



EmpowerMap

MINI-REPORT

MAPPING ORGANISATIONS SERVING
ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE WOMEN IN
FRANCE, POLAND, ROMANIA AND SPAIN



Romania



Funded by the Rights,
Citizenship and
Equality Programme.



Foundation



EmpowerMap

EmpowerMap is a joint project of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) —the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in Europe— and the Orange Foundation.

The goal of the project is to gather information about grassroots women's organisations in Spain, France, Romania and Poland which have on-the-ground programmes aimed at the socio-economic empowerment of vulnerable women.

This mini report is based on empirical data collected by Laura Albu, from March 2017 to October 2017 in Romania, on behalf of the European Women's Lobby and the Orange Foundation. The collected data were drawn from desk research, in-depth and semi-structured interviews and a free online survey in Romanian.

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Introduction

Women and the Digital Divide

Today, in a world where more people have cell phones than toilets, basic digital skills are essential for a vast number of activities ranging from simple communication to finding decent employment. But even in the most developed regions, including throughout Europe, women are less likely than men to have these skills, putting them at a severe disadvantage from an economic perspective.

For women who are already in situations of economic difficulty because of poverty, lack of education, their immigration status, or surviving violence, a digital skills deficiency only increases a woman's vulnerability. The digital skills gap creates an additional barrier to seeking information, communicating with support networks, and finding a job.

The Orange Foundation's Women's Digital Centres

The lives of vulnerable women, whether they are in Africa or Europe, can be improved by learning digital skills and gaining access to information and communication technology. Telecommunications company Orange has recognised this and devoted part of the work of its charitable foundation to providing grassroots women's organisations with the means to empower vulnerable women by teaching them digital skills.

The scope of Orange's Women's Digital Centres Programme has been ambitious with hundreds of Centres being opened globally. However, the Orange Foundation is limited in its ability to be impactful by the fact that it does not have a comprehensive sense of the needs of the women it aims to serve with its Centres, nor an understanding of which grassroots organisations are the most successful at actually enabling women's empowerment.

Knowing more about the needs of the economically vulnerable women in its operating countries, as well as more about the grassroots organisations which work with these women, will allow the Orange Foundation to make more informed decisions about which organisations they choose to partner with, and which groups of vulnerable women would be the most positively impacted by their training programme.

The EmpowerMap Project

In response to this need for information, this six-month project provides a mapping of the needs of vulnerable women and the practices and capacities of grassroots organisations which assist them, in four Orange operating countries in Europe, (France, Spain, Poland and Romania).



Tapping into the European Women's Lobby's network of over 2,500 member organisations, this project illuminates the various issues and struggles that women in situations of economic difficulty face across diverse countries, how service-provision organisations assist them in their journey to empowerment, and how digital education has the potential to help them become independent.

This information will enable the Orange Foundation to make better-informed and more strategic choices about which kinds of organisations and which groups of vulnerable women can be best served by the Orange Foundation's 'Women's Digital Centres' Programme.

The European Women's Lobby

Comprised of 2,500 members, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in Europe with 25 years of experience promoting the participation of women's organisations at the EU level and in designing and leading campaigns with its members across Europe.

The European Women's Lobby has strong national members in the four selected countries, all of whom serve as a hub for dozens of grassroots organisations working with diverse groups of vulnerable women, in different ways. Each of the four members represents the voice of women in the country and is staffed by experts who have a deep understanding of the local, regional and national economic and social contexts in which women live, as well as best practices for overcoming obstacles to empowerment and independence.

The European Women's Lobby is also known for its proprietary feminist mapping research methodology, which it debuted in 2015 with a ground-breaking ten-country study of the needs, experiences and profiles of women social entrepreneurs (WEstart). This best practice methodology has been continually refined over the course of the past two years, as the EWL has undertaken additional country mappings at the request of the governments of Belgium and Luxembourg. Using research tools that have been crafted by a group of international experts and successfully used to gather data on over 1,200 women and organisations to date, the EWL has a unique ability to quickly and efficiently gather data that would otherwise be inaccessible.



