## Challenges for increasing the quality of social public services and reducing administrative burdens at the level of the Romanian National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (ANPIS)

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore which were the challenges for Romanian National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (ANPIS), as a provider of public services, for increasing the quality of social assistance and reducing administrative burdens by creating an easy access way for the users of the social public services.

The research methodology combine the qualitative method with the quantitative one. Thus, a structured questionnaire was applied to the employees of the ANPIS in order to identify what is the time required to provide responses to petitions, what difficulties do staff face in dealing with interactions with citizens, how does their work affect them, and what tools they could use to reduce this effort .

Keywords: social benefits, Covid-19 crisis, communication channels, good governance.

Introduction

The public administration aims to satisfy various needs, for which the insufficiency of the particular initiative is appreciated., thus, by creating public services, the satisfaction of the public need of a community is pursued [1].

Generally, one of the most important principle of the public services is that of continuity. In this situation, the public service, is considered indispensable for a community, it must be operate continuously, without interruption. It has to be constantly ensured and operate regularly, so that the operator has the obligation to organize his activity so that there are no interruptions [2].

Thus, in the global context generated by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, the public administration systems from all over the world faced serious challenges to provide public services continuously, because in many cases the access at these services was a physical one.

Many public administrations, promoting the principle of good governance by increasing the degree of transparency, had to rapidly adapt by creating modern tools and efficient accessible communication channels, adapted to the advances of modern technology.

The aim of this paper is to explore which were the challenges for Romanian National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (ANPIS), as a provider of public services, for increasing the quality of social assistance and reducing administrative burdens by creating an easy access way for the users of the social public services.

The research methodology starts from another important principle which defines a public service, the principle of adaptability. The principle implies two obligations for operators:

* identification of user expectations;
* continuous improvement of service quality.

This principle also involves adapting the public service to technological evolution [2].

In order to see how ANPIS, as the main provider of public services in the area of social assistance, answer to the principles exposed before, the research methodology design combines the qualitative method with the quantitative one. Thus, a structured questionnaire was applied to the employees of the ANPIS in order to identify what is the time required to provide a type of response, what difficulties do staff face in dealing with interactions with citizens, how does their work affect them, and what tools can they use to reduce this effort .

Regulations regarding the social public services in Romania

The research will have to take into account what Beckhard highlights as areas of interest for the application of the diagnosis: systemic components and (intrasystemic) processes [3].

Regarding the systemic organizational components, these are closely linked subsystems, with sequential processes, which are organized as legal-normative structures under the external factors of legal norms [4].

In this sense, the analysis of the paper identified first the regulations on social assistance benefits in order to be able to corroborate the needs of the beneficiaries with the legal regulations and to be able to finally formulate some proposals for adapting the legal regulations to the needs identified following the research.

According to the law [Law no. 292/2011 on social assistance, published in the Official Gazette no. 905 of December 20, 2011, with the amendment and subsequent additions], in Romania, the national social assistance system represents the set of institutions, measures and actions through which the state, represented by the central and local public administration authorities, as well as the civil society intervene to prevent, limit or eliminate the temporary or permanent effects of situations that may generate social marginalization or exclusion. of the person, family, groups or communities.

Thus, at the central level was created the ANPIS, in order to achieve a unitary administration of social assistance benefits and evaluation, monitoring and control in the field of social assistance. In the field of social assistance benefits, the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection aims to establish, pay and manage the amounts granted under this title from the state budget, the amounts intended to support social services and assess, monitor and control compliance with specific legislation. In the field of social services, the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection aims to evaluate, monitor and control compliance with criteria, standards and indicators based on accrediting providers and social services, finding contraventions and applying sanctions provided by Social Assistance Law no. 292/2011, with subsequent amendments and completions.

ANPIS has in each county am agency for payments and social inspection- APIS and one to the municipality of Bucharest – APISMB (in total 42)[[1]](#footnote-1), which are working as decentralized public services, with juridical personality.

