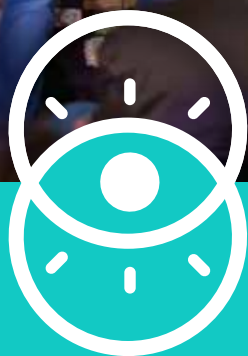


ROMANIA



I GET YOU

Promoting best practices to prevent racism
and xenophobia towards forced migrants
through community building

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Co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union*



Published in Brussels by
JRS Europe in December 2017
Chaussée de Wavre 205
1050 Brussels
Belgium

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Cover photo
Syrian rapper, Ali, performs at Timisoara cultural festival in Romania. He says Romanians made him feel welcome. (Still taken from the Romania / Get You video: JRS Romania / JRS Europe)



I GET YOU ROMANIA

National chapter no.8 of the European / Get You report

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** This report has been produced with the financial support of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020) of the European Union. The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of JRS Europe and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.*

Introduction

Because of its geographic position, Romania is in the path of significant migration routes starting from both the African and Asian continents of migrants transiting through the country and seeking safety and a new life in Europe. In addition, Romania has recently developed and implemented bilateral cooperation on migration with several countries including the Republic of Moldavia, China and Turkey to facilitate migratory flows. As of 2005, citizens from these three countries represent the major part of third country nationals who have temporary or permanent residence in Romania.

Since Romania became a nation state in 1918, it was never known to be a country of high immigration with the total population in 2017 being just under 20 million.¹ From 1991 and until 31 December 2014, a total number of 25.135 foreign citizens requested asylum in Romania, from which 5.242 persons obtained a form of protection (refugee status or subsidiary protection).² A total number of 3,175 asylum applications have been submitted in Romania in the first 8 months of 2017, compared to the 1,880 asylum-applications in 2016.³ However, since the refugee crises in 2015, public opinion about the immigration issue in Romania changed towards negative.⁴ Despite the low number of refugees in the country, anti-refugee sentiment increased dramatically during the year.

The aim of *I Get You*, implemented by JRS Romania in partnership with JRS offices in 8 other countries in Europe, is to identify and promote best practices among different locals and national Community Building Initiatives (CBIs) working in Romania. CBIs work on the inclusion of forced migrants and

raise awareness and understanding throughout Romania of issues faced by forced migrants.

Following the identification and mapping of 25 CBIs that are organised across Romania, a qualitative assessment of the most effective, diverse and representative of the CBIs was undertaken to assess and identify best practices in raising awareness and creating common spaces of encounter. Through its own objectives, *I Get You* has also promoted the social inclusion of forced migrants in Romania by identifying the good work of CBIs and promoting best practices thereby, fostering hospitality and creating human bridges that break down divisions.

In Romania, *I Get You* has seen that there are few CBIs, in the strictest sense of the definition, compared to other countries because the asylum system is only 20 years old, started in 1996. As a result, civil society initiatives and NGOs have lead the way to provide both holistic services and accompaniment to forced migrants and refugees in Romania, with the number growing over the years. Covering basic needs and services for forced migrants, with the help of the local community, is still the focus of the vast majority of CBIs in Romania.

1.1 CONTEXT: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS FORCED MIGRANTS IN ROMANIA

According to a country report by the US Department of State, the public perception of Romanians towards the so-called refugee crisis switched

1 Worldometers. *Countries in the world by population (2017)*.

<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>

2 Erasmus + et.al. *Study Report: The integration of refugees in Romania, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Sweden*. April 2017.

<http://erasmusproject.refugees-integration.prorefugiu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Study-Report-in-English.pdf>

3 Eurostat. *Asylum and first time asylum applicants - monthly data (rounded)*. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00189&plugin=1>

4 Korec, Maria. Asociația Divers. *Mapping Out the National Context of Online Hate Speech in Romania*. 2017.

https://positivemessengers.net/images/library/pdfs/OHS-report_Romania-EN-form-d.pdf

from initial empathy and a lukewarm reception to growing hostility due to increasing anti-migrant rhetoric within the public sphere.⁵ A national pole from INSCOP revealed that almost 90 percent of the public would not agree with hosting refugees in their community, which is a significant increase from the 2015 levels of 75 percent.⁶ In February 2016, an NGO attempted to build a small refugee shelter in Ardud but gave up the project after residents protested and signed a petition against it. In April of the same year, residents of Vama Veche, a popular seaside resort, protested the building of a government transit centre. The extreme-right party Noua Dreapta (New Right) was active and vocal in protesting the establishment of such centres.⁷

