

The Investigation of the Role of Universities in providing Lifelong Learning in Romania

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Abstract

This paper presents preliminary results of a study that aims to assess the role of universities in providing continuing education and training in Romania. The need for this assessment appears in the context of larger topic, that of lifelong learning, construct that raised considerable interest in Romania. The methodological design of the research consisted of a quantitative analysis of secondary data. For the purpose of this investigation, data were collected from the County Registries for Continuous Training from 10 counties belonging to all development regions of Romania, plus Bucharest. Findings reveal a low participation of universities from the investigated counties in the adult continuing education and training. The specialisations offered prove to be linked to the regional context, as it might seem natural. Further research is needed to clarify the link between the specialisations offered within the regional context.

Keywords: continuing training, continuing education, lifelong learning, regional analysis

JEL Classification: I21

1. Introduction

The concept of lifelong learning was emphasized by the European Commission as a way to achieve the aim ‘to make the EU the most *competitive* and *dynamic* knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, by 2010’ (Lisbon Strategy, EC, 2000). In this view, the competitiveness of the knowledge-based economy is ensured by lifelong learning as it represents the building and upgrading of skills and knowledge. The dynamism is enhanced by the continuing learning throughout the life of an individual. By acquiring a high level of qualification, individuals that learn throughout their lifetime will have better access to better jobs. Clearly, this represents a need if we were to consider that the number of jobs that will require higher qualification increases at a higher rate than the number of jobs requiring lower qualifications decreases due to technological development. The importance given to lifelong learning was re-emphasized with the revised Strategy Europe 2020. As such, the reviving of the economy of the EU was to be performed through “smart, sustainable, inclusive growth” with greater coordination among Member States (EC, 2010).

The term ‘lifelong learning’ was intensively and all-pervasively used in the literature. The research of the relevant literature reveals a very rich concept, in terms of evolution, meanings, forms, benefits and coverage. Since the initial use of the term in the international gatherings led by intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the 1960s, the concept was enriched by multiple interpretations that varied from its implementation in different national

contexts. This was previously underlined by Gelpi (1984) that acknowledged the lack of conceptual clarity and argued that there was a need for a clear definition of the term.

In the context of different conceptual delimitations, the European Commission clarifies in *A Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* the breadth of learning activities that are covered by the concept of ‘lifelong learning’ (EC, 2000):

‘All learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and / or employment related perspective’.

The breadth of the above definition draws attention to different **types of learning**, acknowledging the fact that learning occurs in different contexts. Further clarifications are provided by another EU policy document, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality* (EC, 2001):

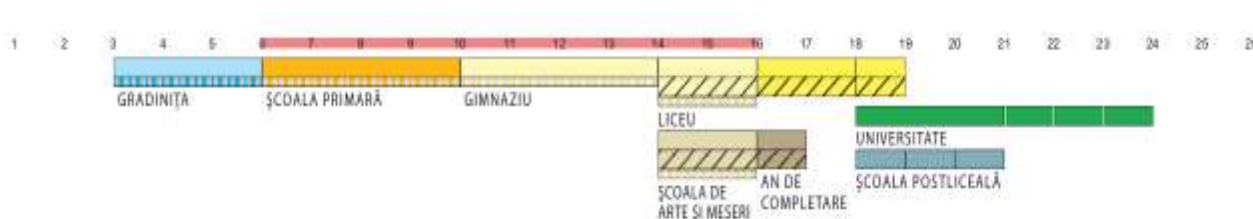
‘Lifelong learning covers formal, non-formal and informal patterns of learning throughout the life cycle of an individual’.

- **Formal learning** refers to learning activities that are provided by an education or training institution, which is typically structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and learning support, and leads to certification (recognised diplomas and qualifications);
- **Non-formal learning** refers to learning activities that take place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. It is intentional from the learner’s point of view, and normally does not lead to certification.
- **Informal learning** covers learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning; therefore it may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

Time dimensions of learning:

- **Initial education** refers to learning activities undertaken in education or training institutions, from early childhood and preschool education to tertiary education. Usually, by initial education we refer to formal education done in primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions. The structure of the initial education and training systems differs from country to country in terms of types of educational programs, the ages at which they are meant to be started and completed. As Figure 1 reveals, initial education ends with ISCED level 5, including all tertiary education up to and excluding the doctorate (EUA, Davies, 2009).
- **Continuing education** covers any form of education, general or vocational, resumed after an interval following the initial education undertaken in formal settings. The continuing education could be undertaken in all three contexts of learning: formal, non-formal and informal. Continuing education is also referred to as **adult education**.

