

# REPORT TO MINISTER DANIEL FUNERIU ON

*Fiecare copil în grădiniță*

AUGUST 2010 – FEBRUARY 2011

## A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO CLOSING THE EDUCATION GAP

MARIA GHEORGHIU, LESLIE HAWKE, ALINA SEGHEDI

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### REPORT

Justification	3
Objective	4
Overview	4
Development of <i>Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță</i>	5
Direct Implementation Costs per Community	6
Next Steps	7
Site map	8

### APPENDICES

1. International Evidence of the Lasting Effect of Early Education	10
2. Target Group and Locations	14
3. Detailed Results Sept 2010-February 2011	15
4. Problems Encountered & Lessons Learned	16
5. Frequently Asked Questions	18
6. Legal & Strategic Context	19

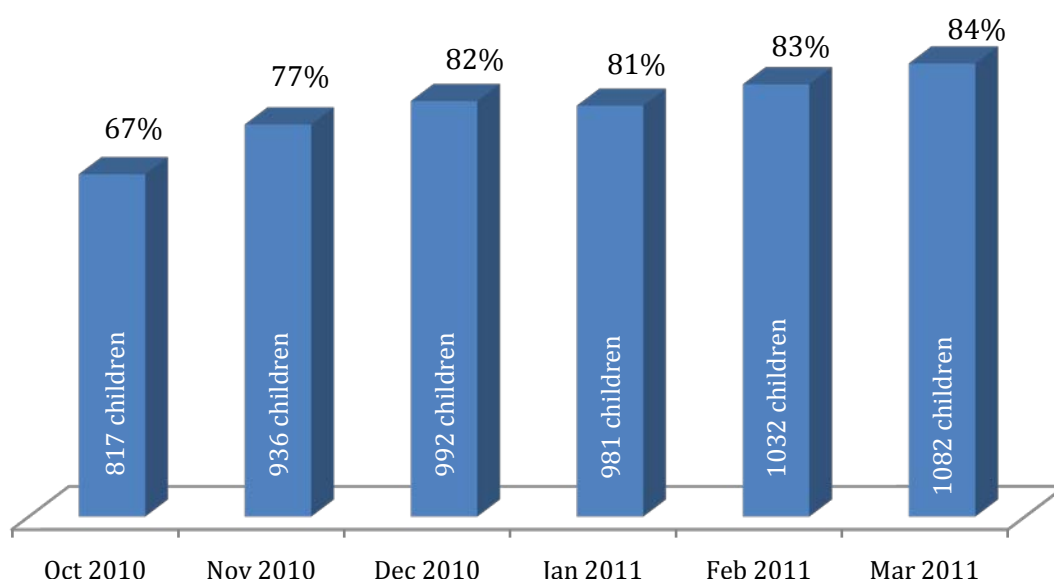
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<http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/The-Economist-article-June-21-2008.pdf>
- 8.a. Invitation to Mayors (in Romanian) <http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Invitatie-catre-primari.pdf>
- 8.b. Application Form (in Romanian) <http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Formular-de-aplicare.pdf>
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<http://www.ovid.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Scrisoare-catre-inspectorate.pdf>
9. “13 Reasons” documentary narrated by Marcel Iures, *Ovidiu Rom*, Oct. 2010  
[http://www.myvideo.ro/watch/7840773/13\\_Reasons\\_to\\_Believe](http://www.myvideo.ro/watch/7840773/13_Reasons_to_Believe)

## JUSTIFICATION

- ✓ Impoverished early experience has severe and long-lasting detrimental effects on later brain capabilities.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ **Preschool education reduces school abandonment, unemployment and crime rates.**<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ Early childhood education programs pay a return of 4-10 times the investment.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ **Early education is the *only intervention* that has consistently been shown to make a major difference in school retention rates of disadvantaged children.**
- ✓ Most of Romania's poorest children receive NO formal early education.
- ✓ **Poor parents DO send their children to "grădiniță" when they get modest incentives to do so.**

**Preschool Attendance of Children Qualifying for Food Stamps  
October 2010 – March 2011**



A large body of international research shows that early intellectual deprivation results in major learning disabilities. In other words, **the environment children live in for their first five years affects their ability to function successfully for the rest of their lives.** For evidence of the critical importance of early education, see Appendix 1.

Even if they are officially registered, many poor children in Romania do not attend preschool often enough to reap any benefit from it. Poor parents themselves have little or no education and are easily intimidated by the system, the authorities, and the "hidden costs" of education<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> "The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture", Centre for the Developing Child, Harvard University [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/library/reports\\_and\\_working\\_papers/working\\_papers/wp5/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/library/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp5/)

<sup>2</sup> "Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications", W. Steven Barnett, Rutgers University, Sept 2008; and David Boulton, *New York Times*, December 24, 2010;

<sup>3</sup> James Heckman, [www.heckmanequation.org](http://www.heckmanequation.org)

<sup>4</sup> Hidden costs include appropriate clothing, outerwear and shoes as well as coloured pencils, paints, and other materials used by kindergarten children. In many communities parents are expected to furnish these items, but coming up with the cash to buy them can be a mighty obstacle for a destitute mother with several children. It is just easier to postpone introducing their children to formal education until the last possible moment, frequently as late as the age of 8.

**OBJECTIVE: PREPARE IMPOVERISHED CHILDREN, AGE 3-6, FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL BY PERSUADING THEIR PARENTS TO SEND THEM TO GRĂDINIȚĂ EVERY DAY.**

**2010:**

- ✓ Registered all 3-6 year old impoverished children in 19 communities for preschool.
- ✓ Obtained 100% daily attendance of 80% of the children, utilizing food coupons as incentives
- ✓ Collected data to show the efficacy of food coupons to increase registration and attendance
- ✓ Honed methodology in preparation for scaling up.

**2011-2012:**

- ✓ Publicize results to encourage more communities to adopt this strategy
- ✓ Obtain Government & EU Funds to expand program to additional communities

**2012-2013:**

- ✓ Offer program to communities that apply for all of their qualifying 4&5 year olds.

**2013-2014:**

- ✓ Offer program to communities that apply for all of their qualifying 3, 4 & 5 year olds.

**2014-2015:**

- ✓ Offer program to ALL Romanian communities for all of their qualifying 3-5 year olds.

