



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

# Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis

## Romania

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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion  
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**European Social Policy Network (ESPN)**

**ESPN Thematic Report:  
Social protection and inclusion  
policy responses to the  
COVID-19 crisis**

**Romania**

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## CONTENTS

SUMMARY.....	5
1 TRENDS OF THE PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT .....	7
1.1 Epidemiological situation .....	7
1.2 Economic and (un)employment situation .....	12
1.3 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion situation.....	19
2 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC .....	21
2.1 Measures related to unemployment benefits .....	21
2.1.1 <i>Prelungirea duratei de acordare a indemnizației de șomaj cu 3 luni</i> (Extension of the period for which the unemployment indemnity is granted by three months) .....	21
2.2 Measures of job protection provided through support to employers, employees and the self-employed.....	23
2.2.1 <i>Subvenționarea salariului la angajarea în muncă a unor categorii de șomeri</i> (Wage subsidies for hiring some categories of unemployed people most affected by COVID-19) .....	23
2.2.2 <i>Indemnizații pe perioada suspendării temporare a contractelor de</i> <i>muncă/șomaj tehnic</i> (Indemnities for employees whose work contracts are temporary suspended/technical unemployment) .....	24
2.2.3 <i>Decontarea unei părți a salariului pentru angajații a căror contracte de</i> <i>muncă au fost suspendate temporar datorită restricțiilor impuse pe perioada</i> <i>stării de urgență/alertă</i> (Wage subsidies for employees whose activity has been suspended due to restrictions during the state of emergency/alert) .....	25
2.2.4 <i>Reducerea timpului de muncă a angajaților afectați de restricțiile legate de</i> <i>activitatea economică pe durata perioadelor de stare de urgență/alertă și plata</i> <i>unei indemnizații compensatorii</i> (Reduction of working time for all employed people whose economic activity has been affected by restrictions during the state of emergency/alert and the payment of a compensatory indemnity).....	26
2.2.5 <i>Flexibilizarea raporturilor de muncă: decontarea unei părți a salariului</i> <i>angajaților cu contracte de muncă pe perioade scurte</i> (Flexibilisation of work: wage subsidies for employees with short-term contracts) .....	28
2.2.6 <i>Facilități fiscale pentru angajați și companii: de la măsuri legate de plata</i> <i>taxelor și impozitelor la exceptarea unor beneficia oferite de angajatori de la</i> <i>plata contribuțiilor sociale</i> (Fiscal facilities for employed people and enterprises: from measures related to the fiscal debts to the exemption of some benefits granted by employers from the payment of social contributions) .	28
2.2.7 <i>Stimulentul de risc</i> (Risk stimulus).....	29
2.3 Measures related to sickness benefits and sick pay .....	30
2.3.1 <i>Creșterea accesului la concedii medicale și a nivelului indemnizației pentru</i> <i>carantină/izolare</i> (Increasing access to medical leave and level of associated indemnity for temporary work incapacity due to COVID-19/quarantine .....	30
2.4 Measures related to health insurance .....	31
2.4.1 <i>Universalizarea accesului la servicii de tratament/prevenție pentru COVID-19</i> (Universalisation of access to treatment and prevention of COVID-19) .....	31
2.4.2 <i>Măsuri legate de protecția persoanelor instituționalizate și a personalul</i> <i>centrelor rezidențiale</i> (Measures protecting the residents and staff of residential care centres) .....	32
2.4.3 <i>Măsuri de sprijinire a persoanele vulnerabile izolate la domiciliu sau</i> <i>carantină instituțională</i> (Measures for enhancing the support for vulnerable people in home isolation or institutionalised quarantine) .....	33
2.4.4 <i>Creșterea accesului la medicamente și dispozitive medicale destinate</i> <i>tratamentului și prevenției COVID-19 dar și a altor boli cronice</i> (Increasing	

access to drugs and medical appliances addressing the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and other chronic diseases) .....	34
2.4.5 <i>Introducerea serviciilor medicale ambulatorii la distanță și rambursarea acestora în sistemul asigurărilor sociale de sănătate (Introduction of remote medical services in ambulatory care reimbursed from the mandatory health insurance system)</i> .....	35
2.5 Measures related to minimum-income schemes and other forms of social assistance	35
2.5.1 <i>Programul "Școală de Acasă" ("School from home" programme)</i> .....	35
2.5.2 <i>Schema națională de suport a persoanelor vârstnice și a persoanelor fără adăpost: tichete electronice pentru mese calde (National support scheme for older and homeless people: electronic vouchers for hot meals)</i> .....	37
2.5.3 <i>Schema Națională de Sprijin pentru Elevii cei mai Defavorizați: tichete sociale pentru sprijin educațional din fonduri nerambursabile (National educational support scheme for the most vulnerable children: social vouchers for educational support from non-refundable funds)</i> .....	38
2.5.4 <i>Acordarea de pachete de igienă personală și alimentare persoanelor defavorizate (Distribution of personal hygiene and food packages to vulnerable people)</i> .....	38
2.5.5 <i>Prelungirea perioadei de acordare a indemnizației de creștere a copilului și a stimulentei de inserție și creșterea valorii stimulentei de inserție în anumite condiții (Extended duration of the child-rearing indemnity and insertion stimulus, and the increase in value of the insertion stimulus under certain circumstances)</i> .....	39
2.6 Measures related to housing support.....	41
2.6.1 <i>Suspendarea ratelor la credite bancare ipotecare pentru o perioadă de maximum 9 luni (Deferral of repayment of mortgages)</i> .....	41
2.7 Leave for parents whose children are unable to attend school or a pre-school service by reason of COVID-19 .....	42
2.7.1 <i>Zile libere plătite pentru părinții ocupați pentru supravegherea copiilor sub 12 ani pe perioada închiderii școlilor datorită COVID-19 (Free paid days for working parents for supervising children under 12 during periods when schools/kindergartens are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic)</i> .....	42
2.8 Other important temporary social protection/inclusion measures adopted in the context of the pandemic, which do not fall in any of the categories listed in the previous sections.....	43
3 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS: OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND POSSIBLE GAPS .....	43
3.1 Expected cost of social protection and inclusion measures .....	44
3.2 Impact on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies.....	46
3.3 Remaining gaps in the social protection system and social inclusion policies .....	48
3.4 Debates and recommendations .....	49
REFERENCES .....	50
ANNEX .....	51

## SUMMARY

Between Monday 3 February 2020 and Sunday 18 April 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was 6,740 for the EU-27 as a whole; in Romania, it was 5,439. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27, versus 142 in Romania.

Romania was one of the first European countries to establish a state of emergency and to impose a generalised lockdown, very early in the outbreak of the pandemic (during 16 March to 15 May 2020). The decision was accompanied by a series of measures to protect employees, and to prevent unemployment. As a consequence, unemployment did not explode and the average net salary even increased constantly in real terms during 2020, with an increase of 12% in December 2020 compared with January 2020. Similarly, the healthcare system was able to provide a timely response to COVID-19, as the outbreak was delayed due to lockdown. Overall, the government put in place effective emergency procedures in the healthcare sector, thus allowing access – once the state of emergency ended – to prevention and treatment, prioritising access to other medical services, prioritising COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, and deploying significant funds for acquiring protective equipment and medical appliances. Responses in both the sectors – employment and healthcare – have been consistent and well structured; but there are also shortcomings.

Emergency measures focused mainly on employees, and only a very small segment of the self-employed were addressed properly by these. Thus, the government failed to provide significant protection to an important segment of the Romanian workforce: non-employees working in the grey economy, most of them in agriculture. Of the roughly two million non-employees who are employed (representing about a quarter of all employed people), only about 10% are “visible” to the social insurance system and thus formally entitled to work-related benefits.

This is also reflected in the allocation of funds and distribution of costs related to measures addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the total costs generated by the measures adopted by the government during 2020 – estimated at 4.45% of 2019 GDP – 47% were forgone revenues, due to fiscal measures, while 53% was expenditure (both investment and benefits). Of the expenditure on benefits, about 75% was directed towards employees. The structure of expenditure did not change significantly during the first three months of 2021, but on the revenue side costs fell.

The social protection system failed to address, in a consistent manner, other vulnerable categories, especially low-income families (including families with children, families living in marginalised communities and long-term unemployed people). As the government deployed significant funds towards reviving the economy and keeping the healthcare system functioning, attention has been diverted from these groups. No measures to ensure a minimum income and housing stability for the most vulnerable have been put in place. On the contrary, the government deferred and phased in the increase in some benefits (child allowance, pensions, minimum-income guarantee) and even cut off entirely some benefits for 2021 (such as social tickets for early education). Finally, the government was far too slow in addressing the shift to online educational services. The flaws of the educational system, with its structural weaknesses that have generated significant inequalities over the last decade, became even more visible during this period; the lack of a prompt response to address existing gaps threatens to increase inequalities beyond the possibility of recovery. The healthcare system, despite the quick and organised emergency response to the pandemic, is also marked by structural flaws and shortages, leading to high preventable mortality rates and frequent accidents.

Thus, the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed and amplified some of the most significant structural inequalities in access to education and healthcare, the disastrous infrastructure of the healthcare system, and the inability of the social protection system to address two important, mostly overlapping, vulnerable segments: low-income families and

employed people without a formal employment status (such as occasional workers and self-employed people in subsistence agriculture).

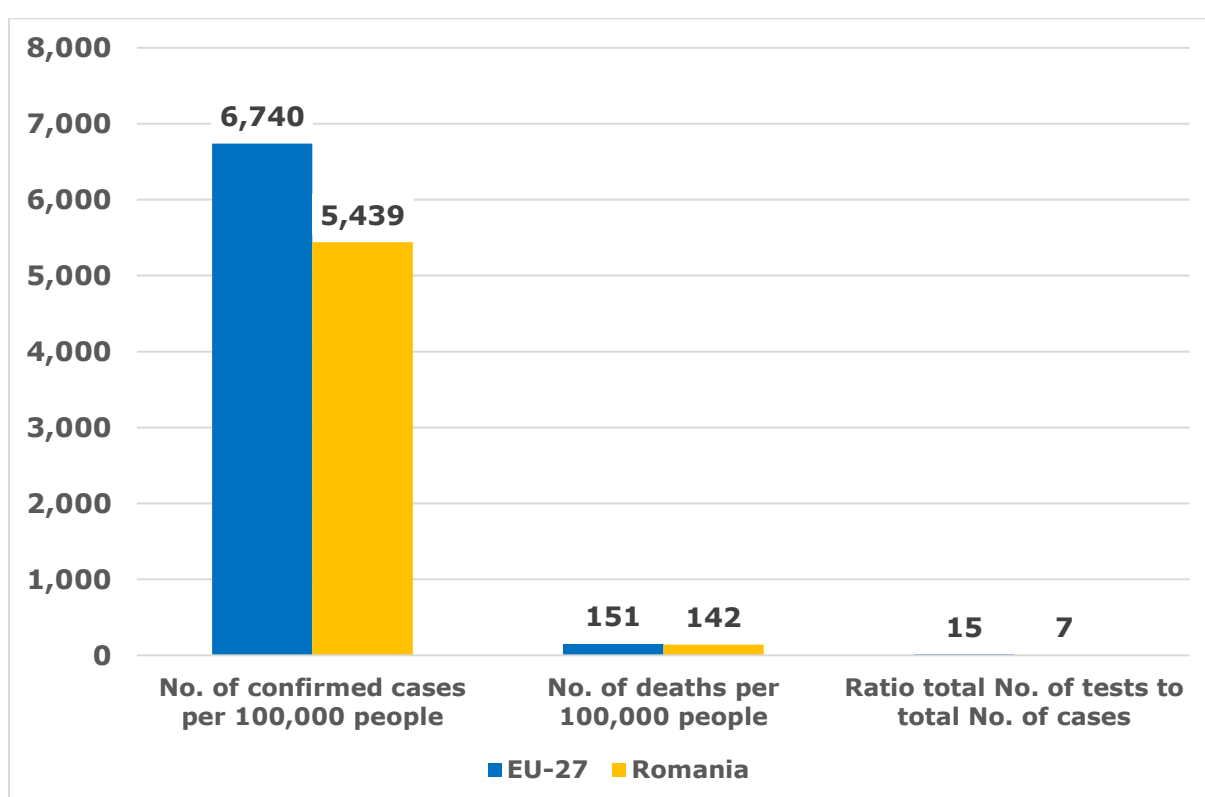


# 1 TRENDS OF THE PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Epidemiological situation

During the 63 weeks considered for these three indicators (from Monday 3 February 2020 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people was 6,740 for the EU-27 as a whole; in Romania, it was 5,439. The total number of deaths per 100,000 people was 151 for the EU-27 versus 142 in Romania. The ratio of the total number of COVID-19 tests conducted to the total number of confirmed cases was 15.3 for the EU-27 and 6.9 for Romania.

**Figure 1: Total number of COVID-19 cases and deaths per 100,000 people & ratio of total number of COVID-19 tests to total number of cases, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Romania)**

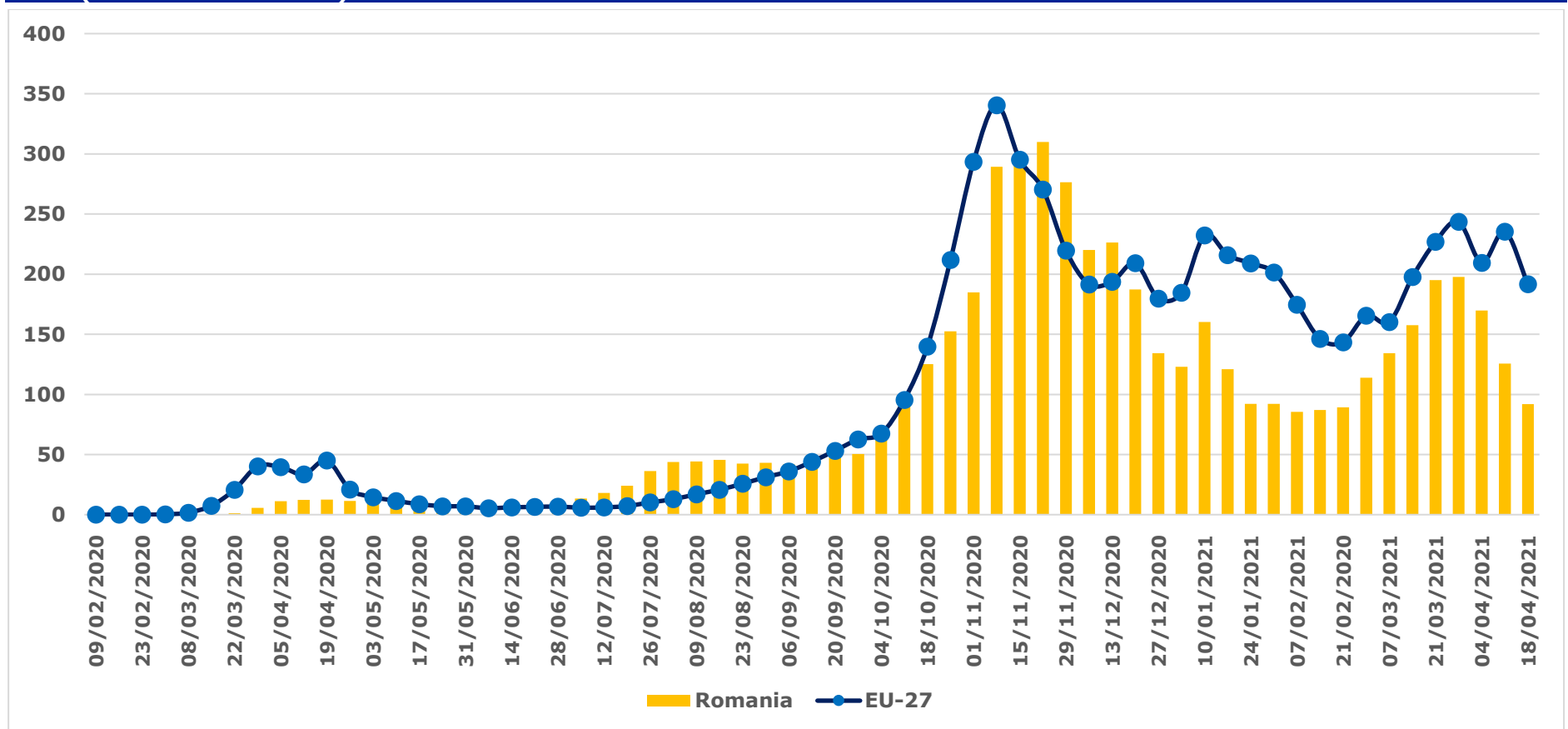


Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021

<sup>1</sup> Except if otherwise specified, the indicators presented in Sections 1.1 and 1.2 were calculated by the ESPN Network Core Team on the basis of data coming from two data sources: Our World in Data (OWID: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-source-data>) and the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>). These indicators were calculated for all the 35 ESPN countries for which data were available. All of them are presented in Annex B of the following report: Isabel Baptista, Eric Marlier, Slavina Spasova, Ramón Peña-Casas, Boris Fronteddu, Dalila Ghailani, Sebastiano Sabato and Pietro Regazzoni (2021), *Social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. This report also provides additional explanations on the data sources used and the calculation of the indicators. In addition, Annex B of the report provides the country results related to all ESPN countries included in the two international data sources used (see Tables B1.1, B2.1 and B3.1 for Figure 1, Table B1.2 for Figure 2, Table B2.2 for Figure 3, Table B3.2 for Figure 4, Tables B4.1, B4.2 and B4.3 for Figure 5, Table B5 for Figure 6, Tables B6.1-3 for Figures 7a-c, and Tables B7.1-3 for Figures 8a-c). The full report and its various annexes can be downloaded [here](#).

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people reached 191.8 for the EU-27. In Romania, it was 91.9.

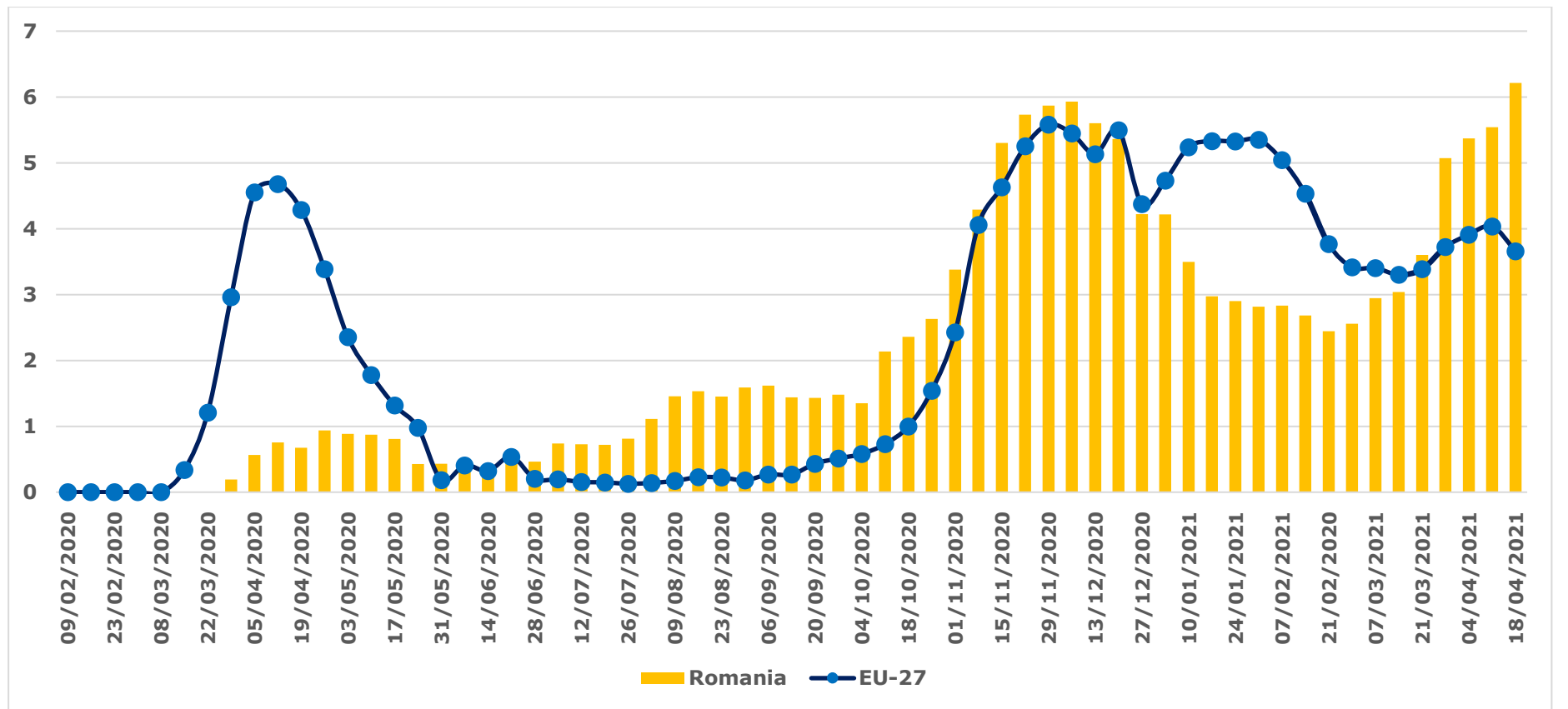
**Figure 2: Weekly evolution - Number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people from 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Romania)**



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people reached 3.66 for the EU-27 as a whole. In Romania, it was 6.21.

