Romania
Final
**Improving
Ethnic Relations in
Southeast Europe**
Report 2001-2004

Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe. Facilitating multiethnic community change

Review of the
programme

CONTENTS

CONTEXT

With roots reaching back to 1996, when the programme focused on grants to support projects in the fields of education, media, civil society and art, "Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe" changed its orientation in 2001 so as to integrate a community-building approach to address inter-ethnic relations. This shift was determined on the one hand by the development of civil society in Romania (marked by the emergence of numerous NGOs and the parallel mitigation of majority-minority relations) and, on the other hand, by political evolution in the Balkans. EDRC therefore decided to find a more flexible and sensitive means of intervention that would bring about fundamental changes in inter-ethnic relations.

We identified a series of major issues, including the fact that the projects financed to date, whilst notable as initiatives of inter-ethnic dialogue, had had a less significant impact at grassroots level than had been hoped. Another aspect taken into consideration was the rapidly worsening economic and social situation in Romania, affecting rural areas above all and having a particularly drastic effect on Roma communities.

We therefore narrowed down the focus of the programme to address the following problems: the lack of civic initiatives, responsibility and cooperation in the communities, the need to preserve minorities' linguistic and cultural identities, and widespread discrimination and marginalisation, especially of the Roma. Other aspects considered were ethnocentrism in approaching community issues and the under-representation of minorities in local authorities. The absence of initiative groups capable of mobilising ethnic communities represented was also one of our major concerns.

In recent last years there have been some significant developments in the environment in which the programme operates. One of these is the establishment of the National Council for Fighting Discrimination and the adoption of the Law for Prevention and Punishment of All Forms of Discrimination, making Romania the first of the EU accession countries to enact general anti-discrimination legislation. In 2001, recognising the need for special measures to bring about positive changes in the life of the Roma, the Romanian Government developed their Strategy for the Improvement of the Roma Situation, a 10-year programme that addresses, among other things, living conditions, access to justice, social protection, healthcare and education of the Roma.

The new Law of Local Public Administration (LPA) guarantees the right of any minority

to use its mother tongue when addressing local authority institutions, provided that the minority represents at least 20% of the total population in the jurisdiction of the respective LPA. Furthermore, the new Constitution grants minorities the right to use their mother tongue in the court of justice, and to use an interpreter in judicial dealings (*see* the *Facts and Figures* section for more detail about this).

Despite such legislative changes, a number of problems remain: the lack of widely-accepted institutional solutions for accommodating ethno-cultural differences, the absence of policy-making experts who can address the diverse needs of the country's twenty minorities, and the lack of a well-developed institutional framework for interethnic dialogue that could contribute to raising awareness of the problems related to ethno-cultural diversity.

PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT

The scope of the programme

The programme was implemented in Romania by the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center (EDRC), in partnership with the Romanian Association for Community Development (RACD) and the Pro Europe League, with financial support from the King Baudouin Foundation, the Open Society Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

EDRC, as coordinator of the programme, was responsible for liaising with the donors and the implementing partner. It supported the facilitation and networking components, as well as the training sessions for community leaders. The Center also monitored the implementation of the programme and managed the grants.

RACD selected and trained the community facilitators and coordinated the facilitation and mentoring processes. Together with EDRC, it organised the training sessions for community leaders and co-organised the cultural events.

The Pro Europe League participated in the development of the programme strategy and its promotion, provided consultancy to the organisations that submitted grant proposals and participated in the monitoring of the programme.

By combining development grants, community development, networking and learning activities, the programme has promoted the improvement of relations between the various ethnic groups, and has sought to have an in-depth influence on the overall evolution of interethnic relations in Romania. More specifically, the programme provided support for community capacity-building activities in cooperation and collaboration with local ethnic groups, as well as the emergence of a critical mass of people to initiate and manage the desired changes at community level. It has also facilitated meaningful communication between groups and people with different ethnic backgrounds, encouraging community meetings, transparent activities and the exchange of experience.

The two programme modules complemented each other well and in turn provided us with invaluable experience. On the one hand, we aimed for long-term intervention, involving in-depth change-oriented capacity building through the facilitation module developed in priority regions (Banat, central Transylvania, Dobrogea and the Bacau – Chango region). This kind of intervention included a long-term facilitation process

inside the community, with the involvement of a facilitator and a grant provision for the community, based on participatory development of ideas for change in the community. On the other hand, we supported community development countrywide by giving small grants to NGOs, community organisations, and informal groups hosted by a public institution (grant-giving module). These latter projects were intended to raise civic awareness and to encourage people from different ethnic backgrounds to work together for mutual benefit. The application procedure comprised a pro-active phase involving counselling and the dissemination of information, which enabled small multiethnic communities with little or no experience in developing projects but interested in developing their capacities and relations at local level, to generate successful applications.

The effects of the programme

With regard to the impact of the programme on the implementing organisations, there are a number of gains that are worth highlighting. Firstly, prior to 2001, EDRC did not work directly with the beneficiary communities but limited itself to administering the grants they received. Following the changes implemented to our overall strategy, we have had direct communication with all of the beneficiaries and developed a new approach to dealing with communities, based on better knowledge of the characteristics of each beneficiary ethnic group, their problems and needs.

Management of the programme led to enhanced competencies of the programme officer, a more professional approach to performing the tasks by the team working on the programme and more durable partnerships among the implementers, as well as the implementing team and the beneficiary organisations. The programme also resulted in much greater visibility and recognition for the implementing organisations across the country. They established links with similar organisations running the programme in other countries, with a view to sharing the approach and strategies applied in Romania and also the knowledge acquired.

Thanks to the experience gained in this programme, EDRC has enhanced its capacity to manage grants and secured membership of the Romanian Donors' Forum. RACD on the other hand has had the opportunity to develop the training, facilitating and mentoring skills of its members.

Building on the benefits of the programme so far, and responding to the needs identified jointly with some of its beneficiaries, EDRC and RACD have initiated a project entitled "The Development of NGOs in Rural Areas" (funded by the PHARE programme) to support the development of the 11 community-based organisations that emerged during the programme. Special attention is being paid to developing management capacity among the organisations.

The experience acquired has also been used to develop another project designed to provide assistance for the transfer of knowledge to disadvantaged communities, "Capacity building and human resource development in disadvantaged communities". The project aims to encourage income-generating activities within the context of industrial restructuring and attempts to modernise agriculture. "Helping Underprivileged Children

Succeed" is another project based on the needs identified within the programme and developed using the experience and ideas generated during the programme. Members of the multiethnic communities, called tutors, have been recruited to work individually with Roma children. This has created friendships between adults and children from different ethnic backgrounds and created long-term commitment to helping Roma children to learn to read.

In recent years, some organisations in Romania have initiated programmes aimed at improving interethnic relations in multiethnic communities, whilst others have focused on community development initiatives. EDRC's plan, however, was to combine both types of programmes: improving interethnic relations but using community development as an instrument to achieve this. The aim of this approach was to encourage people of different ethnic backgrounds in multiethnic communities, people who rarely interacted with each other, or not at all, either socially or culturally, to work together to attain common objectives of mutual interest, to engage actively in finding solutions to their own problems and to improve their living conditions. The challenges proved to be considerable, but after a few months of community facilitation, a more relaxed relationship was created among the local people and a normal kind of co-existence in a tension-free environment resulted.

Throughout its duration, "Improving Interethnic Relations" has influenced other significant programmes implemented in Romania. The Resource Center for Roma Communities developed a facilitation and community capacity building programme, with special focus on the Roma. Organisations such as the Civitas Foundation and the Moldova Soros Foundation showed a great deal of interest in some of the elements tested in the programme: direct intervention in communities, increased flexibility in handling each case, the combination of long- and short-term interventions, and cross-module networking between organisations.

The instruments developed within the programme are also currently being used by other Romanian organisations active in community development, namely the Center for Rural Assistance and the Resource Center for Roma Communities.

The programme is by now well known among organisations for ethnocultural minorities in Romania. Organisations active in the field of human rights and minorities are familiar with the strategy that has been developed and tested. As a member of networks such as the Soros Open Network (SON), the Network of Organisations Active in Community Development (RuralNet), the Romanian Donors' Forum and the Consortium on Minorities Resources (COMIR), EDRC has had the opportunity to disseminate the results of the programme quite widely through newsletters, presentations to interested parties and round table discussions. The programme is also known among public institutions charged with managing ethnic minority issues (the Roma offices in prefectures and county councils, regional offices of the Department for National Minorities, Schools County Inspectorates and schools).

What makes the programme unique

We consider the uniqueness of the programme to be primarily due to its strategy, which was both highly innovative and a real pioneer in Romania.

From a **general perspective**, the partnership and commitment provided by all of those involved in the programme for improving ethnic relations has made it unique. Another element that contributed to the success of our initiative was the fact that the programme was developed on three levels: community, national, and regional. This facilitated learning and the on-going development of national strategies by incorporating the ideas and experience gained in implementation.

