

EUROPEAN MODELS OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

The article presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the professional training process for public administration personnel in three European Union Member States: France, Ireland, and Romania. In the first part, the study presents and analyses the common elements, but also the differences, starting from the legislation in force, reports, and other sets of official documents. In the second part of the study, a sociological survey was carried out in a central public institution in Romania - the National Institute of Administration (INA), based on a questionnaire, with the aim of analyzing the professional training process and its impact on the career development of public administration staff.

Keywords: professional training, public administration, training provider, legislation

1. INTRODUCTION- MAIN CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Training is a key concept in the architecture of any organization. It represents "the sum of means of informing, learning, guiding, instructing and improving a person's knowledge and skills in a given field of activity" (Profiroiu et al., p. 60). Pynes (2013) considers that training is a planned process on the part of an organization that aims to change and improve employees' skills in order to increase their effectiveness on workplace. Developing services or products and making work processes more efficient starts with a professionally trained human resource. Continuous technological and organizational changes require a permanent updating of existing skills or the development of new ones, or new qualifications, and make the role of professional training increasingly important (Monville & Leonard, 2008, p. 5). According to Simonds (2008, p. 8), „training and change are interdependent”, therefore it seems necessary to reorient the organization towards the professional training of its employees (Bercu, 2009, p. 121). Employee training has two main functions: usefulness and motivation (Chisu, 2002, p. 352). Utility is concerned with how training programs contribute to the development of new skills and the impact on employees, while motivation is concerned with achieving performance, increasing self-confidence and job satisfaction.

Training and development are equally important processes, for both the public and private sectors, with efficiency as the main objective. Every employee at every level of the organization needs training. Most HR specialists consider that the quality of human resources depends on the level of seriousness with which training is treated (Raboca, 2010, p. 68). In terms of training the public sector personnel, at EU level, the attention is

constantly directed towards professionalization of staff to develop new skills in line with trends in professional training and technological development (Romanian Government, 2016a).

Modern trends in e-government and the digitization of public administration increase the skills demands and training of employees in information and ICT (Krpalek et al., 2021, p. 3). Training of public administration staff can take place both inside the organization and outside the workplace, in educational institutions or professional training centers. It is implemented according to specific legislation, adopted at the level of each country, and is carried out by both government agencies, higher education institutions and private entities, depending on the type of training: initial, advanced, specialization, and the category of personnel involved in the process.

In this respect, the present study aims to analyze the professional training process in the public administration of Romania, France and Ireland, in order to observe the specificities of each system and the impact of public personnel's career development.

2. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is an exploratory one, comprising two types of analysis, namely a qualitative as well as a quantitative one. One of the research objectives is to analyze the process of professional training in the public administration of Romania compared with the systems from other EU Member States (France and Ireland) in order to identify similarities and differences. The second objective of the study is to investigate civil servants' perception regarding the professional training process in Romanian public administration and its impact on their career development.

The study started with the following research questions:

- R1: What are civil servants' training needs?**
- R2: What is the real impact of professional training on career development?**
- R3: What is civil servants' opinion regarding the process of professional training in public administration?**
- R4: What are the similarities and differences between the analysed training systems?**

In the first part of the study, a comparative analysis has been conducted between civil servants' professional training systems in three states, namely Romania, France, and Ireland. The comparison was conducted based on document analysis of official reports and studies from scientific literature.

In the second part of the study, a sociological survey have been conducted in one institution from the central public administration of Romania - the National Institute of Administration. The survey is based on a questionnaire designed by the authors, aiming to investigate the process of professional training in the Romanian civil service and its impact on career development, in order to identify its main deficiencies and to propose recommendations for improving it.

The questionnaire was dedicated only to civil servants from the National Institute of Administration, being distributed in June-August 2022. The reason for choosing this particular organization is because of its prerogatives in the process of professional training, being the main trainer of human resources in the public administration of Romania. The sampling method was exhaustive, with the questionnaire being sent to all the civil servants in the organization. 48 respondents agreed to participate in the study. The sample is not representative for the whole central public administration, consequently, the next phase of the research will be to extend the number of public organizations that will be comprised in the sample.

Regarding the main characteristics of the sample, the majority of the respondents (74%) were women and 26% were men. The distribution of the sample based on age showed that 29% of the respondents were between 18 and 35 years old, 60% were between 36 and 55 years old and 11% were over 56 years old. Regarding the level of education, 70% of the civil servants graduated bachelor programs and 30% also had master's degrees.

As far as the distribution of the held positions, 75% of the respondents were execution civil servants and 25% were civil servants in management positions.

3. PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN ROMANIA, FRANCE AND IRELAND- A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

3.1 Professional training process in Romania

Public administration in Romania is in a continuous process of reform, and the successful implementation of change requires a well-trained human resource (Profiroiu et al., 2022, p. 64). In recent years, professional training, as a key-element in the architecture of the public administrative system in Romania, has undergone a series of transformations, which have taken place on several levels: legislation, training methods and models, digitalization, and evaluation. All these processes have as their main goal to improve the quality of professional training. An administrative system is as efficient as its staff, with permanently updated skills, able to carry out reform processes, to provide a quality public service, at the highest standards, in order to increase citizens' satisfaction and trust in state institutions.

In recent years, several strategies have been developed, such as the Strategy for Strengthening the Public Administration 2014-2020 (Romanian Government, 2014), the Civil Service Development Strategy 2016-2020 (Romanian Government, 2016b), and the Training Strategy for Public Administration 2016-2020 (Romanian Government, 2016a), aiming to strengthen administrative efficiency and the reform process. The Training Strategy for Public Administration 2016-2020 was a very important document, that came up with a plan of measures to help improve the existing situation and to bring public administration in line with European standards, in terms of developing human resources competences, in addition to the analysis of the situation regarding the training of human resources in the Romanian public administration. At the moment, new strategies on public service management or training are being developed and are expected to be adopted in the next period by Government Decisions.

The Administrative Code, approved by Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2019, provides that professional training is a right and an obligation, both for civil servants (art. 458) as well as for contractual staff (art. 551) (Romanian Government, 2019). Professional training is mandatory in order for civil servants to be promoted to a higher professional rank, to be able to undertake exams for some of the public positions (e.g., high civil servant, according to art. 394 - Administrative Code) or to be appointed for public dignity (e.g., prefect or subprefect, according to art. 251 Administrative Code).

Public authorities and institutions, both central and local, must provide from their budget, every two years, at least one professional training program for their staff. Regarding the methods of financing, there are four options: full financing - from the institution's budget, partial financing - costs are divided between the institution and the civil servant, financed entirely from the participant's budget, or participating in training programs that are funded externally, which do not involve costs.

Professional training programs organized for public administration personnel are divided into two categories: short term training and specialized training. According to Government Decision no. 1066/2008 (Romanian Government, 2008), short term training is that type of training that takes place over a relatively short period of time, with subject groups defined in a broad sense, usually based on self-assessment, and dealing with a single theme, after a specific field (art. 3, point i). This type of program traditionally lasts from 3 to 7 days. If it is held online, it lasts between 18 and 30 hours (National Institute of Administration, 2023a). Specialized training is intended for developing necessary competences to exercise high rank functions that require a series of specific skills and aptitudes. This type of training takes place over a relatively long period of time, the target groups are precisely defined and constituted, usually based on selection, and deal with multiple topics in training modules. Organized in classic format, the number of modules varies from 3 to 9, being organized in 3 days - 6 hours/day. If it is held in online format, each module lasts 18 hours (National Institute of Administration, 2023b)

Henry Giscard considered that specialized training is the development of new skills while professional development is the improvement of existing skills (Bercu, 2009, p. 123). According to the legal provisions in force, the National Institute of Administration organizes specialized training programs necessary for: taking a position corresponding to the category of high-ranking civil servants, being appointed to a public office as prefect or subprefect, public functions of management or in the field of spatial planning, urban planning and building authorization for lead architects at the level of municipalities, cities, or communes.

TABLE 1 - SPECIALIZED TRAINING ORGANIZED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION IN 2022

No programs	No. of training hours	No. of participants	Program format			Categories of participants			
			Classic	Hybrid	Online	Prefects and sub-prefects	Senior officials	Public management positions	Secretaries-General TAO
8	1296	305	3	1	4	82	93	113	17

Source: Author processing, according to INA 2022 Report

TABLE 2 -SHORT TERM TRAINING ORGANIZED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION IN 2022

No. programs	No. of training hours	No. of participants	Program format		Programs on offer %	Programs on request %
			Classic %	Online %		
69	1890	1412	51	49	57	43

Source: Author processing, according to INA 2022 Report

The tables above present the training programs, the number of participants and the format of the courses, that were organized by the National Institute of Administration, in 2022, that were funded by the institutions in which the participants worked or by public personnel's own funds.

Beside the mentioned courses, through externally funded projects, INA organized a total of 18 specialized training programs (1296 training hours) in online format, in the field of public procurement, in which 868 people participated and a total of 32 short term training programs (576 training hours), in which 1524 people participated (National Institute of Administration, 2022).