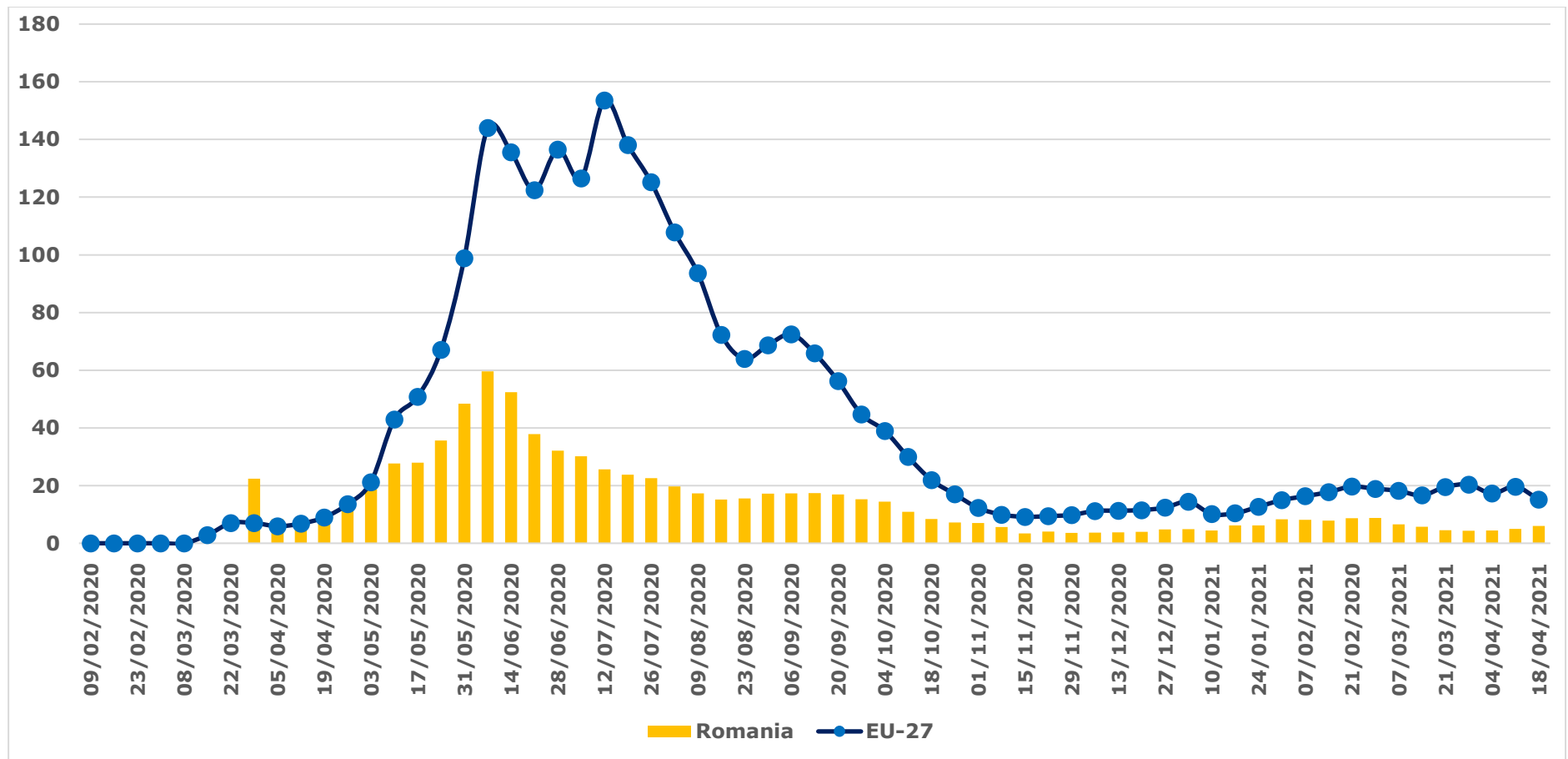
**Figure 3: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 people, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Romania)**



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the last week of observations (from Monday 12 April 2021 to Sunday 18 April 2021), the number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 cases was 15.2 for the EU-27. In Romania, it was 6.0.

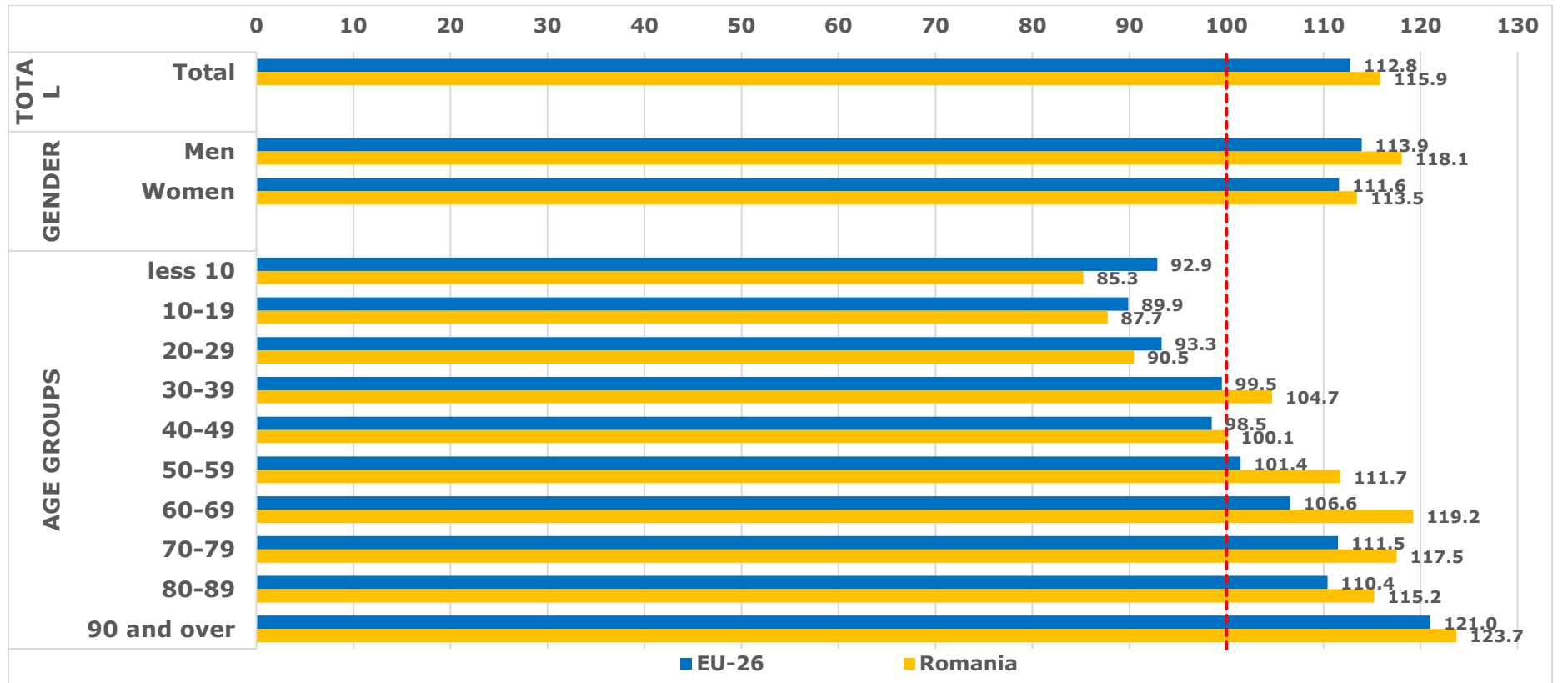
**Figure 4: Weekly evolution - Number of COVID-19 tests per new confirmed COVID-19 case, 3 February 2020 to 18 April 2021 (EU-27 and Romania)**



Source: Our World in Data (OWID) online database on COVID-19 - downloaded 26 April 2021. Full quote for these testing data: Hasell, J., Mathieu, E., Beltekian, D. et al. (2020). "A cross-country database of COVID-19 testing". *Sci Data* 7, 345 (2020) (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41597-020-00688-8>).

The excess mortality ratio for 2020 is the total number of deaths (without distinction of causes) in the year 2020 expressed as a percentage of the previous 4-year (2016-2019) annual average of the total number of deaths. For the EU-26 average (no data for Ireland), the ratio of the total population is 112.8% while it is 115.9% in Romania. For the EU-26, it is 113.9% for men and 111.6% for women. In Romania, these gendered ratios are 118.1% and 113.5% respectively. Excess mortality is higher among older age groups. For those aged 90 years and more it reaches 121.0% for EU-26 and 123.7% for Romania.

**Figure 5: Excess mortality - Total number of all deaths in 2020 as percentage of the 2016-2019 annual average (including gender and age breakdowns (EU-26 and Romania))**

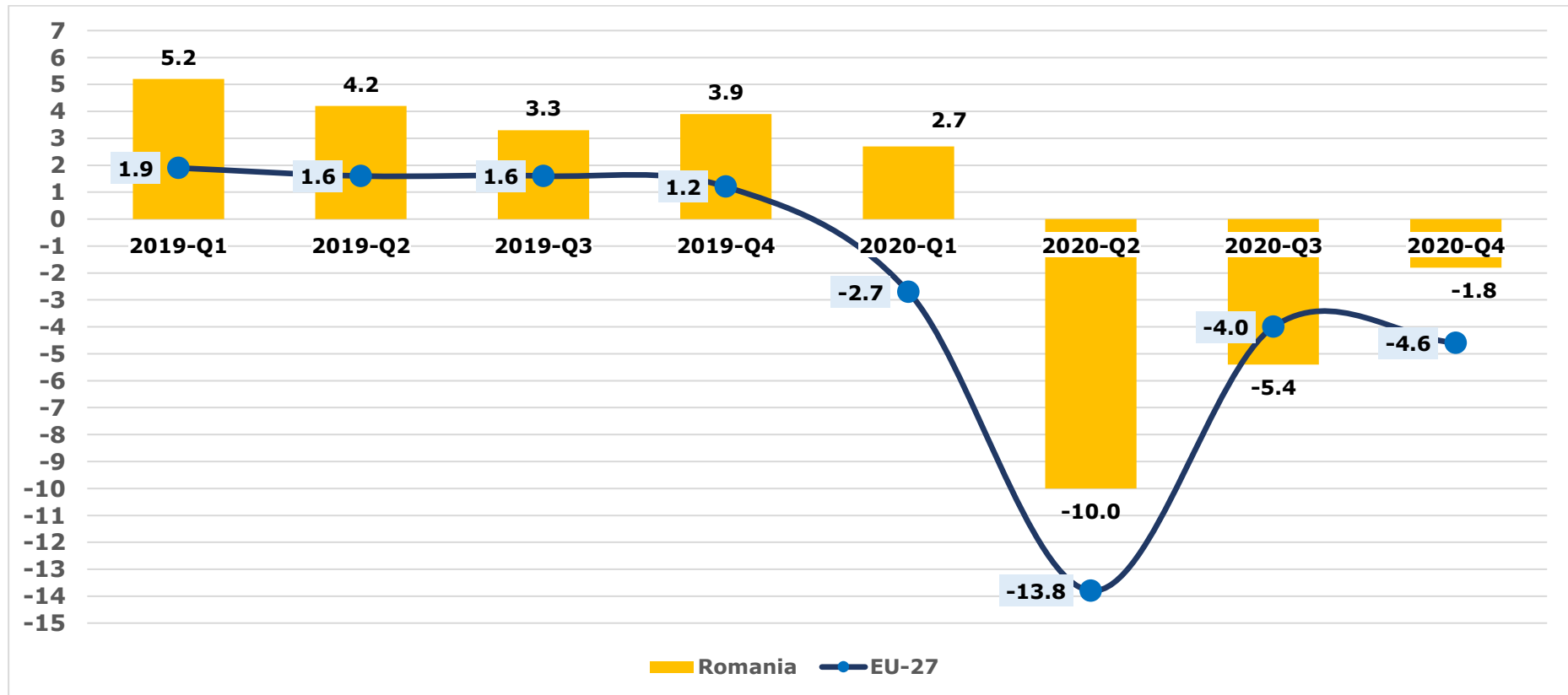


Source: Eurostat - indicator [DEMO\_R\_MWK\_10\_\_custom\_560457] Deaths by week, sex and 10-year age groups - downloaded 26 April 2021. For Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agency for statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (data received upon request on 19 April 2021).

## 1.2 Economic and (un)employment situation

In the EU-27, GDP in the fourth quarter (2020-Q4) of 2020 fell by 4.6% compared to the fourth quarter of 2019 (2019-Q4). In Romania, the decrease was 1.8% for the same period.

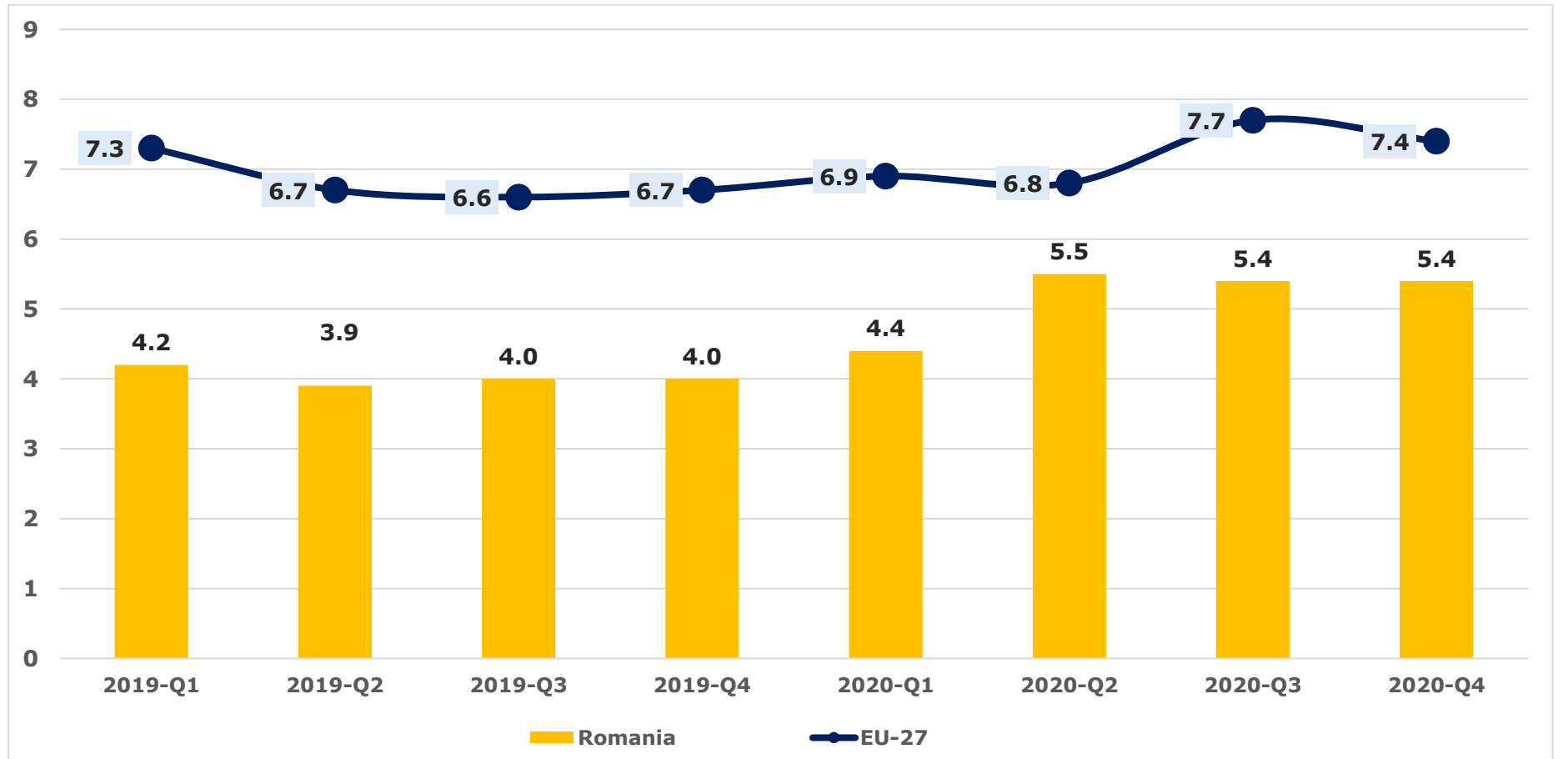
**Figure 6: Gross domestic product at market prices, chain-linked volumes prices adjusted, percentage changes in quarter compared with same quarter in previous year (2019-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**



Source: Eurostat -GDP and main components (output, expenditure and income) - indicator [NAMQ\_10\_GDP\_\_custom\_507806] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 for people aged 15-64 years is 7.4%. In Romania, it is 5.4%.

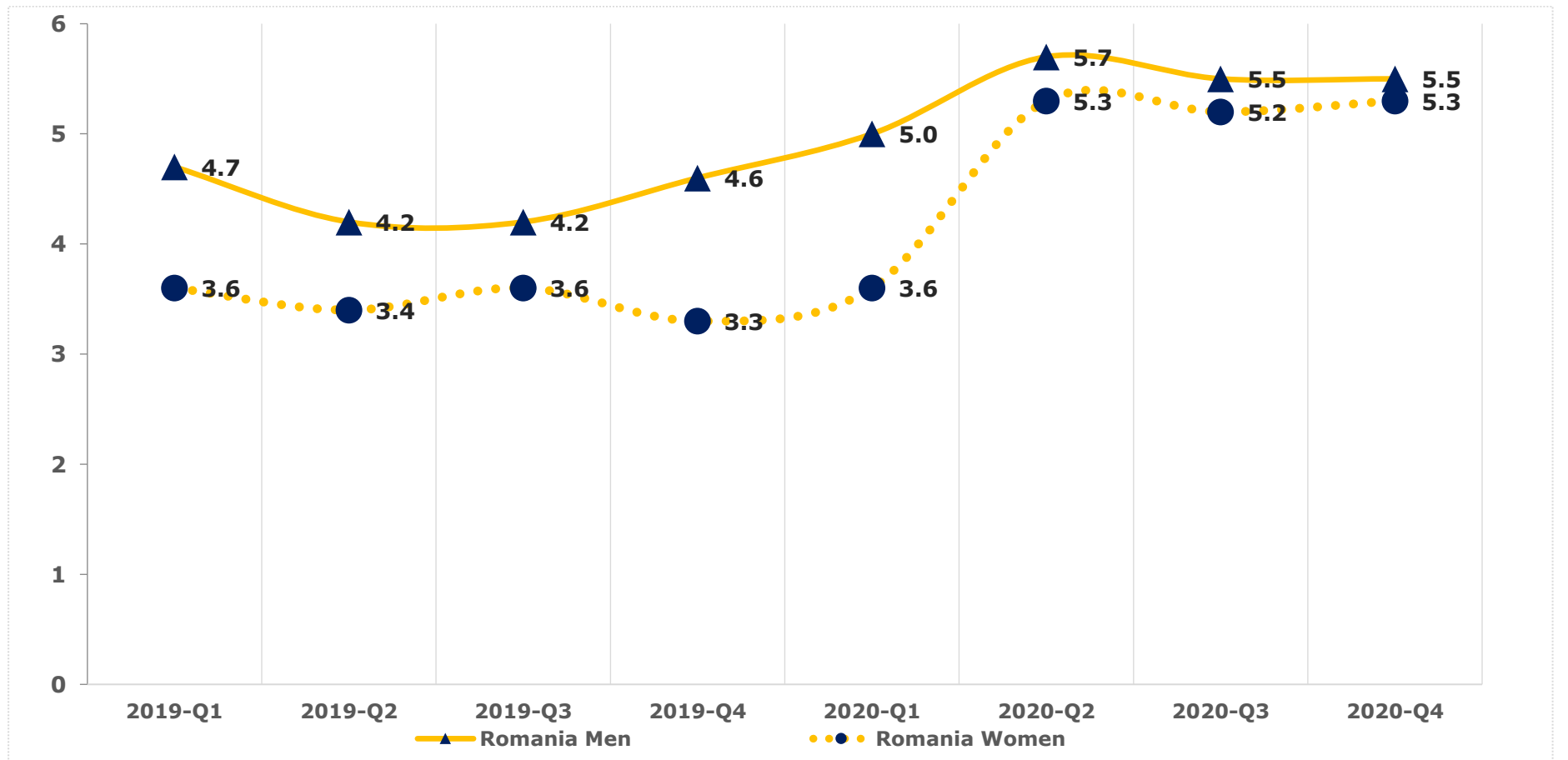
**Figure 7a: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq\_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 for people aged 15-64 years is 7.1% for men and 7.7% for women. In Romania, these figures are 5.5% and 5.3% respectively.

