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## Performance – a Determining Factor in the Public Health System from Romania and the EU

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**Abstract:** Performance in the health system is one of the determining factors of the growth and development of a state, because the well-being of people depends on the quality of the health system, on the life expectancy of citizens. A healthy person directly contributes to the increase of labor productivity, as well as to its contribution to the state budget, through the payment of taxes. Performance in the health system can only be achieved if we understand that at the center of the system is the patient, with his needs for medical services that must be met safely.

**Keywords:** performance; health; contribution; patients; infrastructure

In the case of a health system, performance is a complex objective, involving a number of factors. We cannot talk about performance in a sensitive field like health, without thinking first of all about the human factor, then the logistical one, and last but not least the financial one. The human factor considered refers on the one hand to the patients, to the population that needs medical services, whether we are talking about preventive medical services, curative or emergency medical services, and on the other hand to the medical staff, the training, its availability and number/sufficiency. From a logistical point of view, we refer to the health infrastructure, to the medical units available and prepared to ensure quality coverage

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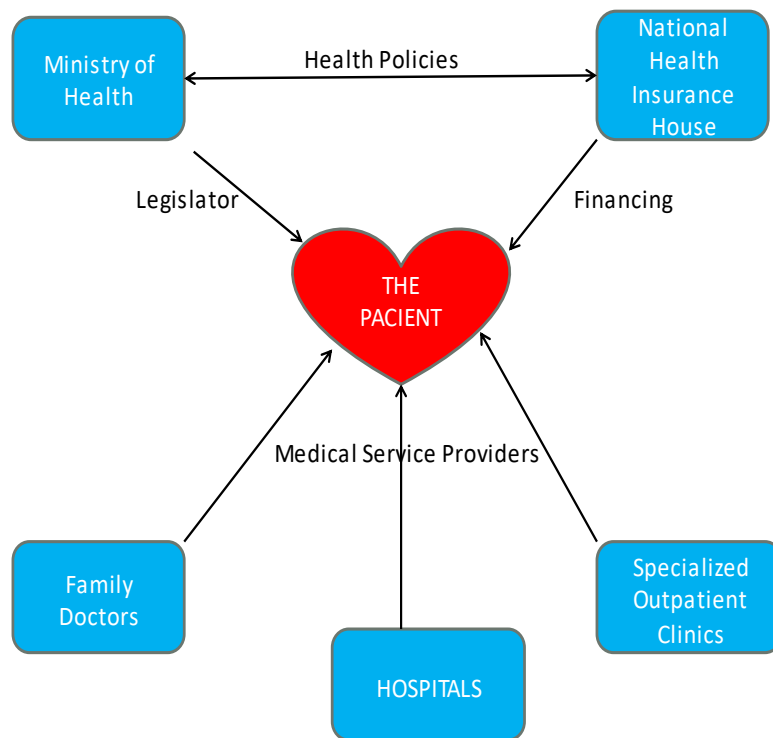
of medical services at a given moment, both under normal operating conditions, but especially in borderline situations. Regarding the financial support of the health system, investments are one of the key performance factors in this important sector. Without proper provision of the sanitary units with the materials and equipment necessary for optimal functioning, the performance suffers, sometimes with the most serious implications, which even lead to the death of patients. Performance in the health system can only be achieved if we understand that at the center of the system is the patient, with his needs for medical services that must be met safely.

### **Research Method**

We used as a research method the analysis of the indicators that can quantify the performance in health through indicators that are addressed especially to hospitals, indicators according to which the payment of the medical staff is made. The patient's needs can be satisfied under optimal conditions, only if the activities carried out by the authorities involved in the health system take this into account.

### **Case Study**

In the specialized literature from Romania, there is no indicator that quantifies the performance in the health system. The performance indicators are specifically addressed to hospitals, indicators according to which the payment of the medical staff is made. In the international literature, previous research on the calculation of a health performance indicator has been addressed in articles published in various journals. Donabedian (1996) mentions that performance is in direct correlation with the quality of medical services. It states that “the likelihood of achieving the best outcome is guaranteed by the delivery of the best quality healthcare” (Vlădescu, et al., 2011). Time is an important dimension when it comes to medical services, as it can be fatal in the case of chronic diseases or aggravate an existing medical condition. None of these indicators holistically address such a complex approach with strategic implications as health system performance. This approach is all the more important since, for about a year and a half, since December 2019, the issue of health has been in the foreground for all countries worldwide, with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Each country tried locally to manage this unforeseen situation, which proved to be difficult to manage even by countries with a developed economy and significant investments in the health system.



