Dynamics of the Public Contract Award Process in Romania between 2022 and 2024

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Abstract

The period 2021-2024 represented a period of significant transformations in the public procurement system in Romania, influenced by legislative changes, the intensification of digitalization processes and the need to align with European Union requirements. This study analyzes the dynamics of the public contract award process during this period, highlighting procedural developments, the level of transparency, operational efficiency and the degree of compliance. Through a mixed methodological approach–including statistical analysis of SEAP data, assessment of regulatory changes and interviews with public procurement specialists–the research identifies the main trends that shaped the award mechanisms. The results show an increase in the use of competitive procedures, a progressive simplification of administrative stages and the consolidation of digital tools, but also persistent challenges related to institutional capacity, the duration of processes and the heterogeneity of reform implementation. The study also highlights the impact of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan on the volume and dynamics of public procurement. The conclusions contribute to understanding how the public procurement system evolves in a constantly changing economic and regulatory context, providing relevant recommendations for decision-makers involved in optimizing the award process.

Keywords: *public procurement, contract award, transparency, procedural efficiency, digitalization*

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1. Introduction

Public procurement is an essential mechanism through which the state ensures the provision of goods, services and works necessary for the functioning of public institutions and the implementation of development projects (Patrucco, Agasisti& Glas,2021). In Romania, the process of awarding public contracts has

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experienced significant changes in the period 2022-2024, determined by legislative, economic and technological factors. Recent reforms aimed to improve transparency, efficiency and competitiveness in the conduct of procedures, as well as alignment with European Union standards, including through the process of putting into practice the measures outlined in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

The digitalization of processes, through the Electronic Public Procurement System), has accelerated access to information and reduced administrative barriers, but the challenges regarding institutional capacity, the complexity of procedures and the duration of contracts remain relevant. In this context, the analysis of the dynamics of awarding public contracts becomes essential for understanding the evolution of procurement mechanisms, identifying trends and formulating recommendations for optimizing processes (Murray, 2012).

The mechanisms used to award public contracts represent a core element of any national economy, as they directly shape the effectiveness of public spending and influence the overall business environment. In Romania, this sector has undergone substantial changes between 2022 and 2024, driven by the transposition of European regulations, the acceleration of administrative digitalization, and the need to respond to challenges that emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments were intended to enhance transparency, improve efficiency, and strengthen competition within the public procurement system (Olsson & Öjehag-Pettersson, 2020).

The objective of this article is to examine how public contract award procedures evolved in Romania during this period, with particular emphasis on legislative updates, the integration of digital instruments, and the effects of these modifications on current procurement practices. By offering a thorough and up-to-date analysis of these transformations, the study provides valuable insights for both scholars and professionals, contributing meaningfully to the existing body of research on public procurement.

2. Literature Review

Analyzing public procurement procedures requires a multidisciplinary perspective that brings together concepts from law, economics, and public administration. Within the public sector, procurement is widely acknowledged as a key component of managerial activity, ensuring the provision of goods, services, and infrastructure essential for governmental functions. As highlighted by Bititci et al. (2012), procurement activities encompass stages such as needs assessment, drafting technical specifications, supplier selection, and contract administration. These stages are structured around core principles, including transparency, fair competition, and the pursuit of optimal value for public spending (Arrowsmith, 2010). In recent years, the use of historical data in procurement processes has gained increasing attention, offering important opportunities to enhance budget forecasting and improve the effectiveness of procurement decisions.

Boykin (2022) argues that analyzing historical procurement data enables public institutions to gain a clearer understanding of market behavior and supplier performance, which in turn supports more accurate budgeting and more effective allocation of resources. Such a data-oriented perspective is crucial for mitigating risks and ensuring that public funds are used efficiently (De Waal, 2010). Moreover, a well-structured procurement system encourages competition, and—as suggested by Porter's competitive theory (1980)—competition drives innovation and lowers costs. Within the sphere of public procurement, structured and transparent procedures create equal opportunities for bidders, thereby improving value for money and contributing to higher-quality services (Glas & Eßig, 2018; Prier, McCue & Csáki, 2021). Additionally, incorporating historical data into procurement planning resonates with the dynamic capabilities framework, which highlights the importance of organizational adaptability in rapidly evolving environments (Dobrotă, 2015).

