

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 2024



**REALITY
CHECK**

Dear friends,

We founded Reality Check seven years ago, mainly because we were worried by the big distances between our worlds - between the world of children with chances and the one of those who have none; between the worlds where there is tolerance and those dominated by hatred; between the opportunities of municipalities that have resources, and the apparently unsolvable problems of those who do not; between the theoretical world of legislation and strategies that look good on paper and the practice of applying them on the ground. We believed then, and we still believe, that we can only progress as a country if we do everything in our powers to bring these worlds closer to each other.

It is a long term process, and our approach was always to support directly children and families from severely impoverished, marginalized communities, while documenting the problems they are facing and suggesting possible solutions which could contribute to improving public policy in anti-poverty related fields.

Now is a good time to do an evaluation of our work in the past years. To take an honest look at the journey of our partner communities, to rethink our activities according to the evolution of local authorities' involvement and to the socio-economical dynamics of the people living in these communities, and to analyse intervention areas where we can have the best impact. We are also looking at the way in which we can use all that we have learned so far to improve the way in which various social issues are approached at national level, from a legislative and strategic perspective.

We kindly invite you to read the following pages for details about our results so far, achieved together with our partners, and what we are planning for 2025.

Thank you for your support and we hope you will continue to partner with us in our work against poverty, both at grass-roots and at policy level.

Gratefully,
The Reality Check team,
Nadia, Iolanda, Oana, Alina, Carmen, Simona și Wolf



REALITYCHECK
Open a door. Shine a light.



LONG TERM IMPACT



PONORÂTA, COROIENI

It took years of involvement of Reality Check members and of the dedicated sponsors that were close to the community for 14 years now (Romstal, Kaufland, EdFiCo) in Ponorâta - but we are happy to say that results are visible, particularly regarding the community's attitude towards education. If in 2010, on a regular day there were less than 25 children of all ages in the entire school, now over 265 children are present every day! And their parents are bringing them to school clean and proud (instead of just sending them down the street alone and unwashed, as they were doing some years ago).

To accommodate all the children, the City Hall built a school annex with two more classrooms, and the preschoolers and primary school children learn in two shifts, in the school building as well as in the community center next to it. Since April 2024, Coroieni Secondary School has taken over the after-school program with hot meals for children from 5th to 8th grade, through the EU funded National Program of Reducing School Drop-out, and the City Hall funds lunch for all the other children, through the national Healthy meal program.

The essential change is one of mentality: it has finally become a normality that all children are enrolled in preschool and school, from age 3, and that they come to school every day.

Children's school results have also improved, particularly since we decided to condition the food coupons not only on regular attendance, but on individual progress of children, as well. Children's evolution is evaluated every two months - and in a community where, 14 years ago, nobody had more than four grades of school and almost noone knew how to read and write, now

most primary school children read and write easily, and the number of high school children is growing every year: in September 2024 there are 16 young people enrolled, and we also have the first two graduates!

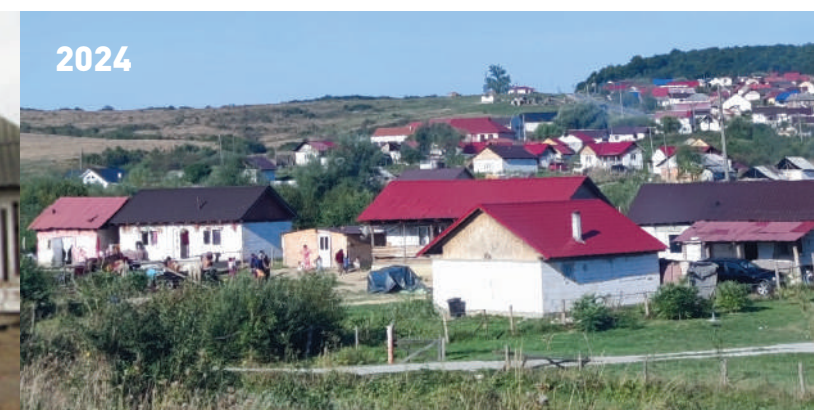
In the 2024-2025 school year, the County School Inspectorate followed up on our previous discussions and allocated a full-time position of school mediator in Ponorata, a full time school counselor (psychologist) in Coroieni school (with dedicated days for Ponorata), and a part-time logoped.



