

The importance of human resources development in the local public administration - foundation for good governance

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Abstract

The development of human resources in local public administration has a very important correlation with the objectives and principles of good governance. The efficient and effective implementation of local public policies, the provision of quality public services in relation to citizens' needs, the transparency and accountability of local public administrations, equity and inclusion, and active participation are just a few of the principles that depend on human resource development for good governance at the local level. The objective of this study involves an analysis of existing literature and legislation to identify the main concepts and areas impacting good governance through human resource development. The research methodology includes an extensive literature review in the field, employing bibliometric analysis. Additionally, we will use quantitative methods to analyse the fluctuation of the available human resources in local public administration over recent years, as well as the evolution and impact of professional training programmes at the level of roles within local public administration, distinctly focusing on the activities of civil servants. Predictive result indicators will demonstrate how important it is to utilise human resource development methods and practices for effective and sustainable good governance that responds to current needs and fosters trust in local public administration.

Keywords: local public administration, sustainability, results orientation.

1. Introduction

Globally, the development of human resources within public administration is essential for achieving good governance objectives. This paper undertakes a theoretical and pragmatic analysis of the definition and evaluation of human resource development (HRD) in local public administration, framing it as a cornerstone of effective governance. The analysis draws upon existing literature on HRD and good governance in local public administration, examining the conceptual framework and relevant Romanian legislation and jurisprudence. The study focuses on establishing and achieving the specific objectives of local public administration. The research involved a review of relevant literature and legislation, providing a comprehensive overview. Furthermore, an empirical analysis was conducted to assess the importance and necessity of HRD within local public administration.

In the current context of ongoing modernization and efficiency improvements within public administration, HRD in the local public sector is imperative for ensuring high-performing government. Broadly speaking, HRD is a significant factor for all public institutions, whether central, local, or other decentralized/deconcentrated entities under their authority.

2. Conceptual framework

Improving public administration efficiency and delivering services in the public interest have been major priorities in recent government programs. These programs have addressed

issues such as accelerating administrative reforms, enhancing public administration performance, improving citizen focus, simplifying and harmonizing legislation, increasing access to public information, and enhancing the involvement of public officials in local public administration decision-making processes [1].

Therefore, HRD is an important element for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services offered to citizens. Public administration faces unique challenges, including the need to adapt rapidly to legislative changes, manage limited resources, respond effectively to citizen needs, and maintain high levels of transparency and accountability. Consequently, HRD is essential for implementing effective public policies that meet citizen needs.

Furthermore, good governance is a factor positively impacting state growth and development [2, 3] despite ongoing debate in the literature regarding governmental priorities [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9].

Implementing HRD policies is considered a function that can enhance public representation within public administration. This supports the development of a public sector workforce that reflects the social composition of the population in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and other attributes, such as geographic diversity. Adopting the concept of "representative bureaucracy" [10], a representative public service will be influenced and guided by the diverse political opinions and public policy preferences of the population. To achieve representativeness, there is a strong argument for integrating equal opportunities into the recruitment, selection, retention, and promotion of public employees.

A primary analysis of public administration reveals that HRD encompasses more than initial training for public officials; it also includes continuous training programs, professional and personal development, and performance evaluation. Technological advancements, particularly digitalization processes, are also decisive for innovation and modernization in public administration. Public administration HR must evolve through training programs to utilize digital competencies to facilitate public services and needs efficiently and effectively.

Armstrong [11] highlights the essentiality of HRD for achieving high organizational performance. Performance orientation has become increasingly important, particularly in the face of global competition and recession, and the rise of HRM has also contributed to the emergence of performance management. Effective HRD management, encompassing both evaluation and continuous development, directly contributes to organizational success. A systematic, evidence-based approach to HRD, including training, professional development, and career planning, is fundamental for maximizing employee and organizational potential.

