

Appendix C Showcase *Project Citizen* Devoted to Roma Issues Parliament Building, Bucharest June 1, 2011

On Wednesday, June 1, 2011, a *Project Citizen* Showcase, held at the National Parliament Building in Bucharest, featured presentations by student teams from eleven public schools across Romania. Those schools had been involved for only a few months in focusing their *Project Citizen* efforts on issues impacting Roma students, families, and communities. The showcase also attracted teachers, principals, national civic education leaders, a Florida-Romania Partnership delegation from the United States, and two members of the Romanian Parliament, who participated in the entire session.



FLREA Executive Director Annette Boyd Pitts, IIT Director Calin Rus, and Parliament Member Maria Stavrositu during a *Project Citizen* Showcase.

Calin Rus, Director of Institute Intercultural of Timișoara, welcomed all of the students and guests to this first-ever *Project Citizen* Showcase devoted to Roma issues. He thanked the students and their teachers and principals for their hard and thoughtful work. In a brief poll, he asked how many of the students were visiting Bucharest for the first time (about 45 percent). He then asked students how many were visiting the Parliament Building for the first time (nearly 100 percent). Some groups had traveled for twelve hours across Romania to be at the event.

After brief remarks by U.S. delegation members, Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc.; Irving Slosberg, a member of the Florida House of Representatives; and Kenneth Anthony, a lecturer in the College of Education at Mississippi State University, Rus invited each of the eleven teams to do their five-minute presentations. *More complete descriptions of the evaluator's on-site visits to three of the schools represented at the showcase are presented in Appendices D, E, and F.*

School Partenie Cosma, Oradea, Bijaor County Problem of Roma/Project: Roma don't know their rights.

Oradea is a city of approximately 206,000 people located in western Romania, eight miles from the Hungarian border and straddling the Crisu Repede River. The city was first documented as Varadinum in 1113 A.D. Serving grades 9 through 12, School Partenie Cosma has 25 *Project Citizen* students. Their teachers are Ramona Breazdau and Aurica Cifor.

In their research, the 10th-grade *Project Citizen* team found that few in the Roma community were aware of existing programs designed to be helpful to them. They concluded that “not being aware of their rights” and “communication problems” were leading to a lack of access to services.

Social mediation will play an important role in solving this problem, team members suggested. Students proposed that their Local Council support a campaign, organized by the mayor, to help Roma understand their rights. Included in their proposed plan of action were: a possible film; leaflets; annual opinion polls; meetings with various groups, such as NGOs and appropriate public institutions; and the need for a system to evaluate the effort.

School Octavian Voicu, Bacău, Bacău County

Problem of Roma/Project: Salubrity (health and well-being) and the lack of education.

Bacău, with a population of approximately 177,087 is located in the historic Moldavia region of northeastern Romania, near the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, at the confluence of the Bistrita and Siret Rivers. Bacău is relatively close to the Moldova border. Serving students in grades 1 through 8, School Octavian Voicu has 25 *Project Citizen* students, whose teachers are Mihaela Frascase and Maria Vlad.

These 8th-grade *Project Citizen* team members had conferred with their local city government and the Roma community in identifying a problem that would be a focus for their efforts. As part of their research, problem identification, and planning for solutions, students concluded that the overall system needs to provide even better services for the Roma population. The team suggested panels to inform Roma of how to handle issues such as sanitation and the education of children who might move frequently from one place to another. Students also proposed involvement in Roma Day, held in April, to provide sanitary items and demonstrations of how to use them. In conducting research, students had gone to the community seeking opinions and advice, and, in turn, urged the community to participate in a symposium on the issue at their school.



Members of a *Project Citizen* team sharing key portions of their presentation during a Roma issues showcase.

School Ecaterina Teodoroiu, Târgu Jiu, Gorj County

Problem of Roma/Project: Lack of intercultural understanding. Some do not read or respect cultural heritage.