As far as professional training programs for public administration staff are concerned, they can be organized by: (1) public authorities and institutions whose activity is professional training, (2) higher education institutions, (3) private entities whose object of activity is the organization and progress of professional training programs.

Providers organize training programs according to the priority areas and specific themes, established by order of the President of the National Agency of Civil Servants (OPANFP no. 234/2022) (National Agency of Civil Servants, 2022). Training needs for civil servants are centralized by each public authority and institution, then being submitted for centralization, in a report, by the National Agency for Civil Servants (ANFP). According to the latest Report on Professional Development of Civil Servants published by National Agency for Civil Servants (2022), the number of institutions that sent the training needs, has increased significantly, from less than 10% in previous years, to 33.4% in 2021. Out of a total number of 3267 institutions that have the status of principal authorizing officers, 1091 have sent training proposals (National Agency of Civil Servants, 2022). If the training needs of civil servants are centralized by the National Agency for Civil Servants, for the other categories of public employees, there is no institution that has among its tasks the centralization of training needs. According to a report of the Ministry of Finance (2023), in December 2022, the number of public sector employees was 1.280.003, only 174,658 being civil servants.

At the moment, there is no centralization of the number of civil servants or contractual staff who attended professional training programs, the providers or the amounts allocated for professional training.

3.2 Professional training process in France

The role of the civil servants in the French public administration is a very important one, as they are considered part of the social and intellectual elite of the country. Public administration researchers describe the French

system as a good example in terms of implementing policies for human resources' development, based on a career system (Katsamunski, 2018, p. 15).

In the French administrative system, there are three types of civil service: state, territorial and hospital civil service. In 2021, there were approximately 5.7 million civil servants in France (L'institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 2022): 2.5 million state civil servants, 2 million territorial civil servants and 1.2 million hospital civil servants. The French administrative system has been over time, a model for many administrative systems, including the Romanian one, characterized by professionalism, rigor, and stability in the civil service. The three categories of civil servants have several types of training available to them throughout their careers. In this sense, training is either aimed at adapting to the requirements of a new job or at career development.

For the state civil service, the institution responsible for professional training is the National Institute of Public Service (INSP), formerly the National School of Administration (ENA). The main tasks of the INSP are the organization of competitions for access to initial training and related training, the training of persons interested in taking part in competitions in European institutions, ongoing training for persons wishing to take up state public management positions, government positions or master's degrees, in collaboration with higher education institutions.

Professional training is divided into four phases: training, internship, schooling, and the finalizing training procedure. The number of positions available to undertake is determined by presidential decree. During the initial training, which lasts 21.5 months (INSP, 2022), the trainee has the status of probationary civil servant. The INSP's professional training offer includes not only civil servants, but also employees from the private sector, depending on the addressed topic. The Institute also organizes training courses for civil servants from abroad.

The professional training of territorial civil servants is established by Decree No. 2008-512 on mandatory statutory training of territorial civil servants. The main actor in terms of professional training of territorial civil servants is the The National Center of the Territorial Civil Service (CNFPT, n.d.), a deconcentrated public institution, whose main mission is the training of territorial civil servants, having about 100 locations throughout France and organizing training in more than 11,000 places (Le Projet du CNFPT 2022-2027, p. 1). The CNFPT is one of the main bodies at European level.

In regard to the training of territorial agents, French law distinguishes five types of professional training throughout the career (CNFPT, 2009, p. 114). These are as follows:

Statutory training - integration and professionalization: The integration training aims to facilitate the integration of the territorial civil servant by acquiring knowledge about the environment in which he/she will carry out his/her mission. It lasts 5 days and is organized in the first year after appointment to the civil service.

In regard to professionalization training, there are 3 components: at the first job (from 5 to 10 days for categories A and B and from 3 to 10 days for category C). It has to be taken within the first 2 years from employment; professionalization training throughout the career (from 2 to 10 days) - over a period of 5 years; and training following appointment to a management post (from 3 to 10 days) - to be taken within 6 months of appointment.

Professional training - at the request of the employer or agent. This type of training aims to develop new skills or update existing ones.

Training in preparation for competitions and professional examinations of the civil service: promotion or change of job.

Professional training at the initiative of the agent. It allows for the realization of personal and professional projects and covers 4 types of leave: training leave, leave for studies and research, leave to validate skills acquired (lasting 24 hours and aimed at obtaining a diploma, a title, or a certificate of professional qualification), leave to assess skills.

