

# Reform Fund Linked to the Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups

Christian Bergmann<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

*The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program 2009-2019 (SRCP) helped to implement around 300 projects in Romania with a total budget of 180 million Swiss Francs over a period of 10 years. While the program was evaluated at the end, it lacked a sustainability analysis. The SRCP was made up of eight thematic funds, each containing several projects. This article shows, on the basis of a thematic fund, how the entire program was analyzed for sustainability. While the overall program received a fairly positive review on sustainability, some thematic funds did not perform satisfactorily. The article will illustrate the problem we faced during the analysis and presents one thematic funds with all its projects. The projects left a positive impact on the target population but it could not influence policy making on the national level. This left several interventions at the end of the program phase without the necessary funding to continue their activity.*

## **Keywords**

*International-Relations, Europe, Swiss-Romanian cooperation, minorities, integration*

## **1. Introduction and Methodological Approach**

This article is an extract from the PhD thesis titled *"The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program 2009-2019. A Sustainability Analysis of the First Swiss Contributions to Romania"*. The thesis's overall goal was to conduct a sustainability analysis of the first comprehensive Swiss-Romanian cooperation programme implemented between 2009 and 2019. The article describes one thematic fund from that programme, which is called *"Reform Linked to the Inclusion of Roma and other Vulnerable Groups"*. Before discussing the thematic fund and its findings, we present the methodological approach to this thematic fund. Followed by a brief review of the programme and an examination of how it was designed, structured, and implemented. Additionally, we will outline

---

<sup>1</sup> Independent scholar. PhD in International Relations and European Studies, University Babeş-Bolyai (Cluj-Napoca, Romania). Swiss-German citizen from Marly, Switzerland. Alma mater: University of Bern. E-mail: [c.bergmann2279@gmail.com](mailto:c.bergmann2279@gmail.com).

other similar projects implemented in Romania. We conclude the article with the results and conclusions from the analysis of this thematic fund.

How did we analyse the sustainability of this thematic fund? The fund implemented five projects, one of which was to build a structure for occupational purposes. The other four focused on health, education, awareness-raising, and information campaigns. As this analysis was part of a larger project, we were limited by time and financial resources. As a result, we were unable to conduct thorough surveys among the target population to assess the extent to which the intervention improved their lives or changed their attitudes and core beliefs. It would also have been necessary to conduct an on-site visit to observe the built object. However, that was not within our scope. We had to settle for "desk-top" reviews by telephone and email.

The preferred method was a questionnaire survey submitted to each project manager by email, along with additional non-formal discussions via telephone. To make the cases comparable, we decided to ask each participant the same question. Additionally, each one was asked 2-3 project-specific questions. The task of the sustainability analysis was to find out how the implemented projects influenced a desired change in the long run, especially without the Swiss funding. The projects finished at different time points, the oldest in 2017. In December 2019, the entire SRCP was terminated. We analysed the program from 2023 to 2024. This gave us up to seven years since the oldest project was terminated in 2017. Plenty of time for a project to develop and evolve.

What seems to be an advantage, in some cases it turned out to be a challenge. On average, it is recommended to implement sustainability analyses around two years after program termination (Mertens, 2019: 11). In our cases, it is between five to seven years after. On one side, we have very solid and reliable data, confirming the sustainability of a project; on the other side, we could not always find the people involved with the projects, so many years after program implementation. Although the sustainability analysis does not concern the project during the program phase, it is very advantageous to survey those people who were involved during implementation. They can compare the situation before, during, and after the program phase. This gives us valuable data for the final classification. In the case of the Roma Inclusion Fund, we were lucky because, except for one project, we were able to conduct telephone surveys with four project managers from the other projects. This helped a lot, especially to obtain better contextual information, which would not have been possible only with the schematic project descriptions online.

## **2. The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program 2009-2019**

The Swiss financial contributions to the extended European Union (EU) were established before Romania joined the EU. The legal framework was the

*Memorandum of Understanding* between the European Union and Switzerland, signed on 27. February 2006. (Swiss Federal Government, 2006) The reason for this payment was twofold: Switzerland benefited from the common EU market without being a member. Therefore, the European Commission decided that Switzerland has to pay an "entrance fee" to the common market. Switzerland agreed on a financial contribution of 1.302 billion Swiss Francs (Sfr.) to all new EU member states that joined in 2004. In Switzerland, the contribution program was approved by a popular referendum on 26 November 2006. (Federal Chancellery, 2006)

When Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007, the agreement was extended to cover the two new member states. The guiding framework was enshrined in the bilateral Framework Agreement of September 2010. (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2010) In Romania, it was enacted in November 2010 by Government Decision No. 1.065/2010. (Romanian Government, 2010)

The other reason this program was developed was that Romania and the other new member states were not on par economically with the Western member states. To help mitigate this issue, the new member states benefited from financial help that was allocated. However, Switzerland did not just transfer money; it designed together with Romania the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program (SRCP). By doing so, it kept a certain control over the use and distribution of those funds.

In **Table 1** on the following page, we see how the entire Swiss contribution sum was distributed among the new member states. The distribution was based on population size and per-capita income. (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2020: 4).

