

PEEMMAUS EUROPE EMMaUS EURI EMMaÜS EUROPE EMMaÜS EUROPE)Pa eMaÜS EUROPa eMaÜS EUR

Romania Collective
23-4 October 2018
Emmaus Cambridge (UK)

Participants

Maarit Kinnunen, **Emmaus Westervik, Finland**
Alain Capmas, Anne Lahaye, **Emmaus Bougival, France**
Jean-Luc Ferstler, **Emmaus Forbach, France**
Freddy Ouari, **Emmaus Rédéne, France**
Rodica Bizu, Tudor Carnu, **Amicii d'Emmaus, Romania**
Dana-Maria Andron, Gelu Nichitel, *national delegate for Romania*, Maureen Piot, Mélodie Saura, **Un coup de main d'Emmaus Iasi, Romania**

Ivett Szilagyi, Jean-Philippe Légaut, *collective representative, member of the Emmaus Europe Regional Executive*, Sorin Onica, **Frères Europa de Satu Mare, Romania**
John McGovern, Mark Boden, **Emmaus Cambridge, UK**
Jean-Louis Carroz, Vincent Gasparini, **Emmaus Sion, Switzerland**
Elena Adam, **Bucharest, Romania**
Lise Daviet, **Emmaus International Secretariat**
Théo Robin, **Emmaus Europe Secretariat**

Presentation of the root causes of poverty identified and addressed by the Romanian groups

The traditional segment devoted to the groups' activities and news was replaced by a themed session on the root causes addressed by each group in its local area. This enabled us to highlight the rationale for our initiatives.

In Iasi in Romania, the identified issues are **dropping out of the education system** (street children exposed to human trafficking at the age of 13-14) and **homelessness**, with a deep-rooted feeling of **social indifference** towards them (and even aggression towards organisations such as Emmaus who want to help them) and a certain feeling of **worthlessness** among the homeless, who do not believe that they will find work. The local authorities only have 80 residential places for 400,000 residents in Iasi and at least 400 people sleep rough, without taking into consideration those living in insecure housing.

The most vulnerable groups are not solely the **Roma community but also people with disabilities** (they stay the longest at Iasi because there are very few other openings for them), **elderly people** (raising the issue of support in the community) and **rural populations** (of whom 80% receive benefits amounting to 300 lei).

In Bucharest in Romania there is a wide range of at-risk groups. People from **disadvantaged backgrounds**, people **in debt** because they are unemployed, **elderly people** abandoned by their families, people with **learning difficulties**; the Roma are not the community most affected by homelessness in Romania because they help each other out within their community. In total, there are 5,000 rough sleepers (according to the official statistics, although this is undoubtedly a significant under-estimate).

The problem is not a lack of jobs but instead the **very low wages** which do not enable people to live decently. Moreover, there are **very few shelters** in the city (although the number is increasing) and they are badly located as the poorest area of Bucharest (out of six) is the only area not to have a

shelter. Some of the shelters charge "rent" of €100-€150 and are primarily occupied by retired people who use their pensions to cover the rent.

In Targu Jiu in Romania, the main at-risk group is **children and young people**, particularly those from disadvantaged families. The main problem is a **lack of training**, notably within public service provision. The public services are responsible for children when families are unable to pay for their schooling. These children leave the care of the authorities at the age of 18 without any training and they find it very hard to secure a job.

Nos enfants d'ailleurs, an association funded by Amicii Emmaus, is the only organisation targeting children, who mainly come from poor families. The next step is to **set up a community to help care system leavers** as no provision is made for them. At the same time, the region is economically very poor and there is a need for real administrative and political change to move things forward at this level and **create more jobs**.

In Satu Mare in Romania the main problem is also **children and young people** and in particular young people with **behavioural issues, disabilities etc who do not receive adequate care from overburdened public services** and foster families. The people running these services have no training and **the children have no stability** and have to change foster family/children's home regularly. They **completely lose faith** as they have had traumatic experiences with other adults in their previous care settings. One of the major issues experienced by Romanian social services is the payment of benefits **without support and education** to enable people to get out of difficult situations.

In Cambridge in the UK it is surprising to see that **homelessness is on the rise**, even though the city is quite wealthy. Indeed, it is the city's wealth and the rich fabric of third sector organisations offering help, which are drawing in the most deprived people.

In Finland, homelessness is not a massive issue at the present time because of low population density and winter temperatures, but **the phenomenon is on the rise among young people** (because it is more difficult to secure bank loans for housing). This issue also affects the **Roma community**. The state does not want to help them find housing.

In Switzerland, **offering shelter and support to migrants is complicated**, as health insurance is very expensive for foreign nationals and must be paid by companions in the communities. **Homelessness does exist but is to all intents and purposes invisible** and therefore forgotten.

