



SYSTEMIC GAPS

HEALTH

INSUFFICIENT AND INEFFECTIVE HEALTH PROMOTION, HEALTH EDUCATION AND DISEASE PREVENTION

The measures aimed at promoting health and preventing disease among children and youth are inefficient, due to a major emphasis placed on curative efforts - treatment is prioritized over prevention. This comes as a result of minimal efforts in the field of health education (healthy nutrition, mental health, sexual education, early education etc.) targeting children, adolescents, young people, as well as their parents and teachers.

Human resources

Part of the reason for which health promotion is almost absent is the lack of the human resources involved in designing, implementing and evaluating the initiatives (public health services and policies specialists, psychologists, social workers, communicators, sociologists, teaming up with health professionals doctors & nurses) to address issues like healthy diet, physical activity, mental health, substance abuse, etc.

Health system (de)centralization

Romania's health system is still heavily centralized. Despite efforts to deploy responsibilities and capabilities at local and regional level, the capacity for program design, implementation and evaluation is still poor. Moreover, decisions on the development of new programs are many times not in the hands of local actors.

Over-medicalization of the health system

The overarching paradigm of the Romanian health system is paradoxically more related to disease and illness than it is to health. Training of health professionals covers mostly treatment of diseases, with little focus on efforts to prevent them through a health-in-all policies approach.

RUDIMENTARY COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL ACTORS OF HEALTH PROMOTION AND HEALTH EDUCATION

When initiatives are indeed present, they mostly lack an integrative vision on the health of children and young people in the metropolitan area. Integration should manifest itself in the range of partners involved, the overall framework for behavioural change, as well as in the desired outputs and outcomes.

Supporting entities

There is an inefficient coordination between local actors, and existing initiatives are not carried out in a collaborative manner. Ideally, they should engage a wide range of entities such as children and young people, families and schools, specialists in psychology, social work, public health, nutritionists, family doctors, public authorities, the private sector, and the not-for-profit sector.

Leadership

Most of the times, roles and role descriptions are lacking, leading to unclarity among partners. Given institutional constraints, it is difficult to have proper leadership, oversight, and accountability in the interventions. Also, soft skills like communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, work ethic are insufficiently developed.

Evidence and evidence-based decision making

Data that is available to support collaborative approaches is almost absent. Moreover, even when data exists, its reliability cannot be confirmed. Data literacy could be improved, as well as basic concepts around the use of data and evidence in decision-making processes.

INEQUALITIES IN ACCESSING HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICES

The public health system is characterized by a difficult access to medical services, which are often inadequate to young people's needs. Social determinants (education, socio-economic status etc.) influence greatly the ability to access health services, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Lack of patient pathways

The Romanian health system has not developed yet any patient pathways. They should help patients guide them through the system once a medical condition has been installed. Many times, patients experience the health system as being highly fragmented, with poor connections between various medical specialties, as well as between health care and social care, which is all the more difficult for children and young people with disabilities or from marginalized groups.

Low levels of health literacy

Health literacy represents an individual's ability to search for, understand and utilize health-related information. According to existing research, health literacy levels in Romania are much lower than needed. When this is the situation, individuals' ability to understand the health system, and the path they need to take once they need to be seen by a health professional is significantly impaired.

Out-of-pocket payments

Romanian patients need to frequently make payments in order to receive service which would otherwise be covered by their insurance. In the case of children and young people, this leads to services being available depending on their families' capacity to make these payments. The difference in the socio-economic status is thus leading to inequalities in access.



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LEARNING

DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN EDUCATION NEEDS AND SCHOOL OFFER

Education needs to be dynamic: as societies adapt to fast-paced global changes, education needs to change as well, in order to respond to them. The Romanian educational system DOES NOT seem capable of doing so. There is no consensually agreed upon set of social values that all instructors adhere to; in turn, this is problematic in the creation of future democratic citizens. There is no substantial overlap between knowledge acquired in school and the practical skills that the labour market requires.