A general analysis of HRM in public administration suggests utilizing a range of methods and techniques to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of public officials and contract administrative staff. These include job analysis, recruitment and selection, performance

evaluation, professional development and training, career planning and development, and promoting diversity and inclusion.

According to the Guide for HR departments on personnel management and career development in public administration, produced as part of the "Development of a unified HRM system in public administration" project [12], the main objectives of these HRM methods and techniques are to guide, motivate, and develop employees to enhance workplace performance.

The importance of HRD management in public administration has steadily increased recently, driven by factors such as efficiency and effectiveness, motivation, adaptability and innovation, transparency and accountability, and legal compliance. These HRM methods and functions are beneficial for ensuring effective HRM in local public administration, contributing to the development and performance of public organizations. Public organization performance refers to the degree to which established strategic and organizational objectives at the local public institution level are met, clearly and concisely expressing the expected level and type of performance.

Therefore, a strong correlation exists between HRD in local public administration and the concept of good governance. This correlation is crucial for understanding how local public administration can function efficiently and effectively in the public interest. HRD and good governance are essential elements of administrative reform in Romania, highlighting the importance of developing the competencies and capacities of public officials to improve public administration performance and efficiency [13].

HRD in local public administration requires theoretical analysis; however, given its specific applicability to local public administration, an analysis based on the results achieved in relation to good governance objectives is also necessary. This paper represents an initial stage in research on HRD in local public administration, viewed as a foundation for good governance.

3. Literature review

Romanian literature highlights the strong interdependence between HRD and good governance in local public administration [14]. Effective governance requires a skilled and motivated workforce capable of implementing key principles such as transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Conversely, a commitment to HRD - through training, skills enhancement, and improved working conditions - directly contributes to a more efficient, responsive, and citizen-oriented local public administration, thereby strengthening good governance. Investment in human resources is presented not merely as an operational cost, but as a strategic investment in the future of local governance and in building public trust in institutions.

Simultaneously, HRD is closely linked to motivation and HRM within the context of local public administration [15]. Other research focuses on the interrelationship between budgetary transparency, good governance (using Worldwide Governance Indicators), and human development, rather than directly on HRD [16]. Effective good governance in public

administration depends on the professionalism of its human resources [17], encompassing skills, knowledge, and ethical conduct, which is essential for providing efficient and responsive public services. Achieving good governance requires a professionalized public administration [17], characterized by the competence, dedication, and ethical behaviour of public officials, essential for efficient and responsive public services and improved organizational performance.

In Romania, attracting, retaining, and motivating competent and ethical public officials is fundamental to achieving good governance [13]. The need for continuous training, transparent performance evaluation, and merit-based promotion systems to build a competent and responsible public workforce are presented as key factors in enhancing public service efficiency and citizen trust, ultimately contributing to better governance.

3.1. Defining human resources in the context of local public administration

Human resources are central to the efficient functioning of local public institutions. This encompasses processes and practices such as recruitment, selection, professional integration, continuous training, performance evaluation, motivation, and retention of personnel within town halls, local councils, and other local administrative entities. The primary objective of HRM in this context is to ensure that local institutions have qualified and competent personnel to provide efficient and high-quality public services to the communities they serve. Furthermore, these practices contribute to a positive organizational culture and support institutional adaptability to economic and social changes. The relationship between HRM activities and employee workplace performance generates positive effects through the efficient coordination of recruitment, skills and career development, performance evaluation, rewards, and motivation [18]. In Strategic planning of human resources in public administration. Insights from North-East Romanian region [19], HRD is defined as a process designed to ensure the optimal human resources needed within a public institution to achieve a set of proposed objectives. This process is critically important, as any error, inaccuracy, or omission in its implementation can lead to a decline in the quality and efficiency of services provided by local public administration. Therefore, HRD in local public administration is empirically necessary in the context of good governance.

