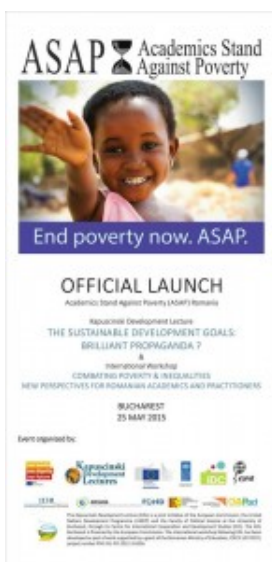


Academics Stand Against Poverty launches its first Eastern European Chapter in Romania

In a world where the inequality gap is extremely disproportionate, where [67 individuals own a fortune equivalent with 3.5 billion](#) (half the planet's population) poorest people, where famine and poverty related diseases are killing more than 18 million people a year and where the global institutions, through policies, have the capacity and the moral obligation to eradicate poverty worldwide and offer universal respect for human rights, a group of prominent academics have united to find the policies that can adjust to solving the current problems.



Official
launch of ASAP
Romania, May
25th, 2015

Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) is a global

organization focused on utilizing scholarship to influence policy and public attitudes to poverty. More than 150 academics, experts and researchers worldwide, are constantly working on a global institutional formula that can rapidly and through clear measures is designed to end world poverty. Because the status quo of the world institutions consists in policies that are rather pursuing the interests of the most affluent, the ASAP members are doing rigorous research to tackle the causes and give recommendations suitable for a just global society.

So far, many academics were debating essential global issues within conferences and in niche articles, with no actual success in reaching the ears of the policy makers, the civil society, or the general public, even though their research and possible solutions were very well thought. As a consequence, the global discourse on poverty was only sold to the public by the global institutions which were responsible to end poverty. Thus, the data on progress offered to the public by the UN or the World Bank was not really put under the question mark.

ASAP has been developed as an international platform that facilitates contact between North-South poverty focused academics and that helps academics pursue applied research and intervention projects, as well as campaigns on specific issues. In the five years of existence, it has extended in over 18 chapters in different corners of the world. ASAP Romania is one of the newest, representing the first Eastern-European chapter.

The launch of [ASAP Romania](#) took place on May 25th, 2015 at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute in Bucharest, with the financial and logistical support of the [Centre for International Cooperation and Development Studies](#) (IDC) of the [Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest](#). The event gathered over 100 academics, government officials, NGO representatives, development workers, students and other civil society actors to discuss current and urgent issues of international

development, with a focus on systemic poverty.

The ASAP Romania launch was marked by the [Kapuscinski Development Lecture](#) held by [Thomas Pogge](#), Leitner Professor of International Affairs at Yale University and President of *Academics Stand Against Poverty*, 'Development Goals – Brilliant Propaganda?' during which he emphasized the flaws within the Millennium Development Goals and how we should address them in the post-2015 development agenda.



Thomas Pogge speaking at the Kapuscinsky Development Lectures, May 25th, 2015

According to **Professor Pogge**, the main issue is that the development goals are merely a 'wishlist' that doesn't specify who is accountable for what, while too much effort is invested in trying to make us more successful than we really are in implementing the development goals.

With this occasion, Thomas Pogge has recommended to the responsible experts **three immediate actions necessary to improve the SDGs framework**:

- 1. We should sharpen and specify the responsibilities of capable agents. Who are the agents that are undertaking this effort together and what is the division of labor among them? Who is supposed to do what?*
- 2. We need a clearer outside independent measurement of success. So we need to have independent agents and*

agencies that monitor progress in particular dimensions and report independently to the world as to how we are doing.

- 3. We need to pay more attention to the systemic factors. Why is it that poverty persists? Why is it that inequality is rising in most countries? We have to change these mechanisms in order to stop increasing inequalities at the source, rather than counteracting them through development assistance.*

The second session of the launching event was the workshop called **Combating Poverty and Inequalities: New Perspectives for Romanian Academics & Practitioners** where Romanian and international experts have presented their theoretical and empirical work on issues of poverty. Speakers such as Ciprian Necula (Ministry of European Funds), Leslie Hawke (OvidiuRO), Cătălin Berescu, Grațian Mihăilescu, Dani Sandu, Doina Doroftei (MFA Romania) or Alexandru Ciorobea ([Together for Development](#)) have discussed issues of child poverty, youth poverty, living conditions in extreme poverty in Romania and Europe and its link to racial segregation, the problem of communities of Roma that have no identity cards or other official papers, therefore considered invisible and showed examples of successful actions that managed to ameliorate or even eradicate the extreme poverty in several communities. The discussions raised a high interest on behalf of the participants, who took the chance to ask insightful questions regarding the methodologies used in studies or the ground-experiences of the speakers.



Alexandru Ciorobea, Doina Doroftei, Andrei Poama, Leslie Hawke, Gratian Mihailescu, Ciprian Necula @ Romanian Diplomatic Institute

Besides putting an urgent global debate on the table of the Romanian experts and academics, the innovative aspect of the launch of ASAP Romania consists in giving those who work on poverty-related issues the opportunity to increase their impact through ASAP's international network which encourages them to collaborate with other academics, enables them to effectively outreach to policy-makers and broader public audiences and helps them to pursue applied research and intervention projects.

The event was also an online success online. The lecture of Professor Thomas Pogge had a rating equivalent to that of a prime time news journal in Romania, one of the European countries with the highest number of TV viewers. In total, the Kapuscinski lecture reached more than 200.000 people from over 60 countries.

Needless to say, the whole event was an opportunity to get engaged with global debates, issues and solutions, meet new people, create new partnerships, but also to reconnect with fellow colleagues in a pleasant and constructive atmosphere.

In order to find out more about **Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) & ASAP Romania** and their activities, visit:

www.academicsstand.org

www.facebook.com/AcademicsStandAgainstPoverty

www.facebook.com/ASAPRomania

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 asses 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 forth 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 years' "legacy". Over 80% of the activities implemented as part of EYD2015 in Romanian 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



At the border 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 via 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 activist'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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Ms Olguta Anghel is the Romanian ODA Project Assistant communicating on the [European Year for Development 2015](#) at the [United Nations Development Programme – Istanbul Regional Hub](#). Previously, she worked in Tiraspol, Chisinau and Sarajevo on conflict resolution and communications projects in the academic and non-governmental sectors. She holds a Master's Degree in Peace in Conflict Studies from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and International Law. In addition to this, she has a keen interest in the way Social Media can be used to inspire, empower and unite communities in order to bring positive changes in the world we live in.

On the road to COP21

The 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([COP21](#)) comes in a context of increased consciousness on the fact that several planetary boundaries actually limit our growth pattern. Some go on to call it the 'last chance' Agreement, and ask for another development model to be adopted, one that is more protective to our planet. There is a strong concern and consensus that these limits were already overcome when it comes to biodiversity loss and the cycle of nitrogen in the atmosphere, while others such as climate change may quickly grow in the coming years^[1]. Moreover, 2015 is also the year when humanity prepares for a new set of more general development goals to be adopted, much of which pointing towards environmental protection and the fight against climate change.

More than 1.5 planets are used everyday in order to provide the resources we use and to absorb the waste that we produce. This means that it now takes the Earth one year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year.



If current population and consumption trends continue, **by 2030 we will need the equivalent of two Earths to support us.**

In our current society, resources are turned into waste way

faster than waste can be turned back into resources. This creates a global ecological instability that affects the quality and the quantity of those assets on which human life and biodiversity depend for their survival.

The result is diminishing forest cover, reduced soil fertility, intensive agricultural practices, collapsing fisheries, depletion of fresh water systems, and the build-up of carbon dioxide emissions, which creates problems such as global climate change. These are just a few of the most noticeable effects of the ecological instability that we create.

Additionally, this disequilibrium also contributes to resource conflicts and wars, mass migrations, famine, disease and other human tragedies, which tend to have a disproportionate impact on the poor, who cannot buy their way out of the problem by getting resources from somewhere else.

Our (sustainable) life on this planet is influenced by the assumption of these ecological limits central to our decision-making processes. That is what the successive Conferences of the Parties (COPs) are all about. Or at least what they try to achieve.

From the first UN Climate Change Conference held in 1995 in Berlin, to this year's Conference in Paris, this annual meeting reunites all parties to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in order to assess progress in dealing with climate change, and try to establish legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The last COP was held last year in Lima, Peru. The main outcome of the Conference at that time was a consensus on the way countries would state their contributions to the Paris 2015 Agreement, as well as on the

role adaptation plays in the fight against climate change.



There is a high pressure on the 21st COP to deliver concrete and effective solutions for fighting **climate change**. More than the political and legal pressure, there is an urgency to take immediate action in order to avoid ending up with a planet that is not liveable anymore. For some, the damage accumulated during all these years is so important, that even a complete, full stop of our activities would not prevent world temperatures to continue rising over the next couple of years. But a significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is essential to avoid the worst scenario, and selfish behaviours are not part of the solution.

The EU clearly stated its priority for the 2015 meeting in Paris: the adoption of a legally binding agreement that is ambitious as possible, and that allows us to keep track to deliver the objective of keeping the temperatures rise below **2°C**. Together with the United States and China, the EU committed to a major greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

Parties to the Convention were invited to come forward with their **intended nationally determined contributions** to the Agreement (INDCs) early 2015, well before the Paris conference. These INDCs represent what countries are ready to do to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The Agreement itself would validate and reiterate these commitments. The success of the Agreement would therefore depend on (1) the number of Parties and in particular of major emitters that come forward with such commitments, (2) the strength of the

rules designed to enforce those commitments, the progression in ambition from the pledges made under previous agreements, and (3) the flexibility and commitment of the Parties to further, and periodically review and strengthen their greenhouse gas reduction commitments over time, as scientific claims, economic and technologic development ask for stronger action.

In practice, one can notice **two types of climate change policies**: some which are dealing with **climate change adaptation** (i.e. reducing the intensity of and vulnerability to climate change impacts), while others are dealing with **climate change mitigation** (i.e. reducing the magnitude or the intensity of climate change). Adaptation becomes rather a local responsibility, while mitigation is a more global responsible thing to do. Although these two policies complement each other, financial, human, technical resources, as well as the intensity and urgency of dealing with climate change made these policies follow the global division North-South. While richer countries in the North focus on climate change mitigation, poorer (and usually the most affected) countries in the South focus on climate change adaptation. As it was initially designed, the Paris Agreement would focus only on climate change mitigation efforts. This ignores however the needs and priorities of those that suffer the most from climate change.