Ponorâta community itself progressed a lot. Our efforts to consolidate a local initiative group in the village paid off, and the evolution is visible year after year.

In 2017 we organized for the first time a "community teambuilding" with ten men from Ponorata, the school principal, the social worker, the local coordinator and the Reality Check team. This first step to create cohesion among villagers (naturally divided in a few big families) was a real success. We continued this process every year, both through trips to Viata program (in Straja/Băile Tușnad) and through regular meetings in the village, to discuss together the local problems and the solutions that the villagers propose. Community representatives from the Local Initiative Group are now attending meetings with the mayor and negotiate solutions for the benefit of the entire village. As results:

- In 2018 we helped for the first time a few families to replace their roofs made of asbestos or plastic foil, with reused insulated tin; in the following year we helped other families with new tin and OSB - this small help made people want more and realize that they can also improve things for themselves, so they started to make efforts and started to procure their own the materials they needed to replace their wood and mud shacks with more solid constructions. Now, more than half of the improvised houses have been replaced with BCA constructions.
- In 2011 in Ponorâta there were only two water pumps. In 2017-2018 the City Hall connected the village to the water pipe and now all the houses have a pump in the courtyard - there are also more and more houses with inside bathrooms;
- In 2023 Reality Check bought pebbles and the City Hall used its machinery to put the stone on the main streets in the village - an important step in getting rid of the mud and keeping the school cleaner;
- In 2024 more families bought the land they had built their houses on, in order to legalize their property situation;
- We have reached 100 families that we help with seeds to cultivate their own vegetable gardens (in the first year only 15 families found some land to plant).





CASTELU

In Castelu we help children from a very poor community of Roma-Turks, called Horahai. We started our work here in 2017. The change in Castelu is more difficult particularly because of the often discriminatory attitude of the other villagers towards the Horahai. This reflects as well on their reduced access to essential services, such as enrollment in preschool and school and primary medical assistance. Consequently, a big part of our work over the years was to try to bring closer the Romanian and Turkish inhabitants (who usually have a better socio-economic situation) and the impoverished, marginalized Horahai.

Our interventions in Castelu were on three levels: (1) non-formal education, (2) health and (3) support for the integrated local team (social workers, community nurse, school mediators).

A central element were the activities that attracted children to school (sports education, fast literacy bootcamps, personal development through play and adventures) and events that brought together the whole village community (education relays, medical caravans).

In Castelu there is still a long way to go until we can see similar results to those in Coroieni.

Regarding education, an important problem is that the school management has been changed often, which made it difficult to create an inclusive attitude of teachers towards the impoverished Horahai children, who are more difficult to work with because they speak Turkish at home and they understand very little

Romanian, if any, when they start kindergarten or school. Another problem is that sooner or later, all the teachers who got involved actively in our projects decided to move with their main job to other schools from the nearby cities Medgidia or Constanta.

There are however two opportunities: (1) the fact that starting 2022, there are two Teach for Romania teachers working in the preschool and preparatory grade, and (2) the restructuring of the school, which united with the Castelu Technology High School in 2023. This means that now the entire education process, from preschool to 12th grade is managed by one educational institution, so it will be easier to build a more coherent process of inclusive education and school retention for the vulnerable children.

The stability element in Castelu remains the involvement of the City Hall - over the past years the institution has accessed European funds to enlarge the kindergarten and renovate the school, put asphalt on the street where most of the Horahai live (in 2024), transform a building from the village in a socio-medical integrated center, and build a day center for the vulnerable children (for this, the funding has just been allocated). The City Hall also supported the process of strengthening the local integrated team, which functions well currently, at least in what concerns the collaboration between the social workers and the community nurse (the involvement of the school mediators and the school counselor is not yet as efficient). This is extremely important, because it allows local specialists to approach in a more comprehensive way the complex social problems that families face, and to identify more efficient solutions.



