

Strengthening the Reformed Church in diakonia and parish development

Context

By comparison with Romania's urban areas, which have received infrastructure investments over recent few decades, more rural areas face massive problems with the social, health and school systems. Moreover, rural areas are suffering particularly from emigration and population ageing.

Yet another challenge is the situation of the Roma. A large portion of this ethnic minority, representing some 10 per cent of Romania's population, lives in poverty, has only rudimentary education and hence bleak employment prospects.

A long-standing HEKS/EPER partner, the Reformed Church in Romania (RCR) is present mainly in rural Transylvania. The RCR comprises two church districts (Oradea and Cluj-Napoca) with a total of 450,000 members. The RCR is often the only official institution present in many small villages. Through its welfare and social service activities, the RCR also fulfils its social responsibility in the society.

Objectives, priorities, activities

In conjunction with the welfare and social work of the RCR and the organizations FAER, Philantropia and Caritas, HEKS/EPER endeavours to contribute to greater health coverage and economic inclusion for the Roma. This is being done by introducing home care services in Roma neighbourhoods, through vocational training and job placement services and the provision of microcredits. Pupils are also assisted with their homework in 100 afternoon schools.

Since 2001, the welfare and social services arm of the RCR has built up a home care service in five regions of Transylvania, and its personnel currently looks after elderly and care-dependent people in some 180 localities. This cost-efficient service allows the elderly to stay at home for as long as possible and is to be further expanded.





Although domestic violence is taboo in Romania and even largely tolerated, the church also operates a victim counselling centre in Oradea and another in Brasov and raises public awareness around the topic. As an immediate measure for their own protection, affected women find shelter in a women's refuge. In addition, church personnel reach out to local people with disabilities to assist them in becoming integrated into society. The church also promotes social inclusion through protected employment for appropriate candidates.

The RCR will need outside support if it is to continue to be a living church in the future. There is a continuing education programme designed to undergird the work of pastors. Considerable investment is also needed for church buildings. With the help of HEKS/EPER, it should be possible to refurbish churches, pastor-ages and church parish buildings in strategically important church parishes.

Target groups

Target groups include the marginalized and especially vulnerable, such as Roma, the elderly and people in need of care, women who have been victims of domestic violence and people with disabilities. Yet another target group comprises church parishes and their members and pastors.

Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

In Romania HEKS works with the RCR and its welfare and social services. HEKS/EPER cooperates with FAER, Philantrophia and Caritas on social inclusion for the Roma. One key component of programme work comprises the transfer of knowledge, or networking between Switzerland and Romania. This takes the form of church parish partnerships, group travel or a professional exchange.

HEKS/EPER on the ground

HEKS/EPER is regularly represented in Romania by the programme leader for church cooperation. The Roma programme is coordinated through a HEKS/EPER office in Cluj-Napoca.

Topics and working approach

HEKS/EPER has gained much experience from decades of cooperation with the RCR. This work also invariably involves the sharing of knowledge and experiences between Romania and Switzerland.

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Romania

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