Two serious threats could hinder the adoption of an international binding and effective agreement: **(1) international solidarity in the fight against climate change, and (2) transparency and accountability.**

Achieving the 2°C climate change objective is not about autarchic measures. International solidarity should contribute towards a



strong agreement that benefits all. In particular, wealthier countries should help countries in need towards increasing their climate resilience and offer them climate-related support.

The EU, as a Party of the Convention, has translated its at least 40% economy-wide GHG domestic reduction target into an INDC. Together with its Member States, the Union provides also technical and financial support to countries in need for drafting their own INDCs. The Union also encouraged the inclusion of an adaptation component within INDCs, which was one of the main concerns of developing countries. In fact, European support towards third countries against climate change already includes support to national climate change adaptation strategies. Existing arrangements under the Convention could however, and should be used to strengthen cooperation and coordination between climate change adaptation and climate change mitigation. International aid should therefore contribute not only to achieving developing countries goals, as set in their INDCs, but also strengthen these countries' resilience against climate change.

Public actors don't bear alone the responsibility and costs of achieving a solid agreement though. They will act as enablers and facilitators for climate resilient investments, development plans and national policies that attract private investors. They will put the basis for investments in technology and infrastructure that allow us to live on a resource-constrained planet. Their action represents just the first step towards the set up of a public demand that enables

businesses and policy-makers to participate. In order to achieve a climate resilient society and keeping the increase in temperature under 2°C, the world needs a significant amount of resources. 100 billion dollars per year by 2020 were estimated to be the needs of the world population back in 2009 at the COP in Copenhagen. This amount is however far from the actual flows of development aid against climate change. As an example, the EU contributes around 12 billion dollars out of this amount.

For **developed countries**, engaging in the fight against climate change would also procure self-benefits, apart from the obvious social justice. Avoiding climate migrants and easily spreadable climate related diseases are just some examples.

But the goodwill of some is not enough to ensure that everyone will deliver on their commitments. The seriousness of the efforts must be measured through a standardised procedure. Expectations, possibilities for climate change action should therefore be made clearer through a simple, understandable and predictable accounting system and standard, that is internationally enforced. Introducing fairness in the process will make sure that rules apply to each and every country which is Party of the Convention, in a way that reflects its capability and national circumstances.

Civil society is encouraged to fully participate in the preparatory events for the COP21. Ensuring the same level of knowledge about the importance of climate negotiations among NGOs, local authorities, media, researchers and companies in both developed and developing countries would ideally increase popular pressure for transparent and accountable commitments. Moreover, solutions and actions coming from the civil society could guide decision-makers in formulating their own actions.

The road to Paris was long and fastidious. Some countries went to deny their responsibility for climate change and claimed their “right” to make use of world resources and develop.

Indeed, for a long period countries have considered that decreasing their carbon emissions would slow down their development. This mentality is against any agreement to be found in Paris. To put all chances on our side for keeping the planet a liveable place, solidarity and transparency must be the key words to define the new climate deal. And there is hope for a strong agreement in Paris. Economic and social data now slowly comes to prove that the transition to a low carbon society is not only decisive, but it can also generate prosperity, create new jobs, and improve our health and well-being. New business models were developed, allowing us to make an infinite use of rare resources that would otherwise fill up our landfills, pollute our waters and soils, and deteriorate our human condition. Climate change adaptation is in some cases not seen as a constraint anymore, but as an opportunity to generate growth and create a better way of living. In some countries, for example, protecting ecosystems and coastal areas against erosion has generated economic opportunities, preserved landscapes and livelihoods. Civil society is also more and more mobilised in the fight against climate change. Numerous networks have already shown their support to making the COP21 a successful Conference and have shown their interest in maintaining a strong dialogue before, during and after the official meetings.

[1] Limits to growth, planetary boundaries, developed by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-programmes/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

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The views expressed in this article are solely the property of their author and do not represent under any circumstances the official position of the European Commission.

Talking the language of Human Rights activism in Romania

Amnesty International Bucharest Group, the first and only local group of Amnesty International in Romania, was founded in August 2014 gathering at the very beginning 10 members only. Since then, the group developed and it consists now of 30 members who undertook four campaigns in order to raise awareness about refugee and asylum-seekers' rights, sexual and reproductive rights, women's rights, freedom of expression, political and civic rights and the ban of torture practices.



Ionela Maria Ciolan is the initiator of the Volunteer Facilitators movement of Amnesty International in Romania and the founder and leader of the first Human Rights activists group of Amnesty in her country (**Amnesty International Bucharest Group**). She has extensive experience in youth work, advocacy and Human Rights (HR) and had organized 9 international campaigns in Romania concerning Roma/ LGBT /sexual and reproductive rights, women's rights, refugee and asylum-seekers' rights, housing rights, freedom of speech, etc.

Alexandra: Since 1961, Amnesty International has been involved in major campaigns, investigations and communications in order to promote a world of Human Rights for all. It has more than 7 million activists, members, supporter and donors all around the world. In Romania, you have been working as an Amnesty Volunteer Facilitator since 2011 and afterwards you created Amnesty International Bucharest Group. What were the incentives that led to the establishment of the AI local group in Romania?

Ionela: After 3 years of intensive collaboration and 6 Human Rights campaigns with Amnesty as a Volunteer Facilitator, I have decided that I got enough experience and understanding of the way the organization works in order to move to the next level. Founding this group came from my desire to promote AI and its values in my country. I wish I could bring my contribution towards changing the Romanian mentality concerning Human Rights, namely making ordinary citizens more tolerant and open to embrace diversity. A large number of them do not know what Human Rights are and have never had any Human Rights education in school or throughout their life. Thus, the degree of intolerance and discrimination in Romania is, at some extent, worrisome.



Apart from my idealistic goal to improve Romanians' attitude in this direction, I have also been motivated by my willing to positively change Romania's image abroad. If my country is internationally perceived as one where various Human Rights (i.e. Roma/ women/ LGBT/ prisoners' rights, etc.) are persistently violated, I wanted to stand up against such practices and bring my contribution towards building another

side of Romania, one, where we care about Human Right, respect them and fight to promote them, both locally and globally.

Alexandra: You have served as a Volunteer Facilitator at AI for almost four years now. What are your responsibilities as a volunteer facilitator/group leader in Romania?

Ionela: As a Volunteer Facilitator, I've been in charge with the organization of several Amnesty campaigns over here (i.e. finding out what are the most efficient ways to organize a campaign on a certain subject, preparing working strategy plans, recruiting volunteers, coordinating and training them, promoting the events through social media, maintaining a constant contact with my Regional Coordinator from the International Secretariat in London, preparing the logistics, facilitating the events, delivering Amnesty messages on all their specific campaigns, collecting petitions and letters of support and sending them to London, etc.).

As a group leader, I would mention that I am in charge with the internal communication of Amnesty International Bucharest Group, the coordination of my team of activists, namely motivating and offering them support, intermediating the communication between the group and our coordinator from the International Secretariat, etc. I also make sure that the message we present through our campaigns and other coordination tasks perfectly matches with the one promoted by Amnesty.

Alexandra: Since 2011, you and Amnesty International Bucharest Group have organized several campaigns that aimed to raise awareness for several causes such as Roma rights ("Stop forced evictions of Roma community in Romania"), the fight against torture ("Stop torture"), Women's rights ("My body, my rights"), etc. Could you recall any moment or any lesson about freedom and dignity that had a tremendous impact on your activity as a volunteer for AI in Romania and motivated you to work harder in order to improve the Human Rights situation in

Romania?

Ionela: Last year, I was involved in the 3rd Human Rights Action Camp of Amnesty in Bulgaria where we've discussed the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. At that time, the refugee crisis wasn't so widely covered by International media; however, this does not mean at that time asylum seekers' rights were not violated. Apart from AI activists from all over Europe, some refugees accepted to attend the camp with us. The stories they shared were simply heartbreaking. Very briefly, I will give you some examples and I wish readers could put themselves in the shoes of these people.

In 2011, when conflict erupted in Libya, Said, a 10-year old child was playing in a football competition in Libya. Against his will, Libyan authorities put him in an overcrowded boat and sent him to Italy. Apparently, this happened at Gaddafi's instructions when Italian forces joined the NATO air campaign against Libya. However, there can be no justification for sending away a helpless minor in a foreign country where, as you can imagine, he didn't know anyone and had zero-knowledge of Italian. Not even today, after 4 years, he couldn't reconnect with his family. He doesn't know if they are still alive or not, if they flew away from Libya or not.

Other refugees shared with us critical moments from their life back in their home countries where war is a daily fact. Escaping from war-torn Syria or Iraq was not an easy task at all, but a risky trip by boat towards unknown lands. All these personal recollections of the refugees' journey to Europe have touched me so deeply that I returned to Romania with the purpose of creating the AI group we have today. I wanted to fight harder in order to spread the AI Human Rights cases in Romania. If until this camp, I wasn't very convinced that I was ready to move from a single volunteer activity to leading a group of volunteers, that experience and the courage of the refugees I've met, gave me the reasons and the strength

to be more determined in promoting human rights and less worried about *what if I'll fail*.

Alexandra: 2015 is definitely a watershed moment for all development workers involved in the fight for a better world for all. Human Rights are at the core of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are about to be adopted in 2015. From your point of view, as an Human Rights activist and a youth worker, how would you evaluate the new post-2015 agenda? If we define it as a new Human Rights agenda, how would you assess both its potential achievements and shortcomings?

Ionela: As we all know, the post-2015 Agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets that are to be attained by 2030. Of course, it is an ambitious, wide-range global plan to create a better world for all. From a Human Rights activist point of view, the new SDGs tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time: ending extreme poverty and hunger, reduce gender inequality, increase access to health care and education, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, etc.; some of these *things* seem pretty basic and are taken for granted by many of us. One of the most relevant aspect of the new UN agenda is the fact that the SDGs do not focus anymore on developing countries only (like the MDGs used to do), but they strongly claim that even in the most advanced nations, there are people left aside, living at the edge of poverty, people who don't have access to minimum basic facilities. Therefore, the UN system aims to raise a challenging debate with the participation of each and every country to analyse their own level of achievement in regards to the proposed sustainable development goals.

