

Career counselling and guidance (CCG) in pre-university education system of Romania – a stakeholder analysis

Keywords: career counselling and guidance (CCG), stakeholder analysis, pupils, school counsellors, class master teachers

Introduction

This paper presents the main results of a stakeholder analysis, undertaken in a national research report, prepared in the period May 2022 - October 2023, under the Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement on "Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) III: Strengthening the Capacity of the Romanian Administration to carry out impact studies for better regulation", signed by the General Secretariat of the Romanian Government with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and implemented in partnership with the Romanian Ministry of Education (MoE). The objectives of the technical assistance aimed: (i) to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education, in the quality of central institution that elaborates and implements policies in the field, to use RIA as a tool for decision-making; and (ii) to develop clear recommendations on career counselling and guidance (CCG) in the pre-university system.

The research report assessed the system of CCG provided within the Romanian pre-university education system and in particular, the activity of the County Centres for Educational Resources and Assistance and the Bucharest Municipal Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance (CJRAE/CMBRAE) as providers of CCG services for students.

Objectives

This paper aims to present one of the steps, namely the stakeholder analysis, undertaken in the application of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) methodology on CCG activities for the lower and upper secondary education students .

Theoretical basis

The main problem identified in the analysis undertaken in this report relates to the fact that the career counselling needs of pupils at the end of a level of education are not sufficiently being met by the class master teachers and school counsellors.

In the Romanian education system, according to the taxonomy of intervention models in career counselling and guidance, the counselling and guidance model integrated in the school curriculum and the counselling centre model are mainly used (Zelloth, 2014). As an educational approach and practice, counselling and guidance activities are carried out in Romania in the following ways:

- across the curriculum, through compulsory and optional lessons and extra-curricular activities within the Counselling and guidance curricular area, carried out by class masters in collaboration with other key actors;
- within the school psycho-pedagogical assistance offices, through individual and/or group counselling activities carried out by teachers -school counsellors ;
- through projects developed by various educational institutions in partnership with the community, represented by non-governmental organisations and/or local and national authorities and institutions, which take on the role of career counselling for pupils.

Methodology

The research report (General Secretariat of Romanian Government & World Bank, 2023) applied the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) methodology on career counselling and guidance activities, in particular on CCG activities and services for all gymnasium and high school pupils. It followed the steps of the regulatory impact assessment (RIA): identification and definition of the problem; stakeholder analysis; designing the objectives; development of different regulatory and non-regulatory options; assessment of costs and benefits; recommendation of the preferred policy option; guidance on monitoring, assessment and reporting requirements.

The stakeholder analysis was undertaken by the working group established by the Ministry of Education and in consultation with experts and relevant organisations in the field of CCG in Romania. Between June 2022 and March 2023, 20 meetings of the Working Group, set up by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of carrying out the RIA exercise, took place within the project. The issues discussed were: identification of the problem, its causes and effects, establishment of objectives and presentation of policy options.

Between October 2022 and December 2023, the project held 6 consultation sessions (2-3 hours each) of the Working Group, set up by the Ministry of Education and World Bank representatives with relevant stakeholders in the field, who provided expert opinions and significant arguments.

A large number of categories of individuals and institutions with influence and interest in CCG have been included in this stakeholders' analysis.

Results

The roles, interests and difficulties of the main stakeholders involved in CCG activities in Romania (pupils, parents/legal representatives, school principal, class master teacher, school counsellor, CJRAE, CMBRAE, CJAP/CMAP) are briefly discussed below.

1. Pupils are the primary beneficiaries of pre-university education and the main beneficiaries of counselling services and are consulted in major decisions through their representatives. However, pupils do not benefit adequately from the CCG activities included in the school curriculum and the services provided by the teacher-school counsellor at the school's psycho-pedagogical assistance office. Gymnasium and high school pupils do not benefit adequately from the services offered by the teacher-school counsellor due to the busy school schedule (high number of hours included in the compulsory curriculum and the degree of school curriculum load). It is often necessary for pupils to be excused from other classes to attend counselling sessions, as there is no institutional mechanism for marking counselling activities in pupils' timetables. Another problem concerns the fact that the counselling programmes and activities proposed for pupils in schools by the teachers-school counsellors in the Psycho-pedagogical Assistance Offices are not carried out systematically, but are in response to specific requests or are dealt with as one-off events at the end of an educational cycle.

Differences in student access to services offered by counselling centres and offices are found, with socio-economically disadvantaged pupils at risk of being deprived of relevant information about future education and career choices. According to the PISA 2018 analysis (OECD, 2019), the gap in access to career counselling for pupils in schools in advantaged and disadvantaged areas is more than 40 percentage points for Romania.

