



ROMANIA COLLECTIVE REPORT

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emmaüs

EUROPE

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The documents are available online:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/beykvvkyk226sn5/AACRQctiwyj-CbWD7VpyvkgXa?dl=0>

Patrick Bourgeois, the president of Emmaüs Chalon s/Saône, warmly thanked all the Romania Collective participants. He encouraged each of them to learn about the initiatives and aims of the Chalon s/Saône Committee of Friends.

The rest of the morning was spent visiting a Chalon area household waste recycling centre with which the Committee of Friends has a strong partnership based on trust, which enables an employee on the employment access scheme to work at the recycling centre.

The second part of the day was spent at the Maison Verte (Eco House).

INTRODUCTION – SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT IN ROMANIA

Jean-Philippe gave an overview of the situation in Romania, and went back over four topical issues that are affecting the work of the Emmaus groups in Romania.

- Progress on social enterprise status
- Changes to child protection law
- The issue of waste and the country's response
- Inflation

1) Social enterprises

To date, the social economy sector has been subject to legislation approved in 2015; with a relatively stringent definition of what a social enterprise is, and offering few advantages, while imposing a lot of obligations. Romania's biggest social enterprise, Ateliere Fara Frontiere, received a fine and has had its status withdrawn because it was unable to evidence that it met certain requirements.

Slight progress is being made, even if there is only talk of a label, and no legal structure (e.g. Satu Mare is an association with the "social enterprise" label).

EU funding is allotted to the social economy sector in Romania, but the State struggles to make full use of the funds. It has therefore made several changes in order to widen the scope of the social economy sector in Romania:

- Definition of profit: the government wanted to dilute the concept of a social enterprise, by opening it up to profit-making organisations. The law was passed but was then repealed, because too many businesses with no social purpose were covered. From now on, 80% of profits must be reinvested for a social purpose.

Three other plans:

- A small percentage of public procurement will be ringfenced in the near future for social enterprises.

This could prove problematic for our shops, which are not suited to this public procurement clause.

- Grants: *for the time being*, a social enterprise is entitled to no more grants than a classic business. Grants are available for some new hires in all companies: people with disabilities, socially-excluded young people etc. A draft bill aims to enable employment access social enterprises to specifically employ these young people who are classed as "vulnerable", and not just those under the age of 26.
- Social enterprises *might* no longer have to pay tax on profits.

Some developments are emerging, albeit in a modest fashion. For instance, the social economy network is growing to include all social organisations, not just enterprises.

Each Emmaus group is part of an individual social economy network, and undertakes advocacy with the Parliament's Social Affairs Committee, to limit negative consequences in the social economy sector. However, each entity feels overwhelmed; there is almost a need for a full-time member of staff in each organisation if we are to properly do this work.

Rodica confirmed this view: the civil servants who are in charge of this status are not managing to get their bearings and are incompetent.

2) Changes to child protection law

This new law is problematic: from now on, a young care system leaver will have two options when s/he turns 18:

- Continue to benefit from some provision while s/he continues their studies/looks for a job.
- Leave the care system and receive an allowance of €500 until the age of 26, if s/he can provide evidence of a job search or study.

This raises a number of issues:

- Young people are being encouraged to leave the children's home, meaning that the young person becomes totally independent. This would be running the risk of having to start from scratch again.
- How to manage a young person who arrives at the centre, and would receive around €160 pocket money plus €500 from the State in addition: this would be very challenging.

3) Waste

Second-hand trucks are increasingly regarded as waste and returned to the sending country. There are more and more checks of second-hand shops. A major challenge remains – the vague concept of “waste” – what is considered suitable/unsuitable for sale?

These “returns to sender” are the result of a retaliatory policy by Romania, which is part of the EU but not the Schengen Area, because of opposition by Sweden and Denmark.

This refusal fuels frustration, which gives Romania the impression of being a second-class citizen in the EU. This should also be viewed in conjunction with Romania being a destination country for EU member countries' waste; Romania refuses to undertake this role.