According to the CNFPT Report for 2021 (p. 7) the most training days were allocated to training for exams and competitions - 23,523, followed by integration training - 21,984. Training sessions were organized in traditional format - 62.66%, hybrid - 28.09% and online - 9.24%.

In terms of distribution of training days for trainees, the highest percentage was allocated to category C agents - 68.63%, followed by categories B - 17.17% and A - 14.20%.

In accordance with French legislation, an important issue is the allocation of resources for professional training of employees by local authorities. Thus, according to the legislation in force, territorial authorities, about 34,000, pay to the CNFPT a fixed contribution of 0.9% (until 2016 it was 1%) of the wage bill, which is used for free training of territorial agents (Le Projet du CNFPT 2022-2027, p. 1-2).

According to the CNFPT (Rapport d'activite 2021, p. 6), in 2021, a total of 735,671 civil servants were trained, an increase compared to 2020, when due to the COVID 19 pandemic, only 576,567 civil servants participated in training programs. Also, the total number of training sessions was 74,361 and the costs were in the amount of 368 million euro. The Centre proposes various training offers and models - traditional, online, hybrid and diffused training resources such as MOOCs, podcasts or videos (Le Projet du CNFPT 2022-2027, p. 22).

As far as schools in the French public administration are concerned, they are part of a network of associations called Réseau des Ecoles de Service Public (RESP). Private sector companies, political and professional associations also offer training services, which administrations can purchase based on rules applicable to government orders.

3.3 Professional training process in Ireland

The Irish Civil Service includes permanent staff of State Departments, as well as those working in State agencies and for the Government of Ireland. The Civil Service has two main components: the Government Public Service and the State Public Service.

The Public Service of the Government includes officials who advise and carry out the work of the Government, through state departments, each department being managed by a minister. The permanent head of a department is the Secretary General. The head of the civil service is the Secretary General of the Government.

The State Civil Service is a small component within the civil service, including civil servants working in such authorities as the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Office of Public Works, the Comptroller and Auditor General of Ireland, the Irish Courts Service, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Ombudsman Commission, etc.

In Ireland, only staff in ministries and some state agencies are classified as civil servants. The civil servants number is about 40,000 people (Irish Government, Civil Service Renewal). In the other sectors of the state work about 300,000 people, most of them in education and health sectors (Irish Government, 2022).

Since 1957, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is the main provider for professional training in Ireland. Until 2011 the IPA was under the coordination of the Department of Finance, afterwards it has been transferred to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Institute is the only agency in Ireland that focuses exclusively on public sector development (Institute of Public Administration, 2023).

The main directions of IPA action are: education and training; direct consultation; research and publication and international projects and cooperation.

The Institute functions both as a higher education institution through the bachelor, master, and doctoral programs it offers, but also as the main professional body for the development of competencies of public sector staff. The training programs offered at IPA address the employees in the public service, local authorities, health service, state-supported bodies, the education sector, the police, and defense forces.

The programs cover various topics such as audit and governance, civil service, financial management, human resources management, IT&C, leadership, local governance, project management, etc. The courses are

organized in both classical and hybrid formats, at IPA headquarters, in regional centers or at the beneficiary's premises. The Institute also provides programs on demand.

IPA provides from half-day training programs to modular programs, each module having 1-2 days. Between March 2020 and May 2022, IPA organized 1675 training programs and 155 consultancy projects (IPA Strategy 2022-2027, p. 5).

Also, in addition to IPA, there are many providers of professional training in the public sector. In Ireland, any private sector provider can tender for the public sector. All public sector organizations have to formally procure training above a certain amount and seek three bids, so they either go to suppliers they know or publish them on eTenders, the procurement platform run by the Government Procurement Office. Therefore, we are talking about a highly competitive environment where, for example, IPA competes with both public suppliers, such as some universities, and private suppliers.

Public service staff can access programs from the One Learning Irish Public Service Learning and Development Centre, which is an organization set up within the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform. It is responsible for providing learning and development that supports the development of skills and competencies within the public service. One Learning also offered training programs for new entrants to the system. As One Learning do not have trainers, they simply procure the program, with IPA responsible for its design and delivery.

3.4 Differences and similarities between the training systems

After analysing the professional training process in Romania, France and Ireland, several similarities and differences were observed.

Therefore, in terms of similarities, it can be mentioned:

- Professional training programs are designed based on an analysis of training needs in order for the programs to be relevant.
- Training programs are organized in traditional, online and hybrid systems.
- The existence of public institutions as main actors in the training of public sector staff: INSP and CNFPT in France, IPA in Ireland, and INA in Romania.
- In Ireland and France, in addition to professional training, INSP and IPA also organize master programs. It is worth mentioning that in France these programs are organized in partnership with universities.
- With certain exceptions established by law (programs for which there is a monopoly), training is carried out by both public and private providers.