**OVERVIEW**

Romanian popular opinion places the blame on poor parents for their children's weak academic results and soaring school abandonment rates. And indeed, very poor people often postpone enrolling their children in school and skip pre-school entirely, but the reasons are complex. Many poor parents:

1. Do not realize the importance of early education;
2. Are unable to support the hidden costs, and
3. Feel unwelcome and are ill at ease in the school environment.

The result of this late school enrolment is poor school integration and early school abandonment – because these children never catch up academically or fit in socially with their peers.

**Ten years of working closely with severely disadvantaged families has led us to conclude:**

1. **Early (age 3-5) exposure to formal education is essential for the academic success of children from disadvantaged families, and**
2. **The only effective way to get large numbers of poor children into the system early is by empowering the local communities to “incentivize” their parents to send them to school every day.**

**In poor communities food coupons dramatically increase children's attendance rates and consequently, their performance and retention rates in school.** If Romania is serious about raising the school attainment level and literacy rates, it simply *must* make early education for **ALL** a cornerstone of its national education strategy.

Many Romanian mayors and school directors are fully aware that early education is important for children's future success in school AND life, but they simply don't have the budgets or know-how to address the problem that *very few poor parents send their children to kindergarten.*

## DEVELOPMENT OF *FIECARE COPIL ÎN GRĂDINIȚĂ*

In July 2010, Ovidiu Rom and the Ministry of Education invited Romanian mayors to apply for funds to help them *get every poor 3-6 year old child in their communities in preschool*. Ovidiu Rom allocated approximately €150 for each child 3-6 whose family qualified for social benefits or met other poverty criteria. These funds covered educational resources as well as monthly food coupons to the families whose children had perfect attendance.

To qualify a community was required to have:

- ✓ At least 50 children who were not currently attending;
- ✓ A school mediator;
- ✓ Local willingness to recruit children door to door & provide necessary clothes and shoes;
- ✓ The desire to have every poor child age 4-6 attending kindergarten.

Over 100 communities applied. With input from the Ministry, Ovidiu Rom selected thirteen. As a result Ovidiu Rom expanded its methodology from six to 19 communities in September 2010. A total of 1200 children living in severe poverty were included in the program. Daily attendance was recorded by teachers and monitored by Ovidiu Rom. The local coordinator distributed monthly food coupons to parents of children with perfect attendance at the end of each month.

The basic elements of *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță* (“Every Child in Preschool”):

- 1. Leadership of local authorities and a *proactive* Local Action Group;**
- 2. Door-to-door recruitment of children at risk** for dropping out after primary school;
- 3. Teacher training** in modern methods and strategies for working with disadvantaged children;
- 4. Parent engagement, primarily through incentives in the form of food coupons for their children’s perfect attendance in pre-school (age 3-5).**

- Currently, 1200 impoverished children in 19 communities in 10 counties and Bucharest are participating in *Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță*.
- **In October 2010, 67%(817 children) had 100% daily attendance.**<sup>5</sup>
- **In March the percentage had risen to 84%** (1082 children). In all of the communities, attendance over this period was the highest in recent years—and many local coordinators noted that **this is by far the highest attendance rate EVER in their communities.**
- **In all communities, children’s perfect attendance grew by at least 40%** compared to the 2009-2010 school year.
- In every community children’s daily attendance increased every month of the fall term, as parents got used to the fact that they only receive food coupons if they bring their children EVERY day.
- Two communities observed that attendance of their primary school students in the same building also increased.

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<sup>5</sup>Children’s attendance is noted daily by the teachers. Each week one local team member randomly checks the attendance and the local coordinator sends Ovidiu Rom an sms text message with children’s attendance that day. Ovidiu Rom visits each kindergarten at least once a month and checks the project file.

## Local coordinator comments:

**Alțina:** “We registered the **highest attendance rate in the past 10 years.**”

**Araci:** “Last school year 89 children were registered. This year there are 152 children in kindergarten, out of which 115 are in the program... **110 out of 115 children have only a few absences for illness; even the attendance of children who are not in the program has increased.**”

**Band:** “We succeeded in changing the mentality of some parents who said, in the beginning, „my child is just fine at home” and are now smiling, happy that their children know the names of colours.”

**Roșia:** “In the four months of monitoring, **87% of the children had 100% attendance;** although we don’t have exact data, we believe that **no child registered such a perfect attendance last year.**”

**Coroieni:** “Last school year 60 children were enrolled, out of which 15 (25%) attended regularly. **This year the attendance rate has increased to over 75%.**”

**Gura Șuții:** “This school year we have an excellent attendance even on the coldest days.”

## DIRECT IMPLEMENTATION COSTS PER COMMUNITY

This program is designed to utilize current human resources in the community, i.e., the part-time involvement of a social worker, a school mediator, the kindergarten teachers, and a designated program coordinator (most often this is the school director or social worker). It also includes the costs of a two week summer program.

It does not include the costs of training, consultation, and oversight, which are currently being provided by Ovidiu Rom. It is essential that teachers be given appropriate support for the special challenges of educating severely disadvantaged children, that the implementation be carefully monitored, and the data collected, but we believe these expenses can and should be borne through other channels (EU funds, World Bank, etc.) in the beginning.

Local costs for 40 children age 4-6	
<b>1. Personnel</b>	
Two teachers	school
Local coordinator	school
School mediator	local budget
Social Worker	Local budget
<b>2. Classroom equipment</b>	600
<b>3. Direct program costs</b>	9400
Food coupons (40 children x 20€ x10 mo.)	8,000
Summer School program	1,000
Monthly parent meetings	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>€10,000</b>
<b>Cost per child:</b>	<b>€250</b>

Estimates of the number of children living under the poverty line vary dramatically. Approximately 200,000 children are born per year, so there should be about 600,000, aged 3, 4, & 5. If 10% are living in poverty, then 60,000 children a year would be eligible for this program.

**For all 60,000 children the cost would be 15 million euros per year.** Compare €250 per child per year with the cost of keeping a man in prison for a month (estimated in 2008 to be €300<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.ziarulprahova.ro/articol~categorie-social~stire-20596~%e2%80%9epentru-intretinerea-unui-detinut-statul-cheltuieste-lunar-circa-300~cauta-eduard-stasie~perioada-toata\\_arhiva.html](http://www.ziarulprahova.ro/articol~categorie-social~stire-20596~%e2%80%9epentru-intretinerea-unui-detinut-statul-cheltuieste-lunar-circa-300~cauta-eduard-stasie~perioada-toata_arhiva.html) accessed on January 30, 2008.