Leveraging historical data analysis contributes to greater flexibility and improved efficiency in public procurement procedures. The specialized literature on public procurement emphasizes the strategic role of this field in managing public resources, promoting competition and supporting economic development. According to the European theoretical framework, public procurement is a key instrument for stimulating the internal market, increasing transparency and improving public governance (Micheli & Mari,2014).

International studies highlight that the efficiency of the award process depends on the clarity of regulations, the administrative capacity of contracting authorities, the level of digitalization and the degree of compliance with competition rules.

A significant body of work examines the impact of digitalization on public procurement. The implementation of electronic procurement systems (e-procurement) is associated with reducing costs, limiting corruption risks and accelerating workflows. Electronic platforms, such as SEAP in Romania, are analyzed as tools for strengthening transparency and facilitating equal access of economic operators to award procedures (Mircea, Stoica & Ghilic-Micu, 2022).

However, recent literature emphasizes that digitalization is not sufficient in itself; efficiency depends on interoperability, organizational capacities and staff training. Another stream of research focuses on legislative reform in the field of public procurement (Rolfstam, Phillips& Bakker, 2011).

At European level, Directives 2014/24/EU and 2014/25/EU imposed a series of common standards on transparency, competition and award procedures, directly influencing national legislation. Studies highlight that Member States have encountered different difficulties in implementing these rules, depending on the level of institutional maturity, administrative traditions and available resources.

In the case of Romania, existing research signals a gradual evolution in the modernisation of the system, but mentions challenges related to the complexity of procedures and the variability of administrative practices (Stritch et al., 2020).

The literature on public procurement in the context of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) analyzes the additional pressures placed on procurement systems exerted on contracting authorities to accelerate award processes and ensure the absorption of European funds within a limited time. Studies show that projects financed through European mechanisms impose rigorous standards of compliance, monitoring and reporting, which can increase both professionalisation and administrative difficulties.

Research on performance and integrity in public procurement also highlights the role of monitoring indicators, audit mechanisms and ex-post controls. Numerous studies address the issue of corruption risk, considering public procurement as a vulnerable area, especially in the absence of effective oversight and standardized procedures (Wynstra Rooks& Snijders, 2018).

3. Research Methodology

This study aims to analyze public procurement processes and related appeals in Romania during the 2022–2024 period. Data were obtained from official sources, including the national public procurement platforms SEAP and ANAP, governmental databases (ANAF, GOV.ro), official reports and policy documents, as well as relevant academic and professional publications. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining automated data extraction from SEAP and ANAP with quantitative statistical analysis of procurement data. In addition, comparative analysis was used to identify temporal and procedural differences, while qualitative content analysis of institutional documents and media sources supported the interpretation of key trends, challenges, and systemic issues in public procurement.

To complement the quantitative findings, the research also incorporates a qualitative component, including a review of national legislation and relevant European regulations, case studies of complex procedures and projects financed through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), and semi-structured interviews with public procurement specialists, representatives of contracting authorities, and consultants. This approach allows for an in-depth assessment of perceptions regarding the efficiency, transparency, and challenges associated with the procurement process (Sarbu et al., 2025)

The proposed methodology enables the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, offering a comprehensive view of the dynamics of the contract award process. However, the study is subject to several limitations. The reliability of SEAP data depends on the accuracy and completeness of recorded information, interview findings may be influenced by respondent subjectivity, and the analysis is confined to the 2022–2024 period, without assessing the long-term impacts of the implemented reforms.

By combining these methods, the research aims to provide a rigorous assessment of the evolution of the public contract award process, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges.

4. Results and Discussion

The award of public contracts via the Electronic Public Procurement System (SEAP) proceeds through a series of well-defined stages, governed by current legislation to ensure transparency, fair competition, and the efficient use of public resources. The main stages of the process are:

- Publication of the tender notice: The procedure begins with the publication of a notice on SEAP, which specifies the contract requirements, award criteria, and submission deadlines.

- Submission of tenders: Economic operators interested in participating submit their bids in accordance with the tender documentation, which encompasses the technical specifications, procurement data sheet, and any additional requirements outlined by the contracting authority.