The socio-economic situation in both communities is dynamic, as it is in the entire country. The legislation and public policy have evolved and they should be more inclusive - they are, at least, on paper. Schools and local public authorities now have access to European Funds for hot meals in schools, after-school and remedial education programs, integrated community centers and other social services. A part of the population also has higher income. As things improve at a local level (increased access to preschool and school, better streets and infrastructure, more solid houses built often with money saved by people who go abroad), we need to adapt our interventions to other needs, according to new social phenomena that develop.

Therefore we have decided on the following strategy for next years:

- To continue the activities with the highest impact, which cannot yet be funded by local authorities (such as the food coupons conditional on attendance and educational progress for primary school children in Ponorata, the fast literacy bootcamps, adventure summer camps in Viata, education relays and medical caravans in both communities); at the same time, we will focus on increasing the quality of educational, medical and

social services;











- In Castelu, we planned to do an analysis of the impact of our activities and to discuss with decision makers from the City Hall and the school, to decide where Reality Check is most needed in the following years;
- In 2025 we are planning to start supporting a new community - in the marginalized urban area of Tei Toboc in Bucharest District 2; here we will start with health activities for children, mothers and teenagers, and with small non-formal education projects;
- An important thing for Reality Check in the following years will be to dedicate more time to research activities, awareness and advocacy on the following topics of interest for us:

- (1) Discrimination against Roma children regarding their access to education;
- (2) Inclusive education for children with special educational needs or other learning difficulties, who need specialized psycho-pedagogical support in regular schools;
- (3) Minor mothers, and
- (4) Monitoring the implementation of the National Roma Inclusion Strategy.



2023-2024 RESULTS

In 2023 we ended two integrated services projects that took place in Castelu and Coroieni-Ponorâta over two years, with funding through The Active Citizens Fund (EEA and Norwegian funds). In the final evaluation of these projects we analyzed our interventions, together with local teams, and we decided to continue the ones that were most effective and could not be covered by local authorities. In both communities we kept education and health in the center of our activities.

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|
|  330 children received a daily hot meals when attended kindergarten and school (Ponorâta 2023, 2024) |  100 children received social coupons for regular attendance and good results in school. (Ponorâta 2023, 2024) |  45 children left outside the educational system were registered to kindergarten and school due to our recruiting campaign (Castelu, 2023) |  11 highschoolers were helped with transportation money and school supplies (Ponorâta, 2023, 2024) |  69 children participated to intensive literacy classes (Castelu, Ponorâta, 2023) |
|  900 children participated to community events like Education Relay (Castelu, Ponorâta) |  80 children participated to sports clubs - football and volleyball (Castelu) |  27 children went in adventure educational camps (Castelu, Ponorâta 2023) |  100 parents were more involved in their children' education (Castelu, Ponorâta) |  270 children had medical checkups from specialists during a medical caravan (Castelu 2023, 2024) |



EDUCATION

In Ponorâta and Coroieni we continued to stimulate regular attendance in preschool and primary school, through the following methods:

- 100 primary school children benefited from food coupons conditional on attendance and results (teachers evaluate children's knowledge at the end of each education module). For each child we allocated 30 euros every two months, for attendance of over 75% and educational progress.
- For all the children from preschool to grade IV we offered a hot meal every day they attended (300 children per day, on average). Since April 2024 the meals for secondary school children was taken over by the School through the National Program for Reducing School Drop Out, and the ones for preschool and primary school were paid by the City Hall, through the Healthy meal national program.
- In 2023 we helped 250 children be fully prepared for school (with school supplies, backpacks, clothes and shoes).
- For high school students we cover the cost of transport from Ponorata to Tg. Lapus (11 students in 2023 and 16 in 2024). For us it is very important that children continue their education as long as possible, and our common efforts to support education are visible year after year, through the increased number of kids admitted to high school.
- In addition, we are raising children's interest for school and their curiosity to learn, through:
- Scholarships and prizes for children with very good attendance during the school year;
- Personal development camps through play and experience in Viata program run by New Horizons Foundation, for 14 children with very good results;
- Fast literacy bootcamp - 39 children attended intensive literacy sessions;



- The Education Relay brought together over 350 children from the village, who ran in mixed teams, encouraged by over 100 parents, teachers and volunteers who helped organize the event. All the children received sports equipment, and the winners were awarded various prizes.
- Approximately 100 parents were involved in discussions about their children's educational progress.