Racist attacks against Muslim migrants were reported by media and civil society organizations starting at the height of the refugee crisis, such as the case of two Syrian women were physically assaulted on the streets of Bucharest by five unidentified teenagers for wearing the hijab in March 2016.⁸

In recent years, in the political debate in Romania, has argued that immigration takes jobs from the local population, depresses wages and puts pressure on public services and focused on how aid allowances received by asylum seekers is higher than some local workers make. In addition, views on the cultural and social effects of immigration are becoming increasingly negative because of the perceived differences that people of other religions bring. All in all, these shifting public attitudes account for increasing nationalist sentiments among the population.⁹

Trends that influence societal response to hate speech was captured in the 2016 Report on the perception of Romanians about the refugee crisis by Pro Democratia Association in the P4EU-DEM project financed by the European Commission. The

study's question, aiming to find out the degree of openness of Romanians to refugees, was: "Do you agree with the presence of refugees in Romania?" Of survey respondents, 54 percent disagreed and 46 percent agree with their presence in the country. One case study to exemplify the perspective of those who disagree with the presence of refugees in Romania, outlined three main reasons for this response: 1. Fear of the outbreak of violence or social warfare; 2. Cultural differences and customs; and 3. Possible economic instability at national or European level.

The fears and concerns can be attributed to the simple fact, that the mainstream population still does not receive correct information on issues about forced migration and is influenced by mainstreamed hate speech even at the highest levels of leadership in the country. The former President Traian Băsescu, currently the president of the People's Movement Party and member of the Parliament, was sanctioned by the National Council for Combating Discrimination in 2014. During his last year in office he made racist statements, and he had explicit anti-Muslim speeches during the refugee crisis. In September 2015, he made statements associating Muslims with terrorism and inciting rejection of Muslim people, such as: "I think about the problem in terms of national security. Let us not forget that among these people are Sunni, Shia, people who bomb reciprocally in their country... why should we Islamize Europe? We should destroy the migrants' boats and ships, right in the docks. Otherwise immigration will increase each year, will triple from year to year."¹⁰

An outspoken display of xenophobia in Romania in recent years was a protest organized in October 2015 by a local businessman, in response to rumours refugees were expected to be received in an old barracks in the town of Câmpulung Muscel. Although 500 people announced their participation,

5 US Department of State. *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016 – Romania*. 3 March 2017. http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/337198/466958_en.html

6 INSCOP Research. *Romania Insider: Three in Four Romanians Believe that Romania Should Not Receive Refugees*. 11 December 2015. <http://www.inscop.ro/en/11-december-2015-romania-insider-three-in-four-romanians-believe-that-romania-should-not-receive-refugees/>

7 US Department of State. *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016 – Romania*. 3 March 2017. http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/337198/466958_en.html

8 Digi 24. Anchetă după agresarea în Capitală a două tinere din Siria. 1 April 2016.

<http://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/justitie/ancheta-dupa-agresarea-in-capitala-a-doua-tinere-din-siria-502387>

9 Korec, Maria. Asociația Divers. *Mapping Out the National Context of Online Hate Speech in Romania*. 2017. https://positivemessengers.net/images/library/pdfs/OHS-report_Romania-EN-form-d.pdf

10 Active Watch, Annual Report On Hate Speech in Romania, 2014 – 2015. (page 50). <http://www.activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/annual%20report%20on%20hate%20speech%20in%20romania%202014%202015.pdf>



📷 Migrant Integration Centre Brasov - festival of multiculturality (Photo: Migrant Integration Centre Brasov).

only 15 took part in the event. The participants distributed leaflets saying, “Dear refugees, here is a toxic waste town, the economy is poor, no future, and no hope. Choose your destination responsibly!” According to the organizer, the protest was not thought of as a xenophobic one, but its purpose was to draw attention that the town faces a number of problems that would make it an undesirable destination for refugees, but admitted however that he was concerned for the safety of the locals if refugees also lived in the town.

Some media outlets have also conducted news campaigns that generated hatred in the online

environment on topics such as the documentary “Romanians are coming”, the construction of the mosque in Bucharest, the wave of refugees from Syria.¹¹ As a result of the constant practice of media association of refugees with acts of terrorism, they have entered the list of traditional list of targets when it comes to hate speech.¹² According to Active Watch, demonstrations against refugees and migrants conducted in 2016, but with a poor participation, the anti-migrant rhetoric and political positions at a national or EU level over the course of 2015/2016 were played out through the media, and this had an impact on public opinion on the ground.