Located in southern Romania, Târgu Jiu, population approximately 97,179, is on the banks of the River Jiu in the sub-Carpathian Mountains. An ancient Dacian village occupied the site prior to Roman conquest and occupation. The Roman army withdrew in approximately AD 271. However, as with much of Romania, the area retained Latin influence, which was promoted by Constantine. Serving grades 1 through 8, School Ecaterina Teodoroiu has 25 *Project Citizen* students, whose teachers are Gianina Bacitea and Diana Ciurea.

In addressing the need for greater intercultural understanding and appreciation, these 8th-grade students suggested a computer information search to broaden their background knowledge and supplement what they were learning with examples from their community. The *Project Citizen* team concluded that a good Roma dictionary might be needed and that the inclination of people to use information technology might be a way to promote greater intercultural understanding. During their presentation, students asked for consideration of Roma representation at the European level. Other actions suggested by the team included: conducting a survey of parents and students using a questionnaire; building greater communication with the Roma community and their NGO; meeting with the Local Council, police, and the school library director; and appointing a person to manage the program in the school for at least one hour a week.

School Mathias Hammer, Anina, Caras-Severin County

Problem of Roma/Project: A lack of education.

Anina, located in southwestern Romania near the Serbian border and north of the Danube River, had a 2000 population of approximately 10,886. Anina's southern Carpathian setting is geologically rich. In 2002, the oldest modern human remains in Europe were discovered in a cave near the city, dating back 40,000 years. Serving grades 1 through 8, School Mathias Hammer has 25 *Project Citizen* students, whose teachers are Mira Schinteie and Florina Benghia.

The largely 7th-grade *Project Citizen* team formed four groups, which they charged with identifying problems. Together, they determined that one of the greatest problems facing Roma is a lack of education. Students gathered a variety of statistical information from their mayor's office to help them better understand the social situation of Roma in their community.

Among suggested solutions were:

- A school for parents to learn reading and writing and develop hygienic skills.
- An exchange of experiences and learning opportunities focused on managing and interacting within a family. Included would be people who live in a variety of situations.
- Professional development efforts to help Roma become qualified for various types of jobs and to enter the workforce.
- Promotion of greater integration of Roma into society.

Students admitted to some indifference about Roma issues until they confronted the problems and determined they might be able to help. While revealing that they don't know for sure if their parents are interested in the project, they are convinced that the solutions they have proposed should be of interest to everyone.

An action plan included: getting local authorities to assist in presenting their case to the Council of Students, developing a course that could become part of the curriculum, working with the mayor's office to raise funds to cover the cost of a parent education program, and helping shape attitudes of students so that even more will be prepared to work with Roma. As students considered their possible solutions, they found "more advantages than disadvantages."

School Slobozia Bradului, Vrancea County

Problem of Roma/Project: Street dogs--threat to 80 percent of the community, including Roma.

Slobozia Bradului, a city with a 2002 population estimated at 5,063, is located in eastern Romania, a relatively short distance from the Moldovan border. Serving grades 1 through 8, the school has 25 *Project Citizen* students. Their teachers are Voica Costache and Marilena Andrei.

The *Project Citizen* team reported that more than 200 dogs roam their city and have recently injured at least ten people. In describing the situation, members of the team said, "Stray dogs are all over the streets." This problem involves everyone in the community, they said, including those who are Roma.



With presentation boards shaped like doghouses, *Project Citizen* students make their case about control of stray dogs in their community and other parts of Romania.

In considering solutions, 7th-grade *Project Citizen* students said they had no desire to destroy the dogs but would like to have a shelter available for them, suggesting adoption of the dogs as a possible option. Shelters and sterilization could be costly, they said.

Team members were planning discussions with veterinarians to obtain their counsel on dealing with the concern and considering writing a proposal for funding and support as a European project. An 8th-grade student will be discussing the issue with the local community. In closing, students mentioned that the mayor of their city had adopted five of the dogs.

We got a sense of how to help others and do positive things for society. We have developed more trust in ourselves and others, in addition to a sense of self confidence. We've gained an ability to understand and appreciate differences among people. We were able to go into the Roma community to gain first-hand experience.