In Castelu, in 2023 we continued to support teachers and school mediators enroll children in preschool and school, both through discussions with the parents and through the tool that we developed to identify children from the village who are not yet enrolled (we tested the tool in 2022 when we managed to identify and enroll in preparatory grade in school 100 children, many of ages higher than 6 year old).

- Here the educational activities included:
- Sports education - weekly voley and football clubs for 80 girls and boys - from October 2023 until June 2024;
 - Fast literacy bootcamp for 30 children who attended intensive literacy sessions for 10 days in a row - in Catelu the challenge of teaching the Horahai children read and write is even bigger as they speak Turkish at home;
 - The Relay for Education from April 2024 - 500 children participated (from preschool to IXth grade). This was the first year when high-school students also ran in the Relay - they were also reliable volunteers in organizing this event, which reached its 6th year.
 - Personal development summer camp at Viata, for 13 children with good school results.





2023-2024 RESULTS



HEALTH

- Two medical caravans for children in Castelu - 270 children had medical checkups (150 in 2023, 120 in 2024);
- 50 children received treatment or were transported to the doctor or hospital, and 57 medical emergencies were solved (50 in Castelu, 7 in Coroieni);
- With specialists from SAMAS we offered child-care courses to 120 young mothers (60 in 2023 and other 60 in 2024), and in 2024 we also offered 8 individual counseling sessions for breastfeeding, accompanied by giving mothers a newborn box (Castelu, Coroieni);
- Courses about body and consent, provided by our partners from Pe Stop, for 79 young people (35 students from Castelu Technological High School and 19 girls from the Horahai community, as well as 25 girls and boys from Coroieni), in 2024;
- Personal and dental hygiene courses, accompanied by 300 packages with necessary products, for all the children from Castelu school;
- 300 packages with basic healthy food products and nutrition education for the children enrolled in Castelu school.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

More developed in Ponorâta and Coroieni, this component includes:

- Regular meetings and activities to consolidate the Local Initiative Group - people living in the village discuss common problems and identify solutions together with the authorities;
- Pavement of the main alleys between houses in Ponorata, which used to be full of mud - Reality Check bought the pebbles, and Coroieni City Hall provided the necessary equipment and employees to coordinate the process. Ponorata villagers were involved in this activity, from identifying the problem and deciding the alleys to be paved, to helping with laying out the stones on the road;
- Support for growing vegetable gardens - for 100 families each year in 2023 and 2024 (we started in 2019 with 15 families);
- Easter Cleaning has already become a regular activity of the people in Ponorata - initiated by Reality Check, the campaign is now organized by the City Hall together with community leaders, who are part of the Local Initiative Group;
- Community events that bring together villagers of different ethnicity and social status: the Relay for Education, play and movement activities organized by World at Play volunteers.


SOCIAL SERVICES

- In both communities we work together with the integrated local teams (social workers, community nurse, school mediator) in order to help solve the complex, severe problems of vulnerable families.


ADVOCACY

- Communicating grass-roots problems to local, county and national public authorities and mobilizing decision makers to contribute to solving them has always been an important component of our way of working.

We invite you to watch short videos on our activities:



Together or a better future in Castelu and Ponorâta



Education through sports and adventure



Together in Time of Crises

In 2023 și 2024, with our partners Autoklass, Romstal Imex, Romstal Investment, Valrom, and Valplast, we continued to be close to our neighbors from **Ukraine**, who are living one of the most difficult periods in their history, fighting against the Russian invasion.