Common values

It is difficult to identify a coherent set of common values that the education system transmits to students, values that instructors themselves should adhere to. While the presence of ideas related to entrepreneurship and its importance has increased in recent years, there are too few or fragmented efforts to transmit, among students, key democratic values such as solidarity, trust, altruism, or tolerance.

Necessary skills

Education is too much focused on providing theoretical knowledge and too little on acquiring practical skills / abilities. Moreover, theoretical knowledge is often memorized, without students understanding its practical usefulness. The current informational context, marked by an accelerated spread of false news and information without scientific coverage, reaffirms the need to cultivate critical thinking among young people and engage them in meaningful debate.

Co-decision in schools

Children are not often properly included in decisions made about their education and consultations with them are not substantial. It is important for young people to participate in decision-making processes regarding their education, both from a perspective of equity and the acquisition of essential skills that will prepare them for adult life: autonomy, participation, accountability.

INEQUALITY IN OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS AND URBAN-RURAL DISCREPANCIES

The inequalities in the Romanian educational system are substantial and persistent. A combination of various processes such as the uneven development of communities, aspects related to school financing and human resourcing and a less than optimal approach to inclusive education contribute to an overall picture characterized by visible disparities. Moreover, there are important equity issues, as students' achievements are markedly influenced by the socio-economic status of their families.

Geographic barriers

The discrepancies between rural and urban areas are probably the most telling illustration of the imbalances that characterize the Romanian educational system. The most important concerns refer to existing differences in school infrastructure, the quality of learning / teaching, student performance and the rates of school dropout.

Socio-economic barriers

Socio-economic inequalities at the family level are an additional challenge; the maximum level of education of young people, access to top education, as well as the participation and involvement of students or that of their parents in decisions that affect them are influenced by the economic well-being of the family.

Cultural-ethnic barriers

Minorities are disadvantaged in the context of education, as often its socio-economic vulnerability is supplemented by exposure to discriminatory discourses and practices. An unfavourable situation is also that of students with disabilities and students with special educational needs. Often, cultural-ethnic, and socio-economic barriers reinforce each other, potentially leading to marked discrimination and inequity.



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AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT

****INHIBITORS AND CATALYSERS OF AGENCY****

There is a lack of connectors and connector-type entities to facilitate working relationships between young people and decision-makers, between young people and organizations that may involve them and mechanisms that encourage their community involvement and participation in decision-making.

People

There is a lack of people who would have the role of a connector (community navigator) as a vocation in their daily work which is properly remunerated providing a normal existence. Because of this people who are fit for a role like this take jobs in other organisations and represent their interest becoming non-neutral and not being able to connect between actors.

Systems

Information spreading and resource sharing does not happen on a permanent and systemic basis. Additionally, collective and systemic approaches were not encouraged also because of a lack of capacity for enabling this kind of thinking on a strategic and operational level.

Organisations

There is a lack of know-how and resource capacity for the sustainable involvement of young people with the support of youth workers and improved methods of engagement and activation.

THE LACK OF RECOGNISING AGENCY

There is need of promoting existing recognition and certification mechanisms and the development of new forms of pursuing and recognizing the community involvement, participation and the acquisition of life skills, forms that are widely accepted by community members and organizations in general.

Standards

There are no local standards on accepting agency among young people while the existing Romanian, European and global ones are not widely made aware of and accepted among possible acceptors of these standards.

Providers

With some exceptions, there is a lack of stimulus and motivation within organisations and a lack of demand among donors towards supported organisations on using existing or creating new validation mechanisms at local level.

Acceptors

While there is an increased demand for soft and life skills among employers, there is a lack of knowledge about existing standards and a lack of synchronisation about mutually developed and accepted validation mechanisms of these skills at local level.

PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

There is a need in strengthening existing mechanisms and developing new mechanisms for youth participation in local decision-making on the issues that directly concern them in both personal and social life.

Established ways

The existing, already established structures need a wider outreach towards various groups of young people who are not part of the mainstream activation mechanisms either through simplified means of engagement or dedicated efforts in reaching them in their usual surroundings.