Programme flexibility was another strength: on-going monitoring of the environment and the possibility to make adjustments in response to developments facilitated access to information and support for those interested in applying and provided long-term commitment to relationships with the communities, organisations and initiatives supported.

However, what made the programme unique in the field of interethnic relations **in Romania** was the type of support it provided: capacity building, both at community level and inside the organisations, combining grants with direct work at community level and rallying members of the community and people of different ethnic backgrounds around issues of common concern. Another element specific to the programme was the emphasis placed on supporting projects carried out by and with local people, projects in which local people engaged fully, where we could help them to establish meaningful dialogue.

For our organisation, working directly at community level was a new area of interest, where special attention is paid to ensure community involvement in the identification of their problems, in designing strategies for change and allocating resources through grants, technical support, access to information and assistance in fundraising. The programme has incorporated multiple approaches to achieve a bigger impact, whilst remaining flexible enough to incorporate emerging experience.

For EDRC it was the only programme to be part of a regional initiative that developed a national implementation strategy to better address domestic needs.

The models and approaches we developed

In order to accomplish the project's major goal of improving interethnic relations, two types of approaches were combined the first being direct intervention in multiethnic communities through community facilitation, the second that of indirect intervention via grants to the communities.

The grant-giving module included providing funds for short-term activities (ranging from a few months to a year) initiated by NGOs and local authorities in partnership with informal groups for the purpose of improving living conditions in multiethnic communities. Most of the grants involved projects that aimed at improving the understanding of ethnic diversity. For instance, the ''Societatea Carpatină Ardeleană'' in Satu-Mare County is an environmental body that organised educational camps for Romanian, Hungarian, Roma and Swabian students. The students had the opportunity to get to know each other and work together in cleaning up the River Tur. The project was triggered by the fact that in the early 1990s there had been open conflicts between the Roma and other ethnic groups in Turulung. Even if the camp happened some 10 years after the conflict, the organisation in Satu Mare considered that it was only by facilitating a meeting and communication between the children that they could eliminate prejudice and build durable relationships in its place. The invaluable examples set by the children proved to parents that the only acceptable solution to misunderstanding and conflict is dialogue.

In each successive year of its implementation, the programme experienced an increase in the number of ethnic groups involved and the areas of activities covered by the grants: informal education, rural development (school rehabilitation, the repair of cultural houses, parks and roads), environmental projects, cultural activities to name but a few. The common goal of all of these projects was to bring people together, regardless of their ethnic background, age or profession, and to provide a framework for them to meet and interact. The final result of this approach was the improvement of life in multiethnic communities achieved through dialogue and joint ventures.

The second component of the programme involved long-term assistance to the community. Instruments used included community facilitation, training sessions for the community leaders, dialogue enhancement among members of the various ethnic groups and the authorities, as well as networking visits. The networking visits and training courses provided the links between the short-term and the long-term modules, as they brought together NGO leaders, representatives of local authorities and community leaders.

Long-term intervention was affected through two series of <u>community facilitation</u> sessions. These included 9 selected communities in the first cycle and 7 in the second. The premise was that facilitation is an instrument that has the potential to bring about change in interethnic relations in the community. It relies on strengthening social connections between the members of the communities, encouraging community initiatives, the emergence of responsible local leaders and local authority regeneration.

<u>Facilitation</u> involved motivating members of the community to surpass the stage of development they were in and progress to the next level. The message of facilitators was that through the involvement of responsible leaders, in-depth processes of change could be initiated through which partnerships and strong associations could emerge, capable of planning and implementing improvements in living conditions. Facilitation lasted for 14 months in each community. The facilitators began by identifying the leaders of each ethnic group and they then started to stimulate the emergence of an initia-

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tive group in the community. In parallel, they mobilised the entire community to raise people's awareness of the fact that all, regardless of ethnic origin, share the same resources, needs and problems. During the first few months, the visits were frequent (3-4 a month), after which they gradually became less frequent, depending on the manner and rhythm with which the leaders and the community responded. Each facilitator went through at least two key stages: firstly encouraging people to get involved and secondly building the trust necessary to mobilise and motivate the local people.

The key outcomes of the process were knowledge of 'the others', the identification of ethnic community leaders, the identification of the specific problems of each ethnic group and building awareness of common problems in the community. The process continued by looking for solutions inside the community, without relying on outside help or help from the local authorities. It was demonstrated that a community that knows and values its resources strengthens the desire of its members to be involved in the solution of local people's own problems, and removes the ethnic and cultural barriers.

Mentoring was the instrument that completed facilitation. The role of the mentor was to coordinate and support the activities of the facilitator, but also to monitor the evolution of the community. Mentors were therefore selected from among the more experienced facilitators, who already knew how to run a facilitation process and the types of problems that could be encountered. Each mentor coordinated the activities of one or two communities, which they visited at longer intervals than the facilitators. This allowed them to be more objective in evaluating the steps that had been taken by the community. Some of the facilitators confessed that they were too emotionally involved in the activities of the community and that they sometimes did not manage to see the small advances made by the leaders because they had been expecting more spectacular developments. In such moments, the support of the mentor was very important, as the following example, taken from a mentor's report, shows:

"At 2 p.m. we are in the schoolyard; people are gathering slowly. There is an incident. The room we thought we would be in is locked. Only a cold and messy one is open. The Roma people are upset: they think it is because of them, so Marta (the facilitator) goes to the caretaker's home, but she is not at home and her son asks her to leave their yard. Everyone talks – in Hungarian, Romanian and Romani. There are 11 people: 6 Roma and 5 Hungarians. They start asking questions. Marta and I tell them what we would like them to do, but they get back to the issue of money – you cannot do anything without money. Marta insists that resources can be other things, as well as money; the people themselves are resources too.

The people suggest that we should write the projects, they would sign them, and that's it. Some people walk out, others walk in. Marta looks at me. It's a disaster, she says. I tell her it's not and say let's try to have the people calm down and move on. ……………. It has been a noisy, stormy meeting, but there have been results. People realised that they need the villagers' support, which is essential. …………..…. I debriefed the visit with Marta. She wanted to know what she had done well and what went wrong. As a mentor it is important to feel useful, both in the community and for the facilitator. In Sangeru de Padure I felt this double satisfaction. I also learnt a lot from

the people we met and from my colleague. It was a tiring trip, but I returned home very pleased with my work –my job is important, and my experience can prove useful to people." (Gina Nicoara, mentor)

The transfer of responsibility from the facilitator to the leaders was made gradually. At the end of each cycle, the facilitators became the mentors of the community, and the leaders of the ethnic group had to carry on the facilitation. They became models for the members of the community to follow. They had to look for new resources to begin new projects, to encourage continued teamwork and to promote volunteering, as well as motivating other members of the community to get involved.

Training sessions were another instrument we used in the programme. In both cycles of facilitation, community leaders attended training courses in communication, community development, organisational management, project writing and evaluation. They learnt to communicate within their ethnic groups and with other groups, with other communities in the programme and potential donors. They learnt to identify their own resources and capacities (financial, human, and material), they learnt how to fundraise, how to sell a good idea, and how to make ethnocultural diversity pay off to create sustainable development.

The training sessions had a strong impact upon the members of the communities. A facilitator commented about one of the participants in the training sessions, "*He shared with me in detail the meeting in Sinaia. I saw he was thinking critically, in a structured manner, I liked this. It was as if I saw him as accomplished, serious, and involved in the presentation, like a true opinion leader. I am not sure what the situation is in other communities, but the direct and indirect investment that this person benefited from – discussions, meetings – were worth it. And about the most important thing for our programme, the goal of improving interethnic relations, he said, "I don't care if it's DAHR or the Romanians or the Hungarian Church who bring money and welfare to the village. The important thing is it gets here. Even the Roma benefit from this work.*"

The training sessions and their impact were spelled out in the magazine entitled *Together*, which was published in the first cycle of facilitation, as well as in other national information journals for non-governmental organisations, such as *Infociv, ROAD, Atitudini, Cronica Societății Deschise*, and also in local and national seminars and conferences.

Another important part of the programme was that of **the networking visits.** Leaders of some communities visited other communities included in the programme, where they were told about the successes and challenges faced by the locals. The most successful visits were those paid by community leaders who were trained in the second year of facilitation to communities included in the first year of facilitation. The communities visited had a lot of experience to share concerning the projects they had initiated themselves. This allowed the visitors to be motivated as a result of seeing the achievements of the older communities. They also developed a sense of belonging to a larger family with similar aims, and as a result became more confident that they too could be successful.

Challenges and difficulties

The programme's greatest challenge proved to be the diverse cultural and social context in which we worked. A flexible and varied approach had to be adopted to deal with the conflicts and suspicion we sometimes encountered among members of the communities. The programme contributed to encouraging, facilitating and supporting initiatives of dialogue across the many different cultural and social backgrounds of those sharing the same living space.

Some communities needed particular time and attention and required very sensitive intervention of the facilitator-mentor team. In Ciucurova, for example, the large number of ethnic and religious groups made intervention particularly difficult and time consuming. Furthermore, communities with a significant Roma population generally have to deal with situations where others have rather negative perceptions of the Roma. There is also usually widespread poverty and it is often difficult to get the Roma involved.