**Table 1:** *Swiss Financial Contributions to the new EU member states*

	Contribution in million Swiss Francs
Poland	489
Romania	181
Hungary	131
Czech Republic	110
Bulgaria	76
Lithuania	71
Slovakia	67
Latvia	60
Croatia	45
Estonia	40
Slovenia	22
Cyprus	6
Malta	5

(Source: Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by the Swiss State Department – EDA, 2025)

The contributed sum for Romania was 180 million Sfr. over a period of ten years. As shown in Table 1, it was the second-highest sum among all 13 member states. The SRCP was structured into eight thematic funds:

- Security Issues Fund
- Sustainable Energy Action Fund (SEAF)
- Health Issues Fund
- Scholarship Fund
- Research and Project in Education Fund
- Civil Society Participation Fund
- Partnership and Expert Fund
- Reform Fund linked to the Inclusion of Roma and other Vulnerable

Groups

The last-mentioned fund is the object of this article. From now on called the Roma Inclusion Fund or just (RIF). Each fund had several projects within its field of operation. Some funds had only five projects, others had up to 141 projects. The program implemented a total of **307** projects. The idea behind this structure was to combine Swiss expertise with Romanian needs. A country-specific leitmotif was also expressed:

*"To reduce the economic and social disparities within the enlarged European Union and between different regions of development of the beneficiary country of Romania. And to contribute within Romania to the reduction of economic and social disparities between the dynamic urban centers and the structurally weak peripheral regions."* (Annex 1, 2010: 1)

The key factor for the program was the Swiss expertise behind almost every thematic fund. The Swiss experts acted as Swiss Intermediate Bodies (SIB) and coordinated the funds. Almost because the SEAF and the Roma Inclusion Fund did not have a specific SIB in Switzerland. Additionally, almost every project had another Swiss organisation as a partner for additional support.

In Romania, the program coordination was conducted by a governmental agency. It was designated the National Coordination Unit (NCU) and made up of operatives from the financial ministry. On the Swiss side, there were three governmental institutions involved: the Swiss Contributions Office (SCO) in Bucharest, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), both in Bern. (Annex2, 2010: 6-7)

The projects were all implemented by Romanian Executing Agencies (EA). This structure ensured solid Swiss expertise delivered directly where it was needed most. It is noteworthy to mention that only three funds

involved Swiss official institutions; the other five had little to no institutional involvement from the Swiss side. The vast majority of projects were implemented through NGOs and other non-governmental organisations. The overall positive outcome of the sustainability analysis assures the competence and professionalism of those involved on the Romanian side.

The projects were chosen after specific objectives:

*(...) focused on the needs of Romania and took into account the possibility to transfer Swiss knowledge and experience, institutional partnerships, potential for networking, innovation and visibility (...)* (Annex 4, 2010: 3)

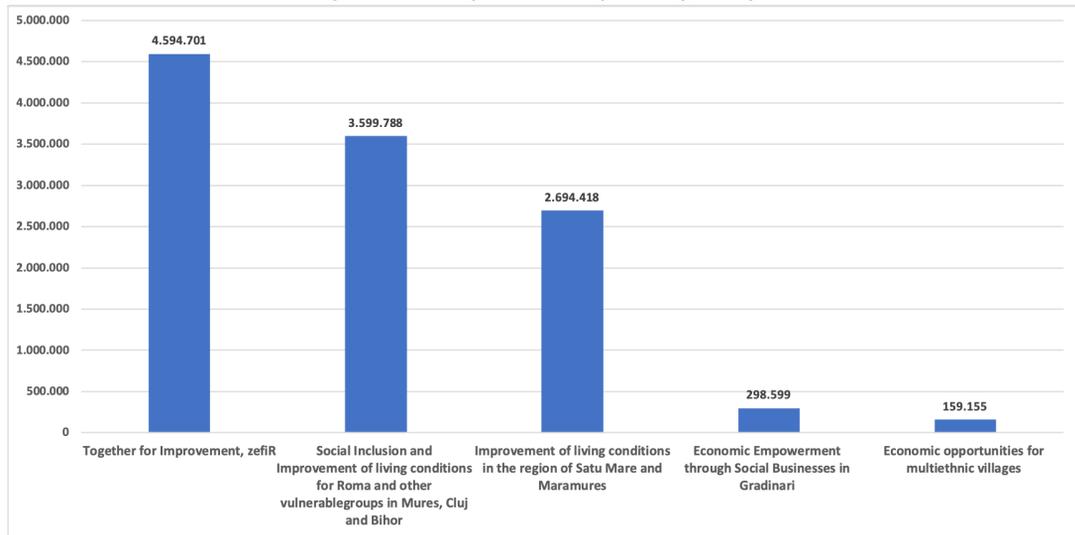
### **3. The Reform Fund Linked to the Inclusion of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups** (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The RIF consisted of five projects. It did not have a dedicated SIB from the private sector; it had a combination of government operatives from the SDC, with the help of Swiss NGOs. Those NGOs were also the Swiss Project Partners for some projects within the fund. This means the SDC helped with administrative and organisational problems, but they could not provide the necessary expertise for this field of operations. That was left to the Swiss partners. Unlike other thematic funds, where the SIB was an organisation with expertise in its area of responsibility.

