

IMPROVING LIVING CONDITIONS OF ROMA COMMUNITIES IN NORTH-WESTERN ROMANIA IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND MEDICAL CARE FOR ROMA



One of the children who receive extra lessons and after-school care at the Caritas centres © Caritas

The Roma people are one of the largest ethnic minorities in Romania, forming an estimated 13% of the population. A large number of Roma suffer from social exclusion, discrimination and poverty. The unemployment rate among the Roma is far higher than the national average, and many have no access to education and medical care. Switzerland therefore supports improvements in the Roma's living standards, in particular in the fields of health and education.

Most Roma communities in Romania live in poverty, in miserable living conditions with insufficient access to water and sanitary facilities. As a result, they suffer from poor nutrition and ill health. Many Roma are not officially registered with the state, nor do they have the financial means to pay for doctor's visits or medicines. Furthermore, medical services in rural areas, where many Roma live, are limited.

A further problem is the high rate of unemployment. Whereas 64% of the overall Romanian population are employed, only about 30% of Roma who are able to work actually have a job. Social exclusion, discrimination and a lack of education are the reasons why many Roma are unable to find work.

Just 37% of Roma children between the ages of three and six go to preschool. As many suffer from poor development – partly as a result of malnutrition – all children would benefit from schooling. Just one quar-

ter of Roma six-year-olds attend school, and only 10% of Roma children complete secondary school, often for financial reasons.

According to the last census carried out in 2011, there are about 613,000 Roma in Romania. However, the European Commission estimates that there are about 2.5 million Roma living in Romania, about 13.5% of the population. The Roma are therefore one of the largest ethnic minorities in the country, along with Hungarians.

Switzerland is contributing CHF 2.7 million to improving living conditions and prospects for the Roma in north-western Romania (Satu Mare and Maramures) in a project run by Caritas Switzerland, in conjunction with Caritas Satu Mare (Romania). Caritas Satu Mare has been running a number of centres for Roma children in these regions since 1992. Caritas works closely with the local authorities in order to ensure the sustainability of the project. It is planned that a large number of the activities launched will be continued by the authorities and state services once the project has been completed.

The project covers three areas:

- Community Development: helping Roma communities to organise themselves and improve their conditions
- Improved access to education
- Reducing health risks

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Many Roma still find it difficult to assert their civil rights. Initiatives have therefore been launched in Ardud, Turulung and Baia Mare in the north-west of Romania, with groups set up in the Roma communities to identify the problems and needs of the community and develop strategies to improve cooperation with the local authorities. In Baia Mare, for example, the mayor has attended some of the initiative group's meetings in order to discuss the problems of the Roma community and help find solutions.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO EDUCATION

In the three Caritas centres up to 230 Roma children receive additional lessons and after-school care, as well as lunch and, if necessary, clothes and school materials. The teachers also support the early development of about 140 preschoolers in the centres' kindergartens, preparing them for school. Caritas also runs a volunteer programme and advice service for older children. Each year ten young people who have been unable to complete their schooling can take part in a vocational training programme, which allows them to gain a recognised qualification.

REDUCING HEALTH RISKS

In the Caritas centres children learn what healthy eating is, what it means to be ill and to pay attention to their personal hygiene. Caritas also runs a health programme and offers personal advice to young people and adults. Thanks to this programme, the members of the Roma community know where and how they can access medical care. All these activities are organised in conjunction with the initiative group.

"ROMA AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS" THEMATIC FUND

The project is part of the "Roma and other disadvantaged groups" thematic fund, in which Switzerland provides CHF 14 million to finance various projects in Romania run by Swiss partner organisations.

THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

OBJECTIVE

Improving social security, Promoting economic growth and improving working conditions

TOPIC

Social inclusion of minorities

COUNTRY

Romania

PARTNER

Caritas

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Roma are one of the largest ethnic minorities in Romania, and also one of the most disadvantaged. A large number of Roma are socially excluded and discriminated against, in particular when it comes to accessing education and health services.

OBJECTIVE

The project improves the living conditions and prospects of the Roma communities and other disadvantaged groups long term, in particular in the fields of education and health.

ACTIVITIES

- Forming an initiative group in the Roma communities to promote self-help and organisation
- Developing and expanding existing education programmes (e.g. kindergarten and after-school programmes)
- Improving access to health services for the Roma community

TARGET GROUPS

2300 members of the Roma communities and other disadvantaged groups in the Satu Mare and Maramures region. Children between 3 and 15 years old; young people over 15; expectant mothers and mothers of young children; other members of the community.

COSTS

Total project costs:
CHF 3,35 million
Swiss contribution:
CHF 2,69 million

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Satu Mare (Sastipen, Resource Centre for Roma Communities)

DURATION

2014–2017



Melinda K. (28) grew up in the Roma community in Ardud and was among the first children to visit the Caritas centre after school to receive extra teaching and care. She went on to study Psychology and now works at the same centre, where she is responsible for organising the kindergarten, after-school activities and the volunteer programme for young people.