



## EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

# Making access to social protection for workers and the self-employed more transparent through information and simplification

Romania

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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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**European Social Policy Network (ESPN)**

**ESPN Thematic Report on  
Making access to social  
protection for workers and the  
self-employed more transparent  
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simplification**

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The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

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The ESPN is managed by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and APPLICA, together with the European Social Observatory (OSE).

For more information on the ESPN, see: <http://ec.europa.eusocialmain.jsp?catId=1135&langId=en>

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## Summary

The purpose of this report is to identify and analyse policies put in place by the country to improve transparency in access to social protection, considering both access to information and simplification of access. The report focuses on the six social protection branches covered in the 2019 Council Recommendation on Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (hereafter “2019 Council Recommendation”) and covers policies and measures implemented between January 2017 and May 2022.

Digitalisation and the increased institutional capacity of public institutions charged with managing social protection benefits have been flagged by the governments during the last five years and became one of the main objectives of the Romanian Recovery and Resilience Plan, among many other strategic documents. Further, national strategic documents emphasise the need to increase access to social protection benefits for all employed people, in both standard and non-standard work forms. Thus, the provision of general and personalised information, in the context of the targets set for increasing the interoperability, accountability and transparency of information, improved significantly during this last period. The COVID-19 pandemic further precipitated the process of digitalisation of information and simplified the relationship between citizens and public institutions charged with managing social benefits and programmes.

General and personalised information is provided in person, on-site at public institutions managing social benefits, online, and through integrated platforms. Information and awareness-raising campaigns are less systematic; although there are no evaluations on their effectiveness, the scarce data available on their impact show low effectiveness unless campaigns are carried out through different service-providers (schools, family physicians etc.). Employers and trade unions are also important sources of information for employees.

However, the provision of general and personalised information is uneven across social sectors, and is sometimes hard to find, retrieve, and understand, while most online platforms are not yet fully functional. This becomes even more important, as the digital competencies of both the overall population and of public institutions, and the degree of integration of digital technologies in Romania were, in 2021, the lowest across Europe. Further, information channels are more diversified for employees than for the self-employed, as the former receive information not only through public institutions but also through employers and trade unions. This is extremely important as it negatively affects the already low access of self-employed and non-standard workers to social benefits. Lastly, the increasing amount of digital noise (distorted or incorrect information and informational debris) also impairs access to information on social benefits.

Simplification of application processes regarding all six categories of benefits revolves around establishing a system which allows for digital submission/issuing of documents and forms and for online applications for benefits. In addition, the National Public Pension House and the National Health Insurance House established, as part of their annual action plans, objectives regarding: (a) reducing the processing time for applications and optimising the provision of benefits through electronic issuing of documents, and interoperability of information; and (b) improved communication between public institutions.

Digital submission of documents and applications is supported through the improvement of integrated information systems in both the social security sector (covering pensions, work-related medical benefits, invalidity and unemployment) and the healthcare sector, and through consolidating platforms which allow access by citizens to personalised information. The measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly contributed to the consolidation of these efforts.

Healthcare (including the management of sickness benefits) and the social insurance pension system are the sectors which during the last five years did the most to develop their capacity to increase access to general and personalised information to insured people,

and which achieved some progress in simplifying the access to social benefits. Reforms are still ongoing.

## **1 Current policies and practices to ensure information on, and to simplify access to, social protection for workers and the self-employed**

This section presents the policies and practices in place that ensure the provision of information on various social insurance benefits to workers and the self-employed. The section will also describe those practices that are aimed at, or result in, the simplification of access to social benefits.

### **1.1 Policies and practices to ensure access to information on social protection rights, entitlements and obligations**

The following sub-section will analyse and evaluate the practices in place that allow workers and the self-employed to access information on various social insurance benefits, either by awareness-raising campaigns or by providing generalised and personalised information in person and online.

#### **1.1.1 Policies and practices to ensure access to general and personalised information**

*Digital access to general information* increased during the last five years, although rather unevenly. Although most important information regarding benefits and services, eligibility conditions and application procedures is available online, this is not always easy to identify, access and retrieve. First, there is no general template for information provision across public institutions; thus, the logic behind the way information is structured and provided is not always obvious or clear. Second, the digital competencies of both the overall population and public institutions, and the degree of integration of digital technologies were, in 2021, the lowest across Europe<sup>1</sup>.

Currently, *online accessible personalised information* regarding social protection rights, entitlements and benefits is limited to: (a) information regarding fiscal obligations, through Ghiseul.ro<sup>2</sup> and the portal of the National Agency for Fiscal Administration (ANAF<sup>3</sup>); (b) health insurance status, through the digital health insurance platform (*Platforma Informatică a Asigurărilor de Sănătate – PIAS*<sup>4</sup>); and (c) social insurance pension entitlements, at cnp.ro through an online account<sup>5</sup>. However, accessing this information might be a challenge for many people, as the procedure to open an account – in the case of the ANAF and the National Public Pension House (NPPH) – requires an in-person appointment and holographic signature. Although the digital competencies of public institutions involved in managing social protection programmes increased significantly during the last five years (i.e. all institutions went online to a certain extent; some of them improved their websites, others made information accessible to people with disabilities, while others allowed online applications for benefits and the submission of documents<sup>6</sup>),

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<sup>1</sup> According to the [Digital Economy and Society Index country profile for 2021: Romania](#), the country has the lowest value along three of the four dimensions of the index: human capital, integration of digital technology and digital public services.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ghiseul.ro/ghiseul/public/>; since January 2022, the site has had 1.5 million active users and 2.4 million transactions.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.anaf.ro/anaf/internet/ANAF/servicii\\_online/reg\\_AMEF](https://www.anaf.ro/anaf/internet/ANAF/servicii_online/reg_AMEF)

<sup>4</sup> <http://siui.casan.ro:82/Asigurati/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnp.ro/web/guest/autenticare>

<sup>6</sup> For example, the NPPH allows for online the application/submission of documents and provides detailed information on all benefits. The National Payment and Social Inspection Agency (ANPIS) provides detailed

the interactions between citizens and public institutions continued to take place in physical settings rather than online.

The websites of public institutions are the main *online information source* (national and county public pension houses<sup>7</sup>, national and county employment agencies<sup>8</sup>, the National Institute for Medical Expertise and Recovery of Work Capacity<sup>9</sup>, and the national and county health insurance houses<sup>10</sup>). Online information regarding rights and entitlements is also available on the websites of trade unions, associations of entrepreneurs, and private firms providing consultancy on work legislation (e.g. Cartel Alfa<sup>11</sup>, startupcafe.ro<sup>12</sup>, and legislațiamuncii.ro<sup>13</sup>). In addition, an improved version of a digital single contact point (SCP)<sup>14</sup> has been in place since 2016 (GD 922/2010, amended by GEO 41/2016). The SCP serves as a digital one-stop-shop for comprehensive information related to almost all social benefits and updated information from local/county agencies regarding the timing and specific circumstances for the provision of benefits. The SCP is part of the e-governance system, implemented within the European programme "Platform for integrating e-governance services in SEN-PISEG".