While the new SDGs framework can make a lasting impact in the world as we know it and improve the current situation, there are many doubts about the results of the post-2015 Agenda. The main critique comes from the fact that some of the targets are vaguely expressed, generally presented and hard to measure and

put into practice. Additionally, we have to keep in mind that some goals, although they sound really appealing, cannot (easily) be achieved within the desired timeframe. We also have to ask ourselves if all the countries have the necessary resources (material, technological and the knowledge) to accomplish these objectives. And in this particular case, how would countries select their priority items? Is there any scale system to measure what goals are the most important or in other words, the first / second priorities in a country?

Alexandra: Keeping in mind the new post-2015 Agenda, what are the goals Romania should place more emphasis on in the next coming years?



Ionela: If we are looking at all the 17 SDGs is hard to select the areas where we have to be more engaged. However, keeping in mind the real concerns of Romanians, I believe that ending poverty (or at least, diminishing it), increasing

health care, investing in quality education and promoting sustainable, inclusive economic growth are the areas where we should invest more. Let me also add that *achieving greater equality and empower women and girls* should be one of our priorities and we need to keep on fighting the battle in order to reduce domestic violence, end human trafficking (affecting young girls and women in general), and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. In this direction, I totally support the idea of having sexual and reproductive education programs in schools. At the moment, the rates of teen birth and abortion (under 19- year old girls) in Romania are one of the highest in Europe; moreover, 60% of sexual active teenagers (teenagers between 15-19- year old) have never used contraception. This can be a real problem not only in terms of birth or abortion numbers, but also

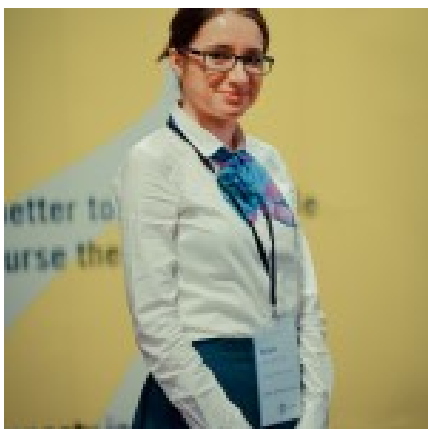
concerning the spread of STDs. Needless to add, the economic impact on the state.

Alexandra: These days, many people are interested in humanitarian and development work. What is the message you would like to pass on to those who are interested by the activities of the AI group in Romania?

Ionela: I invite all those interested in the work of Amnesty International to visit [AI's website](#) and read about the ongoing campaigns and sign the petitions. By signing a petition, promoting it and encouraging friends to do the same, we are spreading the message of Amnesty and we are gathering support for that case. It's not a singular example where millions of individuals from different corners of the world supported and promoted the same case, thus helping Amnesty to have a stronger impact and succeed in freeing people, stopping governments from violating human rights and finally changing some people's lives. Because each of us can have the power to bring his/ her contribute to changing the world in a better place.

They can also join Amnesty by becoming online members. Needless to add, if they consider that they need to acquire more knowledge regarding human rights, they can join Amnesty's first massive open online course (MOOC) on freedom of expression, which is [now](#) open for registration.

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Ionela is the first Romanian in the history of Amnesty International who was selected as an International Movement Delegate for Europe to participate in the 2015 Amnesty's International Council Meeting. This is the highest position that an activist can have in the organization and Ionela has represented

all volunteers and local groups from the European countries where Amnesty doesn't have an office.

Recently, she extended her experience with a Professional Fellowship granted by the U.S. Department of State and an internship at [Chicago Coalition for the Homeless](#).

A PhD Candidate in International Relations, her research is focused on the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU's Eastern Partnership and the Union's relations with Russia.

Communicating the SDGs? Mind your business!



When analyzing Eastern European's reactions to the refugee crisis Ivan Krastev rightly pointed to a *compassion deficit*[\[1\]](#), quoting statistics that showed that the citizens

of the Czech Republic were against allocating any public resources to help the refugees and Slovakia's Prime Minister saying that 95% of the people arriving to Europe are not 'real' refugees and in any case Slovakia could only receive Christians into the country. In Romania, President Iohannis embarrassed himself by first saying that under no circumstance will Romania receive more than 1700 refugees, just to realize later that he will have to bend to the quota voted by the European leaders in Brussels and receive a bit over 6000 people. Still in Romania, after World Vision launched a fundraising campaign for the refugee children, under the slogan 'They have no fault, but they are the most affected', cynical comments flooded their social media channels: 'Why don't you help the poor Romanian children? Poverty in Romania is rampant and all you can think is how to help a group of future killers', 'Their only fault is that they have stupid parents', 'These kids are dangerous. They are taught to kill from very early ages. Help Romanian children instead'.

How, in this context, can we expect to successfully communicate the **Sustainable Development Goals** in the Eastern European countries? UK observers deplore that less than 4% of the British citizens knew about the MDGs in 2013 and call for better communication strategies to be created for the SDGs. If this is the case in one of the countries who invented the notion of 'international development' from the ashes of the colonialism ideology, how much bigger the need is in a country like Romania, Bulgaria or Hungary (to name just a few) where the majority of the people believe that they still need to be helped to overcome their own poverty and where events from the developing countries are very rarely reported by the media?

Here are four simple ideas:

Mind your messenger.

The agreement on a new global plan to fight poverty is an important step, but similar plans have been presented and have

failed in the past. Many in the post-development circles show that after 60 years of 'development' and trillions spent, poverty is still a shameful reality of the human race, at a time when we would have all the resources to truly eradicate it, as the supporters of the development business have been trumpeting all along the way. Development is growingly contested as a useful technology and many call for its demise. 'Development is dead' or it should be killed as soon as possible, say thinkers like Wolfgang Sachs, Gustavo Esteva, Dambisa Moyo, James Ferguson, Serge Latouche and many others. In Eastern Europe not many will remember the Millennium Development Goals and still fewer will be able to say if they were a success or a failure, but many believe that our own development is our first priority and a promise that was not delivered on. Additionally, racism is rampant, with many people believing that other nations do not develop simply because they are too lazy to do so. Cynicism is also on the rise as shown by the recent refugee crisis.

Who, in this context, is the right messenger for promoting the SDGs? CEOs of big NGOs or inter-governmental organizations (many of them perceived as indulging in luxury and totally disconnected from the 'normal' people), high profile public officials, diplomatic staff will in no way be the best people to communicate that. The people who should carry the message should be perceived as genuine and legitimate: those who can talk about poverty from their own efforts to help poor people or those who know poverty in and out because they live in it. Compelling story-telling techniques rather than sophisticated advertising techniques should be used. The story of the people who fight poverty or the story of the people experiencing poverty should be documented, told and disseminated instead of advertising vague messages about how the world should fight poverty. The costs would probably be in the same range, with far better results that can also have indirect results, such as reducing the mental space for racism and cynicism.

Mind your language

The development business is infested by technical jargon, many 'isms' that combine into long and abstract sentences that are incomprehensible for the non-expert audiences, i.e. the majority of the population. Mass murders are transformed in 'abuses', wars become 'tensions', 'incidents' or 'crisis', starving children and adults become 'people who live on 1.25 USD / day', the millions who run from torture are actually facing 'escalations'. In terms of actions, what we do is to 'condemn', 'regret', 'deplore', express 'concern', ask for resolutions and make recommendations on top of other thousands of recommendations and resolutions never heeded by anyone. Jargon can never produce the empathy which is needed for the global solidarity movement that is implied by the SDGs, but it can surely create the kind of misunderstandings that lead to prejudice and narrow-mindedness. The messages should therefore be 'tested' with their end users and not only in the large creative agencies or communications departments of the institutions and the organizations meant to lead the 'awareness' campaign. In general, the civil society should consider fighting the 'discursive' war that waters down the big tragedies of our world in a way that allows for starvation in a time of lavish affluence. Fighting under-development is the word of the day, but why not fighting the over-development that creates and perpetuates under-development? Fighting poverty can easily turn into fighting the poor, if the ways of the opulent are not considered.

Mind your business

In the Eastern European countries the talk about the predicament of the developing countries is constantly opposed to 'our own poverty'. In Romania and other EU Member States the failure of the state administrations to integrate the Roma populations created unprecedented levels of racism. Many still use the term 'crow' to refer to the Roma citizens, as they use the term 'monkey' to refer to non-white persons. Before 1989

the non-aligned movement included the Eastern European countries in a global movement where under-development was hotly debated, although ideologically blamed on the Western countries. In those years the Romanian 'Scînteia' (the main newspaper) had a whole page on international affairs and very often the articles reflected the situation of the developing countries, global meetings, Romania's positions in the international summits, etc. After 1989 the 'free' but resource-depleted mass media stopped reporting from the developing countries which totally disappeared from the public discourse. For the regular Romanian, Romania is probably one of the poorest country in the world and statistics showing that Romania scores in the first 70 countries in the world in the Human Development Index are not convincing. And still, the voices who want us to first address 'our own poverty' before any talk about global development are frequently dismissed by development professionals as a proof of degrading and outdated selfishness that should be quickly marginalized. This can result only in frustration on both ends, while a middle way, that of speaking of co-development and the global inter-dependencies do exist, although it would require us to go the extra mile for identifying those areas where these inter-dependencies could be explored and harnessed.

Mind the compassion deficit

Krastev is doing us a big favor when coining the metaphor of the 'compassion deficit', as he gives us a crucial insight into how our SDGs communication campaigns should be framed. People in the 'new' EU Member States were eager to join the EU for the prosperity promise. A promise about how prosperity would be shared with themselves and not about how they would be expected to share with the 'others'. Living at the margins of the most developed club of nations, not far from the shiny comforts of some of the most industrialized countries in the world, the Eastern European citizens feel that they are the unluckiest people in the world. History had wickedly conspired

to keep them away from progress. Any comparisons with those who are even unluckier is taken as a bad joke. Blinded with the sparkly luxuries they can almost touch across a border that does not even exist any longer, Eastern Europeans feel that they suffered enough and now they 'deserve' to be as developed as anyone can dream. In the EU 'new' Member States any SDG 'awareness campaigns' needs to take this complex aspirations into account and probably build on them, instead of dismissing them. Smart communicators will want to talk about common interests, before they speak about any 'duty' or moral obligation to help those in need.