- In 2023 we organized 16 shipments to Ukraine with closing, equipped medical kits, tactical medical tourniquets, vacuum device for treating wounds, 4 equipped ambulances and 11 off-road vehicles, heaters for hands, body and feet; in 2024 we contributed with 2 ambulances, 4 off-road vehicles, emergency medical kits and other medical supplies.
- In these more than two years we continued to be close

to the Ukrainian refugees from an accommodation center from Bucharest District 2, by covering a few urgent expenses that could not be paid from other sources.

In february 2023 we also helped victims of the earthquake in Turkey, with sleeping bags, winter coats, shoes, socks, blankets and generators.

In 2024 we endowed the Elias Hospital in Bucharest with a fast Belmont infuser, an advanced medical device which is essential in emergency units, surgery rooms and intensive therapy units, being projected to save lives in case of severe bleeding.

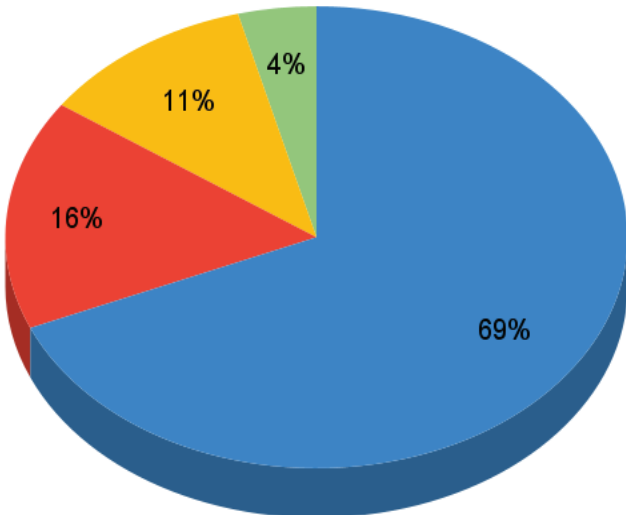
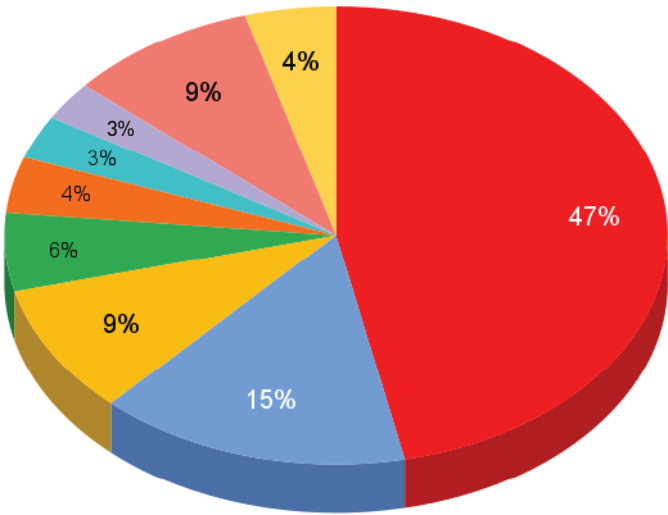


INCOME AND EXPENSES 2023



| INCOME | EURO | EXPENSES | EURO |
|---------------------------------|---------|--|---------|
| Kaufland Romania** | 153,140 | Education | 129,774 |
| EFTA FM0 (Active Citizens Fund) | 49,829 | Health | 21,251 |
| FDSC (În Stare de Bine) | 30,052 | Social and community development | 30,528 |
| The Alex Fund | 18,217 | Fundraising, communication, administrative, taxes etc. | 7,694 |
| Education for Every Child | 12,917 | TOTAL | 189,247 |
| JYSK | 10,108 | | |
| Global Giving Foundation (FORD) | 8,985 | | |
| Alte companii* (sub 5.000 Euro) | 30,285 | | |
| Contribuții individuale | 14,573 | | |
| TOTAL | 328,106 | | |

* Other companies: United Media Services, Dental City Solutions, Up Romania, World at Play, C2D, Daldo
** Sponsorships and inkind donations



