

The European Year for Development in Romania

2015 is the **European Year for Development** marking the EU's commitment in accelerating the progress towards the MDGs and stepping up its efforts between now and the SDGs target date of 2030. It was for the first time in its history when a European year was focusing on what is happening beyond EU's borders. Through 12 thematic months, the EC, namely DG DEVCO and other EU institutions tried to raise awareness on the global engagement of the EU with its neighboring countries and international partners.

A special survey dedicated to the #EYD has been carried out at the end of 2014 in all the 28 Member States of the European Union. At a European level, 85% of the citizens consider that helping people in developing countries is extremely important and should be a priority for the EU (64%).

However, more than half of the Europeans (55%) do not know where the EU aid for development goes and lack knowledge on the way the EU operates in partner countries where development work is conducted.

Having a look at the way Romanians answered, we discovered that 55% of the population does not know where the Romanian ODA goes; nevertheless, almost the same percent of respondents (54%) consider that tackling poverty in developing countries should be a priority for the national government. About 70% agree that tackling poverty in developing countries is a moral duty of the European Union.

In this context of confusion and morality, the European Year for Development should have brought some clarity and raised awareness about the EU development cooperation and foster a sense of shared-responsibility and global commitment.

In order to find out more about the #EYD2015 activities, challenges and priorities in Romania, we interviewed **Ms Olga Anghel, Romanian ODA Project Assistant at UNDP**.

Alexandra: According to the abovementioned survey, there is a gap between acknowledging the moral idea of helping "the other" and understanding national and European priorities in terms of development cooperation. Olga, how would you evaluate Romanians' knowledge and understanding of the idea behind the European Year for Development?

Olga: In Romania, as well as in other European countries, the knowledge and understanding of the idea behind EYD2015 highly depends of the way international development cooperation topics are presented. Prior to developing the national work plan for the EYD2015, UNDP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania had various consultations not only with actors actively involved in international development and cooperation but also with "new comers" to development scene in order to better assess how international development topics be communicate in order to reach beyond the "usual suspects". Following these discussions, it resulted that EYD2015 should be communicated in Romania using human stories for people to make sense of national and EU policies on development cooperation, the MDGs or the newly adopted SDGs. Romania is no exception to the way development cooperation is perceived by the general public in Europe as the above mentioned survey reveals. As we are rapidly approaching the end of EYD2015, a European year which had as backbone communicating on international development and cooperation topics with a human twist, I believe that some light was shed between the moral aspect of helping "the others" and national and European priorities in terms of development cooperation. Therefore, the good aspects of EYD2015 and the best practices implemented under its umbrella should be incorporate into further communications efforts when it comes to international development and cooperation in order to continue improving the knowledge of European citizens on the aid awarded by the European Union and its member states to developing countries.

Alexandra: How was the European Year for Development celebrated in Romania? (i.e.

activities, actions, discussions, etc.)

Olga: The national work plan for EYD2015 in Romania comprised **five work packages** divided by the type of activities and events planned.

The first work package comprised a social media campaign with three International Solidarity Ambassadors designated to present and explain to their targeted audiences international development and cooperation topics. The specific objective of the Ambassadors for Development campaign is to encourage public figures to initiate, undertake or support activities and special events dedicated to EYD2015 with aim of raising public awareness about and galvanize support around development and international cooperation efforts.

The second work package comprises **co-organizing side-events mainly during cultural events chosen** especially because of their unique power to attract, mobilise and inspire large audiences. International development-focused **side events** such as exhibitions, debates, talks, were organized during film festivals, concerts and sports activities. Also, **an art exhibition was planned part of this work package**. Romanian young artists were involved in promoting EYD2015 by creating illustrations and drawings portraying international development messages, MDGs / SDGs, etc. Their art pieces were further displayed in an art exhibition.

As part of the third work package, a collection of Romanian official development assistance **Success Stories blogs** will be created and posted/disseminated on line to inform/increase awareness of Romania's development cooperation results so far. Also, **special prize for international development projects** was awarded within the Romanian Civil Society Gala.