**Figure 7b: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, Romania, %)**

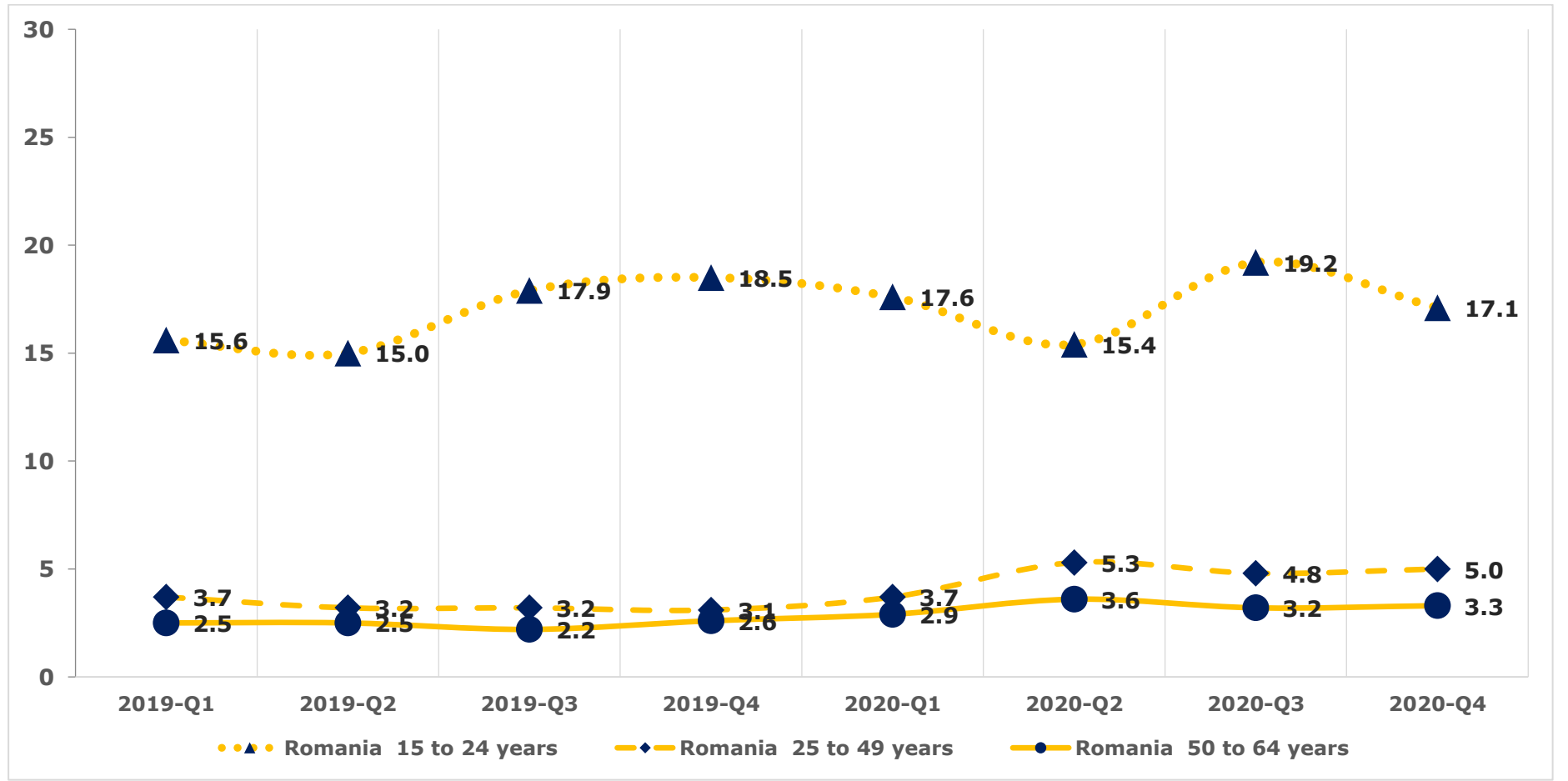


Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq\_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.



In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the unemployment rate in the EU-27 is 16.9% for the 15-24 age group. In Romania, it is 17.1%.

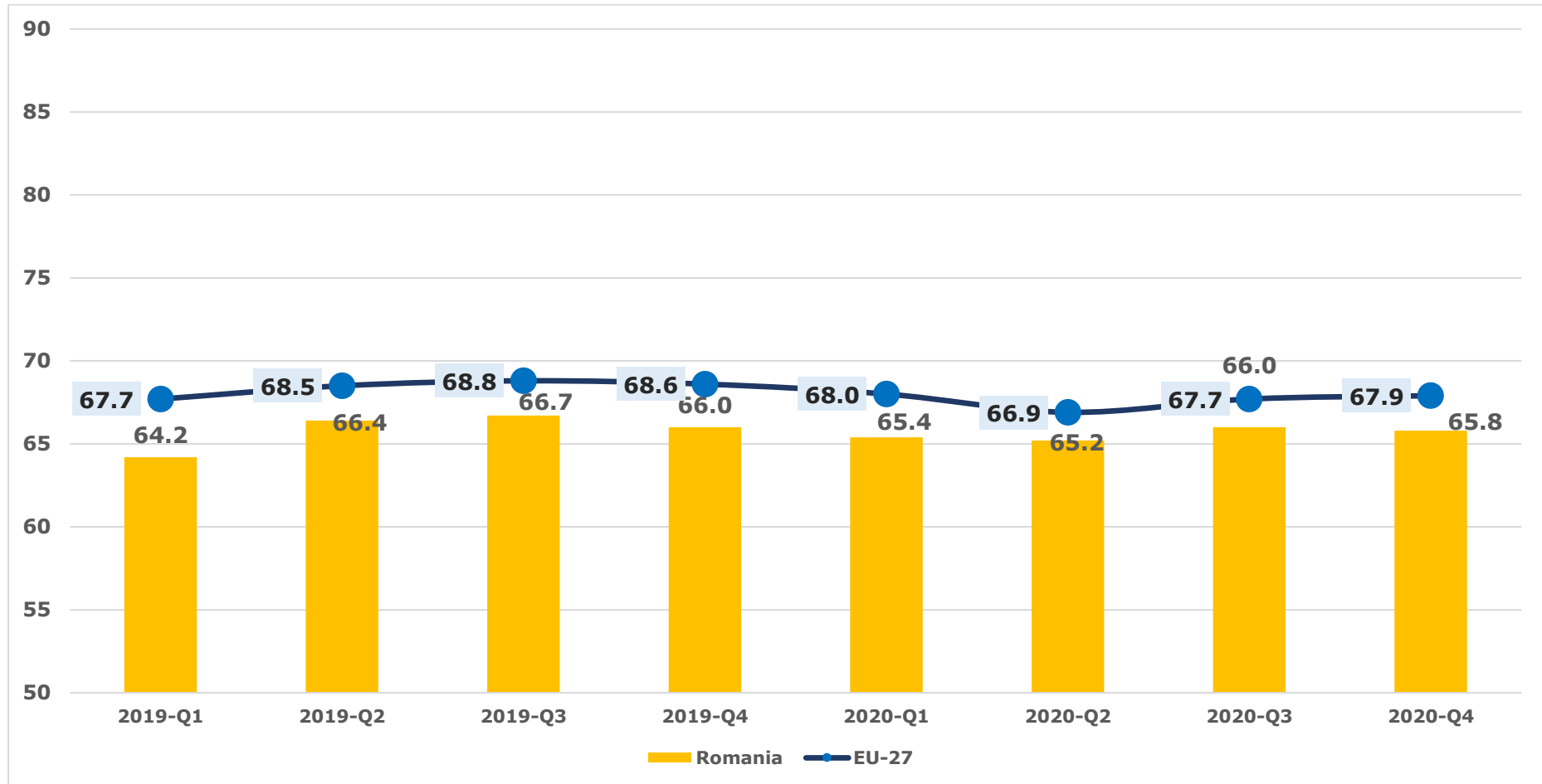
**Figure 7c: Seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, Romania, %)**



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq\_urgan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate for people aged 15-64 in the EU-27 is 67.9%. In Romania, it is 65.8%.

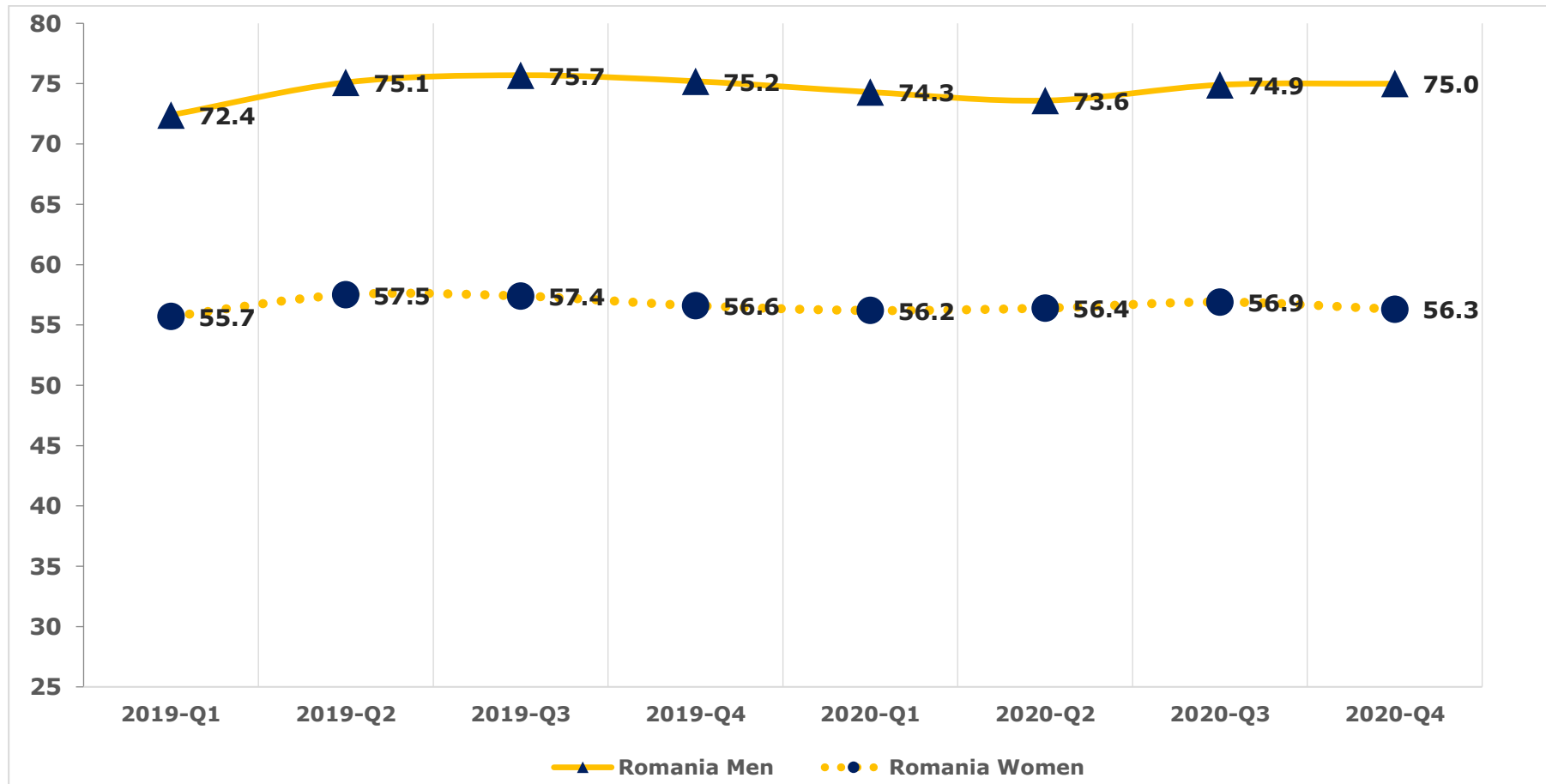
**Figure 8a: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 (2019-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq\_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate in the EU-27 is 73.0% for men and 62.8% for women. In Romania, these figures are 75.0% and 56.3% respectively.

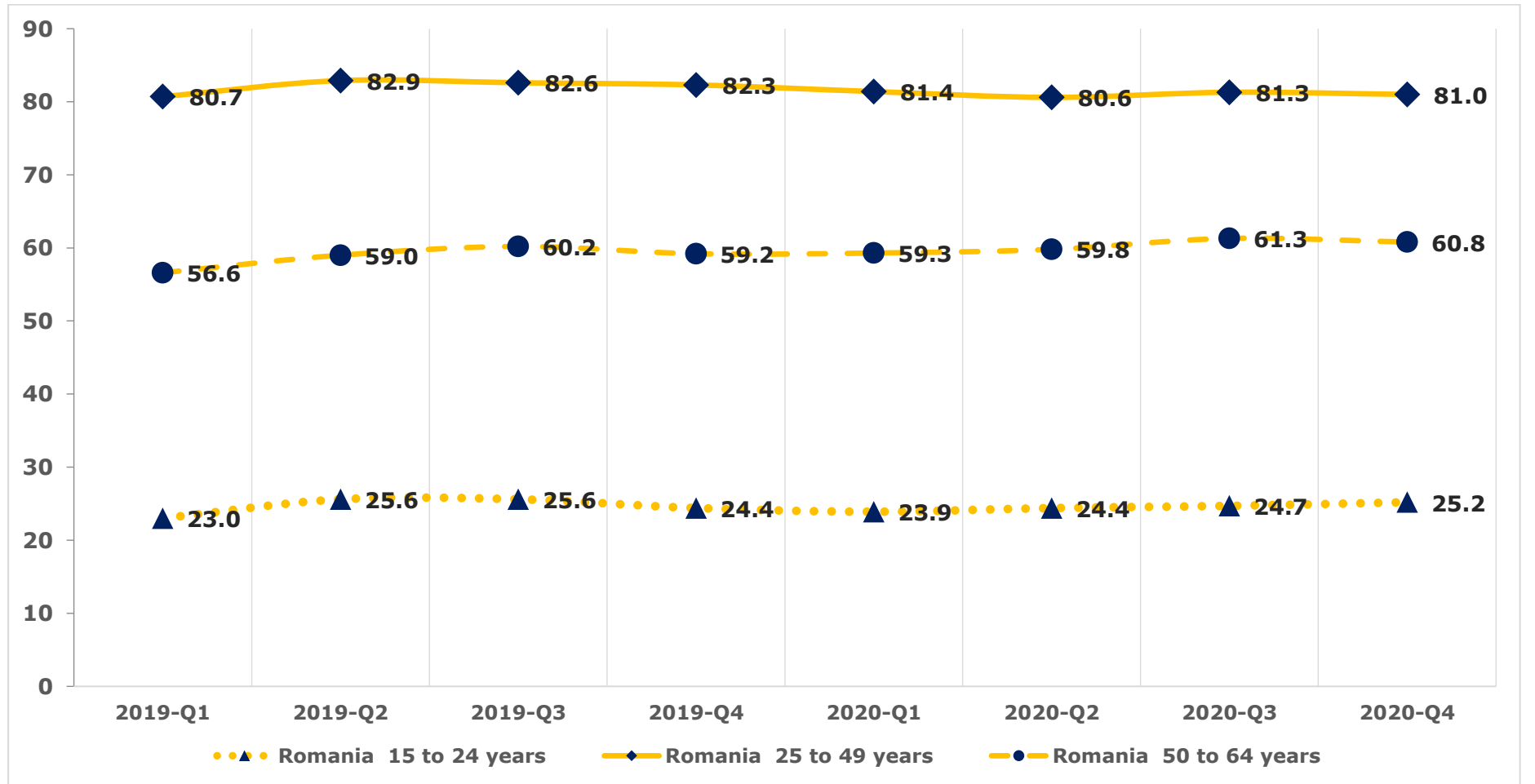
**Figure 8b: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by gender (2019-2020, Romania, %)**



Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq\_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2020 (2020-Q4), the employment rate in the EU-27 is 31.1% for the 15-24 age group. In Romania, it is 25.2%.

**Figure 8c: Seasonally-adjusted employment rate, quarterly data, total population aged 15-64 – by age group (2019-2020, Romania, %)**

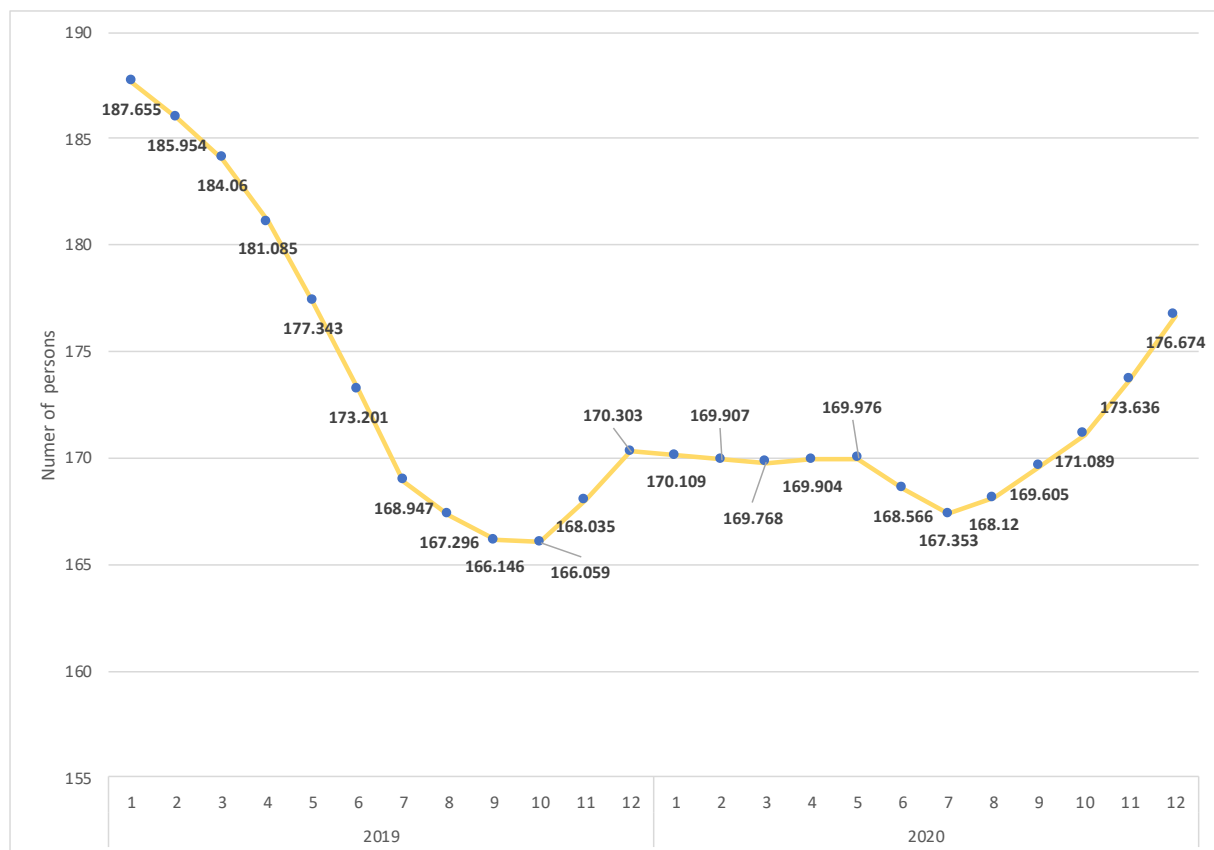


Source: Eurostat LFS - indicator [lfsq\_ergan] - downloaded 26 April 2021.