A rather different story comes from Zorile, one of the facilitated communities in Caras County, where the process of facilitation was slowed down because the facilitator did not take his job seriously. In cases such as these, we therefore needed more time to make things happen and to prepare for the handover of the facilitation process to local leaders.

Registration of some local initiative groups as organisations was slowed down due to bureaucratic problems, changing legislation and government reshuffles, but the groups persevered and were eventually registered as non-governmental organisations. The importance of the process that resulted in the creation of a formal structure deserves special mention here. Community leaders came to understand the opportunities to be gained for their groups from being registered as formal structures. As recognised bodies, local initiative groups could represent their communities in negotiations with different actors, especially local authorities and, most importantly, they were able to access funds.

Lesson learned

Of the two approaches used in the programme, community development proved to be a good choice because it allowed us to adjust to the environment of unstable ethnic relations with specific dynamics.

Building grantee organisation capacity through training and networking activities also represented an important aspect of our acquired experience. Since improving interethnic relations is a long-term challenge, it is important to offer support that will increase the sustainability of processes initiated in rural communities. We observed that building on previously achieved results was an effective approach to this. One significant focus of the programme was developing the capacity of newly created organisations to respond to the needs of their community.

Implementation of the projects led to many positive experiences of working together. Importantly, the projects mobilised the resources of the whole community and involved local authorities as partners. Although local authorities were formal partners for the lifetime of a project, within the programme we promoted long-lasting creative partnerships between them and the community. Another important gain was that such projects enhanced the belief and trust of members of rural communities in their own abilities to generate positive change within their own environment.

The emergence of a cultural component within the programme was also of great importance in our endeavour to achieve the programme objectives because it stimulated dialogue, exchange, and understanding. Members of multiethnic communities were proud to talk about and share their local cultural values and traditions. In Vasile Alecsandri, where no cultural event had been organised for the last 20 years and where relations between the two ethnic groups (Aromanians and Romanians) were very poor, a cultural event provided the opportunity for interaction and interethnic dialogue. The communities did everything they possibly could to find their own particular traditional costumes, to prove to local people that they could represent them with dignity at a festival. To make sure that they would be successful, the mayor, who had not been involved in any of the activities up until then and who had not supported any community activities, carried the flag of the community and was the most ardent supporter of his people at the event in Svinita.

Achievements

Establishing initiative groups in every multiethnic community was of primary importance to the success of the programme. The facilitation process fostered the involvement of the members in activities aimed at improving living conditions in their communities. Public debates about the role of community members and about cooperation between the different ethnic groups took place in every community. Such meetings have become a practice in almost every settlement facilitated.

We believe that creating a critical mass of people (support groups) will foster long-term change in interethnic relations at community level. Thus, in the facilitated communities more flexible forms of community organisation were developed, which were more able to answer the needs of those particular communities. In almost all of the assisted communities local initiative groups were created that became legally registered non-governmental organisations. These organisations have been supported to develop their own organisational capacities, so as to be able to manage projects aimed at bringing about change at community level. Whilst at the beginning of the facilitation process community members were suspicious or uncooperative, people gradually gained trust in each other and mobilised other members of the community in the programme activities.

Mutual communication was encouraged through meetings of the beneficiaries and inter-community visits. In order to promote dialogue between different ethnic groups,

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an annual multicultural festival was organised, involving participants from all of the facilitated communities, which was attended by more than 1,000 spectators each year. Harmonisation of interethnic relations and respect for each other's culture and identity are much harder to achieve when there is no basis for such an approach in the community or where there are no positive examples, and yet they happened.

In order to develop civic awareness, to encourage responsible civic initiatives by involving population groups in developmental initiatives, partnerships were created with NGOs or local institutions. Members of the community were not passive actors: they jointly participated in the needs assessment process, in finding solutions and in writing project proposals. For example, within a community in Tulcea, Turks, Ukrainians and Roma joined together to build a market that was of benefit to the entire community.

Interaction among leaders from different communities is reflected in the way they see themselves as a community, open to new ideas and cooperation.

Implementation of the projects within the grant-giving module contributed to consolidating the position of the local ethnic groups' leaders. Awarded projects within the grant-giving module have been developed in the fields of education, community development, art and culture, civil society development and social issues, all of which have led to positive experiences of working together, mobilising the resources of the community and stimulating civic initiatives.

Training sessions in the community, developing and implementing the projects and sharing experience across communities, helped both the networking component and the promotion of changes recorded in the community.

Facilitation and providing grants both proved to be effective instruments for community development in multiethnic communities. On one hand, the overall image of the facilitation process is a complex one, with up and downs, but also the joy of achievements. On the other hand, the grants approach successfully completed our effort to respond to the needs of social (ethnic) interaction within the larger perspective of community development.

The programme developed a team of facilitators and mentors, whose experience is now highly valued by other organisations and institutions. It also created more responsible leaders and a sense of civic engagement at community level and, by no means least, it supported the emergence of community-based organisations.

After three years of mixed fortunes, successes and hesitations, we consider the approach we used worthy of further development because it provides a much wider perspective for addressing the issue of interethnic relations. We believe that future work should focus not only on NGOs, but also on other local actors such as schools, churches and Town Halls, to help them build their capacity both to initiate and to implement sustainable activities. Our cumulative experience shows that the co-ordination of complementary approaches, such as promoting the social and economic development of the community, or preserving and cherishing local cultural traditions, is needed in order

to build sustainable communities and improve interethnic relations.

The process of intervention has to be tailored to the community's profile, since the cultural, social and economic environment varies greatly from one community to another. We believe that the invaluable experience we have accumulated legitimises us to develop further projects aimed at building local capacities, accommodating different cultural backgrounds and supporting community initiatives.

In present-day Romania, diversity in general and the existence of a considerable number of national minority communities committed to preserving their culture, in particular, is still considered burdensome and a potential source of tension. Only occasionally is it valued as a source of creativity and cultural wealth. Under such a prevailing mentality, the presence of minorities in the public arena is barely acknowledged, the status of minority languages in public life is largely contested and potential tensions arising from issues that have been ignored are often exploited by competing political forces, particularly during election campaigns.

Returning to the roots of the programme, we find the overall image of the programme "Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe" reflected in the words of Mircea Toma, a member of the EDRC Board of Governors:

"Diversity is not a neologism. It is a linguistic fact. The word is used by each of the ethnic groups in Romania. With a lot of care, I should add, so as not to include any other ethnic groups in its content. Therefore, at the level of interethnic relations, and for the time being, diversity is indeed a neologism. So as to reduce the space between the word and reality, the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center has taken upon itself the role of interpreter. An interpreter that changes the neologism into normality." [This is a quote]

FACTS AND FIGURES

The legislative framework of non-discrimination

After signing and ratifying international norms and law regarding human rights, Romania seems to be on the right road to developing a legal framework to fight racial and other types of discrimination. Fourteen years after the collapse of communism, years that have witnessed at least two political directions in government (Social Democrat, National Christian Democrat and Social Democrat again), the Romanian political class seems to have understood the importance of legal measures to guide social dialogue and regulate equality among its citizens, regardless of their ethnic belonging or religious orientation.

Romania has ratified the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. As a member of UNO, Romania has committed itself to respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Declaration of the United Nations Regarding the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. In addition, Romania has signed, but not yet ratified, the Additional Protocol no. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits all forms of discrimination. International legislation on human rights, signed and ratified by Romania, has – according to the Constitution – priority over domestic legislation in the event of a conflict between the two.

With regard to domestic laws concerning human rights, and especially the rights of national minorities, Romania took an important step forward by adopting a law that establishes the setting up of the National Council for Fighting Discrimination. The role of the Council is to follow the application and respect of anti-discriminatory legislation and to implement the principle of equality among all citizens. Since its creation, in August 2002, the Council has received over 450 complaints, carried out 37 surveys and ordered sanctions in 31 cases. However, the legal authority of the National Council to issue sanctions remains unclear. The 2003 report of the European Commission on Romania comments, "*Because the National Council is still administratively under the Government's authority, this seems to limit its capacity to act independently. Only one of the members of the Directors' Board belongs to the vulnerable groups covered by the mandate of the group.*" The EC document also states that, "*in general, there should be more transparency in the manner the National Council carries out its activities. [...] Special attention should be paid to the clarification of the role of technical departments and to strengthening the surveys and legal departments.*"

Two years ago, the Government launched its *Strategy for the Improvement of the Roma Situation*, which is a 10-year programme. The strategy provides a detailed analysis of the situation of the Roma and contains measures to address their situation. It covers standards of living, healthcare, social protection, employment, justice, education, culture and communication and combating discrimination, as well as representation in various national and local administration structures. The strategy, however, fails to refer to the violence generated by racism. This issue receives only a passing mention, in the section about justice and public order, in which the Ministry of Home Affairs is asked to 'identify and solve the states of conflict that may generate family, community or ethnic violence" (Strategy, Chapter VII, Section F). This omission is serious because during the last 10 years, problems in this field have been pointed out both by domestic and international observers. In "Monitoring the Process of Accession to the European Union: Ethnic Minorities", published in 2002 by the Open Society Institute, it was emphasised that "formulating clear objectives to combat intolerance and especially to address police brutality would serve the purpose of the Strategy to reform public mentality and to eliminate discrimination".