The types of social assistance benefits administered by ANPIS are [Art. 11-13 of the Law no. 292/2011 on social assistance, published in the Official Gazette no. 905 of December 20, 2011, with the amendment and subsequent additions]:

* State allowance for children;
* Placement allowance;
* Family support allowance;
* Monthly child raising allowance;
* The insertion stimulus;
* Allowances and aids for raising a child granted to persons (adults / children) with disabilities;
* Monthly allowance for accommodation leave;
* Monthly HIV / AIDS food allowance;
* Social assistance;
* Emergency aid;
* Aid for refugees;
* Aid for heating the house
* Financial aid;
* Allowances for the disabled person.

For all the social benefits referred to, the central public authority with the role of coordination and control is the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity together with the specialized structures at the central level - ANPIS, respectively in the territory of APIS / APISMB.

The analysis of the legislation highlights the complexity of the social benefits system which involves authorities at the central level, as well as authorities at the local level in the payment of social benefits, thus, regarding the majority of the benefits (except for some benefits such as the state allowance for children), the public institution that manages the granting of these benefits within the territorial competence of the citizen's domicile / residence. beneficiary of the social benefit.

In the case of the child raising allowance, the insertion incentive, the mayor's office has the responsibility to send the complete files with the beneficiary' applications and the rest of the relevant documents to the APIS, where it will be taken the decision to grant specific social benefits.

Methodology of the research

The approach proposed is constructivist, in the sense that the purpose of the research take into account as much as possible the opinions of the participants on the analyzed situation - ANPIS employees / territorial structures. The way in which participants construct and define the interaction is the starting point of the analysis. From this perspective, subjective meanings are socially negotiated and are formed through interaction with others. The approach focuses on the specific contexts in which people live and work for a cultural and social context of the participants [5].

The collection of empirical had a sample which included the staff working from ANPIS / APIS and it was used questionnaire which aimed to identify problems on all categories of social benefits paid by ANPIS, as the main provider of social public service.

The questionnaire focused on the following research directions:

* the most frequently asked questions of citizens / petitioners regarding social assistance benefits
* the time period for answering each type of question
* the real needs of the citizens regarding the provision of information of public interest and the granting of social benefits
* the directions for improving the relationship between the beneficiaries and the institution.

Results of the research

Through the questions addressed to the employees from the territorial structures of ANPIS, the respondents who filled in the online / physical questionnaire were asked to indicate the specific problems and situations they face in the interaction with the beneficiaries of the social public services.

Thus, as can be seen in the table below (Tab.1), it answered a 29 territorial structures of ANPIS, representing a percentage of 69.5% of the total structures that responded to this request, this being considered to be a good response rate. The table also includes the percentages of questionnaires sent by each structure.

**Tab.1** The percentages of questionnaires sent by each structure.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No.**  | **APIS/county** | **Percentages of questionnaires sent** |
|  | Alba | 1,3% |
|  | Arad | 3,8% |
|  | Argeș | 5,1% |
|  | Bacău | 3,8% |
|  | Bihor | 6,3% |
|  | Brașov | 5,1% |
|  | Brăila | 6,3% |
|  | Buzău  | 5,1% |
|  | Covasna | 3,8% |
|  | Dâmbovița  | 1,3% |
|  | Dolj  | 2,5% |
|  | Galați | 3,8% |
|  | Harghita | 1,3% |
|  | Hunedoara | 3,8% |
|  | Ialomița  | 1,3% |
|  | Iași | 3,8% |
|  | Ilfov  | 5,1% |
|  | Maramureș | 1,3% |
|  | Mureș | 3,8% |
|  | Neamț | 7,6% |
|  | Olt | 1,3% |
|  | Prahova | 6,3% |
|  | Satu Mare  | 6,3% |
|  | Sălaj | 1,3% |
|  | Sibiu | 1,3% |
|  | Suceava  | 1,3% |
|  | Teleorman | 1,3% |
|  | Vaslui | 3,8% |
|  | Vâlcea | 1,3% |

