

European Romania Collective
25-26 April 2017
Amicii of Emmaus, Târgu Jiu, Romania

Participants

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The new law on social services in Romania and its impact on the groups

A barrier or an opportunity to improve?

The law came into force in 2014 and sets new rules for organisations offering social services. The intention is to improve the services offered. However, the new law is having an impact on the groups by setting requirements and in particular making it necessary to **obtain social service provider accreditation and then various operating licences** in line with the services offered, target groups, professionals involved etc. Consequently, the groups must meet a large number of criteria, including health, fire safety, minimum accommodation areas, compulsory qualified staff, written procedures and rules being established etc.

Repercussions

- An increase in costs for the Emmaus groups caused by improving companion living conditions and working methods, more effective distribution of roles and tasks. However, the state is not offering any financial support to the organisations affected by the new law.
- Regular inspections to check compliance. Accreditation can be withdrawn and large fines can be imposed.

Proposals

How can the groups continue offering services?

- Analyse the shortcomings of the legislation in force. The aim would be to request help with implementing the requirements because non-profits deliver 80% of social services in Romania. For instance, funding could be obtained to pay the salaries of the qualified professionals required by the law and protocols could be drawn up covering the medical-social services agreements aimed at the homeless as a priority.
- Promote the rights, foster the social inclusion and get homeless people back to work by facilitating access to the labour market. Raise the awareness of decision-makers so that the state provides funding for this. There are many and varied social rights in Europe and they are not harmonized. However, the EU protects a common set of values.

This could be achieved by making Emmaus' voice heard in Romania and raising the profile of its initiatives. Ideas include:

- Create a national organisation (Emmaus Romania). The groups prefer to wait for Amicii d'Emmaus to become a full member before setting up a national organisation.
- Hold a Regional Council of Emmaus Europe in Romania and invite the media, arrange a public meeting, and take advantage of the opportunity to promote Emmaus' work in Romania to the general public.
- Identify associations which could be potential Emmaus partners.
- Encourage public figures to support Emmaus' work.
- Consider a status for companions/people supported in Romania and Europe.

News from the groups in Romania and challenges in 2017

Amicii d'Emmaus Târgu Jiu

The meeting was reminded about the initiative by the Emmaus Forbach companions who approached Târgu Jiu council about supporting the children's home and the creation of Amicii d'Emmaus in order to develop the income-generating activity (selling second-hand goods). Târgu Jiu's mayor suggested setting up a twinning arrangement.

The links between Amicii d'Emmaus and the Forbach-Târgu Jiu Romanian twinning organisation are based on three areas (the same organisation has also been set up in France):

- Economic development. Specifically, installing textile containers.
- Sustainable development. Romanian politicians visited Forbach's methanation plant.
- Cultural exchanges with local schools. In November 2016, 10 pupils and the French and history teacher from Târgu Jiu sixth form college travelled to Forbach to discover Emmaus and how it operates and to meet the companions. Opportunities to socialize with the pupils were interspersed with visits to Verdun and Strasbourg, talks about important figures from the Great War and a visit to the cemetery where Romanian soldiers deported by the Germans are buried. Pupils from Forbach and a council delegation will travel to Târgu Jiu on 15-22 May of this year. This twinning arrangement is also a campaigning tool as the extreme right is at the gates of Forbach and has attacked the twinning arrangement, taking advantage of people's fear of a 'mass influx' of Roma from Târgu Jiu in Forbach.

Information about Amicii d'Emmaus' work

- The group collects clothing. It empties four containers a month. Clothing not sold in the charity shop is given to people in difficulty. Polaris collects waste textiles for free at the present time.
- The group also repairs furniture in its carpentry workshop. The European groups send one lorry load of goods per month to stock the shop.
- The group allocates 20% of its profits to the children's home.
- The group runs social mutual support activities with the families and young people from the children's home.

In 2017, Amicii will concentrate on:

- Insulating the shop's roof.
- Formalities in order to obtain social service accreditation.

- Consideration will be given to how to support the children's home children once they reach the upper age limit of 18 (stipulated by the current accreditation). The intention would be to create an organisation that could accommodate and support them when they become young adults, offer them vocational training and/or the option of working in the shop or workshops if they so wish.
- It should also be noted that the French *Nos enfants d'ailleurs* association which funds the children's home to the tune of 50% is ageing and Amicii will need to cover the full cost of funding the children's home in the next four to five years.

