



A public awareness campaign to promote universal education in Romania *June - December 2009*

Report to the Ovidiu Rom Board of Trustees & Advisory Board

In June 2009 Ovidiu Rom launched “**Scoala te face mare**”, a public awareness campaign designed to both (1) inform parents on how to solve problems related to their children’s access to education, and (2) motivate citizens to inform authorities about children who beg or work instead of going to school. With the slogan “*If you know a child who doesn’t go to school, call 116 111! Every child in school is everyone’s responsibility*”, the campaign promoted a free hotline manned by Telefonul Copilului as a tool to provide information and counseling to callers, and to collect data on obstacles to school enrollment and attendance, and regional statistics.

The campaign involved five Romanian public figures, two advertising agencies, a major film production company, multiple media outlets and corporations, government ministries and other NGOs, all of which donated time and/or services. UNICEF covered our single largest out-of-pocket expense – the production and delivery of printed materials to key target audiences.

The “Scoala te face mare” message reached Romanians through TV spots, press articles, and online promotion, as well as through the direct distribution of posters via mailings, events and meetings. In September, Ovidiu Rom distributed over 30,000 promo pieces on “Scoala te face mare” – to schools, city halls, police stations and other public spaces – in order to reach poor parents, teachers, child protection specialists, key government stakeholders, and the general public. In December we produced a follow-up mailing to schools, city halls, and police stations. A letter urging local stakeholders to work together on education issues was co-signed by Liliana Preoteasa of the Ministry of Education, Edmund McLoughney of UNICEF, and Maria Gheorghiu of Ovidiu Rom. It was sent to schools, city halls and police stations, accompanied by a 2010 school calendar/planner.

Objectives and outcomes:

Objective 1: Inform parents regarding their role in their children’s education and offer them a toll-free number to request information and report problems they face in sending their children to school.

Objective 2: Make citizens aware of their legal rights and social responsibilities regarding education (e.g. to motivate citizens to get involved by reporting cases in their neighbourhood in which children are not routinely in school).

1) Media coverage

Public Service Announcements, print ads and articles

Renowned film directors Cristian Mungiu and Radu Munteanu, directed six public service announcements (PSAs) featuring Romanian public figures with high name and face recognition among both poor parents and the general public: Andreea Marin Banica (TV celebrity), Dana Deac (TVR director), Cabral Ibacka (actor and TV anchor), Dan Bittman (famous band leader), and Damian Draghici (Roma musician). Also featured was Narcisa Cumpana, a Roma mother who had returned to school and is now a kindergarten teacher in Bacau. (Her story can be found at www.ovid.ro) PSAs can be viewed at: <http://www.fiecarecopilinscoala.ro/acasa/news/>

All the major television companies except one agreed to air the six public service announcements. Space was obtained by Zenith Media and monitored by Alfa Cont. The spots ran a total of 2000 times on 17 channels: Acasa, Alfa, B1, Cartoon Network, Discovery, Etno, EuroTV, Kanal D, MTV, National, Prima, Pro Cinema, ProTV, Realitatea, Money Channel, TVR 1, TVR 2, TVR 3.

Although Antena did not air the spots, Antena 3 dedicated an hour-long program on 7 November that featured Ovidiu Rom and two of the schools where our programs are ongoing.

Link to “[Reporter special: Romania fara carte](http://85.9.12.243/a3/watch3.php?year=2009&month=11&day=7&show=reporter_special)”: *start at min. 5:40*

http://85.9.12.243/a3/watch3.php?year=2009&month=11&day=7&show=reporter_special



Three installments of a 10-part series of comic strips were designed to inform poor parents regarding their children’s rights to education and were published in *Libertatea* and *Evenimentul zilei*. We will complete the 10-part series in 2010, running them in dailies and putting them in a “comic book” format to be distributed in city halls, markets, and other places where poor parents are likely to see them.

E-promotion

The campaign’s website www.fiecarecopilinscoala.ro was viewed by **4800 different visitors** between July and October and registered **18,000 page views**. In addition to hotline calls, OvR directly received approximately **50 e-mails and calls** from people inquiring about the campaign, offering to help, or reporting cases of children not going to school. A “cause page” on Facebook (*Fiecare Copil in Scoala* at www.facebook.com), registered **1300 fans** and generated more than 200 comments. The “Scoala te face mare” e-banner was posted on the homepages of frequently viewed sites, such as www.carrefour.ro (over 450,000 views per month), www.copii.ro (the official site of the National Authority for Child Protection), and www.salvaticopiii.org. A posting about the campaign by Cabral received 115 comments.