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

**Tab.2** Seniority in the public authority activity

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **No. of years** | **Frequency**  |
| 0 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 6 |
| 3 | 6 |
| 4 | 2 |
| 5 | 2 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 7 | 2 |
| 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 5 |
| 10 | 3 |
| 11 | 3 |
| 12 | 3 |
| 13 | 2 |
| 14 | 3 |
| 15 | 5 |
| 16 | 1 |
| 19 | 1 |
| 20 | 8 |
| 21 | 1 |
| 22 | 4 |
| 23 | 3 |
| 24 | 3 |
| 25 | 2 |
| 26 | 2 |
| 28 | 1 |
| 29 | 1 |
| 30 | 2 |

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

Table 2 indicates the structure of the sample, that the respondents have a varied seniority within the ANPIS structures, showing from this point of view a heterogeneous group, through which different problems and solutions can be verified depending on the experience and activity within the authority.

*Time period for answering each type of question/petition*

In order to identify the time allotted to respond to the beneficiaries, it was introduced a filter question to show which channel or channels of communication with the beneficiaries used by the employees of the territorial structures – APIS.

**Fig. 1** Distribution of types of interactions with beneficiaries (multiple response**).**

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

Fig. 1 shows that at the level of the ANPIS structures, all types of interactions with the beneficiaries take place, almost to the extent, being prevalent, however, the telephone interaction (98.7%) to the detriment of the electronic one by e-mail, or the face-to-face one. This can be justified by the simplicity of the interaction method (real-time, direct communication of the beneficiary with the APIS / APISMB employee), as well as the situation created by the limitation of face-to-face interactions caused by the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic.

**Fig. 2** Time allocated for answers to petitions.

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

Regarding the time allocated after requests for information for social assistance benefits, it can be observed in the Fig.2 that most petitions are resolved on the spot (84.6%), this being also determined by the fact that the main interaction is by telephone, followed by a significant percentage of that in person. Only 32.5% of the petitions were categorized by the respondents as having a required resolution time of more than 15 days.

This graph guides us to understand the needs of the beneficiaries, which through the short time allocated for solving them, show their low complexity.

*Needs of the beneficiary*

The Fig. 3 highlights the main social benefits that correlate the needs of the beneficiaries, so it can be seen that the highest rate of needs are related to the request for information on the state child allowance (79.7%), the child raising allowance ( 77.2%) and the insertion incentive (62%), at the opposite pole being the food allowance for people living with HIV / AIDS (8.9%).

**Fig. 3** Distribution of the types of benefits for which most information is requested (multiple answer)

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

The Fig.4 shows what could be the causes of the need to request information from the beneficiaries.

 **Fig. 4** Causes for requesting information from beneficiaries

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

Thus, in proportion of 67%, the ambiguity of legislative regulations, it was considered as the main cause that determines the need of the beneficiaries of information regarding the social benefits, on the other hand, only 7% considered the clarity and accuracy of the information provided by ANPIS/APIS to be a cause. Among other causes were highlighted, their difficult access (10%), as well as lack of publicity of information (15.7%).

*Frequent questions*

In Tab. 3 the most frequently asked questions of the beneficiaries were highlighted, according to each benefit identified[[2]](#footnote-2).

**Tab. 3**. Questions categories asked by type of benefit

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Social benefit type** | **Questions asked** | **Frequency** |
| State allowance for children | Payment date | 33 |
| Change payment method | 17 |
| EU form | 16 |
| Placement allowance | Payment date | 6 |
| Payment | 6 |
| Amount / Transfer to bank account | 3 |
| Child raising allowance | Payment date | 23 |
| Calculation method | 10 |
| Granting conditions | 10 |
| The insertion stimulus | Required documents | 9 |
| Granting conditions | 8 |
| Payment date | 7 |
| Monthly allowance for accommodation leave | Payment date | 4 |
| Bank transfer information | 3 |
| Check agreement | 3 |
| Monthly HIV / AIDS food allowance | Amount | 2 |
| Required documents | 2 |
| Date of granting / transfer to another county / retroactive payments / re-orders | 1 |
| Compensation for people with disabilities | Payment date  | 9 |
| amount | 6 |
| Rights after death | 5 |
| Family support allowance | Payment date | 4 |
| Amount | 4 |
| Granting conditions | 3 |
| Guaranteed minimum income | Debt clarifications | 15 |
| Bank account | 10 |
| Other benefits (e.gg. Government Emergency Ordinance no. 30 for Covid-19) | Required documents | 7 |
| Categories of beneficiary | 3 |
| Deposit method | 2 |