Romanian legislation in the field of rights for national minorities has been modified in the last three years. Thus, Law 215/2001 regarding Local Authorities provides for citizens belonging to national minorities to use their mother tongue in their dealings with local authorities in towns where their number represents more than 20% of the total population. According to the same law, meetings of the Local Council may be conducted in the language of the ethnic minority if one third of the councillors belong to that ethnic group. To complete these provisions, the revised Constitution, adopted in November 2003, incorporates the right of national minorities representing a "considerable percentage" of the local community (over 20% according to Law 215/2001) to use their own language in communication with local authorities. In a new feature, Art. 127 of the Constitution stipulates the right of citizens belonging to the national minorities to use an interpreter. It also allows citizens who do not understand or speak Romanian to address the court of justice in their own language, through an interpreter. Under the Constitution, this right is provided free of charge in penal processes.

Prior to the Referendum on the Constitution, but also after it was adopted, the provisions referring to the use of a citizen's mother tongue in justice and the recognition of confessional education were disputed and contested by political parties such as the Greater Romania Party, which has a declared extremist orientation.

Attitudes towards minorities and discrimination

By adopting these measures, Romania has aligned itself to international standards on the rights of national minorities and the elimination of ethnic discrimination. There has, however, been no visible progress in the Romanian mentality to accept 'otherness' (national, religious or other minorities). A study conducted by the Institute for Public Policies, Bucharest, in September 2003, showed that, despite the fact that approximately 40% of Romanians live in a mixed social environment, with regard to ethnicity and religion, many still have prejudices and discriminatory attitudes toward certain groups or persons.

The study, entitled *Intolerance, Discrimination and Authoritarianism in Public Opinion*, revealed that approximately 1 in 10 Romanians expressed racist attitudes, stating that Coloured people, Chinese and Roma should not live in Romania. According to the study, the most contested ethnic minority is the Roma. Two thirds of Romanians believed that Roma should not be allowed to travel abroad because they give the country a bad reputation, and even that they should be isolated from the rest of society because they cannot integrate. At the same time, 82% of Romanians shared the prejudice that most Roma are criminals, and almost 3 out of 10 supported the idea of Roma assimilation through giving up their traditions and customs. With regard to the other minorities, the same study indicated that 81% of the Romanians interviewed disagreed with Hungarians being allowed to use their mother tongue in matters of public administration or receiving more autonomy in counties where Hungarians represent the majority. The poll revealed that almost half of all Romanians were against state-supported education conducted in Hungarian.

Anti-Semitism is not widespread in Romania and yet 10-15% of Romanians agreed with discriminatory remarks about the Jews and a quarter believed that Jews exaggerate the persecutions to which they are subjected.

Research on ethnic, religious or other minority groups, such as the study mentioned above shows that minorities are threatened by stigmatisation, discrimination and social exclusion.

In this context, the Roma minority in particular has problems, pertaining on the one hand to discrimination and on the other hand to the emancipation of the community, both of which prevent them from enjoying better representation and a more equitable participation in the distribution of resources. In recent years, pressure from the new Roma leaders, both political and civic, together with pressure from civil society and the international community, has led to some improvements. Nevertheless, because of strong division inside the Roma community, their political representation remains low. As a result, Roma integration can be discussed both in terms of negotiations between the Roma and the majority population, and in terms of a democratic society. The same data reveal that the frustrations of the Roma population result from a lack of necessary resources to access certain services and goods and from the negative perception of the social and political environment in Romania.

The ethnic groups in Romania

According to the 2002 Census data, there are 17 minorities living in Romania: Hungarians, Roma, Germans, Ukrainians (Ruthenians have also been included here), Russian (including Lipovans), Turks, Tatars, Serbs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Greeks, Jews, Czechs, Poles, Italians, Armenians and other ethnic groups. On the basis of their representation in the National Minority Council (CMN) or/and the Parliament, all 20 national minorities[1] should be considered. They represent 10.5% of the total population of the country.

The Census shows a decrease in the total population of Romania. However, whilst in the case of most ethnic groups the numbers have remained the same or decreased, the

Roma population has increased. The number of people declaring themselves Roma in 2002 has increased by one third compared with those who identified themselves as Roma in the previous 1992Census. The Roma now represent 2.5 % of the total population - a significant increase - compared to 1.8% in 1992. Roma organisations estimate that the real figures of Roma in Romania vary between 1.4 and 2.5 million. An increase can also be observed in the case of Croats, Turks, Greeks and Italians. The Hungarian ethnic group represents 6.6% of the total population (the precise number is 1,435,747 persons), a fall of 109,600 persons compared to the previous Census caused partly by migration (especially of young people). A significant decrease in the number of persons belonging to the German minority was recorded, from 0.5% (119,462 persons) in 1992, to 0.3% (60,088) in 2002.

Ethnic group	2002		1992		2002
	Individuals	%	Individuals	%	compared to 1992
Total	21,698,181	100.0	22,810,035	100.0	95.1
Romanians	19,409,400	89.5	20,408,542	89.5	95.1
Hungarians	1,434,377	6.6	1,624,959	7.1	88.3
Roma	535,250	2.5	401,087	1.8	133.4
Germans	60,088	0.3	119,462	0.5	50.3
Ukrainians (Ruthenians)	61,353	0.3	65,764	0.3	93.3
Russians (Lipovans)	36,397	0.2	38,606	0.2	94.3
Turks	32,596	0.2	29,832	0.1	109.3

The 20 national minorities living in Romania have different interests and approaches to the ethnic issue. The explanation for this resides in the size of the each minority and its traditions, in the way it assesses its own needs and the solutions it proposes to affirm and develop its identity. As a result, there are *three different types of national/ethnic minorities in Romania*[2]

- the Hungarian minority, which is very aware of its national identity and has well-organised political representation (the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, DAHR) that keeps the demands of the Hungarian community high on the Romanian political agenda;
- the Roma minority, which faces mainly social and educational problems, fighting both prejudices and discrimination, with several competing political organisations that have so far failed to reach consensus on the priorities of the community, and
- the other "small" minorities, whose size varies between a few thousand and as many as 60,000 and whose main preoccupation is to preserve their particular identities and cultures.

The minority policies of post-communist governments have mainly benefited the less numerous minorities, which have been able to be reinvigorated after the communist

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period. The groups most often targeted by nationalist rhetoric are the ethnic Hungarians, the Roma, and sometimes the Jewish population. Most ethnic conflicts recorded in the past 14 years have been related to multiethnic communities including Romanians, Hungarians, and Roma, or all of these in various minority-majority relationship configurations.

Grant applications and awards

The ten ethnic groups involved in the programme "Improving Interethnic Relations in South Eastern Europe. Developing Multiethnic Communities" are Aromanians, Csangos, Germans, Hungarians, Lipovans, Roma, Romanians, Serbs, Turks, and Ukrainians.

A large number of grant proposals were received from a very wide geographic area. Since 2001, 46 projects have been supported and 16 communities have been involved in the programme's facilitation module.

2001	2002	2003	Total
9 projects	20 projects	17 projects	46 projects

The total budget of grants awarded to date is € 100,194.

Most of the supported projects received amounts of less than € 3,000, a number of projects received between € 3,000 and € 6,000 and a very few received funds amounting to more than € 6,000.

Grants	2001	2002	2003	Total
Less than €3,000	2	13	9	24
€ 3,000 to €6,000	6	5	8	19
More than €6,000	1	2	-	3
Total	9	20	17	46

The applicants were both NGOs and state institutions, although more NGOs received funding than state institutions. Nevertheless, some of the projects were submitted in partnership, such as a state institution in partnership with a local NGO or an informal group.

Type of applicant		2001	2002	2003	Total
NGOs	**Organisations**	6	11	11	28
State institutions	**City Halls**	3	5	4	12
	Schools	-	4	-	4
	Others	-	-	2	2

The number of projects developed in urban areas is comparable to the number of projects developed in rural areas. Urban area projects tend to develop educative and intercultural activities, while those developed in small rural areas are more likely to involve social and infrastructure/developmental issues.

	2001	2002	2003	Total
Urban	5	10	5	20
Rural	4	10	12	26

Projects that have received grants have been developed in the fields of education, community development, art and culture, civil society development and social issues.

The total number of people who have benefited from programme implementation is about 40,000. Children have been active players in the projects supported. Around 20 of the 46 projects undertaken have directly involved some 2,400 children from various ethnic backgrounds.

The long-term (facilitation) module has been developed in Banat - Caraș-Severin County, Timiș County; Center Transylvania – Mureș County; Dobrogea – Tulcea County; Southwest Moldavia – Bacău County. The short-term (grant-giving) module has national coverage.