## NEXT STEPS

**March 2011:** Communities that want to continue the program must make written applications for the 2011-2012 school year. (We expect at least 17 of the 19 communities to reapply, and possibly all. Where there is doubt, it is a result of weak commitment from City Hall).

Reasons expressed by the team members for reapplying:

*"The things children learned this year, thanks to daily attendance"*

*"The importance of the food coupons to the families and children"*

*"The space set-up in a way that is now proper for educational activities"*

*"The opportunities for teachers to visit the American School in Bucharest"*

*"Financial support to buy classroom materials"*

*"So that the primary school can receive a generation of children who have benefited from kindergarten, which will for sure also decrease school abandonment."*

<b>FiecareCopil in Grădiniță - 2011 Timeline</b>							
Activity	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
"Sotron Zero" module							
Training of teachers							
Presentation to European Ambassadors							
Local Action Group meetings and program evaluation							
Community reports due							
Final selection of 2011-2012 communities							
Report to Minister of Education on first year results							
"Sotron" summer workshops							
Fall semester begins							

**Suggested Rollout of a National Early Education Plan targeting poor children:**

**Year 1 (2012)** FCG for all impoverished 5-6 year olds in communities that apply.

**Year 2 (2013)** FCG for all impoverished 4-5 year olds in communities that apply.

**Year 3 (2014)** FCG for all impoverished 3-5 year olds in communities that apply.

**Year 4 (2015)** available for all impoverished 3-5 year olds in Romania.

**Elements of FCG:**

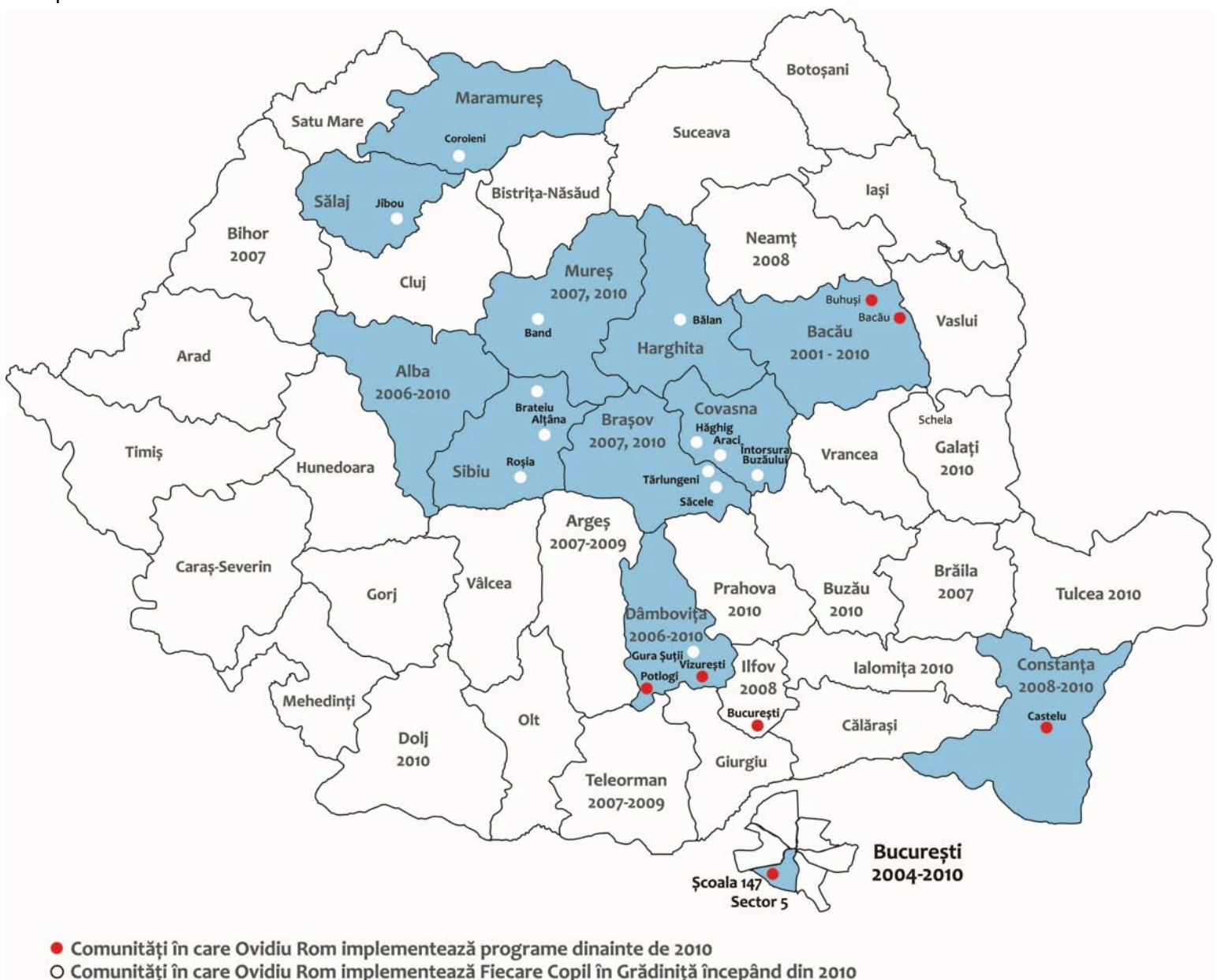
1. Teacher training
2. Community recruitment of impoverished children
3. Inspector for FCG (under Kindergarten inspector)
4. Food coupons for perfect attendance
5. Oversight by outside agency

## CONCLUSION

Forward-thinking European and American leaders are beginning to heed the international research that confirms that **early learning opportunities are the smartest, most cost-effective investments to ensure future economic stability and growth.**(See Appendix 1 for the evidence.)