The strategic role of human resources in local administration includes implementing public policies and providing services to citizens. Here, human resources are not merely a labor asset but a strategic factor influencing the performance and efficiency of the entire public sector. HRD includes processes such as training, professional development, career management, and organizational development [20]. Institutions responsible for HRM at the local level in Romania include town halls and local councils, coordinated by the National Agency of Public Officials (ANFP), which ensures compliance with legal regulations regarding public service management. A well-trained and motivated workforce can optimize internal processes, reduce the risk of administrative errors, and promote governmental transparency and accountability.

According to the National Strategy for Professional Training in Public Administration 2023-2029 [21], the main objective is to create a unified framework to improve the quality

of professional training and skills development across various occupational families in public administration. The effectiveness of public institutions largely depends on the capacity of human resources to adapt quickly to changes, innovate, and respond to citizen needs. Consequently, local public administrations must invest in continuous training programs, provide an attractive work environment, and adopt HR policies that promote merit, diversity, and inclusion.

Continuous HRD is essential for constant adaptation to legislative, economic, and social changes, as well as for reforming HRM. In local public administration, this process involves the continuous updating of the knowledge and skills of public and contract officials, enabling them to efficiently meet citizen demands and contribute to improving the quality of public services. A competency-based, future-oriented administration requires more than traditional training programs. An integrated and systematic approach to learning and development, integrated into the daily activities of officials, is necessary, as a well-trained and motivated workforce is a cornerstone of good governance.

The importance of continuous HRD in local public administration cannot be overstated, as it directly influences the efficiency and quality of public services. In a context of continuous change, where legislation, technology, and citizen expectations evolve rapidly, the constant development of officials' competencies is imperative for maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration. HRD should not be limited to updating technical knowledge or complying with regulations; it must also include adapting to new work methods, using modern technologies, and improving communication and management skills. As citizen expectations rise, officials must be able to respond proactively and efficiently, demonstrating an understanding of community needs and the ability to implement innovative solutions.

In the context of good governance, continuous HRD is crucial for promoting transparency, accountability, and active citizen participation. Well-trained and motivated public officials can ensure compliance with good governance principles, contributing to building an administration that works not only in the interest of the citizen but also with the citizen. Investment in HRD is not merely an operational necessity but a solid strategy for ensuring an efficient and responsible local administration.

Continuous skills development is essential for institutional efficiency and ensuring a skilled and dedicated workforce. Training the entire public administration is necessary to eliminate discrepancies between existing and required competencies, according to the competency framework. Strategic HRM must go beyond traditional training programs, offering continuous learning and development opportunities. These practices are fundamental to the success and adaptability of organizations in a dynamic environment.

Employee motivation and retention are also positively influenced by investments in HRD. This motivates employees and shows organizational appreciation, reducing staff turnover and increasing loyalty. Another important consequence is stimulating innovation; well-trained employees contribute to the innovation process by implementing creative ideas and solutions essential for organizational progress. A well-trained team performs tasks with

increased efficiency, reducing errors and improving overall organizational productivity. Professional development opportunities can also increase employee job satisfaction, as they feel more fulfilled and capable in their roles.

Aligning development programs with organizational objectives is another important aspect, ensuring that personnel possess the necessary skills to contribute to achieving these strategic objectives. Furthermore, an organization that invests in training and professional development becomes more attractive to top candidates in the labor market, facilitating the attraction of talent.

These factors underscore that continuous HRD is not only beneficial for employees but also essential for the long-term success and sustainability of organizations. A local public administration that invests in human potential ensures not only operational efficiency but also governance that works for the benefit of the communities it serves.

3.2. Defining good governance concept

Good governance refers to the process by which public institutions manage and administer public resources and services in a transparent, accountable, and efficient manner, respecting the law and promoting citizen participation [22].

The concept of good governance in local public administration is frequently discussed in academic literature and can be defined, according to Hyden & Mease [23], by a series of central principles and characteristics, including:

- **Participatory and transparent decision-making:** This definition emphasizes citizen involvement and transparency in the decision-making process, promoting accountability and efficiency.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness:** This involves the optimal use of resources to meet citizen needs, focusing on how administrations can improve performance and deliver quality public services.
- **Justice and equity:** Good governance is associated with the non-discriminatory provision of public services and ensuring equal access for all citizens.