2) Events and meetings

Press conference

The “Școala te face mare” launch event on 15 June 2009 at the Cinema Pro movie house in Piața Universității, was attended by 100 people, including key government stakeholders:

- Luminita Anghel, Subsecretary of State at the National Agency for Child Protection,
- Oana Badea, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education, and
- Corina Tara, representative of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration Reform.

Meeting with 200 comune mayors in Mamaia

On 3 August Maria Gheorgiu made a presentation at the Asociația Comunelor conference in Mamaia attended by 200 comuna mayors. At the conclusion they voted unanimously to become official partners in “Școala te face mare”. Discussions in smaller groups made it clear that the local authorities are aware and concerned that many of their poorest children are currently not getting much of an education. They understand the need to reach these children but bureaucracy, political constraints, lack of technical expertise, and budget shortfalls conspire to keep this issue very low on the local agenda.

3) Direct mail



- **22,000 posters to ALL primary schools, kindergartens, and school inspectorates in the country**, accompanied by a letter co-signed by our executive director, Maria Gheorghiu and the Ministry of Education’s director of pre-university education, Liliana Preoteasa. The letter re-enforced the message that no one single institution can change educational problems in Romania and it urged school principals and inspectors to get involved by working together with social workers to identify and register all school age children not regularly attending school in their jurisdiction.
- **6400 posters to all city halls and police sections** in Romania, with a letter co-signed by the president of Asociația Comunelor din România, Mr. Emil Draghici.
- **200 posters in public buses in Bucharest** on high traffic routes in Rahova, Berceni, Pantelimon, Ferentari and six other neighborhoods to encourage poor parents to register their children for school and report problems they encountered doing so.
- **200 posters to Salvati Copiii** for distribution in the 14 counties where they work.

- **42 posters to all County Child Protection Departments (DGASPC)**, accompanied by a letter co-signed by the sub-secretary of state in the National Authority for Child Protection, Luminita Anghel, encouraging social workers to join teachers in identifying all school-age children who do not go to school, and help them register for school.
- **22,000 wall calendar/planners** to ALL primary schools, kindergartens, and school inspectorates in the country and 6400 to police stations and city halls.

Objective 3: Collect data about problems citizens report.

Objective 4: Provide authorities with a list of problems reported to the hotline.

Telefonul Copilului reported receiving **600 calls** directly linked to the campaign between June and September. Calls to the hotline came from all over the country, but the highest per capita calls were from Ilfov, Constanta, Prahova, Vaslui, Timis, Giurgiu, Bacau, and Bucharest's Sector 5. The majority of calls concerned children who had dropped out or "aged out" of the system and wanted to get back into school. According to Telefonul Copilului's report many children who had abandoned school were reintegrated in school, and two schools from rural areas, which were about to be closed following local decisions, stayed open for 16 students in Ichimenii Noi, Botosani county, and 70 students in Plesa village, Galati county.

According to the records that Telefonul Copilului shared with us, the biggest single problem concerned **children who have dropped out of school** and those who were **never registered**, and wanted to go to school. Out of the **340 calls** on these issues, 134 were received from children who wanted to get back into school. Most of these calls were from rural areas. The most commonly cited causes of school abandonment were: lack of financial resources, child labor, parents' separation, domestic violence, parents working abroad and children having gone abroad with their parents and then returning.

128 cases concerned first grade registration. The main issues were that the children hadn't gone to kindergarten ("anul pregatitor") or the school didn't have enough places. The highest number of cases came from Prahova, Constanta, Ilfov, Bucharest Sectors 5 and 3.

114 calls came from parents who wanted to enroll their children in kindergarten, but they faced a lack of available places. Most of these cases came from Bucharest (all sectors) and Ilfov county.

We were disappointed by the limited amount and generic nature of information that Telefonul Copilului chose to share with the Ovidiu Rom team. Citing confidentiality, they were only willing to give numbers and basic categories regarding the subject of calls. We did not get any referrals from TC and we do not know how (or if) these cases were resolved. Thus, we have no way of knowing how the authorities responded or how many of the cases were addressed to the satisfaction of the callers. The full report from Asociatia Telefonul Copilului is available at:

http://www.galasocietatiicivile.ro/view_stire.php?id=369

Note: a few persistent callers who could not reach the Hotline called Ovidiu Rom directly and we thereby learned of some specific cases. Other inquiries came directly to Ovidiu Rom from teachers requesting help in keeping middle school children in school and getting those who had dropped out back in.