*Responsibilities to provide information in a simple and intelligible manner* are stipulated in various legal frameworks, starting with the law regarding free access to public information (law no 544/2001), the law on the SCP (GD 966/2010, GEO 41/2016) and the labour code (law no 53/2003), and ending with the primary and secondary legislation in the field of health, social security and social assistance, including national strategies in various fields.

Overall, during the last five years, the access to information increased, especially as a result of the implementation of EU projects aimed at enhancing the capacity of public institutions; the pressure put on public institutions during the pandemic to become digitally more active and present contributed as well. Both developments led to legislative amendments emphasising the obligation of public institutions to inform and address in a simplified manner those segments, in particular, that are most vulnerable in the labour market (people employed in non-standard work forms, people with disabilities, and workers with low levels of education).

However, there are no publicly available data on the take-up or number of users of these websites, with very few exceptions. For example, Ghiseul.ro, the website of the ANAF, is the only website that provides information on the number of active users, the number of transactions made through the website and the amounts collected by the state and local administration through online transactions. The NPPH provides the number of visualisations only for the news releases on its website<sup>15</sup>.

Calculation tools and simulators are mostly unavailable on public institutions' websites, and when available do not provide personalised information, but rather information based on the input of a few variables, as is the case with pension benefits. Platforms allowing for personalised interaction are still not fully functional, and thus do not yet provide customised simulators and benefit calculators. Most calculators and simulators are provided by non-governmental websites and private firms providing legal counselling and information (e.g. startupcafe.ro, as mentioned above).

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information regarding eligibility conditions and how to access benefits, along with monthly data on the number of beneficiaries.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cnpp.ro/activitati-cnpp>

<sup>8</sup> National Employment Agency – <https://www.anofm.ro/index.html?agentie=ANOFM&page=0>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.inemrcm.ro/despre-noi/activitati/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://cnas.ro/lista-si-accesul-la-informatii/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cartel-alfa.ro/#>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.startupcafe.ro>

<sup>13</sup> <https://legislațiamuncii.manager.ro/a/14407/indemnizatie-de-somaj-mod-de-calcul.html>

<sup>14</sup> Punctul de Contact Unic electronic, <https://edirect.e-guvernare.ro/SitePages/landingpage.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cnpp.ro/noutati>



Most institutions managing social benefits provide accessible information; however, this is a rather recent development and a World Bank study on the situation of people with disabilities (2020) showed that 71% of people without limitations accessed without difficulty the information provided by public institutions, whereas only 51% of those with some limitations (and only 30% of those with severe limitations) accessed information without difficulty. There was also, according to the World Bank survey, a significant difference between rural and urban areas and between women and men regarding accessing information on social benefits. Only 44% of rural residents with some limitations, and 28% of those with severe limitations, had access without difficulties to information. Women, older people and those with lower levels of education had lower access than men, younger people and those with higher educational attainment. However, even fewer people were using the internet for information purposes. According to the same study, 21% of people without limitations, 50% of those with some limitations, and 64% of those with severe limitations, did not use the internet at all; while of those with some or severe limitations who did use it, between 12% and 28% had some or major difficulties (World Bank, 2020, pp. 59-60).

#### **1.1.1.1 Unemployment benefits**

Romania has in place only one unemployment benefit (insurance-based) and a wide array of employment services and labour market integration incentives. Unemployment benefits, along with all employment programmes, are under the responsibility of the National Employment Agency (ANOFM), and its devolved county-level/regional branches under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP). Employees are automatically covered by unemployment insurance (paid for by employers), whereas non-employees are allowed to enrol voluntarily (paid for by workers). During 2020-2021, self-employed and other categories of non-standard workers have been granted, for the first time, a series of benefits to compensate for the restrictions imposed on economic activities during the pandemic. These were managed and provided by the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection.

Information on unemployment benefits, employment services or other associated entitlements is part of the service packages provided by the county-level/regional employment agencies. This information is provided in person, through the regional offices, but also online, on the websites of national and regional employment offices. While most of the information refers to national programmes and policies, regional/county-level offices provide, in addition, information on local/region-specific circumstances, events, benefits or programmes.

Employees are also informed about their rights, entitlements and how to access benefits by their employers. Employers are responsible by law for informing employees about their rights and entitlements (e.g. labour code, law 76/2002 on unemployment). In addition, employees receive pre-dismissal services from the employment agencies (which are contacted by the employers at least 30 days before the dismissal), including the provision of information on specific benefits and how to access these. Trade unions – where present – also provide employees with information on rights and entitlements in the case of dismissals.

However, non-employees (i.e. self-employed people or workers not directly in a contractual relationship with an employer) do not benefit from any of these information sources (employers, trade unions). Websites, on-site information and awareness campaigns are the only information sources for self-employed and non-standard workers.

However, during the pandemic (2020-2022), the national and county-level payment and social inspection agencies consistently provided information related to the emergency social protection benefits put in place for unemployed and employed people, and especially for self-employed and temporary/seasonal workers. Information was provided through websites, press releases, trade unions, and associations of employers; and legal advice was provided through the territorial payment and social inspection agencies. No targeted

information or awareness campaigns have been carried out; however, the information provided by the payment and social inspection agencies was adequately presented, accessible and easy to understand.

Compared with the websites of other public institutions involved in managing and delivering social benefits, the structure of the website of the employment agencies is not user-friendly. Information on benefits, services or workers' entitlements/rights has been uploaded, since 2019, under the "frequent questions" section<sup>16</sup>. The information is the same as that posted on the European Commission website<sup>17</sup>. In addition to this, on-site information is provided regionally. However, the fact that more detailed information, and especially personalised information, is not available other than on-site puts unemployed people from more remote areas at a disadvantage.

Personalised information on entitlements/benefits for unemployed people is not available online, either on the website of the employment agencies or under the SCP<sup>18</sup>. In fact, the SCP does not even provide general information regarding unemployment benefits, but only about the rights and entitlements of migrant workers.

To overcome the inequalities of access to unemployment insurance between the two broad categories of employed people (i.e. employees and non-employees), the provision of information covering the benefits associated with being insured and the available options to enrol becomes critical. However, this information is scarce and not available in a systematic manner.