Educated parents in Romania appreciate the importance of early education for their own children. Public opinion and policy makers in Romania all too often conclude that when it comes to the rural poor and the Roma, early education is an impossible dream. Ovidiu Rom is demonstrating in 19 communities (13 new and 6 continuing) that with the support of the local authorities, there is a relatively simple and inexpensive method for gaining the immediate participation of impoverished children: **food coupons for perfect attendance.**

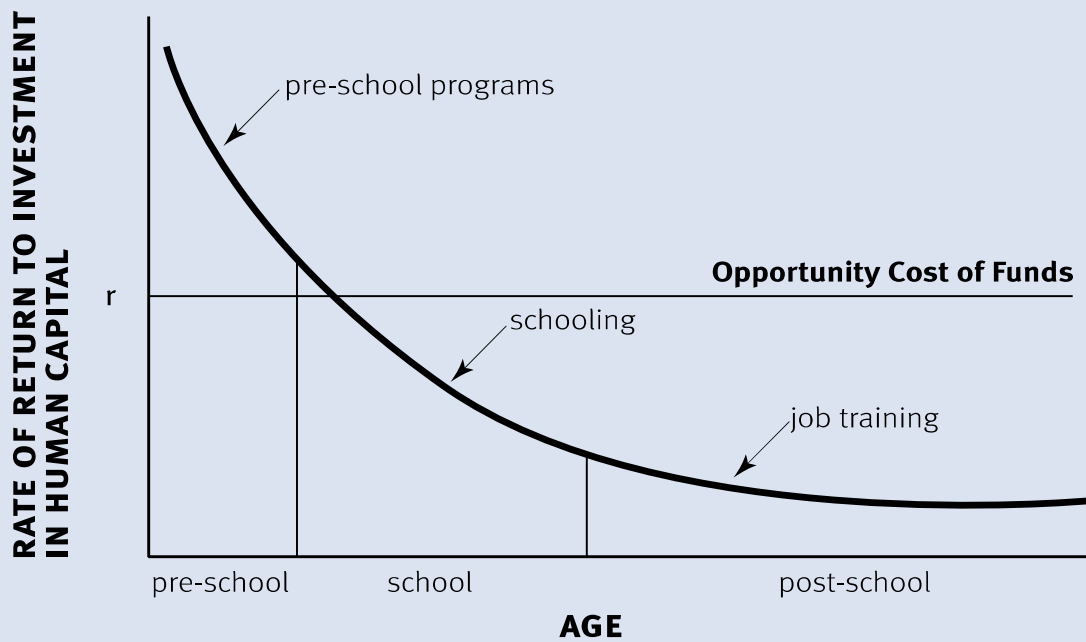
Local communities that want to get every child in kindergarten manage to do so. And with food coupons, they keep them coming. With early participation in the education system, these children have a chance to become productive citizens.



## APPENDICES

1. International Evidence of the Lasting Effect of Early Education	10
2. Target Group and Locations	14
3. Detailed Results August 2010-February 2011	15
4. Problems Encountered & Lessons Learned	16
5. Frequently Asked Questions	18
6. Legal & Strategic Context	19

### Return on Investment Over Time



Rates of return to investment in human capital as function of age when the investment was initiated. The data were derived from a life cycle model of dynamic human capital accumulation with multiple periods and credit constraints. Investments were initially set to be equal across all ages. 'r' represents the cost of the funds. Data are from Cunha et al (2005).

Source: Knudsen, et al.<sup>13</sup>

## APPENDIX 1: INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE LASTING EFFECTS OF EARLY EDUCATION

The following sections summarize or excerpt from important recent literature on early education and the economic consequences of not educating Europe's poorest, least educated minority.

**A. Summary of "Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research & Policy Implications",** W. Steven Barnett, Rutgers University, September 2008

<http://nieer.org/resources/research/PreschoolLastingEffects.pdf>

<http://nieer.org/docs/index.php?DocID=284>

This thorough examination of preschool education in America reviews the research regarding the short-and long-term effects of preschool education on young children's learning and development.

### Conclusions:

- ✓ Well-designed preschool programs produce long-term improvements in school success, including higher achievement test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and special education, and higher educational attainment. Some preschool programs have also been associated with reduced delinquency and crime.
- ✓ Economically disadvantaged children reap long-term benefits from preschool.
- ✓ Increasing public investment in effective preschool education programs can produce substantial educational, social, and economic benefits.

### Recommendations:

- ✓ Preschool models that have proven highly effective typically have reasonably small class sizes and well-educated teachers with adequate pay.
- ✓ Preschool teachers should receive intensive supervision and coaching.
- ✓ Programs should regularly assess children's learning and development to monitor how well they are accomplishing their goals.
- ✓ Programs should be designed to develop the whole child, including social and emotional development and self-regulation.
- ✓ **An earlier start and longer duration produces better results; policies expanding access to children under 4 should prioritize disadvantaged children who are likely to benefit most.**

In the US in 1960, just 10% of America's 3 and 4 year olds were enrolled in any type of program. Less than a half century later, three quarters of American children enrol at age 4 and about half at age 3. Rapidly increasing access to early education worldwide poses challenges for any nation's global competitiveness.

Multiple meta-analyses summarizing findings over the past 25 years have found preschool education to produce an average immediate effect of half a standard deviation on cognitive development. **THIS IS THE EQUIVALENT OF 7 OR 8 POINTS ON AN IQ TEST. For the social and emotional domains, effects are enough to reduce by half the school readiness gap between children in poverty and the national average.**

Recent meta-analyses find that preschool has significant lasting effects on cognitive abilities, school progress and social behaviour. Two studies that began in the 1960s stand out. They were well-implemented, randomized trials of public school programs.

The **High/Scope Perry Preschool** program randomly assigned 128 disadvantaged minority children to either a half-day preschool program with home visits by the teachers or a control group. Children attended for two years beginning at age 3. The study followed 123 children from preschool well into adulthood. Researchers' ability to study nearly the entire original group over time allows confidence in long-term findings. The initial cognitive advantage declined over time but the study found a persistent effect on achievement tests through middle school. The preschool group had better classroom behaviour, less delinquency and crime, fewer special education placements, and a higher high school graduation rate. Through age 40, the group had increased employment and earnings, decreased welfare dependency and fewer arrests.

The most rigorous long-term, large-scale study of pre-K is the **Child Parent Centre** study in Chicago. It confirmed the Perry Preschool study, finding higher school graduation rates and less grade retention, arrests, and special education.

Research in other countries confirms the US findings regarding the short- and long-term outcomes of pre-K and the overall benefits across a wide range of social, political and educational environments.