Figure 1. The Structure of Initial Education and Training System in Romania

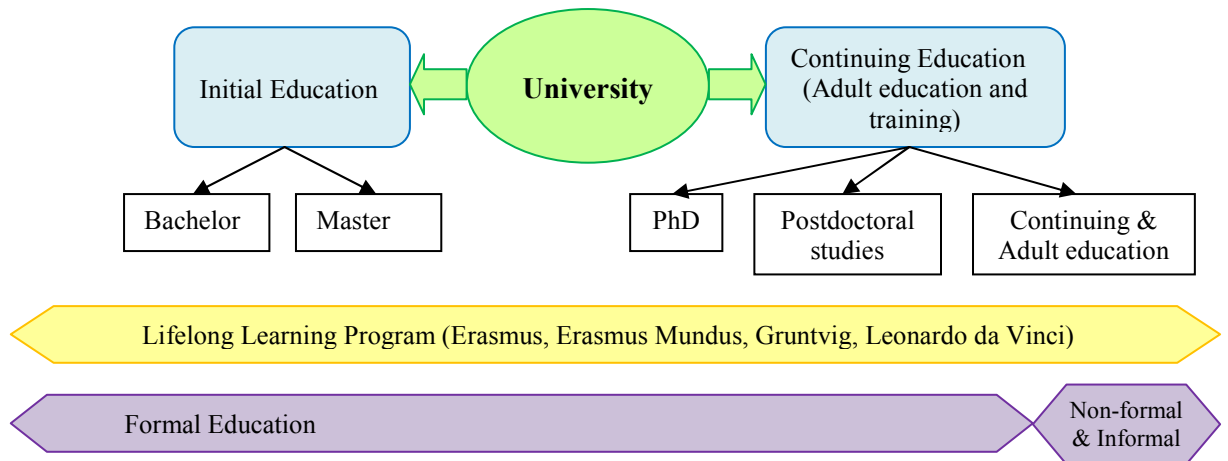


Source: Eurydice (2011)

Several considerations on the Role of Universities in providing Lifelong Learning

By their nature, universities are in the first place providers of initial education: bachelor and master degrees. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) forms of continuing education provided by universities are: doctoral and postdoctoral degrees. In addition, universities may provide lifelong education by offering specialisation courses for adults (Figure 2).

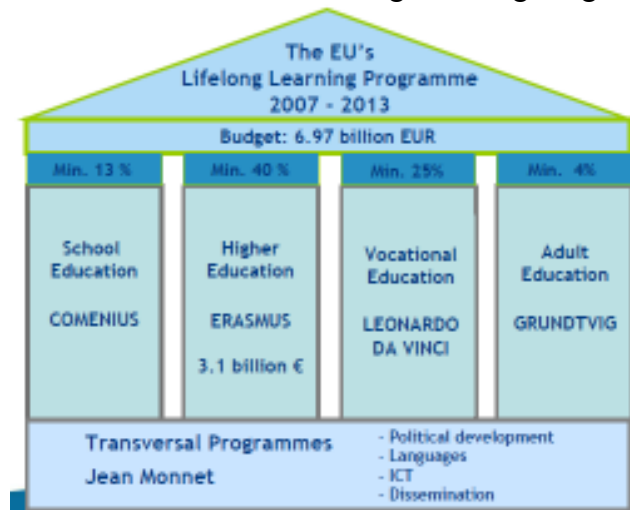
Figure 2. University’s Involvement in Lifelong Learning Activities



Source: Author’s conceptualisation

Also, universities are central actors in the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union, mainly as host institutions for students and academics participating in Erasmus Mobility schemes, and in adult education programmes offered within the Gruntvig programme (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Framework of EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013



Source: European Commission

In Romania, a number of 72 higher education institutions (out of a total of 108 HEIs) hold a valid Erasmus University Charter for the academic year 2011/2012. The number of incoming international students coming to study to Romanian universities is modestly increasing: 116 foreign students in 1998/1999; 206 foreign students in 1999/2000; 204 foreign students in 2000/2001; 275 foreign students in 2001/2002; 355 foreign students in

2002/2003; 535 foreign students in 2003/2004; 602 foreign students in 2004/2005; 653 foreign students in 2005/2006; 792 foreign students in 2006/2007; 1103 foreign students in 2007/2008; and 1206 foreign students in 2008/2009 (Teichler et al, 2011).