The national strategy on employment for 2021-2027<sup>19</sup> stipulates explicit measures aimed at: (a) increasing the level of information and awareness of employers and employees in regard to new and non-standard work forms (as part of the objective of enhancing support for a flexible, functional and resilient labour market); and (b) increasing the information level of those at risk of informal work regarding the rights, entitlements and responsibilities of employers and employees – and also the risks of informal work – through intensified information and awareness campaigns (as part of the objectives on reducing informal work).

#### **1.1.1.2 Sickness and healthcare benefits**

Sickness<sup>20</sup> and healthcare benefits are insurance-based. Each type of benefits falls under a different social insurance system: (a) work insurance (for sickness and temporary work incapacity); and (b) healthcare insurance. Both types of insurance are compulsory for employees, whereas sickness insurance is elective for self-employed and other non-standard workers, and healthcare insurance is elective for all self-employed people or other non-standard workers with an annual income less than a certain threshold.

The following types of medical leave are covered by sickness insurance: (a) medical leave resulting from a temporary work incapacity, due to regular diseases or accidents that are not work-related; (b) leave for the prevention of loss of, and rehabilitation of, work capacity, as a result of work accidents or occupational diseases; (c) maternity/paternity leave; (d) leave for assisting a sick child; and (e) maternal risk leave. Romania has no monetary healthcare benefits in place. Insured people have access to predefined healthcare service packages and the reimbursement of certain type of health services received while traveling abroad.

As in the case of unemployment insurance, information on how to become insured against sickness, and about the associated benefits and entitlements, is scarce and barely

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.anofm.ro/upload/689/Intrebari\\_frecvente\\_ANOFM\\_-\\_Ianuarie\\_2019.pdf](https://www.anofm.ro/upload/689/Intrebari_frecvente_ANOFM_-_Ianuarie_2019.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1126&langId=ro&intPageId=4758>

<sup>18</sup> <https://edirect.e-guvernare.ro/informatiigenerale/SitePages/cetateni.aspx?IDC=36>

<sup>19</sup> [https://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/MMPS/SNOFM\\_2021-2027.pdf](https://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/MMPS/SNOFM_2021-2027.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Regulated by GEO 158/2005 and successive amendments.

available. This information is provided by the ANAF<sup>21</sup>, but the website is hard to navigate and the information not easy to understand, especially for those who would need it most. This is due to too many legal terms and cross-references to legal documents. Public institutions do not reach out to the most vulnerable segments with information on possible routes to increased access to these benefits.

General information on sickness and healthcare benefits is available on the websites of the National Health Insurance House (NHIH)<sup>22</sup> and the county-level health insurance houses. General information on entitlements and responsibilities is presented, along with that on healthcare service packages provided through the healthcare system, on various national curative programmes, on drugs which are totally or partially supported through the insurance system, and, finally, on sickness benefits. This is available on the website under the section on “information for insured people”. In addition, a guide for insured people<sup>23</sup>, with a simplified presentation of the information, is available for downloading. A special service, the national contact point (*Punctul Național de Contact – PNC*<sup>24</sup>), available on-site and digitally, is dedicated to the information on health services received abroad for which patients can be reimbursed through the health insurance system.

Currently, the only personalised information available on healthcare or sickness entitlements concerns people’s health insurance status, which is provided through the PIAS<sup>25</sup>. Personalised information regarding sickness and healthcare benefits – types of benefits and level of reimbursements from the National Health Insurance Fund to service-providers – will be available by accessing the electronic patient file (*dosarul electronic de sănătate – DES*<sup>26</sup>); the platform is not yet fully functional.

### **1.1.1.3 Maternity and equivalent paternity benefits**

Maternity and maternal risk benefits are granted as part of social insurance against temporary work incapacity, which regulates sickness benefits (see Section 1.1.1.2) and are administered by the national and county-level health insurance houses. Paternity leave is granted as part of the social insurance pension system (law 210/1999) and supported by employers. These are managed by the public pension houses. Access to paternity benefits is restricted to workers with an individual work contract.

General and personalised information is available on the websites of the health insurance houses and public pension houses<sup>27</sup>, along with all information on sickness and health benefits, as well as on pension benefits (see Section 1.1.1.2 and Section 1.1.1.4 for details).

### **1.1.1.4 Invalidity benefits**

Invalidity benefits, along with old-age/survivors’ benefits (Section 1.1.1.5) and benefits in respect of work accidents and occupational diseases (Section 1.1.1.6), fall under the social insurance pension system, and are thus administered by the NPPH and its county-level devolved organisations.

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<sup>21</sup> The taxpayer guide, see ANAF webpage:

[https://static.anaf.ro/static/10/Anaf/Informatii\\_R/SAF\\_T\\_Ghidul\\_D406\\_1712021.pdf](https://static.anaf.ro/static/10/Anaf/Informatii_R/SAF_T_Ghidul_D406_1712021.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> The NHIH and county-level health insurance houses are public institutions of national interest that manage the healthcare insurance system, respectively the healthcare insurance fund and benefits. They are in charge of approving benefits, reimbursing healthcare providers for services and managing healthcare expenditure: <https://cnas.ro/drepturi-obligatii-asiurati/>.

<sup>23</sup> [https://cnas.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/cnas\\_ghidul\\_asiuraturului\\_final\\_v2.pdf](https://cnas.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/cnas_ghidul_asiuraturului_final_v2.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cnas-pnc.ro>

<sup>25</sup> <http://siui.casan.ro:82/Asiurati/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.des-cnas.ro/pub/>

<sup>27</sup> Public pension houses – national and county-level – are public institutions of national interest that manage the social insurance pension system, respectively pension benefits and the social insurance fund.

However, invalidity benefits can extend to disability benefits in some cases<sup>28</sup>. These benefits are administered by the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, supported from the state budget. Access to the agency is managed by the county-level decentralised authorities, through the general directorates for social assistance and child protection (DGASPC), whereas the National Authority for People with Disabilities is responsible for the design of the benefit system, and for advising and offering technical support to county-level organisations.

General information regarding access to invalidity benefits and other related social security entitlements is available on-site, at the territorial public pension houses, on the website of the NPPH<sup>29</sup>, and through the SCP website<sup>30</sup>.

Specific information related to invalidity benefits, medical conditions and procedures to assess invalidity, is also provided, on-site and online, by the National Institute for the Assessment and Rehabilitation of Work Capacity. In addition, information on access to disability benefits is available on the websites of the National Authority for People with Disabilities and the decentralised county-level social assistance directorates.

The legislation on pensions (law 263/2010 and its amendments) stipulates the right of citizens to personalised information regarding current benefits or entitlements. This can be received either through regular mail (monthly information documents regarding current benefits) or through personal accounts on the NPPH website. Until 2021 personalised information on current benefits was provided only via regular mail.