Background

Economic data

Romania ranks at the bottom of the Gender Equality Index in the EU¹. Some of the most critical areas that demand immediate action are women's participation in decision making, increases in women's income and an equal distribution of care work among family members that should allow women more free time to dedicate to recreation, education or other socially engaging activities.

Educational and literacy data

In Romania, education and literacy rates for women were 98% in 2015.² Despite this figure, headways must also be made to improve women's access to education –especially tertiary education.– Likewise, the country must work to overcome the barriers of educational segregation if Romania is to catch up with EU gender equality indicators and better the situation of women in Romania.

Financial and digital literacy and access data

Policy-wise, there is a strong need for budgets that take the gender component into account for public policies. Such consideration of gender would influence the way budgets are used and impact gender at a local and national level. Currently, there are a very limited number of programmes at the national level dedicated to gender equality and financial and digital literacy. Those programmes that do exist risk disappearing for lack of funds, such as the National Interest Programmes for equal opportunities and violence against women in Romania, which was announced in 2016 and then cancelled in 2017.

Women's rights in law and policy

While violence against women is widespread and recognised by the general public, few services are available to women survivors of violence. Across the country, shelters can only accommodate 4.46% of victims. Moreover, while the legal framework *on violence against women* has made important progress by including protection orders and multidisciplinary intervention teams, it remains inefficient and uncoordinated in practice. The signing and speedy ratification process of the Istanbul Convention in 2016 is a step in the right direction and adds to the political momentum gathering on this subject.

What are the main issues affecting women's economic independence?

An overwhelming 92.5% women with care responsibilities who are not employed or who work part-time say they do so because of a lack of care services in the country. This proportion is by far the highest of any EU country. Care work and childbearing falls on the shoulders of women because of the traditional and stereotyped gender roles within the family, creating an imbalance in women's enjoyment of free time.

¹ eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/gender-equality-index/2015/RO

² world.bymap.org/LiteracyRatesFemales.html



Romanian women's NGOs have few financing options –among them EU funding programmes and EEA (European Economic Area) Grants.– However, the complicated process of accessing EU funding is a barrier in continuing to support NGO activities for women's rights and to introduce new projects and new programmes. It is imperative that adequate and flexible solutions for funding for women's rights are available as well as funding solutions for supporting coalition building among different women's rights advocates on a national and regional level.

Who are the most vulnerable women? In which ways?

Women's economic vulnerability is highlighted by the fact that twice as many women as men over 65 are at risk of poverty. Poverty affects women disproportionately, especially women of Roma ethnic background. Discrimination in school and employment as well as in access to care and social services is well documented among Roma women. And while there are constant attempts to denounce abuse and improve the situation of Roma, more coordinated and gender-sensitive programmes need to be established.

Are there relevant state aid and social protection programmes? Are they working for women?

Recent surveys show that Romania is the country with the largest number of teenage mothers and unwanted pregnancies among young women³. Health data also looks worrisome when it comes to STIs, with young women being again most affected.

At the same time, declining birth-rates and recent conservative backlash have led to debates in Romania and a rise in the Coalition for Family regarding the debate on limiting women's access to abortion⁴ in an attempt to increase birth rates. Demographic concerns should not trump women's rights, especially women's right to determine control over their bodies since this is a grave infringement of human rights. Recently, a proposal regarding reducing the pension age for women with three or more children is under legislative debate⁵.

What is the current political situation and its relationship to women's economic independence?

While some parties implement a quota system for their electoral lists on a voluntary basis, only 19.35%⁶ of members of parliament are women, with the number of women elected as parliamentarians decreasing with each new election process. While women have better representation in the public sector, the percentage of women politicians is far from the EU average.