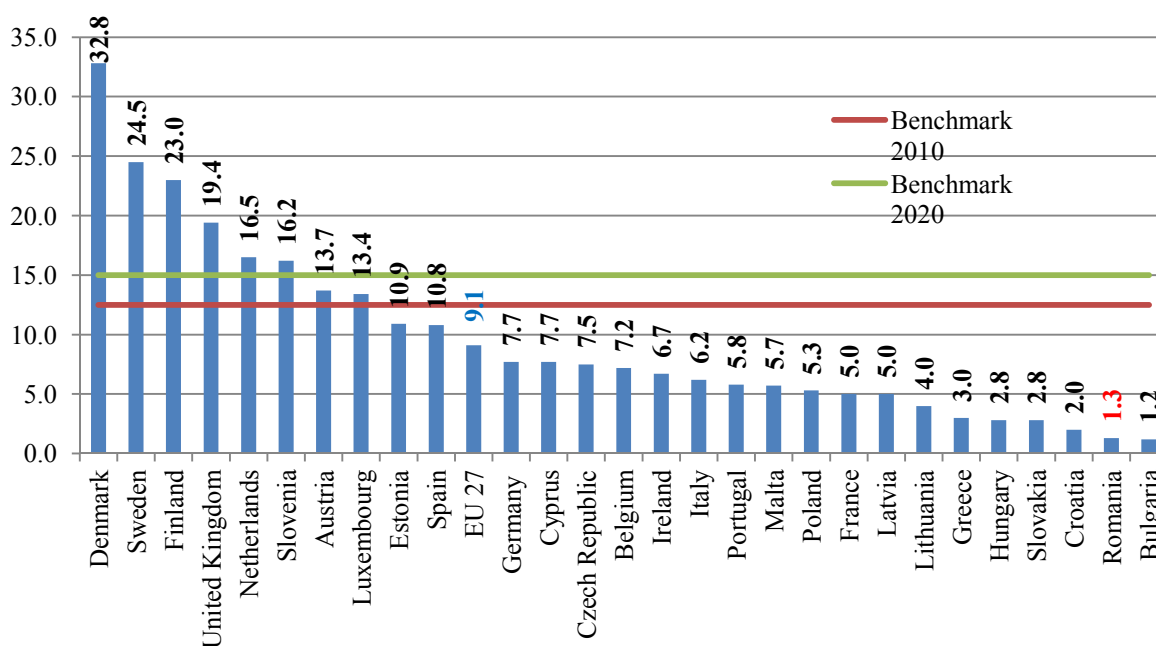
2. Methodology

A quantitative analysis of secondary data about the authorised providers and courses of continuing training was conducted to assess the degree of involvement universities from the investigated counties have on the professional training market in Romania. Data were collected from the Committees that manage the Registries for Continuous Training from Bucharest and from another 10 counties: Arad, Argeş, Constanţa, Bacău, Bihor, Caraş Severin, Cluj, Ialomiţa, Sibiu, and Gorj. Results presented in this working paper refer only to these counties, plus Bucharest.