## **B. Excerpts from “The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture”, Centre for the Developing Child, Harvard University**

[http://developingchild.harvard.edu/library/reports\\_and\\_working\\_papers/working\\_papers/wp5/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/library/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp5/)

The foundations of brain architecture are established early in life through a continuous series of dynamic interactions in which environmental conditions and personal experiences have a significant impact on how genetic predispositions are expressed. Because specific experiences affect specific brain circuits during specific development stages it is vitally important to take advantage of these early opportunities in the developmental building process. That is to say, **the quality of a child’s early environment and the availability of appropriate experiences at the right stages of development are crucial in determining the strength or weakness of the brain’s architecture, which in turn, determines how well he or she will be able to think and to regulate emotions.**

Building more advanced cognitive, social, and emotional skills on a weak initial foundation of brain architecture is far more difficult and less effective than getting things right from the beginning.

The exceptionally strong influence of early experience on brain architecture makes the early years of life a period of both great opportunity and great vulnerability for brain development. An early, growth-promoting environment, with adequate nutrients, free of toxins, and filled with social interactions with an attentive caregiver, prepares the architecture of the developing brain to function optimally in a healthy environment. Conversely, an adverse early environment, one that is inadequately supplied with nutrients, contains toxins, or is deprived of appropriate sensory, social, or emotional stimulation, results in faulty brain circuitry. Once established, a weak foundation can have detrimental effects on further brain development, even if a healthy environment is restored at a later age.

The susceptibility of the young, developing brain to the synergistic effects of environment and experience has enormous implications for policymakers, parents, and society. Scientific evidence demonstrates that critical aspects of brain architecture begin to be shaped by experience before and soon after birth, and many fundamental aspects of that architecture are established well before a child enters school.

Nevertheless, there remains a persistent tolerance for poor quality care and education in the early childhood period. Scientific evidence indicates that **for children to reach their full potential, communities need to support the capacity of all families to provide a variety of stimulating and appropriate experiences in the earliest years, when a child’s brain is optimally programmed to benefit from specific types of experiences**, and then build on that sturdy brain foundation through continuous exposures to high quality, age-appropriate experiences throughout the school-age years.

**The Science-Policy Gap** Practical experience tells us that it is easier to teach a “slow” first grader how to read than it is to train an illiterate adult for a job that pays a living wage. We don’t need sophisticated research to prove that aggressive pre-schoolers are easier to “rehabilitate” than violent criminals. Common sense tells us that the learning and behaviour problems of young children can be fixed more easily and at less cost than those of adolescents and young adults. Neuroscience tells us why these statements are all true. Notwithstanding the fundamental principles of biology and human capital formation, the critical importance of time is often ignored in the world of early childhood policy.

**There is a striking gap between science and policy.**

For example, the child welfare system is typically characterized by cumbersome and protracted decision-making processes that leave young children vulnerable to the adverse impacts of significant stress during sensitive periods of early brain development.

The powerful and far-reaching effects of severely adverse environments and experiences on brain development make it crystal clear that time is not on the side of an abused or neglected child whose physical and emotional custody remains unresolved in a slow-moving bureaucratic process. The basic principles of neuroscience indicate the need for a far

greater sense of urgency regarding the prompt resolution of such decisions as when to remove a child from the home, when and where to place a child in foster care, when to terminate parental rights, and when to move towards a permanent placement. The window of opportunity for remediation in a child's developing brain architecture is time-sensitive and time-limited.

Education reform efforts that invest resources in the training, recruitment, and retention of skilled teachers for K-12 will have greater impact if they also include higher standards for preschool programs. Research shows that staff knowledge and skills are among the most important determinants of the impact of early childhood programs. Consequently, when model programs that have been proven to be effective are "taken to scale" with less well-compensated personnel who have less expertise, it is not surprising that comparable benefits are often not realized.

Stated simply, effective preschool investments require well-trained staff whose knowledge and skills match the needs of the children and families they are asked to serve. Poorly qualified personnel (whose low salaries provide immediate cost savings) compromise the effectiveness of preschool education programs and diminish the ultimate returns that can be achieved from subsequent K-12 investments.

**The basic principles of neuroscience and the econometrics of human capital development both suggest that early and effective intervention for the most vulnerable children will generate the greatest financial payback.** In recent years, a growing body of sophisticated economic analyses has contributed an important new dimension to the public debate about the value to society of investing in the care and education of young children who are at risk for later failure in school and the workplace.

**Extensive data now indicate that policymakers can achieve greater return on investments in early education for children from families with low income and limited parent education than they can from remedial programs for adults with limited workforce skills.** In short, although optimal financial benefits depend on continued investment throughout the middle childhood years, **the greatest returns are realized when investments are made in the lives of vulnerable children well before they begin school.**

The environment of relationships in which young children live literally shapes the architecture of their brains. Effective programs provide center-based, growth-promoting experiences for the children. They also help their parents create a home environment that provides positive social interactions, rich language exposure and early literacy experiences. This increases the probability that a child will enter school with the social, emotional, and cognitive skills needed to succeed.

**C. The Heckman Equation - "Learn How Early Childhood Development Affects Society", James Heckman, 2009.**  
<http://www.heckmanequation.org/heckman-equation-slideshow>.

James Heckman is a Professor of Economics at The University of Chicago, a Nobel Prize winner in Economics, and an expert in the economics of human development. His case for investing in early childhood is called the Heckman Equation. It is a formula for understanding the great gains to be had by **investing in early and equal development of human potential.**

This site explains why investing in the early years is so important and gives countries a much better return on human capital investment: <http://www.heckmanequation.org/>

**D. How Does Your Kindergarten Classroom Affect Your Earnings? Evidence from Project STAR,**  
Raj Chetty, Harvard University et.al., January 2011

In Project STAR, 11,571 students in Tennessee and their teachers were randomly assigned to different classrooms within their schools from kindergarten to third grade. Kindergarten test scores were highly correlated with outcomes such as earnings at age 27, college attendance, home ownership, and retirement savings. Students who had a more experienced teacher in kindergarten had higher earnings. Students in small classes were significantly more likely to attend college and exhibit improvements on other outcomes but class size did NOT have a significant effect on earnings at age 27.

## E. Key messages of “Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion”, The World Bank, Europe & Central Asia Human Development Department, April 2010

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/Economic\\_Costs\\_Roma\\_Exclusion\\_Note\\_Final.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTROMA/Resources/Economic_Costs_Roma_Exclusion_Note_Final.pdf)

The vast majority of working-age Roma lack sufficient education to participate successfully in the labor market. As a result, European countries are losing hundreds of millions of Euros annually in productivity and in fiscal contributions to the governments.