Regarding the identified differences, it can be mentioned:

- In France, training for civil servants is provided by the INSP and for territorial civil servants by the CNFPT, while in Romania and Ireland, INA respectively IPA organizes training for all categories of civil servants.
- Allocation of 0.9% of the wage bill by the territorial authorities to the budget of the CNFPT, as a contribution, which ensures the training of territorial officials. This situation is not encountered in Romania and Ireland.
- IPA operates both as a higher education institution and as a professional training provider unlike the other public entities analyzed in the study.
- Differences in legislation regarding the regulation of professional training process.

It should be mentioned that between INSP (former ENA), IPA and INA there have been several collaborations, which have contributed to a transfer of know-how between these flagship training institutions, the aim being to improve processes on how to develop and implement professional training programs.

4. THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR PUBLIC PERSONNEL IN ROMANIA- MAIN FINDINGS

Within the framework of the study, considering the professional training models analyzed, a questionnaire was carried out and applied at INA level to investigate the professional training process in the Romanian civil service and its impact on career development, at the level of a central level institution.

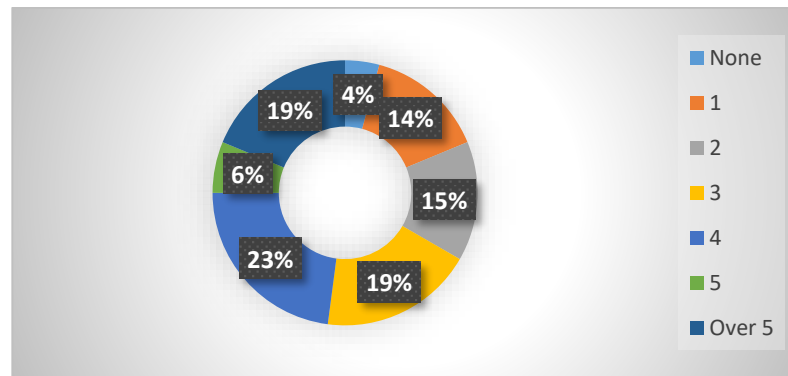


FIGURE 1 - NUMBER OF TRAINING PROGRAMS ATTENDED BY CIVIL SERVANTS IN THE LAST 5 YEARS
Source: Authors, 2023

The first question aimed to investigate the number of training programs attended by civil servants in the last 5 years. As can be observed, the highest proportion of respondents (23%) participated in 4 training programs. An equal proportion (19%) attended either 3 or more than 5 programs. Quite a small proportion participated in 5 programs (6%). The rest of the respondents participated in 2 or 3 programs. Only 4% did not attend any training program. Most of the civil servants did not succeed in attending one training program per year.

We can see that INA's employees frequently participate in professional training programs, in accordance with the legal provision of the Administrative Code, according to which public authorities must ensure that civil servants (art. 458) and contractual staff (art. 551) participate in professional training programs.

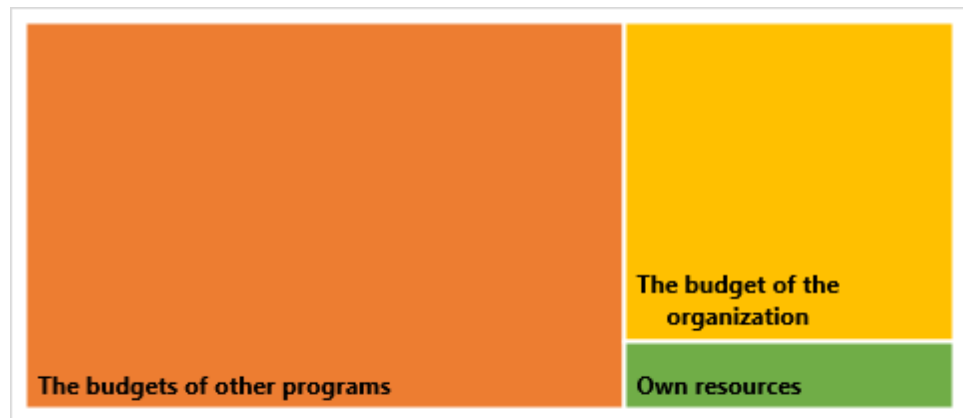


FIGURE 2 - TRAINING PROGRAMS' MAIN SOURCES OF FUNDING
Source: Authors, 2023

Regarding the main sources of funding for the training programs attended by civil servants, it was observed that most of them (64%) were financed from the budgets of different programs implemented by the organization.

