

ACTIVITY REPORT OF AUTONOMIA FOUNDATION - 2020

The year 2020 has been severely affected by the Covid epidemic which has brought lockdown already in early March, and even in periods of less severe limitations, several restrictions affected our work. Our operation did not come to a complete halt, it was possible to continue work in our office but the intensity of the fieldwork had to be lessened and several activities were forced into the online space. This unprecedented new situation brought challenges but also opened up new possibilities. All our creativity was channelled into coming up with new working methods.

In 2020 we continued several projects which started previously (Find your way to the world of work”, Social Basis Building, Civil Map, complex project in Dombóvár) and also launched new ones (R-Home, New Solutions to Old Problems, Mystery Shopping).

2020 is not only significant because of the epidemic that is turning our lives upside down, but also because the foundation had its 30th anniversary this year.

We have been working with disadvantaged groups for 30 years, mainly to empower the Roma. Over the decades, innovative methods have been developed in several areas in our think tank. The anniversary has been celebrated with a series of online workshops, with representatives from various fields discussing topics that usually get little emphasis in public discourse but have a significant impact on the lives of everyone. One-and-a-half-hour records of each workshop are available on our website and video-sharing channel. We hope these might inspire the work through a professional discourse and serve as a good basis for media coverage of the topics.

Projects and results in 2020

We run 9 programs in 2020.

Mystery Shopping

We were participating in a fact-finding action research which has been implemented in three countries to provide evidence-based measures of discrimination against Roma.

CEU was the project leader, while the professional work of Czech, Bulgarian and Hungarian partners have been coordinated by the Budapest Institute.

In 2020 the action research was prepared, the methodology developed and ethical aspects were analysed.

Supported by: EU DG Just

Reference number: No. 881903

Project period: May 2020-December 2021

New solutions to old problems

In the project, Roma and pro-Roma NGOs from 11 countries help each other to adapt and implement project ideas. The knowledge transfer is accompanied by the development of project management capacities.

The role of Autonomia in the project:

- Gathering good practices from the partners, organizing a project fair, preparing professionals for the adaptation of the selected project ideas, and monitoring the adaptation process in each country.
- Gamification of the project management training, developing a board game.
- Local and international lobbying at decision-makers.

In 2020 the preparation took place and an online communication training was organized by our Macedonian partner.

Sponsored by: EEA / Norway Grants Regional Cooperation

Reference number: 2018-1-0697

Project period: 2020-2023

Ergo network 2020

We helped the annual work of the network of international Roma organizations by organizing an online project planning training. It was aimed for rural Roma activists to be able to formulate project plans more effectively.

Using the internet and implementing online activities is a challenge for communities that do not have the necessary bandwidth and equipment. Most of the participants used mobile phones so the conditions were far from ideal, but we were still able to implement a successful training with dozens of participants.

Contract No: VS2020 / 0028

Project period: 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2020

Sponsored by ERGO / DG Employment

Partnership and Cooperation for Autonomy

As part of the project, the foundation intends to expand its support base. To this end, we have launched a volunteer program, and in 2020 more than 50 volunteers contributed to our activities.

We strengthened our communication and made a three-minute animated film about the work of the foundation.

We organized two successful community fundraisings which raised hundreds of thousands of forints for the social sensitization Detectivity game for 200 young people and covered the cost of one of our summer camps.

A survey has been run among those who know the foundation to find out their perception about our organisation. The number of people following our work on social media increased by 20%. Promotional materials have been prepared; and last but not least, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of our foundation with a series of 13 professional programs.

Supported by: OSIFE

Contract number: OR2019-63479

The project period is October 2019 - October 2021

Evaluation of the Endless Possibilities Program

We have been monitoring the program implemented by church actors in the five districts since 2019 as a subcontractor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Our staff is following the projects running in the Cigánd and Baktalorántház district, where they are being implemented by the Baptists and Reformed church. In 2020, due to the epidemic, only one report has been produced, as opposed to the planned two.