Personalised information related to entitlements and the status of applications for social security benefits is available through a personal account system managed by the NPPH, and digitally available through the webpage of the institution. The platform allows insured people to apply online for benefits. Personalised information on disability-related benefits is, in principle, available through the SCP. However, the system is currently still unevenly developed and allows only partial online management of personal benefits.

The information system on public pension benefits is undergoing major reforms; digitalisation of personalised information and the implementation of the European electronic exchange of social security information (EESSI) have been on the agenda since 2017. Currently, the information provided on the website of the public pension houses (see footnote 30) refers to: (a) public pension system enrolment conditions; (b) types of benefits under the public pension system, and eligibility conditions; (c) application procedures and required documents; and (d) institutions responsible for managing applications for benefits and benefits.

As in the case of healthcare, unemployment and sickness insurance, information related to benefits, options and enrolment conditions for workers not automatically covered by social insurance is scarce.

#### **1.1.1.5 Old-age benefits and survivors' benefits**

All old-age benefits and survivors' benefits are insurance-based and fall under the public pension system. Along with invalidity benefits (Section 1.1.1.4) and benefits for work accidents and occupational diseases (Section 1.1.1.6), all old-age benefits are regulated by the pension law (law 263/2010 with subsequent amendments) and managed by the NPPH. The legislation providing the framework for information provision is the same as for invalidity benefits.

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<sup>28</sup> Invalidity benefit recipients can apply to be certified with a certain type and degree of disability. This latter certification grants access to different benefits, some of which are alternative to those granted through the social insurance system.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.cnpp.ro/pensii>

<sup>30</sup> <https://edirect.e-quvernare.ro/informatiigenerale/SitePages/cetateni.aspx?IDC=40>

Provision of personalised and general information on pension benefits has been described in Section 1.1.1.4. Although there is no proper pension benefit calculator on the NPPH website, which would allow insured people to estimate their future pension income, the NPPH provides personalised information on the pension age<sup>31</sup>, and the county-level public pension houses provide, in some instances, examples of how pension benefits are calculated<sup>32</sup>. Pension benefits and age calculators are available online through private organisations (some free, e.g. [lapensie.com](https://www.lapensie.com)<sup>33</sup>; and some for a fee, e.g. [calculpensie.ro](https://www.calculpensie.ro)<sup>34</sup>).

In addition to this, information on old-age/survivors' benefits associated with privately managed statutory funded pension schemes within the public pension system is provided by the Romanian Association of Privately Managed Pensions (*Asociația pentru Pensiiile Administrate Privat din România* – APAPR<sup>35</sup>) through its website. On the website, beneficiaries, and those interested in signing up for a private pension, can find information on different funds and their evolution, and on the entitlements of those insured. Personalised information is also available for those already enrolled, through the platforms available on the websites of all private funds. Since July 2021 employers have been legally bound to inform new employees aged under 45 regarding the statutory funded pension scheme (pillar II) of the public pension system on private pension funds (MLSP order 585/2021).

#### **1.1.1.6 Benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases**

Benefits related to work accidents and occupational diseases are insurance-based and fall under the public pension system. As in the case of sickness benefits, these benefits (regulated by the law 346/2002) are conditional upon a distinct insurance scheme, with contributions payable by the employer. Only employees holding an individual work contract, people holding elected public offices and apprentices are entitled to these benefits.

Access to information on potential and current benefits, enrolment/eligibility conditions and procedures to access benefits is regulated in a similar way to that for invalidity benefits and old age/survivors' benefits. Information is specifically available on the same website<sup>36</sup>. Work inspectorates also provide information on the specific risks related to the legislative framework, different work activities and protection requirements and available equipment<sup>37</sup>. This information is targeted at both employers and employees.

#### **1.1.2 General awareness-raising campaigns**

During the last five years, information initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns regarding work-related entitlements and rights were carried out in the context of: (a) the high proportion of the Romanian workforce working abroad; and (b) the high proportion of workers in the informal economy. Both issues became even more significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the consequences of informal work became even more acute, leading to significant social problems. Thus, awareness campaigns targeted seasonal migrant workers and employers.

The main objectives of the campaigns targeting migrant workers in EU Member States were to prevent abuses on the part of work mediators or employers and to protect Romanian seasonal workers from being deprived of legal work contracts. These types of campaigns

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cnpp.ro/varsta-pensionare>

<sup>32</sup> Bucharest public pension house: <https://cpmb.ro/prestatii/calculul-pensiei/>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.lapensie.com>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.calculpensie.ro/exemplu.html>

<sup>35</sup> <https://apapr.ro/pensii-private/verifica-pensia/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cnpp.ro/accidente-de-munca-si-boli-profesionale1>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.inspectiamuncii.ro/en/web/guest/legislatie2>

started in 2011<sup>38</sup> and address specific legislative issues depending on the host country. In March 2021, the MLSP initiated a similar series of campaigns under the headline: "Are you a worker in a foreign country? Be informed, take up legal work and know your rights!". These were carried out at the national and regional level and focused more on general practices/guidelines for finding work abroad, entering a legal contractual relationship (while avoiding scams), and basic entitlements in the host country. Information was provided through the websites of the MLSP and county-level work inspectorates. In addition, fliers and brochures were handed out at the main border crossing points, an initiative carried out in co-operation with the Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Foreign Affairs; finally, TV ads were broadcast. Unlike the previous campaign (2011-2013) targeting migrant workers in Spain, these campaigns did not involve Romanian associations or community organisations that offer support to migrant workers abroad.

Similarly, campaigns carried out by territorial work inspectorates regarding the risks and penalties of informal work are addressed at employers rather than employees. These campaigns emphasise the penalties and legal risks to which employers expose themselves by hiring informally, and largely ignore the benefits and disadvantages for workers.

Finally, an information and awareness-raising campaign was launched during 2019-2022 as part of an ESF-funded project for increasing the access of people with disabilities to the labour market through the provision of assistive technology.

No impact evaluation of these awareness-raising campaigns is publicly available, except for the impact evaluation carried out in 2013 in respect of the 2011-2013 campaigns for migrant workers<sup>39</sup>. According to this, although a high proportion of Romanian workers in the sample considered the information provided to be useful, the proportion of people interested in receiving similar information was considerably lower. However, the rural population was more interested in receiving information on available jobs, entitlements, benefits and services provided by the state. Although there is no other recent similar study or evaluation available, the conclusions of the 2013 evaluation seem to point to the fact that the segment which is most in need of information is self-employed people and dayworkers (mostly residing in rural areas) aged 25-35.