The rest of the programs were either financed from the National Institute of Administration's budget (29%) or from participants' own resources (7%). Access to professional training programs organized free of charge, in the framework of externally funded projects, is very important as it has a positive impact on the budget of the public organization.

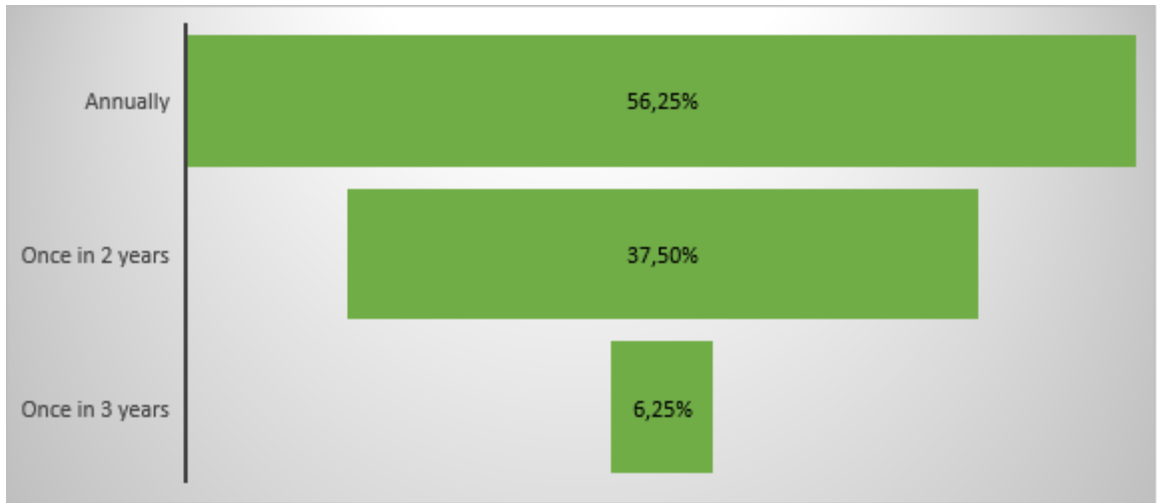


FIGURE 3 - THE PERCEIVED NEED OF PARTICIPATING IN PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS.

Source: Authors, 2023

Another important aspect is to find out how often civil servants believe they need to be trained, because professional training should not be a formal process in which the beneficiaries are obliged to participate. It should also be based on their desire to improve their skills. In this case, an eagerness and willingness for learning were observed as more than half of the respondents (56,25%) considered that it is important to be trained once a year. The other half considered that they need to participate in training courses once in 2 years (37,5%) and even once in 3 years (6,25%).

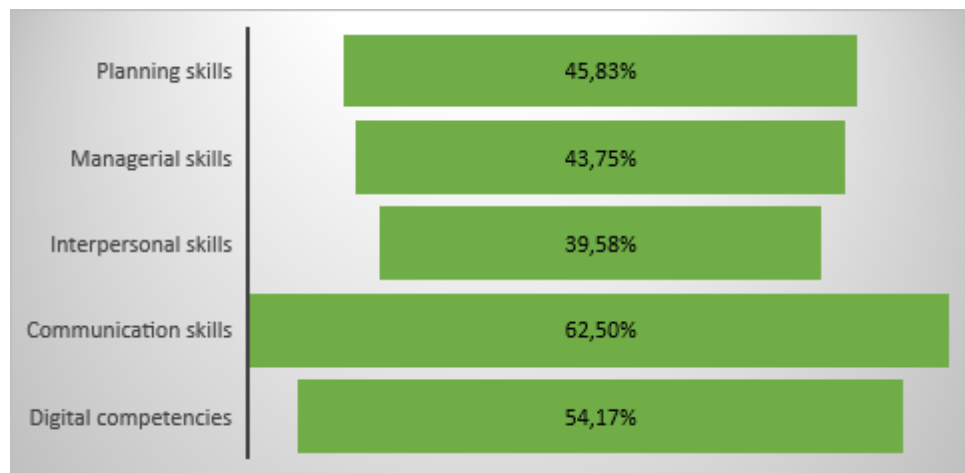


FIGURE 4 - CIVIL SERVANTS' TRAINING NEEDS

Source: Authors, 2023

Even if the National Agency of Civil Servants centralizes annually the needs of training based on the proposals received from public administration organizations, it is also important to investigate directly, civil servants' personal opinions on this subject. It can be observed that a high proportion of respondents (62,5%) considered that they need to improve their communication skills, followed by digital competencies (54,17%). Another mentioned aspect were the need to improve planning, managerial and interpersonal skills, but from a smaller proportion of participants.