Good governance in local public administration is defined as a set of principles and practices that guide how local authorities manage resources and interact with citizens to ensure efficient, transparent, and accountable administration. In essence, good governance represents the normative and procedural framework through which local public authorities fulfil their obligations and achieve their objectives legitimately and ethically. Governance and Good Governance: A New Framework for Political Analysis [24] argues that for good governance, local authorities must adhere to principles such as transparency, participation, accountability, and efficiency. These principles are promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank and the UN and are considered essential for sustainable development and the proper functioning of local democracies.

In practice, the concept of good governance in local public administration is based on characteristics such as active citizen involvement in local decision-making, transparency and access to public information, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, fairness, and

equity. Therefore, good governance and HRD are interdependent because, to implement the principles of good governance, local public administration must have well-trained and competent officials. Good governance in local public administration cannot be achieved without continuous HRD. This development ensures that local public administration is prepared and able to serve the interests of citizens in an efficient, transparent, accountable, and equitable manner. Investment in HRD is not only necessary but also indispensable for achieving good governance standards.

Furthermore, Good Governance in Relation to Public Administration [25] considers good governance an essential part of the administrative process and includes resource mobilization. Growing citizen aspirations place greater demands on efficient resource mobilization. Citizens demand value for money paid through taxes, measured in terms of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, making the relationship between public administration and good governance vital for service delivery performance.

Thus, good governance in public administration is summarized by the need for a competent, coherent, transparent, integrated, and citizen-oriented administration. This involves a set of practices and principles designed to ensure that governance operates in the public interest, based on integrity and respect for human rights.

The fundamental principles of good governance in public administration are essential for ensuring efficient, equitable, and transparent public service delivery. According to the UNDP [26], these include:

- **Participation:** Active and meaningful citizen involvement in the decision-making process. Participation paves the way for dialogue and consultation and is essential for democratic legitimacy.
- **Rule of Law:** Strict adherence to laws and regulations, ensuring fairness and justice in their application. This principle guarantees administrative stability and predictability.
- **Transparency:** Free access to relevant information and an open decision-making process, allowing citizens to be well-informed and effectively participate in governance.
- **Accountability:** Public authorities must be accountable for their decisions and actions and answer to those they govern. Reporting and evaluation mechanisms are crucial in this regard.
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Optimal use of resources to meet societal needs. Public administration must provide high-quality services while minimizing resource waste.
- **Equity and Inclusiveness:** Ensuring equal and non-discriminatory access to public services. Equity involves special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.
- **Consensus Orientation:** The ability to mediate diverse interests to reach broad societal consensus on policies and processes.
- **Results Orientation:** Focusing on achieving established objectives and delivering services that meet citizen expectations and needs.

These principles are interdependent and together create the framework for efficient and sustainable governance that meets the needs of citizens and promotes public trust in

administration. Their implementation significantly contributes to strengthening governmental legitimacy and efficiency.

Therefore, by establishing a correlation and interconnection between HRD in local public administration and good governance, we can highlight:

- **Human Resources as a Strategic Factor:** The definition of human resources in local public administration includes recruitment, selection, training, performance evaluation, and retention of personnel. These processes are not merely operational but strategic, directly influencing the performance and efficiency of the administration. An administration with qualified and motivated personnel is essential for the efficient implementation of public policies and the provision of quality services, fundamental elements of good governance.
- **Continuous Development = Adaptability:** Legislative, economic, and social changes require constant adaptation of public administration. Continuous HRD, through updating the knowledge and skills of officials, is crucial for responding effectively to these changes. This adaptability is essential for good governance, which requires flexibility and the ability to respond quickly to citizen needs.
- **Competencies = Implementation of Good Governance Principles:** The principles of good governance—transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, equity—require public officials with the appropriate competencies. HRD ensures that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to implement these principles in practice. For example, transparency requires efficient information systems and officials capable of managing them. Accountability requires performance evaluation mechanisms and officials willing to take responsibility for their actions.
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Good governance relies on the optimal use of resources to meet citizen needs. Qualified personnel, resulting from HRD, contribute to better planning, management, and use of resources, leading to greater efficiency and effectiveness of the administration.
- **Citizen Orientation:** Good governance is citizen oriented. Well-trained public officials who understand community needs and can communicate effectively with them are essential for a citizen-oriented administration. HRD contributes to improving communication, accessibility, and the quality of public services, thereby increasing citizen satisfaction.
- **Prevention of Administrative Errors:** A well-trained workforce reduces the risk of administrative errors and contributes to more transparent and accountable administration.
- **Attracting and Retaining Talent:** Investments in HRD make local public administration more attractive to qualified candidates, contributing to attracting and retaining competent personnel.

In conclusion, HRD in local public administration is indispensable for good governance. Investments in this area are not only necessary for operational efficiency but represent a strategic investment in the future of local public administration and in strengthening public trust in institutions.

To complement the classical analysis of specialized literature, a bibliometric analysis was conducted, considering a sample of over 500 articles extracted from "Web of Science" that address the similar research topic of HRD in public administration as a foundation for good

governance. Fig.1. below presents the thematic data addressed by authors in various associated studies, the co-occurrence, and the links between the main terms and research guidelines approached by these studies.

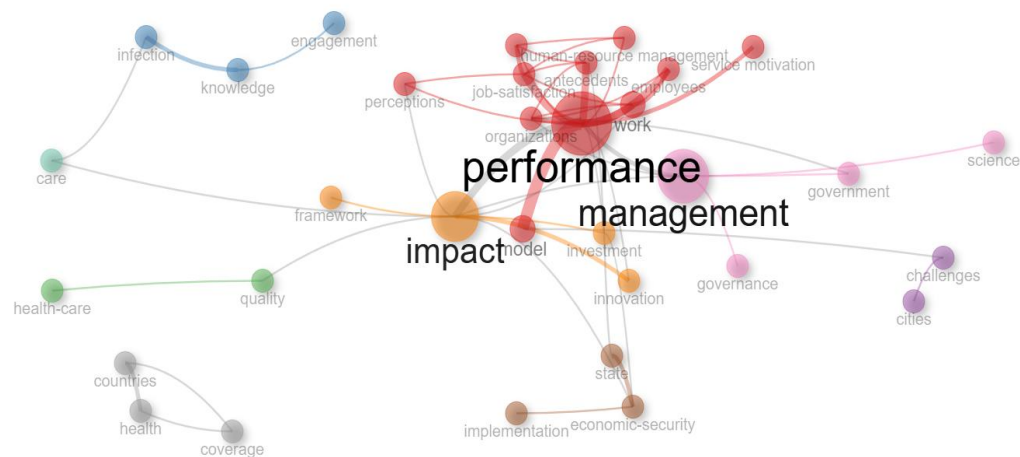


Fig. 1. Co-Occurrence and Links between Terms/Keywords Approached in Relevant Literature Related to human resources development in the local public administration – foundation for good governance
Source: Created by authors in RStudio, using Web of Science indexed articles

Fig. 1. reveals that performance, transparency, accountability, sustainability, trust, active participation, correct decision-making, management, and good governance are central to similar terms on this thematic subject. Furthermore, the bibliometric analysis demonstrates that the subject of this paper is current, as shown in Fig. 2.