The most important caveat of awareness-raising campaigns is that they put in place unsustainable information systems with no continuity after funding ends. Information campaigns are usually carried out within specific projects, with temporary funding, and are thus focused on short-term, visible results. As a result, after the project closes websites are abandoned and the provision of information is disrupted.

#### **1.1.2.1 Unemployment benefits**

No awareness-raising campaigns were organised specifically regarding unemployment benefits.

#### **1.1.2.2 Sickness and healthcare benefits**

No public awareness campaigns were organised specifically regarding sickness and healthcare benefits.

The Ministry of Health initiates regular educational information campaigns on various public health topics, but these are mostly restricted to fliers and brochures, with a rather low impact. More effective are the campaigns which are run through primary care physicians and itinerant preventive healthcare services (vaccination campaigns, oral health, prevention of various forms of cancers etc.). In the healthcare sector, evaluations regarding the satisfaction of patients are carried out twice a year. These also include

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<sup>38</sup> The 2011 campaign for Romanian workers working in Romania or in Spain, "Be informed", "More information, more opportunities" ([evaluated in 2013](#)); 2021 [campaigns targeting Romanian migrant seasonal workers](#).

<sup>39</sup> See the assessment mentioned in footnote 3.

assessments of the information level of patients. For example, according to the 2021 activity report of the NHIH<sup>40</sup>, 94% of patients were aware that they are assigned to a health insurance house and 90% of them considered that they were informed about the rights and responsibilities associated with being insured within the healthcare insurance system. Almost three quarters (approximately 73%) of patients mentioned family physicians as their primary information source, and only 6% derived information from leaflets or brochures. 17% of patients retrieved their information from the internet. The information level on national programmes among patients who benefited of these was also 90%; two thirds of the beneficiaries of national curative health programmes got their information from the attending physician and only 23% from the family physician. The findings seem to support the conclusion that information campaigns are largely missing, and that – when carried out – their impact is rather low.

According to public health institutions (see the 2021 activity reports of the NHIH), vaccination campaigns managed to increase access to vaccination despite strong previous resistance, and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1.1.2.3 Maternity and equivalent paternity benefits**

No public awareness campaigns were organised specifically regarding maternity/paternity benefits.

### **1.1.2.4 Invalidity benefits**

No public awareness campaigns were organised specifically regarding invalidity benefits or disability benefits.

### **1.1.2.5 Old-age benefits and survivors' benefits**

No awareness campaigns were organised specifically regarding old-age/survivors' benefits.

### **1.1.2.6 Benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases**

No awareness campaigns were organised specifically regarding benefits for occupational diseases and accidents at work.

## **1.2 Policies and practices to simplify access to social protection**

The Romanian *National Plan for the Implementation of the 2019 Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed* ("National Plan") emphasises the need to improve the legislative framework in order to: (a) allow or improve access by self-employed people, platform workers, dayworkers and seasonal workers to social protection; (b) optimise the provision of unemployment benefits and its value; (c) grant access to paternal leave for the self-employed; and (d) improve the legislation on disease risks and maternal protection, so as to allow equal access to all categories of insured people.

The first objective of the National Plan, related to the modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions to support the diversification of labour market arrangements, coincides with one of the objectives of the national strategy on employment 2021-2027, and emphasises the need to reform the system of unemployment benefits, so as to optimise its adequacy and provision. The strategy also focuses on increasing access to a formal labour market for several vulnerable categories (people with a low level of education; people living in marginalised communities; people with disabilities; women; young people not in employment, education or training; young people in general; and the rural population), which are also the main constituents of the long-term unemployed

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<sup>40</sup> <https://cnas.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Raport-CNAS-2021-final-27-aprilie-2022.pdf>

population. The interventions outlined refer to both improving the legislative framework and optimising (inter)institutional arrangements, so as to reach out to vulnerable groups, stimulate the formal economy and increase the scope of social protection for self-employed people and other workers without an individual work contract. Among the measures proposed by the operational plan of the strategy are: increasing the monitoring and assessment capacities of public institutions; promoting co-operation and communication between relevant public institutions; and the debureaucratisation, flexibilisation and digitalisation of the public employment services. These are expected to result in the creation of a single digital platform mediating the interactions between clients of the public employment services and employers (i.e. the “Relationships between public employment services and employers” – eSPOR – programme).

### **1.2.1 Simplification objective embedded in reforms of social protection schemes**

Simplification objectives were not explicitly outlined in any of the strategic documents or reform programmes during the last five years. However, simplifying access to social benefits has been an important aim of the extraordinary measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. The legislation adopted or amended during this latter period resulted in greater effectiveness and efficiency in application and provision procedures.

#### **1.2.1.1 Unemployment benefits**

Simplification of access to unemployment benefits has not been an objective of the legislative amendments on unemployment.

#### **1.2.1.2 Sickness and healthcare benefits**

Simplification of the access to sickness and healthcare benefits was an important means for ensuring adequate access to these benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, while not an objective per se, it represented one of the main means to deal with the disruptions in service provision during the pandemic.

#### **1.2.1.3 Maternity and equivalent paternity benefits**

No objectives regarding the simplification of access to maternity or paternity benefits have been outlined by any of the strategic documents or reform plans in the social sector.

#### **1.2.1.4 Invalidity benefits**

The strategy of the national and territorial pension houses is operationalised, annually, and is part of the activity plan of these institutions. The main strategic objectives since 2017 have been reducing the average time for assessing applications, and improving relationships with citizens through personal interactions as well as the use of digital platforms. Simplification objectives are related to the procedures to access social benefits by migrant workers.

No specific objective regarding the simplification of access to invalidity benefits has been outlined by any of the strategic documents or reform plans in the social sector. Simplification of access to invalidity benefits, along with other social insurance benefits, has been pursued as part of the administrative reform of the social insurance system on digitalisation and interoperability.

#### **1.2.1.5 Old-age benefits and survivors' benefits**

As in the case of invalidity benefits and benefits for work accidents and occupational diseases, the simplification objective has been rather implicitly part of the reforms planned in the social security sector, with the exception of pension benefits for migrant workers. The activity plan for 2020 stipulated, explicitly, the need to simplify access by this category



of workers to social benefits through legislative harmonisation and more individualised information on entitlements and the means to access these.

### **1.2.1.6 Benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases**

The information provided in Sections 1.2.1.4 and 1.2.1.5 also applies to benefits regarding accidents at work and occupational diseases.

## **1.2.2 Simplification of the application process for accessing benefits**

### **1.2.2.1 Unemployment benefits**

During the last five years the simplification of the application process for unemployment benefits was not a priority, as the emphasis was more on diversifying services and improving administrative capacity. In fact, the reform of the unemployment benefit system, including improving benefit provision and adequacy, is a strategy to achieve specific objectives set by the national strategy on employment 2021-2027.