Border checks are therefore going to increase. This is an issue for Emmaus, in terms of paperwork, compliance with the rules, communication etc. We need to work and be mindful in this area.

The issue of container loads will be tackled in a second phase. Currently, two new certificates are needed to enable trucks carrying donated goods to enter Romania:

- Certificate of disinfection **conducted by an external service provider.**
- Certificate of insect disinfestation **conducted by an external service provider.**

The standard documents have to be supplied alongside these two new certificates: certificate of donation and certificate of compliance, signed by Emmaus, and a packing list of donations.

Regarding the shipment of clothing and food: they must be limited to 500kg maximum per type of shipment.

4) Inflation

Inflation is affecting all the groups worldwide. In Romania, gas and electricity bills have increased four-fold. Emmaus is endeavouring to address the issue via the Green Transition Fund, which enables the groups to be fitted with renewable energy systems, and improve building insulation.

The groups would like to increase wages, but are also facing the dilemma of whether to increase the prices of the goods sold in their shops.

UKRAINE FOCUS – IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT IN ROMANIA

The Romanian groups described the initiatives put in place to cope with the arrival of refugees and humanitarian needs in Ukraine.

The question was raised about the impact of the Emmaus Movement in terms of supporting Ukrainian refugees, while maintaining our unique features and know-how: how to help with our specific resources, without going beyond our areas of expertise?

The EE Board is prioritising funding initiatives on the ground, rather than sending humanitarian aid, for which there are specialist emergency aid organisations. Emmaus Europe will contact these associations and link them up with our partners in Ukraine, Poland and Romania. Our groups can send warm clothing, a need highlighted by our groups in Ukraine.

The conflict has had a particular impact on Emmaus Iasi and its day-to-day work: food distribution, supplying accommodation centres, humanitarian lorry loads being sent to Ukraine twice a week. This has impacted the team, with a 20-30% increase in workload.

The impact is also financial and practical, with a drop in income, and a quantitative drop in goods on sale, with most donations being sent to Ukraine or donated in the local area.

Serge Hirbu of Tarare also spoke about the desire to send reinforcements to Emmaus Iasi to support them with their Ukraine work via the Emmaus Companion – Leader – Volunteer “tripod”. This form of partnership between the Aura Region and Iasi is a good idea; however, be mindful about the extra work generated by hosting people from outside the community.

CONTAINERS – SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM ISSUES

See the points raised above.

Discussion summary

- Send more solidarity container loads to the three Romanian groups.
- Send better quality goods.
- Stop sending clothes: issue of waste at border controls.

- Better communicate needs: travel to Romania, discuss in order to gain an improved understanding of the recipient groups' needs, make video appeals filmed in the shop/warehouse.

Solutions to shield ourselves from rising fuel prices:

- Share the cost of the truck across the region of a country.
- Purchase an Emmaus lorry (Switzerland).
- Importance of the connection between the associations.

Jean-Luc felt that the amount of solidarity sent to the three groups should be increased, by sending more solidarity loads (goods for sale), with better goods (better quality), and better communicate needs. He stressed the importance of viewing the Romanian groups as *partners* rather than *recipients* of solidarity.

A plan to buy a truck is under consideration in Switzerland, with a decision being taken based on the potential benefits for sending and receiving groups in France and Romania. If the plan comes to fruition, the options of hiring out or sharing the lorry with other groups will be considered.

All of these solutions are for the short and medium term. A change to our economic model in order to become less dependent upon solidarity loads is not conceivable at the present time. We need to look at how we envision the future without radically changing our *modus operandi*.

We could draw inspiration from other Emmaus groups in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe: catering (Lublin, TOMS), service provider (CNZD, NG).

Some Emmaus groups are also starting to get involved in permaculture in order to increase their food self-sufficiency. Reuse and refurbishment of old furniture is also an idea, just like sewing and bike repair workshops. Most of the Emmaus groups in Europe have already implemented these ideas.