[1] Ivan Krastev, Easter Europe's Compassion Deficit, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/opinion/eastern-europes-compassion-deficit-refugees-migrants.html?_r=0.

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What in a word: Education for Sustainable Development



Over the past few months, under Adela's coordination, the **Education for Sustainable Development Group** has been working at creating a network of Multipliers on Sustainable Development information, in the framework of [2015 – European](#)

[Year for Development](#). This endeavour was developed as part of the *Multiplied information, greater impact* project implemented by [ARCADIA](#) with the support of the [UNDP's regional office for Europe and Central Asia](#) and the [Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#).

We are currently interested in developing ARCADIA's activity as a relevant actor in the field of Development Education. We strive to do so by promoting projects and educational initiatives which support mass-media, civil society organizations and any other interested parties to expand their understanding of sustainable development. Using participatory education methodologies, we wish to engage such social actors in advancing their practice towards a broader, more inclusive approach to development, both locally and internationally, she told us.

Adela Militaru is the coordinator of the **Education for Sustainable Development Group (ESD Group)** within ARCADIA – the Romanian Association for International Development and Cooperation.

The Group was established in March 2015, with the aim of shaping a community of practitioners and researchers working towards a more informed approach of promoting Sustainable Development by means of Education and training. Its main focus is to provide expertise and engage stakeholders in constructive dialogue, building on evidence-based perspectives on the dimensions of Sustainable Development.

Alexandra: Education for sustainable development (ESD) was included in 3 targets in the proposed post-2015 sustainable development global agenda (Goal 4, 12 and 13) showing its importance in contributing to the achievement of different development objectives (i.e. education, sustainable consumption and climate change). In this context, the *Education for Sustainable Development Group* (ESDG) that you recently organized in Romania seems to follow the global trend and grow accordingly very fast. *What were your incentives to coagulate such a global-like group in Romania?*



Adela: At a close scrutiny of the post-2015 Agenda, the value of Education in promoting Sustainable Development seems to be of crucial importance for the next 15 years. Surely, it transcends the scope and mandate of Goal 4, that of ensuring equitable and quality education and promoting lifelong learning

opportunities for all. I would agree that education plays a big part in contributing to the success of most of the other goals: eradicating extreme poverty and ending hunger, as well as achieving gender equality, ensuring sustainable consumption patterns, raising awareness on climate change, and ensuring productive employment through better qualified workforce.

In my view, our work as ESDG is valuable precisely in the light of the recently adopted Sustainable Development global Agenda. Our purpose was to provide expertise and training to build the capacity of public institutions and the private sector, as well as civil society organizations and mass-media, to understand and develop more sustainable practices in applying the principles of sustainable development. We see this as a precondition to the success of the 2030 global agenda, and in this light, as a community of research and

practice, we seek to encourage Romanian stakeholders to join the global partnership as a reliable actor in promoting sustainable development.

Alexandra: ESD, as a concept, has the tremendous fluidity and capacity to enable different development actors to collaborate and address global issues and local priorities. How does ARCADIA's ESDG contribute to the advancement of this concept?

Adela: Our activity reflects the well-known principle ***Think globally, act locally***, in whichever setting we are active. As all ARCADIA members, ESD Group members are contributing their expertise and specialized input to reach larger audiences in countries where they work, informing about sustainable development by means of education and training.

Using the experience of our latest project, we elaborated accessible informative materials on sustainable development, and delivered three training courses dedicated to civil society and mass-media from 3 regions of Romania. The participatory methodologies we use during our trainings and interactions with target audiences facilitated collaboration, and aimed precisely at addressing interconnected global issues with relevance for participants' own local contexts. The ESD methodology encouraged them to reflect on their experience and advance ideas on how they could tackle their local challenges in line with global priorities.

Alexandra: What are the main priorities of the first project you are working on now with the Education for Sustainable Development Group?



Adela: First of all, we seek to inform the local public on the global priorities set through the new global agenda (for example see our [Infographic – from MDGs to SDGs \(RO\)](#)). In order to do so, we created a community of trained multipliers

– civil society members and media professionals – who can contribute with their skills and knowledge to larger target audiences, promoting a broader understanding of what sustainable development is and how we can actively contribute to it.

Our trainers and multipliers are contributing with their experience to reach a larger public and inform an increasing number of actors on the urgency of committing to a more sustainable set of social, economic and environmental practices.

***Alexandra:* The ESD Group has the dynamics of a learning organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge. How do you see it growing in the near future? In which direction do you aim to orient your activities?**

Adela: After addressing the target audience of civil society members and mass-media, we will transfer this knowledge to other stakeholders who promote sustainable development through their activities. Our focus for the near future relies on developing more informative material, working methods and applied research tools, adapted to local and international audiences. By this effort, we wish to encourage more effective ESD practices and evaluate their impact and alignment with the priorities to the new global agenda. For instance, at the moment we are working with a group of researchers on elaborating an Observatory of Romanian Resources for Sustainable Development Education, which will be used to monitor the impact of ESD activities implemented locally.

Looking beyond this, the future will probably challenge us to perform more and more capacity building for public institutions and private organizations, as well as provide training and consultancy to NGOs and other actors. There is huge potential of this field, and our expertise may well be of increasing interest for a wide range of actors interested in expanding their understanding of sustainable development and realigning their organizational practices with a more global, sustainable dimension.

Alexandra: What message would you like to pass on to development workers interested in working with the concept of education for sustainable development or in other words, working with the Education for Sustainable Development Group?



Adela: Development is happening as we speak and it is our collective responsibility to shape the direction it is growing into. A growing community of professionals believes that **education lies at the core of sustainable development** and if we are willing to join forces, our voice can become strong enough to make a difference.

Working with the Education for Sustainable Development Group will challenge all those interested to join forces in redesigning our world based on the principles of people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership. For sure, it cannot be an easy task, but it is definitely worth our effort.

If you wish to get more information on the activity of ARCADIA's ESDG, you can join our network on

http://arcadianetwork.ning.com/group/development_education, or write an email to adela.militaru@arcadianetwork.org

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Adela Militaru holds a BA degree in Psychology from the University of Bucharest and she specialized in Counselling and Educational Psychology at MA level at Babeş-Bolyai University. Throughout her studies, she pursued her passion for education and training and was actively involved as trainer and mentor within several NGOs, at European and local level, including AEGEE-European Students' Forum and

PATRIR.

Curious about the world, in 2013 Adela joined an [MA programme in International Development](#) at the Faculty of Political Science of Babeş-Bolyai University, which she recently graduated from. Her passion for Education and Development led her to undertake a field research in Ahmedabad, India, that became her MA dissertation. Contributing to the capacity building of an Indian grassroots organization to increase the quality of community-based educational programs, she returned from India motivated to follow-up on this experience, and deliver the best practices she had found to other parts of the world. This experience had a tremendous influence in her decision to coagulate the Education for Sustainable Development Group.

She believes that education can change our approach towards development for the better, by fostering more inclusive, responsible, just and cohesive communities around the world.

Infrastructures for Peace- From International Need to Context Adapted National Implementation

According to the World Bank statistics from 2013 surveying 186 countries, 526.000 people are killed by armed violence each year. Even though, people being killed in conflict settings represent only 12,2% of people being killed, the rest of 87.8% are killed in non-conflict settings with 75% of them being victims of intentional homicides. [\[1\]](#)

Other statistic, made by Wars in the World, reveals that 65 countries are currently directly involved in a war fighting over 650 militias-guerillas, separatist and anarchic groups in their region, with most of ongoing conflicts in Africa and in Asia. [\[2\]](#)

Reviewing these numbers and the statistics, one can notice that even the international context has changed in the nineties with the end of the Cold War, armed conflicts and violence are still present, impacting societies all over the world. The numbers I have mentioned are just a small part of the effects caused by **direct violence**, the visible effects of violent clashes. But there is always more than that, even if only the tip of the iceberg is visible to us. The willingness of states to get involved into armed conflicts, the eagerness of terrorist, anarchic and separatist groups to fight their enemies, the high death rates of victims of intentional homicides reveal a small part of the most dangerous facet of violence, which is strongly embedded in most societies:

cultural and structural violence.

One can identify aspects of structural violence in many societies where authorities and public policies use violent methods to deal with conflicts. Their actions rather encourage the creation of structures which facilitate the escalation of conflicts, being supported by cultural violence, strongly embedded in people's mentalities and mirrored by their behaviors.

When it comes to conflict, every state has largely determined its own mechanisms for solving various types of conflict. Many or maybe most countries face various institutional gaps in order to manage conflicts – they lack tools, resources and structures needed to deal with them. Other states completely ignore the possibility of peaceful settlement and draw on violence based tools, which are deeply rooted in their culture, in their human nature and are justified by the mentalities of the majority.

This is the point where infrastructures for peace are brought in discussion. They are less expensive than wars and can be built on existing structures.

The term infrastructure for peace is most often associated with conflict zones or countries experiencing various forms of direct violence or conflict escalation. The concept itself can be put into practice in countries experiencing tensions within society and that are dealing with other types of violence, such as cultural and structural with the purpose of transforming conflicts at an early stage and consolidating peace.

Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) is a term that knows a wide range of definition proposals although the concept is still in definition phase. Even if it is a new term, abstract and complex it has shown various ways of adapting itself to existing realities and specific contexts. **Jean Paul Lederach**

is the first who introduced the concept in the 1980s, assuming that sustainable peace can only be the result of a deep and structural conflicts transformation, including socio-economic roots and political drivers.[\[3\]](#)

Chetan Kumar, Senior Conflict Prevention advisor at UNDP defined an I4P as a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills- shared by the government, civil society and community institutions. A functional I4P is in his opinion based on dialogue, consultation and peaceful mediation among these actors.[\[4\]](#)

Paul van Tongeren, author of many articles related to infrastructures for peace, defines infrastructures for peace as institutional mechanisms, appropriate to each country's culture which promote conflict solving approaches based on dialogue and non-violence within communities.[\[5\]](#)

Summing up some major streams in the literature, one can identify common aspects as key elements to define an I4P which is in fact a structure based on institutional mechanisms, on peaceful mediation, dialogue and networking within communities aiming to prevent or to diminish violent conflicts.

