-AP), The European Union Public Licence (EUPL), e-Documents Reference Architecture, IMAPS, Re3gistry, LEOS, European Single Procurement Document (ESPD), EUSurvey, Interoperability Test Bed, CAMSS, OpenPM², VocBench3, Open e-Prior, e-Certis, CIRCABC, Interoperability Quick Assessment Toolkit (IQAT), Ref2Link, European Legislation Identifier (ELI). All of these IT tools support the well-functioning of EU public administrations (European Commission, 2019).

Through the National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020, approved in April 2015, the Romanian government assumed the objectives of the Europe 2020 Digital Agenda, adapted them to the situation of Romania and defined four action plans, as follows:

1. e-Governance, Interoperability, Cyber Security, Cloud Computing and Social Media;
2. ICT in education, culture and health;
3. ICT in eCommerce, and R & D and innovation in ICT;
4. Broadband and digital infrastructure services.

e-Governance aims to increase the efficiency of the activities and the profitability of the public services provided by implementing a modern, efficient, technologically and transparently system, which encourages the participation of all stakeholders (citizens, business environment, civil servants, internal structures of the administration) in the process of making decisions.

According to the specialty literature, there are four main categories of interactions:

a. **G2C** (Government-to-Citizen) is to improve the relationship with citizens, in sens that the administration to provide a transparent decision-making, easy communication in terms of time, cost and convenience for citizens, as well as providing integrated services for various issues;

b. **G2B** (Government-to-Business) aims to create a symbiosis between the two parties involved, to reduce bureaucracy by offering various IT tools and platforms;

c. **G2E** (Government-to-Employees) seeks to simplify internal processes by providing an easy interface between the administration and its employees, as well as the ongoing evaluation of the its employees' work for to provide quality services;

d. **G2G** (Government-to-Government) requires the efficiency of the activity through the development of the state information infrastructure.

The necessity to accelerate digitalization of public services

In the present context defined by the new work environment influenced by information and communications technology, access to digital information and the ability of the human capital to use it are essential factors in cultural, social, economic development.

The strong penetration of the IT sector in all social activities is reflected by the number of digital users. (Figure 1)

Individuals using the Internet per 100 inhabitants, 2001-2018*
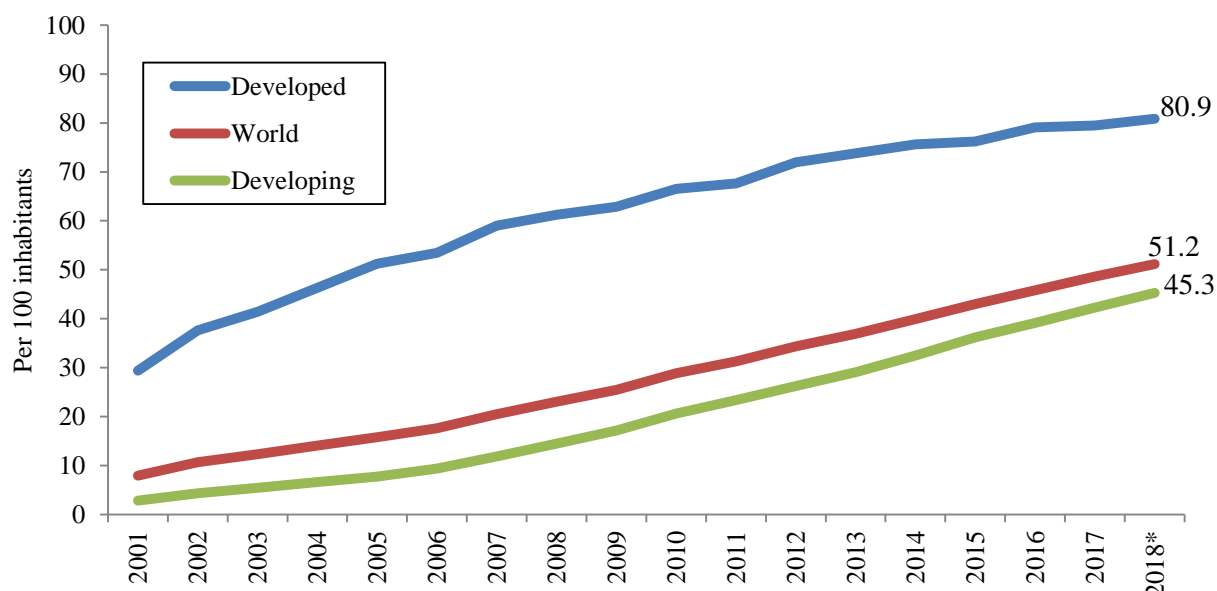
The developed/developing country classifications are based on the UN M49,
see: http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/definitions/regions.aspx.html
Note: * Estimate
Source: ITU World Telecommunication /ICT Indicators database , http://www.itu.int/ict/statistics

Figure 1

Dynamics of ITC evolution determins not only increase of number users, also expectations of users in terms of how technology should work in public domain.