SOLIDARITY – 2023 ESP and Green Transition Fund

The Green Transition Fund, mentioned several times during the discussions, was briefly introduced.

The 2023 ESP was also quickly outlined, and Jean-Luc described the initiative submitted by Emmaus Forbach – arranging a summer camp in Targu-Jiu bringing together young people from Algeria, Burkina Faso and Romania, with the aim of living together and arranging solidarity visits to Africa.

The organisation of an Emmaus Football World Cup in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2023 was also mentioned. This initiative could involve EE and EI, in agreement with Emmaus-ISF, which could host the event in summer 2023.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY - 2023-2026 ISSUES & DISCUSSION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The participants split into four groups to discuss the issues for the 2023-2026 period at the local, national and European levels. A transcription of the work groups' discussions is found below.

Group 1 – Serge Hirbu

- Local: Work together, this enables costs to be shared.
- National: discuss how to support new groups: how to guide them, enable them to learn about Emmaus and how the movement works. We must raise Emmaus' profile and travel to see them.

Group 2 – Leila Thouret

A few observations:

- Drop in donation quality due to increased competition from online resale sites and COVID.
 - How to maintain Emmaus' core activity, and also diversify?
 - Enactment of the AGEC (Anti-Waste for a Circular Economy) law across Europe – this law will ban the destruction of unsold products. What should our response be to the probable rise in sales of new items from companies' unsold stock? The State has set a limit at 10% for tax (VAT applicable if new items account for over 10% of turnover). There is a risk of some groups becoming "commercialised".
- Recruiting new people to sit on the board/volunteers: leaders, presidents, how to find people able to get involved in decision-making in each group?
 - ➔ What activities should we run to attract new people?
 - ➔ We need to prioritise awareness-raising in secondary schools/sixth form colleges, even if the results are not immediate.
- Communication: an online presence is needed. Be able to quickly provide general information, and if possible, have a daily online presence. This involves work but is a real challenge for the future.

Group 3 – Yves Fallouey

The group tried to apply a European slant to its discussion.

- Although geopolitics differ from one European country to the next, we are seeing an overall rise in extremism: what is Emmaus' stance regarding solidarity initiatives in view of the migration crisis? And what is the long-term future of Emmaus' work in this context?
- There is a need to consolidate the current groups before considering any expansion. How to safeguard the long-term future of the groups, what are these groups' needs, and how to meet them?
 - Group interdependence: example of Emmaus Sion and Emmaus Iasi, an idea for development in order to have this foundation.
- Communication and advocacy: consensus about the fact that there is a lot to do in these two areas. The Brussels conference fits with this idea.

Group 4 – Virginie Soyer

- Advocate for a European companion status? It would be better to work on companion exchanges, because the different countries' legislation differs too much. Should we campaign for a European passport, which would address the difficulties involved in exchanges for migrants?
- Conveying our values: we are seeing a loss of the Emmaus values and of “*come and help me to help others*”.
→ How to convey them to new audiences in three years – solidarity and sharing.
- Green transition: should be supported through education, and training our beneficiaries and teams and volunteers.
- Encourage exchanges between groups via experience sharing and supporting groups in difficulty.
- Develop reuse and recycling: we burn and bury too much.
- What should our political stance be at the European level, we are too timid: need to challenge more in the Parliament.

EMMAUS INTERNATIONAL – WORLD ASSEMBLY

A video was screened. The WA presentation is available in Dropbox; the link can be found at the beginning of the document.

The resolutions taken fall into three main categories:

- Strengthen the movement.
- Combat poverty.
- Keep our heritage alive.

FOCUS: EMPLOYMENT ACCESS AND EMMAUS' KNOW-HOW

Two former Emmaus Chalon Committee of Friends employment access scheme employees talked about their journeys and the support provided by Emmaus to help them find jobs.