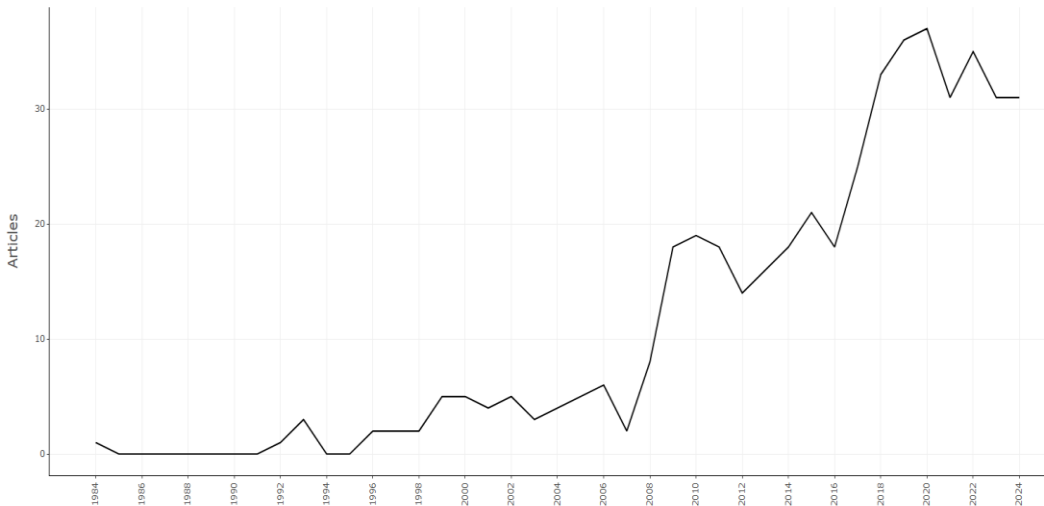


Fig. 2. Evolution over Time of Subjects Similar to the Topic Addressed
Source: Created by authors in RStudio, using Web of Science indexed articles

In summary, authors' conclusions vary depending on the emphasis placed on specific indicators of good governance. A direct link between budgetary transparency, good governance, and human development is not explicitly highlighted in all the studies presented. The subject remains timely, and interest in analysing transparency to improve governance quality is significantly increasing, particularly in these challenging times.

4. Methodology

This study analyses the evolution of human resources in Romania from 2019 to 2023 to determine the occupancy rate of public positions in local public administration and demonstrate the necessity of HRD in local public administration for achieving good governance objectives. This period is of interest because, beginning in 2019, Romania implemented Government Emergency Ordinance No. 57 on the Administrative Code, a normative act regulating the functioning of public administration.

Using reports on the management of public office and public officials produced by the National Agency of Public Officials during the analysis period, data on the evolution of the total number of existing public positions in public administration and the evolution of public officials for each year were extracted (see Fig. 3).