In France, offering shelter and support to migrants is a real challenge for many Emmaus groups. In Forbach located on the border with Germany (the group collects goods from both countries), **there is a real problem with the border police**, as they inspect the lorries several times a week, and the companions are in a situation of great anxiety and instability. **It was stressed that this could be avoided if there was a Europe-wide companion status**. In Bougival, the police are really piling on the pressure with a raid in the summer. No legal proceedings were started thanks to a media campaign, but this really keeps the pressure on companions who have already had complicated life experiences. It was noted that one of the advantages of the **French companion status is that it enables undocumented migrants to be offered shelter and support**: there is the possibility of paying the companions the minimum wage (and let them pay for accommodation, food etc) but in this

scenario they would be subject to the French labour code and would need to have their papers in order.

At Rédéné, there are 18 different nationalities living in the community. Similarly, **the pressure being put on migrants** is clear to see, for instance with the requirement to report to the police station every morning in some cases; in these circumstances, finding work becomes even more of a struggle.

The meeting observed that **at-risk groups vary significantly depending on the context**. For example, the Romanian groups focus their work on children, which is very rare in the other groups. On the other hand, migration is not really an issue in Romania, as more people are leaving the country than moving there.

Solidarity initiatives in Romania

Two applications were presented at the meeting from Frères Europa (building a new warehouse) and from Elena (Bucharest) who wants to set up a new Emmaus group.

Emmaus Bucharest

The plan to set up a new group has three core components: a shop, a farm and an outreach team to support the homeless. Moreover, this group could act as a homelessness monitoring unit, producing more reliable statistics than those currently available.

This future group already has a range of resources at its disposal:

- The local authorities are willing to make a building available free of charge. The group would have a choice of three buildings that could meet their needs.
- Several large businesses (Petrom, Société Générale and Lafarge) could help fund the initial investment.
- In terms of the team required, social workers are already willing to get involved, as well as several people with technical expertise, and Laugan, who has been heavily involved in Emmaus and has already set up large projects (such as a recycling centre in Paris).

Wages for the first year of operations are estimated at roughly €60K; this figure equates to three staff and a part-time psychologist.

The collective's opinion

A full investment budget needs to be prepared (including any donations and voluntary contributions) so that it can be presented to companies that might be interested in supporting the project.

The first priority will then be to set up the income-generating activity, which will generate income and therefore pay the wages, and then enable the group to invest. The collective's member groups may agree to send a number of containers which would easily cover the wages.

The collective also agreed on a small budget of €5K to enable the future group to ready the project by undertaking the technical assessment and obtaining the necessary quotations. The Iasi group will help Elena to submit the application to EE within the scope of the European solidarity programme.

A budget may also then need to be earmarked to cover the first few wages.

At the same time, the issue of the source of the funding and of the companies that support us was raised. Should this matter be discussed and should there be safeguards in place?

Frères Europa

The group's financial situation is regularly called into question, notably each time there is an increase to taxes or the minimum wage. Several cost-cutting measures have been taken and sales have increased significantly over the past few years. It was stated that the group's sorting and therefore sales capacity is directly related to the size of its warehouse. The meeting was also told that the rent paid for the current warehouse is very high (€850 a month) and that the warehouse needs to be brought into line with standards (this would cost around one year's rent). Consequently, the group wishes to buy a plot of land to build its own warehouse. A 2,500m² plot has already been earmarked. It would cost €25K and would enable a warehouse of roughly 500m² to be built, equivalent to the current warehouse. The owner is well-inclined towards the sale and the plot is located in an area intended for buildings of this type, so the local planning regulations will not be an issue.

The idea would be to purchase the plot in summer 2019, as it would take this long to obtain initial funding. The group would then undertake the administrative formalities during the winter and do the building work over a six-month period in spring 2020.

The total budget is €101,000 of which €5K is own funds. The remaining €96K would be shared between a loan of €30K (repayments of €500 per month for five years) and €66K solidarity requested from the movement.

The collective's opinion

The collective agreed to this solidarity application being submitted to Emmaus Europe's governing bodies.

General discussion on solidarity

During the collective, the question of the Romanian groups' reliance on solidarity provided by other European groups was raised.

The meeting was told that the Romanian groups could be independent if they reduced the number of people being given shelter and support. However, they are located in regions where the need is great and it is important to be able to help as many people as possible. Therefore, the solidarity of the groups that send goods, for example, is not really helping the Emmaus groups in Romania so much as helping the most deprived and excluded people with whom they work.

Moreover, the legal framework in Romania differs greatly from that of other countries. In Romania, the Emmaus groups are subject to the same conditions as classic companies and are therefore supposed to be competitive even though they work with young and untrained people. It is impossible for them to be "competitive" without solidarity, unless the legislation becomes more favourable.

Self-sufficiency is not necessarily an end in itself, given that the priority is to help the most excluded people wherever they are, be it in Europe or further afield.