### 1.3 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion situation

**Figure 9: Monthly beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum income (GMI) in 2019 and 2020 (Romania)**

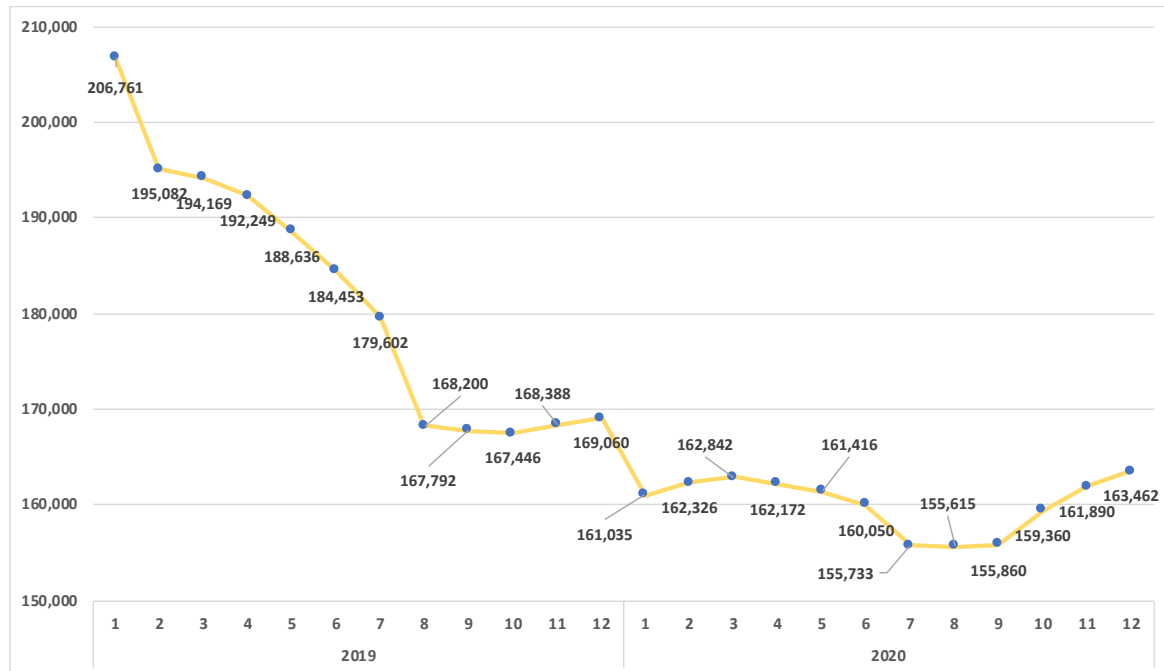
Reading note: The number of beneficiaries increased during August-December 2020, reaching nearly 176,700 in December 2020. The GMI is subject to a means-testing procedure. It increases the income of the beneficiary up to a certain threshold.



Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) statistics on social assistance: [http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/Raport\\_12\\_2020.pdf](http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/Raport_12_2020.pdf) (downloaded 12 February 2021).

**Figure 10: Monthly beneficiaries of family support allowance in 2019 and 2020 (Romania)**

Reading note: The number of beneficiaries of this means-tested benefit started to increase in August 2020 and reached nearly 163,500 in December 2020. The family support allowance provides a benefit to households with low income, depending on their income level (two tiers of income ranges), their family status (single parent versus two-parent families) and the number of children in the household.



Source: MLSP statistics on social assistance: [http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/Raport\\_12\\_2020.pdf](http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/Raport_12_2020.pdf) (downloaded 12 February 2021).

## 2 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC<sup>2</sup>

Most of the measures in the social protection sector adopted by the government in response to the pandemic address either the effects of economic restrictions, by supporting employees and employers and protecting jobs, or access issues to healthcare and, secondarily, to education. No other significant measures were taken that were specifically designed to support low-income groups to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This section provides a brief description of the main measures related to social protection and social inclusion that have been put in place to help mitigate the financial and social distress produced by the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. It is based on readily available data and evidence. For each measure, it provides the following information.

- a) Short description of the measure.
- b) Category: Is it a flat benefit, a conditional benefit, both a flat and a conditional benefit, or neither a flat nor a conditional benefit?
- c) Timing: When did the measure start/end? Has it been extended?
- d) Depending on the category:
  - amount and duration (for flat measures); and
  - range (minimum-maximum), duration and conditionality (thresholds) (for conditional measures).

If the measure is neither flat nor conditional, this is indicated by "Not applicable".
- e) Targeted population: what is/are the target(s) of the measure? – that is to say, which parts of the population or of the labour force. Where data and evidence are readily available, estimated number of people targeted and/or applicants.
- f) Beneficiaries: What is the number of recipients of the measure (if relevant and available)?
- g) Novelty: Was the measure new or an already existing one that was adjusted?

### 2.1 Measures related to unemployment benefits

#### 2.1.1 *Prelungirea duratei de acordare a indemnizației de șomaj cu 3 luni* (Extension of the period for which the unemployment indemnity is granted by three months)

- a) Short description of the measure: Law 59/2020 (adopted in May 2020) extended the period for which the unemployment benefit is granted by three months. The measure applies to all those who receive, or are eligible to receive, an unemployment indemnity (i.e. new graduates who cannot find a job, or people with a previous work history of at least 12 months during the last 24, who lost their jobs recently; both categories of unemployed people are required, to be eligible, to have no other monthly income exceeding the level of the social reference index (SRI) – RON 500 (€103). As unemployment benefit is granted for a period of 6-12 months, according to the work history of the unemployed person, the current measure extends its duration by 25-50%.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure was extended<sup>3</sup> to cover the period between May 2020 and 30 June 2021. The benefit was paid from the unemployment insurance fund (UIF).

<sup>2</sup> The temporary measures mentioned in this report refer to the situation as of 15 April 2021. Their duration may have been extended since then.

<sup>3</sup> Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) 211/2020, extending the application of some of the support measures adopted in early 2020.

- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The measure granted three additional months of unemployment allowance on top of the six to nine months stipulated by the law. Normally, the benefit is granted only to new graduates (upper secondary or tertiary education) or to those people with a previous employment history (at least 12 months of employment during the previous 24) who recently lost their jobs and who register as unemployed. The benefit is, in addition, means-tested, as it requires the beneficiary's income to be less than RON 500 per month (1 SRI: €103). The duration of the benefit varies according to the number of years worked and the length of the contributory period.
- e) Targeted population: The measure was targeted at unemployed people eligible for unemployment benefit – either new graduates or recently registered unemployed people who had worked at least 12 months out of the previous 24. Self-employed people can be covered by the unemployment insurance scheme, as long as they enter a voluntary contractual relationship with the National Employment Agency and pay the contributions otherwise paid by employers.

The National Institute of Statistics conducted an ad hoc assessment of the contraction in economic activity during March and April 2020<sup>4</sup>, both months during which Romania was under lockdown and a state of emergency. In March, 33% of enterprises reduced their economic activity by over 25%, while in April the proportion increased to 45%. According to the study, the rate at which businesses closed increased, from 9.8% in March to 13.8% in April. But despite the relatively high number of individual work contracts (IWCs) that were terminated (430,000 between March and June 2020, around 7-8% of all IWCs), registered unemployment increased more slowly, with a first peak in August 2020 and then an additional increase in November-December 2020 (overall between March and December 2020 there was an increase of 18%, that is about 45,000 new unemployed people). According to MLSP<sup>5</sup> data, in May 2020 (when Law 59/2020 was passed) the number of unemployed people benefiting from an unemployment allowance was 77,000, representing 30% of all registered unemployed people, and 20% of all unemployed people on the ILO definition.

- f) Beneficiaries: It is too early to estimate the impact of the measure, but the number of recipients was 100,740 in December 2020, 77% higher than in February 2020. At the end of 2020 the number of recipients represented 34% of the total registered unemployed, reflecting both the increase in unemployment and in recipients due to the extension of the unemployment benefit period. During January-February 2021 the situation remained relatively stable, with 99,547 beneficiaries at the end of February, representing 34% of all registered unemployed people.

Although the measure was especially welcome, as the unemployment allowance is the only monetary benefit granted to unemployed, the measure affected only the more recently unemployed, and left the most vulnerable unemployed people, the long-term unemployed, totally unprotected. In addition, the level of the unemployment benefit is low, and has not increased since 2008.

- g) Novelty: The measure did not bring anything new to the social protection system, beyond a temporary extension of the duration of the benefit. It was meant as a transitory measure.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.economica.net/ins-ponderea-agentilor-economici-a-caror-activitate-se-restrange-cu-mai-mult-de-25prc-a-urcat-in-aprilie-la-45prc\\_182882.html](https://www.economica.net/ins-ponderea-agentilor-economici-a-caror-activitate-se-restrange-cu-mai-mult-de-25prc-a-urcat-in-aprilie-la-45prc_182882.html)

<sup>5</sup> Monthly statistical data on unemployment, see:

<http://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/date-statistice>.



## 2.2 Measures of job protection provided through support to employers, employees and the self-employed

### 2.2.1 *Subvenționarea salariului la angajarea în muncă a unor categorii de șomeri (Wage subsidies for hiring some categories of unemployed people most affected by COVID-19)*

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure – introduced in May 2020 by GEO 92/2020 – refers to partial wage subsidies, lasting 12 months, for private employers who hire specific categories of people made unemployed due to the economic situation generated by the COVID-19 pandemic during the state of alert or emergency (Article III). The measure also reduces the period for which the beneficiaries of wage subsidies (under existing schemes) are required to be kept in employment after the subsidy period ends (from 18 months to 12 months).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure applies during 1 June 2020 to 1 September 2021<sup>6</sup>, meaning that the measure applies only to new hiring occurring during this period. The benefit is granted from the UIF.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The measure stipulates a subsidised level of up to 50% of the gross salary (not more than RON 2,500: €513), for 12 months, for new hires among the eligible categories mentioned below in e). The measure does *not apply to public employers/institutions* and is conditional upon keeping the employee in full employment for at least one year after the subsidy ends.
- e) Targeted population: The measure targets *private employers* who hire a person from one of the following three categories: (i) unemployed people aged over 50 who lost their job during the state of emergency; (ii) unemployed people aged 16-29 who are registered as unemployed; or (iii) a person who worked abroad (returning migrant worker), and who lost their job due to reasons out of their control. The measure targets mostly those who became unemployed during the state of emergency or alert.

An estimate of the size of the target group is not available. The first two eligible categories had been already acknowledged as vulnerable in the labour market, even before the start of the pandemic, and subjected to employment measures taking the form of work subsidies. In addition to these, the return of the emigrant labour force after the pandemic started has raised a series of concerns. In March 2020, a survey carried out by SOCIOPOL<sup>7</sup>, estimated there were 3.5 million Romanians working abroad, of which 800,000 returned to Romania in March either due to fear of the pandemic or because they remained without jobs.

- f) Beneficiaries: The number of people who have benefited from this wage subsidy is not clear, as data are not available. Traditionally, however, take-up of wage subsidies by employers is low compared with the number of new hires, due to a series of restrictions/conditions that reduce the incentive to apply. In fact, during 2020 the number of people employed by employment agencies fell by 12% compared with 2019, while the number of registered unemployed people increased by almost 15%.
- g) Novelty: The measure is not a novelty. Previous measures of subsidised employment applied to: graduates; unemployed people aged over 45; long-term unemployed people; young people not in education, employment or training; single parents who were unemployed; people with disabilities and graduates with disabilities; and unemployed people with less than five years until reaching retirement age<sup>8</sup>. However,

<sup>6</sup> The application of the measure has been extended, through GEO 220/2020.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.economica.net/sociopol-800-000de-romani-s-au-intors-in-ara-in-doua-saptamani-doar-400-000-recunosc-ca-au-facut-o-de-frica-coronavirus\\_181635.html](https://www.economica.net/sociopol-800-000de-romani-s-au-intors-in-ara-in-doua-saptamani-doar-400-000-recunosc-ca-au-facut-o-de-frica-coronavirus_181635.html)

<sup>8</sup> According to the law on unemployment, Law 76/2002, with its subsequent amendments (especially GEO 60/2016).

the measure adds additional categories, and specifically targets people made unemployed due to economic restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2.2.2 Indemnizații pe perioada suspendării temporare a contractelor de muncă/șomaj tehnic (Indemnities for employees whose work contracts are temporary suspended/technical unemployment)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure (GEO 30/2020) stipulates that employed people<sup>9</sup> whose IWCs<sup>10</sup> have been suspended during the state of emergency, or whose work activities have been temporary suspended because of the economic restrictions, have the right to an indemnity proportional to their previous income. The indemnity for employees with a temporarily suspended IWC is supported from the UIF, while the indemnity for other professionals and self-employed people is supported from the state budget.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure was in effect between March 2020 and 30 June 2021, and the benefit was granted monthly according to the number of working days affected by the restrictions.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The level of the indemnity for employees with temporarily suspended IWCs due to COVID-19-related restrictions was 75% of salary, up to a maximum of 75% of the national gross average salary (4,072 RON in 2020: €834). However, employers were allowed to increase the indemnity above the 75% level from their own salary fund. The benefit for employees was paid by the employer, who was reimbursed from the UIF. The reimbursement of the benefit was *conditional* upon keeping employees for at least six months after the restrictions were lifted. Self-employed people, people with incomes from copyright, people with sport activity contracts and lawyers received, upon proving that their activity had been suspended, 75% of the national gross average salary; the benefit for these categories was supported from the state budget. The allowance was subject to income tax, and to all contributions with the exception of the insurance contribution for work (i.e. 2.25% of income). The recipients were insured nevertheless for sickness leave and benefits, but these were calculated, during this period, at the level of the minimum wage.
- e) Targeted population: Those targeted were: (i) employees in the public and private sectors (with individual part-time or full-time, temporary or open-ended, work contracts); and (ii) some categories of self-employed people – independent professionals; people with income from copyright and related rights; co-operative members; people with sport activity contracts in public and private sport structures/clubs; and lawyers. *Eligible employees* were those for whom the employer had decided, without their consent, to temporarily suspend the IWC. In order to be eligible for the benefit, employers who suspended IWCs had to be affected by either: (i) the restrictions imposed during the state of emergency/alert<sup>11</sup>; or (ii) a critical number of actual infections with SARS-CoV-2 among employees. *The eligibility of self-employed people* was granted by the temporary suspension of their economic activity due to the restrictions imposed as a consequence of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infections, including suspension of activities due to COVID-19 sicknesses<sup>12</sup>. An exception was made *for lawyers, who were eligible* for the benefit if their current income was diminished, due to the restrictions in place, by at least 25% compared

<sup>9</sup> “People employed” include employees as well as non-employees, who can be self-employed or contributing family members. By contrast, the term employee refers to all those with an IWC – full-time or part-time, temporary or open-ended.

<sup>10</sup> Romanian legislation allows IWCs for open-ended as well as temporary employment, full-time or part-time, and also stipulates that work-force leasing companies use IWCs (temporary or open-ended) with the workforce they intend to lease, based on a leasing contract.

<sup>11</sup> The state of emergency gives the government the right to restrict/limit civil rights, while the state of alert only empowers the government to take preventive measures.

<sup>12</sup> GEO 120/2020 (July 2020).

with the previous year. An ex ante estimate of the targeted population is not available, as the emergency ordinance was approved immediately after the installation of the state of emergency, in March 2020.

- f) Beneficiaries: In May 2020<sup>13</sup> the government announced that 1,118,865 employees, and 129,149 employers, had benefited from the indemnity. This was about 22% of all employees (an average of 5,124,428 during March-May 2020, according to the number of social insured employees holding IWCs during this period<sup>14</sup>). The number of beneficiaries due to suspended IWCs after July 2020 fell significantly, despite the prolonged periods of alert. The National Public Pension House indicates a peak, in November 2020, of 10,429 people benefiting from the indemnity for a suspended IWC. During February 2021, the number fell to 4,250 employees.

According to the MLSP<sup>15</sup>, during 2020 about 104,000 self-employed people and other professionals benefited from the indemnity, representing 50% of all self-employed people insured through the social insurance system in December 2020. However, this number represents about 7% of all self-employed people identified through survey data<sup>16</sup>. During the first three months of 2021 an additional 9,079 self-employed people and other professionals benefited from the indemnity.

The available data indicate that the number of suspended IWCs fell over time, while the number of self-employed people with suspended economic activity increased. This suggests that the coping strategies of most businesses favoured the retention of their employees by shrinking their outsourced activities.

- g) Novelty: Although the labour code stipulates employees' right to an indemnity during periods when the employer temporarily suspends its economic activity due to structural or technological reasons, the current measures bring two novel elements to this: (i) the payment of the indemnity is supported from the UIF, and not from the salary fund of the employer<sup>17</sup>; and (ii) the benefit has been extended to some categories of self-employed people.

### **2.2.3 Decontarea unei părți a salariului pentru angajații a căror contracte de muncă au fost suspendate temporar datorită restricțiilor impuse pe perioada stării de urgență/alertă (Wage subsidies for employees whose activity has been suspended due to restrictions during the state of emergency/alert)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure (GEO 92/2020, Article I) was adopted after the state of emergency ended (May 2020), in order to encourage employers to keep their employees after restrictions on economic activities were lifted. The measure established the right of an employer in the private sector to request a partial wage subsidy – of 41.5% of the gross salary (not exceeding 41.5% of the national average gross salary) – for all employees for whom the IWCs had been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic for at least 15 days. The subsidy was granted, upon request, for three months after the activities were resumed. In addition, the employer had to keep beneficiaries of the subsidy in work at least until 30 December 2020. The benefit was supported from the UIF.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.

<sup>13</sup> <https://gov.ro/ro/quvernul/procesullegislativ/note-de-fundamentare/nota-de-fundamentare-oug-nr-92-28-05-2020&page=4>

<sup>14</sup> See statistical data, [www.cnpp.ro](http://www.cnpp.ro).

<sup>15</sup> Statistical bulletin on social assistance benefits, 3rd quarter 2020: <http://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic/6197>.

<sup>16</sup> Less contributing family members who are not paid for their work.

<sup>17</sup> Legally defined as the total amount of all monthly gross incomes and all additional salary-related benefits, according to the IWCs; the fund has to be secured by the employer and cannot be used for other categories of expenditure.