Objective 5: Provide policy recommendations that can contribute to solving the growing school drop-out rate in Romania.¹

¹ Since 2001, the school drop-out rate in Romania has tripled for grades I-IV and quadrupled for grades V-VIII. This is largely a result of the disproportionate number of impoverished Roma children who start school late and drop out early. On average, children of Roma descent spend six and a half years in the formal education system, whereas the overall Romanian average is eleven years. In

A grant from the Dutch Embassy enabled OvR to promote our 2008 policy recommendations for reducing the educational gap in Romania.² We organized a series of focus groups with high level representatives of different stakeholder categories:

- The international community (eight embassies and the Information Office of the Council of Europe, January 2009)
- Mass media (three advertising agencies, eight media companies and CNA, March)
- Civil society (eight NGOs plus UNICEF, March)
- Government (representatives from public administration, education, and child welfare)

These meetings helped to draw attention to the problem of the growing education attainment gap in Romania between the ultra-poor and the middle class. They also spawned new collaborations that helped promote the “Scoală te face mare” campaign, the most important being the agreement of several major media organizations to support it, despite the competition among them.

Local communities were extremely receptive to our offers to help in address their problems of unschooled children. Of course the “help” necessitated the provision of funds, since local budgets are more strained than ever. To address this need Ovidiu Rom initiated a program whereby companies can “Adopt a School”. This strategy, as with the PSAs, focuses on making regular citizens aware of the issues while providing the community with the services that ultimately the government should provide, i.e., greater access to education for the most vulnerable children. It gives sponsoring companies and their employees a personal relationship with a poor community, a stake in student outcomes, an increased awareness of the underlying issues (e.g., it’s never as simple as parental laziness, neglect, or “values”). Employees can get involved in many ways, from volunteering to directing 2% of their taxes to the project. To date, four companies have adopted schools: Carrefour, E.on, Oracle, and Prospectiuni. Three companies, Petrom, Raiffeisen, and Rosia Montana Gold Corporation have agreed to sponsor Summer School Preparation programs in 2010.

Each 10,000 € donation to Adopt a School helps 50 kids enter school at the appropriate age and succeed there. This donation covers the costs of student recruitment, school supplies, summer school, teacher training, and set-up of a modern classroom, plus the establishment of a local action group and monthly parent meetings. A **€5000** donation allows a company to **Sponsor a Summer ‘School Preparation’ Program** to help 50 children in an impoverished community prepare for first grade and to familiarize their parents with the school environment and its requirements. The donation covers cost of training & stipends for two teachers and a school mediator, materials, snacks, student workbooks, and all educational activities.

Conclusion

From individual cases to school principals and mayors seeking assistance, responses to the “Scoală te face mare” campaign continue to come in. The campaign spawned new partnerships with two economically struggling communities, Castelu and Medgidia, near Constanta where many children are at high risk for abandoning school. We partnered with a local NGO in the area, Open Doors, and since September we have recruited children for first grade, started local action groups, provided teacher training for 100 teachers, and obtained Carrefour’s sponsorship of the Castelu School.

People got involved in a variety of ways: by visiting the campaign website or Facebook page, posting messages on blogs; distributing posters in their communities; attending stakeholder

rural areas, all children are at risk for dropping out after eighth grade, but school abandonment in *primary school* is largely a problem among Roma children.

² See White Paper: <http://www.ovid.ro/ecis/law/?limba=En>

meetings and calls to the hotline. NGOs reported cases of children they wanted to help but did not know how, and expressed interest in participating in the campaign.

The single most glaring finding from the campaign is that there is a great number of middle-school age children who are out of the system and want (or need) to return to school. It was telling that 40 percent of such calls were made by the children themselves. However, this is not Ovidiu Rom’s target audience. Today, Ovidiu Rom’s focus is on getting young children into kindergarten and first grade at the appropriate age -- *so they have a better chance to stay in school and succeed there*. **But there is clearly a need among older children which is not being adequately met. We urge UNICEF, Salvati Copiii and other NGOs to work with the Ministry of Education to expand the “Second Chance” program to provide services so older children can make a successful re-entry in the school system.**

In 2010 Ovidiu Rom will:

- A. Produce a follow-up series of Public Service Announcements pairing a public figure with a child who has succeeded in school despite great odds.
- B. Offer to local communities consultation and training in ways and means to “get every child in school”.
- C. Assist communities in finding company sponsors to cover the “hidden costs of school”.
- D. Lobby the Romanian government to play a more active role in guaranteeing equal access to quality education for Romania’s most vulnerable children.