The impact of technology on the behavior and social interaction is huge, the more so as the administrative barriers (such as physical environment, inaccessibility of documents, the loss of time to find a solution and so on) are eliminated. So, we can say with certainty that technology reinvent our approaches to govern.

Digital transformation of public services from Romania

To achieve digital transformation of the public services, governments need to better map, understand and integrate citizens' demands and needs in the design and delivery of public service strategies. Also, it is necessary the movement from citizen-centred to citizen-driven approaches, allowing governments to better design and tailor public service delivery processes. (OECD, 2017)

Investments in the digitalization of public services, by strategically leveraging new technologies, data and advanced analytics, as well as to optimize public policies are prerequisites for adapting to digital society and the economy. The consolidating of digital economy leads to a high level of competitiveness, otherwise any state is only a net consumer of innovation, goods and digital services.

Unfortunately, according to DESI Report 2018, Romania alongside Greece and Hungary recorded the lowest scores and at opposite pole is situated Finland alongside Estonia and Denmark. (Figure 2)

Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2018, Digital Public Services
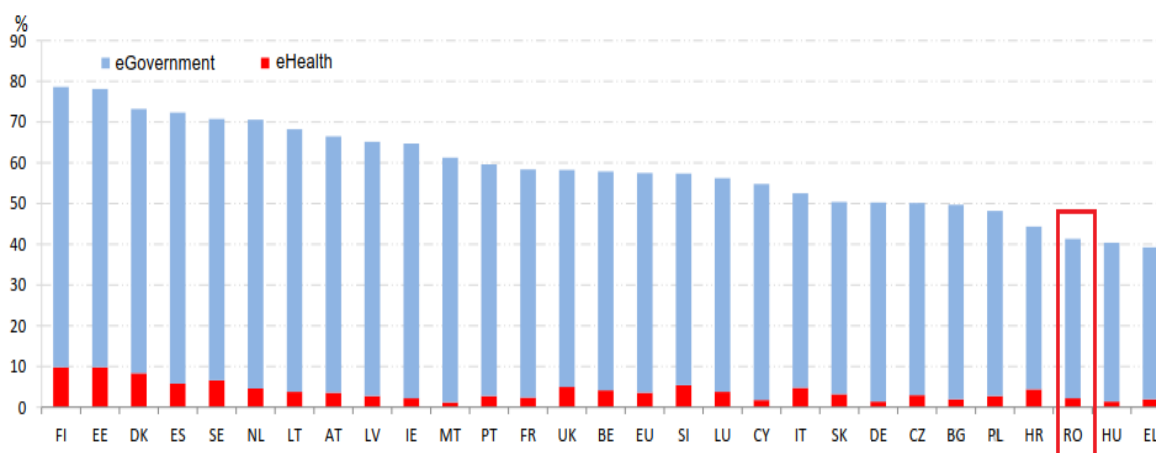

Source: European Commission, DESI Report 2018

Figure 2

Romania's position at the end of the ranking in terms of public services offered online has several causes, such as: a deficient legislative framework in the field of digitization, lack of confidence of Romanians in digital public services, low digital competences, non-uniformity in the technological infrastructure within public institutions, delays implementing the Digital Agenda 2020, etc.