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

It can be seen that, although there are heterogeneous responses, three major directions can be identified. One of the main recurring questions regardless of the social benefit is the date of payment of that right. The second most common question highlights the need to know how much the social benefit is or how it is calculated, and the third concerns the method of payment, i.e. how to make a payment in a particular bank account, how to change payment in another bank account, or in another county (in the case of the state child allowance). In addition to these three directions, which highlight the most frequently asked questions from the beneficiaries, we can point out with moderate recurrence that there is also the one regarding the acts or conditions for granting a certain benefit.

*Evaluation of the institution*

For the evaluation of the institution, there were asked several types of questions, which focused on the one hand the quality of information and the evaluation of communication channels on the one hand, and on the other hand, how the internal structures can be improved.

**Fig. 5.** Evaluation of the information on the website - clear and comprehensive

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

Regarding the clarity of the information on the ANPIS / APIS / APISMB website, in a very high percentage they appreciated that they are very clear (26%), respectively (64.5%).

Fig. 6 shows how is considered the way of communication with the beneficiaries, using the existing communication channels at the level of the institutions. The respondents appreciated positively well (20%) and very well (57.3%) the use of these channels.

**Fig. 6.** Evaluation of information on the website - easily accessible

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

Regarding the way of communication with the beneficiaries, using the existing communication channels at the level of the institution, as highlighted in Fig. 7, the respondents appreciated as very well (20%) and well (57.3%) the use of the existing channels.

**Fig. 7.** Evaluation of the way of communication with the beneficiaries

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

As directions for improving the interaction with the beneficiaries, Fig. 8 shows that the most viable solution would be the creation of a specialized call center (51%), followed by the creation of a mixed electronic and telephone information mechanism (43%). Only 25% of the respondents consider as a solution the creation of a help desk, as a solution that would really respond to the needs of the beneficiaries in the interaction with ANPIS / their territorial structures.

**Fig. 8.**  Directions to improve interaction with beneficiaries

Source: Author elaboration, on collected data

**Conclusion**

For increasing the quality of social public services and reducing administrative burdens at the level of the (ANPIS), it should be take into account the strengths and weakness of the institutional system, which was highlighted by questionnaire.

Thus, as strengths, it could be identified, the following:

* the existence of ANPIS territorial structures, which communicate in short period time with the beneficiaries of social services benefits
* short and medium response time (according to complexity) to citizens' petitions/questions
* communication channels with existing functional beneficiaries
* ANPIS territorial structures website contain large information about social benefits.

As weakness in relation with the beneficiaries of the social service, could be underlined:

* use of communication channels (telephone) mainly to the detriment of others (e-mail)
* website with inappropriate language to explain how some social benefits can be obtained
* frequent legislative changes, vague and interpretable regulations.

The main action that should be undertake. for reducing administrative burdens at the level of the ANPIS, is the implementation of a national help-desk system, with specialized staff that would have the following advantages:

* online assistance and intervention services;
* single point of contact;
* real-time interaction;
* knowledge base;
* flexibility and adaptability to the needs of the beneficiaries.

The research underlined, also, that many beneficiaries have ambiguities about the amount and calculation of the social benefit. In this regard, for increasing the quality of social public services, we propose the introduction of a virtual calculator, accessible online on the website, for certain social benefits which, following the introduction by the beneficiary of some data, to make an approximate calculation of the amount to be received by the beneficiary.

A the end of this work, it should be underlined the research limits, which took into account the point of view of the employees of the ANPIS structures in their relation with the citizen, and, in some situation, even if the questionnaire was anonymously applied, some answers could nor reflect the real situation.

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1. The territory of Romania is divided into 41 counties, plus the municipality of Bucharest which is a municipality with county rights. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Q4. Please mention, what are the three main information requested by the beneficiaries, for each category identified in the questionnaire [↑](#footnote-ref-2)