3. Findings and Discussion

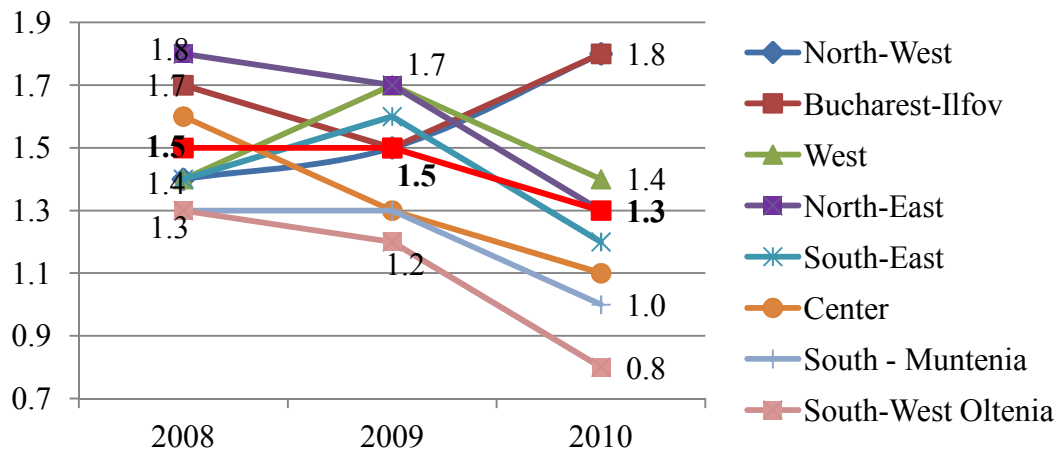
EU Education Policies emphasize the role of adult education, as a means to establish employability and competitiveness, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development across Europe. Although widely acknowledged across EU counties, adult participation in ‘lifelong learning’ education varies significantly from country to country. The European Union set a target for average participation in lifelong learning throughout the EU at 15 % by 2020 for adults aged 25–64. In 2010, average participation was 9.1 % (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Participation of Adults aged 25-64 in Education and Training in Member States (2010)



Source: Eurostat Database, data for 2010.

Figure 5. Regional Analysis of Adults' Participation in Education and Training in Romania (2010)



Source: Eurostat Database, data for 2010.

Adults' participation rate in education and training in Romania differs from region to region. The average rate of 1.3% of the total number of adults involved in learning activities does not show in a straight manner the large differences between regions. As one may note from Figure 5, two regions step aside, both with a rate of adults' participation in learning activities of 1.8%: Bucharest – Ilfov and the North-West region. The Western region is also situated above the average line. The regions in which adults have a lower participation in learning activities are: the South-West Oltenia (under 1%), the South – Muntenia (1%) and the Centre (1.1%).

In a survey of institutional concepts, Tight (1996) identified a narrow interpretation of adult education under the form of '*university continuing education*'. In a narrow sense, continuing education historically has often referred to continuing professional development, and this understanding is still common throughout Europe. For instance, Parellada and Sanroma (2001), in a study of practices in Spain and Belgium, state that continuing education is about workforce development and is 'usually understood to be as training activities carried out after the training delivered by the educational system'. Similarly, in France the term *formation continue* can be traced back to the French Revolution with the creation of the CNAM (Conservatoire National des Arts et Metiers) and refers to that provision that was designed originally to give engineers and technicians the capacity to keep abreast of technological advances and improve their professional expertise (Feutrie, 1996).

However, the provision that is encompassed by university continuing education in many countries is more than continuing professional development, and includes second chance education, education for leisure and social development, University of the Third Age (U3A), technology transfer, part-time education, open and distance education and work-based learning.

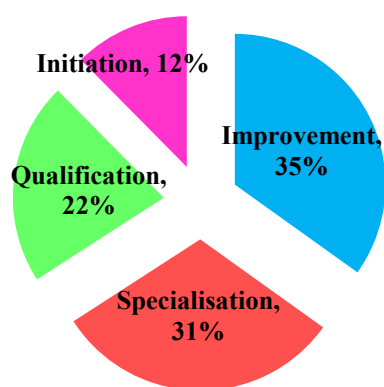
Now with the emergence of lifelong learning, as Leicester and Parker (2001) state, this term 'could be seen simply as a new name for "adult (or continuing) education"', though they make the important point that it blurs a number of distinctions between older dichotomies of informal vs. formal learning and liberal vs. vocational education. In spite of the considerable debate about the slipperiness of the concept the emergence of lifelong

learning does present some new and fundamental challenges to institutions. Kokosalakis (2000) writes that *‘lifelong learning cannot just be an appendix to what universities have always been doing’*. Within Duke’s Learning University, *‘fringe-dwelling adult continuing education or extension work was moving “out of its box” and increasing transforming the university’* (Duke, 2001). So, that which was a fringe activity becomes embedded into structural modifications that are institution wide. In the context of Finland, Hellbom et al. (1999) remark that *‘lifelong learning is regarded as a theoretical umbrella term and adult education and continuing education are still used as its operational counterparts’* has considerable resonance in much of Europe.