The framework left the project organisation to the Romanian EAs and did not bother to additionally install an umbrella organisation. The fund also had a leitmotif:

*"The Thematic Fund shall contribute to improve the living conditions of Roma and other vulnerable minorities in a number of communities as well as contribute to the empowerment and awareness building in order to foster the social inclusion of the same groups."*

Thematically, priority was given to children's and women's education and health. The other goal was to build empowerment and awareness by strengthening the cultural identity and integration of Roma and other minorities, improving acceptance, and enhancing their participation in decision-making. The fund absorbed around 14M Sfr. illustrated in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1: The five RIF Projects by Budget**

(Source: author's own preparations based on data collected from the Swiss State Department)

The five projects in Figure 1 are:

**Together for Empowerment, Zefir** (Swiss State Department, 2010)

This project aimed to improve access to education and health for more than 25.000 people in several rural communities in three counties: Dolj, Olt, and Gorj. (SASTIPEN, 2015) The communities mainly include vulnerable Roma people. The activities were divided into three categories: education, health, and empowerment. (Terre des hommes, 2015)

The educational component helped forty-two people from Roma and other vulnerable groups to increase their business and entrepreneurial skills. After the project's conclusion, 26 income-generating activities and individual companies out of 28 were efficient and profitable in ten local communities.

The health component provided information, education, and awareness activities for vulnerable populations. General practitioners were supported in improving their standards of care for Roma patients. The project addressed the health component with parents, pupils, and teachers. It provided parental support activities, after-school classes, intercultural kindergartens for children, and teacher training. The health component yielded plenty of results: 3475 children and 400 mothers were registered with general practitioners and received quality health care services. 100% of the newborn babies were vaccinated.

Six community centres were established. Ten schools supported the introduction of health education classes focusing on reproductive health and maternity risk prevention. Forty-four teachers were trained to deliver health classes.

The community empowerment component consisted of initiatives for intercultural dialogue, which solved common problems and enhanced the capacity of community members. The results were notable: 1893 benefited from the educational component, 1220 children participated in different psychosocial activities, 600 parents participated in parental education for at least one year, and 223 teachers and educators were trained in intercultural skills. The empowerment component helped develop ten communities and increase their level of empowerment. More than 30 community initiatives helped more than 3.800 community members, and 290 community members improved their skills and competence in advocacy, communication, negotiations, project writing, management, and mobilisation. (AGERPRES, 2019)

**Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups in Mureş, Cluj, and Bihor** (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The project's overall goal was to improve the living conditions and social inclusion of Roma communities and other vulnerable minorities in Mureş, Cluj, and Bihor counties. The project intervened in the areas of education, health, social assistance, and vocational training. (HEKS-EPER, 2013)

The objectives were attained through after-school classes, catch-up summer kindergarten, and other preschool and primary school support to foster inclusive education. Information on the right to access medical services and health insurance, offering assistance with registration, awareness raising on health issues, medical services, nutrition, hygiene, childcare, family planning, social counselling services, and establishing home care services by Roma for Roma, as well as promoting access to vocational training and micro-business development.

The results have been promising: 5.231 children benefited from educational support in the after-school groups organised in 93 communities; 11.757 children participated in intercultural educational activities, and 305 in mentoring programs; 206 teachers and non-teaching staff participated in training programs on children's abilities, learning difficulties, and social pedagogy; 564 parents were involved in educational activities. 5.062 beneficiaries received information and support on their rights and how to access public services and avoid health problems. Two thousand sixty-six

people benefited from a package of employability services and the microcredit system; 1553 beneficiaries benefitted from information, counseling, and job mediation; 220 people benefitted from the vocational training program, and almost half of them obtained an employment contract; 258 people found a job through job mediation, and nearly 110 jobs were created through the microcredit scheme; a total of 598 people improved their income situation.

Ninety-five families from 9 communities improved their housing conditions, specifically through extensions with bathrooms or entirely new houses.

### **Improvement of Living Conditions in the Region of Satu Mare and Maramureş** (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The project aimed to improve the living conditions, health and education, and prospects of Roma communities in Satu Mare and Maramureş. The project aimed to empower members of Roma communities and vulnerable groups to participate actively in social, economic, and political life.

To achieve its objectives, the project implemented the following measures: Members of Roma communities and other vulnerable groups were given access to existing resources to improve their situation; children and young persons were participating in the public educational process appropriate for their age and specific needs; the vulnerability of members of Roma communities and other marginalised groups to health risks was reduced.

Activities consisted of initiative groups assessing the situation and elaborating strategies for the development of their communities; each community will have an expert present to coordinate project activities, mobilize people, and maintain the network. Kindergarten groups, afterschool programs, and social support were introduced as programs for the beneficiaries. A network has been established with local economic actors for vocational training programs to provide internships and jobs. Local healthcare teams will develop recommendations to improve access to health services for the members of the local Roma communities. They will put the recommendations on the authorities' agenda and promote activities like information and health education programs, counselling, and support.

Community development was the final component of this project. Thirteen local initiative groups, three youth groups, and 53 micro-projects were implemented in 10 communities, covering a total of 2170 beneficiaries from the Roma communities.

The results were remarkable: 819 children benefited from educational programs, 157 were employed in regular jobs, and 114 kindergarten and primary school teachers were trained. The health component also flourished: 85% of the children born in the project communities received all vaccinations included in the national immunisation program, 117 people had access to medical specialists, and 1386 members of the project communities used a permanent health counselling and referral service.