I4P International – an international network of NGOs, local peace committees and peacebuilding practitioners – defines Infrastructures for Peace as following: “a dynamic network of structures, mechanisms, resources and interdependent qualifications contributing to conflict prevention and peace restoration in the society through dialogue, consultation, cooperation and coordination”.[\[6\]](#)

Reviewing the existing literature, one can notice that the majority of examples of implementing infrastructures for peace can be found in Africa, followed by some Asian countries or singular examples in the Middle East and South America. Some components of infrastructures for peace exist also in other contexts but are not gathered under the same umbrella called

I4P. Even so, the External Action of the European Union acknowledges the importance of infrastructures for peace also at the European level, in terms of strengthening national capacities for dialogue, mediation and national dialogue platforms with regards to conflict prevention.[\[7\]](#)

The concept of infrastructures could be translated into reality in peaceful but also in conflict-torn societies with the aim of preventing violence and dealing with conflict. To this purpose, one can have as examples:

- National Dialogues:
- Local Peace Committees
- Mediation

The **National Dialogues** can be implemented as roundtables or national conferences, aiming to ensure platforms for discussions legitimized by the national authority.

The **Local Peace Committees and Councils** represent structures which facilitate the creation of networks of local bodies. Within the network, interaction is encouraged with the goal of strengthening national peace infrastructure, addressing issues of local relevance considered to be a threat to peaceful conditions, supporting the peaceful settlement of disputes and establishing consensus among different parties involved in conflict situation.

Mediation is another component of infrastructures for peace aiming to restore broken relationships between and within communities, where tensions emerge among different ethnic and social groups.

A major remark is that even if infrastructures for peace have some common components, these have to be adapted to each context when implemented. An infrastructure for peace has to be acknowledged and owned by the community and by the civil society but has to be also legitimized by the national authority.

An example of a partly successful I4P can be considered the case of Nepal. This country found its path towards democracy in 1990, having free parliamentary elections one year later. Unfortunately, the high expectations of the population regarding social and economic change were not met, escalating into the Maoist insurgency from 1996, which had cost over 16,000 lives and had led to a large amount of internally displaced people. After the bloody conflict, due to the eight-party negotiations a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed and ambitious plans for an infrastructure for peace were made.

The components of the Nepalese infrastructures for peace were implemented at national and local level. On the national level the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) was established having as major tasks to coordinate the implementation of the Peace Agreement, to set up local peace committees (LCPs) and to manage the Nepal Peace Trust Fund. At the local level, local peace committees were established in almost every district. These LCPs had the role to link the national peace process to the communities, to run programs on conflict prevention, to have activities related to domestic violence and psychological healing. Even the infrastructures for peace have had a comprehensive design and accordingly established institutions^[8], the Nepalese model was not as successful as expected. It has been criticized that LCPs were not efficient in addressing core issues because they were not really owned by the communities and civil society due to high implication of the government, which had a too political oversight. Moreover, the infrastructure itself lacked capacities in terms of funding and skilled staff, which burdened the achievement of its goals.

Having the example of Nepal in mind, one can learn from its experience and before establishing an infrastructure for peace in an apparently peaceful society, former communist country starting to answer the question: why do we need I4P here?

The main argument why we need I4P in Romania is not because

each of us is confronted every day with direct violence and we experience war, but because:

- structural and cultural violence are strongly embedded into every structure within the Romanian society and dominate the mainstream mentalities and behaviors

- Romania has a history in approaching conflictual situation with violence (the Revolution from 1989, violent uprising of the miners in 1990, the inter-ethnic conflicts between Romanian- Hungarian minority, Romanian- Roma minority)

- externally, due to contemporary interactions at the global level and to the synergies we are directly affected by the war in Ukraine, the wars in the Middle East and the existing tensions and instability within the European Union

- internally we face increasing numbers indicating cases of violence in schools and domestic violence, with measures taken to address the effects and not the causes of violence

- internally, we experience very often political instability, inter-ethnic tensions due to the lack of inter-ethnic dialogue

- hate speech and violent speech is present in everyday life and promoted in the media

- lack of methods and instruments for transforming conflicts in a non-violent way, in order to prevent cases of violence.

In other words: we have perfect conditions for nurturing violent conflicts. With regards to the needs, challenges, gaps and threats identified, a new chapter on I4P starts to be written by AIDRom – the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania and PATRIR – the Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania.



AIDRom in partnership with PATRIR have started on the 1st of March 2015 the implementation of a 14 months project called **I4P Romania- “Establishing Infrastructure for Peace Romania”** financed by the EEA Grants 2009-2014, through the NGO Fund Romania. The project

aims to create a network of organizations in Romania, to build and transfer capacities for conflict transformation to these organizations. Beside training NGOs and fortifying their capacities to deal with different conflict typologies, the project also aims to develop advocacy skills with the purpose of acknowledging the importance of infrastructures for peace from national authorities.

Within these 14 months, the organization team organizes trainings on Complex Conflict Analysis, Reconciliation and Restorative Practices and on Design Intervention in Conflict Transformation Processes. Moreover, in order to achieve one of its goals and change mentalities with regards to approaching conflict, three Good Practice Guides providing examples for conflict transformation for different conflict typologies will be elaborated. These Guides will be presented within workshops and will be disseminated to the Romanian NGOs to fortify their capacity to deal with different conflicts. Another component of the project is related to developing a White Paper and create legislative proposals to consolidate the NGOs position towards dealing with conflict at the national level. The peak of the project is represented by the network of organization, which will have the legitimacy to come together and develop activities related to conflict prevention and conflict transformation in their communities, being in a constant dialogue with public authorities.

Through this project, one will set up the basis for an

infrastructure for peace inspired by I4P internationally but designed in accordance to the specificities of the Romanian context, according to the existing needs and to the surrounding internal and external factors.

Being aware of the high rates of direct violence but also of the prevalence of structural and cultural violence embedded in the most of the existing structures, establishing an infrastructure for peace in Romania means raising awareness about the importance of peaceful settlements, changing mentalities and behaviors, challenging diverse actors, communities and authorities to have a dialogue and work efficiently on conflict prevention and conflict transformation.

To impact the Romanian society peacefully and change people's lives. To maintain peace and prevent violence. To shift the terrifying statistics.

[1] Geneva Declaration: Global Burden of Armed Violence, <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence.html>, (25.09.2015).

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Migration – the buzzword of the moment

Migration-related words seem to have become the buzzwords of 2015 lexicon: about 60 million refugees worldwide, millions of economic migrants, almost 100 million people dependent on everyday humanitarian aid to survive, large-scale displacements in Ukraine, millions at risk of famine in South Sudan, 5 years of conflict in Syria, 1 year of ISIS, plenty of minorities slipping into oblivion. The picture looks gloomy at the moment and the phenomenon of migration is both academically and professionally challenging.

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Alexandra: We are interviewing **Irina Mihalcuț**, a young professional in international development with a strong background in migration policies.



Irina, June 2014 ©StudioAlb

The concept of *migration* has a very special meaning for you. It can be translated through many stories and serendipitous moments that have marked your personal and professional path. With a Master Degree in Migration and European Affairs from Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium) and Babes-Bolyai University (Romania), your first professional experience with the phenomenon of migration was in Italy where you worked as a Cultural Mediator and Social and Legal counselor for a local immigration office. Before joining the team of [UNCHR](#) in Malta you have experienced the status of a foreign student in Belgium and the one of a migrant in Italy, Belgium and South Korea.

What first made you to choose migration as the core topic of your studies and then, of your profession?

Irina: Yes, as you have mentioned already, the concept of **migration** has played a very important role in my life. When I was about 13 years old, I heard from my family about an uncle of my father who ran away from Communist Romania and became a refugee in France. He was a Catholic priest in a small village in the region of Moldova and he tried to oppose the Regime

through different actions in his community. Of course, he was living with the constant fear of being *stopped* by the authorities but despite that he continued his work, mainly in awakening the community through his preaching. One day, the *Securitate* was informed and of course they took him for questioning. I do not know all the details related to what exactly happened to him after, but apparently one day he just disappeared and nobody from the family saw him again. Only after the fall of the Communism, they found out that he became a refugee in France. There, apparently, continued to work as a priest until his death. Some years ago I actually have managed, by chance, to find a book written by him during his stay in France. It is really incredible to have found a copy of that book with his signature on it. It was a very emotional moment!

This family story was the starting point for me in getting interested in the topic of asylum and migration. It would have been great if during High School we had had some classes about migration. Not necessary as a separate subject, but somehow integrated in the curricula of another subject, like History or Social Sciences. That would have helped me understand earlier so many issues related to this phenomenon, which is part of the human history since its beginnings. Migration affects almost everybody's lives in our current society and it is important to make people think from an earlier age about the consequences of migration, the effects of conflicts and what it means to be a refugee. Only like that we can diminish and, hopefully, even eliminate rampant racism, discrimination and xenophobia which are so much prevalent in our societies these days. Only like that we can prevent the manipulation of the masses by media and politicians.

The second main reason why I became so much interested in the migration phenomenon is also a personal one. My mother has become an economic migrant in the late '90s. She was "forced" to leave Romania by the economic situation in our town and her

desire to make sure that I have a better future. She had to leave me alone while I was still in High School and that had a tremendous impact on the way I have perceived and led my life afterwards. Through her experience as a migrant I have learned about the many difficulties a foreigner can encounter while working and living abroad, I learned about the emotional costs that a migrant has to pay but, I also learned about the wonderful gifts that the world can offer to these courageous people. Yes, all persons who decide to leave their country for any reason, are very courageous people. Some have it easier than others, but for all of them the hearts will always long for something left back home: their family, a friend, a special place, a dish, a landscape, a feeling, a particular time in their youth etc.