As such, university continuing education could be broadly defined as *‘Any form of education, vocational or general, resumed after an interval following the initial education. This may include: education for full-time mature students (those starting an undergraduate course at the age of twenty-one or over, and other courses at the age of twenty-five or over; liberal adult education; part-time degrees and diplomas; post-experience vocational education courses, including staff development; and open access courses’*. (EUCEN, 1997)

In Romania, universities made a first step to opening up towards adults, by providing continuing professional education and training courses. According to CNFPA, there are five types of courses: for initiation, for qualification, for re-qualification, for specialisation, and for improvement. The initiation represents the acquisition of minimum knowledge, skills and abilities to perform an activity. The qualification represents the set of professional competences that allow an individual to perform activities particular to a job or profession. The improvement consists of the development of professional competences within a qualification. The specialisation is a particular form of professional training that aim the acquisition of knowledge and skills in a narrow area of a profession. The re-qualification consists of the acquisition of specific competences of a different profession than the initial profession.

Figure 6. Types of Professional and Continuing Education Programmes offered by Romanian Universities



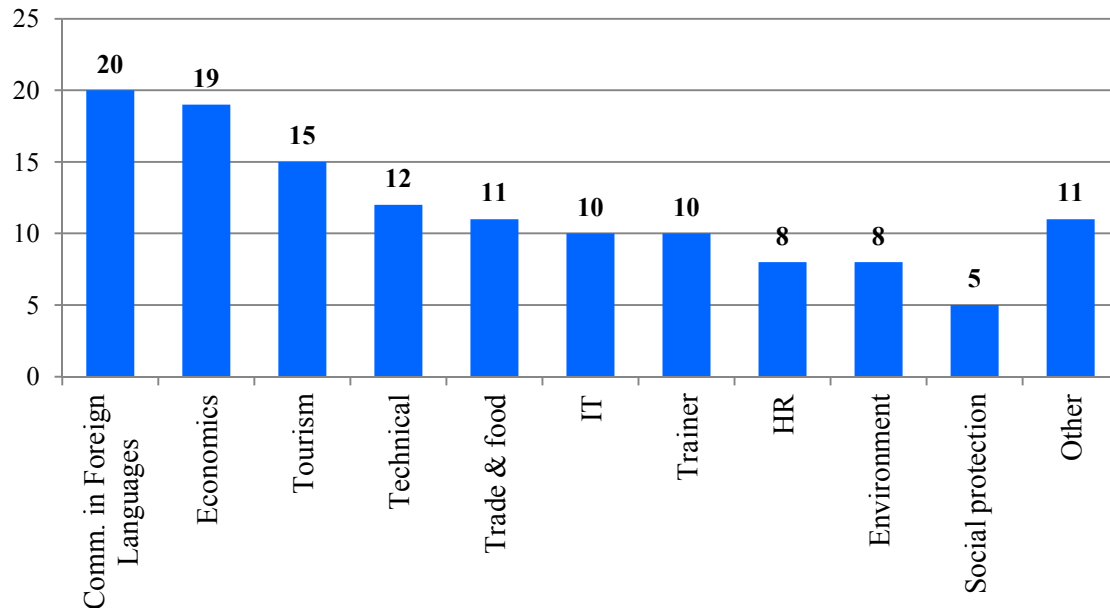
Source: Author’s calculation based on CNFPA data

Investigated universities offer four types of continuing professional education and training courses, most of them being for improvement (35%) and for specialisation (31%). One third of the investigated universities offered initiation and qualification courses (see Figure 6).

The analysis of the subject areas of the courses provided by the investigated universities from Romania reveals that most of the courses aim to provide learners with skills in

communication in foreign languages (English, French, German, Italian, Greek, and Spanish). Secondly, there are courses in economic field, most of which being courses for building entrepreneurial skills and project management skills. Thirdly, there are courses in the touristic field, most of which aiming to certify administrators of touristic guesthouse and hotel technicians. Next there come the technical courses, offered mainly by technical universities, followed by the trade and food sectors. Also, investigated universities offered courses in information technology (IT), most of which for web-designer, programmer and computer-assisted design (Figure 7).