Interaction with public authorities by Romanians citizen is situated at a low level comparative with EU average (Figure 2)

Internet use: interaction with public authorities (last 12 months)

Percentage of individuals
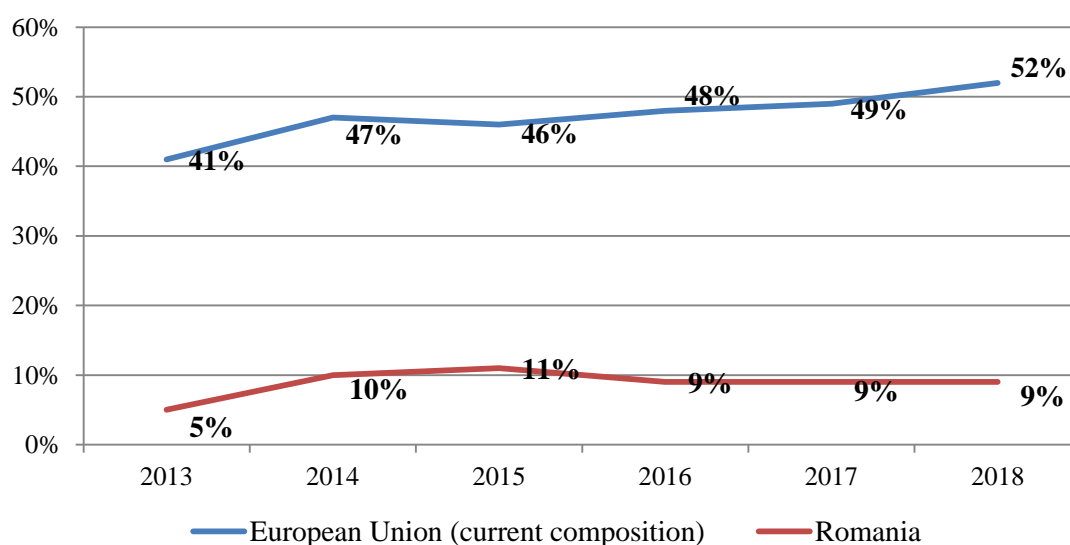
Source: Eurostat, E-government activities of individuals via websites [isoc_ciegi_ac], Last update:20.12.2018, Extracted on: 29.01.2019

Figure 3

The portal of public administration in Romania

The national electronic system (www.e-guvernare.ro) serves as a portal for Agency for the Digital Agenda of Romania with the role of operating computer systems at national level for e-government. This platform operates only in Romanian language and provides a simple support by phone and an email address for tehnical problems (Figure 4)

Source: www.e-guvernare.ro

Figure no. 4

This portal will be referenced by a link to the portal called PCUe (Electronic Contact Point), which is to provide electronic public services and is available at www.edirect.e-guvernare.ro. This platform operates in 3 languages: Romanian, English and French and provides user guides, depending on the category of users: citizens, business environment or employees.

The low use of digital public services by citizens remains a problem of Romanian eGovernment.

Colesca & Dobrica (2008) demonstrate that perceived trust is a statistically significant factor influencing users' decision to adopt and use e-government. The level of preparedness of the human capital with digital competence is other decisive factor in assuring the success of the European industry. (Buica & Dragan, 2017).

The basic digital skills of Romanians are far below the EU average, according to DESI Report 2018, these are almost twice as low (29%)

The European Commission encourage initiatives that increase digital literacy and help to close the digital skills gaps through many projects and one of them is The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition. This project, which brings together EU Member States, businesses and civil society for identification projects that could be inspiring sources to all European countries for more open and democratic societies. (European Commission, 2018). In Romania, the projects boosting digital skills are support by Skills 4 IT Coalition which is an open platform that includes a variety of stakeholders who are involved in educational activities based on IT domain.

A positive impact on behavioural intention to use e-government services are non-technical factors, such as trustworthiness and active citizenship. (Fakhoury & Aubert, 2015).

The successful e-government implementation requires careful consideration of the IT skills of public employees. In this sense, the Government should form strategic partnerships with educational institutes in order to be able to offer courses which can improve digital literacy of public officers. (Velicu & Munthiu & Zara, 2013)

CONCLUSIONS

The adoption and extensive use of advanced IT technologies to deliver quality public services may contribute decisively to the rhythm and depth of socio-economic development. The governments need to harness the power of digital technologies in order to become a powerful engine for sustainable development.

In the context of a dynamic socio-economic environment, the provision of quality public services, tailored to the complex needs of citizens, implies additional efforts by the administration in terms of IT infrastructure, public policy and legislation, e-literacy, privacy, security, transparency, interoperability, records management, education and marketing. (Reffat, 2003)

The 26th place occupied by Romania in DESI 2018, the Digital Public Services chapter, shows the existence of a fragmentation of the IT system in the national administration, and the European principle "one document, one record" can't be implemented at present. In this regard, major investment is needed in the process of digitization of public services, encouraging innovation in the virtual environment and public policies directed towards promoting digital and technological education.

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