The abovementioned reasons made me become interested in the topic of migration and determined me to become a migrant myself. Since September 2004, this life style has become my "full-time job" when I started my Master Degree in Brussels and I think I will not stop being a nomad for quite some time from now on. You know what they say? ***Dust if you must, but the world's out there/With the sun in your eyes, the wind in your hair,/A flutter of snow, a shower of rain,/This day will not come around again...*** as in Rose Millingan's [poem](#).

Alexandra: In Italy you used to work with refugees and economic migrants seeking for a better life in Western Europe. What have been the common misconceptions about migration that you encountered in your work at the immigration office in Italy?

Irina: Yes, I had the chance to work with refugees and economic migrants in Italy for some time in 2005 and in 2007. It was a very challenging experience for me, since I was still at the beginning of my professional career; nevertheless, during those times, I learned a lot about what I wanted to do in the future. And more than that, through interaction with colleagues from different teams I worked with I learnt how to

balance emotions, reactions and actions, how to become a good professional in such a tough environment.

During those times, I understood that there are **three types of professionals working in the migration and asylum environments**: **1) the pastoral ones** – these are the ones who give everything to the people they are working for; they do not separate their personal lives from the work life; they do not have the strength to say “no” when is needed; they are the ones who are ready to listen to the life story of a person for the tenth time at three o’clock in the morning; **2) the technical ones** – these are the ones who do not shed a tear when they hear a horrific story form a war situation; they are the ones who will stop the interview with five minutes before the end of their working office hours and, even if that moment might be crucial for the status determination of that case, they do not care; **3) the techno-pastoral ones** – these are the ones that can show compassion, but who can also say when needed *now it’s enough! Take your life in your hands and start living again, do not expect the system to do it for you!*; they are the ones who separate their personal lives from the work life but who can say *Hi! How is your family? How were things for you lately?* whenever they meet a migrant/refugee on the street.

In my opinion, the first two types are often met in the migrant/refugee contexts (including in the Italian Immigration Office where I worked) and are very dangerous. The professionals falling in the first category create most of the time an emotional dependency for their clients and the ones found in the second category provoke fear and inhibition in the hearts and minds of the migrants/refugees with whom they deal with. These two categories of professionals contribute a lot to the failure of the projects and programmes they try to implement and they fuel very much the **misconceptions** about what migration and asylum seeking means. On one side, the migrants/refugees either believe that their lives are in the

“hands” of the system or they just avoid telling the truth because they fear the system (depending on what type of professionals they deal with). On the other side, these failed projects and programmes are used by media to create sensational news, by politicians to create “catchy” propaganda slogans and by hosting communities to blame foreigners for their socio-economic problems.

From my point of view, the third category of professionals – *the techno-pastoral ones* – are the best. They are the ones giving the emotional comfort needed so much by the migrants and refugees, laying the foundation for trust and truth and for successful personal stories, but in the same time they are the ones ready to tell at the right moment that is time for the migrants/refugees to take their lives in their hands and not to behave constantly as vulnerable and victims.

I have mentioned these categories of professionals working in migration and refugee contexts because I believe they are very often the main responsible for the existence of many misconceptions about migration and the way they act influences a lot how migration and asylum seeking are perceived by everybody.



Irina Mihalcut (in the middle) with her colleagues at UNCHR, World Refugee Day (2011)

Alexandra: Working with [UNCHR](#) in Malta (2009 – 2012) while the new office was opening in Valletta was definitely a great professional challenge. *What were your main tasks and how did a day-to-day work look for you? What gave you most job satisfaction?*

Irina: Yes, you are right. It was a very challenging professional experience working with UNHCR in Malta while the new national office was established. The Country Agreement between UNHCR and the Government of Malta was just signed when I arrived in the archipelago (the summer of 2009) and the initial steps for the set-up of the office had to be finalized by the end of the same year. I started my employment with UNHCR sometimes in November, mainly due to bureaucratic delays related to a slow national process for getting the work permit in Malta. Yes, I was again experiencing on my own skin what it meant to be a migrant.

I have been hired to assist the Country Representative in all aspects related to the set-up of the new office. My tasks were very technical at the beginning and mainly related to logistics, procurement, administration, human resources, IT and finance. I have received an empty building, that required a lot of repairs and improvements, and my task was to make that place a functional office. In the first months, a “normal” day at the office meant long hours of technical work and learning. I was new in Malta and in the same time it was my first experience in such a large organization built on a very complex system of rules and regulations and I had very little time to “get used to it”. I had to do it fast and I had to ensure that everything was done according to the UN requirements and in accordance with the local rules and regulations.

After the whole rush for the set-up of the office has ended, I also started getting involved directly in the other activities planned by the UNHCR office. Therefore I was also going with my colleagues from the Protection and Durable Solutions

departments in the open and closed centers to do registration of persons of concern (PoC), to distribute non-food items to the newly arrived, to do counseling or simply to monitor what was going on in the different locations. In 2010, due to the large number of new arrivals coming from North-Africa (due to the Arab Spring revolutions), the UNHCR office has started also an intra-European Relocation Project, in which Romania took part as well. Since our office team was small and our projects were many, I helped my colleagues in identifying and counseling the PoC to be submitted for relocation to one of the ten EU states who offered to share the burden with Malta.

In 2011, apart of all the above mentioned activities, I was also involved in the preparation of a contingency plan for Malta in coordination with the other UN agencies present in the country and with the local authorities (especially with the Maltese Civil Protection). We needed to do that so that we could respond immediately to large influxes of asylum seekers coming in the archipelago. We set-up the first *non-food items warehouse* in Western Europe and that implied a lot of coordination with our offices from the region, from the HQ and from the Middle-East (where the items were shipped from), with shipping companies and of course with the local Maltese authorities.

During the three years I have spent with UNHCR Malta, I did a lot of interesting activities and my days of work were extremely diverse, because I was interested in learning a bit from all the departments. I was hired for a very technical post but I wanted to be also close to the PoC as much as possible. My joy and satisfaction during this professional experience came from seeing my team happy because they had a functional office and from the reactions of the different PoC that I have interacted with. For example, one day in 2011 I have received a phone call from one of the Ethiopian refugees that I worked with. He called me to tell that he was accepted to be relocated to Norway (where one of his brothers was

living) and he wanted to thank me for the way I encouraged him one day while I did a visit in the center where him and his family were hosted. He said that my kind words and the way I behaved gave him courage and hope, and that was a turning point in his life which marked the beginning of a new personal chapter. That was an emotional moment for me and I was given an insight into what an important role me and my colleagues had in the life of those people. I still keep in touch with him and I am so happy to hear that him and his family are achieving so much in their new home country.

From this professional experience I learned that no matter what you do, if you do it with enthusiasm, if the things you accomplish are done with love and a sense of purpose, then you can change lives.

Alexandra: In Romania, you were the National Focal Point for Romania for the [European Resettlement Network](#) (2013-2014). During that period, 40 selected Iraqi refugees have been resettled from their camp in Turkey to Romania. These days there is a huge debate about hosting a certain quota of refugees from Syria in Romania. *From your experience gathered during the abovementioned experience, how would you assess the main challenges encountered by the responsible authorities and the Romanian civil society during the current debate about welcoming and integrating refugees?*

Irina: Indeed, in my role as ERN NFP for Romania, I had the chance to get involved also in the different discussions held at the national level, about the resettlement of 40 Iraqi refugees to Romania. During those discussions it became very clear that Romania had still a lot of difficulties in welcoming and facilitating the integration of persons in need of protection. There were **several factors that contributed and still contribute to this situation: **1) the Romanian asylum system is still quite young, 2) the lack of real coordination between the different non-governmental organization in the country is still present, 3) the economic problems and the****

lack of jobs at the national level are current topics, 4) the small immigrant communities present in the country, 5) the low involvement of the administrative authorities from the local levels and of course 6) the desire of the refugees to have a better new start in life which would be assured by a more developed country in the Western of Europe.

When we think about welcoming asylum seekers and persons with a form of protection, both in Romania and in Europe in general, we have to remember that we are talking about saving lives first of all and, in my opinion, this element is often placed on a secondary place by the different actors involved in the discussions. Recently the President, Mr. Iohannis said that Romania is ready to welcome 1785 in need of protection while the EU said that Romania should take 6351. When I hear these discussions I feel like we are at a market where things can be negotiated. **No, lives cannot be negotiated!**

I understand the different issues connected to receiving new asylum seekers, especially when they come from a very different social and religious context, but we do have to open our country and our continent to saving as many people as possible no matter where are they coming from, no matter how educated they are and no matter how strong they are. I still remember the ridiculous criteria used by some countries in receiving refugees for relocation from Malta. They had to be Christians, educated, to speak one foreign language, to not need special medical care and/ or to not want family reunification.

Did Romanians forget that we were "exporting" refugees during Communism? Did Europeans forget that a total of about 60 million Europeans became refugees during the entire World War II period and that (according to the UN) a million people had yet to find a place to settle down by 1951, more than five years after the fighting stopped? What would have happened to those Europeans if the borders would have been closed for them when trying to escape war and famine?

Of course, there are some countries better equipped than others that can accept persons in need of protection, but this is a very cheap excuse from some European governments (especially in the Eastern Europe) and it is time to look at values that are beyond economical and financial matters: like hospitality and humanity.

At the same time, it is the moment for **the finalization of a common European Asylum system** and for a bigger freedom of movement within the EU borders for all persons with a form of protection. If it will be put in place an easier way for these persons to move and to compete for the labour market around the EU member states, then there will be less trafficking and less irregular work. There will be less traumatized people, less „asylum shopping” and more competition on the labour market which, on a longer term, will inevitably motivate both the European citizens and the persons with a form of protection to learn new skills and develop personally and professionally.

Imagine if all asylum seekers would be allowed to work and study immediately after their registration with the local authorities, then there will be a smaller need for financial support from the local entities and those persons would learn immediately more about the hosting society, they would be able to make friends from amongst the locals, they would learn the local language faster and they would keep themselves busy while waiting for the result of their status determination. Briefly, the process of integration would be much faster and more successful! In my opinion, if governments around Europe would focus more on supporting and welcoming than on prohibiting and limiting, the current situation would not be defined as a “refugee crisis” but rather a “new page in the European humanitarian intervention”.