During the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. during the emergency or alert states) procedures to simplify the application process for unemployment benefits were put in place (GEO 30/2022). For the first time, electronic mailing of documents was introduced, approved and legally validated, and the validity period for the documents required to prove unemployment has been increased from three months to six months.

### **1.2.2.2 Sickness and healthcare benefits**

Reforms in the area of sickness and healthcare benefits carried out during the last five years by the NHIH emphasise the need to increase the level of information among insured people regarding available benefits/services and to promote better institutional management, debureaucratisation of services, and digitalisation<sup>41</sup>. In 2017, in the context of the changes to the fiscal code, additional amendments to the implementation of sickness and maternal risk leave were required. Thus, a governmental ordinance was issued that regulated the electronic provision of documents justifying sickness and maternal risk leave (GEO 99/2017), leading to the simplification of benefit provision.

In 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine was recognised as a valid reason for 100% compensated leave (Order 872/543/2020 on simplification of conditions for granting sickness and maternal risk leave). Other transitory measures explicitly aimed at simplifying access to benefits and services were the legal regulation on telemedical services (GEO 196/2020), and the simplification of access conditions (by-passing the minimum contributory period requirements in some cases) and application procedures.

In 2017 the application methodology of the GEO<sup>42</sup> regulating sickness and maternal leave was amended to both comply with the changes to the fiscal code and to validate the electronic transmission of documents attesting leave (GEO 99/2017). One of the stated rationales of the amendment was the debureaucratisation of the process for documenting medical and maternity leave.

During the COVID-19 pandemic access to both healthcare benefits (access to medical services and prescriptions) and sickness / maternal risk benefits has been simplified.

The implementation methodology of the legislation regulating sickness and maternal risk leave (GEO 158/2005 with subsequent amendments) was amended again (through Governmental Order 872/543/2020), this time in order to: (a) allow for, and legally validate, the electronic provision of documents attesting conditions of temporary work incapacity; (b) permit approval of sickness and maternal risk benefits without the endorsement of the family physician; (c) permit the approval of benefits for sickness leave

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<sup>41</sup> See [annual activity reports](#) of the NHIH for details.

<sup>42</sup> Government Emergency Ordinance.

which exceeds 90 consecutive days or a total number of 183 annually without the endorsement of workplace medical experts; (d) permit approval of maternal risk leave and benefits without the endorsement of the medical expert of the social insurance system. Except for the electronic transmission of documents, measures have been put in place only on a temporary basis.

In addition, there has been an extension of the validity period for documents used as referral documents for specialised medical services and rehabilitation services, and as referrals or decisions regarding eligibility for certain medical services or medical/assistive devices.

Telemedicine services, regulated through GEO 196/2020, were put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, although these were already on the agenda of the parliament before 2020. Teleconsultations (including the electronic issuing of prescriptions), tele-expertise, tele-assistance, teleradiology, telepathology and telemonitoring were introduced as services eligible for support through the healthcare insurance system.

### **1.2.2.3 Maternity and equivalent paternity benefits**

Procedures to access maternity benefits have been simplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with other sickness benefits. In addition, restrictions imposed on issuing sickness leave – such as minimum contributory periods and the monitoring and evaluation plans for extending leave – do not apply to maternity or to maternal risk leave. Simplification of the provision of maternity benefits was among the objectives of the measures adopted during the pandemic. However, paternity benefits have been largely ignored.

Maternity benefits – the same as for the sickness and healthcare benefits (see Section 1.2.2.2).

In regard to paternity benefits (regulated by the social insurance system, along with the pension benefits), simplification of access procedures has not been the object of any regulation since 2017.

### **1.2.2.4 Invalidity benefits**

The application process has been simplified by introducing the SCP, a platform that provides information on benefits and guidance for applying, and at the same time allows insured people to apply for benefits. The NPPH allows direct electronic applications for benefits through a personal account, while providing, through its webpage, access to information, downloads of required forms, and free consultations by responding to questions addressed by citizens via e-messages. The possibility of electronic submission of documents has been enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, during the pandemic, for some of the required documents, especially medical ones, the validity period has been extended. An integrated database of all social insurance-based benefits, expected to be in place and functional until 2025 (see Section 1.2.1.4), will provide better management of applications and easier access to benefits for beneficiaries.

### **1.2.2.5 Old-age benefits and survivors' benefits**

Information provided in Section 1.2.2.4 also applies to old-age benefits and survivors' benefits.

### **1.2.2.6 Benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases**

Information provided in Section 1.2.2.4 also applies to benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases.

### **1.2.3 Simplification of the structures within the social protection administration**

#### **1.2.3.1 Unemployment benefits**

Optimising the provision of unemployment cash benefits is an objective of the national strategy on employment for 2021-2027. In 2020, the ANOFM launched two ESF-financed projects for the debureaucratisation and digitalisation of the unemployment services, costing an estimated €63 million. The first project (eSPOR) is designed to create a single digital platform aimed at integrating all services targeting employers, in order to simplify procedures and reduce bureaucracy in implementing employment services. The second project – “case management” – is aimed at developing a digital app for profiling unemployed people, providing customised information and counselling, and initiating personalised case-management. The target groups of the apps are an estimated 102,600 job-seekers – with priority given to the most vulnerable groups (those with low employability, young people leaving child protection institutions, migrant workers, stateless people, drug-dependent people, homeless people, and very long-term unemployed people) – and at least 836 experts within the public employment services. The apps will also provide personalised information on the status of applications for benefits, scheduled meetings with public employees, etc<sup>43</sup>. The programmes are aimed at increasing interoperability between public institutions involved in providing employment services.

#### **1.2.3.2 Sickness and healthcare benefits**

Institutional reforms of the healthcare insurance system were aimed at the debureaucratisation and digitalisation of administration. The PIAS project was launched in 2018-2019 as part of the administrative reform of the health insurance system and finalised in 2021 (according to the annual NHIH report for 2021<sup>44</sup>), through integrating the app allowing for electronic prescriptions to be collected in any pharmacy in the country (*sistemul informatic de prescriptie electronica* – SIPE).

#### **1.2.3.3 Maternity and equivalent paternity benefits**

Institutional reforms described in Section 1.2.3.2 cover maternity benefits. Paternity benefits were not subject to any institutional reforms.

#### **1.2.3.4 Invalidity benefits**

Administrative reforms of the pension system, aimed at simplifying and integrating informational systems into its operations, have been ongoing since 2017. Among the measures adopted to increase the capacity of the national and territorial public pension houses were: an increase in the number of employees (and especially IT specialists), in order to increase the functionalities of the integrated information system; and modifying the statute of the NPPH.