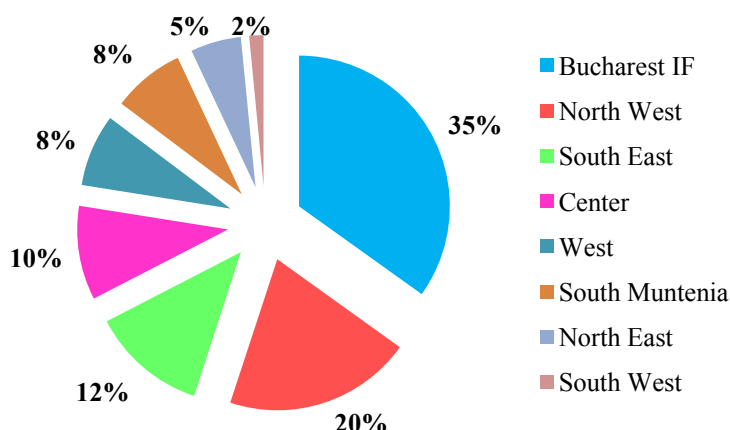
Figure 7. Subject Area of Professional and Continuing Education Programmes offered by Romanian Universities



Source: Author's calculation based on CNFPA data

We noted from Figure 5 that the regions with the highest rates of adults' participation in continuing education and training in Romania were Bucharest – Ilfov and the North-West region. Now, the analysis of the geographical spread of the number of courses offered by universities show the same two regions to have the highest number of professional education and training courses offered by universities. More than one third (35%) of the professional courses are offered in the region of Bucharest – Ilfov by USAMV Bucharest (10 programmes), the “Politehnica” University of Bucharest (9 programmes), The Ecological University (8 programmes), The Romanian-American University (7 programmes) and others. In the North-West region, The Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj offered most professional education and training programmes (17 programmes). (For more details see Figure 8 and Annex 1).

Figure 8. Geographical Distribution per Development Area of Professional and Continuing Education Programmes offered by Romanian Universities



Source: Author’s calculation based on CNFPA data

4. Conclusions

Universities are involved in lifelong learning in several ways. Firstly, through the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission that covers several programmes. Among them the most notable participation is recorded within the Erasmus mobility programme, both for students and the academic staff. The insignificant involvement of the investigated universities in Grundtvig and Leonardo da Vinci programmes require a better attention on these programmes.

As it concerns the adult education and training, universities could attract adults for several types of continuous education and training programmes. Several Romanian universities decided to offer improvement and specialisation training programmes to adults. The number of universities that have entered the market for lifelong learning is still reduced. In this paper, the analysis was made on the number of continuing education and training programmes *offered*, and on the number of universities that offer such programmes. Another side of the story is that of the success of these training programmes, meaning the number of individuals that *actually graduated* these continuing education and training programmes. This was not assessed here, making the subject of further investigation and analysis.

The level of adults’ participation in continuing education and training is likely to increase in the near future. The motivations of and the costs and benefits for individual learners are have been the object of a number of studies. Similarly, the benefits for universities, in terms of additional revenues for adults participation in higher education are, even if not fully quantified, evident. However, universities are not only motivated by financial aspects. In this respect, the incentives, benefits (e.g. why should universities reach out to adults/ What potential benefits can they bring to universities?) and costs (e.g. how universities need to adapt to accommodate adult learners?) to universities of providing mainstream and targeted higher education programmes for adult learners are recommended as a potential area for future research.

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Appendix 1.

Top University Providers of Professional and Continuing Education Programmes

No.	University	No. of Programmes
1.	“Babes Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca	17
2.	USAMV Bucharest	10
3.	“Politehnica” University, Bucharest	9
4.	“Lucian Blaga” University, Sibiu	8
5.	Ecological University, Bucharest	8
6.	“George Bacovia” University, Bacau	7
7.	Romanian-American University, Bucharest	7
8.	“Eftimie Murgu” University, Reșița	6
9.	University of Pitești	6
10	“Ioan Dalles” People’s University	5
11.	Romanian-German University, Sibiu	5
12.	University of Oradea	5
	Other Universities	36
	Total Courses offered by the Investigated Universities	129

Source: Author’s calculation based on CNFPA data