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## **Romania: Assisting Vulnerable Populations and Improving the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Relief**

"I believe that, as long as there is plenty, poverty is evil." These wise and true words were said by Robert Kennedy. Having so much in only certain parts of our world is wrong, when there is so little in others. Romania has 19 doctors and 42 nurses to 10,000 people, compared to an average of 32 doctors and 79 nurses, according to the World Health Organization. Living in the city of Chicago, the thought of a statistic like this has never even occurred of being possible to me. Outside major cities in Romania, even basic medical supplies are limited. Doctors and nurses avoid working in rural areas, which is a big problem since most people living in the rural areas cannot afford to travel to major cities to receive the medical treatment they need.

Romania is located in Southeastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea, between Bulgaria and Ukraine. It's the twelfth largest country in Europe. It's home to the Danube river which is the longest river in Europe, going through several countries. It's definitely the most important river in Romania for the two reasons: it's a major transportation route for domestic and international trade and for the production of hydroelectric power. Romania has had many earthquakes; the most severe being in the South and Southwest regions. There is very low agricultural productivity in the rural parts of Romania, and that is leading whole rural areas to poverty. Some small-scale farmers are too poor to have the collateral to help them get loans to help purchase their equipment for even small acres of farmland. If they had this opportunity, farmers could improve their income.

Some of the more serious problems Romania faces are urban waste and the handling of toxic residues. [AFP] With no official figures, it is estimated that 2,000-10,000 tons of dangerous 'materials' have been imported into Romania. Twenty percent of Romania's rivers were dead in 1989 due to a great lack in the environmental policy. Some things HAVE improved since after the fall of communism. Now only 10% of the rivers in Romania cannot have aquatic life. Now affecting air pollution, the total area of parks around Romania has gone down. "Only half of the Romanian population has access to an organized garbage collecting system, while the industrial and mining waste often lies in improvised dumps," says Elena Dumitru. It will cost Romania over 2.5 billion Euros to modernize the dumps in Romania a bit.

Breakfast in the rural areas is usually a small meal of one piece of bread with butter or jam and tea, if that. Majority of the people are poor, and in general, the standard of living is low if compared to Western Europe. Very few reach above the generally low standard of living. Imported goods, cars and some household items represent high standing in the economy, considering very few families had them. The majority of the people wear Western-style clothing in the cities, yet in rural areas, some people still wear traditional garb. Rich or poor, Roma stands out in brightly colored clothing. Hairstyles could indicate a woman's marital status, for example: unmarried women wear their hair in braids, and married women use a cover for their heads. The majority of women work outside the house, yet they get the lower-level positions and work in fields traditionally made for women. For example: a primary school education teacher. Men left the farming jobs in the 1950s and around the 1960s women picked up on those jobs, which were considered to be 'undesirable' and now they make up the bigger half of the agricultural jobs. Even though men's jobs haven't expanded, and woman roles have, women are still the ones expected to do all the housework! So if a woman works full time, the hour she gets home she still has to cook and clean for her family. Many babies born around this time are sick due to lack of parenting, and so they have to be taken to hospitals to be fed because of under-weightiness. Although it's becoming a growing

health concern, AIDS still isn't being taken with caution and the government has been slow to act about the virus, and wary to release recent statistics.

In many rural areas the only source of water is from wells. Most of these wells aren't sanitary enough for ANYONE to drink. Water is a big factor to healthy living, and pesticides in water make people of all ages sick. Romania has a low level of breastfeeding that negatively impacts on the health of babies and children because just at the young age of two months, the mothers of some of these babies start feeding them other liquids including the extremely dirty water. The infant mortality rate is still the highest in the EU, and life expectancy in Romania is 8-9 years less than in "developed" countries. This is a health hazard that just cannot be ignored. Some cutbacks that Romania has made it very hard for children who live in rural areas to access their school in order to complete at least the education that is required. It can cost the parents up to 25% of a Romanian family's income to pay for just one child to transport to and from school.

Romania's government collapsed in November. Other EU countries like Ireland, Greece and Spain are counting on France and/or Germany to help their governments when in debt. However, Romania has come to the US-based IMF for a loan needed of 20 billion Euros. Many promises are made to those poorer of Romania to hear their vote during election year, but many of them feel left out by the political process. Basically, they are helped out when the government has time for them, when there's left over jobs, or when there isn't someone bribing them to do otherwise. Campaign promises are forgotten in a finger-snap. Romania's banks are owned by Western Europe. If western banks need money to hide bad debt they might have, they take money out of Romania's holdings they have thus making the currency in Romania to fall and it also dries up money available to give out as loans. At the moment, an average income in a Romanian household is probably about a fourth of any other EU state. Just as an example: minimum wage in France is about 1,200 Euros a month, while Romania's is 150 Euros. The poor of Romania have known very little besides a constant crisis with the economy, but they've never received out of what they know.