- c) Timing: The measure was effective between June 2020 and December 2020 and was temporary in character. The benefit was supported from the UIF.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The level of the subsidy for employees was 41.5% of the gross salary of the workers (but could not exceed 41.5% of the national average gross salary). The national average gross salary was, in 2020, RON 5,429 (€1,111), meaning that the upper cap amounted to RON 2,253 (€461). The benefit was granted for employees whose IWCs had been formally suspended for at least 15 days, and was granted for three months immediately after the IWCs were resumed and restrictions lifted.
- e) Targeted population: The measure targeted only employers in the private sector, either with employees whose IWCs had been suspended during the state of emergency or with employed people who were co-operative members, whose *work conventions* had previously been suspended during the state of emergency. The benefit was granted regardless of whether employers had previously requested the reimbursement of the compensatory indemnity paid to employees during the suspension period of their IWCs or work conventions. The measure covered employees in the private sector and *did not* apply to employees in public institutions or to self-employed people.
- f) Beneficiaries: A substantiation document for the emergency ordinance introducing the measure shows that 1,118,865 employees benefited from the indemnity granted to those with suspended IWCs – about 22% of the total number of employees.
- g) Novelty: The measure was new, although its design was not; it differed from other similar measures by the fact that the wage subsidy applied only to those whose activities (and, as a consequence, their IWCs or work conventions) had previously been suspended. Regular employment measures granting wage subsidies apply only to newly hired employees, and do not cover exceptional situations, such as temporary suspension of IWCs or technical unemployment.

**2.2.4 Reducerea timpului de muncă a angajaților afectați de restricțiile legate de activitatea economică pe durata perioadelor de stare de urgență/alertă și plata unei indemnizații compensatorii (Reduction of working time for all employed people whose economic activity has been affected by restrictions during the state of emergency/alert and the payment of a compensatory indemnity)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure, adopted in August 2020<sup>18</sup>, added up to the first set of measures targeting employers/employees and self-employed people. It granted employers the possibility of reducing the working time of their employees by up to 50%, with the agreement of the trade unions, employee representatives or employees. The reduction in working time was accompanied by the possibility of requesting a compensatory indemnity for both employees and self-employed people and was limited to those situations where economic activity was restrained due to a state of emergency or alert, and to the following three months, after restrictions were lifted.
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure applied between August 2020 and 30 June 2021, and covered states of emergency or periods of alert and the three following months.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality:
  - The indemnity for reduced working time *for employees* (of up to 50% of the total working time specified in the work contract) was calculated as 75% of the difference between the gross base salary according to the IWC and the gross salary according to the effectively worked number of hours. The indemnity was paid by the employer

<sup>18</sup> GEO 132/2020 (8 August 2020), Law 282/2020 (8 December 2020), GEO 220/2020 (Article II), GEO 211/2020; the latter emergency ordinances extended the period of applicability of the measures.

and reimbursed by the UIF subject to the following: (i) the reduced working time was agreed with the trade unions; (ii) it had to be adopted for at least five consecutive days per month; (iii) it affected at least 10% of the employees in a given business; (iv) the reduction in working time was justified by a reduction of at least 10% in turnover compared with the same month of the previous year; and (v) the working time could not be reduced more than by 50%. Additional conditions applied; employers were not allowed, as long as their employees benefited from the measure, to: (i) initiate mass dismissals; (ii) hire additional employees for the jobs performed by those employees for which working time had been reduced; and (iii) pay overtime to those employees for whom working time had been reduced. Finally, the measure did not apply to public institutions/employers.

- The level of the indemnity for reduced working time for self-employed people (i.e. professionals and members of co-operatives) was 41.5% of the national average gross monthly salary (paid from the state budget). Self-employed people needed to provide proof of a fall in income due to limitations on their economic activities.
  - The benefit for occasional, unskilled workers was calculated as 35% of the gross daily payment the worker would have received if the activities had not been restricted (paid by the service contractor and reimbursed from the state budget). Employers of occasional, unskilled workers (i.e. service contractors) had to document the restrictions imposed on their economic activities.
- e) Targeted population: The measure covered employers in the private sector eligible to reduce the working time of their employees<sup>19</sup>, as well as some self-employed professionals, members of co-operatives<sup>20</sup> and occasional workers<sup>21</sup>. According to a press release of the MLSP, announcing the adoption of the measure<sup>22</sup>, 700,000 people were intended to benefit from the scheme. The estimate included beneficiaries of all measures included in a more comprehensive package (along with the one-time flat payments for telework and wage subsidies for short-term work contracts).
- f) Beneficiaries: According to National Public Pension House data, during December 2020 the number of insured people holding an IWC who benefited from the indemnity was 38,320<sup>23</sup>, and it increased in February 2021 to 45,204. The number of beneficiaries among self-employed and occasional workers was 33,776 over the period August-December 2020, about a third of those benefiting from the indemnity for suspended activity and approximately 15% of all self-employed people insured within the social insurance system at the end of 2020. The highest number of self-employed people receiving the indemnity was registered in November (26,400) and the lowest in August 2020 (9,700). The number of beneficiaries, for the first three months of 2021, was 27,754.

Although the number of employees receiving the benefit seems to have been higher than the number of self-employed people, the budgetary effort was higher for self-employed people, thus indicating a higher average number of days for which the benefit was paid for self-employed people compared with employees.

<sup>19</sup> The usage of the term “employees” implies the existence of an IWC, as regulated by the work code (temporary or open-ended, part-time or full-time).

<sup>20</sup> Whose work is regulated by work conventions.

<sup>21</sup> Employed without an IWC; according to the legal definition of occasional worker (Law 52/2011, regarding occasional and seasonal work activities amended by Law 132/2019), this is employed for no more than 120 days per year (exceptions allowed only in the animal farming sector, extending the duration up to 180 days per year) and in a sector of employment which is specified as eligible by law.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/6039-noi-masuri-de-sprrijin-pentru-plata-muncii>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.cnpp.ro/indicatori-statistici-pilon-i?p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_svWpDmJy1qVg&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=0&p\\_p\\_state=normal&p\\_p\\_mode=view&p\\_p\\_col\\_id=column-1&p\\_p\\_col\\_count=2&p\\_r\\_p\\_564233524\\_taq=2021](https://www.cnpp.ro/indicatori-statistici-pilon-i?p_id=101_INSTANCE_svWpDmJy1qVg&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-1&p_p_col_count=2&p_r_p_564233524_taq=2021)

- g) Novelty: The measure was not entirely new, as it was embedded in pre-existing legislation (it amended the labour code); however, the measure had a temporary character. Its novelty consisted in the modified source of financing for the indemnity.

**2.2.5 Flexibilizarea raporturilor de muncă: decontarea unei părți a salariului angajaților cu contracte de muncă pe perioade scurte (Flexibilisation of work: wage subsidies for employees with short-term contracts)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure was part of a package related to flexibilisation of work relations, which also included measures to encourage telework and allow for a reduction in working time<sup>24</sup>. The measure entitled employers to request a wage subsidy for new hires with short-term IWCs (up to three months).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure applied from August 2020 to 30 June 2021.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The wage subsidy amounted to 41.5% of the gross salary received for a workload of eight hours per day, but not more than 41.5% of the national average gross salary, and was paid for employees on short-term contracts for up to three months. The measure did not apply to public institutions.
- e) Targeted population: The benefit targeted *private sector employers* who were willing to hire people with short-term contracts. It could stimulate the hire of occasional workers or of unemployed people who were between jobs. The measure increased both employer's flexibility in response to varying economic circumstances and the dynamism of the labour market, allowing for increased income opportunities for unemployed people and self-employed/occasional workers. The benefit was granted for up to three months and it was paid from the UIF.
- f) Beneficiaries: The number of beneficiaries is not available.
- g) Novelty: The measure was temporary in character and built on pre-existing measures of subsidised work, expanding the categories of new hires for which employers were entitled to wage subsidies.

**2.2.6 Facilități fiscale pentru angajați și companii: de la măsuri legate de plata taxelor și impozitelor la exceptarea unor beneficia oferite de angajatori de la plata contribuțiilor sociale (Fiscal facilities for employed people and enterprises: from measures related to the fiscal debts to the exemption of some benefits granted by employers from the payment of social contributions)**

- a) Short description of the measure: A range of fiscal facilities addressing both individuals and companies were enacted in order to cushion the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The size of revenues forgone varied with the type and size of the fiscal debts.

A. One group of measures was aimed at *postponing the payment deadlines for local and general taxes* (from 21 March to 30 June 2020, as established by GEO 29/2020) and at reducing (by 50%) the annual local tax for properties accommodating an economic activity which had been interrupted due to the pandemic (GEO 69/2020). These measures were temporary, applying to debts or taxes on income accumulated during 2020. The taxes and contributions overdue during the state of emergency were exempted from penalties until 25 December 2020 (GEO 29/2020; GEO 181/2020). In a second stage, all the penalties, interest and fiscal accessories overdue by 31 March 2020 were cancelled, provided that the fiscal debt had been paid by 15 December (GEO 69/2020).

<sup>24</sup> GEO 132/2020 (8 August 2020), Law 282/2020 (8 December 2020), GEO 220/2020 (Article II), GEO 211/2020; the latter emergency ordinances extended the period of applicability of the measures.

B. *Another group of measures was aimed at easing the fiscal burden of companies and individuals*, through a broad range of measures including: exemption from penalties for delayed payments; rescheduling of debts; reducing the interest rate for delayed repayments; and *exemption from the payment of social contributions* (both pension and health insurance) for a series of benefits – monetary or in-kind – paid by employers to their employees. The payment of fiscal debts exceeding RON 500 (€102) for individuals and RON 5,000 (€1,025) for companies, which were accumulated after the beginning of the state of emergency, could be rescheduled for a maximum period of 12 months beginning in October 2020, with an annual interest rate of 3.65% (GEO 181/2020). The measure was temporary, and it applied to debts accumulated during 2020. In addition to these, the hotel, restaurant and catering (HORECA) sector benefited from a recalculation of the annual specific tax according to the number of days with economic activity. The specific tax was lifted for a period of 90 days after 1 January 2021 (GEO 181/2020). The measure targeted employers in HORECA, was new and had a temporary character.

The latter measure amended the fiscal code (Law 296/2020) and expanded the list of incomes which were *exempted from the payment of social contributions*. This included, among others, a series of benefits – monetary and in-kind – granted to employees to support early childhood education, telework, gifts and appreciation benefits.

- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measures took effect in March 2020 and were initially meant to end in December 2020. They were then extended until 31 March 2021 (GEO 226/2020). This applied to all measures with the exception of employees' exemption from the payment of social contributions for certain monetary and in-kind benefits, which has a permanent character.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: Most of the measures related to fiscal debts and delayed payments applied to all taxpayers – individuals or enterprises. Some of these targeted debtors with debts over a certain threshold. However, the exemption from the payment of social contributions targeted only employees, as the measure addressed only those benefits granted by employers to their employees.
- f) Beneficiaries: Data not available.
- g) Novelty: None of the measures represented a novelty. They built on former experiences (e.g. previous fiscal amnesties such as in 2019) and existing legislation, by fine-tuning these or expanding their applicability.

### **2.2.7 Stimulentul de risc (Risk stimulus)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure rewarded staff working in risk situations with a financial bonus of RON 2,500 – €513 (taxable) – per month during the state of emergency (Law 82/2020).
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: Although the law was adopted in June 2020, the benefit referred to the months for which Romania instituted a state of emergency (March-May 2020).
- d) Amount and duration: The level of the benefit was RON 2,500 (€513) per month, gross income. The benefit was conditional upon working in environments with a risk of contracting COVID-19.
- e) Targeted population: The measure was aimed at workers in social services, community assistance, social workers and medical staff who were at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of their work.
- f) Beneficiaries: Data not available.

- g) Novelty: The bonus was a novelty, triggered by the overstretched medical and social services.

## 2.3 Measures related to sickness benefits and sick pay

### 2.3.1 *Creșterea accesului la concedii medicale și a nivelului indemnizației pentru carantină/izolare (Increasing access to medical leave and level of associated indemnity for temporary work incapacity due to COVID-19/quarantine)*

- a) Short description of the measure: In May 2020 a measure (Governmental Decision 423/2020) was adopted granting access to paid medical leave, and associated indemnities, without any requirements regarding the minimum contribution period to the social insurance system for people diagnosed with COVID-19, similar to other conditions representing exceptions from the minimum contribution rule<sup>25</sup>. Quarantine and (self-)isolation for COVID-19<sup>26</sup> have become subject to regulation, and any abuse of these regulations is subject to penalties (Law 136/2020, amended by Law 210/2020). In addition to this, in September 2020, the indemnity for temporary work incapacity due to COVID-19 (quarantine or isolation) was raised from 75% to 100% of the reference income (Law 136/2020). Paid medical leave (temporary work incapacity) and associated indemnities due to COVID-19 are entirely supported from the national social health insurance fund (NSHIF).
- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure is partially temporary, as COVID-19 became a group A infectious disease for which no contributory period is necessary and an increased level of benefit is granted; otherwise, the financing, entirely from the NSHIF, and the quarantine coverage apply only during states of emergency/alert and took effect in May 2020. Benefits, supported from the NSHIF, were increased from September 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: All conditions related to COVID-19, including quarantine, grant unrestricted access to medical leave for all insured people, regardless of the length of contributory period. The indemnity for temporary work incapacity is 100% of the reference income, raised from the previous 75%. The level of the monetary benefit is limited to 12 times the monthly gross minimum wage.
- e) Targeted population: The measure targets all employed people who are insured through the social insurance system (employees as well as self-employed people), regardless of the length of their contribution to the social insurance system.
- f) Beneficiaries: The overall number of beneficiaries of medical leave (including COVID-related leave but not limited to it) was, in September 2020, only 2% higher than in September 2019<sup>27</sup>. However, a first significant increase in the number of cases of medical leave could be observed in March 2020, reaching 324,600 recipients. This was 51,700 more people than in March 2019, an increase of 19%, while the total number of insured people fell only slightly, by 0.6%. The proportion of insured people on medical leave increased in December 2020 to 5.8%, compared with 4.1% in December 2019. June 2020 was also the month with the lowest number of insured people, and

<sup>25</sup> Medico-surgical emergencies, severe diseases, such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and a number of infectious diseases grouped under the label "group A infectious diseases", which are established by government decision.

<sup>26</sup> Law 136/2020 defines quarantine as the separation of individual people who are suspected of carrying an infectious disease or who have been at risk of acquiring the disease, in either special places provided by public authorities or at home/private address; the public health directorates are involved in monitoring the person placed in quarantine and determine the length of it. (Self-)isolation refers to a situation when a person who is carrying a pathogen that develops into an infectious disease is isolated in a health facility or at home (self-isolation), until cleared or for at least 14 days after testing positive. Both situations are subject to specific legal regulations and penalties.

<sup>27</sup> MLSP, Statistical Bulletin, Pensions and Social Insurance, <http://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic>.



the lowest number of recipients of medical leave (in both absolute and relative terms – 189,000 recipients, 3.3% of all insured people), since the start of the pandemic.

- g) Novelty: The novelty of the measure is that COVID-19 has been included in the so-called group A of infectious diseases which represent exceptions from the requirement for a minimum contribution to the social health insurance system of at least six months during the last 12. In addition, the condition of quarantine and isolation due to COVID-19 entitles the insured person to an increased indemnity. The increased indemnity is granted to those being quarantined only on a temporary basis during a state of emergency or alert. However, the indemnity for temporary incapacity to work due to being sick from COVID-19 is granted at 100% of the reference income on a permanent basis, given the introduction of COVID-19 in the group A of infectious diseases.

The indemnity for all COVID-19-related conditions/situations is paid only from the NSHIF, and not shared, as in the case of other conditions/diseases, with the employer. In addition, medical leave due to COVID-19 will not be taken into account when calculating the total number of days of temporary work incapacity leave to which an insured person is entitled.

## 2.4 Measures related to health insurance

Hundreds of legislative measures were issued between February 2020 and January 2021, and substantial funding was deployed, to strengthen the health system (investment in infrastructure and incentives for the frontline COVID-19 health workforce). The measures below are directly linked to changes in the healthcare baskets or towards extending health coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic in the reporting period.

### 2.4.1 *Universalizarea accesului la servicii de tratament/prevenție pentru COVID-19 (Universalisation of access to treatment and prevention of COVID-19)*

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure ensures universal health coverage for testing, treatment, care and vaccination of any citizen or foreigner on Romanian territory related to COVID-19, by lifting conditions related to health insurance and extending the minimum healthcare service basket (Decree 204/2020, Law 55/2020). In December 2020 the strategy for vaccination was approved; the principles on which this is based, as well as its stated objectives, underline the free nature of the process and the coverage of the entire population. Furthermore, it stipulates the necessity to create a favourable operational environment which allows for an equitable distribution and vaccination process, aiming at reaching out to the entire population<sup>28</sup>.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The law took effect in May 2020 and will stay in effect until the state of alert ends. The state of alert was issued for 30 days, and during 2021 Romania extended the state of alert five times until 13 May 2021.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: All Romanian citizens regardless of their insurance status, as well as any other person (such as refugees, asylum-seekers and foreigners) on Romanian territory. Testing<sup>29</sup>, treatment and vaccination are completely free of charge and costs are borne by the healthcare system.

According to the spokesman for the National Health Insurance House (NHIH), the number of uninsured people was, in 2019, about 4 million<sup>30</sup>, compared with

<sup>28</sup> [https://vaccinare-covid.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Strategia-vaccinare-02-12-2020-CL-FINAL-cu-COVID-19-tabel-2\\_CUPRINS-UPDATE-1.pdf](https://vaccinare-covid.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Strategia-vaccinare-02-12-2020-CL-FINAL-cu-COVID-19-tabel-2_CUPRINS-UPDATE-1.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Testing is free when the disease is symptomatic or there is a suspicion of asymptomatic infection.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/cifrele-care-arata-cum-se-prabuseste-sistemul-asigurarilor-de-sanatate-romania-are-19-categorii-de-persoane-exceptate-de-la-plata-1333288>

approximately 17 million insured. However, according to the NHIH the problem lay not so much in the size of the uninsured population, as in the fact that over 10.7 million of those who were insured were exempted from the payment of any contribution. Thus, about 6 million people (of which a stable number of around 5.3 million corresponds to the number of employees) support all those insured by the effect of law. The measure introduced a set of additional services for all 22 million people residing in Romania, thus imposing a significant burden on the NSHIF. Much of this burden became obvious for both patients (for example, in the form of long waiting lines and lack of access to hospitals) and medical staff (for example, a low number of staff leading to burn-out, and disagreements among staff due to the distribution of benefits).

- f) Beneficiaries: The number of people receiving COVID-19-related health services is not available, but the number of people tested free of charge and vaccinated is available.
- g) Novelty: The measure is not entirely new, as it represents an extension of the minimum free healthcare basket offered to all citizens, regardless of their insurance status. The measures are by law regarded as temporary and will be in force until the World Health Organization, and therefore Romania itself, declares the pandemic ended.

#### **2.4.2 Măsuri legate de protecția persoanelor instituționalizate și a personalul centrelor rezidențiale (Measures protecting the residents and staff of residential care centres)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measures regarding the protection of people in residential and institutional care (Decree 240/2020, followed by Order 807/2020, Order 978/2020, recommendation of the National Public Health Institute regarding prioritisation of testing procedures<sup>31</sup>) include: (i) prohibition of the closure/suspension of activity of all long-term social and medical facilities, people and patients being discharged only at the family's request if it can be proved that they will benefit from appropriate conditions at home; (ii) provision of personal protective equipment for staff, and regulation of their work schedule in order to avoid frequent entering and exiting from the centres; (iii) testing/vaccination procedures for residents and staff according to prioritisation criteria set up by the National Public Health Institute; (d) preventive isolation measures at the workplace, for most of the categories working in residential centres, wherever the necessity to ensure a permanent watch in the centre cannot be fulfilled otherwise; and (iv) banning external visitors. In October 2020 the Ministry of Health and the National Agency for Child Protection and People with Disabilities passed an order establishing a methodological guide for the prevention of COVID-19 in residential centres for older people, people with disabilities and children (Order 1808/1466/2020)<sup>32</sup>.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The applicability of the measures varied according to the moment when the specific measure was passed, but the measures, temporary in character, have extended over the states of alert. The first measure took effect in April 2020, as COVID-19 hotspots had been acknowledged around residential centres.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: These measures were specifically targeted at residents and staff (medical and non-medical) in long-term care facilities (for older people, people with disabilities and children). Among the first cases of COVID-19 which were assessed as the result of community transmission were those clustered around residential centres.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cnscbt.ro/index.php/1812-definitii-de-caz-si-recomandari-de-prioritizare-a-testarii-pentru-covid-19-actualizare-19-06-2020-1/file>

<sup>32</sup> <http://andpdca.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ordinul-nr-1808-1466-2020-pentru-aprobarea-ghidului-metodologic.pdf>

In April 2020 residential centres became significant hotspots for the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

- f) Beneficiaries: On 27 April 2020<sup>33</sup>, 591 residents and 223 staff members of residential centres for children and adults with disabilities were infected. Whereas the beneficiaries of residential services represent about 0.25% of the entire population of Romania, the number of COVID-19 cases in residential centres represented, in April 2020, 7% of all cases diagnosed in Romania at the time. In December 2020, 29% of the total population in residential centres contracted COVID-19, of which 1.5% died due to complications associated with the disease. As a result of the measures adopted, between January and May 2021 the infection rate among children and personnel in children's institutions fell to 8%, while the incidence among the personnel and residents in institutions for adults with disabilities fell even more in proportionate terms, reaching 4.1% and 6.4% respectively. On 18 April 2021, the vaccination rate among personnel in institutions for children and adults with disabilities reached 45%, while among residents it was around 85% for adults with disabilities and 60% for children over 16.
- g) Novelty: The measure represents a novelty, especially as it includes on the priority list a category of social services beneficiaries who have traditionally been neglected.