A number of flagship events are currently under implementation as part of the fourth work package. A series of **career orientation talks** will be organized in Romanian universities, featuring a variety of international development practitioners from civil society, international organizations, private sector and volunteerism who will share success stories and professional challenges on the ground. The events are dedicated to students interested in learning more about international development and career opportunities in the field. Also, EYD2015 **opening and closing conferences** were developed under this work package in order to gather the major development stakeholders (academia, policy decision makers, media, civil society and the large public) to inform them about Romania's and EU's development cooperation policies and programs, to raise awareness on the benefits it brings to the Romanian and European citizens and to stimulate engagement in the global development debate and actions. A **public opinion survey** to test the level of Romanian citizens' awareness and information with regard to the EU and Romania's development cooperation policies is currently being conducted at the national level. The survey follows the opinion poll conducted by the MFA in 2009 and will aim at recording and analysing the trends in Romanians' awareness and information levels on these topics.

The fifth work package comprises a **call for project proposals** launched targeting Romanian NGO, students' associations and other youth organizations, media groups, schools and universities. Currently, 7 organizations are implementing communications projects on EYD2015 as a result of the call for proposals.

Alexandra: **The EYD should have been a major opportunity for NGOs to engage in a dialogue with citizens about global priorities, social justice and new development challenges. How would you assess the engagement of Romanian NGOs in taking part and initiating activities related to the EYD?**

Olga: NGOs played a key role in making EYD2015 a success in Romania, from the feedback given before the submission of the national work plan to the European Commission and the continuous assistance offered through the implementation of the EYD2015 activities to their vital role in the continuation of this year's "legacy". Over 80% of the activities implemented as part of EYD2015 in Romania were implemented in partnership with local NGOs. We were very happy to create new synergies throughout this year with various NGOs, from youth to cultural organizations and their support was essential when it came to communicating development in innovative ways to students, young professionals, or artists for example. Apart from partnerships, civil society organizations the

opportunity to put their EYD2015 ideas into practice via a call for proposal especially dedicated to NGOs, academia and media associations. The projects selected brought creativity and diversity to international development communication, hence reaching multiple audiences across the entire country. Just to name a few key elements to the projects implemented by NGOs, academia and media associations: the development of a board game on migration and climate change to be played in schools, a graffiti on world solidarity, bursaries allocated to journalists to investigate the current hot topics on the international development agenda, articles on development published on key media platforms in Romania, trainings on SDGs in various cities in the country and peer to peer challenges addressed to teenagers, a photography exhibition at the metro. The number and diversity of these initiatives shows the high level of engagement of NGOs in implementing EYD2015 in Romania, a contribution that should be continued beyond this year.

Alexandra: Could you give us some examples of initiatives and projects designed under the EYD concept in Romania?

Olga: EYD2015 offered the incentive to change not only what was being communicated in terms of



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of the EU exhibition, Eurosfat 2015

international development but also how the information was disseminated. As development language switched to storytelling, showcasing development results switched to hashtags, Facebook posts, twitter feeds and Instagram photos. In Romania, this European trend of reaching targets beyond the “usual suspects” by using social media was also adopted. One of the initiatives development under EYD2015 that aimed at bringing development topics closer to non-development practitioners was the designation of three International Solidarity Ambassadors- Andreea Raicu, Connect-R and Horațiu Țicău. Throughout the year, the three Ambassadors communicated to their audiences causes related to international development vis blog posts, events and projects targeting young people or through televised interventions. Over 14 side-events have been implemented during various festivals, conferences or related happenings targeting audiences seldom exposed to international development. For example, at the beginning of the year, international development topics, especially Africa and Ukraine related, were debated during One World Romania. Also, during World Press Photo Exhibition in Bucharest, people could express their support for the LGBT community by tying a ribbon at the “Be free of your prejudices” installation placed in the University Square. During EYD2015, “World’s Best News” newspaper -a collection of positive news on international development- was distributed in Romania as well as in other 19 European countries. Over 9.000