In Romania, (2009) the government spent just 3.7% of the national GDP on health. This is being less than half of the EU average. Communism ended in Romania in 1989, but 20 years later, even after joining EU, Romania continues to be one of the poorest countries in Europe when it comes to medical care. Doctors and nurses have to be bribed to work in some hospitals. Not only is there a shortage in staff, there are also shortages in supplies. Even if there were just one doctor in a hospital, he wouldn't be able to help anyone if he doesn't have the supplies to perform even the simplest operation. Imagine patients who didn't supply their own bandages, syringes, surgical thread and antibiotics, they couldn't be operated on even if at a very critical state. Although contraception is available, many of Romania's youth still see abortion as the easiest method. One family planning study estimates that 106,000 youth between the ages of 15 and 19 have had an abortion. (<http://www.wordmadeflesh.org/romania/2010/04/the-situation-in-romania-2010/>)

The INS in Romania stressed that the income per household [average] in urban areas was 30.3% higher than the rural households. Urban household income structures make up in a proportion being: 61.7% from wages, 23.9% from social benefits, and "kind income" represents 8.4% of the total average. The average salary for a Romanian is around \$12,204 a year. That is, having a proper education. Compare this to the educated Americans \$41,674 per year and the difference is definitely a drastic one.

With the water supply only being 33% in the rural areas, it's nothing good. It can't be said that well water is also clean water, for there are so many pesticides found in the ground in rural areas, which is a problem because in some areas that is the only source of water people have. According to Mihaela Vasilescu, "The main drinking well, which according to the villagers was clean, had extremely high levels of pollution with nitrate and atrazin, a persistent pesticide." This is a problem not only because are the

people not drinking clean water, but also because nitrate is a compound that could be reduced to the compound nitrite. This compound can and will 'malfunction' the way that blood cells carry oxygen, which could lead to a severe health condition. When more and more people were falling ill in these recent past years, the drinking water was tested, finally. The results were terrible - the rate of microbiological pollution in the water was so high that the EU legislation didn't even think that the water should have been used for bathing!

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) is currently working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Forty-one maternity hospitals are part of their initiative, 25 of them having already received certification for reaching the global criteria; heightening 29% of the total births. UNICEF also helped make easier the assistance to families and sent emergency kits and school supplies to 2,200 children, plus four education units will be rehabilitated soon. The total amount spent on supplies in 2010 was somewhere around \$160,000, which represents only 7% of the programs total input. The Relief Fund for Romania has also put in their share of work. They provide transportation and medical care for the people in rural areas whom can't afford the care cost. Also, food and clothing is made available for the very poor. They provided doctors where there was never one and also do home visits, for those who can't even leave their house because of such illness.

BFHI, UNICEF, The Relief Fund for Romania and all the other organizations who are putting their time to helping Romania, need to also include education of what they're doing to the people. Sure, they're giving these people in need the great opportunity of health care, yet if they are uneducated with what comes along with it, is it really a benefit? UNICEF gave emergency kits, but there are people in Romania whom don't know how to correctly use a simple antibiotic, so what is the point? In order to really help these people, they need to know what they're being given.

The World Bank could definitely be one of the organizations Romania could benefit from. Romania is a country that is doing well in some parts, and very poorly in others (such as the rural areas). So when money is given to the country, since the part that is doing better has the power, they do what they want with the money. The World Bank needs to make specific projects to help out Romania. If Romania had a project where people were taught to learn how to use medical supplies, that would be great. So if The World Bank funded a group of nurses to visit the rural areas and teach the Romanians how to use a simple first aid kit, that would lessen the number of people with infectious cuts or other simple everyday accidents. Or to fund doctors to come work in the needed areas. If a health van, weekly at least, visited the needed areas, that would save many lives. Being one of the top countries in Europe with worst health care, having the required amount of doctors and nurses per area might even lower the mortality rate.

The other biggest thing is water. Supporting organizations could definitely give some money to Romania to help with its water problems. Even though 52% have clean water, there's still that huge 48% that doesn't and more than 71% of the wastewater is either untreated or insufficiently treated. (doingbusiness.ro) Cases of intestinal diseases, and even miscarriages have been blamed on the water in the rural areas of Romania. Intensive agricultural practices contributed to this environmental degradation, as synthetic fertilizers contaminated the ground water, which is the only source of drinking water in most rural areas. (Environmental News Service) Only 18% of the rural population has access to improved drinking water sources at the moment. (ENS) Romanians remain worried about their water quality. Some 62 percent consider water pollution the country's worst environmental problem. Intensive farming is blamed for the high levels of nitrate found in the ground water in Calarasi, a predominately agricultural county in southeastern Romania. In 1997, every case of acute nitrate poisoning in the country occurred in Calarasi. (ENS) According to government sources, of 59 samples from the area's public wells and other water supply sources, nearly 80 percent exceeded the drinking water nitrate standard. (ENS)

If enough money was supplied, wells could be dug and that would help both the water and health problems, which are the biggest. Many programs and organizations claim to help Romania, so this shouldn't be such a big problem. Digging a deep enough well so that the water is safe enough to drink, at least one per small town, would be a huge help and would lower dehydration rates. Another choice could be to supply the people with water filters or purifiers. This would be less costly and the people would be able to use the water from their current wells.

Romania has some serious issues to deal with before they are on par with many modern or first worlds, countries. Romanian wells are contaminated from urban waste and toxic chemicals, making them not fit to drink from. Economic problems in Romania are just as severe, if not more, due to their recent government collapse. Finally, the medical technologies in Romania are certainly not up to date; they have few advanced medical facilities, and bad birthing processes. However, there is a solution. It seems that the best way to help Romania is through different organizations, dedicated to either advancing the medical standards of Romania, or providing water filtration systems. Also, one sure fire way to help Romania is to donate money, which could be allotted to certain areas where Romanians need help.

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