#### **2.4.3 Măsuri de sprijinire a persoanele vulnerabile izolate la domiciliu sau carantină instituțională (Measures for enhancing the support for vulnerable people in home isolation or institutionalised quarantine)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure (Government Order 725/2020, GEO 43/2020, Law 56/2020) is aimed at giving priority support to socio-economically vulnerable groups, people with health risks, and especially those living in rural areas and Roma ethnic groups, during the quarantine. People in institutionalised quarantine are also targeted by this measure. For quarantined areas<sup>34</sup>, community nurses, Roma mediators and midwives are providing support, food delivery and care, including medicines and surveillance to isolated older people living alone at home, as well as to other vulnerable categories.
- b) Category: Partially flat.
- c) Timing: The measure regarding community interventions took effect in April 2020 and will remain in place until the end of the state of alert.
- d) Amount and duration. Community workers reaching out to vulnerable/isolated people and providing in-home help and support receive free protective equipment, as do the vulnerable households. Family physicians receive a RON 105 (€21) bonus for every COVID-19 patient monitored at home, even remotely. As a permanent measure, bereavement grants and survivor benefits for children of health personnel who died from COVID-19 were settled by law in May 2020. In addition, vulnerable households are receiving during the state of emergency or alert food support of RON 30 (€6) per day.
- e) Targeted population: Vulnerable groups, defined as follows in accordance with the laws regulating community interventions: people below the poverty line; unemployed people; people with disabilities; chronically ill people; people with terminal diseases; people in need of palliative care; pregnant women; children; older people; single-parent families; families at risk of social exclusion; and other categories considered vulnerable from a medical or socio-economic standpoint at the community level. An emphasis is especially put on those groups who are not enrolled with a family physician. No ex ante estimate is available. The number of family physicians is about

<sup>33</sup> <http://andpdca.gov.ro/w/?s=covid>

<sup>34</sup> The Committee for Emergency Situations can decide to quarantine entire areas (villages or cities) and restrict circulation to and from these areas, as well as inside them.

10,000, while the number of personnel involved in reaching out to vulnerable/isolated people is unknown.

- f) Beneficiaries: No data are available on the impact, number of overall recipients or allocated funds for all other specific measures.
- g) Novelty: The *measure is not entirely new*, as it is aligned with the role and responsibilities of community nurses and family physicians and with the new legislation on a minimum social services package. Its novelty consists in particularising interventions to the needs associated with home isolation and quarantine, including food and medicine delivery to those in isolation/quarantine. It is set up as temporary measure, due to the particularities of the interventions.

#### **2.4.4 Creșterea accesului la medicamente și dispozitive medicale destinate tratamentului și prevenției COVID-19 dar și a altor boli cronice (Increasing access to drugs and medical appliances addressing the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and other chronic diseases)**

- a) Short description of the measure: Three important measures have been adopted. First, banning the export of COVID-19 medicines and medical devices – a measure which was accompanied, as a temporary measure, by exemptions from market authorisation for drugs or devices used in COVID-19 treatment, allowing a simplified process. This led, second, to a *permanent measure*, a new inclusion criterion added to the reimbursable pharmaceutical lists (i.e. the treatment of infectious diseases which can cause epidemics/pandemics). Another change to the healthcare basket (*permanent measure*) was, third, the introduction on the list of compensated drugs of 39 new molecules for chronic diseases (such as cancer, diabetes, leukaemia, rare diseases and HIV/AIDS), in December 2020.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional.
- c) Timing: The export ban took effect in March 2020 and was extended, by six months, in October 2020; the inclusion criterion was added to the pharmaceutical list on 31 July 2020; while the expansion of the list of compensated drugs followed in December 2020.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The first measure targets all people in need of treatment and care for COVID-19 disease, regardless of their health insurance status; the last two measures address all insured patients with chronic diseases, who are granted access to innovative treatments covered by mandatory health insurance.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data are available on the impact, number of overall recipients or allocated funds.
- g) Novelty: All three are new measures, of which one is temporary and the last two are permanent; the inclusion criterion added to the pharmaceutical list, and the introduction of 39 molecules on the list of reimbursed drugs funded through the national programmes, increase access to good-quality care.

### **2.4.5 *Introducerea serviciilor medicale ambulatorii la distanță și rambursarea acestora în sistemul asigurărilor sociale de sănătate (Introduction of remote medical services in ambulatory care reimbursed from the mandatory health insurance system)***

- a) Short description of the measure: To encourage the population to access ambulatory care (primary care and ambulatory clinical services) and to reduce the pressure on hospitals, the government included remote medical check-ups on the list of services covered by mandatory health insurance, while limiting access to hospitals to medical emergencies and to patients with chronic conditions in need of in-patient care (e.g. oncology treatments) or childbirth. The measure is supported from the NSHIF.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional.
- c) Timing: The reimbursement of remote (digital-assisted) consultations was introduced in March 2020 as a temporary measure; the measure became permanent in November 2020, when the government included telemedicine services in the health law.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The entire population, both insured and uninsured people. The measures address all people seeking ambulatory healthcare and ensure remote access to ambulatory medical services.
- f) Beneficiaries: No data are yet available on the impact, number of overall recipients or allocated funds.
- g) Novelty: The remote digital-assisted medical consultations are new and, although initially adopted as temporary, have been converted into permanent ones. In November 2020, telemedicine health services were included in the health law as a permanent solution for healthcare delivery.

## **2.5 Measures related to minimum-income schemes and other forms of social assistance**

Romania did not adopt any measures related to minimum-income schemes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the exception of the measure extending the duration of unemployment benefit<sup>35</sup> by three months, as discussed in Section 2.1. Programmes targeting vulnerable groups in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have not been adopted (with the exception of those targeting children without access to electronic devices connected to internet, in the context of the shift to online educational services). The government limited its effort during 2020 in the area of social assistance to making operational several European programmes which should have been implemented during 2014-2020. These will be presented under this section, as they became operational during 2020.

### **2.5.1 *Programul "Școală de Acasă" ("School from home" programme)***

- a) Short description of the measure: The programme has been established as a means to secure funds for the procurement of electronic devices with internet connection for children and students with no financial means and no access to the internet or a computer, in order to ensure access to online educational services during periods of school closure (Law 109/2020, followed by the order of the Ministry of Education [ME] 4738-2020 and GEO 144/2020, approved by Law 269/2020). The programme is aimed at providing, free of charge, for up to two years (on a yearly basis) electronic devices connected to the internet to children who have no access to one (with a value of €250 per device).
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.

<sup>35</sup> The unemployment benefit is insurance-based but, at the same time, means-tested.

- c) Timing: The programme is limited to the next two school years (2020/2021 and 2021/2022) and the tablets are leased to the children annually. The programme was established in July 2020 and amendments were made in September and November 2020. The needs assessment started in June 2020.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: Initially, Law 109/2020 stipulated that electronic devices had to be granted to all those who needed one, "by request". In September 2020, the criteria for eligibility were defined (Order of the ME 4738-2020) as: (i) being enrolled in primary, lower or upper secondary education (preparatory pre-school year, grades I-XII, professional schools); and (ii) coming from disadvantaged households<sup>36</sup>. Additional criteria to be taken into account are: (i) households without any electronic device connected to the internet; (ii) students who have no electronic device connected to the internet for personal use; and (iii) children of migrant families returning home, with no electronic device connected to the internet. Starting from October 2020, university students benefiting from social fellowships are also eligible to receive an electronic, internet-connected, device. Finally, the legislation grants eligibility to teachers who do not own an electronic device for personal use.
- A study by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy<sup>37</sup>, carried out in May 2020 after almost two months of school closures and online learning, shows that 30% of the students in (pre)primary and secondary education had no or limited individual exclusive access to a desktop, laptop or tablet. Their number was estimated at 900,000. This is 3.6 times more than the estimate by the ME in August, when it announced the acquisition of 250,000 tablets, of which 20,495 were for the children of migrant workers returning home due to the pandemic. The number of children estimated to receive an electronic device with an internet connection represents about 10% of the total school population<sup>38</sup> (primary, secondary and professional education). In August, when GEO 144/2020 was adopted in order to secure the funding for the acquisition of the tablets, the number of children expected to gain access to an electronic device was about 250,000.
- f) Beneficiaries: In November the ME announced that only 43,455 tablets had been distributed, approximately 17% of those promised in August<sup>39</sup>. In December 2020<sup>40</sup>, the ME announced that 141,600 tablets had been distributed to children in approximately 10,000 schools; this was about 57% of the number of expected tablets from the funds secured through the November law, and approximately 6% of the total school population. In January the new Minister of Education estimated that the promised 250,000 tablets would reach students that month, but this still left 287,000 students without access to an electronic device. The minister blamed the administration for not being able to gather relevant data regarding actual needs<sup>41</sup>.
- g) Novelty: The law represents a novelty, and was established as a temporary measure.

<sup>36</sup> The law does not precisely define what it means to be from a disadvantaged household, and it is left to the discretion of schools to decide who is disadvantaged and who is not.

<sup>37</sup> Details of the study are available at: <https://www.edupedu.ro/studiu-ires-accesul-copiilor-la-educatia-online-numarul-efectiv-al-elevilor-care-nu-au-acces-sau-au-acces-limitat-la-un-dispozitiv-este-de-peste-900-000-de-36-ori-mai-mare-decat-evaluarea-ministeru>. The study also pointed out that over a third of families with children have more than one child and need to provide access to an online learning device for more than one child simultaneously. In addition, 10 days before schools started in September, out of 22,000 school buildings in Romania, 5,000 had no access to the internet, affecting mostly marginalised, remote areas. On top of these difficulties, teachers had little to no special training, and the ministry did not provide a common platform for online learning.

<sup>38</sup> Calculated based on the 2019 school population in primary, secondary and professional education of 2,341,691 students (Tempo-online database, NIS, SCL103A).

<sup>39</sup> <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/oms-recomandă-deschiderea-scolilor-românia-le-închide-pe-toate/30933817.html>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/141-600-de-tablete-de-la-orange-au-fost-livrate-pentru-elevii-din-aproximativ-10-000-de-scoli>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/educatie/paradoxul-tabletelor-din-romania-numarul-de-elevi-fara-acces-la-online-a-crescut-desi-s-au-achizitionat-si-distribuit-echipamente-1431738>

### **2.5.2 Schema națională de suport a persoanelor vârstnice și a persoanelor fără adăpost: tichete electronice pentru mese calde (National support scheme for older and homeless people: electronic vouchers for hot meals)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure (GEO 115/2020) was adopted within the framework of the operational programme for the assistance of vulnerable people 2014-2020 (supported from the European Aid Fund for Vulnerable People) and stipulates the distribution of monthly electronic tickets for low-income older and homeless people. The methodology requires the printing of the electronic tickets and the contracting of a number of service providers.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: Although the measure was adopted in July 2020, it took effect in September 2020. The monthly benefit was granted for 10 months.
- d) Amount and duration: The value of the monthly benefit is RON 180 (€37) and the value is uploaded monthly to the electronic voucher. The following eligibility criteria apply: (i) homelessness (especially evicted families with children, and especially single-parent families, without a stable residence); and (ii) the income of pensioners aged over 75 equals or is less than the minimum social pension benefit (RON 800 – €164 – per month, in September 2020). The benefit is granted for 10 months within the programme.
- e) Targeted population: (i) People aged over 75 with an income equal to or less than the minimum social pension; and (ii) homeless people – that is, people sleeping rough – including people/families who have been evicted and families with children without a stable residence, especially single-parent families. The Ministry of European Funds (MEF) estimated, in July 2020<sup>42</sup>, a total number of 290,000 pensioners (no estimates have been provided for the homeless population). The number of pensioners expected to receive the benefit represents 30% of the total number of pensioners receiving the minimum social pension benefit in June 2020<sup>43</sup> and 18% of all people aged 75 and over<sup>44</sup>.
- f) Beneficiaries: The programme became active in September 2020, and up to 31 March 2021 284,853 cards had been distributed and charged for the first six months, according to the MEF<sup>45</sup>.
- g) Novelty: The measure is new. Currently, the only similar measure is the social canteen, available in a few cities.

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<sup>42</sup> <https://mfe.gov.ro/un-nou-pachet-de-masuri-sociale-si-economice-finantat-din-fonduri-europene>

<sup>43</sup> The number of social pension beneficiaries, in June 2020, was 952,528 (National Public Pension House, <https://www.cnpp.ro/indicatori-statistici-pilon-i>).

<sup>44</sup> In 2020, the population aged 75 and over was 1,565,603 (TEMPO-online, NIS, POP105A).

<sup>45</sup> The management authority of the European programme for the support of vulnerable people (<https://mfe.gov.ro/programe/autoritati-de-management/autoritatea-de-management-pentru-programul-operational-ajutorarea-persoanelor-defavorizate>).

### **2.5.3 Schema Națională de Sprijin pentru Elevii cei mai Defavorizați: tichete sociale pentru sprijin educațional din fonduri nerambursabile (National educational support scheme for the most vulnerable children: social vouchers for educational support from non-refundable funds)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure (GEO 133/2020) was adopted within the framework of the operational programme for the assistance of vulnerable people 2014-2020 (supported from the European Aid Fund for Vulnerable People) and entitles children from low-income families to an annual electronic social ticket for educational support. The voucher is intended to cover only school supplies and apparel.
- b) Category: Flat benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure, adopted in August 2020, took effect in September 2020 and has a permanent character.
- d) Amount and duration: The value of the social voucher was RON 500 (€102) for 2020 and is being re-evaluated on an annual basis. Eligibility is means-tested, and the eligibility thresholds are as follows:
  - for families with pre-school children, the threshold is equivalent to the eligibility threshold for the family support allowance (a means-tested social assistance benefit), currently RON 284 (€58) per family member per month<sup>46</sup>; and
  - for families with children in primary and lower secondary education, enrolled in public schools, the threshold is a per capita family income equal to 50% of the minimum gross salary, currently RON 1,115 (€229) per family member per month<sup>47</sup>.
- e) Targeted population: Children in pre-school facilities and primary/lower secondary education from low-income families. Families with pre-school children who are eligible for the means-tested family support benefit are also eligible for this benefit. Families with children enrolled in primary or lower secondary with a per capita family income equal to or lower than 50% of the minimum gross salary are eligible for the benefit. According to the justifying note of the MEF introducing the measure, the target population was evaluated by the ME, for the 2019/2020 school year, at 302,173 children<sup>48</sup>.
- f) Beneficiaries: In November schools were supposed to submit the lists of eligible children to the ME. No data are available regarding the distribution of the vouchers (whether these have been distributed and how many children benefited from them).
- g) Novelty: Children from disadvantaged families benefited, previously, from a package of school supplies. The current benefit allows parents to prioritise between clothing and school supplies and allocate the money as needed among these two categories of goods.

### **2.5.4 Acordarea de pachete de igienă personală și alimentare persoanelor defavorizate (Distribution of personal hygiene and food packages to vulnerable people)**

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure, adopted within the framework of a broader EU programme – the operational programme for the support of disadvantaged

<sup>46</sup> The threshold corresponds to the threshold used to assign kindergarten tickets of 0.2 social reference index (RON 100) to low-income families, according to a law aimed at stimulating pre-school education. Initially the threshold corresponded to the threshold for the minimum income for a single person (Law 248/2015); the law was amended in 2020 (Law 49/2020) and replaced the threshold with that granting eligibility for the means-tested family support allowance.

<sup>47</sup> The threshold corresponds to the threshold used by the ME to identify eligibility for a programme running since 2001 (Law 126/2002) which distributes annually, at the beginning of the school year, school supplies to low-income families.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.bursa.ro/romania-are-302173-de-elevi-defavorizati-dar-guvernul-acorda-cate-500-de-lei-doar-pentru-260000-de-elevi-07423040>



people – stipulates the distribution of food/personal hygiene packages to disadvantaged people. Overall, the programme covers a number of fixed rounds of distribution. GEO 84/2020 specified the conditions and criteria for the allocation and distribution of packages during 2020. Six rounds of distribution of food packages and four rounds of personal hygiene packages will take place during 2020-2022. Priority is granted to people or families who are beneficiaries of, or eligible for, the GMI and/or family support allowance. A third group of eligible people/families are those in critical situations; the definition of critical situation lies entirely at the discretion of the local authorities.

- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: Personal hygiene packages will be delivered in four instalments and food packages in six instalments by the end of 2022. The first round of packages with hygiene products was distributed in January 2020, while the first round of food packages and the second round of hygiene packages were distributed during 15 June to 15 July 2020.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: People/families who are beneficiaries of, or eligible for, the GMI or the means-tested family support allowance are the target group for the measure. In addition, people/families in critical situations, to be assessed at the discretion of local authorities, can benefit from this measure after the first two categories have been covered (including those in isolation at home and in institutional quarantine). The MEF estimated there were 1,188,822 people eligible for the benefits<sup>49</sup>.
- f) Beneficiaries: In July 2020, the MEF announced that 75.5% of the hygiene packages in the second round (i.e. 897,421 recipients) and 34.6% of the first round of the food packages (i.e. 411,540 recipients) had been distributed. By the end of April 2021, the first two of the six rounds of food packages, and three out of the four rounds of hygiene product packages, had been distributed. 1,189,000 people received packages during these rounds (about 6% of the total population).
- g) Novelty: The measure is not new; the novelty consists in the increase in the number of beneficiaries and in the allocated funds. The programme that was previously in place had a smaller coverage and a less frequent of distribution of packages.

### **2.5.5 Prelungirea perioadei de acordare a indemnizației de creștere a copilului și a stimulentei de inserție și creșterea valorii stimulentei de inserție în anumite condiții (Extended duration of the child-rearing indemnity and insertion stimulus, and the increase in value of the insertion stimulus under certain circumstances)**

- a) Short description of the measure: Due to the restrictions imposed on economic activities during the state of emergency and periods of alert, many parents were forced to change their decision regarding their return to work. To accommodate this situation, and to protect employees who benefit from either a child-rearing leave/indemnity (with children aged up to 2) or of a subsequent insertion stimulus (granted to parents returning to work either before the child turns 2 or immediately after), the legislation has been amended<sup>50</sup> so as to ensure that: (i) parents who return, or are about to return, to work will benefit from the insertion stimulus in all circumstances determined by the COVID-19 pandemic; and (ii) parents who would have returned under normal circumstances but cannot due to economic restrictions can still benefit from the child-rearing indemnity. Thus, two important measures were adopted in March 2020 (GEO 30/2020), as follows.

<sup>49</sup> <https://mfe.gov.ro/banii-europeni-schimba-vieti-75-din-pachetele-de-igiena-destinate-persoanelor-defavorizate-au-fost-distribuite-in-mai-putin-de-o-luna>

<sup>50</sup> GEO 111/2010 (Law 132/2011), amended by GEO 30/2020, GEO 32/2020, GEO 70/2020. See also: <https://www.mmanpis.ro/anunt-prelungire-icc>.