- Lower bound estimates of annual productivity losses range from 231 million Euro in Serbia, 367 million Euro in the Czech Republic, 526 million Euro in Bulgaria, to **887 million Euro in Romania**.
- Lower bound annual fiscal losses range from 58 million Euro in Serbia, **202 million Euro in Romania**, 233 million Euro in the Czech Republic, and 370 million euros in Bulgaria.
- Using other Roma population estimates (UNDP, 2006), the economic losses for the four countries combined are as much as 5.7 billion euros annually, and the fiscal losses 2 billion euros annually.

Bridging the education gap is the economically smart approach:

- Better educated Roma can expect much higher earnings. Compared to Roma with primary education, Roma who complete secondary education can expect to earn 83% more in Bulgaria, 110% more in the Czech Republic, **144% more in Romania**.
- **The annual fiscal gains from bridging the employment gap are much higher than the total cost of investing in public education for all Roma children;** by a factor of 7.7 for Bulgaria, 7.4 times for the Czech Republic, 2.4 times in Romania, and 3.3 times in Serbia.
- **The share of Roma among the working-age populations will rise as majority populations in Eastern and Central Europe are aging rapidly.** Equal labor participation among the Roma is essential to shoulder the nationally rising costs of pensions, health and other costs of aging.

**The challenges posed by the economic and fiscal cost of Roma exclusion are particularly acute in light of the declining and quickly aging populations.** Between 2000 and 2025, the national populations of the four countries in this study are expected to decline by as much as 18% in Bulgaria, 5% in the Czech Republic, 10% in Romania, and 3% in Serbia . The countries will also experience substantial increases in the proportion of elderly people (65+ years).

These factors put extra demands on the declining working age population (15-64) which must shoulder the greater fiscal burden as expenditures on pensions and health care rise. This can only be achieved with a working age population in which all communities are full participants in the labour market. The Roma population represents already a sizeable share of the working age population in many European countries, including the four countries in this study. This share will continue to increase given the relatively younger age profile of the Roma. As such, substantially increasing the participation and productivity of Roma is an economic necessity for everyone.

## F. Policy Note: *Roma Inclusion: An Economic Opportunity for Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia*, Prague, Sept. 30, 2010

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRROMA/Resources/Policy\\_Note\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRROMA/Resources/Policy_Note_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

This Note builds on the findings above and provides illustrations of the economic benefits of eliminating the productivity gap between Roma and majority populations. It argues that four areas are particularly important: **(a) improving knowledge gathering on what specific programs and policies work best;** **(b) ensuring that information on effective programs is widely discussed, debated, and disseminated;** (c) enhancing the program design, implementation, and monitoring capacity of (sub)national entities and civil society organizations; and, (d) strengthening Roma participation.

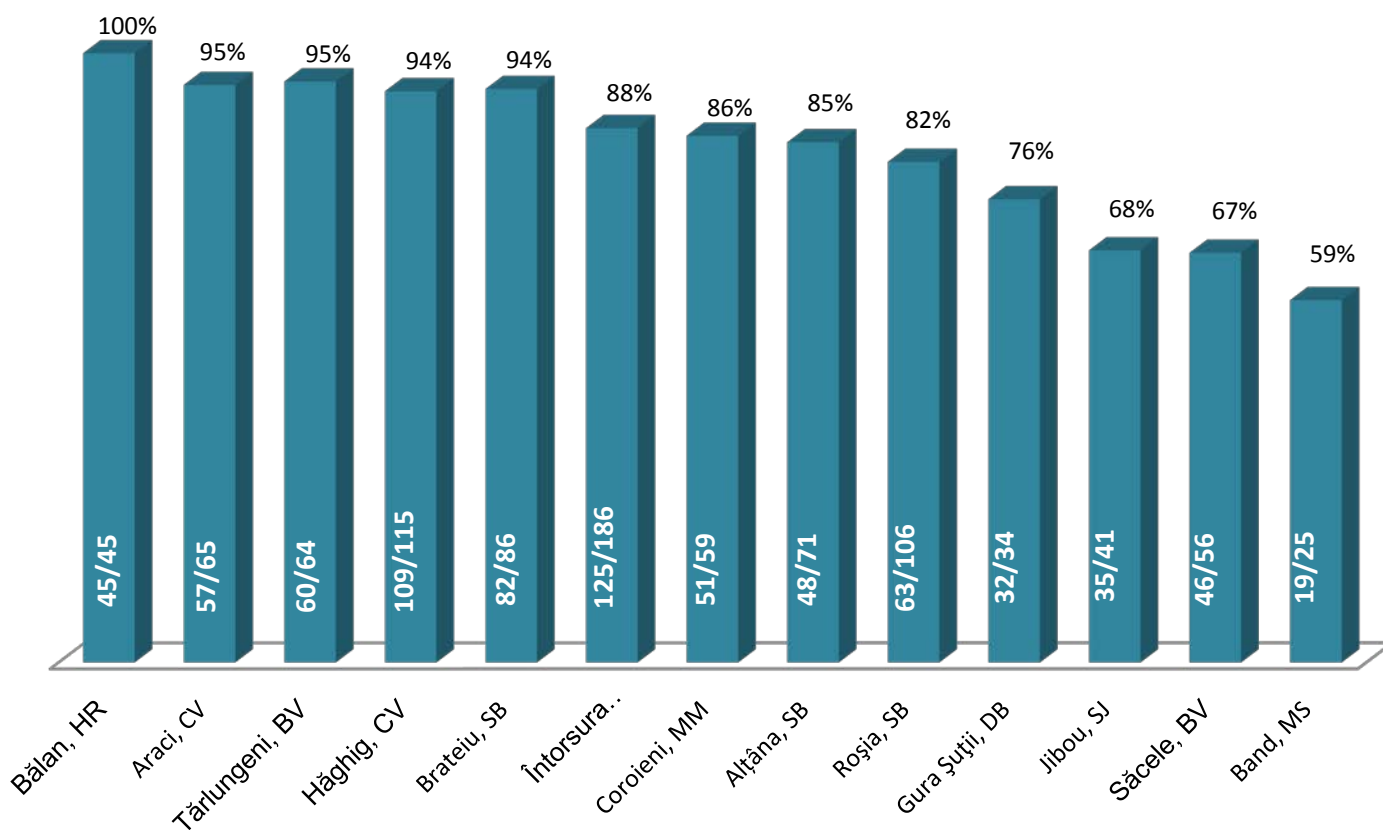
## APPENDIX 2: TARGET GROUP & LOCATIONS

### Communities selected:

**Braşov:** Săcele, Tărlungeni; **Covasna:** Araci, Hăghig, Întorsura Buzăului; **Mureş:** Band; **Constanţa:** Castelu; **Maramureş:** Coroieni; **Sălaj:** Jibou; **Sibiu:** Roşia, Alţina, Brateiu; **Harghita:** Bălan; **Bacău:** Bacău, Buhuşi; **Dâmboviţa:** Gura Şuţii, Potlogi, Vizureşti; **Bucharest** Sector 5.