Training, mentoring and networking

16 communities benefited from long-term assistance and mentoring, whilst 29 communities benefited from short-term grants. 3 leaders from each of the 9 assisted communities attended 4 training and networking sessions to promote positive practices and 2 leaders from each of the 29 short-term assisted communities attended 3 training and networking sessions.

Interaction between leaders from the various communities reflected the way in which they consider themselves as a community open to new ideas and cooperation. In the case of NGO grantees, training sessions focused on writing proposals, project management, monitoring and evaluation, communication, public relations and defining perspectives. The training sessions offered working opportunities and space to promote good practice developed within the programme. Training and networking activities also helped to train responsible local leaders as people able to initiate and coordinate activities involving community members.

Mentoring was seen as a support activity for facilitators in the processes they helped to develop in the community. An important objective of the mentoring component was to transfer the process from facilitators to community leaders and thus to the community itself. Another aim was to provide local support for formal and informal groups in drafting a strategy for the development of their community. Facilitation and mentoring were both important tools of the programme. On-going communication between everyone involved in the programme was a necessary pre-requisite for this. The e-mail group of

the programme facilitated access to information and provided a means of sharing experiences. In all, 810 messages were sent on the group.

Local organisations or initiative groups were created in all of the communities supported within the long-term module. There are examples of communities where such groups developed advocacy campaigns, though not named as such. In Ogra, a local initiative group, now a registered NGO, was granted a small amount of money to repair the school floor. When the County Education Department read in local newspapers about the work done by people in the community, it decided to contribute financially to the school renovation. The people of the community had not intended to influence the local authority, but the lessons learned showed them the value of their work and how they should act in future.

There are cases where advocacy was the final objective of the actions of members of the community. One such case was that of the community based organisation in the village of Gheorghe Doja, who specifically set out to influence Local Council decisions. Their effort was successful only when they found out that they had the right to participate in local Council meetings. Their presence in a Council meeting helped Council members to better understand the problem and their position and to realise that community member initiatives help, rather than prejudice the community.

Events

The programme encouraged the sharing of experiences between diverse communities and between more and less experienced communities. Two editions of a multicultural festival were organised, gathering participants from ten local communities and over 1,000 spectators. It was a good opportunity to network and exchange both ethnocultural traditions and good practice. Participants were proud to reveal the uniqueness of their communities.

Facilitation and the provision of grants proved to be efficient tools in improving interethnic relations in the diverse communities involved in the programme. The networking component of the programme was also of great importance. Exchanges between the facilitated communities of the first cycle and those of the second cycle played a significant role in this respect. The figures and facts above regarding the organisations supported, the people involved, the training sessions, the events and so on provide some guidelines to the wider picture and provide an insight to the achievements and impact of the programme.

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1 Hungarians, Roma, Germans, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Russians, Lipovans, Turks, Tatars, Serbs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Greeks, Jews, Czechs, Poles, Italians, Armenians, Macedonians.

2 Classification within the *Feasibility Study* realised by Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center.

CASE STUDY:
"The Art That Unites" Iași Minority Communities

Throughout the history of the programme *"Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe",* most of the projects financed in Romania have involved activities designed to bring together the majority and "large" minorities such as the Hungarians, Roma. The interest of the majority (and that of the numerically small minorities) in proposing projects that will give prominence to these communities is naturally limited. The "Art that unites" project, initiated in Romania by the Hellenic Community, in partnership with the Italian Community and the Democratic Forum of Germans, in addition to being a *rara avis*, may provide a starting point for developing funding policies in the future.

Iași, the historic capital of Moldova, has had numerous ethno-linguistic communities. In 1930, the most numerous of these was the Jewish community. Though less numerous, there was also a Greek community (130 people in 1930) and an Italian community, both of which experienced a period of development, during which schools and cultural edifices were built and magazines published. Such rich cultural activity, together with the fact that their members were of a certain social status, brought symbolic recognition to these communities. The communist regime forced the Greek and Italian communities, as well as a German community, to give up all kinds of associative life, despite the fact that the Greek community received members of the ELAS party that visited Iași.

The result was a weakening of minority identities, an effect that was further enhanced from 1956, when Italians and Greeks were forced to choose between losing their national citizenship and leaving Romania. Minority community belongings were nationalized, their schools taken over by the public education system and, from then on, it was decreed that education should be only in Romanian. The minorities' magazines were also closed down. Unlike in Transylvania and other Moldavian towns, where identity and its preservation focused on community churches, in Iași the absence of a "Greek" church forced people to celebrate their national identity within the family and informal groups. In the case of Italians, the Catholic Church continued to serve the community during the 45 years of communism, but even this failed to keep the Italian community spirit alive. The visibly declining German community met with the same fate and, as a result, the number of German-speakers where the language was their mother tongue, also fell and traditions started to die out.

After 1989, an initiative to revive community activities came from 'senior citizens' who had known and been active in the minority communities between the two world wars. In the case of the Italian community, and at the suggestion of its leaders, they published an announcement in the local newspaper to locate members of the community. After several meetings, the Italian Community of Romania registered legally. There are currently several Italian associations, but there is no competition between.[1] The Greek community first registered the Greek Union, a national organisation based in Bucharest. The

central organisation encouraged the development of local bodies. A range of methods was used to identify previous members, including informal networks, direct searches in the neighbourhood and looking up names in the telephone directory[2]. The German community did likewise, starting from a central organisation and moving toward local minority organisations.

According to the 2002 Census, the Greek community in Iași had 475 members, the Italian community 86 members and the German community 276. Of course, the number of active members or sympathisers is not the same as the total number of people in each of the respective ethnicities.

The three minority communities have similar goals resulting from efforts to preserve their national identity.
The finance necessary for community activities comes from the state budget3 or from organisations and institutions in their mother country since most organisations of this kind have insufficiently developed fundraising skills. All of their activities have the goal of raising members' sense of belonging to an ethno-linguistic community and of making their identity known to other groups. All activities seek to have a symbolic dimension and this is especially true within the Greek community, which tries to "*make known the places where Greeks have passed*". The three ethnic groups provide language lessons in their mother tongue, which are popular with members of the majority population, too, and the communities produce a number of publications. The Greek community produces a bilingual magazine (*Speranța* [Hope]), while the Italians publish the weekly *Columna.* All three communities do their utmost to publicise their existence and support their members, through activities such as translations, poetry evenings, theatre performances and exhibitions. The organisations also provide social assistance to members in difficulty.

The management in all three organisations is based on strong personalities, namely their presidents. Marica Pieptu, the president of the Greek Community, is a former partisan fighter; Ms. Gita Navari is the editor of *Columna* and Ms. Astrid Agache is a university reader at the University of Iași. Although they represent very small ethnic groups, the three communities are extremely active and are therefore well known to the mainstream population. Frequent media coverage is given to the organisations and their events[4].

Despite knowing about each other's activities, none of the three communities had ever carried out a joint project prior to the project funded by the Foundation. In the absence of any coherent fundraising policy, the proposal to implement a partnership project with funds from outside the traditional sources of the three communities was surprising. Roxana Cozma initiated the project, which was immediately accepted by all three communities, and Ms Cozma became the project coordinator. The rationale for the project was inspired by Iasi's recent history: "The major reason for this project is the diminished sentiment among members of the target group of belonging to an ethnic community."

The project objectives came from the need to strengthen the individual identity of members of each community and the desire to develop some form of collaboration

with members of the other ethnic communities.[5] Activities included establishing three dance troupes that performed traditional folk dances of their respective ethnic communities. Through the various activities, the project managed to develop ties between the representatives of the Greek, German and Italian communities involved in it. Professional Romanian dancers joined the troupes to make up the numbers. As the German troupe only had a few people, they could not start a youth company, so they invited young Romanian schoolchildren to start one.

None of the ethnic communities had traditional folk costumes at the beginning of the project. The Greeks identified a partner organisation in Greece, who donated original Greek costumes to the community in Iași, while the Italians and the Germans decided to make their own costumes.

The direct beneficiaries of the project were the members of all three communities and the young Romanians who completed the troupes. They all learnt to appreciate Iasi's cultural wealth and ethnic diversity.

Beyond the activities that had been planned for the project, there was also an art exhibition entitled "Myths and legends of the peoples", in which the organisers displayed works of artists belonging to the different ethnic groups. The exhibition, which was hosted by the National Theatre, was visited by many people, including members of the minority communities, local authority representatives, students and people interested in culture.

The project activities had excellent coverage in the local media. A detailed presentation of the project can be accessed on the Greek organisation website (www.greekcommunity.go.ro).

The Project's final performance, involving all three dance troupes, was given before an audience of 700 people. Between the dancing displays, there was a modern theatre performance entitled "*Geneze*". The show was very varied. It included a presentation of the myths behind the genesis of the three peoples (e.g. the legend of Romulus and Remus for the Italian community), a presentation of each community's national dances and a performance of the traditional Romanian *hora*. The organisers always kept in mind the principle "Everyone is different, everyone is equal" and their concern to eliminate dissonance and achieve artistic balance and harmony.