Analysis of data from SEAP reveals notable fluctuations in the number of contracts awarded between 2022 and 2024. The total number of awarded contracts increased in 2022, followed by a slight decline in 2023. The most prominent contract categories during this period were the supply of goods, construction works, and services (see Table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of public procurement by contract type

Contract type	2022	2023	2024
Supply	15.548	16.410	13.358
Works	6.539	8.038	10.187
Services	7.242	7.642	6.045
Total	29.326	32.088	29.590

Source: Own processing based on SEAP data (2022-2024)

In 2022, the majority of awarded contracts were classified as supply contracts, a pattern that persisted in subsequent years, although the volume of such contracts exhibited a slight decrease in 2023. In that year, supply contracts accounted for the largest share, totaling 15,548 units, followed by works contracts at 6,539 units and service contracts at 7,242 units, resulting in an overall total of 29,326 contracts. In 2023, all contract categories showed growth. Works contracts rose significantly to 8,038 units, supply contracts increased modestly to 16,410 units, and service contracts reached 7,642 units. Consequently, the total number of contracts awarded in 2023 amounted to 32,088.

In 2024, a notable change is observed. While the works category continues to grow, reaching 10,187 units, supply contracts decreased significantly to 13,358 units. Service contracts also registered a decrease, reaching 6,043 units.

The total number of contracts awarded was 29,590, marking a decrease compared to the previous year.

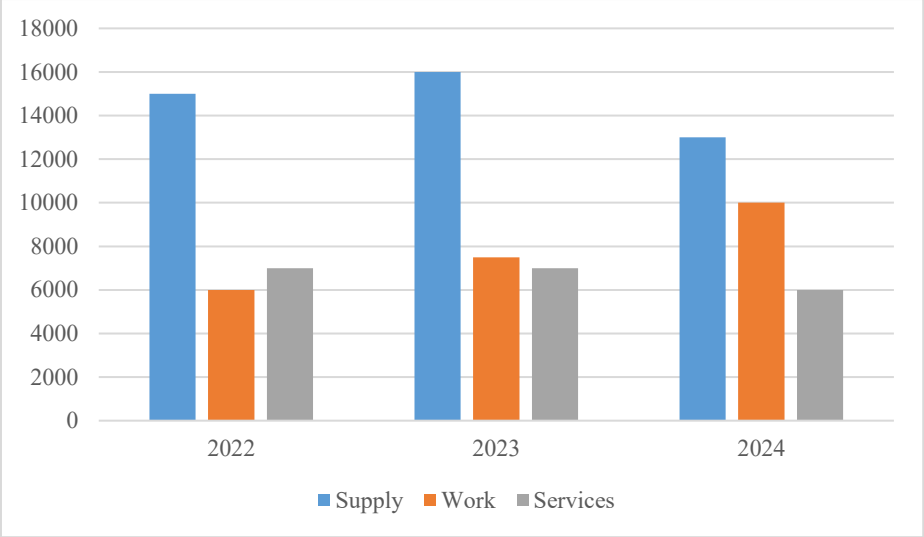

Figure 1. Evolution of contract types in Romania
Source: Own processing based on ANAP data (2022-2024)

Works contracts have a constant increase, reflecting a priority for infrastructure investments. The number of service contracts has slightly decreased during the analyzed period, indicating a change in public procurement priorities.

In terms of value, the total amount of awarded contracts has increased considerably from 160 million RON in 2021 to over 668 million RON in 2024, with a spectacular evolution in the value of supply contracts (see Table 2). These data indicate a general trend of increasing public investments, supported by programs such as the PNRR.

Figure 2 presents the evolution of the main types of public and sectoral contracts awarded through the Electronic Public Procurement System (SEAP) in the period 2022–2024. In this analysis, three major categories are distinguished: supply, works and services. The total value of procurement contracts in Romania evolves from 160,412,961.68 RON in 2021 to 666,708,359 in 2023.

In 2022, the most significant types of contracts in terms of value are works, followed by supplies and services. During this period, the works category recorded the highest awarded value, followed by supplies and services contracts.