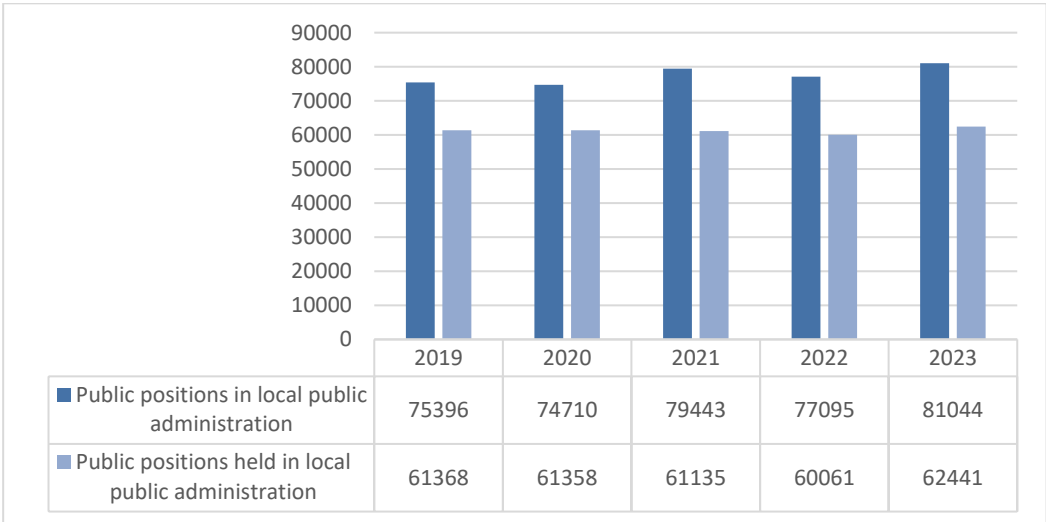


Fig. 3. Total Number of Positions in Local Public Administration
Source: Own processing

While the total number of public positions in local public administration may seem high at first glance, suggesting that the local public sector is a major employer nationally, it is important to note that each territorial administrative unit has a maximum number of approved positions annually set by the Prefect's Institution, which cannot be exceeded. Furthermore, the graph shows a significant difference between the total number of vacant public positions and the total number of occupied public positions, approximately 13% for each year of the analysed period.

According to the Administrative Code [27], public officials have the right and obligation to continuously improve their professional skills by participating in training and development programs, at least once every two years, organized by institutions such as the National Institute of Administration or other accredited institutions. Public authorities budget for these programs, including travel, accommodation, and meals under certain conditions. During training, officials retain their salary rights, for both institutionally organized programs and those undertaken on their own initiative with the manager's approval, if relevant to their work. For long-term programs (over 90 days) funded from the public budget, officials undertake to work in public administration for a specified period after graduation. Failure to comply with this commitment or non-completion of the program due to their fault implies reimbursement of the costs incurred by the institution. University studies are not considered professional training in this context. Annually, authorities develop a training plan, communicating the relevant data to the National Agency of Public Officials according to instructions established by order of the agency's president.

However, according to the activity reports of the National Institute of Administration, a very low percentage of public officials have followed professional training courses, relative to the total number of occupied positions (Fig. 4).

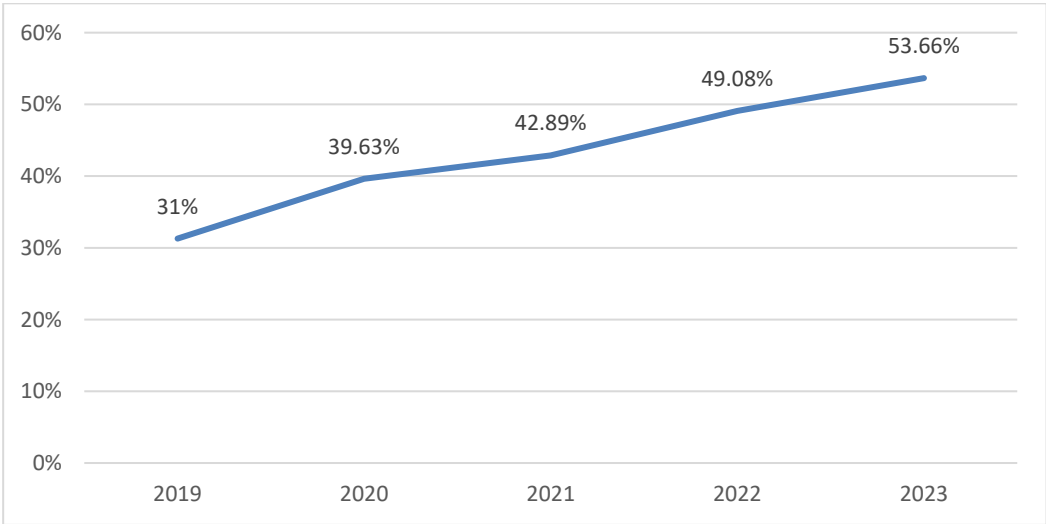


Fig. 4. Annual Rate of Professional Training for Public Officials
Source: Own processing

The annual rate of professional training for public officials in local public administration is very low and unrepresentative. Several factors contribute to the low level of professional training for public officials in Romanian local public administration compared to their total number. The main reasons identified are:

- **Insufficient financial resources:** Budgets allocated for professional training may be limited at the local level, restricting access to courses, seminars, and professional development programs.
- **Lack of strategic training planning:** Without a clear strategy and a well-defined training plan, efforts can be fragmented and inefficient, failing to address the real needs of public

officials. Training may be sporadic and misaligned with the strategic objectives of local administration.