**Figure 1. The patient - the center of the health system**

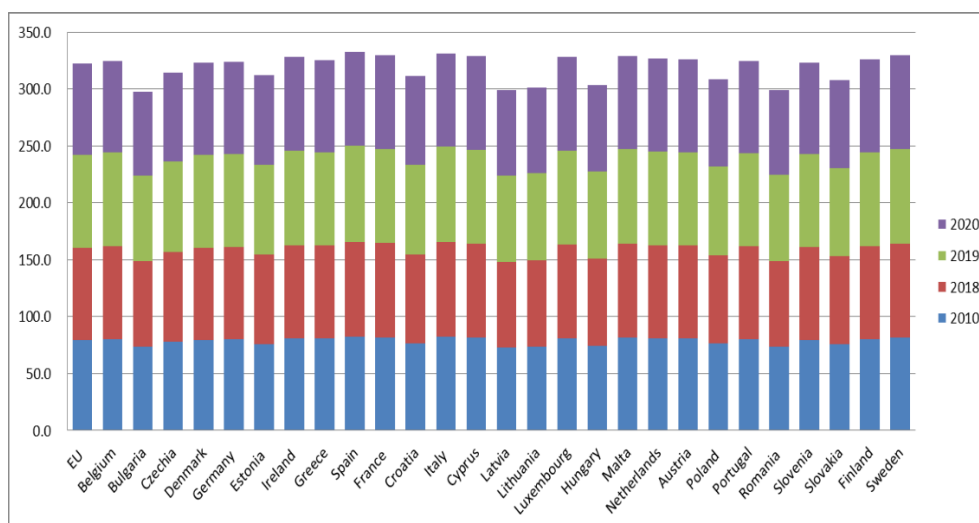
*Source: Own Processing*

In this research, the analysis of the performance of the public health system in Romania is related to similar indicators from the health systems of the member countries of the European Union. We have considered the selected indicators essential to characterize and define a performing public health system and to compare the public health system in Romania with the health systems in the European Union countries, with the aim of identifying weak points and proposing solutions for improving the existing situation. The three dimensions of performance in any organization, namely efficiency, effectiveness and economy, require an appropriate adaptation in the health system. Regarding health, we can speak about efficiency and effectiveness, but economy must be approached differently in the medical field, because it is about the quality of the medical act, the patient's state of health, and in this case things are completely different than in an organization.

### Efficiency and Effectiveness in Health System

Effectiveness relative to the health system is correlated with obtaining favorable results of the medical act, regardless of the costs involved (human effort, time consumption or financial resources). The concept of efficiency in health is different from the economic concept of the term efficiency. In the economic field, efficiency aims at economy, obtaining maximum results with the use of minimal resources, while in the health field, economy can lead to an improper medical act, which can endanger the patient's life. Efficiency and effectiveness, dimensions of performance in any health system, must consider increasing life expectancy, decreasing mortality rates and providing quality medical services.

If we analyze the data published by Eurostat, regarding life expectancy, we notice that Romania is below the average of the European Union countries (figures 2-3)<sup>1</sup>. Life expectancy in 2020 in Romania is 74.2 years, lower than the average of the European Union countries by 7.1 years. Bulgaria has the lowest life expectancy in 2020 at 73.6 years and Ireland the highest at 82.8 years.