Solidarity summary

Recap of the applications supported by the collective

- Emmaus Bucharest - €5,000 to "ready the project" (technical assessment and quotation). A budget then needs to be allocated to enable Elena to work on the first phases and arrange container loads so that the shop can be opened. Gelu and Elena are putting together an application.
- Iasi - A shortfall of at least €15k to fully fund the Belvédère.
- Frères Europa - Loan request of €30K to Emmaus Europe and €66K of solidarity donations.
- Amicii d'Emmaüs - no application for 2019.

The aims and working of the collective

A decade after the European geographical collectives were created, the meeting took the time to discuss their aims and workings and to develop them if necessary in order to meet new needs and wishes.

The members of the collectives were consulted in the summer to find out their opinions in order to lay the ground for this discussion. Few responses were received, but the feedback did raise a number of major issues. Firstly, a large number of different aims were cited: fostering group self-sufficiency, organising solidarity in a transparent and fair way, developing opportunities to get to know each other, discuss and meet, supporting new groups, being trained...even if they do not contradict each other, one idea could be to prioritize some of them, and based on this decision, work out what needs to be done to achieve them: who are the members? How is the collective facilitated? In what conditions?

The collective's opinion

The selected aims are as follows:

- Foster **group self-sufficiency** by not engendering dependency.
- Actively **welcome new groups** because the collectives are relatively informal forums.
- Encourage **people to get to know each other** to enable them to work together.

It was stressed that the other aspects raised in the consultation are also important.

In terms of the workings of the collective, the collective stressed that members who are committed in the long term are needed, while remaining open to new people. A "hardcore" could be a solution, which would also enable several people to work on the meeting agendas.

The role of facilitator is also not necessarily an easy one. It could be worthwhile having a facilitator from outside Romania for each meeting. It would be easier for this person to take a "neutral" stance. This relatively technical role could be rotated at each meeting.

Group news

A recap of group news since the previous meeting was sent out prior to the meeting and can be found by clicking on the following link: <https://frama.link/cWQ-DrEL>.

A few extra pieces of information were added at the meeting.

Amicii d'Emmaüs

- The group funds 30% of the operating costs of the children's home (€6K per month).
- Textiles are collected via four containers in the town. Donations in very good condition are sold, those in a good condition are donated as solidarity, and waste is taken away by the council, while awaiting the development of a recycling system. The lorries no longer bring textiles.
- The twinning agreement between Forbach and Târgu Jiu is reaching the end of the first phase, which has seen school class exchanges on the topic of WW1. A second phase is getting underway with the German town of Völklingen (already twinned with Forbach).
- The group wants to create 10-15 accommodation places to set up a community. Work should start in February and will be directly funded by Amicii.

Un Coup de Main d'Emmaüs Iasi

- The group wants to make better use of unsold textiles by developing arts and crafts. **The group is looking for members of the movement who would be willing to come to Romania**

to share their skills/experiences or alternatively who would host members of Iasi and train them.

- Several partnerships have been developed for the companions: market gardening work placement, blacksmith training, drama lessons. The group also tries to work with the city's large student population. The students play an important role in relaying information.
- The Belvédère project has been on ice this summer because of problems with the architect. A replacement has been hired and everything is now ready. The building work will start after the winter. There are plans for another summer camp beginning in April-May to help fit out the shop and with the start of the agricultural season.
- Once the Belvédère is complete, the next project will be to open a community kitchen in Iasi.

Frères Europa

- The bar opened from May to September in the summer garden and was a great success, notably because of the World Cup and several DJ/live music evenings.
- The group is helping several young people to get set up and launch their own businesses. They are launching a hair salon and a bike repair workshop. Furthermore, a builder has joined the group and will supervise the upcoming work and train the young people at the same time.
- The housing project for companions over the age of 30 using a micro-credit fund has been delayed but the last formalities will be completed at the end of the winter so that work can begin. This project is supported by EE and the FAP.

Other

Lorry loads

The **container load tracking table** discussed and requested at the previous meeting is now available online and can be accessed in real time by all the groups. Please use the following link to access this information: <https://frama.link/V9gYFGDe>.

Events

27-31 October 2019 - Regional Assembly of Emmaus Europe - the association's highest governing body. All the European groups are invited to attend this meeting in San Sebastian in Spain. It is vital that most of the groups attend so that the meeting can deliberate and decisions that represent the movement in its diversity can be taken.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held in **May 2019 in Satu Mare** and will be hosted by Frères Europa. Patrick Atohou, the chair of EI, had expressed a wish to take part, so the exact date will be chosen in light of his commitments. There is also the possibility of arranging a visit to Bucharest in parallel to this meeting.

Thank you to the members of Emmaus Cambridge for hosting the meeting and to the participants for the worthwhile discussions!