Un coup de main d'Emmaus Iasi

30-35 companions are housed by the group on its Iasi and Popesti sites. Every three months companions travel to Switzerland and return as more mature individuals. Two companions are currently staying at Emmaus Angoulême in France and two in the UK.

The group's news and future plans focus on three aspects.

Developing farming on the Belvédère, Popesti and Sarca sites, moving towards more organic and eco-friendly farming. The companions are aware of the issues and contact has been made with organic farms in Romania. Poultry will also be developed in Popesti. As for Sarca, the intention is to develop a sustainable and self-sufficient farm (permaculture). A volunteer and companion are currently staying in Fribourg in Switzerland to receive market gardening training.

Promoting recycling and improving waste management. In 2017, Iasi joined the Zero-Waste Municipalities European network.¹ Numerous projects have been set up in Iasi over the past two years to facilitate this transition with the support of a large number of environmental protection stakeholders. Specifically, the Iasi recyclable waste and final waste collection centre² opened in 2015 under the initiative of Iasi council and in partnership with ECOTIC³ and Salubris⁴, among others. The waste collection centre is the first of its kind in Romania and enables the residents of Iasi and the surrounding area to drop off their waste so that it can be processed. In 2015, a partnership was set up enabling Emmaus Iasi to collect electronic devices and domestic appliances in working order or requiring minor repairs. The community also wants to install collection containers in the shop and develop awareness-raising initiatives.

Outreach programme. The group distributes sandwiches and hot meals in partnership with restaurants. A fourth distribution point was set up in winter 2016. 130 meals are handed out five nights a week. The outreach work will continue in the summer months, as will the administrative support offered in tandem.

¹ <http://www.zerowasteurope.eu/2017/02/zero-waste-progress-in-romania/>

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msQIg0y_Tu8&feature=youtu.be

³ ECOTIC is a Romanian NGO founded in 2006 initially to collect and recycle WEEE but the organisation has since expanded to include waste recycling in general. The organisation operates across the country with over 3,000 collection points and is also part of WEEE Forum, a European association that recycles WEEE. In 2007, ECOTIC enabled the Green Stamp to be introduced in Romania. The Green Stamp is a label that helps consumers to recycle. The association also runs information and education projects via the ECOTIC caravan which travels the length and breadth of the country. <https://www.ecotic.ro/>

⁴ Salubris is a company in Iasi whose stated aim is to "deliver a modern and effective public sanitation service which contributes to the community's efforts towards achieving sustainable socio-economic development and environmental protection." <http://salubris.ro/>

Frères Europa, Emmaus Satu Mare

Frères Europa houses young adults aged 18-30. Companions regularly travel to Emmaus Krefeld in Germany and Emmaus Montpellier in France for training placements, among other communities.

Activities at Timisoara have ended⁵ and the plot has been sold but the 'fresh start' stays with individual support offered to the young people at San Martinu Maghiar had a very positive impact. Frères Europa has therefore decided to offer a small group the chance to spend one week a month in a country house loaned to the group so that they can take part in various therapeutic activities (working in the vegetable garden, jewellery workshop, painting, karate etc).

Regarding the new premises purchased in 2016 including the shop and fast food restaurant:

- Usage authorisations have been obtained for the terrace and fast food restaurant. Frères Europa's summer garden will be open from next week.
- The number of local donations has increased. The shop is better located and attracts people. The house being situated alongside encourages people to ask questions and helps further raise awareness.
- A project has been submitted to the EU and includes recruiting a carpenter who could work with the young people and train them to repair and enhance furniture.

The main project in 2017 is building housing for the young people (see the solidarity programme section). A tradesman who will train the young people has been taken on.

An initiative in Bucharest

Elena Aolam was invited to present her plan to create an Emmaus group in Bucharest. Elena and Gélu have worked together on several occasions, notably on a homelessness lobbying and awareness raising caravan. Elena previously worked for *Médecins sans frontières* with street children and now works for the Samu Social (municipal humanitarian emergency service).

She met Abbé Pierre in Bucharest in 2001 and was impressed by his message and vision. She visited Emmaus in Paris a few years later. She is convinced that Emmaus would be a suitable solution for housing and supporting homeless people in Bucharest and that unwanted goods could be collected and sold.