The Committee of Friends has partnered with DDETS (Regional Department for the Economy, Employment, Work and Solidarity) to enable 27 people to be on four-month employment access contracts, which can then be extended for two years. This makes for a 26 or 28-hour working week, and working time can then be increased in line with the needs of the employee and Emmaus. The provision goes hand-in-hand with support with formalities undertaken with the Prefecture to regularise the situation of employment access scheme employees.

Employment access scheme jobs come with individual and group training (funding under *economic activity skills funding*, a State Fund drawing on social security contributions).

An overall package of support complements this external training:

- Support with integration.
- Work experience: sorting, mentor/handover system: showcases the person with knowledge and the new arrival.

- Linked to career plans.
- Work discovery internships to confirm career plans.

The situation differs in Romania because of the lack of State or local government funding. The Emmaus groups focus on social integration and employment access on the one hand, through working in the shops (teamwork, complying with the job description, hours, customers), and resuming education on the other: to obtain an unskilled job, students must have completed the equivalent of UK Year 11 schooling.

Know-how and acquisition of real skills constitute a higher level, which firstly requires the person to have completed the basic phases of personal development.

The companions have a proper employment contract with Emmaus, enabling them to evidence stable experience gained with the same employer.

Accessing “official” vocational training is complicated, and the training is of poor quality.

More information about the group's work in Dropbox

Amicii Emmaus, Târgu Jiu	Emmaus Iasi	Emmaus Satu Mare
<p>Backstory and aims The association has been operating since 2011 and takes the form of several organisations: Lumea Emmaus is the organisation that sells second-hand goods, while the NGO Recoredi is the employment access social enterprise. The team comprises six paid employees and around a dozen highly active volunteers.</p> <p>The association was founded to support the Nos enfants d'ailleurs children's centre, and has become its main backer, to the tune of €3,300 per month. In summer 2021, a Scout group came to work with the centre's children.</p> <p>The shop floor covers almost 1,000m², but there is practically no storage space. Most of the stock comes from the container loads, of which the group receives 15-16 per year. Textiles come from the three clothes bank donation points in the city. They are emptied once a week. 15-20% of the clothes are suitable for sale, while the remainder is used for social initiatives, and some items are thrown away.</p> <p>New in 2022 Since 1 November, the children's centre has been closed, due to a lack of children being placed there by social services.</p> <p>From 1 December 2022, it will become a day centre with a maximum capacity of 20 children, paid for by social services. This decision was difficult to take, but is also explained by the cost per child per night, and the gradual disengagement of the partner association.</p>	<p>Currently, the association has around a dozen employees, and 30 companions across three sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Iasi: community house and shop. - Popesti: community house, market garden, and shop. - Belvédère: warehouse/shop, farming. <p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social: outreach and distribution of hot meals to 150 beneficiaries. - Sales: second-hand goods. - Agriculture: Belvédère and Popesti <p>War in Ukraine: The group got heavily involved in hosting Ukrainian refugees, and then in transporting humanitarian loads to Ukraine (see document).</p>	<p>Currently, the group has eight paid employees and 20-25 young people (most aged 18-23).</p> <p>Aims and activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aim: Enabling people to rebuild their lives: counselling, group discussions on specific topics, ongoing psychiatric support. - Sales in the second-hand shop. - New sewing business: making bags with the help of a seamstress, in partnership with La Chaux de Fonds. - New project: Taking over a children's home (10 children) located 40km from Satu Mare to prevent it being closed down. Questions about getting involved in the long term in this project, which will require a lot of investment. <p>This follows on from last year's announcement: <i>"Very recently, the last third-sector organisation in the area to manage a children's home contacted Emmaus Satu Mare (the other homes are government homes and are often badly run). The leaders wish to close down their initiative and are suggesting that Satu Mare takes over, which would notably involve being legal guardians for the children, specialised support work, etc. Seven children currently live in this home and a live-in couple manage the home on a day-to-day basis."</i></p>