³ dcnews.ro/eurostat-romania-cele-mai-tinere-mame-din-ue_553494.html

⁴ studentipentruviata.ro/2017/03/press-release-the-march-for-life-2017-in-romania-110000-de-participants-in-138-cities/

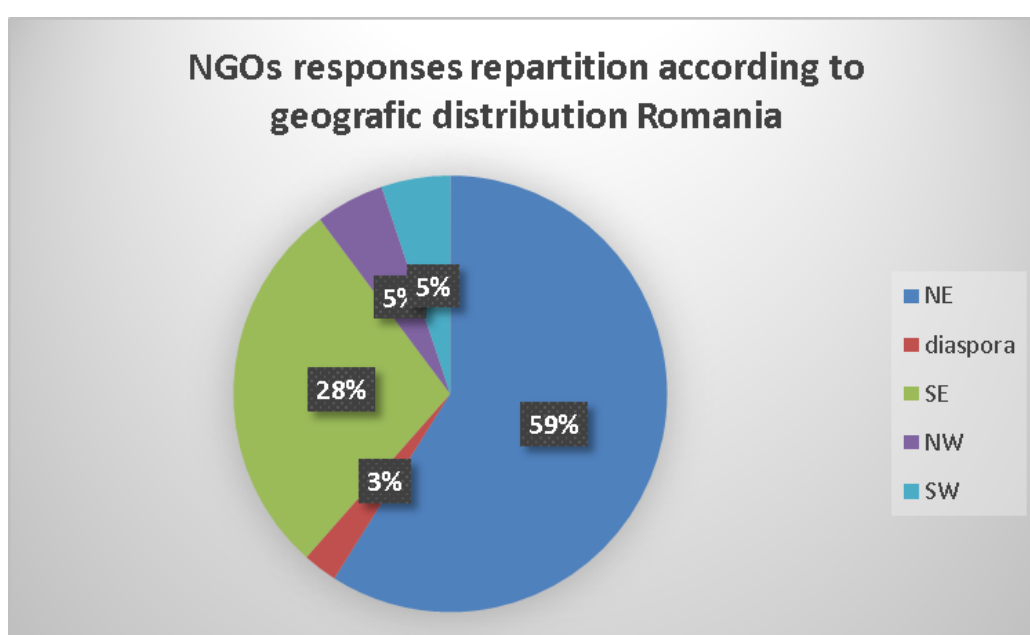
⁵ stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/femeile-cu-3-sau-mai-mult-copii-s-ar-putea-pensiona-cu-6-ani-mai-devreme.html

⁶ www.senat.ro/FisaSenatorului.aspx ; <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura2015.de?idl=1>



Mapped Organisations and their Programmes

39 Romanian NGOs participated in the project survey through interviews and meetings with EWL and ROWL (Romanian Women's Lobby) consultants. Most organisations are part of different networks, coalitions or federations of NGOs and assist women in vulnerable situations. Other organisations were not linked to any network but work at the community level in different communities in Romania. The main networks of NGOs that contributed responses were: Romanian Women's Lobby, Romanian Network and a coalition of NGOs dealing with violence against women, Federation of NGOs in Social Services and RuralNet. Below are some key indicators on the types of NGOs that responded to survey.



NGO budgets

Over 45% of Romanian women's NGOs operate with budgets under €10,000 per year, increasing slowly to under €50,000 (13%), under €100,000 (16%). Only 13% of the NGOs have budgets over €100,000, and just one of respondents over €500,000.

Type of programmes delivered at a community level

An average of 35-36% of the programmes delivered are focused on training for integration in the labour market, preparation for the labour market and support to access a higher level of education. Smaller although significant, 29% of services include social and emotional counselling, support for mental health, followed by support in accessing state aid (25%), legal assistance (20%), basic financial information (16%) and access to childcare services (16%). Support for housing (12%) and access to health and medical services (13%) accounted for the smallest proportion of services.



Interestingly, more than 45% of the respondents noted that they offer other kinds of services, which are not listed in the current survey. Several examples include jobs in social enterprises established by the NGOs, women's leadership and women's entrepreneurship.

Staff and volunteer dimensions

38% of all women's NGOs are working on a volunteer basis. Taking into consideration that many NGOs offer community services that require qualified staff, this is a worrisome indicator.