- **Target group:** Young orphanage leavers who live on the streets and are the most vulnerable people, as they have not lived in wider society and have not been prepared for adult life.
- **What and how:** The plan is to open a shop and workshops in which the companions could work. The aim would be to create a community with residential accommodation as close as possible to the work premises. The next phase would be to create a farm with orchards and/or a market garden if things progress well. The advantage of creating a community in the country's capital is that people donate goods, at the present time via the Samu Social, although the organisation is not able to handle all the donated goods.
- **Who should be involved / encouraged to get involved?** The city's mayor is known for her interest in social issues. The city's social services. Mayors from surrounding rural towns. Locally based companies and their employees.
- **Where?** A building has been identified. The intention is to ask for the premises to be provided free of charge. Otherwise, visible storage and shop premises with road access will be rented.

⁵ See the minutes of the 14 September 2016 Romania Collective in Sion in Switzerland.

Reactions

The Romanian groups had already stated the importance of setting up an Emmaus community in Bucharest. It is interesting that someone is proposing to do just that.

- In the first instance, a network of friends and public figures able to support the project needs to be developed. Care needs to be taken when selecting businesses to approach.
- The idea of an Emmaus Romania caravan based on the old 'travelling' model. A group of representatives from the various Emmaus groups in Romania would start raising awareness, collecting goods, running sales etc.
- It was agreed that the first phase would entail the three Romanian groups analysing together the concrete options and implementation arrangements. They will visit Bucharest. The support of the Romanian groups is vital. A local organisation would then need to be founded and the initiative submitted to Emmaus Europe. A detailed project will be sent out with the resources available at this stage and a list of partners who could get involved.

The social enterprise – a new legal status in Romania

A new law on the social economy in Romania has opened the way to **obtaining social enterprise status**. The local job centre can award this label to foundations, companies and organisations that request it and meet four criteria:

- Have a social and public interest aim.
- The highest salaries must not be more than eight times higher than the lowest salaries.
- 80% of profits must be used for a social purpose.
- If disbanded, the social enterprise's assets must be donated to another social enterprise.

Dedicated EU funds can be accessed by holders of this status.

A second status also exists – '**back to work' social enterprise status** – which covers 30% of the most vulnerable employees (as assessed by local social services). Holders of this status are exempt from tax on buildings and land. At the present time, only three Romanian organisations, including Frères Europa, hold this status.

The first stage is to **draw up a list of the stakeholders involved in the social economy in Romania in order to:**

- Find out more about the social economy in the country and its movers and shakers.
- Approach and discuss the Emmaus social economy model with the other stakeholders in Romania.
- Get Emmaus' voice heard by politicians and be in a position to make proposals.

Several associations in Iasi, Timisoara and Bucharest are already involved in social economy networks in Romania. The idea is to get in touch to find out more about their work. This new label could open the way to obtaining tax breaks for social inclusion companies, such as reducing social security contributions for people on back-to-work contracts, or facilitating the running of a business with a social purpose.

Social entrepreneurship is an issue in Europe at the moment. It is worth noting that some lobby firms and social entrepreneurs call themselves 'networks'. A decision was taken to continue this research work while paying attention to the ideologies championed by the networks, as they must fit with the Emmaus values.

Update on the circular economy package and advocacy prospects

This matter was raised with the deputy mayor, Adrian Tudor, at Târgu Jiu town hall.

The advocacy work on the Circular Economy Package (2015-17) implements the policy areas selected by Emmaus Europe's fifth Regional Assembly:

- Strategic area 1: Step up our European Union lobbying work on the issues that affect us by drawing on the groups' day-to-day initiatives.
- Strategic area 4: Defend and protect commonly-held resources in order to guarantee access for all.

Following the February 2016 Regional Council, **a working group** was formed comprising elected representatives/volunteers. They were tasked with collectively developing EE's stance on the Circular Economy Package. It is vital that Emmaus Europe lobbies the European parliamentary committees working on the issue and develops its own proposals, given that the package has a direct impact on Emmaus' long-standing income-generating activity.