Alexandra: Less than one month ago, the new Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by the world leaders gathered at the UN Summit in New York. The goal no. 10 and more specifically the target 10.7 include specific references related to migrants and the migration phenomenon. *How would*

you comment the importance given to migration in the current Post-2015 Agenda?

Irina: While I was working as NFP for ERN in Romania, I had the opportunity to participate in July 2014 to the Development Camp organized by FOND Romania. That edition was dedicated to the discussions related to the international agenda post 2015 and it was part of the “global conversations” meant to identify the priority areas to be addressed in the SDG goals. During the discussions held there it became clear that migration had to be included in the list of specific targets for the new development goals because this phenomenon is an integral part of the international development. Foreigners can contribute very much to the diversification of local economies and can refresh the local societies. Because of their presence the locals will find a stronger motivation to learn new skills and find new opportunities. In most of the cases, every migrant contributes to the global fight for reducing the social and economical inequalities. If all people can assert their interests without the fear of becoming “illegals or irregulars” the process of reducing poverty around the world will go much faster. I am very glad to see that migration was included in the list of targets for the new development goals. The now expired MDGs did not mention anything specific about migrants or persons in need of international protection and it was about time to include this topic in the global agenda.

“Regular and responsible migration and mobility of people”, “implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” are notions much needed in the new global agenda. The MDGs were meant to be applied to all the countries in the world but in fact they became targets for poor countries to achieve with financial support from the wealthy states and, the inclusion of a topic like “migration” shifts the pressure on all the countries (including the wealthy ones) to contribute to the achievement of the new goals.

Alexandra: The daily path never ends says an African/ Masai proverb. A couple of months ago, you moved to Tanzania where you work with a local NGO. Could you tell us more about your projects over there? How does this experience match with your migration-related professional background?



Lugarawa, Tanzania (2015)

Irina: I arrived in Tanzania at the end of February 2015 and immediately after I have started my collaboration with a local foundation. I live in a small village (of about 2000 people) in the Southern-Highlands of Tanzania, not far from the border with Malawi, in a very fertile and picturesque area, but where the majority of people live beneath the poverty line and the population is heavily dependent on subsistence farming and various forms of aid. It is my first time in Africa and I am so lucky to live this experience in this village. I have decided to work with the foundation because I understood from

my first meeting with the team that they are different. The motivation for doing something for their community and for contributing to the development of their region, was originating from their hearts and not from a foreign impulse or from a personal financial desire.

They are all volunteers and they did all their projects with very little financial support. The team is made mainly of doctors, teachers and business owners. It is a small team but, due to their energy and dedication, together we managed to achieve a lot in a very short time.

As Program Officer, I take care (among other things) of launching and coordinating new projects, of managing fund-raising actions, of planning new strategies and of changing the image of the foundation. Some of the projects we did in the past months included activities related to: 1) childrens rights; 2) respecting and protecting the environment; 3) prevention of conflicts; 4) identification of young leaders in the community; 5) supporting small business ideas; 6) identification of causes for poor performance in schools.

We did also a lot of meetings with local villagers, with students and local leaders during which we discussed also about asylum and refugees. We did this mainly because of two reasons: 1) Tanzania started receiving new asylum seekers coming from Burundi, due to the civil unrest related to the latest Burundian Presidential elections and 2) Tanzania has been preparing for national elections which will take place towards the end of October 2015. During our discussions we emphasised the fact that Tanzania is the most peaceful country in the region (and has been like this since its independence in the '60s) and the only way for this country to remain like this is for its inhabitants to continue living peacefully in diversity and to continue working assiduously on preventing conflicts.

Apart of the above mentioned activities, we have recently

organized a festival, which involved the communities from three villages. The festival had several components, including: 1) awareness about protecting the environment (in special the de-forestation of the mountains and the impact on the water sources in the area); 2) to re-connect those born in the area and who migrated to other destinations with their home communities; 3) the development of a ethno-historical research about the region; and 4) “planting the seeds” for the construction of a community center (where locals could have a library, could take various courses, could make cultural meetings).

The work that I currently do is not related to managing migration, however, it has provided me with an insight into the importance of migration at a micro level. For example, I understand better now the necessity of migration for personal socio-economic development (mainly related to access to education and labor market mobility) and the restrictions that potential migrants meet due to limited resources, high costs and lack of a network for information and experience exchange. **And, yet another time, I am experiencing the life of a migrant. I am learning a new language, I am discovering a new culture and the most important, I understand much better what are the best ways of working efficiently in international development projects.**

Brain drain. Brain gain. The power of networking and the

story of ARCADIA

The constant movement of skilled professionals and students from one country to another represents **brain gain** for the countries that reap their capacities and experience and **brain drain** for their home countries. Nevertheless, in a globalized world the **brain circulation** is becoming a reality and the debate about **brain regain** goes beyond bringing the experts back to their home-countries. **Leveraging the new online tools and the power of networks sending countries can reconnect with their experts without the need of having them in person.**

Especially, in the field of international development cooperation, professionals with a very diverse background (from finance to health and food security) thrive to put their skills and experience in the most disadvantaged regions in the world and address the causes of poverty in the world. It is a natural choice for development professionals to move abroad and travel in order to be where their work is needed most. They usually serve in international organizations, NGOs and consultancies and are ready to adapt in accordance to current development priorities. Romania has strengthened its engagement with the field of international development cooperation; and many Romanians work in this field across the globe.



In this context, [ARCADIA – The Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development](#) – had the main objective to establish **a network of Romanian professionals with transferable skills and plenty of experiences to share.** Through specific activities and working groups created around different topics we engage these experts and “bring back” their expertise fuelling the development of a specific community of practice at national level.

In order to find out more about this phenomenon, we are interviewing Mr **Ştefan Cibian**, the president of ARCADIA.

Alexandra: The gap between brain drain and brain gain has been approached by ARCADIA as an opportunity for exchanging experiences and setting new ways for project-based working. Ştefan, as a community builder, how would you describe the mission and motivation that create the network-like dynamics of ARCADIA?



Ştefan: ARCADIA naturally draws membership from around the world. Given the nature of the field, the professionals concerned with international development relocate, many times, to work in various areas of the world. In that context, ARCADIA's mission is to enhance knowledge and professional expertise in international development, by providing a community space where professionals continue to learn, while sharing own insights and working in collaborative projects. Each practitioner, scholar, expert, policy-maker, journalist and student engaged in this field brings a wealth of knowledge and experience at the table. By providing learning and sharing spaces, ARCADIA aims to both build more capacity in this field and take the field further.

One important result from ARCADIA's work is that the knowledge and experience arrived at in practice is shared with others. **In Romania's context, in a field where brain drain is implicit in the profession, such learning spaces provide the soft infrastructure necessary for brain regain.** The brain regain is multiplied by the openness of the network to professionals

from anywhere in the world and by the focus put on professionals based in Romania. As such, the brain regain is not merely the reverse of the brain-drain, but much more, tapping into the knowledge resources available currently at an international level and at the same time building connections to the broader international development community.

Alexandra: Network organizations are not very common in Romania. Nevertheless, the network approach as a deliberate strategy for the non-governmental sector may have a tremendous social impact enabling members to create/ join various projects and thus, put together different approaches, skills, and capacities. How can the example of ARCADIA benefit to the non-governmental sector in terms of strategy, partnerships, and expertise?

Ștefan: The main nuggets of knowledge come from struggles, challenges and outright failure. Therefore, to meaningfully address your question, it is important to be opened about the *lessons* ARCADIA learnt in the process of setting up the community of professionals. I see a bundle of challenges that interrelate. These are: **challenges related to the mission, challenges related to building adequate learning spaces and challenges related to sustainability.**

Being a professional association that aims to grow the field – a field that is re-emerging after decades of decay – offers ARCADIA a dual challenge: *first*, it emerges in a context where such type of organizations is uncommon or dysfunctional (except maybe the professional organizations set up through special laws); *second*, embarking to support a field that is only recently acknowledged nationally, adds a strong field-building mission to ARCADIA's work, making it important not only to build a community of professionals, but also to contribute to the emergence of the field through its action.

The *lessons* learnt here are that we need more collective efforts to build stronger initiatives that create knowledge

and capacity in various fields, that each field has a number of professionals that are strongly motivated and grow through engaging in professional networks and communities; and while not easy, building a professional community brings a lot of satisfaction from seeing the field, people and the community grow.

A second challenge relates to building adequate learning spaces, more broadly to building processes of all sorts (organizational, community, learning-related, etc). There is little capacity in general in the civil society and universities to design good processes and that leaves a mark in our context as well. The types of engagements that professionals take do not lead in the short to medium term to building well-designed learning processes. The lessons learned are that **we need to invest more in this area and pay additional attention to designing the interactions and learning spaces.**

The last category of challenges relates to the sustainability of both the community and the organization. In terms of financial sustainability, professional organizations are not on the radar for any of the main public and private donors in Romania. In terms of organizational sustainability, we find that success can only come from engaging proactively professionals for a longer period of time. The lessons-learned here are that **we need to advocate more for investments in knowledge services and organizations working with knowledge across sectors – academic, implementation, policy, media and that we need to invest more in building sustainability models for professional and knowledge-focused organizations.**

Alexandra: Who are the Romanians in development or, in other words, who are the professionals that joined ARCADIA and have supported its activities?

Ştefan: There is a wide range of professionals involved in ARCADIA and its activities. There are practitioners in

development working in various parts of the world who contribute with input from wherever they are. There are also practitioners who have lived in developing countries and have returned back to Romania who continue to contribute to developing the field here. An important component of the membership relates to the academic environment – academics, researchers, and students. Also, media practitioners interested in development are present in the network.

Alexandra: As a network of experts and professionals in the field of international development and cooperation, ARCADIA enables members to focus on their cause in a very entrepreneurial way. How does the organization work?

Ştefan: The most important benefits that come from a network appear when members assume leadership on issues of interest. In ARCADIA we provide the necessary space for professionals and their organizations to propose initiatives and lead their implementation. The organization facilitates the activity of working-groups, the online review, conferences, workshops, training sessions, etc. and each of the members can use the space for proposing initiatives and contributing with content. In doing so they are supported by the organizational core to be able to setup the new projects and launch their first initiatives and activities.