Table 2. Evolution of the value of procurement contracts in Romania

Contract type	2022	2023	2024
Supply	55.655.876,58	105.809.396,81	450.988.031
Works	77.523.312,02	177.654.090,52	177.300.995
Services	27.233.733,08	36.023.848,51	40.419.333
Total	160.412.962,68	319.487.336,84	668.708.360

Source: Own processing based on SEAP data (2022-2024)

In 2023, the total value of awarded contracts saw a substantial rise, reaching 319,487,335.84 RON. Contracts for works remained the largest in terms of awarded value, while supply contracts experienced notable growth. Although the value of service contracts also increased, their growth rate was slower compared to the other contract categories.

In 2024, the total value of awarded contracts reached a record level of 668,708,359 RON. This significant increase was largely driven by supply contracts, which emerged as the dominant category in terms of awarded value, surpassing works contracts. Meanwhile, service contracts continued to experience moderate growth.

Analysis of these data indicates notable annual fluctuations, accompanied by a consistent increase in the total contract value of contracts awarded over the three years. The distribution of values between the different contract categories suggests changes in the investment priorities and procurement strategies of public authorities.

Contracts and Framework Agreements in Public Procurement serve as the primary tools for contracting authorities and entities. Standard contracts are typically employed for single procurement procedures, adhering to the value thresholds set by current legislation.

Framework agreements are concluded between contracting authorities and one or more suppliers to establish the general terms and conditions governing future procurements. These agreements are particularly useful for recurring or periodic purchases, providing greater flexibility and efficiency in managing procurement activities.

The dynamic purchasing system (DPS) is a fully electronic method of procurement, open for the entire duration of the process. It is mainly intended for the procurement of products of current use, with standardized characteristics available on the market. Under this system, economic operators that meet the qualification and selection criteria can participate throughout its duration.

The analysis of data from 2022 to 2024 reveals notable variations in both the number and value of awarded contracts, contingent upon the procurement method employed.

For public procurement contracts, the number of awards increased from 22,497 in 2022 to 25,392 in 2023, before declining slightly to 23,863 in 2024 (see Table 2). This trend reflects a sustained preference for this type of contract. The total value of these contracts also rose substantially, from 80,550,400 RON in 2022 to 207,588,404 RON in 2024, suggesting an increase in large-scale projects managed through this method.

Figure 3 illustrates the evolution of contract award methods over the 2022–2024 period. Analysis of contract values shows a pronounced growth, rising from 160,412,963 RON in 2022 to 319,487,337 RON in 2023, and reaching 668,708,360 RON in 2024.

This significant increase in the value of framework agreements indicates a strategic shift toward using this approach for the management of large-scale public procurement.

Although the dynamic procurement system is expanding gradually, it highlights the significant role of digital technologies in modernizing the public procurement process, creating opportunities to streamline procedures and enhance transparency. In Romania, public procurement is primarily funded through two sources: the national budget and European funds. The choice of funding source depends on the nature of the projects and the strategic objectives of the government, and is often influenced by the availability of financial resources.