The main risks

- The package creates a regime conducive to large private-sector players driven by a profit-making ethos to the detriment of social stakeholders, such as Emmaus, who work to forge social bonds (job creation and reintegration) and protect the environment (waste reduction).
- In this context, the risk of the 'social and solidarity economy' model being misused, hijacked and trivialized is real.

Emmaus Europe put forward amendments, which were tabled by MEPs and considered in a vote on 14 March 2017. Following this positive vote, Emmaus Europe met with RREUSE⁶ to discuss a strategy based on each organisation's capacity.

- There will now be two months of informal and formal negotiations between the Member States (ending on 19 June 2017).
- This will be followed by four rounds of trilogue meetings on the package between the European Commission, Council and Parliament.

Given that certain Member States want to water down the targets set by the European Parliament, the circular economy working group has discussed lobbying a number of states, including Germany, Italy, France, Romania and Portugal. As a reminder, a directive needs to be approved by 16 of 28 states representing 65% of Europe's population.

The main aim is to arrange meetings and find out the position of the states in question in time for the day when the council will debate and take a decision on the package. The deputy mayor was therefore asked to request a meeting with the Romanian Ministry of the Environment. Emmaus will submit a letter to the deputy mayor, asking for the letter to be sent to the minister on its behalf in order to arrange a meeting.

⁶ RREUSE is a network of social enterprises active in reuse, repair and recycling.

The European solidarity programme initiatives supported in Romania

Reminder of the process. The requests for support made by the Emmaus groups in Europe and approved by the 18 February 2017 Regional Council make up the European solidarity programme. The programme was sent out to all the European groups on 9 March. Emmaus Europe does not have a solidarity fund, so voluntary donations made by the Emmaus groups will be used to fund the initiatives. While donations have been made, the challenge involves rolling out the initiatives requiring building work in the summer months (Emmaus Padua in Italy, the MPFSC in Lithuania, Emmaus Iasi and Frères Europa in Romania). The 2017 European programme is supporting two projects in Romania.

Creating an educational farm in Iasi, with phase one being the construction of the metal structure.

The project involves developing the 20 hectare Belvédère plot owned by Emmaus Iasi and located 19km from Iasi. An educational farm will be created on the land and will combine an educational and wellbeing initiative with organic farming. Phase one (approved funding amount of €49,360) involves:

- Open a shop and storage area (800m²) in the metal structure already owned by the group and do the necessary building work.
- Connect the plot to a water/power supply.
- House companions and volunteers on the site in the two wooden houses already available.
- Start farming.

Applications for permits have been made to the relevant authorities so that the land surveys needed for building the structure can be carried out, for connections to electricity/water supply, for access to the plot and other architectural criteria. Emmaus Europe has received a first donation of €6,000 from Emmaus Roanne in France and this funding will be transferred shortly so that these formalities can be undertaken (this was approved by the 21 April EE executive).

The group applied for a bank loan of €15,000 but was not approved. Similarly, the group cannot apply for EU funding for this farming project because the area is no longer classified as being 'rural'.

Gélu stressed the importance of developing the organic farming business because of its social and environmental impact and because the project constitutes a step towards the group becoming self-supporting, as well as increasing the group's capacity to house needy people, giving companions vocational training and raising the general public's awareness about the Emmaus values.

Set up a micro-credit fund to offer access to housing for young people at the end of the inclusion pathway at Satu Mare⁷

Young people who reach the age of 30 have to leave the community, so this project aims to offer them a quality and long-lasting opportunity. Furthermore, Romania is a country of homeowners and the Satu Mare young people are unable to take out bank loans and face discrimination when trying to rent property. The aim is to build two two-storey houses for four young people on the plot belonging to Frères Europa between now and the end of autumn. The finishing work will be done in winter and the young people will move into their homes in spring 2018.

The four young people are developing individual projects, are involved in building their homes

⁷ A video about the project made by the group is available.

under the supervision of the building contractor and are gradually paying back the loan in order to replenish the micro-credit fund which will then be used to help others. The young people have been encouraged to save money and €16,000 has been put aside in one year, which shows just how motivated they are.