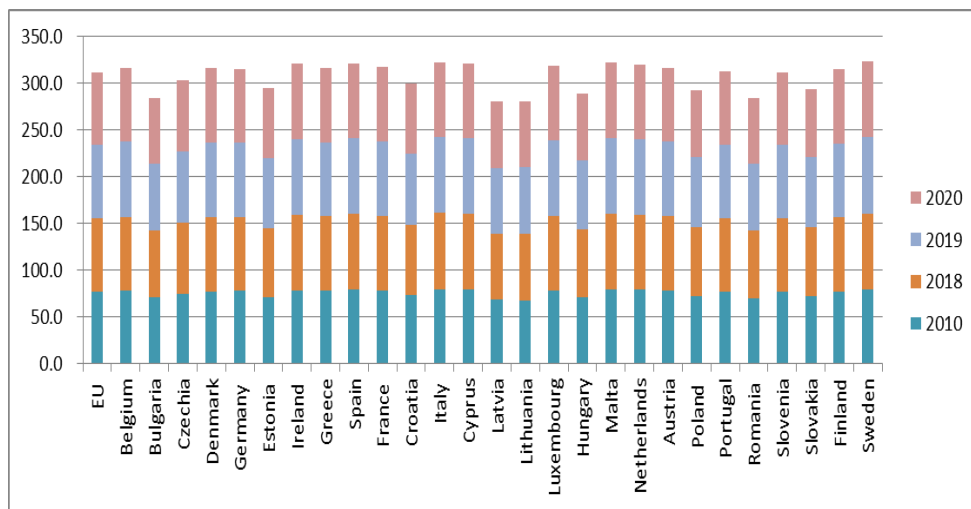


**Figure 2. Life expectancy in the countries of the European Union in the period 2016-2021**

*Source: Processing based on data published by Eurostat*

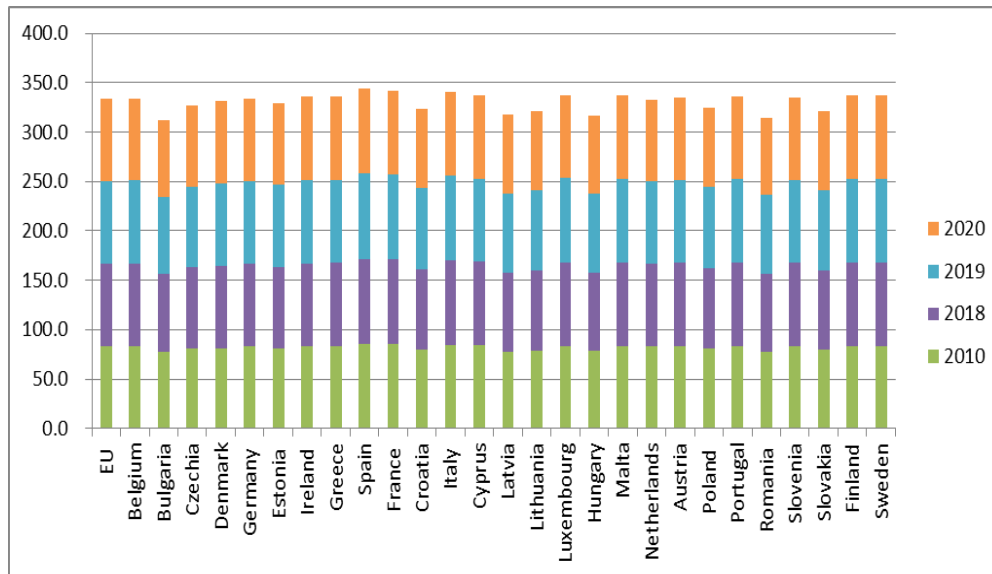
<sup>1</sup> Eurostat 2021. Accessed at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/DEMO\\_MLEXPEC/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=eb24a8d3-224](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/DEMO_MLEXPEC/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=eb24a8d3-224)

According to the data published by Eurostat, in the countries of the European Union, in 2020, 643,906 people died from causes that could have been prevented (figure 4) and 371,917 people from causes that could be treated (figure 5). The first three causes of mortality, which could be avoided through prevention were lung cancer (23%), ischemic heart disease (12%) and diseases caused by alcohol consumption (11%). The main treatable causes of mortality were ischemic heart disease (20%), colorectal cancer (16%), breast cancer (12%) and stroke (11%).



**Figure 3.1. Male life expectancy 2016-2021**

Source: Processing based on data published by Eurostat



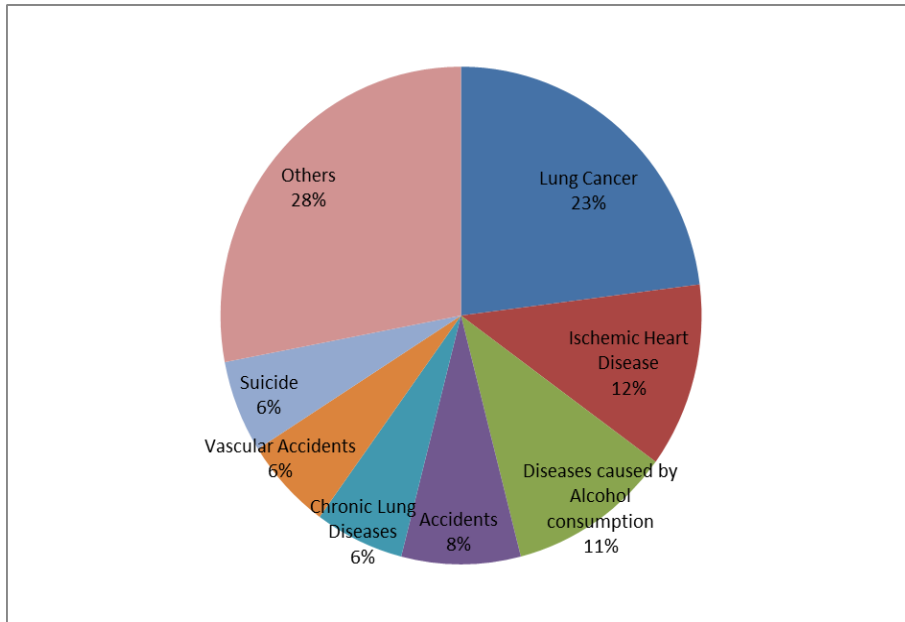
**Figure 3.2. Life expectancy for women in the period 2016-2021**