¹¹ Active Watch, Annual Report On Hate Speech in Romania, 2014 – 2015. <http://www.activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/annual%20report%20on%20hate%20speech%20in%20romania%202014%202015.pdf>

¹² Active Watch, Annual Report On Hate Speech in Romania, 2015 – 2016 [http://www.activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/Raport%20anual%20cu%20privire%20la%20discursul%20instigator%20la%20ura%202015%202016\(1\).pdf](http://www.activewatch.ro/Assets/Upload/files/Raport%20anual%20cu%20privire%20la%20discursul%20instigator%20la%20ura%202015%202016(1).pdf)



“As volunteer, I dedicate 4 hours per week. I help in counselling and accompaniment. Migrants choose to ask for services for undetermined periods of time: some for years. I feel my contribution counts only on occasional cases and even then, sometimes it is too difficult to deal with institutions if you don't pay a lawyer and take them to court.

I advocate for migrants: I accompany, I draft letters to institutions for specific cases but I was not involved in campaigns, I contributed in seminars, drafted law amendments and so on. I contributed to the organisation of events where culture was shared – movie nights and multicultural evenings – and this led to small changes in the local community.

We always promote a decent welcome for migrants, no matter what status they have, or what their country of origin is. We promote this in our Facebook posts as well.

I was always interested to know more, that is why I visited Syria, Palestine and other countries. It always motivated me to get to know more about other cultures. I discussed with migrants many times about their culture and their life before it changed due to becoming a refugee. We organized thematic nights where they could share their culture. When we had cultural difficulties, we discussed and explained how things are usually done in Romania so there is a mutual learning too.”

Methodology

JRS Romania implemented in Romania the methodology that developed in collaboration with the experts consulted and agreed upon during the Steering Committee Meeting with all 9 project partners.

2.1 MAPPING PHASE

In the Mapping Phase of the project, 25 initiatives from a diverse number of Romanian NGOs were contacted by email and by phone to make them aware of the project and request that they fill out the Mapping Questionnaire on the project's website if they felt their activities fell under the scope of *I Get You*. The NGOs that were contacted represented those that were geographically distributed across the country as well as those who had relevant experience implementing community building initiatives

with the aim of combating and preventing racist and xenophobic behaviour through encounter and social inclusion. Out of the 25 initiatives originally contacted, 15 initiatives accepted to complete the Mapping Questionnaire. Lack of available staff to complete the questionnaire and not considering their initiative a true CBI were two of the reasons reported of why initiatives chose not to participate in filling out the Mapping Questionnaire.

JRS Romania supported the CBIs who were interested in participating in *I Get You* to complete the Mapping Questionnaire, either by speaking with them on the phone or by exchanging emails. The Mapping Report, displaying the results of this quantitative data gathering phase was published in May 2017 and is available on the *I Get You* website in Romanian.

2.2 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS AND EVALUATION

After having obtained a clear picture of what was being offered by the CBIs, the next phase of the research involved the qualitative assessment of the initiatives, based on a clear set of criteria and in accordance with the Delphi method. Using the defined indicators, an evaluation was undertaken through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with, in most cases, three members of the CBI: a staff member, a member from the local community, and a refugee or forced migrant. Keeping the 10 Delphi criteria as guidelines, the interviews were carried out with 9 out of the 15 CBIs originally mapped in Romania during this qualitative phase of the research. These contacts were made mainly by email and by telephone, but also by meeting the representatives of the CBI, each organization being contacted several times.

Using an evaluation grid based on the weight of each defined criterion, three members of JRS Romania's team analysed the interview responses to establish the CBIs that illustrates the best practices in working with migrants and local communities.

2.3 LIMITATIONS

One of the challenges encountered in the Mapping Phase was getting CBIs to commit to filling out the online questionnaire from start to finish. JRS Romania supported them by continually contacting the initiatives or by helping them when needed through personal meetings or by phone. It seems that the length of the questionnaire itself was the main obstacle as to why they did not answer it completely or avoided to answer some fields.

Another challenge encountered was to select the initiative that fulfilled the criteria of being a true community building initiative among all the initiatives identified in the country as some of them were innovative and showed commitment to their work on building a welcoming community but missed the direct contact with migrants while others only provided direct services but missed the relationship building side of a CBI.