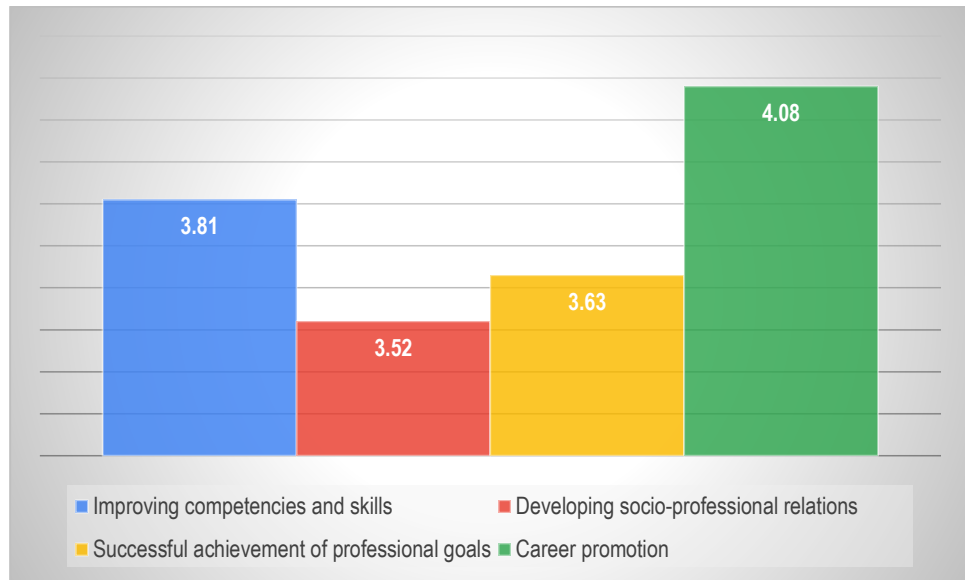


FIGURE 5 - THE IMPACT OF THE TRAINING PROCESS ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Source: Authors, 2023

One important component of training is the real impact of this process. Obtaining feedback from the beneficiaries of the training programs is necessary in order for the organization to understand the utility of these courses and to approach subjects that will be useful for civil servants. It can be noticed that the participants considered the impact of professional training on career development to be between medium to high. The highest impact was on career promotion, followed by competencies and skills improvement.

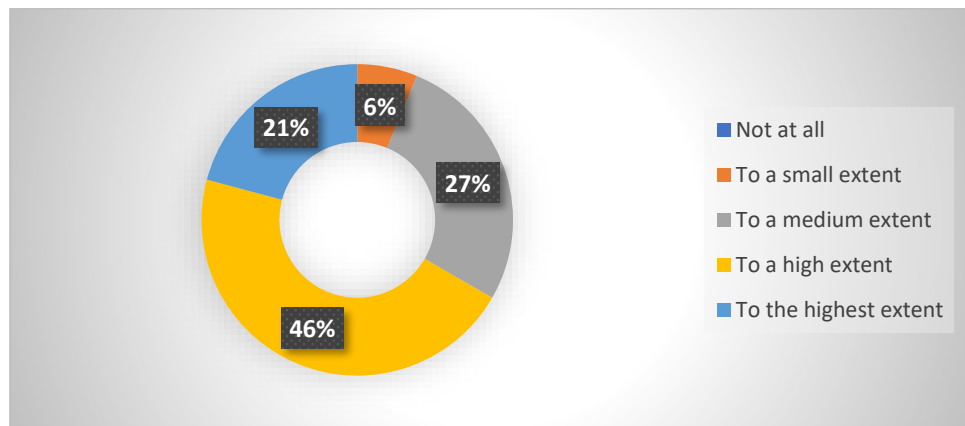


FIGURE 6 - THE UTILITY OF THE INFORMATION LEARNED IN TRAINING PROGRAMS
Source: Authors, 2023

In addition, another aspect related to the training process impact is to find out if civil servants used in practice, in their daily activities, the information learned from the training courses in which they participated. The perception of the participants was positive as the majority stated that the information was useful to a high (46%) and to the highest extent (21%). Consequently, it can be assumed that the subjects approached in the professional training process are correlated with civil servants' training needs and with their activity in the field.