At the end of the funding period, some of the project activities continued. The three dance troupes have continued their activities and the project coordinator replicated the project with a Romanian troupe, *Doina Carpaților*. Motivated by the show's success, the performers and directors repeated the show in a new format, this time also including a set of Romanian dances and the presentation of a Romanian myth. The dance troupes remain a means of strengthening relations between young members of the three communities, who still attend rehearsals and learn new dances. Now, performances are sometimes given separately by each community (e.g. the Greek community had a performance in Crete, and the Italian troupe had several performances in Italy), or togeth-

er (the two troupes were preparing for a festival that was going to take place in Vatra Dornei). The older generations have also started to teach children traditional dances.

As a result of the success of the project, four months after the completion of the project, and at the request of the other ethnic communities in Iasi (Romanians, Armenians, Jews, Ukrainians, Russian Lipovans and Roma), the three communities organised a complex show (Ethnocultural harmony) and an exhibition. This project was the initiative of the British Council. The Students' Cultural House still offers traditional dance courses, as does the Theatre Academy.

"Art that unites" highlights some of the characteristics of the projects initiated by small minority communities. Such projects have an important symbolic value: art is used as a means of communicating and developing closer relations with and between communities: "*They [the young Italians and Greeks] still meet and have parties together, whereas before they just ignored each other*".

Recognition by the majority population – which is significant not only for the minority communities, but also for cooperation between the majority and minorities – is obtained much more easily by direct contact with traditions. One of the high school students that attended the performance shared his thoughts with us, "*The performance was the thing that was necessary for people to break their routine. I noticed how varied and in fact how unitary the city I live in is. I especially noticed the gracefulness of the Greeks, the warmth of the Italians and the rigor of the Germans.*"

As a result of dispersion, emigration and assimilation, especially during the communist period, there are ethno-linguistic communities in contemporary Romania that risk disappearing completely. Ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity can only be maintained through durable programmes of identity preservation, and openness toward the majority culture. Money allocated to minorities from the state budget is insufficient to fund complex programmes. In fact, the bulk of the funds is used to cover the maintenance costs of minority organisation offices and for the publication of their magazines. On the other hand, because of the various types of organisation that the communities have chosen to have (cultural, educational, community-based etc), they are unable to participate with equal chance in raising funds.

Strengthening ethnic belonging provides an important step towards the communities becoming politically active and projects similar to the one presented here can play a significant role in that process.

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1 On the contrary, a unification of the organisations is planned for 2004

2 The president of the Community identified people with Greek names in the telephone directory. These people were called and informed of the opportunity to become active members of the community.

3 This fact brings about a feeling of recognition and support from the Government.

4 Especially in the minorities programme of the regional SRR studio in Iași and in a similar programme on a local television station

5 The project was submitted by the Greek Community

CASE STUDY:
"It's good to have Roma in Tonciu"

In the past, most of the projects whose beneficiaries were the Roma in Romania started from the idea of doing something *for* the Roma. More recently, however, there has been a transition toward projects involving activities conducted *with* the Roma. One such project is "A dispensary for Tonciu".

After 1990, when the Roma were accorded political recognition as an ethnic minority, their community became an issue of interest for researchers, politicians and NGOs. Beyond the characteristics that distinguish them from other minority communities, greater interest in the Roma was stimulated by the attention given to them by the European institutions, often accompanied by non-reimbursable funds. Institutional neglect, as well as occasionally discriminatory legislation (such as the Land Law) or state intervention in the process of crystallisation of the Roma movement have deepened the differences between this community and the majority population.

The economic situation of the Roma has distracted attention from approaching the Roma as an ethnic group (and giving them equal access to power) and has instead focused on the "Roma as a social problem". Successive Romanian governments since 1989 have tended to address the "Roma problem" in their inaugural speeches, but even the rare actions initiated have had no significant impact. On April 25, 2001, the Government adopted the National Strategy for Improvement of the Roma Situation and approved a ten-year programme that aims to improve the social and economic situation of the Roma and integrate them into society. However, in the absence of funds necessary to implement the strategy, a countrywide solution to the problem has little chance of success. At local community level, and thanks to the support of nongovernmental organisations and/or the local authority, some of the more urgent problems do find solutions.

Roma activists claim that Mureș County has the biggest Roma population in the country, with over 120,000 people (local Roma organisations believe that the Roma account for 20% of the county population). 2002 census data mention 40,734 Roma people in Mureș County (7% of the total population of the county). The Roma community here has very diverse traditional occupations and lifestyles (settled, spoon-makers, Gabors with hats) and speak different languages. In general, the Roma here speak three languages. 70% of the community still speak Romani but they also use Romanian and Hungarian. The religious life of the communities is equally diverse: the Roma are Catholic, Lutheran, or Orthodox. More recently, the impact of the Neo-Protestant churches has increased and according to estimates of local Roma organisations, 20% of the Roma follow this religion.

After 1990, branches of the various Roma parties and organisations appeared in Mureș County. Independent organisations such as Uniunea Romilor, the Roma Union, also appeared. The Roma Party, Partida Romilor, is currently the most powerful organisation.

Nevertheless, political representation of the Roma is still poor. In the period between 2000 and 2004, there were 28 local councillors but no county councillor. In the next elections, the Partida Romilor aims to have 2 county councillors elected and twice as many local councillors as in the current mandate. Although data from the last census entitle them to hope for 4 mayorships (in Apold, Băgaciu, Fărăgău and Petelea, where the Roma community represents a significant majority), the lack of competent candidates, the lack of interest of those who are competent to solve the Roma's problems, the assimilation of the elite and the fact that some Roma leaders are also members of other parties, mean that Roma political groups do not promote any mayoral candidates.

At the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Tonciu[1], the village where the project was implemented, was the centre of the commune of Tonciu, which also included the villages of Fărăgău, Poarta and Uluca. After 1918, the "Romanianising" policy made Fărăgău (with a Romanian majority) the commune centre and Tonciu (with its predominantly Hungarian and Roma population) started to be marginalised by the administration. Situated some 7 km from the centre of the commune of Fărăgău and 3 km from the centre of the commune of Cozma, Tonciu lost some of its Hungarian inhabitants and gained more Roma during the communist period. The closeness of Tonciu to Reghin, which was an industrial centre, resulted in people moving to work there for long periods at a time, returning home only during the holidays. Today, members of the Hungarian community are employed by various businesses in Reghin, and the Roma men of Tonciu work on building sites in Cluj, Valea Jiului, Târgu-Mureș etc.

The lack of community feeling, made worse by long absences from the village, affects Roma-Hungarian relations. There is no communication and no contact. From January 1990 onwards, a number of companies employing workers from Tonciu closed down and this had severe consequences on the village. The repercussions from these closures were not only economic: they also brought significant pressure on ethnic relations in Tonciu. For the Hungarians, a loss of income did not cause a dramatic fall in the standards of living (they had pensions and land), but in the case of the Roma it was devastating. Lacking agricultural land and jobs, the Roma became dependent on aid provided by the state, or modest incomes derived from seasonal work in construction and agriculture. Petty theft (usually of food) increased and as a result relations became tense, often resulting in violent conflicts after drinking.

By 2003, there had been little improvement in either the economic situation or that of interethnic relations. 40 people had jobs in Reghin, some were employed in a carpenter's shop in the village (owned by an Italian), whilst others worked in milk processing. Most Roma's income was social benefit, family allowances and occasional income from seasonal jobs.
In the village of Tonciu there are 800 people, 87% of whom are Roma: the Roma represent 40% of the population of the commune. Most of the villagers are Lutheran, though some belong to the Orthodox or Neo-Protestant churches.

Between 1990 and 2000, the Village Hall of Fărăgău only administered the local budget and the funds it received from the County Council. The lack of fundraising abilities and staff overloaded with bureaucracy and legislative changes effectively prevented the emergence of any fundraising policy. The village of Fărăgău never developed partnerships, and the only institutional relations were those of subordination to the County Council and the Prefecture. In the 2000 elections, they elected an independent candidate as mayor, a man who had come to the village from Ialomița County in 1983. An entrepreneur and ex-president of the agricultural association, the new mayor believed he had to „*respond to the trust of the population, as he was both an outsider and had a Hungarian wife*".

The first projects he oversaw were the renovation of the school and street lighting, which were paid from County Council funds. The mayor gained something of a reputation for insisting that the county institutions provide the funds. Later, he felt compelled to join a party ("*I joined them because I had to stay with the powerful*") but he found the funds insufficient *("There were too many Social Democratic Party mayors and too little money"*). Nevertheless, the school in Tonciu was repaired, and the one in Fărăgău was extended. As a result of his collaboration with the councillor on Roma issues in the Prefecture, Nicolae Turcata, he received information about non-reimbursable funds. "*I found the Roma projects appropriate. Most of the things had to be done in Tonciu where 85% of the Roma are. If I received money from the Roma funds and solved the problems of the village, I was going to be able to say, "How good we have them""*.