In some cases, during the qualitative interviews, we were not able to conduct the three separate interviews as intended for the data triangulation. In all cases, at least two interviews, one with staff member and one with the volunteer were conducted.

SARAH¹⁴



MIGRANT INTEGRATION CENTRE IN BRASOV

“At the beginning, we met very often but now that I have established a life on my own, we meet once a month. The interaction helped: I have become more confident as I knew who to ask questions.

It helped other migrants as well: now I am being asked for help and information and I provide it to other community members. On Facebook, we have several groups and we communicate a lot.

I think the CBI has an impact, it could be more if they had more budget, but for what they have the impact is great. With the language classes, they helped both migrants and the local community. It is a good example of welcoming migrants. When you arrive and you are new and lost, it is very important to belong to a community.

The CBI helped me improve my life skills with the Romanian language classes and counselling with regards to the meetings with the Migration officials. It helped me be more independent: to communicate on my own.

People have created groups outside the activities. My opinions were taken in consideration in this CBI. Romanians are generally open or at least very interested.”

Data Findings

3.1 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FROM MAPPING PHASE

The CBI included in *I Get You* were active in all the main areas of Romania (North –West, South, Centre and North-East) covering all the regional centres for asylum seekers and refugees.

Areas Covered	Number of CBI's
North-West	2
West	1
Centre	2
South	8
South-East	1
North- East	1

Here are some more interesting statistics about the 15 CBIs that were mapped during the first phase of *I Get You*:

- 4 of the CBIs are implemented at regional level, 7 of the CBI are implemented at national level and 4 at local level.
- Regarding funding, 8 CBIs have public funds (mainly from the European Union), while 4 have private funding from foundations and 3 are supported through individual donations or grassroots methods.
- 11 CBIs have a budget below 100,000 Euros (out of which 5 have a budget less than 25.000 Euros), while 4 CBIs have a budget of more than 100,000 Euros.
- The number of beneficiaries assisted by each CBI is very different, depending on the dimensions of the CBI and the level of implementation at local, regional or national level. Most of the forced migrant beneficiaries come from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq and from Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan and Eritrea to a lesser degree.

- Most forced migrants involved in CBIs are working aged adults between 26-65 years' old.
- In 8 of the CBIs the forced migrants who are involved have been in Romania from 1-6 months, in 4 CBIs the forced migrants have been in Romania for 7-12 months, and in 3 CBIs the forced migrants have been in Romania from 13-24 months.
- 11 CBIs had less than 100 local Romanian citizens involved in their activities while 4 CBIs had between 100-300 Romanian citizens involved.
- 7 CBIs work mostly with Romanian citizens who are working aged adults from 26-65 years old. Most of the locals involved from the host community are women.
- Regarding the frequency of activities and services offered, 8 CBIs have daily meetings, 2 CBIs have weekly, 1 CBI has monthly, while 4 CBI have periodic meetings such as special events.
- The main kind of support offered in CBIs are emergency support and intercultural activities, while other activities include accommodation, leisure activities, education with the purpose of creating inclusive spaces, temporary shelter and psychosocial services.

It is evident from the CBIs evaluated, that over the last few years in Romania, there has been an increase in services and activities related to integration for forced migrants and refugees living in the country.

3.2 RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE PHASE

Interaction & Encounter

Both beneficiaries and volunteers working with CBIs appreciated the opportunities to meet



Red Cross Romania workshop with volunteers on migration issues (Photo: Red Cross Romania).

each other on a regular basis through the CBI, either weekly, monthly or for a specific event or workshop. Local Romanians participating in CBIs reported that these opportunities were fruitful in sharing their culture, to meet others they would not otherwise meet and dispel any fears of ‘the other’ they previously had. Satu-Mare, a volunteer working with an initiative run by Caritas, observed that in her own community the local people had very little contact with forced migrants and refugees. She told observed that all their views about migrants came from views expressed in the media, which tended to be negative. She saw how meeting forced migrants directly and interacting with them in the CBI changed her own and others’ perspectives from what they saw in the media.

A forced migrant who is a participant in the Migrant Integration Centre in Brasov told us that she appreciated the frequency of the meetings when she first joined the CBI, but as she felt more established with her life in Romania, she met with the people from the Centre only once per month. She added that she became more confident as she

knew whom to seek assistance from when she did not know something, and now she can provide information for the newcomers.