### **Economic Empowerment Through Social Businesses in Grădinari** (Swiss State Department, 2010)

The task was to set up a processing plant for canned fruit and vegetables. The reason was that in Grădinari, Olt County, the farmers were wasting approximately 1,200 tons of grain a year. The other reason was that many farmers were selling their produce on the side of the main road in poor conditions. (Gazeta de Sud, 2015) This was not acceptable from a sustainability perspective, and the farmers wanted a facility to process the leftover food into canned fruits and vegetables. This helped the community leaders and program partners to conduct a thorough needs assessment. (Primaria Gradinari, 2014) The equipment was installed, and they are now able to process 250 tons of fruits and vegetables every week with the new installation. The facility also created around ten jobs during the harvest season. The inauguration was videotaped and uploaded to YouTube. (VGTV Regional on YouTube, 2018)

The output was 20 different types of cans for the local market and some grocery stores. When the funding stopped, the facility kept operating, but it was still the property of the local council of Grădinari. It was explained to us that nobody was willing to take the facility over and invest in it; the association members did not have the time to run such a facility. This harmed the project. One was that it did not grow into a more serious hub for vegetable and fruit processing, and the consequence of this lack of growth was a low number of employees and low production, which prevented it from satisfying the national market with Romanian-made canned fruits and vegetables.

### **Economic Opportunities for Multiethnic Villages** (Swiss State Department, 2010)

This project aimed to empower Roma people to participate in formal economic activities. The participating communities were Archița in Mureș County, Mălâncrav in Sibiu County, and Viscri in Brașov County. The task was to create at least two social economy or individual enterprise structures, one in Archița and one in Mălâncrav; to strengthen the community relations

with the help of a Whole Village Local Action Plan; to increase the sale of locally handcrafted objects produced by Roma members through new channels, such as local markets and online means, by the end of the project.

The project implemented several activities to reach the goals: it used and capitalised on the traditional crafts of the area, especially those of the Roma people. This should have led to the formalization of economic activity; the community development component Whole Village Local Action Plan was implemented where local authorities worked together with the community; training sessions were held for local authority representatives from the three villages; collaborations were established between designers and Roma artisans; a weekly market in the citadel of Sighișoara was organized to ensure the participation of the formalized economic structures.

The implemented activities produced results: two social economic or individual enterprise structures were created in Archita; three strategic action plans were developed to strengthen community relations and common visions; 117 people were consulted and participated in the elaboration of the Whole Village Action Plans; 32 potential beneficiaries from the localities were identified, but only 5 were Roma; 18 sale events were organized, selling 528 items.

The five projects were implemented between 1 March 2012 and 31 March 2019. Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions for Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups in Mureș, Cluj, and Bihor took seven and a half years to finish. While Economic Opportunities for Multiethnic Villages took only 22 months to do so. The variation of time and budget is vast among the projects; however, each project achieved its stated goal. This was confirmed by the evaluation conducted at the end of the thematic fund. The thesis sustainability analysis began in 2023 and was completed in 2024. This ensured that between four and six years elapsed since project termination. Making it ideal for a sustainability analysis. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used to analyse the sustainability of this thematic fund.

#### **4. Similar Projects Review**

We would like to present other projects in Romania dealing with the Roma people and implemented around the same time as the RIF. The SRCP was one of many foreign programs dealing with the challenge. We will present the EEA Grants/ Norway Grants program and see what they have done to improve the situation.

The first EEA Grants/Norway Grants round took place between 2004 and 2009. According to the evaluation, 0% was allocated to Roma people or other vulnerable groups. (Mogen et. al. 2012: 31) The second round took

place between 2009 and 2014. This round had a dedicated Roma support plan. The program covered access to social services, combating discrimination, combating poverty, and improving access to education. The program had 100 projects relevant to Roma people and their needs with a budget of approximately 90 million Euros. (eeagrants, 2009-2014) The third round ran from 2014 to 2021 and covered empowerment through education and employment, advocacy, social participation, the fight against anti-Gypsyism, health care, education, housing, and promotion of Roma culture and arts. (eeagrants, 2022: 20) The allocated budget was approximately 100 million Euros. (eeagrants, 2020)

Another funding source is the EU financial help. The EU funds are distributed among several programs; according to the EU Commission, they are the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. (European Commission, 2025) Additionally, the EU funds other programs in collaboration with the Council of Europe.

There was ROMACT, *Roma Inclusion at Local Level*, working on critical areas such as education, housing, employment, and health (2013-2017 and since 2018 exclusively in Romania and Bulgaria), 134.588.259 Euro generated through 94 projects supported by ROMACT between 2013 and 2023. (ROMACT, 2015)

Another ongoing project is ROMED – Mediation for Roma. This project aims to train mediators to help reduce the gap between Roma communities and public institutions.

It was initiated in 2011 and is supported by 1 million Euro annually. (Council of Europe: 2) JUSTROM is another noteworthy project. First launched in 2016, it was in its third phase until 2021 — the program aimed to improve access to justice for Roma women. (JUSTROM, 2025)

The last program worth mentioning is the Roma Youth Action Plan, initiated in 2011 to support the participation and inclusion of young Roma people in Europe. (Council of Europe, 2025) Unfortunately, not all programs list the allocated budget for the projects. Several mentioned allocating some of the country's funds to civil society activities or minority protection programs.

Researching budget spending within a ministry 10 years ago is not practical. It would have been better if the program website had displayed the amount spent on each program since it was implemented more than ten years ago.

According to the CEU website, as of July 2018, 12 accredited NGOs in Romania were working on Roma issues. (CEU, Center for Policy Studies,

2025) We surveyed three of them for this analysis. Each NGO implements projects funded by other programs, other than the ones mentioned.