24% of organisations have fewer than three people as hired staff; however, the question did not ask whether the paid staff worked full-time or part-time. These numbers are a clear sign that underfunding is in direct relation to the low number of people hired on a permanent basis in Romanian NGOs.

The remaining NGOs have more resources, with 3% possessing over four hired staff, 10% between 11-20 and only 17% with more than 21 individuals. These figures suggest that the organisations can consistently deliver services in the communities. The survey indicated that 40% of NGOs have at least 1-3 volunteers on a weekly basis, while 20% have between 4-6 or between 7-10 volunteers. Only 10% of participating NGOs do not use volunteers in their work.

Staff digital skills, NGOs' technology used for socio-economic programmes

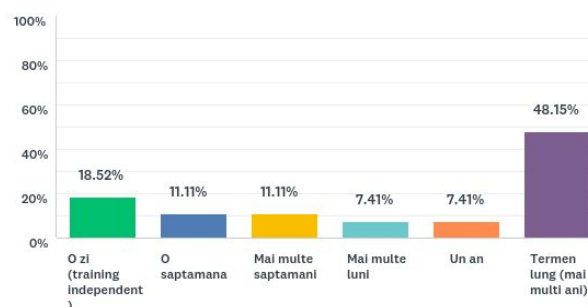
In Romania NGOs have well-trained staff and volunteers: 48% of them have digital skills and can use computers, laptops, and smartphones as tools, and 45% reported very good skills. Regarding technology used by NGOs in their socio-economic programmes, 80% of NGOs have wireless Internet access in their office, 86% use laptops, 82% have printers and 62% use desktop computers. Only 48% are using smartphones at this moment.

Duration of socio-economic programmes

Almost half of the respondents (48%) are working with women on a long-term programme, combined with one-day trainings focused on different topics (19%). The other more costly types of programmes such as one or multi-week programmes are used by only 11% of the NGOs.

Q15 Care este durata totala a programului socio-economic de dezvoltare?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 12





NGO capacity during the socio-economic programme

Depending on the size of the NGOs, and resources allocated to the socio-economic programme, the number of people assisted on an average during the year varies from just under five people per year (24% of the NGOs) to 11-25 (21%). Organisations that supported 26-50 people accounted for 17%, while another 17% cover 51-99 people and 10% assist more than 100 women in a year.

Programme evaluation

82% of the NGOs evaluate their programmes using a wide variety of tools and methods. Quantitative indicators include number of visits, number of beneficiaries, business plans realised by women, startup businesses established by women, rate of occupancy of a job after the programme, number of women certified following a specific training, number of women starting their studies, and number of women establishing women associations. The organisations also use qualitative indicators including psychological reports, beneficiary feedback, staff evaluations, and increases in income-level, as well as “perception of the women on the functioning of her own life”, “participation of women in support network” and “level of satisfaction on their own life”.

Vulnerable women in Romania

Top vulnerabilities

In Romania, vulnerable populations include single mothers (81%), generational poverty (77%), unemployment (70%), domestic violence (67%), women who experience social isolation and lack of community or social network (56%), women who lack of financial knowledge (56%), and women who experience systemic discrimination due to their identity (41%). All other vulnerabilities accounted for less than 15% of the total responses.

Main barriers that prevent assisted women from finding decent jobs and income

From a quantitative perspective, NGOs cited lack of specific abilities (74%), taking care of others including children and family members (70%), lack of knowledge on how to get a job (67%), low self-esteem (67%), lack of education (63%), lack of job opportunities within reasonable distance (60%), lack of motivation (59%), lack of digital training (52%), being out of labour market for a long time (48%), domestic violence (48%) and discrimination on the basis of personal identity or experience (41%).

Some of the responses we received on a qualitative level are listed below:

- Death or serious illness of the spouse or partner; divorce.
- Poor economic development of the community.
- Lack of development strategies; economic crises.
- Lack of access to education and training.
- Ethnic discrimination (Roma women).