Local Partners: Coroieni City Hall, Coroieni Gymnasium School
Castelu City Hall, Castelu Tehnological High School „Dobrogea”

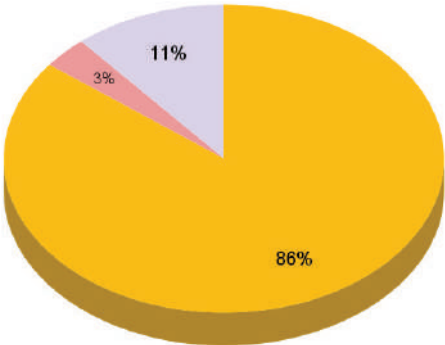
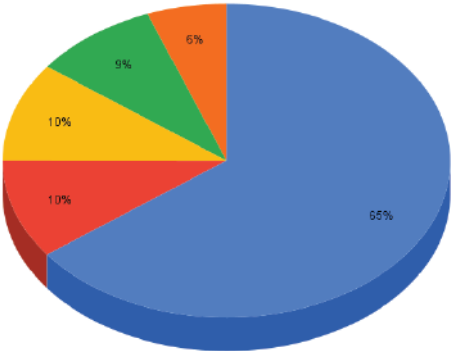
Main Sponsors:



Ukraine Crises 2023

| Income | EURO | Expenses | EURO |
|--------------------|---------|---|---------|
| Autoklass Center** | 216,228 | Ukraine humanitarian help | 276,938 |
| Valplast Industrie | 34,168 | Turkey humanitarian help | 10,801 |
| Romstal Investment | 34,075 | ELIAS hospital support - equipment bought in 2024 | 36,418 |
| Romstal Imex** | 30,143 | TOTAL | 324,157 |
| Valrom Industrie** | 19,160 | | |
| TOTAL | 333,773 | | |

** Sponsorships and inkind donations



Thank you for your support and we hope you will continue to be our partners!





Adrian Cirstea, Adrian Dragomir, Adriana Ioan, Adriana Muscalu, Adriana Pitea, Adriana Sabatini, Adriana Steau, Alex Alex, Alex Busuioceanu, Alex Damian, Alex Gabor, Alex T., Alexandra Popa, Alexandra Tînjălă, Alexandrina Gheorghe, Alexandru Popescu, Alina Maheropol, Alina Seghedi, Amalia Iute-Hațegan, Ana Istocescu, Anamaria Utoiu, Anda Bob, Anda Drăgan, Andra Groza, Andreea Grădinaru, Andreea Măhălean, Andreea Manole, Andreea Stanca, Andrei Andrei, Andrei Burducea, Andrei Găzdac, Andrei Ranac, Andrei Toader-Stănescu, Arabela Anca Sabangeanu, Aurel Fierăscu, Betsy Grob, Bogdan Silaghi, Burușel, Carmen Mihaiu, Cătălina Constantin, Cati Iovan, Ciprian Teleman, Constantin Pavel, Corina Drosino, Corina T, Cosmina Vladuț, Cristian Ghinea, Cristina Alexandra Vasile, Cristina Baciucu, Cristina Dumitrică, Dana Patricia Balosin, Daniela Gradinaru, Dorin Mircea Mateas, Dragoș Nicolae Jidovu, Echipa Fortech, Elena Albu, Elena Bululete, Elena Mocaniță, Eliza Gutău, FamilA Toader Stanescu, Familia Marcu, Flavia Florea, Florin Adrian Gheorghe, Florin Giura, Florin Soldan, Gabriel Solomon, George Garbacea, Georgiana Poraicu, Georgiana Tatulescu, Horațiu Pacurar, Ioana Blănaru, Ioana Bondrilă, Ioana Morovan, Ioana Raluca Chitic, Iolanda Burtea, Ionuț Albei, Ionut Utoiu, Irina S, Irina Simionescu, Irina Vasilescu, Iulian Gheaburcu, Iulian-Victor Aldea, Iustin Mitrică, Julien Zidaru, Laura Frunzeti, Lavinia Soare, Ludwig Wittgenstein, M. Grădinaru, Mădălina Badea, Mădălina Hotnog, Maria Zidaru, Marina Vlădescu, Marius Ion, Matei Fotiade, Mihaela Ban, Mihaela Bob, Mihai Basalic, Mihai Pîrvu, Mihai Răileanu, Mihai Văduva, Nicoleta Maxim, Oana Diaconu, Oana Dumitrache, Oana Solomon, Oana Țoiu, Oana-Maria Ganea, Octavian Gilmeanu, Petronela Caso, Raimar Wagner, Raluca Sava, Raluca Zatropa, Raluca Zega, Ramona Kulcsar, Raul Bogariu, Răzvan Ioan, Răzvan Marin, Razvan Popescu, Robert Lorincz, Sabina Gealatu, Silvana Duran, Stefan Freytag, Valentin Bob, Valentina Florea, Violeta Chiriloaie, Violeta Golea, Vlad Ilina

