

## ***COUNSELING ACTIVITIES IN EU FUNDED PROJECTS***

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*Abstract: European financial programs for Romania (as a EU member) are now at the beginning of the second multiannual budget. These funds are particularly powerful instrument of change in local communities, sometimes the only real possibility for funding necessary projects (educational, cultural, social, etc.)*

*The counseling activities are present in all programs involving intervention on human resources, as this article tries to state.*

*Keywords: counseling, intervention, financing program, human resources, project.*

### **1. Counseling activities– transversal component of a structural funds**

**More broadly, counseling is a complex activity which aims at suggesting how to proceed in a given situation or generally in everyday life. In a narrower way, psychological and / or educational counseling refers to all theory-based processes by which are assisted people who are considered psychologically healthy, to solve situational and development problems.**

Psychological counseling facilitates personal development and interpersonal functioning, focusing on problems such as: emotional, social, occupational, educational, of development, health and organizational. Psychological counseling can be defined as a process carried out in educational contexts, in order to prevent crises. In this regard, the role of counseling is proactive, pursuing personal, educational and social development.

The British Association for Counseling (apud Dafinoiu, 2000, 19) proposes the following definition of counseling: "Counselling is the skilled and principled use of interpersonal relationship which facilitates self-knowledge, emotional acceptance and maturing, optimal development of personal resources. The overall goal is to provide the opportunity to work towards a more satisfying and resourceful life. Counseling relationships vary by demand, but can be centered on development aspects, on formulating and solving specific issues, decision making, control of crisis situations, developing a personal insight (awareness), working on emotional states or internal conflicts or on improving relations with others. "

Going through the applicant's guide in various funding sources available in the post-accession period within the first period of multiannual fiscal allocation (2007-2013), it may be noted that counseling activities are eligible activities in virtually all funding programs aimed at developing human resources . Exemplifying with the POS DRU for proposals requests for strategic projects, counseling activities were eligible in almost all requests for proposals (strategic or grant type).

In the same period, counseling activities were also financed in other structural funds (e.g under Component 3.2.2. of PNDR as part of the operation of community social services) or governmental – complementary to the European ones (such as the program of educational development in rural areas).

In summary, counseling was an activity that was included in a wide variety of eligible projects implemented between 2007-2013 and it was a real transversal component of the funding mechanism through grants in Romania post-accession. The same characteristic is maintained in the current financial year 2014-2020 where the development of projects is only in its early stages by launching the first calls for proposals.

## **2.Types of counseling applicable in projects with European funding**

In the context of counseling and career management (Andronic, 2016, 17-19), we can delineate three types of counseling within the projects with EU co-financing: mediation, counselling and especially peer-counseling.

*Mediation* represents all the activities of linking supply and demand of labor market in order to employ a person in a newly created job or a vacant one. Mediation services are granted to applicants and bidders. On this occasion, information and discussions are provided on: job vacancies and conditions required for their occupation; local employment programs and the possibilities of access to them; evaluating the skills of a job applicant; offers of professional training (including retraining) for filling vacancies;

*Counselling* is given for the creation and development of businesses and is focused on: providing information on the economic and legislative procedures required to start a business, training for acquisition of management methods and techniques; ways to assess the steps taken and the stage of a business (Jigau 2001, 53);

*Peer-counselling.* Often, beneficiaries of counseling hesitate to communicate with professionals, considering them tributaries of traditional patterns, some patterns that are inconsistent with the values and the pace of contemporary society. Sometimes, however, they prefer to talk to the co-elderly. From this perspective a solution can be provided by "peer counseling" knowing that this sort of counselling "from student to student" has proved viable in school contexts. We understand by "peer" counsellors people of close age without any specialized training - selected within the beneficiaries - trained and coordinated by specialists. It is imperative that they have the willingness to communicate, provide information (from authorized sources) to their colleagues, identify alternatives or simply offer moral support to those in need.

A first step is the selection of candidates. Regardless of the method to promote the approach, we have to outline the following selection criteria for prospective "peer-counsellors": firm commitment to provide support to others; acceptance of standards related to professional ethics (confidentiality, etc.); the ability to interact with a wide range of people; assertive communication skills; willingness and ability to work in accordance with the philosophy and objectives of the program.

In addition, an efficient "peer counselor" has certain favoring skills such as empathy, honesty, respect for others.

Education and training *peer counselors* must be made by specialists and the training process covers the following dimensions: data on the competence of the peer; training in areas of interest

of the beneficiaries; training on techniques used in counseling; information on the procedures and organization of the program; selecting the information sources; issues of professional ethics etc.

In forming "*peer counseling*" the following aspects are extremely important: identifying and defining skills in behavioral terms, practicing techniques and methods, solving situations in the form of scenarios, role play, case studies etc.

### **3. Counseling services in Romania**

Mihai Jigău (2003) specifies that the system, organization and content of the activity of advisory services and counseling and guidance are largely a product of socio-economic level and cultural development of the country. Underdeveloped economies, dominated by extractive industries and processing of raw materials, based solely on agriculture etc. will have a reduced need for counseling and guidance services for medium skilled workforce, stable and less diversified that type of training.