- Lack of access to decent living conditions - single mother status, corroborated with the lack of infrastructure for the care of children and other dependents in the family.
- Having one or two children with disabilities, some disabilities being severe and requiring the mother's 100% presence.
- Many children in care (especially in Roma communities).
- Lack of social services specialised for mothers, children and young people with disabilities, especially in rural or small towns.
- Domestic violence, especially in rural areas and lack of counselling services for women.

As one organisation explained:

"Women who come to the assistance of our organisation are victims of domestic violence, physically, emotionally, sexually, socially abused by their partner. In many cases, even if they have some form of education (over 36% of them have higher education), women have poorly paid jobs, are not allowed to go to work, have unsatisfactory jobs or do not have control over their own income, since the partner manages family money."

Many women cannot develop an independent life because they lack the necessary financial resources, or borrowed income, to rent a home. Following the separation from the aggressor, most of them become single mothers and the sole financial supporter of the family. Fathers often fail to pay child support, which in and of itself does not cover a good part of the child's needs. Overall, women lack viable economic alternatives, consistent government support, entrepreneurial and financial education and female leadership."

Profile of women assisted

97% of assisted women are born in Romania, and 80% are in a stable housing situation. Regarding education, 42% completed primary school or less, and 48% have a high school diploma.

Financially, 82% face financial insecurity, and 65% receive no state aid.

Regarding family care, 76% take care of other family members. Skillwise, 50% of women have no digital abilities, and 42% have basic digital abilities. The organisations supported 54% of women between 26-50 years old and equally 23% for women under 26 and those older than 50.



Case studies

- **Asociatia Femeia Conteaza – (Women matter)**

The organisation was founded in 2016, by women in Roman, a town in Neamt county next to Iasi. The local community recognised it lacked a dedicated organisation for women. Since its establishment, it has gained a diverse group of 150 members, of which 70% are active.



Key issues

Asociatia Femeia Conteaza focuses on education, social and political issues. Many women felt that they did not have enough representation on a political level. Likewise, the organisation focuses on health programmes, which are not well established.

Another issue among Romanian women is emigration. It is not uncommon for several family members to work in other European countries, leaving children in Romania, where they miss out on education from the mother. Typically, it's a temporary migration for five to ten months, during which they leave their families. Many children face problems, especially teenagers, who feel like they are left behind.

Resources

The organisation has six or seven volunteers who provide support and run the organisation on a voluntary basis. They run a project on domestic violence and now are doing counselling around work, retirement, work conflict and social issues. The organisation has no funding, and the staff are not paid for their work.

Notes Dana Horlescu, President of the organisation, “*we don't have European funds or any funding. We are working with our own resources. The women call us and know us. So we provide free service for women with volunteers. We do not yet have a training programme in*



place, and now we are trying to learn how to do it.” Asociatia Femeia Conteaza has a little location they are renting with money from their own pockets.

Digital infrastructure:

Horlescu observes,

“It (the Orange Women’s Digital Centre) could be useful in our case for the women we serve. Now we are using our personal items, but there are limits with our own technology. For families who have children with disabilities, there are many applications that they don’t have access to, such as software to help with things like attention and so forth. We don’t have access to these programmes, but it would be good to have it for the children.”

Digital skills of the women they work with now

On the digital capacity of their staff, volunteer, and participants, Horlescu notes *“our volunteers have a sufficient level of digital skills. Because of migration, we need to use the internet a lot. Also in the countryside. Plus in Romania, we have a good internet network –even better than the United States– and people are used to using it to talk to family in other countries. It’s not enough to have access to the internet. What is important for these women is not to learn how to use a computer but to learn how to find the right information, using sites like Wikipedia, and also how to filter this information.*

They can do research, but they often don’t know if what they find is good. It’s about finding the right information that can help with their children who have a disability. For example, there are very good applications aimed at supporting and caring for children with disabilities, and it would be good for women to have access to this. There are things on YouTube that mothers could use to help with issues with their children – speech therapy, for example – but they might not know which one is good for their children. It’s important to focus on teaching the parents.”