copies of the newspaper were disseminated by young volunteers during the Bucharest Days celebration in September. Youth was a peculiar targeted audience for the EYD2015 initiatives as the hopes for a better world often are placed on the shoulders of the young generation. At the Romanian Youth Council, international development practitioners discussed along with students coming from across the country about what does it mean to work towards ending extreme poverty. Art was also used in order to

increase the level of awareness amongst young people. During Bucharest Galleries Weekend, „The artist’s guide on making the world a better place” exhibition was organized. The exhibition displays 10 young Romanian artists’ visions on global issues such as: the rights of women and girls, peace and security, humanitarian aid, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, gender equality and world solidarity. As it is never too early to learn about solidarity with other nations, during ONG fest, children could learn more about Africa by drawing or participating in a quizz, or „treasure hunting” the MDGs in the Herăstrău Park. Last but not least, 7 successful projects which were previously mentioned resulted from the call for proposals targeting NGOs, academia and media associations launched in April as part of EYD2015.

Alexandra: According to the abovementioned survey, there is also a gap between the perceived moral duty to help others and citizens’ availability to take action, with Romania having the 2nd lowest rate of citizen involvement (6%) in international development. In terms of communicating EYD to the Romanian public, how did you take this challenge into account? Do you think EYD will have improved on citizens’ engagement?

Olga: Taking into account the fact that EYD2015 spans throughout a year only, a series of events showcasing possibilities of engaging in international development activities were planned especially targeting young people in order to address the challenge posed by the low level of Romanian citizens’ involvement in international development. For example, a series of “career orientation talks” entitled “Leave your mark” was planned to take place in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara and Bucharest. “Leave your mark” is a series of lectures addressed to students who are interested in learning more about international development and the career opportunities in this field. The event brings together development practitioners working in Romania and abroad who would share their success stories and professional challenges on the ground. The guest speakers usually have various international development backgrounds, coming from public institutions, civil society, private sector and/or volunteerism. The aim of the talks is to inform students about what it means choosing a career in international development and how to become a volunteer or a development practitioner.

It is difficult to assess a long term impact such as improving the level of engagement of citizens in international development related activities as EYD2015 spans over a year only. Within the EYD2015 framework, at least two first very important steps towards reaching further goals have been improved, the level of understanding on what does international development mean and what are the possibilities for actively engaging in eradicating poverty.

Alexandra: Now when 2015 is about to end, what is the legacy of the European Year for Development in Europe and in Romania?

Olga: EYD2015 brought international development and cooperation topics towards the attention of the general public in Romania as well as at European level. It was an opportunity to discuss what are the key themes that we need to debate at the moment or to look further to, it was a way of looking back on what we achieved and where we still need to work. At European level, EYD2015 will remain the first year when the European Union communicated at a large scale on its external actions and the umbrella, the common goal, to create synergies and partnerships amongst diverse parties interested in international development. EYD2015 brought at European level the opportunity to implement common communications activities on international development topics amongst member

states such as the "Worlds Best News" initiative, taking place in multiple EU countries. In Romania, EYD2015 was one of the first substantive efforts to communicate on international development topics especially for the general Romanian public. Under EYD2015 in Romania, a number of initiatives were piloted that are worth continuing beyond the end of this year and a number of good practices to be taken into account when communicating on international development further. Amongst these, I would like to mention three. Firstly, whenever communicating international development topics to audiences that are not familiar with the development language it must always be kept in mind the fact that international development is about people, it is about human stories. Secondly, communicating on international development should not be a "one man show",. Partnerships are essential in order to reach different audiences and to enhance the creativity of the developed initiatives. Throughout EYD2015, new partners joined the international development discussions and this brought a fresh perspective to the way events and projects were developed, implemented and communicated. Thirdly, actively engaging young people in initiatives undertaken under EYD2015 brought a fresh perspective to the actions implemented.

EYD2015 offered the space to implement "out of the box" communications initiatives, to bring new actors to the international development table, to reach out beyond the „usual suspects" audiences and it is essential to continue the partnerships development and the constant dialogue between interested parties for the EYD2015 legacy to live beyond December 2015.

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