- The organisation remains the legal owner of the houses, builds the houses and then sells them to the young person after eight to 10 years. The cost per house including the land and building work is estimated at €11,000.
- The houses will be modest, classic and made from concrete. The architect is currently finalizing the plans and building permits have been obtained. Each young person will have living space of 65m² because the idea is that they can continue living there if they have families in the future. The idea of building eco-homes was considered but the group does not have the practical skills to achieve this. The short lifespan of straw houses was also stressed.
- The first house will mainly be built with own funds but protective equipment will need to be bought first, costing €225 and tools costing €4,835. Consequently, the group wishes to receive the amount of €5,059 for preliminary expenditure between now and May. To date, Emmaus Europe has not received any solidarity donations specifically for this project.

Emmaus International

The Emmaus Movement is continuing Abbé Pierre's campaign against the root causes of extreme poverty, conveying his message and through the work of the groups. 10 years after his death, the Emmaus groups who met at the Jesolo World Assembly in 2016 committed to **giving a fresh boost to international solidarity so as to take action on poverty, focusing on three specific priority areas.**

The first half of 2017 is earmarked for defining and taking ownership of these priority areas. Into which of the three priority areas do the two programme initiatives in Romania fit?

- **An ethical and social economy providing access to fundamental rights.** For instance, the Frères Europa project because it involves taking a stand against the banking system, which excludes people, and fosters independence, among other aspects.
- **Social and environmental justice for a sustainable world.** For example, the Emmaus Iasi project because it campaigns for fair access to natural resources, their participatory, sustainable and frugal management, among other areas.
- **Peace and freedom of movement and settlement for universal citizenship.**

The core idea is the local nature of the alternative models put forward by the Emmaus groups. The intention is to offer the groups resources that will raise the profile of Emmaus' work with the public. The idea of translating the communication resources into Romanian to reach out to as many people as possible was raised.

Future plans

- 2017: link the Emmaus groups' initiatives to the three priority areas and publicize them via the ActEmmaus platform. Organize a first international work camp in Asia.
- 2018: Organize the first global Forum for Alternatives with the world's most excluded people being the driving force.
- 2019: Organize three international days focusing on Emmaus' campaign areas.
- 2020: Publish the very first Global Report on Emmaus' Focus Areas.

The regional transport programme

It was reiterated that the lorry loads of goods sent to Romania are an important source of income. Although the shipping costs of some loads are paid by the sending group, in most cases the Romanian groups pay the shipping costs. It is worth specifying the following points:

- In France, goods donated in this way can be included in the figures for reused furniture waste.
- Supporting the income-generating activities of the Romanian groups is an alternative to the free-market companies who make money by buying in bulk from the Emmaus groups. These emerging private sector industries are a concern for the future.
- Sending lorry loads of goods is an economic exchange and not just an act of solidarity. The Emmaus groups are becoming poorer and local solidarity needs are growing. We need to be aware that it is becoming difficult for some groups to send loads and we should therefore expect a drop in the number of loads sent. The idea of setting up a return on investment system for the sending groups was raised. For instance, a small percentage of the stated value of the goods could be paid or a mutual fund could be set up.

The Romania transport schedule

(Colour coding: Loads received as of 26 April are in black, while planned loads are in red)

Loads requested for 2017	Name of the sending group	01/2017	02/2017	03/2017	04/2017	05/2017	06/2017	07/2017	08/2017	09/2017	10/2017	11/2017	12/2017	Additional information (projections)
Un Coup de Main d'Emmaus Iasi, Romania. 16 loads	Emmaüs Sion	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Total: 16
	Emmaüs Haguenau										1			
	Lille big sale - (leftover items)				1									
	Emmaus Roanne							1						
	Paris big sale - (leftover items)						1							
Amicii d'Emmaüs Târgu Jiu. 16 loads	Emmaüs Longjumeau			1										10 loads from Emmaus Forbach scheduled over the course of the year Total: 16
	Emmaus Forbach													
	Emmaüs Haguenau				1			1						
	Emmaüs Metz				1									
	Emmaüs Nancy								1			1		
Frères Europa, Emmaus Satu Mare. 9 loads	Emmaus Cambridge		1											One or two additional loads from Cambridge, one from Bougival, one from Annemasse and one from Bourgoin. Total of nine
	Emmaüs Etang sur Arroux			1		1		1			1			

The next meeting of the Romania Collective will be hosted by Emmaüs Roanne, 19-20 September 2017.

Thanks to the host group and the participants for their contributions.