In two of the CBI, there was seldom a focus on interaction and relationship building – as one was primarily offering direct support and services to forced migrants while the other was focused on the education of Romanian children to increase their knowledge of issues faced by forced migrants and refugees through research.

Participation

CBIs promote participation through the activities that are offered, through the holistic accompaniment of their beneficiaries, and by organising one-time events that bring people together in celebratory ways.

All the CBIs *I Get You* interviewed have a culture of involving volunteers in their daily activities. Volunteers in CBIs expressed that they had positive experiences and were willing to continue to

dedicate their time to be involved in the CBI. Some volunteers have been involved for many years, in those CBIs that have been active in Romania for a while, but the majority of volunteers interviewed have participated with the CBI for 2-3 months.

Forced migrants involved in CBIs in Romania usually participate for 2-3 months, with some exceptions. While CBIs offer many one-time activities that migrants benefit from, many reported that when they organise workshops participation increases as people bring friends or others along to the CBI as well. For example, Save the Children Romania promotes forced migrants' participation by having parent counselling and support activities for adults, while at the same time, having complimentary activities for the children to participate in while their parents are in class or alternatively having activities focused on children were the parents are asked to join for supervision purposes. By involving both generations in complimentary activities, Save the Children can have both parents and children participate in the CBI. Another CBI, AIDRom in Timisoara reported that the key for involving forced migrants in their activities was to raise awareness among potential beneficiaries. AIDRom does this by making their activities look inviting and attractive through invitations, graphic posters, and speaking enthusiastically with people about fun activities like movies, dinners and getting to know new people.

Awareness Raising

All the CBI in Romania find awareness raising activities to be important and use things like social media, newsletters, flyers, posters and websites to publish information and content about their activities. All CBIs do this on a regular basis, usually posting pictures and their schedules, important news items, and sometimes engage in larger media campaigns. Most of them have been inviting migrants to different public awareness activities like training forced migrants to be speakers during workshops and events to share their stories. Some CBI strengthen their awareness raising activities by providing regular information to the Romanian authorities about their activities and on the current situation of migrants in Romania. Most of the volunteers with CBIs were not involved formally in awareness raising activities but considered they had an impact in their circle of friends because of positive views expressed through social media.

An initiative run by JRS Romania noticed an impact on the local community as a result of their awareness raising activities. The local community

“got used to” forced migrants in their community if not being expressly welcoming, but also religious congregations in the community actively reached out to the most vulnerable migrants to provide them with assistance when they were not previously doing so. Local citizens began contacting JRS Romania to offer support for accommodation or jobs.

Some of the CBI had a bigger impact due to the type of event or the approach used. This was the case for AIDRom in Timisoara who organise a large-scale multicultural and arts festival in the town and the Migrant Integration Centre in Brasov who organized a multicultural festival in a mall. Others have used their networks to publish articles in local newspapers due to membership in a media union. The Romanian Red Cross used an online platform dedicated to 190 Red Cross offices, specifically to their staff and volunteers, to disseminate relevant information as well as public events where forced migrants were invited to contribute blog posts. The impact on the local community was difficult to measure, but the impact on the volunteers was huge as they realized the enormous influence media has on society, and they recognised they should form their own opinions of migrants by relying on diverse sources of information rather than on a single, at times biased, source of information.

Education

Education plays an important role from the perspective of all the CBI's but it was implemented differently. The most popular method was workshops to encourage critical thinking among students from elementary and high school. Some CBIs engaged with school communities and universities in their projects, and all who did report positive feedback from this experience. For example, the Romanian Red Cross introduced the subject of migration through several modules in some schools during the 'alternative school week' - an initiative of the Romanian Ministry of Education.

Almost all people interviewed agreed that children can be agents of change in general. It was stated also that children are more open towards changing their perception especially if they are exposed to the meeting with migrants and if their education goes in that direction. In addition, we have witnessed in Romania that local children who go to schools were refugee children also go treat them as their fellows. One volunteer pointed out that teenagers are also a crucial age group to target for educational outreach because they are forming their own values and principles. Offering education to teenagers involves

a lot of empowerment of them as individuals and the presentation of positive examples that will encourage them to be more open and form their views based on correct information.

Support & Service Provision

In Romania, support & service provision seemed to be the main reason why initiatives were originally set up and remain the focus of their mission and activities. From the forced migrant's perspective, it was clear through the interviews that many reported services tailored towards learning the Romanian language, having private accommodation of their own and finding a job were the most useful to help them feel integrated in the society.