A meeting of the entire community meeting was organised to identify the priorities that all three ethnic groups could support. The meeting was attended by the Roma councillor of the Prefecture of Mureș, as well as the three Roma councillors of Tonciu. After analysing the entire list of issues raised, the people voted to build a dispensary. There were considerable health problems (largely because there were many old people in the Hungarian community and many children in the Roma community) and it was more than 7 km to the nearest dispensary in Fărăgău. The previous medical dispensary in Tonciu had been in the building of a manor house, which was returned to its previous owners, but when the owners came back from the United States, they decided to have the building demolished.

The failure of negotiations with the owners (the Village Hall had assumed responsibility for the rent and renovation of the building, etc.) led to the doctor's surgery closing down. In cases of emergency, consultations were carried out in the priest's house (as the doctor is the Lutheran pastor's wife).

The key objective of the project supported within the IERSEE programme, was to solve the crisis in the provision of medical care. However, other objectives were soon added. The project also provided an opportunity to improve relations between the two communities, to improve communication between the Village Hall and the community, and also 'to test' community participation, volunteering in the process of community development.

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The funds provided by the programme grant and the money from the council were insufficient for the entire construction work. It was therefore decided to renovate an old building belonging to the Village Hall to provide the dispensary. The project involved the purchase of materials for the repair work, organising work teams to do the repairs and furnishing the dispensary. The money secured for the project only sufficed for the materials, so the work was done on voluntary basis. Mobilisation of the community was brought about by less formal, but very efficient means: *"When the project was implemented, the Village Hall did not have funds to pay any social benefits to the unemployed. However, the people came to work. Others brought beverages so that they felt ad if they were contributing. At one point, when the roof was being repaired, there were too many volunteers. The Roma came too, and the Hungarians, and the elderly. They came with their carts and carried the materials."*

The main actors in the project were also the direct beneficiaries. By working together toward the same goal, they had the opportunity to communicate. *"Moreover, the Roma, who are experienced builders, could now show their true face. They are very good craftsmen and work hard, but people had never had the chance to meet them like this."* The mayor estimated that approximately 75% of the villagers participated in the work. The scepticism of some of the villagers (especially the older Hungarians) was soon dispelled. Good management of the financial resources helped ensure that the building would be modern (e.g. with insulated windows, tiled walls and floors and a nice waiting room). At the present time, the dispensary is functional and partly furnished. The villagers still plan to add some furniture, including office equipment, such as a filing cabinet, and the waiting room.

Though it was not widely covered in the media, the project is well known among the surrounding villages. The county council intends to help local people disseminate this good practice in other places. The village also now enjoys a better reputation in the area of Fărăgău, *"They now approve my applications more easily because we have proved that we can manage the funds."*

A real gain for the village is the experience of implementing a project, and raising funds for it. After completing of this project, the Village Hall managed to secure funds from the Government's General Secretariat to repair the roads in Tonciu. The community participated in the implementation of this project too. Discovery of the village's own resources has led to solving the community's problems. The inhabitants of Fărăgău renovated the cultural house in the commune with only ROL 7,000,000 (less than € 200) from the budget of the Village Hall. Most of the materials and the work were contributed by local people.

Although the project *"A dispensary for Tonciu'"* covered only a brief period of implementation, its impact was significant. The main gains have been in social capital: the locals have built on their own skills and knowledge. Their civic attitude is now the engine of community development and there is increased inter-ethnic communication because common activities have led to the mitigation of prejudices.

However, the Hungarian and Romanian communities still have a rather negative atti-

tude toward the Roma. Although they have got to know the Roma community in their own village, their prejudices against the Roma in general persist: *"Our Gypsies are mild and hard-working, not like the others. We do not have problems in Fărăgău."* The crime rate in the commune, which was the major reason for conflicts with the Roma, has also diminished. Community involvement in the projects initiated by the Village Hall has helped improve communication between local people and the administration. To communicate more efficiently with the villagers in Tonciu (7 km away from the Village Hall) the mayor visits the community at least once a week. During these visits, he talks with the people and deals with administrative issues such as certificates, social benefits, etc. In fact, the mayor of Fărăgău is known as the Gypsies' mayor.

The project we have shared grew from a new approach to the integration of the Roma. The idea to present this community as 'one of the village's assets' and to erase the label of poverty was a welcome one. The villagers have understood that their Roma neighbours can bring about changes for the better in the community. Even if the wording of the mayor sounds somewhat mercantile *("Had it not been for the Roma, we would never have got money for the dispensary or for the road")* this model of transforming a community of Roma into becoming a valuable part of the village is worth careful consideration. Changing negative perceptions of other ethnic groups towards the Roma can more easily be achieved if the projects are implemented *with* the Roma, rather than *for* the Roma.

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1 Tonciu or Tonci, as the local people call it.

CASE STORY:
Scăiuș – or who can make difference?

"This school building was repaired in 2002 with funds of 1987 USD for the purchase of building materials, granted by the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Centre in Cluj-Napoca. ROL 11,800,000, the cost of the work and of the wooden materials for the fence, was contributed by the Fârliug Town Hall. The outsider plastering, the pavement around the building, the interior and exterior painting, the painting of the doors and window frames, as well as the work that did not require qualified labour, were completed by members of all the ethnic groups in Scăiuș''. This is the text on the posters displayed in the windows of the school in Scăiuș, Caraș-Severin County.

The village of Scăiuș is 4 km from the road connecting Lugoj and Reșița and 11 km from Fârliug, the centre of the commune. There are some 300 families in Scăiuș, including Romanians, Czechs, Slovaks and Ukrainians, and their houses are scattered among the surrounding hills and valleys. There have never been interethnic conflicts in the village, but there were times when there was ethnic discrimination. The people of Scăiuș say that, 50 years ago, the children went to school to study in their mother tongue and each ethnic group lived in different streets. Over time, the population mixed through marriage but the number of inhabitants dropped because of migration to the towns. In addition to multiethnicity, the community of Scăiuș is also diverse from a religious point of view. There are four cults in the village: Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. This religious diversity has traditionally brought people together on the occasion of various religious festivals and prayer time, leading to the Orthodox helping the Catholics and vice versa. This custom has been preserved to this day.

Most of the people of Scăiuș work the land for a living. Currently, there is only one person who receives social aid from the state on the basis of the minimum wage. However, most of the population has a low standard of living. People cannot afford to buy agricultural machines or to hire labour for agricultural jobs. Even though some families have several hectares of land, they say it is too expensive to cultivate all the land, because the produce is so cheap that they cannot even recover their investments.

Scăiuș was included in the programme in the first cycle of facilitation. The village was selected for implementation of the long-term module because it had been noticed that there was no genuine, constructive collaboration among the four coexisting ethnic groups. Communication was formal, involving only a few members, and there was no feeling of belonging to the same community.

Community facilitation first meant involving responsible leaders, people with initiative and a willingness to mobilise members of the various ethnic groups. Toma Maier, the Romanian leader, Gheorghe Mitric, the Ukrainian leader, and Lauriuc Mihai, the Slovak leader, stood out from the beginning. Some of them had already had experience com-

municating with people, because one of them was a local councillor, and another was the secretary of Fârliug. When Mircea Biro, the facilitator, first went into the village, people thought he was there to identify and solve their problems. Thus, at the first community meeting, members of the ethnic groups shared with him all their problems and asked for solutions. At this meeting, the entire community learnt that things would actually be done rather differently: it was the community that would have to identify the problems faced by a large segment of the community and find the resources to solve them.

The people of Scăiuș complained about the state of repair of the road that led to the village and of the lack of public transportation, especially for the elementary school children who had to go to school in centre of the commune. Other problems identified included the lack of jobs, lack of drinking water, no human or animal surgery, no agricultural associations, and no fixed telephony.

However, the problem that all members of the community agreed was most important was the extremely poor state of repair of the school. The building was very old and had not been repaired or redecorated for over 50 years, and yet 10 children attended kindergarten and primary school there. The kindergarten teacher, Nicoleta Ștefoni said that the school looked like "an abandoned house". The classrooms had no floorboards and desks were placed directly on the ground. This caused a lot of dust and dampness. The stoves were very old and did not heat the rooms and the ceiling was close to collapse. The children's parents were already looking for a house where they could improvise a school because they were afraid for their children's safety in the school.

The people of Scăiuș decided to repair the existing school, and the initiative group had to write a proposal to raise funds for this. The group was centred on one of the leaders, Toma Maier (alias Nea Tomiță) who had the ability to build a team around him and to mobilise people. Repair work at the school lasted for almost a year, and now the members of all ethnic groups in the community are proud of their initiative and their work, because their children can learn in a safe school building. Nea Tomiță says this project "was like a snowball for us, and it helped us develop our community spirit". In the autumn of 2001, at the request of the initiative group, and in partnership with the village hall and the School Inspectorate, the village of Scăiuș received a school bus to take the children to the school in the commune centre. The bus driver is Nea Tomiță. He began the job as a volunteer but later received a rather symbolic salary from the village hall of Fârliug in recognition of his work.

The people of Scăiuș say that following the implementation of the project, all of the ethnic groups are now united, because the entire community has benefited either directly or indirectly from the project. The village is now also involved in two large projects: a road repair project with SAPARD funds and a project financed by FRDS for the introduction of drinking water.