- The eligibility for the insertion stimulus was extended to cover additional circumstances determined by the COVID-19 pandemic, as follows: (i) medical leave; (ii) paid free days for the supervision of children under 12 during school lockdowns; (iii) suspension of the IWC; and (iv) reduced working time.
- The duration of both benefits – the child-rearing indemnity and the insertion stimulus – has been extended until restrictions on economic activities are lifted.

In addition to these measures, in April 2021 a new amendment was passed, to stimulate the early return to work and to prevent the migrant workforce leaving the country (GEO 26/2021). The amendment stipulates an increase in the amount of insertion stimulus if the parent returns to work before the child turns 6 months (1 year for children with disabilities). The increased insertion stimulus will be granted until the child turns 3 (4 for children with disabilities).

Although the benefits – the child-rearing indemnity and the insertion stimulus – are considered social assistance benefits, they are conditional upon at least 12 months of formal income from work during the last two years before giving birth, and the child-rearing indemnity is proportional to this former income.

- b) Category: Conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure is temporary, and extends the duration of the benefits for the periods during which economic activity is affected due to restrictions imposed under states of alert/emergency. The amendments came into effect on 21 March 2020 and remained in place until 31 December 2020.
- d) Range, duration and conditionality: The level of the child-rearing indemnity is calculated as 85% of the average previous net income of the previous 12 months, but not less than 2.5 SRI, currently RON 1,250 (€256) per month, and not more than RON 8,500 (€1,744). The level of the reinsertion stimulus is RON 650 (€132) per month. The benefit was extended in order to cover all periods of restrictions on the economic sector where the beneficiary is employed; and the insertion benefit was, additionally, extended to cover all circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as medical leave, quarantines or school lockdowns.

For parents who return early to work (before the child reaches 6 months, or 1 year for children with disabilities) the insertion stimulus increases from RON 650 (€132) per month to RON 1,500 (€305).

- e) Targeted population: The measure targets parents with children under 3 (or 4 in the case of children with disabilities) who benefit from a child-rearing leave/indemnity or an insertion stimulus, who were, for at least 12 months during the last two years before the child's birth, in *formal employment*. The measure was expected to affect all current beneficiaries of child-rearing indemnity and insertion stimulus and those becoming eligible since March 2020. During January-March 2020, the average number of beneficiaries was 269,600, of which a third were beneficiaries of the insertion stimulus and two thirds of the child-rearing indemnity.
- f) Beneficiaries: Although it is not clear how many beneficiaries of either the child-rearing indemnity or the insertion stimulus have benefited from an extension, the total number of recipients (268,800 in 2020, of which a little over two thirds were recipients of the child-rearing indemnity) of both benefits did not increase, but on the contrary, fell slightly (by 0.6%); this reversed the upward trend in the number of overall beneficiaries since 2014. Recipients of the insertion stimulus fell by 3.7% while the number of beneficiaries of the child-rearing indemnity increased by 1%, reversing the tendency of the previous years when parents returned earlier to work than legally required. It is expected that the new measure, increasing the value of the insertion stimulus, will lead to an increase in the take-up of this benefit compared with the child-rearing indemnity.
- g) Novelty: The measure represents an amendment to an existing benefit. Under normal circumstances the law stipulates that parents who opt to return to work at least 60 days before the child turns 2 (3 for children with disabilities), benefit from more than

three months of insertion stimulus; the stimulus is granted until the child turns 3, or 4 in the case of a child with disabilities. Under the current arrangements, if the parent benefited from prolonged child-rearing leave (that is, after the child turns 21 months), they are still eligible for an insertion stimulus until the child turns 3 (or 4). The insertion stimulus for those who cannot re-enter the labour market due to restrictions is granted during the entire period of restrictions, even if the child turns 3 (or 4), but no later than 31 December 2020. The benefit level remains the same, and the expenditure corresponding to the additional months paid for the benefits is supported from the state budget, the same as the benefits.

## 2.6 Measures related to housing support

### 2.6.1 *Suspendarea ratelor la credite bancare ipotecare pentru o perioada de maximum 9 luni (Deferral of repayment of mortgages)*

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure established the right of debtors to postpone, for up to nine months, the instalments for the payment of mortgages (contracted before 30 March 2020), as part of a broader package of credits (GEO 37/2020, GEO 227/2020). Although in the case of postponement of personal needs credits the forgone interest was capitalised and subject to interest, for mortgages the forgone interest was to be repaid, over a period of 60 months, without interest. The benefit consisted of: (i) the deferral for up to nine months of the instalments for mortgages contracted before March 2020; and (ii) a state-subsidised rate on the interest accumulated during the deferral period for mortgages. The levels of the two benefits depended on how an applicant's income had been affected by restrictions and the size of the initial credits.
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The benefit could be requested by the debtor until 15 March 2021 and was a transitory measure.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: The measure was aimed at all those: (i) whose income had been directly or indirectly affected by the economic restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (a loss of at least 25% compared with the average income of the previous three months); (ii) who had not benefited from any legislative or non-legislative moratorium for more than nine months prior to 15 June 2020; (iii) who had no outstanding payments before applying for the benefit; and (iv) whose credits had not reached maturity.

The justifying note for the GEO 37/2020<sup>51</sup> shows that the size of the credits by individuals amounted, at the end of 2019, to RON 139.7 billion (€29 billion), 7.7% higher than at the end of 2018. Of this, RON 81.3 billion (€17 billion) was mortgages, 58.2% of the total amount of credits. The rate of non-performing credits fell in 2019 compared with 2018, reaching 3.8% in December 2019. Although the data are useful in approximating the size of expected expenditure, the possible number of recipients has not been mentioned. In May 2020, one month before the deadline for applying for the benefit, the Romanian Association of Banks announced that 303,000 individuals and 14,000 firms had requested the deferral of credit payments, with only half of these invoking the government measure, and the other half taking up offers made by the banks themselves<sup>52</sup>. The precise number of people holding mortgages has not been released in this context.

<sup>51</sup> <https://gov.ro/ro/quvernul/procesul-legislativ/note-de-fundamentare/nota-de-fundamentare-ouq-nr-37-30-03-2020&page=1>

<sup>52</sup> [https://www.bancherul.ro/stire.php?id\\_stire=19785&titlu=bancile-au-amanat-ratele-la-credite-pentru-200.000-de-persoane-fizice-si-firme,-in-baza-ouq-37-2020](https://www.bancherul.ro/stire.php?id_stire=19785&titlu=bancile-au-amanat-ratele-la-credite-pentru-200.000-de-persoane-fizice-si-firme,-in-baza-ouq-37-2020)

- f) Beneficiaries: According to the government, in mid-June 2020 (after the deadline for applications), 200,000 people and firms had requested deferrals based on GEO 37/2020. In reality, according to the prime minister, the number of people and firms applying was higher, and the overall size of the deferred payments amounted to RON 4.6 billion (€0.94 billion). The media<sup>53</sup> estimates the number of people and firms deferring payments at about 400,000 in June 2020, representing about 25% of all credit holders. The number of people with mortgages benefiting from the measure is unknown.
- g) Novelty: The measure represented a legislative novelty, and was based on the experience of the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, when many vulnerable families lost their homes due to a loss of income.

## 2.7 Leave for parents whose children are unable to attend school or a pre-school service by reason of COVID-19

### 2.7.1 *Zile libere plătite pentru părinții ocupați pentru supravegherea copiilor sub 12 ani pe perioada închiderii școlilor datorită COVID-19 (Free paid days for working parents for supervising children under 12 during periods when schools/kindergartens are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic)*

- a) Short description of the measure: Granting free paid days to parents whose children could not attend early education services or school due to restrictions, lockdowns or school closure was among the first measures to be adopted in March 2020, after the installation of the state of emergency (GEO 30/2020<sup>54</sup>). The measure granted the right to one of the parents to take free, partially paid, days from work to supervise children under 12 (under 26 in the case of children with disabilities) who attend online schooling or who cannot attend any form of daycare. The measure also applies to guardians of dependent people who do not benefit from a personal assistant and cannot attend day centres due to COVID-19 closures.
- b) Category: Conditional.
- c) Timing: The measure took effect in March 2020 and was extended until 30 June 2021.
- d) Range, duration, and conditionality: The daily payment was 75% of the current gross salary, but not higher than 75% of the average national gross salary (about RON 193 – €40 – per day). For employees the benefit was paid by the employer and reimbursed, on request, from the salary guarantee fund<sup>55</sup>. The reimbursement was made only for the net income of the employee; thus, social contributions had to be supported by employers.
- e) Targeted population: The measure applied to parents who were *employees* (all types of IWC holders), except for those parents working in the army, penitentiaries of the public health system or other strategic industries (such as energy and telecommunications), for which restrictions, due to the nature of their activity, applied. For these, the leave will be granted as a priority to the other parent, unless they are a single parent or both parents work in the same industry. In this latter situation, individual arrangements with the parents are made in order to accommodate the situation (for example, medical staff are granted an additional wage benefit, in order to make alternative arrangements). In addition, the measure does not apply to parents hired as personal assistants to their children with severe disabilities, to parents who are on leave or those whose IWCs are currently suspended. *The measure does not cover self-employed parents.*

<sup>53</sup> Idem.

<sup>54</sup> Adopted by Law 19/2020 and amended by GEO 147/2020 (August 2020), GEO 182/2020 (October 2020) and GEO 198/2020 (November 2020), GEO 220/2020 (December 2020, Article III).

<sup>55</sup> A fund constituted from the work insurance contribution paid by employers (Law 200/2006).

- f) Beneficiaries: Although the data do not provide any information regarding the average number of days for which employees benefited from the measure, some data regarding the number of monthly beneficiaries have been released by the National Public Pension House, starting with September 2020. Although the number of beneficiaries in September, at the start of the autumn school term, was about 533, the number then increased and peaked during November-December, reaching a maximum of 16,000 parents benefiting from the measure. The numbers started to fall again, as schools opened – but only briefly – in January. Overall, the number of beneficiaries was low, representing less than 1% of Romanian employees.
- g) Novelty: The measure was new, and amended the legislation stipulating the normal usage of the salary guarantee fund, in order to allow for reimbursements for the indemnities paid by employers. However, benefits for self-employed people were not being paid from this fund but supported from the state budget. As a rule, the laws regulating the use of the unemployment fund and salary guarantee fund have been amended only to accommodate employees, while the protection of self-employed people has been supported from the state budget.

## **2.8 Other important temporary social protection/inclusion measures adopted in the context of the pandemic, which do not fall in any of the categories listed in the previous sections**

Although the government did not take many measures to protect vulnerable segments of the population, besides employed people, one of the first measures taken in March 2020 referred to the administrative procedures granting access to social assistance benefits.

- a) Short description of the measure: The measure was aimed at maintaining an adequate level of access by the (vulnerable) population to social benefits. The measure expanded the way documents and applications could be submitted electronically and extended the validity of certain legal/official documents (GEO 30/2020, Articles III-IV).
- b) Category: Neither flat nor conditional benefit.
- c) Timing: The measure took effect in March 2020, when the state of emergency was decreed. The greater flexibility of administrative procedures for claiming benefits was meant as a temporary measure, but simpler administrative procedures might prove to be a sustainable improvement even after the lifting of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- d) Amount and duration/range, duration and conditionality: Not applicable.
- e) Targeted population: All beneficiaries of social assistance benefits.
- f) Beneficiaries: It is hard to estimate the precise number of beneficiaries, but these procedures ease access by the less advantaged and more vulnerable categories of beneficiaries.
- g) Novelty: The measure is a novelty, but a significant and necessary step towards digitalisation of public administration and access to benefits.

## **3 SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INCLUSION RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS: OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND POSSIBLE GAPS**

This third section briefly considers three aspects: the expected cost of the social protection and inclusion measures put in place by the country (Section 3.1), the impact of these measures on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies (Section 3.2), and the possible remaining gaps in the social protection system and in social inclusion policies (Section 3.3). It concludes with Section 3.4 on debates and recommendations.

### 3.1 Expected cost of social protection and inclusion measures

The costs of the measures addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania amounted, in 2020, to 4.45% of 2019 GDP (RON 46.3 billion: €9.5 billion). This accounted for 45% of Romania's deficit in 2020.

Almost half (47%) of these costs represented forgone revenues, while a little over 50% represented actual expenditure (see Table A1). Thus, in 2020, a sum equivalent to 2.1% of 2019 GDP (RON 21.7 billion – €4.5 billion) represented forgone revenues due to fiscal facilities and amnesty/support measures for enterprises and employees.

On the expenditure side, about 84% of the overall increase in public expenditure in 2020 compared with 2019 was triggered by the exceptional measures and support programmes aimed at coping with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (equivalent to about 2.36% of 2019 GDP)<sup>56</sup>. 1.45% of GDP was allocated to benefits supporting various vulnerable groups. During the first three months of 2021 the level of actual expenditure on exceptional measures addressing the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 remained relatively constant; Romania spent about 0.6% of 2019 GDP on expenditure related to COVID-19, representing about a quarter of the overall 2020 expenditure. Similarly, as in 2020, investment made up about 36% of this expenditure, with 64% directed towards social benefits and services.

*Financing sources of expenditure related to COVID-19.* While costs related to forgone revenue mostly affected the state budget and the social insurance funds (true for 2020, whereas in 2021 the impact of these measures decreased significantly), expenditure related to benefits addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic mostly *affected the UIF*. As a general rule, measures addressing unemployment and job protection are supported from the UIF and other work insurance related funds<sup>57</sup>. Only a small proportion of the expenditure was supported from the state budget<sup>58</sup>.

Expenditure from the state budget was associated with measures targeting either: (i) self-employed people or any other category of formally employed people besides employees; or (ii) social assistance measures aimed at assisting and protecting vulnerable categories. However, most of the social assistance measures put in place during 2020, with one exception (the increase in duration of the child-rearing indemnity and insertion stimulus), were extensions of ongoing European programmes which should have been in place before 2020, but which have been postponed due to low administrative capacity (including hot meals for low-income older and homeless people; educational vouchers for low-income children and food and personal hygiene packages for vulnerable/low-income people).

In addition to the UIF (and other related work insurance funds) and the state budget, the NSHIF took over a series of expenditure items associated with an increased, universal coverage for health services related to COVID-19 (treatment, assistance, monitoring, testing, vaccination).

Overall, the *structure of expenditure* and distribution of costs associated with measures related to COVID-19 and its effects, show significant support for employers and employees, with marginal support to self-employed people and a low level of assistance to vulnerable groups. More than half of the costs associated with measures aimed at coping with the effects of COVID-19, both forgone revenues and expenditure on benefits, were directed towards *employers and employees*.

In 2020, of all expenditure on vulnerable groups, that on employers and employees amounted to 1.45% of 2019 GDP (RON 15.1 billion – €3.1 billion); about two thirds of this expenditure targeted employees and employers only. Similarly, during the first three months of 2021, a significant part of the expenditure was directed towards employees

<sup>56</sup> <https://mfinante.gov.ro/domenii/bugetul-de-stat/informatii-executie-bugetara>

<sup>57</sup> The fund for professional diseases and work-related accidents, the fund for sickness payments, the salary guarantee fund.

<sup>58</sup> Mostly those directed towards vulnerable segments and employed non-employees.

working with COVID-19 patients, and towards employees affected by economic restrictions (see Table A2).

Thus, in 2020, a sum equivalent to 0.41% of 2019 GDP (RON 4.25 billion – €871.8 million) was spent on indemnities for employees with suspended IWCs during the state of emergency, and 0.21% of 2019 GDP (RON 2.2 billion – €447.4 million) was paid in the form of wage subsidies for those employees whose IWCs had previously been suspended (see Table A2). During the first three months of 2021, the number of employees with suspended IWCs fell significantly, as did the expenditure on this category of employees (measures 2.2 and 2.3 in Table A2). However, the number of employees benefiting from reduced working time indemnities increased significantly in 2021 compared with 2020 (measure 2.4). This measure has been a significant support for self-employed people and workers with civil conventions: 75% of the expenditure under this measure was directed towards self-employed people in 2020, and 65% during the first three months of 2021.

Overall in 2020 and 2021, expenditure on all measures targeting *only employees (all types of work contracts) and employers*, excluding sickness payments, amounted to RON 8.3 billion (€1.7 billion) or 0.8% of 2019 GDP, and was distributed as follows: (i) wage subsidies for vulnerable groups (i.e. measures 2.1, 2.3 and 2.5) – RON 2.25 billion (€458 million), of which 98% was for employee retention and only 2% for new hires; (ii) support for teleworking for employers – RON 77 million (€15.7 million); (iii) risk stimulus and other wage benefits for those working in social assistance and medical facilities with COVID-19 patients – RON 1.1 billion (€228.5 million); (iv) indemnities for temporarily suspended IWCs (measure 2.2) – RON 4.6 billion (€939.3 million); (v) indemnities for reduced working time (measure 2.4) – RON 134.8 million (€27.4 million); and (vi) free paid days for employees whose children under 12 are subject to online schooling due to restrictions (measure 7.1) – RON 118.7 million (€24.1 million). If we add up the excess sickness payments compared with 2019, respectively with the beginning of 2020<sup>59</sup> of RON 1.35 billion (€ 0.27 billion), it reaches 0.9% of 2019 GDP. Compared with these, the measures addressing self-employed people and those in temporary, non-contractual work were limited to indemnities for suspended work due to economic restrictions (measures 2.2 and 2.4) and they amounted, for both 2020 and the first three months of 2021, to RON 1.35 billion (€277 million), or 0.13% of 2019 GDP. Thus, without considering sickness payments, which go almost entirely to employees with IWCs, the expenditure targeting employees was more than six times higher than that targeting self-employed people and other non-contractual workers.

The overall level of this expenditure for all other vulnerable groups, besides employees, was rather low in both absolute and relative terms; it reflects the weak protection provided to all segments other than employers and employees – in terms of the number of new measures, the groups targeted and the impact of the measures adopted. The high expenditure on employees, mostly supported from the UIF, was reflected in the more than five times higher expenditure of the UIF during 2020 compared with 2019<sup>60</sup>, with over 80%<sup>61</sup> of this directed towards exceptional job-protection measures. The amount left for other current programmes and exceptional measures targeting unemployed people was comparable with, or even less than, the amount spent during 2019.

Finally, expenditure on all benefits targeting self-employed people (see also Table A2) during the pandemic (until 31 March 2021) was limited to the equivalent of 0.13% of 2019 GDP. Thus, all other measures – social assistance programmes, unemployment benefits and health-related expenditure (less investment) – accounted for 0.8% of GDP. Social assistance expenditure especially designed to address the effects of COVID-19 was rather

<sup>59</sup> This expenditure went almost entirely towards employees, as less than 0.7% of all employed people on medical leave were not employees in 2020 (according to the MLSP statistical bulletin).

<sup>60</sup> In 2019 there were no subventions to the UIF (with a surplus at the end of 2019). In 2020 the subsidies represented 41% of the total revenues and, on top of this, the budget had an annual deficit of 17.4% compared with its revenues. The total expenditure on social assistance from the UIF in 2020 was RON 7.5 billion (€1.5 billion), compared with only RON 591.3 million (€121.3 million) in 2019 (according to the general consolidated budget execution provided by the Ministry of Finance).

<sup>61</sup> A conservative figure, as it takes into account only available data on actual expenditure and not estimates.

insignificant, as most of the programmes – although implementation started in 2020 – were part of broader European programmes addressing vulnerable groups and had already been approved prior to the pandemic.

### **3.2 Impact on the social protection system and on social inclusion policies**

Of all measures put in place to address the effects of COVID-19, two types of measure will probably have a significant impact on future institutional arrangements and policies: (i) those related to the reorganisation of work, and especially arrangements accommodating telework and remote medical services (i.e. teleconsultations, medical hotlines); and (ii) all those measures involving identification of needs, prioritisation and co-ordination of emergency interventions in exceptional situations.

Telework arrangements proved beneficial, to a certain extent, to both employers (saving time and money) and employees (allowing more flexibility in catering for their personal responsibilities), thus opening a path to a diversified approach to employment. In addition, the development of the know-how, the acquisition of the necessary technologies and the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of medical digital-assisted consultations might prove an important asset of the healthcare system in reducing inequalities of access to, and to improving the coverage of, primary healthcare services.