Emerging ways

There are new ways of engagement and participation which lack the capacity of becoming systemic and established at urban level.

Community relations in participation

There is a lack of capacity and connectivity for youth in being able to manage relations with peers and members of society of different ages.



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ENVIRONMENT

URBAN AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The current infrastructure of the city and the metropolitan area do not meet the needs of young people in terms of self-development, expression, and social interaction. There is an overall lack of safe, inclusive and accessible spaces where they can participate in non-formal activities of their choice, socialize, self-organise and receive professional support.

Meeting points

There is a lack of proper spaces where young people can meet, hang out, engage together in various activities while feeling safe and nourished. The city lacks accessible spaces (free, inclusive, evenly distributed across neighbourhoods), co-designed and co-managed by the youth. Young people require access to cultural, educational, leisure, sports and social activities outside school, hands-on experiences, life and career orientation. Existing spaces are improperly used, given the lack of information and the limited know-how in managing such spaces.

Spaces of creativity

The creative potential of young people is curbed by the improper configuration of the places they are frequently using. Schools do not have proper amenities and methods to enable creativity and teamwork which are needed for young people to develop the skills of the future. The offer for programmes and initiatives which encourage creativity, cooperation and problem-solving among children and youth, during or after school hours, is also limited.

Co-design

With notable exceptions, a youth perspective on urban development projects and efforts is missing. This results in a lack of ownership of the urban environment in its current state but also in its prospected state in the future. This happens partly because public consultations rarely employ youth engaging methodologies and partly because the simple and raw viewpoints of youth are not channelled properly towards decision makers through the action of intermediary agents.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND MECHANISMS

There isn't any clearly defined institutional and policy framework for youth in place at urban and metropolitan level. Frameworks to connect young people with initiatives at national, European and global level are limited. Problems stem, on one hand, from the deficiencies of the national legal framework and, on the other hand, from the limited expertise in building local ecosystems involving all relevant stakeholders.

Youth workers and youth services

There is a gap in providing necessary guidance and support for young people to deal with specific challenges in their individual development and community integration. While there is an official definition and classification of the youth worker according to Romanian law, there is an overall lack of

awareness about what this role means and how this role can be enacted to the benefit of young people. Services addressing specific youth needs are not provided systemically.

Institutions and policy frameworks

Youth as a specific age group is not included transversally in local policies in all fields of activity. A youth strategy was in place till 2020, yet no clear strategic framework addressing children and youth is currently in place. This problem is more acute in the wider metropolitan area where any element of the youth framework is close to non-existent. Outside the educational system, there are very few public institutions tackling children and youth matters systemically.

Financial support mechanisms

Local public funding is available for youth within a general call for projects of public interest, thus does not benefit a dedicated allocation. Although there are various funding and support mechanisms in place, they are not integrated with strategic and institutional frameworks and they do not endorse specific medium and long-term priorities regarding youth.

URBAN LIVING

The urban context provides a challenging environment for children and youth well-being in terms of mobility, housing, and urban design. Child and youth friendly public spaces are limited. The crowded spaces and intensive traffic impact the quality of life of young people.

Urban mobility

Most opportunities for children and youth are concentrated around schools and the city centre. To access these activities and spaces those living in neighbourhoods require a high mobility-related investment of time and money. A high number of young people commute daily between their residencies in the metropolitan area and the city centre. Cycling paths are limited and discontinuous posing safety hazards, while public transport services (coverage, links, time schedule) need improvement.

Autonomy

Challenges related to limited mobility and unaffordable housing impact the autonomy of young people. Unaffordable housing influences young peoples' choices to live with their parents longer than they would opt to, to move to peripheries and spend a long time commuting or to migrate in search for a better life, causing loss of human talent to the city.

Urban interference

The dynamic, crowded, and dense texture of the urban environment poses challenges and impacts the quality of life. Environmental factors causing children and young people additional physical and mental health hazards need to be addressed at systemic level.