CBIs like AIDRom in Bucharest and Timisoara and JRS Romania's initiative for an alternative to detention, have a holistic approach to providing forced migrants with support and service provision. These CBIs offer support for basic needs like finding accommodation and medical assistance, psychosocial counselling and educational assistance. *I Get You* noticed that the aim of these CBI is to help forced migrants to become more independent in their daily lives especially when it comes to learning the Romanian language (with the support of teachers and volunteers) and accessing the labour market. Some of the CBI mentioned that the services are offered gradually, were people are encouraged and supported to find employment to increase autonomy.

Another CBI, the Migrant Integration Centre, offers services focused on education (school enrolment support for children, diploma recognition and informal education and artistic activities) legal counselling and support on how to obtain Romanian citizenship. A forced migrant involved in the CBI told us she became more confident after receiving support from the Migrant Integration Centre as she now knows whom to seek assistance from when she did not know something, and as well as how to provide accurate information for other newcomers.

Save the Children Romania, has a specific focus on parenting support to better help children. They offer social assistance, and support for parents in accessing the labour market, social counselling and provision of basic needs through donations. The volunteers active within the CBI are generally involved in assisting the beneficiaries from the start, helping them to relate to the authorities, go shopping and accompanying them to medical clinics.

Interculturalism

Most of the CBIs focus on music and food as a way to demonstrate the value of interculturalism. CBIs mention that they invite forced migrants to typical Romanian celebrations and Christmas parties but they also create space for other cultures like Iranian music night, Eid Ramadan, and Indian New Year's parties. Some organize specific events where forced migrants can share their culture and know more about Romania. For example, the events organized by the Migrant Integration Centre offer the occasion for forced migrants to share their culture by scheduling events well in advance where people can prepare something to share from their country of origin. The CBI also invites journalists to these events to raise awareness.

Another good example comes from the CBI Friends to Friends in Giurgiu, where there is a collaboration with the local cultural centre and organises events with them like dances and painting exhibitions. The volunteer interviewed from Friends to Friends expressed that there were various occasions to share migrants' culture such as informal discussions and she got to know more about different cultures through a personal approach.

AIDRom in Timisoara have multicultural evenings occasionally in addition to a larger multicultural festival that shares food, cultures and traditional dress. The staff related that, "when people eat together, we are more open."

Dignity & Hospitality

All the CBIs interviewed shared that dignity is a key concept, even when they don't have a written policy in this regard. CBIs see this criterion as treating forced migrants with respect and equality, cherishing their own wills and opinions, and listening to them with no discrimination. All the migrants interviewed, spoke of how all the CBIs, in one way or another, made them feel welcome and respected.

The exception to this is JRS Romania, where dignity is an explicit part of the code of conduct that all staff members and volunteers are bound by. At JRS Romania, hospitality is also highlighted in the mission and is present in activities such as monthly lunches, religious celebrations with the Catholic community and a celebration for Eid al-Fitr after Ramadan. For Caritas, hospitality is part of their mission, and one of the ways they express it is by welcoming forced migrants in the homes of locals for dinner.

Friends to Friends consider that they promote dignity through media and press articles they publish with forced migrants at the centre of the story. This is because they present migrants as full and complex human beings with challenges, dreams and hopes for the future. They hope that this full-picture approach of presenting the stories and voices of migrants helps to better inform the Romanian public through a more dignified approach than some mainstream media provide.

AIDRom Timisoara has no protocol regarding dignity, but the qualities of dignity and hospitality are rather embedded in their social ethic. Flavius a staff member at AIDRom in Timisoara stated, “Hospitality is a personal component in our services. For example, when people arrive, they find the beds arranged, the room clean... at events we try to be welcoming, always having the team welcome people, sharing a hand, inviting for tea and then with this basis we work together easily.” In addition, the staff from the other branch of AIDRom located in Bucharest mentioned that forced migrants are very connected to the place because others are warm and hospitable. Likewise, forced migrants confirmed that they felt welcomed as the members of the CBI through expressed feelings of warmth.

Sustainability

Most of the CBI depend on public EU funding for their operation but have developed ad-hoc strategies for ensuring sustainability with in-kind donations for food and clothes, and smaller amounts of money. Many CBIs also rely on volunteers to compliment the work of their staff members. The changing context in Romania makes it challenging to have a strategic long-term plan to ensure sustainability and many initiatives rely on changing project cycles for funding and the direction of their activities.