*Source: Processing based on data published by Eurostat*

### Availability of Medical Services

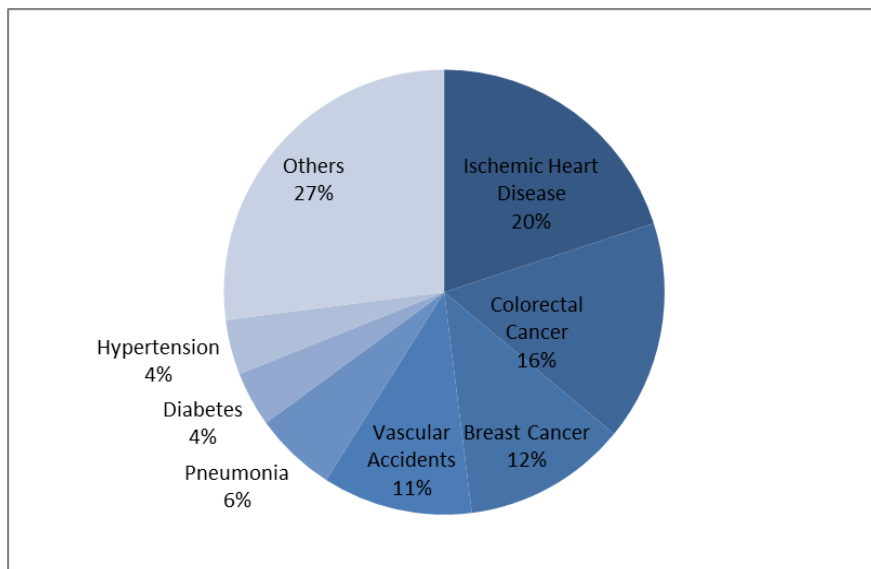
In the health system in Romania, a third dimension of performance and a very important one, we consider to be the availability of medical services, the access of patients to quality medical services when they need those medical services. In the specialized literature, there are timid approaches regarding the availability of medical services. In the European Commission's 2020 report regarding the Romanian health system, it is mentioned that “the uneven distribution of doctors and medical care units determines a more limited access to primary and specialist services in rural areas”<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> European Commission Report. *Romania-2021 Country Profile for Health*. Access at: [https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/state/docs/2019\\_chp\\_romania\\_romanian.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/state/docs/2019_chp_romania_romanian.pdf).



**Figure 4. Causes of mortality avoidable through prevention**

*Source: Eurostat*



**Figure 5. Treatable causes of mortality**

*Source: Eurostat*

**The EHCI indicator (Euro Health Consumer Index)**

Euro Health Consumer INDEX (EHCI) is an indicator with which the performance of health systems in 35 member states of the European Union, including Romania, is monitored. It has been calculated since 2005, by a non-governmental organization in France, Health Consumer Powerhouse. 46 indicators from each national health system are analyzed, indicators grouped in areas such as: patients' rights and their information, access to medical care, treatment, accessibility and diversity of medical services for the population, waiting time for access to medical services, prevention and the use of pharmaceuticals.

