

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Romania

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

In Romania, there are occasional citizens' initiatives supporting migrants involving a rather low number of volunteers and addressing primarily basic needs such as food and clothing. Some activities supporting migrants are initiated by local migrant communities. Such citizens' or communities' initiatives are little visible and, therefore, almost impossible to document.

The reason for the scarcity of such initiatives could be the relatively low number of migrants in Romania. Romania has a population of almost 20 million inhabitants. According to the General Inspectorate for Immigration, in 2015, 104 139, of which 60 257 are third country nationals (most of them come from Moldavia, Turkey and China)¹ and 2,600 beneficiaries of a form of international protection² were officially registered in Romania.

¹ <http://igi.mai.gov.ro/comunicate/citeste/ro/1335/Evaluarea-activitii-Inspectoratului-General-pentru-Imigrri-n-anul-2015>

² <http://igi.mai.gov.ro/comunicate/citeste/ro/1332/96-de-persoane-au-solicitat-protectia-statului-romn-de-la-nceputul-acestui-an>

In this context, most of the activities supporting the integration of migrants involving volunteers, are initiated by NGOs active in the field. For example, the [Association of Jesuit Refugee Service in Romania](#) (JRS Romania) supports volunteering for refugees and encourages direct interaction between volunteers and refugees. They state that they prefer to involve volunteers in activities that require them “to be with the refugees, not just do something for them”, such as teaching Romanian language, accompanying them to different authorities and institutions, contributing to recreational activities for children, participating in educational, multicultural, recreational activities etc. They state that “hundreds of volunteers have passed the threshold of (the) organisation”. Similarly, organisations such as ARCA - the [Romanian Forum for Refugees and Migrants](#), ICAR Foundation, the Romanian Association for Health Promotion and the UN Agency for Refugees Romania work closely with volunteers, involving them in a wide range of activities, from teaching to research and fund-raising.

When in 2012-2013, a few hundreds of mixed families were repatriated from Syria to Romania (it is estimated that, until now, around 700 people were repatriated from Syria to Romania³), [Conect Association](#) (previously named ADO SAH ROM) contacted several other organisations (public and private) and individuals, urging them to offer support and assist some of these vulnerable families meet their most basic needs, such as food and clothing. Also, along the years, the organisation has involved volunteers in other activities such as teaching Romanian language.

Although NGO s’ involvement in such activities and initiatives has become evident over the years, there aren’t detailed descriptions and data.

3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS’ INITIATIVES

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

Romania isn’t a country of destination for migrants and is not (yet?) situated on the main routes used by them. Therefore, it was not among the countries strongly affected by the refugee crisis in Europe. The number of asylum applications was actually lower in 2015 than in 2014: there were 1,266 asylum applications registered in 2015, as opposed to 1,547 in 2014.⁴ However, the country is expected to receive a larger number of migrants within the EU relocation scheme.

Although there is a general concern about the migrant crisis that affects Europe and about the expected larger number of refugee arrivals in Romania, there is no indication (official data, media reports, etc.) regarding an increase or diversification of volunteers’ initiatives supporting migrants. However, there were volunteers’ initiatives aiming to assist refugees in other European countries, facing a critical situation. For instance, in September 2015, a group of 9 volunteers from Timisoara (among which a naturalised Syrian university student) created a Facebook group - [Refugees Welcome to Romania](#) - and collected aid (food, clothing etc.) for refugees blocked at the border between Serbia and Hungary.⁵

³ <http://www.agerpres.ro/social/2015/12/09/mae-trei-cetateni-romani-si-doi-membri-ai-familiilor-lor-repatriati-din-siria-10-18-16>

⁴ <http://jgi.mai.gov.ro/comunicate/citeste/ro/1335/Evaluarea-activitii-Inspectoratului-General-pentru-Imigrri-n-anul-2015>

⁵ <http://www.tion.ro/voluntarii-timisoreni-au-dus-ajutoare-refugiatilor-de-la-granita-ungariei-cu-serbia/1572999>

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

Most volunteers involved in activities supporting migrants (especially those in organised by NGOs) are university students. Some activities also involve volunteers with migrant background, while others are organised by migrant communities themselves.

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

Most volunteer activities supporting migrants tend to address either basic needs (food, clothing etc.) or basic integration issues such as learning Romanian language or cultural accommodation. It is mostly the case of volunteer activities organized by NGOs. At the moment, there is no indication regarding a change or diversification of the content of these activities nor the profile of volunteers, triggered by the current refugee crisis.

6 ADDED VALUE

Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.

Activities involving volunteers are complementary to or part of the activities implemented by NGOs through different projects or by the state authorities, offering migrants the benefits of direct interaction and peer to peer collaboration with volunteers (especially those addressing issues such as learning Romanian language, cultural accommodation etc.).

7 IMPACT

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

In principle, activities involving volunteers have a beneficial impact on the quality of services offered to migrants by NGOs and state authorities, complementing efforts to promote integration. Nevertheless, in Romania, the number of volunteers and of migrants benefiting from these activities remains relatively low and, therefore, the general impact is not substantial.

On an individual level, the impact of volunteer activities - especially those involving peer to peer collaboration - is positive for the migrant beneficiaries, as they enhance their integration and lower the risk of social exclusion and marginalisation. For the volunteers involved, their understanding of migrants' profile and integration issues is enriched, while their tolerance and acceptance of diversity are enhanced.