For example, "*Acceptă Schimbarea!*" was implemented by the Resource Center for Roma Communities from Cluj-Napoca. The project was about the reduction of discrimination and inequalities of Roma people. It had a budget of 53.570 Euro, funded by the PHARE 2005 program. (Centru de Resurse pentru Comunitatile de Romi, 2022)

Another example is Asociația Pro Roma from the city of Iași. Founded in 2008, they have implemented several projects over the years. One such project is "Fii profesionist în audio-vizual" implemented in 2018. The aim was to help young Roma build competencies in multimedia; the budget was 42.864 Euro. (ProRoma, 2025) Or the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities from Bucharest.

They implemented a project in Ferentari (a neighbourhood in Bucharest) in July 2015 called "*The Alternative Education Club*" to decrease the risk of drug use, improve school results, develop skills and talents, and promote active citizenship; the budget was 96.952 SFr. (Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities, 2015) As we can see, the EEA Grants/Norway Grants allocated approximately 190 million Euro between 2009 and 2021, the SRCP 14 million SFr., and the EU several million Euro between 2007 and 2020.

## **5. Analysis Results**

The fund was evaluated by a specialised agency from Basel, Switzerland, and the final report was published in April 2019. (Meier et. al., 2019) We conducted the surveys and phone calls regarding all five projects. The results were not very encouraging. Although the fund performed well during the implementation phase, in cases, the sustainability was not up to par. Let us take a close look at each project:

### **Together for Empowerment, Zefir**

We surveyed the SIB Terre des hommes Switzerland and its Romanian partner organisation, Terre des hommes Romania. We learned that the Swiss agency delegated the project management and execution entirely to its Romanian partner, Tdh Romania. Tdh had an executing partner, PACT Foundation Romania. This NGO was also part of the survey. We discovered that there was no exchange of expertise between the Swiss and Romanian sides.

The management reported mixed observations, believing that the intervention had a positive impact on the targeted communities. After all, certain social activities like after-school programs, psycho-social

counselling, and the community health centres are continued, and the target population is still benefiting from them. Certain small businesses also continue to generate income. However, no policy change on the national level was achieved. This means the long-term financial insurance is not given. The running support measures are at risk of running out of funding. Some local changes could be amended, but that is not enough for the long run, according to the participants. Another challenge remains the still fairly negative perception of the Roma people among the Romanian population.

This problem could not be solved to a measurable extent. As the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and its report "*Roma in 10 European Countries*" confirms. We will get back to this report later on.

### **Social Inclusion and Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma and Other Vulnerable Groups in Mureş, Cluj, and Bihor**

This project had a Swiss SIB; it was HEKS Switzerland. They used HEKS Romania as the executing agency in Romania. After surveying both organisations, we found out that there was a strong expertise exchange between both organisations and a third one in Switzerland, which was the Pedagogical Institute in Zürich.

The management confirmed a strong collaboration between local authorities, Romanian NGOs, and members of the target population. The local authorities continued to finance certain activities after Swiss funding stopped. HEKS Romania could continue after-school activities, mentoring programs, and teacher training.

Although a policy change on the national level could not be achieved either, the management is convinced that this will happen any time soon. Overall, the management is satisfied with the current situation given the limited financial resources.

### **Improvement of Living Conditions in the Region of Satu Mare and Maramureş**

We had the opportunity to survey Caritas Satu Mare, the Swiss Partner Agency in Romania, and The Resource Centre for Roma Communities Foundation (RCRC) from Cluj-Napoca, acting as an executing partner agency.

Even though this project did not have a designated SIB, Caritas Satu Mare had a vast expertise exchange with Caritas Switzerland. This helped a lot, especially to strengthen the relations between the two countries' organisations. However, some activities had to be stopped after Swiss funding, such as the community health care teams. But Caritas maintains

counselling and advocacy activities as well as kindergarten groups. And social workers still provide basic services. What is needed, though, is stronger cooperation between the NGOs and the local authorities. Another issue is the still missing infrastructure in one of the project communities. The problem here is that authorities consider that specific community illegal. Which means all the inhabitants must be relocated, but there is no proper plan to do so. This project did not yield a policy change on the national level and, according to the involved parties, it is unlikely to happen any time soon.

### **Economic Empowerment Through Social Businesses in Grădinari**

The mayor of the Gradinari community was the driving force behind this project. Unfortunately, he passed a few days before we could survey him. A Romanian NGO, the Social Economy Development Foundation, implemented this project entirely. There was no SIB in Switzerland.

The information was collected through a non-formal telephone survey with the project manager. There was no Swiss involvement in this project, and no Swiss expertise or know-how was exchanged.

We learned that this project was a success story at the beginning. However, today it runs on very limited financial help from the local authorities. One of the main issues identified by the project team was the need for more trust among farmers.

Some were reluctant to associate with others out of fear of being deceived. Another problem for the processing plant was insufficient funds to buy the raw material from the farmers.

So far, the products are only sold regionally. The association could not secure substantial contracts with large retailers operating on a national scale like Lidl or Kaufland.

Even though the results of this fund were promising, the impact has been more local than national. Nevertheless, this type of project had the best measurable output of all five. The processing plant is still a part of the Gradinari community, although it is only running after the harvest season. The functioning of this plant can be observed during that time. This makes measurement immensely easier than trying to find out if specific information or an educational campaign improved the living conditions of a participant.

### **Economic Opportunities for Multiethnic Villages**

The SIB for this project was not Swiss, but a Romanian NGO called Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET). They were also the executing agency. We

contacted the organisation and sent them two questionnaires to learn about the project's sustainability. We discovered they had no contact with any Swiss institution or organisation during or after project implementation. There was no exchange of expertise or know-how. MET did the entire project alone; therefore, they do not believe that the project contributed to any significant improvement in relations between Swiss and Romanian institutions or organisations.