Contractor: Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence

Project period: 2019-2023

Civitates - Addressing the Shrinking Space for Civil Society - Coalition Implementation

In 2018, several large foundations pooled a fund for civil development in Hungary. First, we received funding for the first three months of preparation, and then for a two-year work plan in partnership with Ökotárs, Civil Kollégium and Kárpátok Foundation.

We developed a program to strengthen the rural base of the coalition of Civilizáció, which brings together 38 organizations and is supported by another 300+ organizations. The program includes roadshows, finding active civil organisations through local small grant programs, recruiting new members to Coalition.

Our foundation was responsible for the involvement and development of two organizations in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county, and we participated in the organization and implementation of several capacity-building development opportunities.

Supported by: Civitates

Project period: 2019-2020

A complex local program for the social integration of people living in areas at risk of segregation in Dombóvár

The social rehabilitation program has been running since 2016, in cooperation with the local government and the local social service provider.

Autonomia organized the implementation of several innovative programs which we have experimented with in other settlements in recent years. Some examples:

- Strengthen local participation through training community workers and civil activists to reach out to local citizens
- Regular community programs through innovative art programs
- Out-of-school learning support program
- Peer mentor program
- Career guidance for disadvantaged children
- Supporting self-organization, setting up a self-help fund and savings program that develops financial awareness
- Facilitating employment through a program with the involvement of companies

A social housing program is being implemented by the municipality, however, it was still not completed in 2020. The completion of this element was further delayed by the change of mayor and the epidemic.

The EU-funded project period has been extended by two years due to delayed infrastructural investments and the epidemic. In the remaining time, we will support the activities of the social workers with professional programs, community development, community programs, school sensitization, career guidance, and professional supervision.

Supported by: European Social Fund / Urban Development Operational Program

Contract reference numbers: TOP-5.2.1-15-TL1-2016-00001, -00002 and -00003

Project period: September 1, 2017 - August 31, 2022

R-Home program

We have been implementing a program since October 2019 in an international partnership that is focusing on the improvement of living conditions and quality of life of the Roma. It will develop policy recommendations based on research results and exchanges of experience.

Partners: Fondazione Caritas Ambrosiana, Italy / Univertisa 'Degli Studi Di Milano-Bicocca, Italy / Comune Di Milano, Italy / Tárki Zrt, Hungary / Asociata Caritas Alba Iulia, Romania / Fondation Nationales Des Sciences Politiques, France / Federación De Asociaciones Gitanas De Cataluna, Spain

As the project would require significant fieldwork, the consortium, in consultation with the sponsor, suspended the project for several months. But even so, we conducted two dozen interviews with families to provide an analysis of the housing situation of Roma in Hungary, focusing on events that had defined their housing conditions in recent decades.

Supported by: EU REC (Rights, Equality and Citizenship)

Contract number: 849199

Project period: 2019-2021

“Find your way to the world of work” program - co-financed by the EEA Fund and the Velux Foundation

Our largest project is being implemented in partnership with Bulgarian, Spanish and Romanian partners until 2023. In this program, the foundation had a full office staff of seven.

The project aims to support the employment of disadvantaged young people, mainly Roma. In addition to supporting the employability of the participants (individual and group mentoring, social skills development in Miskolc, Hatvan, Gyöngyös and Budapest) and building cooperation with potential employers, we are trying to introduce new experiential pedagogical methods for schools.

By the end of 2019, we had six mentors working with high school-aged youth and young adults looking for employment and another 3 mentors had been hired to help primary school students in seventh and eighth grade.

Despite the difficulties of the year 2020, the results of the project are already visible:

10 local mentors recruited 80 primary school students, 160 secondary school students and 10 employer partners, and helped 24 youth to return to education after an early drop-out. They have been cooperating with 6 primary and 6 secondary schools.

We focused on recruiting young people who do not have sufficient resources, knowledge and motivation to make an informed choice of career or to complete their studies successfully. Those who live in difficult circumstances and have so far did not succeed to find a job that matches their qualifications.