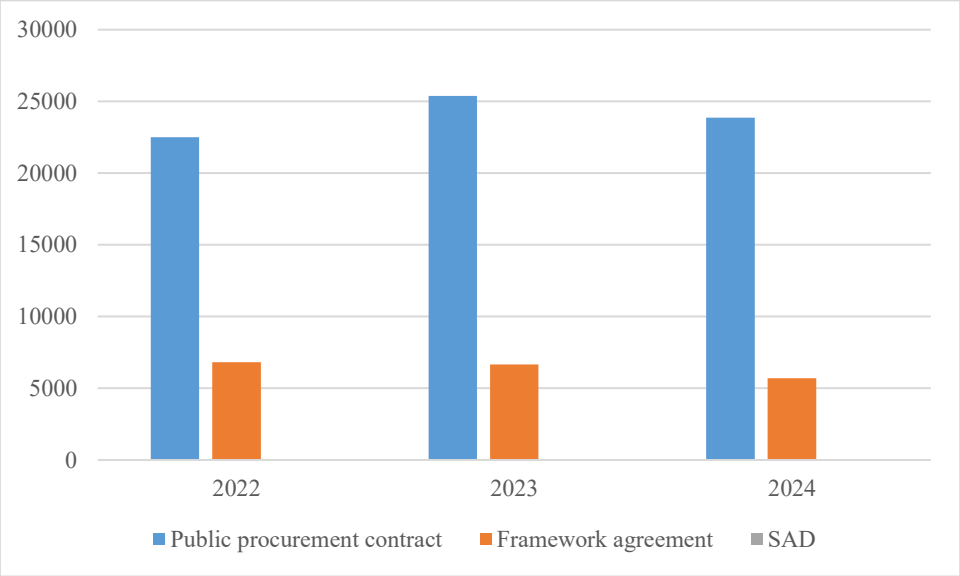

Figure 2. How to award contracts in Romania
Source: Own processing based on ANAP data (2022–2024)

The national budget represents the totality of funds allocated by the government to finance public procurement, derived from tax revenues, government loans and other sources of income.

These funds are used for infrastructure projects, procurement of goods and services, as well as for the implementation of government development programs.

Financial resources from European funds represent an essential source of financing for Romania, providing financial support for various projects through European Union programs, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These resources have been directed towards infrastructure projects, rural development, increasing economic competitiveness and human resources development.

Additionally, funds have been accessed through EAFRD, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Territorial Cooperation programs. These funds have contributed to reducing regional disparities and improving the quality of life of citizens. In practice, public procurement is financed either exclusively from the national budget or by combining both sources, which allows for a more flexible allocation of resources to achieve national and European objectives.

In 2023, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) catalyzed the initiation of public procurement procedures amounting to €6,829.94 million, demonstrating a pronounced commitment to launching projects funded under this program. Of this total, €1,837.68 million represented procedures that reached completion within the same year. This momentum intensified in 2024, with the value of newly initiated procedures rising sharply to €24,142.74 million, reflecting Romania's continued dedication to the implementation of PNRR-supported initiatives.

The PNRR has exerted a considerable influence on the public procurement landscape, facilitating significant investments across diverse sectors, including infrastructure, energy, environmental protection, and digitalization. Moreover, it has contributed to the modernization of existing infrastructure and enhanced the country's overall economic capacity. Collectively, the combined value of initiated and completed procedures grew substantially, from €9,789.58 million in 2022 to €16,314.60 million in 2024. This sustained upward trajectory underscores the pivotal role of European funding in promoting Romania's economic development and in establishing a stable basis for long-term growth.

5. Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive examination of the evolution of public procurement in Romania over the period 2022–2024, with a particular focus on its legal, procedural, and financial dimensions. The legislative and strategic framework governing public procurement has been developed in accordance with both national priorities and European Union standards, primarily based on Law No. 98/2016 on public procurement and Law No. 99/2016 on sectoral procurement, which transpose the provisions of European Directives 2014/24/EU and 2014/25/EU.

The research utilized publicly available data to analyze various categories of contracts, including supply, works, and service contracts. The study aimed to map the distribution of procurement activities across sectors and to investigate the mechanisms through which contracts are awarded, including standard public contracts, framework agreements, and dynamic purchasing systems. Furthermore, it examined the preferences and strategic decisions of contracting authorities regarding the selection and utilization of these instruments and procedures.

A key component of the analysis involved assessing the sources of funding, encompassing both national budget allocations and European funds.

These financial resources have played a crucial role in facilitating development and modernization initiatives, underscoring the significant impact of EU funding on Romania's public procurement system.

The findings provide valuable insights into sector-specific trends and challenges, offering an empirical basis for recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency, transparency, and overall effectiveness of public procurement practices. The implementation of these recommendations could support the modernization of Romania's public procurement framework, promoting more responsible resource management and enhancing public confidence in the procurement process. The study also emphasizes that the dynamics of public contract awarding are shaped by the interplay between regulatory compliance, digital tool efficiency, and administrative capacity.

Overall, the research highlights the need for ongoing reforms, the strengthening of institutional capabilities, and the promotion of transparency to optimize the public procurement process in Romania. These conclusions offer practical guidance for policymakers seeking to enhance the functionality and credibility of the national procurement system.

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