The second category of measures which have a good chance of becoming permanent, the administrative measures, significantly improved the administrative capacity of local and central authorities to manage social programmes and benefits (due to simplified procedures, reduced volume of required documentation, increased digitalisation of services) and the capacity of different sectors to react to emergencies. Emergency responses in healthcare, quick assessment of needs and prioritisation of interventions in social and medical fields became valuable regulative experiences which will definitely affect the shape of social assistance and inclusion policies.

Job-retention measures had a significant impact on the income stability and unemployment of the employed, yet their focus was more on employers and employees, and only marginally on all other categories of non-employees, such as self-employed people and other occasional workers. These latter categories account for about 25% of all employed people; of all these (around 1.5 million people), only less than 10% are captured by the social insurance system. Being enrolled in the social insurance system grants these formal “visibility” and access to some benefits. Yet even these formally “employed non-employees” do not have, under normal circumstances, significant access to unemployment-related benefits. Thus, expenditure on benefits for these categories has been: (i) extremely low (about 0.13% of GDP, as shown above); and (ii) supported from the state budget, due to lack of coverage by work insurance. Finally, Romania performed well in protecting its employees, and during 2020 not only did registered unemployment not explode<sup>62</sup> but the national average salary increased.

The same does not hold true for the protection of other vulnerable groups, such as low-income families, children from disadvantaged households, long-term unemployed people and informally employed people (most of whom work in agriculture). A few measures addressing these categories have been adopted, among which are the following.

- Acquisition of internet-connected tablets for children in disadvantaged households without access to a learning device; the process was slow and the effectiveness of the programme unsatisfactory.
- The deferral of monthly instalments for mortgages by up to nine months, and the repayment of the forgone interest over a period of 60 months without interest. The measure raised a series of implementation issues, and its effectiveness – for

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<sup>62</sup> Registered unemployment differs from the unemployment as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO), and shown in Section 1.2. The registered unemployment rate fell during the state of emergency and increased slowly starting in May 2020; overall, in December 2020, the unemployment rate was 3.38%, 13% higher compared with January 2020 (MLSP, statistical data).



mortgage holders – cannot be assessed, due to lack of data. In April 2020, a proposed law passed through both the Deputy Chamber and the Senate, introducing some measures regarding utility payments for both individuals and firms. The proposal was meant to be supported through zero-interest credits for utility providers for a period of 18 months. The law was aimed at individual consumers and firms. But the law has been deemed unconstitutional by the constitutional court due to procedural issues.

- The extension of child-rearing benefits and of the insertion stimulus for those parents with children under 2 (or 3); the benefit is still related to formal employment, although it is considered a social assistance benefit. In April 2021 the insertion stimulus increased beyond the value of the minimum child-rearing indemnity, to encourage young parents to re-enter the labour market as soon as possible and to prevent the migrant workforce from leaving Romania.
- The extension of the duration of the unemployment benefit, although welcomed, affected a small proportion of unemployed people, leaving out all the long-term unemployed. Even so, its effectiveness was rather low, as data show that the number of beneficiaries of unemployment benefits increased to only a third of all unemployed people in December 2020 (from a mere 23% in January 2020). The level of the benefit is low, and has not been updated since 2008.
- Finally, three EU programmes that should have already been in place in 2020 have been implemented and adjusted to address vulnerable groups during the pandemic. These refer to hot meal tickets for low-income older people and homeless people, food and hygiene products packages for low-income households and, finally, educational tickets for pre-school children and children in primary and lower secondary education.

Finally, most of these measures are temporary and incidental, and do not provide significant support for disadvantaged households to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

In fact, many of the measures adopted during 2020: (i) slowed down the increases in social benefits which were expected to happen in accordance with adopted legislation; and (ii) postponed a series of legislative amendments from taking effect (such as the minimum insertion income, replacing and integrating all means-tested benefits currently in place). This was the case with: (i) educational tickets for after-school provision granted by request to parents with pre-school or primary school children, which have been reduced from 0.8 SRI per month (RON 400 – €82) to 0.4 for the school years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022; (ii) the child allowance, which was to be doubled in value, by law, in January 2020 – the government contested the law and decided to increase the amount gradually over the next two years; (iii) the proposal to increase the SRI, after a freeze of more than 12 years, by 140% by 2023 – this has been sent back by the president to parliament for re-examination due to the high budgetary impact; and (iv) the increase in pensions adopted by law – this has been postponed and replaced with a gradual increase. Thus, many of the increases in benefits that would have otherwise started in 2020 have been put on hold or slowed down, further eroding the effectiveness of some of them, especially of the social assistance and unemployment benefits to address vulnerability and poverty. In addition, in December 2020 a series of additional social benefits were deferred: (i) the social educational tickets for pre-schoolers (until December 2021); (ii) vacation vouchers (reduced in 2021, cut off starting 2022); and (iii) implementation of the Law 196/2016 regarding the minimum insertion income (deferred until April 2022). Moreover, pension benefits have not been updated with inflation in 2021.

The healthcare system responded well to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as the state of emergency, adopted early, in March 2020, delayed a significant spread of SARS-CoV-2 in the beginning. The healthcare system put in place an effective emergency response mechanism and the government provided a similarly effective information campaign. In particular, the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 has been one of the most successful across Europe. Problems of access to regular, current healthcare services have been addressed; testing, treatment and prevention of COVID-19 has been universalised; and institutional arrangements were made to increase access to primary

healthcare. But these measures could not overcome the many structural issues with which the health system is confronted, among which are an obsolete infrastructure and systematic under-investment.

### 3.3 Remaining gaps in the social protection system and social inclusion policies

The crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, and amplified: (i) some of the most significant structural inequalities in access to education and healthcare; (ii) the disastrous infrastructure of the healthcare system; and (iii) the inability of the social protection system to address two important, mostly overlapping, vulnerable segments: low-income families and people employed without a formal employment status (including occasional workers and self-employed people in subsistence agriculture).

**Gaps in education.** The increasing gaps in educational attainment and outcomes over the last 10 years became even more obvious during the lockdown and school closures. According to a report regarding the impact of online education (Save the Children Romania, 2020) the risks associated with the continuation of online schooling in September 2020 were extremely high, as during the March-April lockdown 40% of children in rural areas had no access whatsoever to online schooling and about a third of disadvantaged villages had no proper access to an internet signal. "Overall, 1 in 2 children attends school using a phone, and 28% of the students and 43% of the teachers have no resources for online schooling. Thus, 3 out of 20 children quit school, while 41% of the Romanian students are already functionally illiterate." However, in September, 10% of all schools started with online learning and an additional 25% with a mixed learning system. In November, virtually all schools closed.

No, or too little, support was offered to teachers in regard to alternative ways to reach out to students without proper access and how to use online platforms to organise and deliver their classes. In January 2021 the ME estimated that about 270,000 children were still without access to online education. The number of children with limited access to an internet-connected device proved to be even larger than the initial estimates of the government in June 2020. The situation threatens to become critical, as many children became even more vulnerable and exposed to dropping out.

**Gaps in access to healthcare services.** One of the first problems the population has been confronted with during the state of emergency (March-May 2020), according to a series of four rapid assessments undertaken by UNICEF in Romania during March-April 2020 (UNICEF Romania, 2020), was the disruption and weakening of preventive healthcare services (including, but not limited to, current vaccination plans) and the limited access to specialists and treatments (including disruption in drug provision) for people with chronic illnesses. This is also partly reflected in the fact that Romania had the highest excess mortality rate for older people. Some of these problems have been addressed adequately through the measures adopted in the health sector: digitally assisted remote consultations, drug export bans and the reorganisation of access to ambulatory and hospital care. But others are still unaddressed and tend to increase access inequalities.

**Gaps in protection among employed people.** In Romania the gap between employees and self-employed people<sup>63</sup> was significant even before the onset of the pandemic and had increased over the previous 10 years. In 2019, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for employed people (except employees) was 55.8% compared with only 4.9% among employees. During 2020, employees benefited from more comprehensive protection compared with self-employed people, other professional groups and unskilled/occasional workers. In

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<sup>63</sup> Based on survey data (AMIGO survey, National Institute for Statistics, Tempo-online database, AMG1102) in March 2020, in Romania, 1,313,311 people were self-employed and an additional 582,000 were contributing family members (unpaid workers). The number of non-employees who are formally insured through the social insurance system (thus formally declaring their income and paying taxes) was, in March 2020, 185,000. Of these only about 135,000 have work insurance paid for by an employer for which they work without an IWC. Probably some additional thousands are enrolled in special insurance systems (lawyers, artists etc.). Overall, about 14% of non-employees in paid work were insured in March 2020.

addition to this, the coverage of benefits/measures among these employed non-employees has been extremely low (less than 10% of these were entitled to any benefits). The proportion of those working informally and not captured by any social insurance system is high and was not the subject of any measure during 2020.

In addition, the current measures largely ignored, as shown above, the most vulnerable segments of the population. This will have a significant impact on the polarisation in welfare between the rural and urban populations, with the highest and most disastrous effect on children. The fact that minimum-income schemes have not been updated since 2014 and no systematic support has been provided to low-income households and long-term unemployed people amplifies the gaps and increases exposure to poverty, especially among children in rural areas and marginalised communities.

### **3.4 Debates and recommendations**

One of the most debated problems was related to increased inequalities in access to education. The big gaps between rural and urban schools, between children from higher-income families and children from low-income families, and between children with disabilities or special educational needs and all other children, became obvious and led to public outrage at the inability of the government to handle the situation in a timely manner while shifting to a totally unprepared online educational system.

On top of this, despite the fact that the government was able to mobilise reasonable resources to prevent and manage the burden on the healthcare system, three successive fires started in hospitals (in COVID-19 sections and intensive-therapy sections), triggering further outrage. Although Romania did relatively well in organising information and support campaigns, and adapted rather quickly to the evolving situation, the pressure on the healthcare system revealed all its structural shortcomings and the low administrative capacity to manage and mobilise resources in the long run.

The effects of the structural deficiencies of the social protection system (leaving without protection significant segments of the employed workforce), and of the lack of sustained attention and support to low-income categories, will become visible in the coming years.

In the short run, increased and more systematic support for children, especially those living in vulnerable families and low-income families, is necessary. In fact, instead of withdrawing benefits, these should be increased and diversified. In the medium run, attention needs to shift to how to give a significant segment of the employed workforce formal status, and how to transform the social insurance system into a more inclusive protection mechanism.

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## Annex

**Table A1: Estimated general costs of measures addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021**

	2020		First quarter 2021	
	RON m (€m)	% 2019 GDP	RON m (€m)	% 2019 GDP
<b>Overall costs generated by the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, of which:</b>	<b>46,310</b> <b>(9,500)</b>	<b>4.45</b>		
<b>On the revenue side (forgone revenues):</b>	<b>21,740</b> <b>(4,459.6)</b>	<b>2.1</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unfavourable evolution of budgetary tax and contribution collection (March-December 2020)</li> <li>Deferral of fiscal debt payments / fiscal amnesty / rescheduled repayments of fiscal debts for individuals and firms</li> </ul>	18,120 (3,718.9)	1.74		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>VAT reimbursement for cash flow support in the private sector</li> </ul>	2,720 (558)	0.26		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bonifications for timely payments of income/profit tax</li> </ul>	900 (184.6)	0.09		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>On the expenditure side:</b></li> </ul>	<b>24,570</b> <b>(5,040.2)</b>	<b>2.36</b>	<b>6,060</b> <b>(1,231)</b>	0.58
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional increase in investment (mainly healthcare system, but not only)</li> </ul>	9,500 (1,948.8)	0.91	2,210 (449)	0.21
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expenditure on transitory benefits established to increase support to vulnerable population groups and employees and to provide job protection</li> </ul>	15,070 (3,091.4)	1.45	3,850 (782)	0.37
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b><u>Additional support, such as state guarantees</u></b></li> </ul>	<b>12,480</b> <b>(2,561.9)</b>	<b>1.2</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State guarantee for credits of SMEs and other firms with a turnover higher than RON 20 million</li> </ul>	12,480 (2,561.9)	1.2		

Note: GDP for 2019 has been estimated at RON 1,041 billion.

Source: Ministry of Finance note on the execution of the general consolidated budget – December 2020, March 2021: <https://mfinante.gov.ro/en/domenii/bugetul-de-stat/informatii-executie-bugetara>.

<b>Table A2: Estimated/actual expenditure on measures addressing the effects of COVID-19 pandemic</b>					
	<b>2020</b>		<b>January-March 2021</b>		
	<b>Expenditure (RON m / €m)</b>	<b>% 2019 GDP</b>	<b>Expenditure (RON m / €m)</b>	<b>% 2019 GDP</b>	<b>Source of funding</b>
<b>1 Unemployment</b>					
1.1 Extension of unemployment benefit	No estimated or actual expenditure related to the extension is available. All expenditure on unemployment benefits: <b>513.2 (104)</b> .	<b>0.05</b>	No estimated or actual expenditure related to the extension is available. All expenditure on unemployment benefits: <b>168.6 (34)</b> .	<b>0.016</b>	UIF
<b>2 Job protection</b>					
2.1 Work subsidies of 50% of the gross salary for additional vulnerable groups (GEO 92/2020, Article III, 1+2)	Granted to the employer, for new hires from people aged 50 and over made unemployed by COVID-19, or young people aged 16-29: <b>6.95 (1.4)</b>	<b>0.00006</b>	Granted to the employer, for new hires from people aged 50 and over made unemployed by COVID-19 or young people aged 16-29: <b>15.76 (3.2)</b>	<b>0.0015</b>	UIF
2.2. Indemnities for employed people whose work contracts were temporary suspended (GEO 30/2020)	For employees (public and private firms): <b>4,250 (871.8)</b> .  For professionals and a few other categories of self-employed people: <b>922.13 (189.1)</b> .	<b>0.41</b>  <b>0.09</b>	For employees (public and private firms): <b>332.18 (67.5)</b> . For professionals and a few other categories of self-employed people: <b>144 (29.3)</b> .	<b>0.032</b>  <b>0.014</b>	UIF  State budget
2.3 Wage subsidies of 41.5% of the gross salary for private sector employees whose activity has been formally suspended due to restrictions (GEO 92/2020, Article I)	Employees only, plus workers with civil conventions – all in private sector only: <b>2,203 (447.4)</b>	<b>0.21</b>	Employees only, plus workers with civil conventions – all in private sector only: <b>1.7 (0.35)</b>	<b>0.0001</b>	UIF
2.4 Indemnities for reduced working time (G132/2020, Articles I and III)	For employees, paid by employers and reimbursed from the UIF: <b>45.2 (9.2)</b> .  For self-employed people, professionals and those with work conventions: <b>132.45 (26.9)</b> .	<b>0.0043</b>  <b>0.013</b>	For employees, paid by employers and reimbursed from the UIF: <b>89.643 (18.2)</b> .  For self-employed people, professionals and those with work conventions: <b>155.9 (31.7)</b> .	<b>0.0086</b>  <b>0.015</b>	UIF  State budget
2.5 Wage subsidies, of 41.5% of the gross income, for employees in private firms with short-term contracts (GEO 132/2020, Article V)	Granted to private sector employers, for new hires with short-term contracts: <b>15.6 (3.2)</b>	<b>0.0015</b>	Granted to employers in private sector, for new hires with short-term contracts: <b>12.43 (2.5)</b>	<b>0.0012</b>	UIF

2.6 Fiscal facilities for employees and employers	Covering all fiscal measures: <b>21,740 (4,459.6)</b>	<b>2.1</b>			State budget and social insurance budget
2.7 Risk stimulus for employees in social work, community social assistance and the medical field whose work directly exposes them to a higher risk, during the state of emergency/alert	For both categories covered, social/community workers and medical staff: <b>323.47 (66.4)</b>	<b>0.03</b>	Risk stimulus: <b>52.1 (10.6)</b> . Additional wage related benefits for those working with COVID-19 patients <b>797.9 (162.1)</b> .	<b>0.076</b>	State budget  NSHIF
Support for telework (GEO 132/2020, Article 6)	A flat benefit granted to employers for each employee in telework: <b>76.6 (15.6)</b>		A flat benefit granted to employers for each employee in telework: <b>0.353 (0.072)</b>		UIF
<b>3 Sickness and sick pay</b>					
3.1 Indemnity for medical leave for temporary work incapacity	The total amount paid during 2020 for medical leave paid from the work insurance fund to the NSHIF was 3,600, but the amount covers all medical leave. The amount triggered by COVID-19 can be approximated by the difference in expenditure between 2020 and 2019: <b>854 (175.2)</b> .	<b>0.08</b>	Social insurance indemnities for medical leave: 900.1, <b>498.1 (101.2)</b> more than during the same period in 2020 (i.e. 401.7 during January-March 2020, when the amount was double that for the same period in 2019)	<b>0.05</b>	NSHIF, by transfers made from work insurance contributions
<b>4 Health insurance</b>					
4.1 Universalisation of access to health services related to COVID-19	<i>Data on expenditure by measure are not available.</i>  <i>State budget: 561.2 (115.1) for emergency equipment and other equipment for preventing transmission of COVID-19.</i>		State budget: <b>99.13 (20.1)</b> for emergency equipment and other equipment for preventing transmission of COVID-19		NSHIF, state budget from EU programmes/funds
4.2 Increased support for people in institutional care	<i>NSHIF: additional expenditure from the NSHIF in 2020 compared with 2019: 3,384.1 (694.2).</i>				
4.3 Support for vulnerable people in isolation at home or in institutionalised quarantine	<i>Additional expenditure on investment in 2020 compared with those expected through the effect of law: 9,500 (1,948.8).</i>				
4.4 Increasing access to drugs and medical appliances addressing the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and other chronic disease					

4.5 Simplifying access to primary and out-patient medical services and limiting access to hospitals for medical emergencies and specific conditions					
<b>5 Social assistance</b>					
5.1 School from home	<i>Estimate based on budgetary allocation: <b>731.2 (150)</b></i>	<b>0.07</b>			State budget and non-refundable EU funds (EFDP)
5.2 National support scheme for older and homeless people: electronic vouchers for hot meals	<i>Estimate based on overall budgetary allocation and recipients covered in 2020: <b>208.8 (42.8)</b></i>	<b>0.02</b>	153.8 (31.2)	0.015	State budget and non-refundable EU funds (EFDP)
5.3 National educational support scheme for the most vulnerable children: social vouchers for educational support from non-refundable funds	<i>Based on the number of eligible children in 2019 and the budgetary allocation: <b>130 (26.7)</b></i>  <b>No expenditure in 2020</b>	<b>0.01</b>	No expenditure January- April 2021		State budget and non-refundable EU funds (EFDP)
5.4 Food and hygiene packages	<i>Food packages: 341.25 (68.25)</i> <i>Hygiene packages: 64 (12.8)</i> <b>Total: 405.25 (81.05)</b>	<b>0.038</b>	<i>Food packages: 341.25 (68.25)</i> <i>Hygiene packages: 64 (12.8)</i> <b>Total: 405.25 (81.05)</b>	<b>0.038</b>	Non-refundable EU funds (EFDP)
5.5 Extended duration of child-rearing indemnity and insertion stimulus	No estimates or actual expenditure covering the extension stipulated by the new measures; expenditure in 2020 increased at a slower rate than during previous years; overall costs are high (in 2020, 0.52% of GDP), budgetary impact will be significant compared with other measures				State budget
<b>6 Housing</b>					
6.1 Deferral of the payments for credits for personal needs or mortgages	-				State guarantee
<b>7 Leave for parents</b>					
7.1 Paid free days for parents to supervise children due to	93.5 (19)	<b>0.1%</b>	25.2 (5.1)		Salary guarantees fund and work



school lockdowns (OUG 30/2020)					insurance fund
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*Note: 2019 GDP is used to calculate the budgetary impact of the expenditure on COVID-19-related measures. Information in italics is provisional.*

*Source: Ministry of Finance (budgetary execution for 2020/2021), MLSP (statistical bulletin, data published on the website of the National Payment Agency), the budgetary execution of the UIF (<https://www.anofm.ro/index.html?agentie=ANOFM&categ=2&subcateg=3&page=0>), and various legislative regulations and the arguments supporting these.*

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