The NPPH strategy emphasises the need to simplify: (a) communication with beneficiaries through updating and digitalisation of the integrated informational system, so as to include personalised information on all pension, invalidity and survivors’ entitlements; and (b) the process of benefit provision, through reducing the time for reviewing applications and providing benefits on time. Operational simplification has been an objective reflected in the annual action plans of the national and territorial public pension houses<sup>45</sup> since 2017.

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<sup>43</sup> See the [2020 National reform programme of the Romanian Government](#).

<sup>44</sup> <https://cnas.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Raport-CNAS-2021-final-27-aprilie-2022.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Action plans of the national and territorial public pension houses are published on the NPPH website (<https://www.cnpp.ro/strategie>).

The reform of the pension system is already on the agenda of the National Plan for Recovery and Resilience (RRP)<sup>46</sup>. Operational efficiency is pursued through measures that revolve around the new integrated information system, comprising a communication portal with employers and insured people. The system will provide information and application-related digital services regarding pension, invalidity and survivors' benefits, as well as regarding benefits related to work incapacity due to work accidents and occupational diseases. The system is also expected to automatically correct/update benefit levels and to digitally generate monthly pension fliers for all active pensioners (the e-Talon app).

### **1.2.3.5 Old-age benefits and survivors' benefits**

The information provided in Section 1.2.3.4 also applies to old-age benefits and survivors' benefits.

### **1.2.3.6 Benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases**

For more details regarding general aspects covering all social insurance benefits, see Section 1.2.3.4. In addition to these, the simplification of operations, including digitalisation, in the area of the benefits for work incapacity due to work accidents and occupational diseases emphasises the need to improve communication with other public agencies involved (i.e. the National Institute for Medical Expertise and Recovery of Work Capacity, work inspectorates, and employers) in order to reduce the time between application and resolution, and the proportion of decisions that are contested. The exchange of information between the three different public institutions involved in assessing eligibility for these benefits, and between these and employers, is expected to improve with the digitalisation of the social insurance system. Co-operation protocols between these institutions are based on the type of information exchanged and needed to expedite the processes of applying for benefits, and determining applications.

## **2 Issues, debates and ongoing or planned reforms to ensure information on, and to simplify access to, social protection for workers and the self-employed**

### **2.1 Issues, debates and reforms related to information**

#### **2.1.1 Issues**

There have been no evaluations of practices or policy assessments carried out since 2017 on issues related to information. Impact evaluations of the information and awareness-raising campaigns are not carried out systematically, if at all. The last publicly available evaluation refers to an awareness-raising campaign carried out in 2011-2013 that targeted migrant workers in Spain.

The NHIH conducts an annual patient satisfaction survey, which occasionally includes references to how information is gathered by, and what is the information level of, beneficiaries. However, there are no significant publicly expressed opinions by stakeholders or public institutions on this matter.

Some of the issues related to these practices are nonetheless worth mentioning and need to be addressed. First, the available information is not always clear, sometimes using legal slang or not addressing particular situations. Only a few public institutions provide online consultancy to citizens (e.g. the NPPH through the "ask a consultant" e-messaging service).

On top of this, *informational noise* has also increased during the last decade, as websites that emerged as a result of an effervescence of projects/programmes with temporary

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<sup>46</sup> Available at <https://mfe.gov.ro/pnrr/>.

funding have been abandoned once funding ended. This represents an important risk, as much of the information made available on abandoned websites changed during this period. Thus, the need to deal with information that is obsolete or no longer valid on legitimate websites will become more and more acute.

The *nature of information* is also important. Available information refers mostly to entitlements associated with being insured within the social pension insurance system or the healthcare insurance system. Less information on how to access these benefits is available for those who are not mandatorily insured. Although voluntary insurance is in principle available to all those workers who are not employees (i.e. self-employed people and other categories of non-standard workers), there is no proper targeting of information at these people on the benefits and costs associated with social insurance systems and the enrolment options available.

Employees benefit from more information sources than the self-employed or other non-standard workers. Employees also get their information from both employers (as part of the legal *responsibilities of employers to inform employees* about their rights and entitlements) and trade unions, and have direct access to personalised information through both these actors. However, the information provided to the self-employed is limited to the websites or information offices of public authorities or other local institutions involved in managing benefits. The disparities between the two categories of employed people is even more significant, considering that at least 80% of the self-employed and other non-standard workers are not insured under the social insurance pension system and against unemployment<sup>47</sup>, compared with employees who are 100% covered by all insurance types. Comprehensive information regarding the benefits and affordability of voluntary social insurance (pension, sickness, unemployment and healthcare) is therefore critical to increasing coverage and social protection among self-employed people, platform workers, dayworkers and seasonal workers.

*The need for accessible information* for people with disabilities received more attention during the last five years. Even though the law on disability (law 448/2006) stipulates the legal obligation of all public institutions to provide information related to all benefits in an accessible format for people with physical, hearing, visual or cognitive impairments, on-site information was not always accessible and digital information unevenly provided. However, during the last five years the increase in the digitalisation of information provision also led to more information becoming accessible. The national strategy on the rights of people with disabilities for 2021-2027<sup>48</sup> (approved in 2021) sets as a major objective the improvement of access by people with disabilities to information and communications, by transposing the EU Directive 2019/882 into national legislation by June 2022 and putting it into practice by 2025. According to the strategy, in 2020 only 51% of people with some limitation, and 30% of those with severe limitations, considered that they could access public information and communication without much difficulty, compared with 71% of people with no limitations. In addition, 50% of people with some limitations, and 64% of those with severe limitations, did not use the internet for accessing public information and communications.

### **2.1.2 Debates**

No important debates on issues regarding the access to information have been identified.

### **2.1.3 Ongoing or planned reforms**

Simplifying access to benefits by improving access to, and digitalising, information is the objective of several national plans and strategies. For example, the RRP for Romania

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<sup>47</sup> The estimate is based on the number of insured people reported monthly by the NPPH, besides employees, relative to the number of self-employed people estimated by the Labour Force Survey (Eurostat).

<sup>48</sup> [http://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2021/04/wfggkt8\\_6ncsv3ymp0ri.pdf](http://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2021/04/wfggkt8_6ncsv3ymp0ri.pdf)

allocates 20.5% of the funds approved towards measures contributing to digital objectives, representing about 2.7% of the 2019 GDP. Some of these funds are allocated to increased digitalisation of social protection systems. Of all funds allocated to digitalisation, 6.5% are allocated towards fiscal and pension reforms, 1.2% to healthcare, 18.9% to education, and less than 0.1% to social reforms. However, 30.4% of the funds are allocated to a trans-sectoral project – the governmental cloud and the national interoperability system (*Sistemul Național de Interoperabilitate* – SNI) – which affects all sectors, including all social sectors.