Alexandra: The development of expertise (in any field of practice) requires coaches and trainers who are willing to share from their professional history, giving constructive feedback. If we consider ARCADIA as a learning community that is benefiting its members, how would you assess the learning opportunities provided by the association?

Ştefan: We have been concerned in the last years with the number of people embarking on a career in this field and have tested several methods for enhancing the career opportunities for young practitioners and students. We put in place a mentorship program. We have organized training sessions for

young practitioners and students and have built a network of academic advisors for the students doing research on development. Furthermore we offered, with the support of the MFA and UNDP Romania, [scholarships](#) for students carrying out research in partner countries. What we see as a key modality for enhancing learning among peers is the further development and consolidation of working groups as well as facilitating more events (both virtual and in person) where such sharing and learning is made possible.

Alexandra: *Considering the new dynamics of the post-2015 agenda, what are the directions that the organization is willing to embrace in the future?*



Ştefan: The major shift that comes with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), in my view, is the universalization of the development targets. That implies erasing at some

conceptual level the distinction between developed and developing countries. Such move can have a positive or a negative impact – negative, if certain perspectives of the world continue to be prevalent and imposed. Positive, if this move enables more voices and approaches at the table and if it enables us to recognize the uniqueness of each developing context (be it in a formerly developing or developed environment). This change impacts ARCADIA, as the professionals in the network will become more open to Romania's experience with development and the value-added they can bring to the internal debates on development challenges.

Alexandra: *What message would you like to pass on to current and potential members interested in getting to know ARCADIA?*

Ştefan: To simply be creative in shaping learning experiences within and outside the ARCADIA community and also to take initiative and put that creativity in action.

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The #EYD2015 at a glance: perspectives from Brussels

Interviewing Mr [Victor Negrescu](#), the youngest Romanian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) since the integration of Romania in the European Union in 2007.



Elected in May 2014, he became member in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and a permanent member of the Committee on Budgets and the Delegation to the ACP-EU JPA. Victor Negrescu has an important professional

and academic experience in both politics and Political Science and has worked for several years already in promoting development cooperation policies and European values in

Romania. With a PhD on European development cooperation policies he is the founder of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies English taught MA program on development, international cooperation and humanitarian aid.

He is also well-known for his interesting mix of projects and initiatives that blend local Romanian interests with global open-minded approaches. Thus, the winner of the [MEP Awards 2015](#) for his work on [the Digital Agenda for Europe](#) is also the one who brought the regional features of Romania close to Brussels through his project "Delegation of Transylvania and Banat" and tried to improve the access to healthcare in rural communities due to his 1 million EUR initiative "Access to Health for people in rural areas".

Alexandra: This year, we celebrated the [European Year for Development](#) (EYD2015). Could you tell us more about the European Parliament's participation in EYD activities?



Victor: I believe that it is very important that the European Union decided to celebrate the European Year for Development. The European Parliament completely supports the popularization of the concept of development and the need for a stronger debate on the role of the European Union and of the member states in the implementation of development policies. Therefore several debates have been already organized in the EP premises and almost at every plenary we discuss about a topic related to development. Just recently we discussed about the efficiency of development aid funds and the necessity to focus more the cooperation on sustainable projects in

partnership with the beneficiaries.

Nevertheless I am one of the MEPs who believe that we could have done more. It is clear that in the context of the refugee crisis the world needs the EU and the member states to get more involved in developing countries. In order to do so we need to raise awareness on the necessity to allocate more resources to development cooperation policies but also to involve more our citizens. Public support and development education are necessary for stronger policies, and the EYD2015 should be the instrument that the European Parliament should use to enable a wider participation. Events as such are important not only for sending a strong political message – creating the conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth requires not only different policy instruments, but also a socially responsible attitude from the people, when acting as economic actors.

Alexandra: At the end of September 2015, the final post-2015 outcome, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets have been at the [UN Summit](#) in NYC. An [EP delegation](#) from the DEVE Committee participated to this Summit and passed on the message and the commitments of the European Union and its Member States. From your point of view, what message should the European Union pass on after the UN Summit?

Victor: I think that the European Union should prove again that it is the largest international donor but also the most pro-active world power in relation to development issues. The European Union has to assume the targets but also to promote the Sustainable Development Goals. That means that the EU should prove that contrary to the failure of the Millennium Development Goals, this time there is no space for a detour.

The European Union has to assume this responsibility as well as to engage with the other partners in reaching true global targets that all parties are going to support. The EU can play therefore the role of a leader but also of a negotiator

capable in bringing everyone to the same table and pushing for a more responsible attitude towards our future. It is clear that the EU has to make sure that the Sustainable Development Goals do not remain only nice phrases in the speeches that took place at the UN Summit, but actually transform in concrete policies at global, national and local level. Leading by example can be one of the tactics that the EU should adopt in order to obtain larger support for attaining the SDGs.

Alexandra: In comparison to the MDGs that have been dedicated to ending poverty in developing countries, the SDGs will explicitly broaden their focus to all countries, “poor, rich and middle-income countries”, including all the members of the EU. Therefore, they also have to come up with a new just sustainable social and economic model applicable in their own societies. *What actions do you think policymakers and implicitly the members of the European Parliament need to take in order to promote and support the new global development agenda at home, in all EU countries?*

Victor: This change of including all countries in the Sustainable Development Goals is an important step in making everyone aware that we need to construct a more just and sustainable social and economic model. Therefore a stronger involvement is needed from decision makers at every level.

The first step is to raise awareness regarding the UN Summit decisions and the SDGs. From public debates to education, the SDGs have to become a reference for the citizens and the development perspectives of all societies.



In parallel it is important for everyone, again at every level, to establish clear objectives with concrete benchmarks. Therefore a decision on the European SDGs at European level by the Commission and the European Parliament can be a starting

point. This can be followed by national decisions with a wide participation of the civil society in order to transform the SDGs in a development strategy.

Finally we need to identify clear projects and actions that can raise support and public participation around these commitments. From public campaigns to activities that involve the public administration, more resources have to be used support the new global development agenda.

Alexandra: The [European Consensus on Development](#) (2006), the [Agenda for Change](#) (2012) and the [Multiannual Financial Framework](#) (2014-2020) are only a few of the most important documents that set out specific guidance for planning and implementation of the development assistance component of all EU instruments and cooperation strategies with developing partners. The European Consensus was adopted in 2005 in response to the MDGs and in 2012, the Agenda for Change came as a *de facto* update of the second part. *Is the EU preparing a new update of the European Consensus in response to the adoption of the sustainable development agenda?*

Victor: There have been debates on the need to work on a new document presenting the guidelines of the EU development assistance policy. At the level of the European Commission there are several active debates on a need to merge the SDG and the EU2020 strategy in order to establish a broad consensus on the development agenda of the European Union.

We are still at an initial stage of these debates but you can be assured that I will contribute as much as possible to the implementation in a clear document of the SDG.

Moreover, I believe that the process of updating the EU's development agenda needs to be taken up responsibly – the new priorities need to become true benchmarks of our dedication to solve the major issues of the continent and not a set of desires we want to see accomplished with the passing of

decades. The EU needs to learn from the global lesson, but also from its own institutional history – setting up new policies requires adequate resources and the necessary resolve to see them through. In addition, I believe that at least some of the paramount goals for European development, once set, should not become the object of political trading and negotiation.

Alexandra: As a member of the [Delegation to the ACP- EU JPA](#), could you tell us how do you think the new global agenda will influence the EU external policies, priorities and allocations, namely in the ACP area?



Victor: I believe that the European Union needs to face up to reality and see that it cannot continue this ambivalent attitude towards globalization and its effects. The EU cannot

portray itself as an actor with a global reach and at the same time try to stem the effects of globalization by resorting to outdated policies and models of political action. Many issues on the European public agenda – combating climate change, seeking a solution to immigration, raising the living standards, creating the premises for sustainable development – have a profound global component and we need to stand up to this fact.

Consequently, while the ACP Area definitely has its own characteristics, many of the challenges it faces stem not from particular dynamics, but are part of larger global processes that the EU can and should influence. I believe that the EU's position as the largest donor in the world needs to be taken up responsibly and that the EU needs to adapt its foreign policy and assistance for development instruments in order to raise the efficiency of its actions.

The EU needs a more coherent approach towards the ACP area. A

fair partnership has to be established involving the civil society and the citizens from the ACP area in the direction of a common development. A new approach is needed not only based on aid but on a true guidance and assistance of those countries towards development.

Moreover, I think that the EU is in itself an institutional model with enough flexibility and resistance to tackle the effects of globalization – in the end, accommodating the varying interests of such a large number of members offers an example for managing the challenges brought about by globalization.

Alexandra: According to the [World Bank](#) and [Eurostat](#), Romania- an upper middle income country with one of the highest poverty rates in the EU- is still struggling with numerous social and economic challenges. *Having in mind the new post-2015 agenda and knowing very well the realities of our country, how would you tailor the SDGs to the realities of Romania in order to create better life conditions? On which objectives/ area would you put special emphasis?*

Victor: While the Romanian context has its own peculiarities, the cluster-like manner of establishing the SDGs is a useful method in assessing Romania's future objectives for development. As the World Bank and Eurostat statistics point out, Romania is a country of contrasts and therefore bolder thinking and considerate planning are both needed in order to chart out a course for the future.

We have managed to move away from the harshest consequences of inept austerity policies that have crippled our healthcare and education systems, but we still need to act more on this front. We have done a great job in achieving economic growth, after a period of collapse that has made a serious impact on the livelihood of the poorest citizens of our country. It is high time we moved towards strengthening the conditions for a sustainable, but also inclusive growth model.

We need at the same time to raise the awareness and also our profile in combating climate change – climate change is not something that happens on the news or in developing countries, outside our continent. It is a phenomenon that will affect us increasingly in the coming years.

Last, but not least, we should consolidate our efforts towards building a more inclusive society. Unfortunately, and not because of a desire in public policies, the Romanian society is still characterized by social exclusion: gender equality, social mobility in the context of increasing inequality, racial or ethnic discrimination, these are all symptoms of a what remains a very narrow public space that needs to be expanded in real terms.