

Public Information in Romania, At the Crossroads of Demand and Offer

On Citizens' Needs of Information



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The study **PUBLIC INFORMATION IN ROMANIA, AT THE CROSSROADS OF DEMAND AND OFFER** represents an analysis on a survey conducted by the Quality of Life Research Institute, Romania (ICCV). The research was pursued under the project „Citizens’ Right to Know!” implemented by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB), and financed by CEE Trust, Trust for Civil Society in Central & Eastern Europe. The study **PUBLIC INFORMATION IN ROMANIA, AT THE CROSSROADS OF DEMAND AND OFFER** relies on quantitative data gathered in October 1-20, 2007 on a representative sample of 1050 individuals from 60 localities in Romania (both in rural and urban milieus) and 3 districts in Bucharest.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) is a non-governmental, non profit organization, founded to support and to direct the activities of the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs). NACAB is made up of 49 NGOs that founded CABs and CAB branches in more than 60 localities in Romania, both in urban and rural environments. The Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) represent projects of NGOs active in the field of social services, HR, children protection, consumers’ protection etc.

The study **PUBLIC INFORMATION IN ROMANIA, AT THE CROSSROADS OF DEMAND AND OFFER** embarks upon:

- A. **Identifying citizen’s attitudes towards getting informed** (Which are the most accessed institutions for receiving information? What information do Romanians prefer?)
- B. **Evaluating, from the standpoint of citizens, the services of information provided by the public institutions in Romania** (How satisfied are Romanians with regards to the system of information provided by the public institutions?)
- C. **Identifying Romanians’ needs of information** (What domains of information do Romanians prefer?)
- D. **Identifying means and methods in citizens getting informed** (How/through what means do Romanians want to receive information?).

PUBLIC INFORMATION IN ROMANIA - CITIZENS AND INSTITUTIONS

Between 2006-2007, 94% of the Romanian population addressed one or more institutions to solve certain problems. A citizen interacted on average with 2-3 institutions in this respect.

Family Practice (GPs) and City Halls are the most accessed institutions by Romanians: 78% for Family Practice and 67% for City Halls. The percentage of those that addressed other institutions is significantly lower than that registered by either Family Practice or City Halls.

Family Practice is the institution that ranks the highest in citizens’ evaluation of the services provided. For any of the matters a citizen interacted with the above mentioned institutions, Romanians perceive that they received information and advice for which they were very satisfied with. The hierarchy of satisfaction is followed by the following institutions: Police, Fiscal Administration, Departments for Agriculture.

City Halls represent peculiar cases by themselves. Overall, City Halls offer information appreciated by citizens as being satisfactory. However, there is a net discrepancy at the level of types of information that City Halls provide. While the services related to issuing marriage certificates and local taxes are “very satisfactory”, the services related to social assistance and social housing are considered “unsatisfactory” by the

Romanians. Thus, according to Romanian people, City Halls should improve their services of information in the field of social assistance and social housing.

Satisfied or unsatisfied by the services of information provided by the public institutions? Among the population (94%) that addressed one or more institutions to solve certain problems, 49% of the citizens were satisfied with all the services of information they were offered, 27% of the citizens were satisfied with most of the services, 8% of the citizens were unsatisfied with most of the services, while 10% of the citizens were unsatisfied with all the services they were offered.

Individuals satisfied with most and all of the services of information provided by public institutions are either mostly employed people, located in urban milieus (mostly big cities, with the exception of Bucharest) or farmers that own land and are located in prosperous rural milieus.

The individuals unsatisfied with the services of information provided by public institutions are formed of three significant subgroups. The first subgroup is represented by individuals with low income, located in poor rural milieus, mostly from Oltenia and Muntenia. The second subgroup is represented by the disadvantaged individuals prone multiple types of discrimination. The third subgroup is represented by individuals with high and very high income, endowed with a significant social capital. From the standpoint of the latter subgroup, most of the public institutions do not have strategies of communication and efficient services of information for citizens.

Packages of Information. An evaluation of the services existing on the market of public information shows that the *offer of information* can be structured in two distinct packages of information.

The first package concerns mainly **information related to development** and is represented by services of information in the following domains:

- a) education (opportunities related to professional development)
- b) professional reconversion and training in professional reconversion
- c) working opportunities abroad
- d) documents and forms in order to find a job abroad
- e) accession of EU funds, loans
- f) regulations in the field of SME (Small-Medium-Enterprises) founding
- g) regulations with regards housing policies
- h) consumers' protection
- i) local development programs

This package is mainly targeted by the advantaged individuals (persons that are active on the labor market, with high education, mainly entrepreneurs etc.). The individuals comprising this category count for almost 22% of the total population. Moreover, the advantaged individuals are clustered (in terms of statistical significance) around the dimension of no-need-for-information (22% of the total population).

The second package concerns **social information** and is represented by services of information in the following domains:

- j) health, medical services (including free prescriptions)
- k) pensions (including private pensions)
- l) social assistance programs
- m) children protection
- n) Human Rights (most of the people relate the term "Right" to accessing benefits in the field of social assistance)

- o) working opportunities in Romania
- p) taxes
- q) juridical assistance and notary procedures.

This package is mainly targeted by the disadvantaged individuals (persons with low income, low level of education, marginalized on the labor market, with insignificant social capital, unsatisfied with their life). Almost 28% of the total population targets only the information contained in the social package while other 28% needs a mix between the two packages (the dominant sector being the social package).

From the total population, 22% of the citizens declare that they do not have any needs of information, 22% of the citizens prefer the *development package*, and 56% of the citizens prefer the *social package*.

PUBLIC INFORMATION IN ROMANIA - WHERE TO?

The degree of communication between public institutions and citizens is perceived by the latter ones as being „weak” or „very weak” in percentage of 39%. This group is mainly defined by individuals located in urban milieus (44%), as compared to those located in rural environments (31%). The causes of this situation may rest on the perception of „over-bureaucratization”, „corruption and incompetence on the side of civil servants”, as well as on the “lack of information on the side of citizens”.

Romanians’ leading opinion is that an integrated (conjoined) local service of information is useful (both in a “higher” and the “highest” degree). Although one third of the population does not know whether their localities are endowed with such service, there is however a multitude of explanation for the apparent contradiction: the services in place are either dysfunctional or inoperative; the services may be inaccessible (for certain individuals); or the services may not be meeting the needs of the individuals - the offer. There is also the possibility that people may take into consideration the existent of an integrated (conjoined) local service of information only hypothetically, without displaying a clear interest in accessing such service if in place. However, taking into consideration the present study, almost three quarters of the citizens declare that „the City Hall should allocate more money for citizen information”. Irrespective of the management or subordination of such service, City Halls should, according to Romanians, redirect their funds into meeting citizens’ needs of information.