Comments from students following a *Project Citizen* Showcase on Roma issues

Râmnicu Vâlcea, Vâlcea County

Problem of Roma/Project: School Abandonment. Early marriages cause children to abandon school and their education.

Râmnicu Vâlcea, a city of approximately 107,500 people, is located in south central Romania near the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. The Olt River crosses the town, which was inhabited by the Dacians and Romans and was declared the seat of Vâlcea County in 1392. The Romanian national anthem is reported to have been composed and sung there for the first time in 1848. Teachers who serve the school's 25 *Project Citizen* students are Dragos Gheorghe Duta and Gabriel Dragan.

To begin their project, students gathered information from a local database indicating more than 3,000 Roma were living in the community. Very few had continued their schooling into 9th-grade. *Project Citizen* students met with a Roma neighbor to discuss, among other issues, the early marriage of young women, which leads many to abandon school. He observed that the age of these young brides has been rising from 12 or 13 to about 15 and expressed the opinion that it should be higher.

In addressing the problem, students suggested offering after-school programs and including food as an incentive for people to attend classes. Some Roma young people, they observed, drop out of school because they don't have food like their classmates. Their plan of action included: working with the mayor's office, the president, school directors, and local supervisors. They added that the two percent of seats reserved for Roma students in colleges can be helpful and noted that Roma schoolmates, who are members of their *Project Citizen* team, were not able to come to Bucharest for the showcase.

School Panciu, Panciu, Vrancea County

Problem of Roma/Project: The inappropriate management of trash.

Located in northeastern Romania along the Susita River, Panciu has a population of approximately 9,000. The city is in Moldavia, not far from the country of Moldova. Known since Roman times for its grapes and wine production, the city celebrates its wine cellars, where temperatures are kept constant year around. Romanian writer Ioan Slavici, born in 1848, lived in Panciu. School Panciu, which serves grades 1 through 12, has approximately 25 *Project Citizen* students, whose teachers are Luminita Cociorba and Marissa Oliver, who is a Peace Corps volunteer.

During their Showcase presentation, School Panciu 11th-grade *Project Citizen* students admitted that narrowing the list of problems facing the Roma was difficult. They commented that while many Roma in their community have the financial resources to support the health and well-being of people, they have not been involved in the Eco-Panciu Project, devoted to cleaning up the environment. They conceded that some of Panciu's Roma population may not be aware of the project.

As they further considered solutions, students recommended developing a recycling project that would compensate people for articles they collect and would provide a supplemental source of income for some in the Roma community. Team members noted that a project such as this would be low cost and could provide a constructive activity and service to the community by those who might, in some cases, currently be receiving social welfare.

Panciu *Project Citizen* students developed an action plan that includes steps such as: calling on people who can be helpful in organizing and carrying out the effort; conducting an opinion poll; contacting Roma organizations; and consulting with local celebrities. Members of the team have met with the vice mayor to arrange for a presentation of their ideas before the Local Council. Some funds will be needed to support the project, they said. Among outcomes of their work will be solving a problem, serving the community, and fighting indifference.



Students from *Project Citizen* teams that presented cases at a 2011 showcase at the Romanian Parliament.

Grup Scolar Industrial Nicolae Cioranescu, Târgoviște, Dambovita County

Problem of Roma/Project: Roma people need to be informed about their rights.

Târgoviște, with a 2010 population of approximately 89,000, located in south central Romania in the Muntenia region, is at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. The ruins of a palace first constructed in 1397; a Sunset Tower, commissioned by Vlad III, Dracula, in the mid-15th century; and recent concrete buildings are reminders of the city's history. The community stands along a medieval trade route and was the scene of battles with Crimean Tatars. Târgoviște has one of Romania's largest steel factories. Serving grades 9 through 12, Grup Scolar Industrial Nicolae Cioranescu has approximately 25 *Project Citizen* students, whose teachers are Elena Diana Oprea and Alina Dogaru.