2. Parents/legal representatives are secondary beneficiaries of pre-university education, beneficiaries of counselling services and are consulted in major decisions through parent representative association structures. The educational establishment concludes an educational contract with the parents/legal representatives at the time of enrolment of pupils, which sets out the mutual rights and obligations of the parties. However, in Romania, there is a low level of parental education/information on the role of career counselling in supporting their child. Research data (Cognitrom, 2022) show that a low level of involvement and an inhibiting role of parents, who ignore the teacher-counsellor's recommendations and may have unrealistic expectations, imposing their point of view in the student's choice of future school/occupation are obstacles to the implementation of CCG activities in schools.

3. Class masters teachers coordinate the work of the class of pupils. The class masters carry out educational support, counselling and career guidance activities for the pupils of the class, the themes being established in accordance with the specific age, interests or requests of the pupils, based on the school curriculum area "Counselling and guidance". Class masters can be beneficiaries of counselling services by collaborating with school counsellors from the psycho-pedagogical assistance centres and offices. However, not all class masters in Romania are trained in career counselling and guidance, and when they

do attend courses, the quality of the training is not appropriate and/or monitored. Data from the Ministry of Education (2022) show that an insufficient number of accredited free continuous professional training courses are available for teachers (e.g. 8% in the school year 2021-2022, addressing CCG), and their initial training includes only an optional Counselling course. Cognitrom research (2022) shows that in educational practice the collaboration of the class master with the teacher-counsellor is missing or insufficient for the effective implementation of CCG activities.

4. The **school counsellors** are employed as teachers in psycho-pedagogical assistance centres and offices, work in the offices of educational establishments and assist pupils in one or more schools, which sometimes have several levels of education. The work of psycho-pedagogical assistance is complex: information, prevention and intervention, in a team with teachers, auxiliary staff, school management, working with parents/legal representatives, but also with various specialists (doctors, clinical psychologists, social workers, police, etc.) from different governmental and non-governmental institutions involved in the protection and education of children.

Even in schools where there are offices, the share of career counselling activity is low because the school counsellors do not focus enough on CCG for students, but carry out a variety of tasks, according to the organisation and functioning regulation in force (MECTS, 2011). The delivery of CCG programmes and activities in schools by CAPP counselling teachers is not mandatory, but depends on requests from school management, class masters, parents and pupils. There are no allocated hours for CCG included in the school counsellor and students' timetable. Other obstacles in the implementation of CCG by school counsellors refer to: insufficient equipment of CAPP (specialised, scientifically validated tools, standard methodologies, methodological guides and other unavailable/ insufficient/ inappropriate resources), lack of appropriate spaces for CCG in schools, teaching time (2-4 hours); teaching time allocated in 2-3 schools, depending on the number of pupils; low quality of in-service training of teachers-counsellors.

5. The **principal** is the legal representative of the educational unit, he/she carries out its executive management and organises all educational activity in the school. The principal supports, monitors and collaborates with the teacher-counsellor in the implementation of the CCG in the school. Research data (Cognitrom, 2022) show a low involvement of school principals in monitoring and supporting career counselling and guidance activities in schools. Among causes: lack of information, awareness and training of principals on CCG issues, non-inclusion of CCG activities in the Institutional Development Plan of the school, lack of procedures and criteria for the selection of partners involved in CCG (economic agents, PES, universities, NGOs), as well as a set of indicators for monitoring and assessment of CCG activities carried

out in schools, low collaboration of school principals with CJRAE/CMBRAE directors in coordinating the monitoring and assessment process of CCG activities carried out by school counsellors in schools.

6.The Director of the CJRAE/CMBRAE carries out the executive management of the institution and organises all its activities. The Director of the CJRAE/ CMBRAE collaborates with the CJAP/CMBAP coordinator and the directors of the educational units where the counselling offices operate. Among difficulties: insufficient collaboration and poor coordination of the monitoring and assessment process of career counselling and guidance by school principals, CJAP/ CMAP coordinators and CJRAE/CMBRAE directors.

7.The **CJAP/CMBAP Coordinator** and the CJRAE/CMBRAE Director are responsible for the work of the CJAP/CMBAP, which are financially, methodologically and organisationally subordinated to the CJRAE/CMBRAE. CJAP/CMBAP methodologically coordinates the activities of the psycho-pedagogical assistance offices operating in the educational units. Difficulties include: insufficient collaboration and poor coordination of the monitoring and assessment process of career counselling and guidance by school principals and CJRAE/CMBRAE directors.

Conclusions

As the stakeholder analysis showed in the previous section, a government action is crucial to support the development and implementation of comprehensive and effective career counselling programmes and activities by school counsellors in Romanian schools. The public policy intervention should aim at meeting the CCG needs of pupils at the end of a level of education (lower and upper secondary education), with specific objectives of strengthening the CCG system and ensuring access to CCG for all pupils, including those from marginalised areas. Long-term positive effects of these interventions will be obtained as international research (Hooley, 2014; Hughes et al, 2016) in the field showed, such as: reducing school drop-outs, increasing educational participation rates, improving overall educational outcomes, facilitating transitions between different levels of education and into the labour market.

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