We helped twenty-four students who had previously dropped out of school to return to education, to obtain vocational qualifications. Our employer partners ensured that young people became aware of the most important employer requirements and can try themselves in a realistic working environment.

With the help of the program, twenty people have been able to find employment at the open labour market so far.

Sponsor: EEA Norway Grants and Velux and Villum Foundations

Contract numbers: 2017-1-027 and 18826

Project period: 2018-2023

Civil cooperation

In addition to actively participating in the work of Civilizáció against the narrowing of the civil space, we also try to unite the organizations working in the field of Roma inclusion and promote their networking.

As a result of another civic workshop in 2019, we launched an initiative in 2020 to network Roma and pro-Roma organizations. Autonomia took up the role of secretary of this network.

From the spring of 2020, we consulted and helped each other with two dozen Roma and pro-Roma organizations, first at weekly meetings and later every two weeks.

In the crisis in the spring of 2020, many actors have tried to help families and communities in need, and in parallel, the professional debate has intensified on how we can actually help, what is good help?

This issue has come to the fore among development organizations that have been doing development work based on strong principles, a variety of development tools and methods for long. There seems to be an agreement that distribution of material aid is rarely used as a tool in the activities of development organizations, in some cases is it seen as something to explicitly avoid as aid-giving can destroy the effectiveness of long-term development work.

We organized a special workshop where aid-giving organizations have been invited to learn about their methods and to start a dialogue between organisations active in aid-giving and in development. We have jointly compiled a paper on the relationship between aid distribution and development.

At the end of the year, we evaluated the Hungarian National Social Cohesion Strategy for the period between 2020 and 2030 with 11 organizations.

Fundraising

Very few tenders or calls for applications came out in 2020 for which we could and did apply. We could fundraise a few grants of one-two million forints.

An application submitting to an Erasmus+ call was first cancelled referring to an obligation set out by the Foreign Agents Act: Tempus Public Foundation required a statement from us stating that we would register as a foreign-supported organization. We did agree to do this and our application was evaluated as non-eligible in terms of content.

Erste Emergency Fund issued a grant to alleviate the organizational financial crisis caused by the outbreak of the epidemic. We received HUF 1.5 million for our operational costs.

About the staff

Thanks to the projects started in 2019, the number of our employees increased significantly. Nineteen staff members (Balázs Rózsa, Ágnes Kelemen, Annamária Vankó, Miklós Kóródi, Tibor Béres, Márton Illés, Nikolett Benkó, Zsófia Dózsa, Györnes Bene Alexandra, Andrea Lajhóné Tóth, Dorka Marosváry, Barbara Portik-Leskó, Gábor Zsúdel, Diána 'Fidó' András, Anna Makay, András Nun) worked part-time or full-time at the foundation in 2020. In addition, we had dozens of temporary staff, most of them were teachers at our partner schools to help with our projects.

Thanks to our volunteer program launched in 2019, 50 volunteers helped us with our regular work in 2020.

Board of trustees

The composition of the board of trustees of the foundation did not change, the board had decision power at all board meetings.

Our financial situation

A bank guarantee was the condition of receiving pre-financing of the grant from the EEA Fund. The bank encumbered our only asset, the office, with a HUF 89 million mortgage. Fortunately, we managed to ensure that this did not mean that we had a mortgage on our entire assets, as according to the latest valuation, the current value of the office is HUF 136 million.

The second EEA-funded project, which was won in 2020 and was based on our idea but was not submitted by us, could only be contracted with post-financing. This means that we have to advance 7-10 million HUF every six months to cover the cost of this project. To ensure that this project, which lasts until the spring of 2023, does not cause a cash-flow problem, we got a bridging loan of 7.5 million from Ökotárs. The cost of the loan will be financed from our business revenues.

The infrastructure

The office and its infrastructure can be sustainably maintained for years to come. We are currently renting out three rooms of our office to NGOs and we are looking for tenants for one more room. Revenue from the rent provides us with a few million HUF yearly for costs not covered by grants.