Project Citizen students found in their research that Roma generally are not aware of their rights. Many are unregistered, which makes their progress through the education system more difficult, even though spaces are reserved for Roma high school and college students. Schools, they reported, have 13 Romani language teachers and a mediator. Students found that going into a Roma community is somewhat difficult. They encountered handicaps and other social issues, a separate language, and some other projects intended to serve Roma. Team members speculated that certain issues might require legislation.

Solutions proposed by the Țîrgoviște *Project Citizen* team included: working with the mass media; producing leaflets; doing panels in the community; preparing suggested public policies; informing Roma of their rights; and working with various institutions to help people better understand the Romani language. Students also suggested sponsoring a Roma Day in a public space located in the Roma community. Immediate steps in their action plan focused on working with the Roma leadership and mayor's office, then broadening the effort to encompass everyone.

Additional Presentations of Roma Projects Covered Through School and

Community Site Visits: The following schools and communities were among on-site visits made by the evaluator. While their teams did brief presentations during the *Project Citizen* Showcase in Bucharest, the evaluator's observations are included in individual sections of this Civitas International Program External On-Site Evaluation Report.

Mehai Eminescu School, Jimbolia, Timiș County. (western Romania)

Problem of Roma/Project: Roma often lack official documents.

Project Citizen teachers include Oana Parva and Steliana Petrut. (*Appendix D*)

Ciprian Proumbescu School, Constanta, Constanta County. (southeastern Romania)

Problem of Roma/Project: Abandoning School.

Project Citizen teachers include Doina Buzescu and Carmen Tanase. (*Appendix E*)

Anghel Monolache School, Scrioastea, Teleorman County (southern Romania)

Problem of Roma/Project: The Roma need to know their rights.

Project Citizen teachers include Mirela Soare and Gina Stavrache. (*Appendix F*)

Comments Following Student Presentations: Immediately following their presentations, students heard remarks from the Institute Intercultural of Timișoara and members of Parliament. IIT Director Calin Rus told students, "What you have done will be a resource for teachers across Romania and for other groups."

Member of Romanian Parliament Maria Stavrositu, Council of Deputies: "I am impressed by your enthusiasm, your analysis using this process, and your suggestions," she said. "Everyone should have experienced your presentations." Stavrositu added that she hopes "all schools and students will have an opportunity to participate in *Project Citizen*" and reminded students that civic education has contributed to progress in countries such as the U.S. "However, even they are never satisfied. They know they need to do more."

Member of Romanian Parliament Nicolae Robu, Senator: "The presentations were great," Robu remarked. "I'm impressed with how students have approached problems and identified solutions." He reinforced their efforts by reminding them that, "It is important to be involved and not to be indifferent. We need to be proactive in confronting these problems. The subjects of your projects are of great importance to each of your communities and to all of Romania." Robu then expressed his thanks to Director Calin Rus and the IIT team, including all of the principals, teachers, and students, for what they are doing. He also expressed appreciation to Annette Boyd Pitts, who directs the CCE partnership that includes Romania "for opening the door for us." This Parliamentary leader recalled a recent visit to the U.S. where he experienced a national level competition with students presenting their projects to 3,000 people. Robu reminded everyone that, "Today, June 1, is Children's Day in Romania, and this event provides us with an example of what our children are capable of doing."

Group Discussion Sessions with *Project Citizen* Students: The evaluator joined members of the U.S. delegation in two discussion group sessions with students following their *Project Citizen* Showcase presentations. IIT's Oana Nestian urged students to share their ideas and opinions. "We want students to continue to speak up in the future," she said.



Following their presentations, team members responded to questions and expressed their views. All said they would likely be more involved in identifying and dealing with future community problems because of their *Project Citizen* experience.

Question: What other issues do you face in your communities?