EDUCATION

We will keep the activities that proved effective and for which there is no local funding:

- Food coupons conditional on attendance and results, for 225 primary school children in Ponorata;
 - Scholarships for high-school transport for 10 students from Ponorata who need to travel daily to Tg. Lăpuș, the nearest town;
 - Recruitment and enrollment campaigns in preschool and preparatory class in Castelu;
 - Fast literacy bootcamps for 60 children (30 in Ponorâta, 30 in Castelu);
 - Summer camps for 42 children with good school results (14 from secondary school and high-school in Coroieni, 14 from primary and secondary school from Castelu and 14 from Tei Toboc, Bucharest);
 - The Relay for Education for approximately 850 children (350 in Coroieni and 500 in Castelu);
- We will also focus on activities to improve the quality of education:
- Teacher trainings (literacy methods, the Circle of Security etc.)
 - Investigate possibilities to test an educational alternative class in Ponorâta/Coroieni (Step by Step or Montessori)
 - Develop a mentorship and tutoring component for secondary school children from Ponorâta and Tei Toboc

HEALTH

- Medical caravan for children and stomatological caravan (5th year in Coroieni, 6th year in Castelu, first time in Tei Toboc);

- Child-care courses and breastfeeding conseling sessions for young mothers (Coroieni, Castelu, Tei Toboc)
- Education for health, hygiene and intimate life for teenagers
- Nutrition courses for children and adults (Tei Toboc);
- Accompany parents to evaluate children with special educational needs, to get specialized suppoer (Tei Toboc).

DEZVOLTARE COMUNITARĂ

- Support families to grow their own vegetable gardens (sixth year in Ponorâta, first year in Castelu)
- Teambuilding for the local initiative group in Coroieni (people from the community, employees of the school and City Hall, Reality Check team) and teambuilding for Castelu local team.

RESEARCH, COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

- The discrimination against Roma children’s access to quality education - frequent in schools from marginalized communities;
- The minor mothers phenomenon - highly spread in impoverished communities all over Romania;
- Inclusive education - with focus on children from vulnerable communities who have special education needs (because of disabilities or behavior problems, because their brains were not properly stimulated in the first years of life, or because they live in violent or disorganized family environments) and on the needed psycho-pedagogical support these children need in the regular schools they attend.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Online donations: <https://www.realitycheck.ro/donations>

Redirect (20%, 3,5%) from the income tax

Donate your birthday: <https://asociatiarealitycheck.galantom.ro>

Bank Transfer

Asociația Reality Check, Fiscal Codel: 37978051

IBAN RON: RO66 INGB 0000 9999 0711 1278

IBAN EUR: RO89 INGB 0000 9999 0715 3350

SWIFT: INGBROBU, BIC: INGB, Banca: INGB Centrala



Contact

44 Bd. Ion C. Brătianu, entrance A, ap. 63, 030177, Bucharest

Phone: 0726 840 791 | E-mail: office@realitycheck.ro

www.realitycheck.ro | www.facebook.com/RealityCheckRo