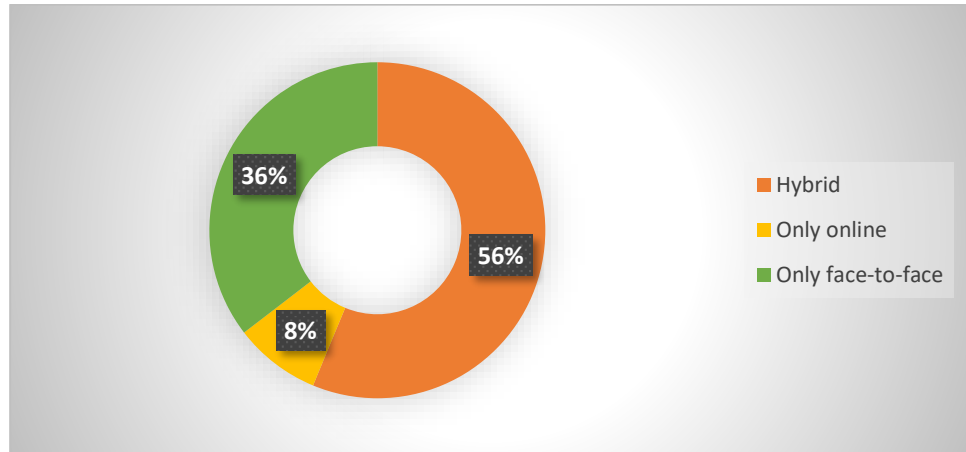


FIGURE 7 -THE MANNER OF CONDUCTING PROFESSIONAL TRAINING COURSES

Source: Authors, 2023

Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in the process of learning, it was important to identify how the process of professional training has been conducted. As can be observed, more than 50% of the respondents attended hybrid courses. Thus, a significant proportion (36%) participated in courses held face-to-face and only 8% attended only online programs.

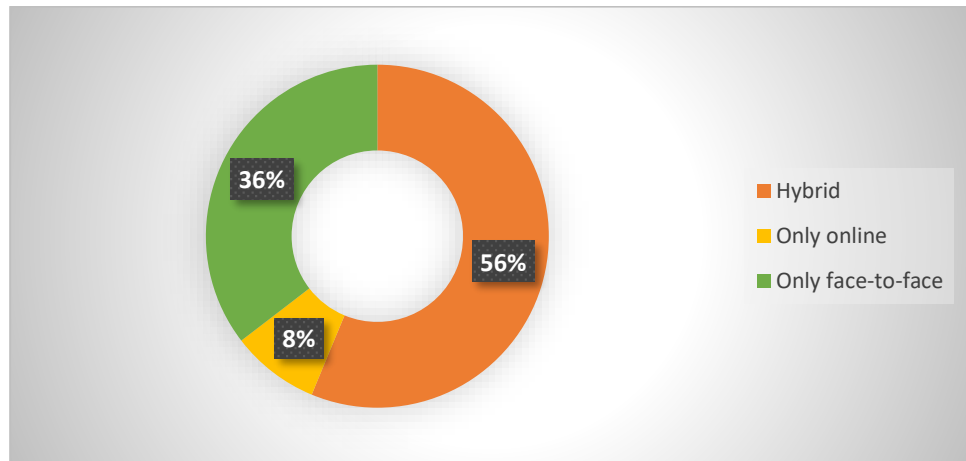


FIGURE 8 - CIVIL SERVANTS' PREFERENCE REGARDING THE MANNER OF CONDUCTED PROFESSIONAL TRAINING COURSES

Source: Authors, 2023

The last question aimed to identify civil servants' preferences on how the training courses should be organized from now on. It was noticed that the proportions were similar to the previous questions, with the majority of the respondents (56%) expressing their preference for the hybrid programs.

CONCLUSIONS

An efficient and transparent public administration, with quality public services, is based on well-trained and professional staff, able to face all challenges. Achievement of the main objective, the professionalization of staff in public authorities and institutions at all levels, depends on the way in which the entire professional training process is designed - training needs analysis, program design, evaluation of participants - together with a coherent legislative framework.

The main objective of this study was to present the professional training activity in three EU countries: Romania, France and Ireland, starting from the analysis of the legislation in force, the way of elaboration and implementation of training processes, with the main purpose of identifying similarities and differences, as well as best practice models. More than that, the study carried out at the National Institute of Administration on professional training and its impact on career can be extended to other central, local, and territorial public authorities or institutions, so that the data analysis is relevant to all types of administration.

The main limitation is the lack of centralized information on the number of civil servants and contractual staff who follow various forms of professional training, the amounts allocated for the training activity, the number of accredited training providers. The study can be extended to other countries in order for the process and used tools to be better known.

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