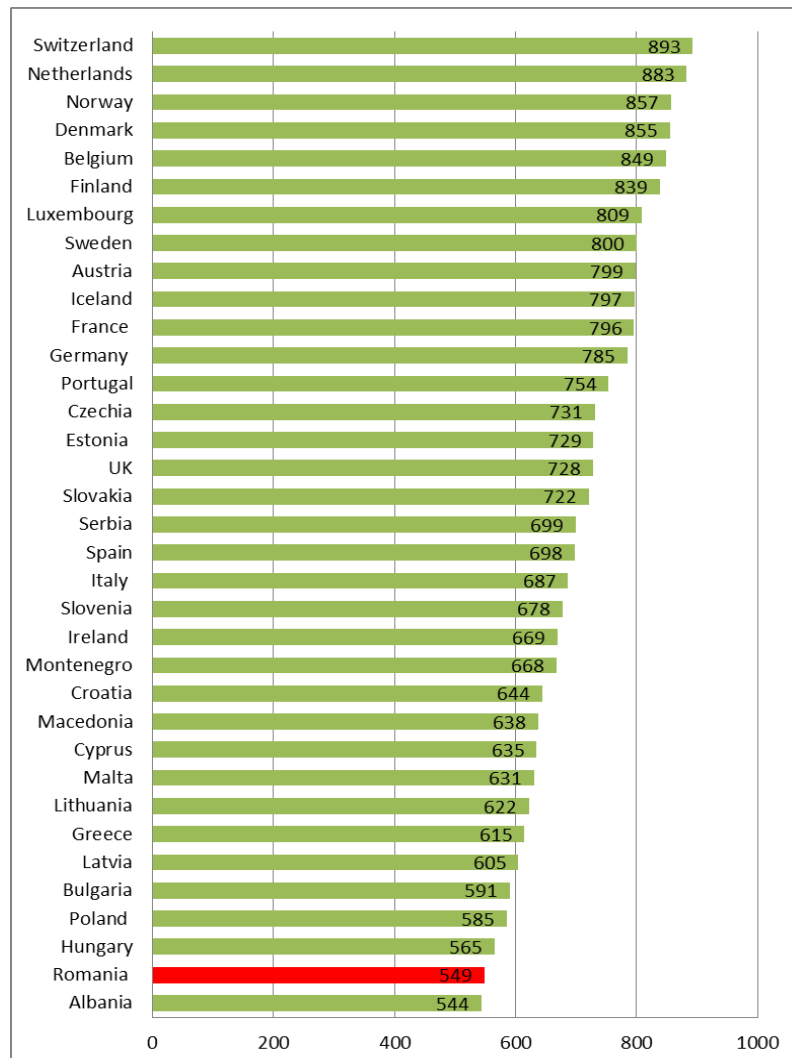
In the last report published in 2020, Romania has one of the weakest health systems among the 35 health systems analyzed, being in 34th place, ahead of Albania. The authors state that Romania “has severe problems regarding the management of the entire public health sector”<sup>1</sup>. Romania, along with Albania and Bulgaria, “suffers from an outdated health structure, with a high and expensive ratio”<sup>2</sup> between hospitalized patients and those who benefit from outpatient medical treatment. “If in some health systems, such as the Swiss or the Dutch, long-term hospitalization is preferred, it is because these countries can afford it, while countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and Albania cannot.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI - 2018/EHCI - 20 20 - report.pdf>, page 19.

<sup>2</sup> <https://healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI - 2018/EHCI - 20 20 - report.pdf>, page 19.





**Figure 6. The EHCI 2020 indicator**

*Source: Data processed according to the 2021 EHCI Report<sup>1</sup>*

As mentioned by Jonathan, C. Et al. in 2020<sup>2</sup>, the EHCI index has certain limits, namely:

1. Scores are arbitrarily assigned to indicators;

<sup>1</sup> <https://healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2020/EHCI-2020-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Accessed at: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/02/09/what-if-everything-does-the-eurohealth-consumer-index-actually-tell-us/>

2. The points-based system does not reflect what matters to citizens;
3. There is no base for the indicators section;
4. Various indicators are randomly combined.

## **Conclusions**

The health system is “the totality of activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore, and maintain health”<sup>1</sup>. The main objective of any health system is to ensure the health of the population, prevent diseases and improve the quality of life. To ensure the health status of the population, any health system must be able to provide quality health services.

This is possible only through an active involvement of the authorities in the public health system, through an appropriate financing of the system, by ensuring the equitable access of the population to quality medical services. The health system in Romania requires an urgent review as a whole. It must be able to provide quality health services, something that is only possible through the active involvement of the authorities in the public health system, through appropriate financing of the system, by ensuring the fair access of the population to medical services quality. For the recovery of the health system in Romania, there is a need for investments in the appropriate endowment of hospitals with medical equipment and materials necessary for their good functioning, investments in the training of medical personnel, in the development of IT platforms in the health system. The conclusions drawn lead to a delicate picture of the health system in Romania at the present time. This system, which was already operating under poor conditions before the Covid-19 pandemic, proved its need for urgent rethinking with this international medical crisis, a crisis that has put the medical system in general and hospital doctors in particular to the test.

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<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization. *The World Health Report 2000 – Health Systems: Improving Performance*. Accessed at: [https://www.who.int/whr/2000/en/whr00\\_en.pdf](https://www.who.int/whr/2000/en/whr00_en.pdf).

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