The RPP is also aimed at reforms simplifying access to social benefits by: (a) simplifying the application process for unemployment benefits (through the digitalisation of services offered by the ANOFM, i.e. electronic submission of documents, electronic registration of unemployed people, electronic applications for benefits, and online provision of employment services); and (b) the digital design of the minimum inclusion income, expected to take effect in 2023. Both planned reforms (components 6 and 13 of the RRP on social reforms) are aimed at upgrading the IT infrastructure and relieving the burden on public institutions involved in managing benefits – that is, the ANOFM, ANPIS, and local authorities – and also on beneficiaries.

Increasing access to benefits through information and simplification of processes, while part of the administrative reforms in the social protection sector, is only marginally touched on by the national strategy on employment for 2021-2027<sup>49</sup> and the National Plan<sup>50</sup>. The main objective of both these strategic documents is the modernisation and strengthening of labour market institutions, whereas increased information and simplification are seen as a result of these administrative reforms.

The national strategy on employment for 2021-2027 touches only briefly on the need for *raising awareness* through information campaigns on the rights of those employed in various forms of non-standard work. The campaigns are part of the sub-objective regarding the transformation of informal work into formal work, and are supposed to target both workers and employers, and to focus on three aspects: (a) the rights and entitlements of workers in different non-standard work forms; (b) the risks associated with informal work; and (c) ways to transition from informal to formal work. Awareness campaigns regarding the risks of informal work for migrant workers are part of the objective on improving access to employment services by those seeking a job and are considered especially relevant due to the large proportion of the workforce seeking seasonal or temporary jobs in other EU Member States. A novelty of these campaigns is the fact that they will also be targeting the future workforce, and will be carried out in high schools and professional schools.

GEOs issued at the very beginning of the pandemic set up requirements for public institutions to compensate for the lack of in-person services (e.g. GEO 30/2020); according to these, public institutions were required to provide written information regarding all benefits and entitlements – posted both in front of the institutions and on their websites. Furthermore, the restrictions put in place during the pandemic also increased the acceptance of digital services by those segments of the population that were less digitally proficient and more mistrustful of public e-services.

## **2.2 Issues, debates and reforms related to simplification**

### **2.2.1 Issues**

Unfortunately, there is no recent evaluation of simplification processes. Indirectly, through the patient satisfaction survey, some information on satisfaction with the accessibility of various benefits is collected (see the annual activity report of the NHIH mentioned in

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<sup>49</sup> The [National Strategy on Employment 2021-2027](#) was approved on 18 May 2021, along with the National Plan.

<sup>50</sup> Romanian Government (2021a).

Section 2.1.1). The last evaluation of needs and objectives regarding the simplification and rationalisation of the administrative procedures for citizens<sup>51</sup> was carried out in 2015.

### 2.2.2 Debates

In March 2022, the National Authority for Digitalisation launched a public debate around a draft law on interoperability, which will simplify the application process for benefits for citizens, based on the “one time only” principle (personal documents which are already digitalised will no longer be required for future applications). The law has been discussed by representatives of central and local public institutions. Some public institutions, but also private institutions, fear a loss of control over the management of their own databases, as the draft law eliminates any possible intervention by the institutions that produce the data. Transferring capabilities without the means of managing their own business flows is an important concern, along with a lack of clarity related to the mix of in-person and online use of personal information. The law is still being redrafted. In a similar position is the legislation regulating the governmental cloud. The Patrons Association of Software Industry (ANIS) and the Association for Technology and Internet (APTI) opposed the draft governmental ordinance. One of the major concerns was the ability of the special services, designed to “secure” the data, to access the personal data saved in the cloud.

A debate is going on regarding online medical consultations and the overriding power of family physicians to prescribe treatments to chronically ill patients. Although in 2019 a legislative package for regulating telemedical services was under preparation, all efforts have been stalled as emergency measures were adopted to cope with the onset of the pandemic. Telemedical services were regulated by emergency ordinances with temporary validity, thus their validity ceased once the alert state was lifted. The association of family physicians expressed its dissatisfaction with the lack of legislation<sup>52</sup>. In its opinion, patients will experience increased costs and barriers to treatment and diagnosis procedures as a result, especially the young and the active population.

### 2.2.3 Ongoing or planned reforms

Reforms to be carried out in the area of digitalisation, with an emphasis on finalising and making functional the governmental cloud and the SNI, are an important part of the commitments made through the RRP. Future reforms depend on the approval of the legislation on the governmental cloud and SNI.

Administrative reforms are ongoing in all sectors of social protection. The national strategy on employment for 2021-2027 is aimed at reforming access to unemployment benefits, by optimising provision processes.

The forthcoming minimum inclusion income is also thought to be designed so as to simplify and increase access to benefits.

The NHIH continues to improve and adjust its information systems, as a measure to optimise processes in healthcare service-provision. Finally, the NHIH launched, in December 2021, a project in partnership with the National Authority for Digitalisation and the Special Telecommunication Service for the management of access to medical forms, referrals and technologies (SIGMA SMART) and for the integration of all healthcare service-providers within a single informational platform (eDES)<sup>53</sup>. The project is aimed at optimising informational flows and digital monitoring of medical services, resulting in the debureaucratisation of medical service provision; the value of the SIGMA SMART project is estimated at 131.1 million Lei (€26.5 million) and is expected to close in 2024. Administrative reforms in the field of social security are also continuing with an emphasis

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.fonduri-ue.ro/comunicare/studii-analize/details/10/39/analiza-nevoilor-si-obiectivelor-de-simplificare-si-rationalizare-a-procedurilor-administrative-pentru-cetateni>

<sup>52</sup> Hotnews article from 13 April 2022 on [the lack of legal framework for online medical services](#).

<sup>53</sup> According to the [2021 annual activity report of the NHIH](#).

on consolidating the integration of information systems, enabling them to automatically update benefits and provide personalised information on entitlements.

### **2.3 Suggestions for improvements**

Information on social benefits provided by public institutions improved significantly during the last five years; however, the provision of information, as well as the type of information provided, could be improved in order to ease access to social benefits for workers for whom public institutions are the main source of information. Other measures could include: standardising the structure of information provided online across public institutions; reducing the digital noise created by websites of various projects that are not updated anymore; and providing systematic information targeted at those workers who are not yet insured on the benefits of insurance, types of insurances, and alternative options to access these – which could significantly increase the access of these categories of non-employees to social benefits.



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