- **Prioritization of other aspects:** Other needs and pressures, such as budget management, resolving current problems, and meeting deadlines, may overshadow the importance of professional training.
- **Limited access to quality programs:** The quality of available training programs can vary significantly. The lack of programs tailored to the specific needs of local public administration or qualified trainers can reduce training effectiveness.
- **Low motivation of officials:** Lack of time, lack of incentives (financial or otherwise) for participating in training programs, or the perception that training is not relevant to their careers can demotivate public officials.
- **Performance evaluation system:** A performance evaluation system that does not emphasize continuous professional development can discourage investment in training.
- **Lack of time:** Public officials often have multiple tasks and a high workload, making it difficult to allocate the time needed for participating in training programs.
- **Inadequate IT infrastructure:** Limited access to modern technologies and e-learning platforms can limit access to online training programs.

It is also important to emphasize that this data only refers to training courses and programs conducted by the National Institute of Administration for local public institutions. In practice, local public authorities may include in their annual professional training programs those conducted by private organizations outside the central government institutions responsible for territorial institutions. Therefore, there is a risk that the present analysis is underestimated; further research is needed including a comprehensive analysis of records indexed at the level of territorial administrative units in Romania.

To improve the situation, greater investment in professional training, better strategic planning, high-quality training programs tailored to specific needs, incentives for public officials, and a performance evaluation system that encourages continuous professional development are necessary. Unequivocal compliance with legal provisions regarding the mandatory nature of professional training is also crucial.

5. Results and discussion

Analysis of HR evolution in Romanian local public administration between 2019 and 2023, based on National Agency of Public Officials (ANFP) data, reveals a complex situation requiring immediate attention. Fig. 3. shows a consistent discrepancy of approximately 13% between the total number of public positions and the number of occupied positions each year. This suggests systemic understaffing, significantly impacting the efficiency and effectiveness of local public administration. Causes could range from inadequate salaries and a lack of career attractiveness in the public sector to difficulties in recruitment and selection processes.

Furthermore, data on participation in professional training programs (Fig. 4) indicates far lower than expected involvement, remaining below 50% in most years. This low rate, despite legal provisions for continuous professional development of public officials, highlights shortcomings in current HRM strategies. Contributing factors include

insufficient financial resources allocated to training, a lack of coherent strategic planning, training programs not adapted to the real needs of officials, and, finally, their low motivation.

These results confirm the interdependence between HRD and good governance. Well-trained and motivated public officials are essential for implementing the principles of good governance (transparency, accountability, participation, efficiency, and equity), as highlighted in specialized literature [22, 23, 26]. Understaffing and low participation in professional training hinder the achievement of these principles, directly affecting the quality of public services and citizen trust in institutions. A lack of qualified personnel leads to delays, administrative errors, and reduced overall efficiency of local administration.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study results highlight an urgent need for reform in HRM in local public administration. An integrated and strategic approach is necessary, including substantial investment in high-quality professional training programs, adapting them to the specific needs of positions, and efficient mechanisms for motivating and retaining personnel. A thorough analysis of the causes of understaffing in public positions is also essential to identify and eliminate barriers to entry into public careers. Only through a holistic approach and strategic investments in HRD can an efficient, transparent, and accountable local public administration be ensured, capable of meeting citizen needs and promoting the principles of good governance. Future research should focus on a qualitative analysis of the factors influencing the motivation and retention of public officials, as well as on evaluating the impact of specific interventions in the field of HRD.

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