The most important accomplishments in Scăiuș, however, have been a significant improvement in more efficient communication between the ethnic groups, more volunteering and an increased capacity to collaborate with various institutions. The lead-

ers who participated in the training courses say they have learnt how to engage in the life of the community, but also how to promote their projects to donors.

Last year at the "People for People" Gala, the effort made by the community in Scăiuș was rewarded with a special award for community development presented to Toma Maier. The Gala was organised by the Association for Community Relations and the American Chamber of Commerce in Romania, and was dedicated to all those who made significant contributions to philanthropic activities in Romania, through donations, sponsorship, volunteering and fundraising involvement. Nea Tomiță tells us that he had not expected to receive a prize and had not known why he had been invited to Bucharest. ''I thought that maybe it was going to be a training course, and I almost decided against putting on smart clothes, but since they called me to Bucharest, I told myself that we might go out somewhere and I was right! I found myself in a room full of important people.'' The prize for community development was handed over to him at the Gala by Princess Margaret and he says he was very honoured and moved. He thinks it was also an extraordinary moment because he was representing the village at such an important event. Nea Tomiță is still proud that his name and that of the village of Scăiuș were mentioned at the event, together with the names of business people and representatives of well-known organisations in Romania. He says he suddenly became an important person, because he was asked for an interview for radio and television stations, and "I talked about Scăiuș, and everyone found out what extraordinary people we are." This year, Nea Tomiță's mandate as local councillor comes to an end and he says he does not want to run again, but he is determined to carry on with the community activities.

Even if it is now almost 2 years since the facilitation process was completed, the initiative group set up in Scăiuș is determined to start other projects for their community. They believe that they can accomplish things for their village only through specific and practical measures. They believe that initiating another similar project this year will help preserve trust in their own capabilities, but also enhance interaction among the members of the four ethnic groups. The leaders of Scăiuș have prepared a list of prioritised needs: repair work at the churches, introduction of cable television and the organisation of multiethnic cultural events that will bring people closer together.

The community of Scăiuș is characterised by ethnic and confessional diversity, and each ethnic group is well anchored in their inherited traditions. Yet through the identification of highly responsible leaders who are determined to change people's mentalities and by engaging representatives of all the ethnic groups in specific actions, visible changes have occurred that demonstrate that communication is more efficient and more constructive than it used to be.

CASE STORY:
Sângeru de Pădure. A picture of a new community

Rain is a nightmare for the people of Sângeru de Pădure. It can isolate them, even if they are only 18 km from Târgu-Mureș and 3 km from the county road. The mayor of the commune does not often visit because of the holes, the mud and the rocks that are a feature of the road.

Sângeru de Pădure is in Mureș County and is administratively part of the commune of Ernei. It lies in an area of rolling hills, which used to be covered in vineyards. After the fall of communism, people did get their land back, but most of them say that the vineyards are too expensive to maintain and so they have given up tending them.

Sângeru de Pădure has around 500 inhabitants – Romanians, Hungarians and Roma. The Roma live in a separate neighbourhood, while houses of the Romanians and Hungarians are intermingled, with no separation by area. The three ethnic groups sharing the village have the same problems: lack of jobs, low standards of living, no local transport, bad roads and no collaboration with the local authority. Under the current 2000-2004 mandate, the village does not have a councillor on the local council of Ernei. There is only one representative, but he has a consultative role with no authority to take initiatives or decisions.

Sângeru de Pădure was one of the villages included in the second cycle of facilitation, as part of the programme ''Improving Interethnic Relations in Southeast Europe. Facilitating multiethnic community change''. The community was selected for facilitation because of the lack of interaction between the three ethnic groups, itself the result of a lack of community initiative and the low standard of living which characterised most of the community members. In recent years, relations between the Romanians and Hungarians on the one hand, and the Roma on the other hand, were rather tense, after several aid projects had been initiated in the village, but targeted only at the Roma. The Roma received clothes, furniture and food, especially those families with many children. The entire Roma community is very poor and few of them have any income at all other than social aid and family allowances.

Because of this situation our project in Sângeru de Pădure initially met with some difficulties. The Roma were expecting aid without doing anything whilst the Romanians and the Hungarians expected the Roma to receive aid, and thought that their own problems would be of no interest to anyone. The first visits to the community focused on learning more about the people and the manner in which members of the three ethnic groups perceived each other. Furthermore, it had been decided to share the objectives of the programme with the entire community. The facilitator, Marta Herki, confesses that she expected poor results, because the inhabitants did not interact and their per-

sonal problems all came before those faced by the community. During her first visits, Marta discovered that "people don't trust each other, they don't even trust their next door neighbours, people they have lived with all their lives."

Quite soon, people learnt about the programme and its objectives. The facilitator made door-to-door visits, talked with people from all ethnic groups, in the street, in front of the church, in the village store, so that they got to know her better and got used to her presence. The community leaders were identified, there were community meetings and soon there was an initiative group. Despite all of this, the actual number of those regularly involved was low. In the end, one or two representatives of each ethnic group got together and formed the initiative group and they committed themselves to initiating activities.

The composition of the initiative group changed between the start of the facilitation process, the establishment of the community association and the implementation of the first supported project. During the facilitation process, there were disputes and tense moments among the leaders and the facilitator had to demonstrate a lot of diplomacy in order to consolidate the group. The most important moments of intervention by the facilitator were when the community's passivity over the last years was challenged. The Romanian, Hungarian and Roma leaders had put forward various initiatives for the village even before they had learned how to write a grant proposal. They had also developed a rather ingenious fundraising method. Each weekend they had organised a disco, and with the money they raised, they had made a playground for the children near the school, as well as football field. They had also arranged a meeting room for their meetings and used some of the money to begin the registration process for their association. The group had even secured a bank loan.

However, the group had encountered a lot of bureaucracy whilst trying to register the association (with the court, the public notary, letters having to be sent to various ministries in Bucharest). Much of the money raised through the discos ended up being spent on taxes and travel. The leaders had also experienced bad luck following a governmental reshuffle, which meant that the roles of various ministries changed and their applications were redirected several times, taking them three times the normal period of time to obtain answers. They were disheartened by the length of time taken to receive the necessary documents, but they did not give up their commitment to start activities in the village.

The leaders in Sângeru de Pădure learnt quickly at the courses we organised for them. Each of them participated in the training sessions. Some found it hard to express their thoughts at the beginning of the sessions, whilst others articulated well. Levente, one of the Hungarian leaders, had had experience of communicating with people as he had been to college and was used to working with people. Bubulina, the Roma leader, did not find it so easy. At the beginning, she preferred to be silent and did not get involved in discussions unless the trainers insisted. She confessed later on that she felt bad that she had so little education (4 years) that she could hardly read or write and that she'd never been to such a course before. However, the leadership course helped her overcome her initial fears. She is no longer timid, silent and smiling, but involved in discus-

sions, and contributing valuable ideas. And in the community she behaves differently. Thanks to her practical good sense, she understood the importance of communication, regardless of education and professional background.

The representatives of the three ethnic groups of Sângeru de Pădure applied to the local authority asking them to solve the issue of public transportation. They pointed out that children had to walk three kilometres to school and three back, and that it was risky for them, and that by the time them got to the school, they were dirty from head to toe. Community leaders called the village together for a meeting and together they decided that the biggest problem was the access road to the village. People complained that they covered the 3 km with difficulty, especially in the winter and in the rainy season. They often made a short cut across the fields, but the mud there was just the same as along the road. The people of Sângeru de Pădure realised that they could not deal with such a big project as the refurbishment of the entire road, so they decided to do the job in phases, segment by segment, both for the efficiency of the work and to demonstrate their credibility to potential donors. The first project was to repair the road leading to the Roma neighbourhood. Even if the Roma are the main beneficiaries of the project, repairing the road is now a priority for the whole community.

Because the initiative group applied for funds on behalf of the association, the leaders were forced to postpone using the funds until the organisation was legally registered. This delay has meant that the repair works could only be started this spring. Meanwhile, to make sure that the Roma would participate in the project, their leader had them commit themselves by signing a written engagement saying they would contribute work to the project.

At the end of the facilitation process in Sângeru de Pădure, the people of the community know each other better and are united, regardless of the language they speak. The fact that they obtained funds for a project that was initiated by the community had made them feel trustworthy and able to solve their own problems. Levente Fodor, one of the Hungarian leaders, says, ''There's no point in giving up now that we are legally registered. And we can write applications from here forever. At least we don't get bored!'' Despite the irony in the message, it shows there are responsible leaders in the village. They have a long list of projects. They dream of repairing their entire road, of getting a bus for public transport, of starting a small milk processing business and growing mushrooms. The leaders are aware that these projects can only be done if all of the ethnic groups work together and collaborate with local authorities and other partners. In addition, they now possess valuable skills: they are able to attract funds destined to sort out the problems of the community, which result in a better life for them all.

Romania, Final Report 2001-2004, Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe
Review of the programme 'Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe.
Facilitating multiethnic community change'