Although MET was pleased with the project, they pointed out that Roma integration requires further funding and intervention in the long term. Since the project's conclusion in 2017, community members have continued to receive training even seven years later. Since then, 11 training courses have been implemented for Roma people and all community members, including other communities from the area. This was remarkable.

However, the formalisation of more artisans was slowed down almost to a standstill. The reason was the massive bureaucratic effort required to formalise their businesses. Nevertheless, Roma artisans in the three villages have continued their activities since the project's conclusion.

The situation of the Roma in the three project communities has improved, but not as much as hoped. Some craftsmen still leave the country to work abroad on a seasonal basis, often in precarious conditions, such as crop picking in Germany, France, or Spain.

Although the MET was satisfied with the project implementation, it reiterated that more was needed to improve the situation in the long term. More funding is needed to continue with other projects that involve similar activities.

The Roma Inclusion Fund did not receive a satisfying sustainability assessment. Although the five projects were successful during implementation and several of the project activities are still running, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and its report "*Roma in 10 European Countries*", published in 2022, painted a sobering picture of the situation in Romania in 2021. (FRA, 2021) The report points out positive developments, especially regarding hate-motivated harassment, which improved between 2016 and 2021 and violence against Roma people; unfortunately, there have been no genuine improvements in tackling discrimination. (FRA, 2021: 13)

The issue we observed was the limited reach of the RIF. The improvements were mostly on the local level, barely visible on the broad national level. Policy change did not occur, and new laws were not passed to help with the financial coverage.

According to the survey results, between 2016 and 2021, education and health deteriorated. Housing problems remained persistent, like poverty and social exclusion issues. Employment deteriorated the most; this category had four measurable items; none of them improved or remained unchanged; they all deteriorated! However, the measurement of long-term success turned out to be difficult. The SRCP was not the only source of financial aid to Romania during the project implementation phase. For us, it would have been almost impossible to measure the effect the RIF had on behavioural change among the target population as well as among the general population.

This was a main issue with the whole thematic fund; we couldn't assert that any measured effect was caused by the RIF alone, or were there contributing factors from outside.

Besides all the rather negative remarks on sustainability, we must mention the project in the Gradinari community. It was about a fruit and vegetable processing and cooling plant built for the local farmers.

This project left a tangible output in that community, and compared to the rather less manifest outputs of the other four projects, it benefited from the long-term appreciation by the local people. It covered a long-sought-after need in that community.

The same is valid for the community health centres with basic health coverage and support. They could be used at the moment of inauguration, and they also covered an urgent need. Unfortunately, most of the centres were closed after the program stopped. In those cases, the follow-up financing was not elaborated by the community, and the structure was abandoned.

We will catch up on these observations and remarks in our final chapter, Conclusion. Before that, we would like to discuss the recommendations we made on this fund.

## **6. Recommendations**

Our recommendations are not targeting the individual project; this would not have been feasible. The recommendations focus on the overall thematic fund. We combine our recommendations with the ones voiced by the evaluation agency. They recommended improvements in light of a possible second Swiss contribution to Romania. And as we know, the second contribution is already coming.

We based our recommendations on the FRA report and the surveys conducted with the SIBs and EAs. The Roma Inclusion Fund results are too few and too slow. The thematic fund was successful on a local level but needed to contribute more at the national level.

The best example of this is the lack of a policy change emerging from one of the projects. Without a law helping to fund and implement the needed measures, the target community must rely on donations, NGOs, and local authorities. That is not a safe, long-term environment for such necessities.

The FRA Roma Report 2021 outlines the most significant issues the Roma community still faces despite various support measures and programs. Discrimination needs to improve; the report shows a one per cent improvement between 2016 and 2021. The risk of poverty is still high among Roma people compared to the local population. Children aged 0-17 are the most vulnerable among the Roma population. There is still a need to reduce under-reporting, which shows a massive lack of trust in law enforcement agencies. This is connected to a low level of trust in the legal system in general.

More emphasis needs to be placed on education; there has been no improvement in kindergarten enrollment, high school drop-outs, segregation, and overall discrimination. The employment situation has not improved either; the gender gap is too wide, and there is still discrimination when looking for a job.

Health is another important field that needs more attention; life expectancy is lower than that of the local population, and discrimination in access to health services remains high. To address these issues, the new contribution program must include a component tailored explicitly for Roma people. Our recommendations are:

- There should also be a greater focus on **raising awareness** among the local population. The problems will only be solved with the help of every citizen

- **Campaigns** need to be intensified, especially at the political level. Minority rights need to be strengthened more at the national level. This measure will benefit not only the Roma population but also other minorities living in Romania, such as Hungarians, Germans, or Slovaks.

- The **education** system needs better monitoring. Roma children must not be subject to discrimination or segregation. Roma children must attend kindergarten and school, not roam the streets and beg for money or do illegal work.

- **Infrastructure issues** must be remedied. Access to clean drinking water must be a right, not a privilege. Designated Roma settlements must be provided with the same quality of infrastructure as their Romanian counterparts.

**Health issues** among the Roma population need to be addressed. Access to health services must be guaranteed, and discrimination based on ethnicity must be eliminated.

NGOs play a crucial role in this domain; they have the knowledge and experience to deal with the problems mentioned. They are also connected with other NGOs and maintain a network of organisations at national and international levels. Contacts with local and regional authorities are important and need to be strengthened. With the help of the NGOs, it is possible to apply best practices on a large scale throughout the country, not just locally. Romania and Switzerland must continue the cooperation in this domain; the following SCRP must include an element dealing with the Inclusion of the Roma people.