● **Corona Foundation**

About the NGO

The foundation was established in 1999 but became active in 2002. It works with a lot of vulnerable groups as well as environmental issues. They have a research department, but now its activity is diminished.

Women’s programme

Executive Director Irina Sile explains, *“we work with women as unemployed people and vulnerable people in different situations. We offer counselling to find better jobs, for training – not just formal qualifications but also on issues such as civil rights and participatory citizenship.*



One programme I am very proud of is our Entrepreneurial Programme for Women. We worked 10 years to offer training on entrepreneurial skills, consulting on business plans and identifying grant plans for startups. We had a lot of women benefit from this work, about 300 women in total.

Another programme that we run is focused on unemployed women. It is still going but at a low level now, with work in Iasi and rural areas. We offer support in terms of how to write your resume, how to find a job, how to apply for jobs and how to present yourself in interviews. We have training on how to do that, with qualified trainers. We also used to offer psychological counselling – the aim was to prepare women with different backgrounds for the job application process.



We had women who never worked, unemployed people and those who had only taken care of the children who didn't know what they could do for themselves. Other people were unemployed for a long period and needed support to accept the fact they were not qualified anymore for the job market. With these individuals, we help them change and update their qualifications and try to find what kind of job is suitable for them."

Resources

On the funding situation of the organisation Sile explains:

"We are a grant-based organisation, so we had grants from EU programmes for our work. We currently don't have any funding and run with no or very little money; staff are not being paid.

We had more than 1,000 beneficiaries in the unemployment programme, more than 50% women. In total, more than 3,000 people came through our programmes or projects from the beginning until now.

We had a few volunteers, but we also had job centres in various areas with paid staff, which offered counselling and support. We worked mainly with paid staff. Now we don't have EU grants (or funding from the government), but the government just signed a small contract, so maybe we will work again on unemployment next year.



At CORONA we have a set-up with a building, offices and a server, but it's a matter of human resources with no paid staff. But for other organisations that are at the beginning other resources like computers and office space are important.

Digital skills of the women they work with now

"Theoretically, you need computers for digital training, and we worked a lot on training people on how to use computers. Our resources are a network of laptops that offer us mobility to go to rural areas. There we rent rooms where we organise training. For example, we work with city hall in small villages and they rent us a room in public infrastructures, and we go and install the computers and do training and counselling with the women there. In Iasi, we had main centres with computers for the staff and for women to search for jobs and learn how to apply for jobs, so it's obviously necessary to have access to digital infrastructure. At the same time, you also need programmes that are licensed or open source software, but that is a thing that people sometimes forget.

In addition to Office and Windows programmes, other important software could assist you in developing a better counselling process. For example, our psychologists work with specific programmes or questionnaires which are very expensive but can help you a lot in your work. You need not only to have qualifications but to improve other soft skills, and with these questionnaires, you can direct the person to other trainings, for example on how to express yourself and other programmes that are important for people without a job. Using these questionnaires also helps candidates find a job that suits their personality. We can then direct them to specific training programmes or jobs, like hairdressers and tattoo artists for example. These kinds of interventions are good for young people to try and find themselves, make some money and do something that interests them. It became a very interesting project with good results.

It's important to have established centres in rural areas since it's difficult for people to travel from remote villages to cities in Romania. Organisations must be mobile and go to them.

It's even difficult to take them from their home to the centre in the rural area because they have a household to run, typically with a farm, animals and other chores to tend to. It's very important to be there, listen to their problems and find a solution to bring them to the support centre.

There are many programmes working to develop digital skills. In schools they have computers and instructors to help children use them; however, in areas where the poverty is very strong, it's important to establish these kinds of digital centres, but they need personnel to train people.

Who will teach people how to use the computers? Who will support them? Who will offer maintenance? What is the point of having a computer if you don't have updated software, and no one pays the internet bill. In the long term, we have to think beyond just computers".



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