Economically developed countries have, however, need a highly skilled workforce, constantly willing to learn and adapt to new contexts of work, dynamic, flexible, with multiple skills, capable of performing different roles.

In this situation, advisory services and counseling and guidance will have, in turn, be extremely active and adaptable to explore new methods of counseling and guidance to make adequate pressure to the system of education and training for it to be consistent with labor market demands and technological development stage of the economy to assume the role of mediator between the school and the requirements of employers.

Support services held in schools rests on an institutional system autonomously and are considering by types of activities performed (pedagogic, psychological, social and medical), creating an environment work and practical training for increase chances of social success and professional integration of students and personal achievement.

The counseling and educational and vocational guidance of Romania is composed of:

- Network sustained by Ministry of Education, represented by the County Pedagogical Assistance Centers (available in all counties and in Bucharest) and inter-school Offices School and Pedagogical Assistance (in schools with over 800 pupils, in school groups respectively). Types of targeted beneficiaries: students of all levels of school education, parents, teachers.
  
- Centre for Information and Mediation for students and university graduates, organized in major university centers;
  
- Medical Educational Commissions and Vocational Guidance in each county and Bucharest (for advising medical educational and vocational guidance).
  
- Boards of complex examination (for psycho-diagnosis and orientation of students with disabilities).
  
- Network sustained by Ministry of Labour, through the National Agency for Employment and Training, represented by the Professional Counseling and Information Centers located in all counties or cities. The target population: young graduates, unemployed persons etc.
  
- INFOTIN centers, organized by the Ministry of Youth and for the age group 18-35 years.
  
- Some private initiatives focused on the selection and job placement usually highly qualified.
  
- Programs and counseling and guidance developed after funding projects from European funds.

Private initiative is also present in the field of counseling. For many companies, NGOs have assumed the duties of counseling and educational and vocational guidance, training and placement of the workforce and supporting small and medium enterprises.

The advantage is that demonstrate greater flexibility, have a greater capacity to adapt to specific situations in each locality or area in which he carried out the work, solving a

personalized wishes of customers. However, we find that their work is not very visible in Brasov county, as is clear from the results of research - action taken in 2008 in the network of offices interschool psycho-pedagogical assistance, most beneficiaries are not aware of their existence and as such services do not use them even free.

In order to rebuild the network of offices and laboratories of educational and vocational counseling first acts after the revolution started a new institutional unit covering the immediate needs of students, parents and teachers: Centre County Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance place in each county in Romania.

These interschool centers offers following services for teachers, students and parents 2005 . Now they are under the umbrella of County Centers for Resources and Educational Assistance (who offer specialized services for school mediation, coordinate, monitor and evaluate, at county level activity and educational services provided by: school centers for inclusive education, inter-school speech therapy centers and offices, county centers and psycho-pedagogical assistance).

Also, County Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Centres are coordinated by the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences - the latter conducts research in the field by the Department of Educational and Vocational Guidance.

Centers for Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance are collaborating with educational institutions at all levels, with Labour Offices and Training with the County Centres of Preventive Medicine, Directorate of child protection or other institutions with responsibilities or interests in education.

Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Centers are staffed with specialist counseling professors, licensed in psychology, pedagogy, pedagogy, sociology and social work.

Practically, psycho-pedagogical assistance addresses the following types of activities:

- advising students, parents and teachers in issues related to knowledge / self-knowledge
- adapt students to school requirements;

- optimizing educational relationship: parents - children, students - teachers, school - family;
- prevent / reduce psychological discomfort;
- psychologically examination of pupils at the request of the school, parents or school inspectorate;
- organizing and conducting career guidance programs for students, including children in rural areas or those in other situations that induce a cultural and socio-economic disadvantage,
- initiating parents for a better understanding of children and to improve their educational behavior;
- collection (along with other specialized organizations) data on dynamics in field researches and their use in guidance and counseling work.

Socio-economic realities of our country (changes in political, education reform, unemployment etc.) imposed starting in 1997 a project "Information and career counseling" - supported by the Government and with external financing.

The main project objectives were:

- occupational profiling;
- 5) issue a publication containing information of general interest to professional orientation;
- 6) printing promotional posters to promote the ideas of career counseling, guidance, achieving videotape presentation of certain professions;
- organizing short and long term courses for training advisers and persons dealing with career guidance and counseling and working in different institutional networks in this field;
- developing programs interactive computerized career guidance,
- adapting tools specific to the psychological counseling and guidance, career guidance;
- equipping counseling offices with specialized equipment.

Unfortunately, after 2010 such activities were increasingly rare, although the need is becoming more acute (Jigău, 2003).

Although the systems and services of counseling and career guidance show specific differences indifferent countries. Specific differences appear in regard to:

- position held (such as school counselor, career counselor, psychologist, counselor integration for disadvantaged groups);
- activity (education and training systems, the unemployment systems, support systems for specific groups);
- practitioner specialization (education sciences, psychology, sociology, social work);
- skill level and specialization of the counselors (licensed in one of the majors legal or basic training in another field, but was supplemented by continuing education courses in counseling).

The counselor must provide an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of the theory and principles of career counseling and specific instruments such as interest inventory, scale of values, skills tests, questionnaires career development, evaluation modules career theories and strategies for career development.

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