We looked at the project in the Grădinari community in Olt County. This single project was not included in the agencies' evaluation because it had not been completed at the time of their review. This project was successful and looked very promising. It still works, but only after the harvest season. People are benefiting from it. Unfortunately, the town hall was not able to provide us with statistical data to see how the program performed during its implementation and after the Swiss funding ended. However, we have two recommendations based on this project:

- This type of project should be repeated in other regions of agricultural significance. It showed that the people appreciated the project and used it to the full extent of its possibilities.
- Statistical data must be tracked to measure performance, compare, and predict future efficiency. This must be mandatory for such projects, especially those funded from abroad.

## **7. Conclusion**

During the analysis phase of this thematic fund, we had to accept the fact that it would not be possible to get an integral picture of the true results of this intervention. Measuring the impact and especially a long-term change, whether behavioural or attitudinal, is a true challenge. The target group was made up of around 40.000 people of different ages and genders, spread out in 11 counties.

To conduct a sustainability analysis on a program with this large number of participants, the analysis must be prepared in advance, during project implementation. Each participant must agree to a follow-up survey at a specified point in the future, and the development until then, related to the project activity, must be tracked and documented. The tangible outputs, as we could see in one of the projects, had the highest success rate from a sustainability point of view. This leads us to the question: Are more projects with manifest outcomes preferable?

If the government wants to further integrate the Roma people into society and build lasting relationships based on trust, more interventions must be planned for the future.

We argue that a project with tangible outputs generates more trust among the target population. So far, there are thousands of Roma people still living without basic infrastructure coverage like clean running water, electricity, and a functioning sewer system in their community. These are administrative responsibilities, and as long as the affected population is not taken into serious consideration, they will continue to lose trust in that administration. People in dire need of basic services and health care are less likely to be interested in civic rights and advocacy workshops. To avoid misunderstandings, we do not want to stop advocacy or awareness projects; the argument is that there must be more projects with instant, tangible outputs, together with the advocacy and awareness projects.

The material deprivation is only one part of the problem; discrimination and harassment are the other. While several awareness campaigns have been conducted and information events held, the basic needs coverage is still not enough. In such an environment, it is not hard to believe that the target population is not evolving as desired, and trust in the government is fading. This is the point where administrations and authorities must act, starting with providing services and infrastructure for basic needs. Once the needed services are provided and a basic infrastructure established, the government will regain trust.

Once the Roma people in Romania live under acceptable conditions, civic rights and duties projects will have a higher acceptance among the Roma people, and the sustainability rating of such projects will be much higher.

Another important aspect is the lack of a dedicated Swiss Intermediate Body (SIB). It would be the task of the SIB to develop a concept on how to obtain the thematic fund's set goals. It would then gather the necessary resources and implement the projects. The SIB would also be able to set up the framework for a thorough sustainability analysis in the future.

## **Bibliography**

An online news portal mentioned the problems in the Grădinari community. [www.gds.ro/Local/2015-09-11/gradinari-comuna-cu-legumicultori-gospodari/](http://www.gds.ro/Local/2015-09-11/gradinari-comuna-cu-legumicultori-gospodari/) It was praised as a model solution for similar situations. Accessed December 2025.

*Annex 2: Rules and Procedures for the overall Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme* p. 6-7

[www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der\\_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex2-Rumaenien\\_en.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex2-Rumaenien_en.pdf), Accessed December 2025.

Annex 4: Rules and Procedures for Thematic Funds p. 3  
[www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der\\_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex4-Rumaenien\\_en.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex4-Rumaenien_en.pdf), Accessed December 2025.

Central European University, Center for Policy Studies, *Roma Civil Monitor - List of NGOs involved*. country Romania. [www.cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-ngos-involved](http://www.cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-ngos-involved), Accessed December 2025.

Document called *Der Schweizer Erweiterungsbeitrag. Bilanz zum Abschluss der Länderprogramme in den EU-12 Staaten*. Published by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Bern, 2020, p. 4  
[www.europa.eda.admin.ch/bilanz-abschluss-laenderprogramme-eu-12-Staaten\\_DE.pdf](http://www.europa.eda.admin.ch/bilanz-abschluss-laenderprogramme-eu-12-Staaten_DE.pdf), Accessed December 2025.

EEA and Norway Grants 2009-2014 Final Strategic Report Romania. Attachment - Report on the objective regarding the improvement of the situation of the Roma people, p. 1. Report is available on the eea grants website, [www.eeagrants.ro/final-strategic-report-2009-2014.pdf](http://www.eeagrants.ro/final-strategic-report-2009-2014.pdf), Accessed December 2025.

European Commission website, *EU funding for Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Funding programmes.  
[www.commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/justice-and-fundamental-rights/eu-funding-roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation\\_en](http://www.commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/justice-and-fundamental-rights/eu-funding-roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation_en), Accessed December 2025.

Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzlei). This page hosts all popular decisions in Switzerland. Among them, the one from 2006.  
[www.bk.admin.ch/volksabstimmungen/volksabstimmung-20061126.html](http://www.bk.admin.ch/volksabstimmungen/volksabstimmung-20061126.html), Accessed December 2025.

FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Roma Survey 2021*, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023  
[www.fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/roma-survey-2021-technical-report](http://www.fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/roma-survey-2021-technical-report), Accessed December 2025.