Analysis of Phone Call Origination: July 2009

“Școala te face mare” campaign

| Top 10 localities by raw number of calls | Top 10 localities by calls per capita (per 100,000 people) | Top 10 localities by calls per 100,000 pre- & primary school aged children (Bucharest not divided by sector) |
|--|--|--|
| (Mun. of Buch, 53) | Ilfov, 5.55 | Ilfov, 51.66 |
| Ilfov, 16 | București 5, 4.24 | Mun. of București, 34.18 |
| București 2, 15 | București 2, 4.16 | Călărași, 18.38 |
| București 5, 12 | București 1, 3.93 | Constanța, 12.53 |
| București 3, 10 | București 3, 2.54 | Timiș, 12.32 |
| Constanța, 10 | (Mun. of Buch, 2.75) | Teleorman, 10.98 |
| București 1, 9 | Călărași, 2.21 | Hunedoara, 9.52 |
| Timiș, 9 | Constanța, 1.40 | Tulcea, 6.92 |
| Călărași, 7 | Timiș, 1.36 | Vrancea, 6.83 |
| Iași, 6 | București 4, 1.34 | Satu Mare, 6.32 |
| Hunedoara, 5 | Teleorman, 1.20 | |

The results are in from the first month of the “Școala te face mare” campaign, launched in June by by the *Asociația Ovidiu Rom* together with the *Asociația Telefonul Copilului*. Unsurprisingly, the largest number of calls has come in from the largest population centers – Bucharest (including surrounding Ilfov), and Constanța.

Of 169 total calls, a third of them – 53 – have come from Bucharest. 16 came in from Ilfov and 10 from Constanța, with the other counties registering fewer than 10 each. When we break Bucharest down by sector, the largest number of calls (15) came from Sector 2, though the largest number as a share of the total population came from Sector 5, often considered to be the sector of Bucharest with the highest poverty rate.

This phenomenon is repeated in Ilfov. According to the National Institute of Statistics, Ilfov, while on average a high-income locality, has a poverty rate considerably higher than that of Bucharest. It ranked first in per capita phone calls (5.6 per 100,000 residents), double the rate from the Municipality of Bucharest (2.8).

When we take into account the percent of the population in each county that is of pre-school or primary school (grades 1-8) age, Ilfov remains ahead of the rest of the country, with almost 52 calls per 100,000 children. Next in line is the Municipality of Bucharest, with 34; Călărași county comes in next at 18. The rest of the country is below 15 calls per 100,000 school-age children. It is worth noting that Călărași falls into the highest poverty bracket in Romania, according to the National Institute of Statistics, and has the second highest reported population of Roma as a percent of the total.

These figures seem to at least partly reflect the reality that low-income children are most likely to be out of school or in need of school registration assistance. They also reflect the fact that Roma children are more likely than any other group to be out of school: Ilfov and Bucharest Sector 5—the two areas with the largest share of calls by population—have large Roma populations. Removing the remaining sectors of Bucharest, Călărași, with its very high Roma population, comes next.

Of course, the results so far—particularly those for Bucharest and Ilfov—might also be a reflection of the campaign's reach: it is most successful in major metropolitan areas reached by cable television, where many of the PSAs are running. Perhaps this difference accounts for the lower number of calls from rural areas, where statistics also show high numbers of out-of-school children.

While the reach of cable television and general exposure to the campaign might explain the higher rate of calls from the more urban areas around Bucharest (compared to poor, rural areas), it does not account for the fact that the poorest Sector of Bucharest (Sector 5), believed also to have the highest percent of Roma residents, has registered 50% more phone calls per capita than the city average. Ilfov county registered twice as many calls per capita as the Municipality of Bucharest. This suggests that Ilfov should be a major target for our efforts in 2010.

Though the numbers from counties with less access to cable TV have little to say so far about the need in those areas, the results from the first month of the campaign reveal an important trend. Even in areas with equally widespread exposure to our television ads, the calls coming in concern children in areas with high poverty rates and large percentages of Roma children. At the very least, this is an early indication that the “Școala te face mare” campaign is having its intended impact. The next step is to find ways to reach the more remote areas of Romania, where the need for assistance remains high, yet so far the call response has been low.

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A society's greatness is not to be measured by how well the strongest in its midst can do, but by how well it takes care of the weakest in its midst.

Parker Palmer, Quaker educator 2009