Students from across Romania brainstormed a range of issues their communities face. The following is a composite list: homeless people, street dogs, violence, illiteracy (people who can't read or write), garbage in the streets, the environment and its threat to our health, misuse of *legal* drugs, smoking among young people, both ethnic and religious discrimination, car accidents, lack of jobs/unemployment, and the emigration of people from Romania to find jobs in other parts of Europe or the world. Students also mentioned corruption, commenting that it is "not fair to have to give more for services that have already been paid for." They noted that "parents pay for health insurance, yet they have to pay more to get attention and actual benefit from those services." *Also see Appendix P.*

Question, Likelihood of Being Involved in the Future: Students were asked if they are more or less likely to be involved in identifying and dealing with community issues and problems because of their *Project Citizen* experience. Fully 100 percent said they would likely be more involved.

Question, How has your involvement in *Project Citizen* made an impact on you? What qualities have you developed because of the experience? *Project Citizen* team members from across Romania responded to these questions by saying that they are: more responsible, more aware of the future, and know more about the role they can play and the process they can use in stimulating change. They said they are better able to empathize and to become both intellectually and emotionally involved in community issues.

Students added that they had, in a short time, "at least had a small and positive impact on the Roma community." The program, "made it possible for us to see the Roma problem not just from the outside but from the inside. We learned that some people tend to be good and bad, just like in any other part of society." Others said they had learned to appreciate the ideas and work of public officials but were concerned, in some cases, that Roma officials preferred fund allocations rather than advice.

"We have developed solidarity," students remarked. The program, they said, "helped us to be good people," and to cultivate "patience, persistence, and politeness," "a sense of modesty," "the ability to speak before any group," and "a more careful approach to identifying problems and developing solutions." Students said they "got a sense of how to help others and do positive things for society" and were able to develop more trust in themselves and others, in addition to a sense of self confidence. Some celebrated gaining "an ability to understand and appreciate differences among people." Still others placed high value on "being able to go into the Roma community to gain first-hand experience." The *Project Citizen* team members seemed to agree that, "Even I can help others."

Students mentioned satisfaction they had gained from specific projects, which made it possible for them to call attention to the importance of a forest in their area, the desire of children to play but not having a playground, and problems posed by the fact that many people could not find jobs. Some mentioned getting notes from the local City or Town Hall letting them know the project they selected was important or that their idea was receiving consideration.



Students said their *Project Citizen* experience helped them develop confidence, communication skills, and a process for stimulating change.

As they thought further about the qualities and strengths they had developed, students mentioned discovering how to generate and deal with a variety of often new ideas and to consider those ideas as an advantage. Some appreciated the experience of meeting with their local mayor and finding that person to be open-minded, even wanting to be more involved with students and to increase participation in the community. Others had similar experiences with members of their Local Council. One student pointed out that members of the group had learned “how to hold a conference.” Another highlighted learning “the distinction between just voting and the possibility of discussing an issue until a better solution emerges.” *Also see Appendix O.*

A Discussion of Exclusion and Inclusion: U.S. delegates discussed cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and the impact of other laws and court decisions on the failed concept of “separate but equal.” They also discussed and responded to students’ questions about demographic changes in American society, where minorities are sometimes becoming majorities and vice versa.

Additional Ideas for Roma Inclusion: Based on their *Project Citizen* experiences and after witnessing presentations from schools across Romania, students were asked to share any further ideas or suggestions for Roma inclusion. The following were among them:

- Roma students need to go to school every day and start learning. Too many are not learning in school and not integrated into society.
- Work to increase interest in education among Roma students, parents, and communities, and be clear about the penalty for not going to school.
- Acknowledge that many Roma parents want to maintain traditions but their children still need an education.
- Deal with the fact that some Roma parents and others have not received an education and don’t appreciate the need for their children to be in school. Because some Roma travel a great deal, their children leave school and move on, which interrupts their education. We may need to help Roma students learn, one team member said, because many of their parents may not be helping them.
- Some students might have jobs, so they don’t come to school.
- Students need to spend more hours in school.
- Concerns about staying in school apply to all students, not just Roma.
- Public authorities, the Roma community, and NGOs need to regularly discuss the issue.
- Consider starting *Project Citizen* for adults to involve them in identifying and dealing with some of these issues.