Homepage of Roma Center in Cluj-Napoca. Project page with information about the project. [www.romacenter.ro/proiecte-finalizate/accepta-schimbarea/](http://www.romacenter.ro/proiecte-finalizate/accepta-schimbarea/), Accessed December 2025.

Homepage of the Asociația Pro Roma. The projects are listed in the section *Despre noi* (about us)  
[www.asociatiaproroma.ro/site/index.php/despre/scurtistoric](http://www.asociatiaproroma.ro/site/index.php/despre/scurtistoric), Accessed December 2025.

Homepage of The Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, projects are found in the section Our Stories, projects. *July 2015 - The Alternative Education Club*. [www.policycenter.eu/en/july-2015-the-alternative-education-club/](http://www.policycenter.eu/en/july-2015-the-alternative-education-club/). Accessed December 2025.

- Joint Programme, Roma Women`s Access to Justice, About JUSTROM1-3. [www.coe.int/en/web/access-to-justice-for-roma-women/about-justrom3](http://www.coe.int/en/web/access-to-justice-for-roma-women/about-justrom3), Accessed December 2025.
- Mertens, Donna M., Amy T. Wilson (2019), *Evaluation Theory and Practice, A Comprehensive Guide* (2. ed.), The Guilford Press, New York, NY.
- Mogen, Mari Brekke, Mike Ferguson, Zozan Kaya, Tore Laugerund (2012), *End Review - EEA and Norway Grants 2004-2009, Final Report 2012*. Evaluation obtained from the website: [www.eeagrants.org](http://www.eeagrants.org), Accessed December 2025
- Norway Grants Results Reporting Guide. Categories and codes for EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021 data, November 2022, p. 20. <https://eeagrants.org>, Accessed December 2025.
- Official website of the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research. *Swiss contribution to the enlarged EU: Signing of a memorandum of understanding*.
- Portal Legislativ is a website of the Romanian Ministry of Justice. It contains a list of legislative changes and existing laws. The decision can be found here [www.legislatie.just.ro/Public](http://www.legislatie.just.ro/Public), Accessed December 2025.
- Roma Youth Participation website, About the project, document *Roma Youth Action Plan*, p. 2, [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int), Accessed December 2025.
- ROMACT infographics, website with information and data about the project, funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. [www.coe-romact.org/sites/default/files/Edited\\_infographics\\_compressed\\_0.pdf](http://www.coe-romact.org/sites/default/files/Edited_infographics_compressed_0.pdf), Accessed December 2025.
- Swiss Confederation. ARAMIS information system contains information regarding research projects and assessments run or funded by the Federal Administration. Meier, Harald, Michael Morlok of B,S,S. Economic Consultants, with contributions from: Claudiu Ivan, Enrichetta Placella, Laurent Ruedin, Enikö Vincze *Evaluation of the Swiss Contribution to the inclusion of Roma and other vulnerable groups. "Reform Fund linked to the Roma Inclusion and other Vulnerable Groups" Final Report Romania* April 2019 [www.aramis.admin.ch](http://www.aramis.admin.ch), Accessed December 2025.
- The allocated funds are an approximation calculated with the help of two documents, one is the EEA Factsheet Roma Inclusion and Empowerment, [www.eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/EEA\\_Factsheet\\_roma\\_7.pdf](http://www.eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/EEA_Factsheet_roma_7.pdf). Accessed January 2026, and the EEA Grants country profile website [www.eeagrants.org/countries/romania](http://www.eeagrants.org/countries/romania), Accessed December 2025.
- The channel is called Online Television (VGTV) Olt County. It is a private channel hosted by the news outlet VGtv Regional. They provide news

from the Olt region. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNwLK4B4UM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSNwLK4B4UM), Accessed December 2025.

The community administration of Grădinari posted the press release for the public. It was a round-table event to promote the project. They mentioned the main stakeholders and program organizers and also what the project is about. [www.primariagradinari-olt.ro/comunicat-de-presa/](http://www.primariagradinari-olt.ro/comunicat-de-presa/), Accessed December 2025.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is the publisher of all official documents relating to the SRCP. The memorandum, together with the five annexes, can be found there. [www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der\\_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Rahme\\_nabkommen-Rumaenien\\_en.pdf](http://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Rahme_nabkommen-Rumaenien_en.pdf), Accessed December 2025.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is the publisher of all official documents relating to the SRCP. The annexes one to five to the MoU can be found here, too. *Annex 1: Conceptual Framework of the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme p. 1*, [https://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der\\_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex1-Rumaenien\\_en.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/Der_Erweiterungsbeitrag/Laender/Annex1-Rumaenien_en.pdf), Accessed December 2025.

Website of the Council of Europe, direct link to the pdf document, p. 2, [www.coe.int/16802ed00f](http://www.coe.int/16802ed00f), Accessed December 2025.

Website of the Federal Council, section Swiss contribution to select EU member states, title: *Countries of the enlargement contribution*. [www.europa.eda.admin.ch/en/countries-of-the-enlargement-contribution](http://www.europa.eda.admin.ch/en/countries-of-the-enlargement-contribution), Accessed December 2025.

Website of the Swiss State Department. All the RIF projects are listed there. [www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/the-swiss-contribution/rumaenien/projekte](http://www.eda.admin.ch/schweizerbeitrag/the-swiss-contribution/rumaenien/projekte), Accessed December 2025.

[www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases](http://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases), Accessed December 2025