

COVID-19

Community Foundations in Action

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Romania - Adapting to bring back quality of life



Alina Kasprovschi

Alina Kasprovschi seems deeply relieved: “It’s almost like in the old days!” She refers to her working environment - for the first time since beginning of March, when the lockdown in Romania started, she is sharing the office with her colleagues at the Community Foundation of Bucharest. The lockdown is over, people are swarming outside, a whole bunch of them ignoring the fact that there is still a pandemic going on, not “believing” in Covid-19. Trust is a big issue in Romania - there’s not much of it in the government, explains Alina, executive director and founding member of Fundatia Comunitara Bucuresti, and it most certainly didn’t grow during the pandemic: “In the beginning of March, the Ministry of Health was ensuring people that the healthcare system

is well prepared - but it wasn’t like that at all.” Masks, gloves, hospital beds - the Romanian healthcare system lacked all of that. At the same time, the population lacked jobs - and money. Clearly, those were the topics, most important for organisations during the pandemic. The Community Foundation of Bucharest set up two emergency funds, to be distributed in Bucharest and across Romania via community foundations: one medical, that was able to fund 7 projects, including the setup of two mobile hospital units. And another one with 46 projects to help vulnerable communities around the country with basic food, medical and hygiene products with close to €300,000 transferred to organisations which are already working in the field.

In the meantime - by the beginning of July - both funds were stopped. “To provide medical equipment is now the Government’s responsibility”, explains Alina, “and of course poverty is still a huge problem in the country, but it’s also the Government’s job to solve it, it hasn’t been our goal of the fund to stop poverty at all, but to support during the crisis.”

For the community foundation, the biggest sacrifice during the pandemic has been the canceling of the popular yearly fundraising event “Swimathon”. This year’s edition was supposed to be the biggest Swimathon ever - with thousands of participants. “Of course, it couldn’t take place”, Alina regrets, “but at least we turned it into an online event.” Swim@home instead of Swimathon. Instead of swimming in a large olympicpool, swimmers activated their social network online, asking for donations with ideas ranging from

childhood pictures at the pool, funny jokes on swimming in the bathtub, to serious posts on the dire situation of non-profits and their acute need for funding. And the biggest surprise: “We came quite close with the donations to what we are collecting with the correspondent live events.” 25 projects could be funded with the money raised. The projects were picked before the pandemic, but could adapt to the new situation: Educational projects were now focusing on homeschooling, offline events for the elderly turned into phone support.



A team of junior swimmers attending the Swimathon with their trainer - they swam and raised funds for home treatment for children with cancer. This is the 8th edition of the Swimathon in Bucharest and, because of the pandemic, they couldn't organize a large event with thousands of people. Instead, all teams swam in small groups and with social distancing, during a weekend of #SwimAtHome.

Photo credit: Radu Fugarescu

One of Alina’s favourite projects from the vulnerable communities emergency fund was funded by the Galatai Community Foundation, in a rural area in the east of Romania, close to the Moldavian border: “While delivering food and masks to people’s homes, the volunteers wore funny masks - like an animal mouth - to make people laugh.” Because according to them that is exactly what is needed most during times of crisis: having a good laugh. “What they brought to people’s homes is something we tend to forget all too often”, Alina says, affected by the memory, “quality of life.” Something so rare during the last month, that the story of this community foundation found favour even in the highest levels of politics: Employees of the European Commission in Brussels started a fund raising campaign for projects all over Europe with the support of the King Baudoin Foundation in Belgium. “When they were calling us and asking for projects that needed financial support, I immediately suggested this one.”



The [Bucharest Community Foundation](#) started in 2011. The Foundation now has 8 employees. Support from up to 150 volunteers comes for large events such as the Swimathon. In times of Covid-19, the community raised



around €300,000 for emergency funds (within an overall budget of €650,000).

The Bucharest Community Foundation is one of 19 Community Foundations in Romania. [ARC, the Association for Community Relations](#), follows among other goals a National Program for Community Foundations Development to provide existing foundations with grants and technical assistance. Additionally the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations represents and supports its members and provides mechanisms for attracting funds and a good communication network. For more information see on our Website.