Most of the families that qualified have been in poverty for many generations. On average, the children's parents finished 4-5 grades although in some communities almost all parents are illiterate (for example in Band, only 5% of parents had finished 1st or 2nd grade, Castelu or Coroieni). In only two communities, Rosia and Sacele, the majority of parents had finished 8 grades. The families have an average of 4-5 children and it is not uncommon for 10-12 people cohabitating in a two room dwelling. Most houses are in appalling condition: improvised roofs, broken or non-existent windows, heated by wood or open electric grills and no running water, cook stoves, refrigeration and sanitation facilities. Children must walk on unpaved, often muddy pathways (in two cases a distance of 1-2 km) to kindergarten.

### Children with daily attendance in January 2011, per location



The main sources of family income are welfare benefits and child allowances. Parents work seasonally (picking fruit and vegetables), make baskets and brooms, and collect iron. Lack of education combined with lack of local jobs make it impossible for them to earn a stable income. Other problems that prevent children's school attendance are frequent illness caused by the improper living conditions and augmented by lack of medical care, the fact that parents take their children along when they work far from home, the need for older children to take care of younger siblings, and children being neglected when parents go to work abroad. Extreme early marriage (at 12-14) was not a major factor in these communities. The poverty is so extreme that few people have the means or connections to go abroad to seek work. Consequently, this is not a major contributor to these children's school abandonment.

### APPENDIX 3: DETAILED RESULTS AUGUST 2010 – FEBRUARY 2011

- ✓ **1200 children** age 3-6 were registered for kindergarten
- ✓ **870 children received clothes and shoes** needed for school. For 380 children, the funds were allocated by the City Hall. For the other 490, the local teams obtained sponsorships or donations from local NGOs companies or other schools.
- ✓ **Over 1000 children received school supplies** purchased by local teams with Ovidiu Rom funds.
- ✓ **By February, over 80% of the 1200 children in the program had perfect class attendance.**
- ✓ **1400 impoverished parents** participated in their children's education and began to understand and appreciate the importance
- ✓ **150 local people were involved in implementing the program** No one on the local team, including the coordinators, receives extra compensation for their participation.
- ✓ **Local teams found solutions to problems encountered** such as finding space for the increased number of children in preschool, get authorization for new teaching positions, and assign school mediators to the kindergartens.
- ✓ **Seven new preschool groups were formed to accommodate the increased number of children.** Five new teacher positions were allocated and paid by the County School Inspectorates. Two other teachers are paid by Ovidiu Rom, but will be taken over by the School Inspectorates September 2011. In some places lack of space required the newly formed groups to be held in the afternoon.
- ✓ **Five teacher assistants** were hired where the number of children was too high for a single teacher. Four assistants are paid by Ovidiu Rom and one is paid by Tarlungeni City Hall.
- ✓ **150 local community members** got involved (school and kindergarten principals, teachers, social workers and City Hall employees, school mediators, mayors); the project also involves family doctors, parents and minority representatives. None of these people receives extra remuneration for taking part.
- ✓ **35 teachers** from the local communities took part in training workshops provided by Ovidiu Rom.
- ✓ **"Şotron Zero"** module was added in the spring term by eight local teams for their 2-4 years olds. The module offers children and their parents once-a-week sessions to familiarize them with the school environment and to show parents educational activities they can do with their children at home.



## APPENDIX 4: PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED & LESSONS LEARNED

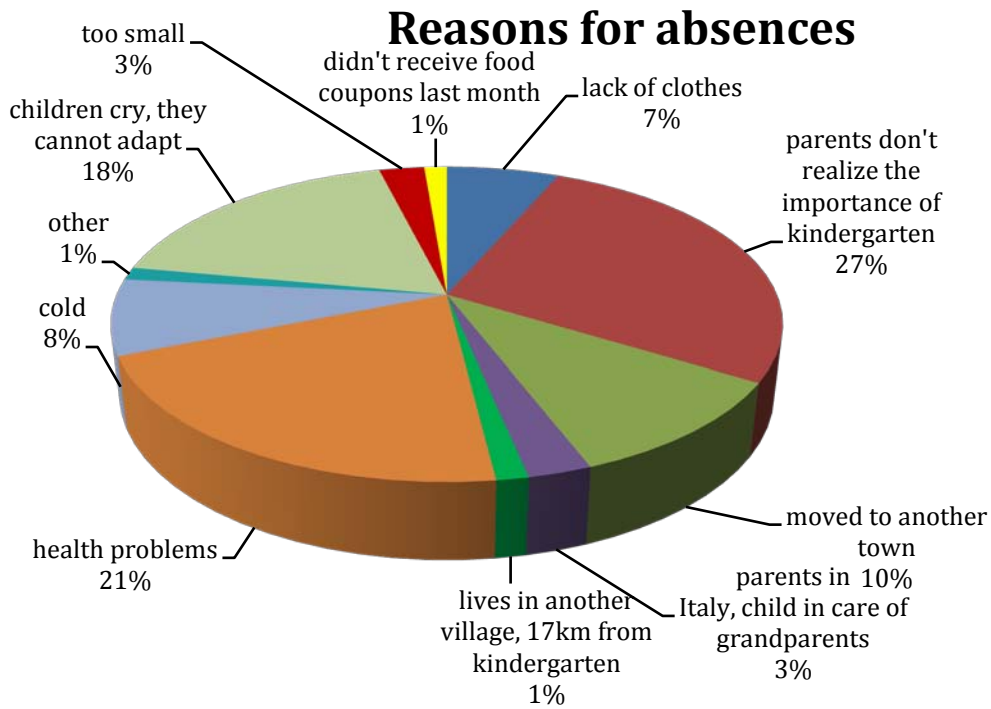
### PROBLEMS:

- a. **Lack of space.** Many kindergarten classrooms are small and crowded, making it difficult to accommodate the additional children brought by the project. Temporary solutions were found by forming afternoon groups. In some communities, the Local Council supports the renovation of other spaces. EVERY community found a solution, even if it was not ideal. As one school director commented, “Lack of space is a handy excuse, but it’s not an insurmountable problem if the authorities genuinely want to find a place for the children.”
- b. **Unclear situation of school mediator** in some communities, for various reasons:
  - A trained school mediator does this job, but is not officially hired and paid for this;
  - One school mediator in charge of both the school and kindergarten, or of more villages in a comuna;
  - No one in the community has enough grades to qualify for school mediator (the law requires minimum 8 grades);
  - The mediator is not paid by the kindergarten, but by the county resource center and the kindergarten director cannot require them to participate in the project.
- c. **Lack of City Hall support** in some communities. This project always brings more children to kindergarten, but that also carries some stressors. Local support can ebb and flow. Social workers play a key role in verifying children’s eligibility (through social inquiries) and distributing the monthly food coupons. Support from City Hall is required to solve this problem.
- d. **Rules not clear** to some parents. In the beginning some parents did not fully understand that the coupons required their child’s *perfect daily attendance* without any unexcused absences. Some parents in a marginally better financial situation were unhappy that they didn’t qualify. These situations are inevitable in the beginning but can be ameliorated with communication and consistency.
- e. **Unqualified, temporary teachers.** in many rural communities teachers lack the training and experience to deal with large numbers of young children who have not benefited from any education at home. And their “temporary position” means high staff turnover.

### LESSONS LEARNED:

#### Successful implementation requires:

- ✓ **Active Local Action Group** committed to finding solutions to the concrete problems that arise (adequate space, more teachers, parental counselling etc.)
- ✓ Strong support from either mayor or school director, and ideally both.
- ✓ **Initial recruitment drive conducted by both the school mediator and the social worker.** These are the two people who know the families the best and are in a position to decide who legitimately qualifies.
- ✓ **Repeated door-to-door visits** in order to make sure that ALL children are identified and registered. Otherwise, eligible children will be missed.
- ✓ **Flexibility of the local team and school directors** so that children without birth certificates and those identified late can still participate.
- ✓ **Transparent and clearly explained procedure** for selecting eligible children.
- ✓ **Communication to parents AND the larger community of the goals** of the program.
- ✓ **Accurate attendance records** kept by the teachers and enforcement of the rule that parents bring medical notes when children miss class.



#### ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- ✓ Communication difficulties due to a lack of Internet access and basic computer skills such as operating Excel and PowerPoint.
- ✓ Widely dispersed communities, with young children having to walk significant distances to reach the school.
- ✓ Delegation and distribution of duties so that implementation is not shouldered by a single person. This is crucial in order to ensure continuity, so that if the coordinator leaves, the entire project is not in jeopardy.
- ✓ Maintaining a healthy balance between strict adherence to procedures and flexibility to deal with new, unexpected situations.

## APPENDIX 5: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. What will happen when these children finish kindergarten and don't get food coupons?

The 2011 requirement of school attendance in order to qualify for the family allowance will help to keep these children in school. In addition, convincing poor uneducated parents of the importance of school is a major element of this program. They are developing new attitudes, NEW HABITS, and new hopes for their children. And with a higher percentage of children from the ghetto attending school, peer pressure begins to have a positive effect. There is definitely "status" associated with school attendance in these communities. The national program that provides school materials, inadequate as it is, helps somewhat to defray entry costs. And the "corn si lapte" daily snack program is another draw for attendance.

### 2. How do you know the teachers are keeping accurate attendance records?

One important element of the teacher training is to explain the "experimental" nature of this program and the importance of accuracy. A member of the Ovidiu Rom team visits each school at least once a month and spot checks the attendance records. Supervision and teacher "buy-in" are definitely necessary for the success of this program.

### 3. What resources does Ovidiu Rom provide?

Our 40 page Implementation Guide is a step-by-step instruction manual derived from Ovidiu Rom's ten-years' experience teaching impoverished children and training other teachers to do so effectively – both for offering quality education to impoverished children and for dealing with the practical issues that invariably arise. In addition to covering the cost of food coupons (15€) for the children with perfect attendance, Ovidiu Rom provides classroom materials and offers training and information-sharing workshops periodically throughout the year.

### 4. How do you involve parents?

To qualify for the food coupons their children must come to kindergarten every day (or the parent must bring a medical slip or make a special request); Parents are also required to take part in class activities, by rotation, once per month, as "teacher assistant" in order to become familiar with the educational activities taking place in kindergarten; and they must attend monthly "open lessons" in order to learn how to work at home with their children.

### 5. How can this possibly work on a national scale when so many communities lack the classroom space?

When people want to find solutions they are amazingly adept at finding them: we have seen kindergartens in the backrooms of stores, in abandoned houses and petrol stations, even in the Mayor's house in one community (Castelu, Constanta).

### 6. How much will it cost to scale it up?

The direct local costs are approximately 250€ per child or 15 million euros per year for 60,000 children. Compare this with the cost of keeping a man in prison for a year. The initial roll-out costs of training and on-going oversight are not included in this figure.

## APPENDIX 6: LEGAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

On February 9, 2011, Romania's new National Education Law was ratified. The law addresses early education in the following sections:

Article 23 Incorporates **pre**-preschool education (age 0-3) in the education law for the first time;

Article 28(2) Assigns public authorities with responsibility for the step-by-step increase in the availability of preschool in their communities;

Article 23(b) Introduces a mandatory preparatory year ("Clasa Pregatitoare") for 6 year olds;

Article 58 Recognizes the importance of recreational, after-school, free time, and remedial activities, and

Article 12(1) Mentions that the State supports preschool children with special needs.

**Fiecare Copil în Grădiniță** supports the philosophy and goals of the new law by its:

- ✓ "Șotron Zero" module which provides educational programs for 2-3 year olds and their moms;
- ✓ Active recruitment of impoverished children for preschool;
- ✓ Piloting of 'clasa pregatitoare' in our program sites in 2011 in partnership with the School Inspectorates;
- ✓ Summer 'school preparation' programs, and
- ✓ Monthly food coupons for children's perfect attendance in preschool.

The European Union has asserted that it considers preschool education a top priority in order to reduce the number of school dropouts and people living in poverty and social exclusion. On February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the European Commission launched an action plan for universal access to quality preschool education that will be discussed by the EU member states on the forthcoming Education Council in May.

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