As such, different CBIs employ different strategies to ensure sustainability. For example, AIDRom in Bucharest has cultivated good relationships with long-term private donors. While the Romanian Red Cross tries to keep their activities as low-cost as possible and strategically chooses activities that are less expensive to implement. Some of the CBIs have included small fees for services, like the Romanian language classes organized by Migrant Integration Centre or JRS Romania who ask forced migrants accommodated in their centre to share utility cost. At CONNECT they identified a space where they can organize events without paying.

Innovation

Each CBI was inventive and tried to adapt and bring new ways of supporting migrants and the host community to the surface in their activities. AIDRom in Bucharest considers that one innovative aspect they utilise is having Romanian language courses through Skype conversations, as it allowed people in diverse locations to access the service.

Red Cross staff and volunteers organized a unique event called ‘Youth on the Run,’ which is also implemented in other European countries but was a new experience for young people and volunteers in Romania to learn more about the journeys of refugees. The CBI also has an innovative approach of using bloggers during their public events and the implementation of the Edu Cafe. The CONNECT association considers their newly developed instruments for learning Romanian language through bilingual manuals to be innovative, as well as employing teachers who also speak Arabic, Turkish, Chinese and Romanian. This initiative provides the information guide and the manual for Romanian citizenship in all of these languages, through the work of their publishing house.

Mainly, what *I Get You* saw as the innovative aspects of CBIs in Romania, was the type of services and the way in which they were offered by CBIs that were not otherwise being provided for. The personal touches – of hospitality and openness to interculturalism – offered by CBIs compared to the service offered by the local authorities were very much appreciated by the forced migrants.

Inspiring Community Building Initiatives

4

14

All the CBIs *I Get You* interviewed in Romania are unique in their activities and work. The initiatives below are those that received high evaluations against the established Delphi criteria.

AIDROM: CENTRE FOR COUNSELLING AND ACCOMMODATION FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

With two locations in Romania, in Timisoara and Bucharest, AIDRom provides accommodation social services, medical care, legal support, language classes, educational activities and multicultural events for the most vulnerable forced migrants in Romania. These accommodation schemes offer an alternative to the state-run open asylum centre which has limited capacity that does not always meet the need of the amount of people coming to the territory. AIDRom also strives to organise many recreational and social activities for those they accommodate, such as theatre workshops and cooking evenings.

Asylum-seekers involved report that they feel independent and autonomous, mostly because they are encouraged and supported to find a job, and they do not have the sense of institutionalisation like they did when they lived in the open centre. This CBI is also impactful in the local community because of the visibility it generates about forced migration e.g. through an arts festival dedicated to refugees. In addition, the initiative is sustainably funded with a diversity of sources which is different from many other CBIs in Romania who are majorly dependent on funds from the European Union or have had limited operational spans, opening or closing in response to the increased needs or presence of forced migrants in Romania.

MIGRANT INTEGRATION CENTRE

Run by the Romanian Association for the Promotion of Quality and Successful Practices, this CBI offers various services to migrants from Brasov and other cities in the area, such as legal counselling,

and Romanian language classes. It organizes various workshops and multicultural events, the most important being the Brasov Multicultural Day, which was the first of this kind. The festival is organised in public spaces and offers the opportunity for cultural exchange through dance and traditional dress and inviting important people to the festival, such as the ambassadors from the different countries represented.

The initiative offers the opportunity for migrants with different backgrounds to share their culture, traditions and identity in an informal way but with a high public impact. The events organized by the CBI have a high number of participants and expands its reach every year. It is also a sustainable activity which can run without dedicated funding. The experience of this CBI has been replicated in other cities, such as Cluj and Bucharest, as it inspired other NGOs and local authorities.

JRS ROMANIA'S ALTERNATIVE TO DETENTION CENTRE

The CBI offers accommodation and holistic services for forced migrants who are tolerated to live in Romania but would otherwise be accommodated in a closed centre or left destitute. It is a unique service, which has operated for more than 13 years and is considered a valid alternative to detention. It provides legal counselling and assistance, social counselling, medical care, educational courses and recreational activities. It brings together forced migrants and members of the local community as volunteers as well as sisters from a religious congregation. Beneficiaries are encouraged to find jobs and supported in learning the Romanian language, improving their computer skills, preparing their CV.

The CBI offers a sustainable support for tolerated and the opportunity to become self-sufficient. The host community is more sensitive to the cases of

the forced migrants accommodated in the centre and get involved in helping and accompanying the people who are there.

SAVE THE CHILDREN ROMANIA'S ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER CHILDREN

The CBI created the opportunities that in each regional centre there is arranged and equipped a dedicated room for children. Education and recreational activities are offered to children, and they are assisted with formal enrolment in the educational system and helped with the homework. Children are supported and included here, and set on the first steps towards integration which has had a positive impact on the integration process of their whole families.

The CBI is implemented by staff and volunteers and creates the premises for Romanian children and refugees and asylum-seeking children to interact. Thanks to the CBI, parents, and especially women, are empowered to follow vocational courses or to get a job while the children are being helped by Save the Children specialized staff and volunteers.

📷 Assisted therapy with dogs for migrant children at the JRS Romania Pedro Arrupe centre (Photo: JRS Romania).



Policy Recommendations

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Our research shows that the majority of the CBI's mapped had a strong focus on providing the basics services, such as accommodation, social assistance, legal assistance, provision of language classes and employment support. However, JRS Romania believes that such tasks fall under the responsibility of the government, as the provision of such fundamental services cannot be left fully to the good will and limited financial means of volunteers.

Government and public administrations can and should build on the positive experiences of CBI's in providing services. Cooperation with CBI's can be maintained in the provision of services, but the government should ensure its sustainability.

To start progress in this direction and drawing on the experience of *I Get You*, JRS Romania has elaborated the following recommendations for the Romanian government:

- **Provide sufficient and continuous funding to CBI's that provide basic reception and integration services to forced migrants.** Most CBI's rely currently on the EU funding for their services, however these are provided in the form of projects, so continuity is not always guaranteed. This does not only negatively affect the well-being and integration possibilities of forced migrants but also impacts negatively on the quality and efficiency of the services provided.
- **Develop intercultural raising awareness programmes** to enable both the local population and the forced migrants to relate with each other and to see the other as an opportunity to learn, rather than as a threat. The experiences of initiatives such as Migration Integration Centre Brasov, that organises workshops and multicultural events, can be used as example of good practice to invest in and build upon.
- **Mainstream issues such as cultural diversity and human rights throughout the all education system.** Most respondents to the *I Get You* interviews agreed on the importance of children as agents of change. The development of national programs on the topic of human rights and migration in schools, high schools and universities is therefore paramount in combating racism and xenophobia. Initiatives such as the modules of the Romanian Red Cross during the 'alternative school week' should be encouraged and replicated.
- **Strengthen and increase the offer of Romanian language courses provided by public administrations.** Innovative techniques and tools developed by CBI's such as the skype conversations organised by AidRom Bucharest or the bilingual manuals developed by CONNECT are best practices that the government should invest in and replicate.
- **Encourage and invest in the organisation and provision of child care or activities for children combined with the provision of other services for adults,** such as language classes or vocational training, to facilitate the participation of adults with children. The example of the initiatives by Save the Children Romania can be used as example to this end.
- **Identify and evaluate good practices among citizens' initiative and make sure they are replicated throughout the country.** Developing a 'Good Practices' manual and making it available at several public services (education, health, social security, employment and training offices) could be helpful to harmonize local practices and offer solutions to similar challenges in the provision of the same services in different places.



“The project is about the participation of the local community: how can we create inclusive spaces for migrants, how we can change the community for it to be more open, welcoming and help migrants integrate. There were a lot of discussions about the manipulation done by media, stereotypes, and how we can be more informed.

Our beneficiaries are the young persons who are involved in the project and the feedback we received was wonderful. They choose to participate for one year, then it was prolonged for 2 months and later they went on with activities.

They really appreciated working on the subject of migrants and refugees and became very curious and interested in searching on this theme. They were given the opportunity to assume responsibility and lead the project organise the budget, contributing in the writing of the continuation of the project and being responsible for the implementation.

I was only guiding them and this was important for their independence and empowerment. I think education was one of the main aspects promoted as we collaborated with educational institutions and at the first events, in Denmark, we invited a representative from the Ministry of Education. In many schools where we are constantly present we introduced the subject of migration during the alternative school week. We had at least 5 events promoting critical thinking: workshops, conference, and an Edu cafe.”



Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and others who are forcibly displaced.

Jrseurope.org

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