

Making Up For Lost Decades

LearnLink

We have lost two generations.

We do not want to lose another.

CRIPS staff member



During his twenty-four years of dictatorship (1965-1989), Nicolae Ceausescu's policies caused severe food shortages and poverty. He also established a pronatalist population policy that severely restricted contraception and, as in other communist countries, social work was declared an unnecessary profession. In Romania, one of USAID's strategic objectives is to tackle the legacy and long term problems created by these policies, including a high rate of maternal mortality, abortion, unintended pregnancies, and abandoned children. USAID is working with Romania to establish a

community-based, family-focused system of child welfare that will reduce reliance on institutionalization. LearnLink and World Learning are co-piloting a project to experiment with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for reinforcing and expanding skills among a cadre of social workers.

Making up for lost decades

The current government of President Emil Constantinescu has passed new child welfare legislation and adopted a national welfare policy focused on creating healthy alternatives to institu-



tionalization, as well as elaborate models for preventing it in the first place.

The adoption of these policies has attracted a new cadre of young people, who have entered the social welfare field and are trying to make up for lost decades. They face formidable challenges as they seek to strengthen their skills to meet the needs of two generations of neglected children. Among their greatest challenges are increasing access to:

- More hands-on, relevant training;
- Communication with colleagues in other judets (counties);
- Opportunities for exchanges with colleagues about what works and what doesn't;
- Ways of keeping abreast with the ever-changing legislation; and
- Exchanges of reports, documents, translations, examples, models, bibliographies, case studies, and articles.

USAID is supporting training initiatives to workers, their supervisors, as well as policy makers. Given the need for widespread training, USAID also contracted with LearnLink and World Learning to implement a new pilot activity to demonstrate how information and

Zoom in on Romania

Geography

Location: Southeastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea, between Bulgaria and Ukraine
Natural resources: petroleum (reserves declining), timber, natural gas, coal, iron ore, salt
Area: total: 237,500 sq km
Environmental issues: soil erosion and degradation; water pollution; air pollution in south from industrial effluents; contamination of Danube delta wetlands

People

Population: 22,334,312
Population growth rate: -0.23%
Total fertility rate: 1.27 children born/woman
Ethnic groups: Romanian 89.1%, Hungarian 8.9%, German 0.4%, Ukrainian, Serb, Croat, Russian, Turk, and Gypsy 1.6%
Religions: Romanian Orthodox 70%, Roman Catholic 6% (of which 3% are Uniate), Protestant 6%, unaffiliated 18%
Literacy: (male: 98%; female: 95%)

Economy

GDP: \$90.6 billion
GDP per capita: \$4,050
Inflation rate: 41%
Budget: revenues: \$10 billion; expenditures: \$11.7 billion

Communications

Telephones: 2.6 million
Radio broadcast stations: AM 12, FM 5, shortwave 0
Radios: 4.64 million
Television broadcast stations: 130
Televisions: 4.58 million
Internet hosts per 10,000 people: 9.01
Personal computers per 1000 persons: 10

The World Factbook 1999

<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>



communication technologies (ICTs) might be used to support professional networking, information sharing and training for child welfare workers on an ongoing basis. The pilot was designed to answer two key questions:

- Can a greater number of participants be trained at a lower marginal cost and without compromising learning outcomes by using computer mediation to bolster face-to-face training?
- To what degree does professional networking actually occur once the electronic communications tools such as ListSerts, discussion forums, web sites, and chat are actually provided?

A sure sign of recovery . . .

A sure sign of post-communist recovery is a rise in the civil society participation of NGOs. One organization, a women-owned and run NGO called The Romanian Resource and Information Centre for Social Professions-known by the acronym CRIPS-is the key implementing agent for the child welfare pilot.

With a capable staff, the group already has gathered and organized much of the existing information on child welfare reform in Romania. However, the information is centrally located at the CRIPS offices in Bucharest and is currently difficult for those outside the capital to access. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) will

make it possible for anyone in the country with a computer, a modem and a telephone line to access not only the information in Bucharest but also throughout the world.

A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

LearnLink and World Learning will create a “virtual community” of child welfare professionals by setting up an

interactive web page. There, users will be able to access and share information relevant to their professional needs and network with their peers by means of listservs and discussion forums. With the creation of a web site specific to the Romanian child welfare reform process, professionals will have easy access to existing reports, translations, papers, and information about events such as seminars and conferences.

The Romanian Resource and Information Centre for Social Professions (CRIPS)

Information in training for transformation

Edgar Morin

The Romanian Resource and Information Centre for Social Professions works as a specialized service for information/training/consultancies in the field of social, medico-social and socio-educational professions

In its projects, CRIPS implements three main categories of activities:

- Organizing seminars and debates on topics of interest to professionals in the social field
- Organizing training courses through traditional and distance methods
- Developing and distributing resource packages and methodological guides

The organization's main activities include:

- Promoting staff training and information pilot projects that are innovative in content and/or methodology and promote new structures and services, professions and roles
- Adding to the supply of fresh information on innovative projects carried out in Romania and abroad
- Stimulating communication concerning innovative experience, dialogue and partnership among the various agents involved at all levels in the social field

The web site also will have links to current sources outside the country that are not readily accessible, such as samples of other countries' policies and procedures for social work. In addition, the web site will provide the opportunity for Romania to share its experience and lessons learned with other countries that might have similar interests in the process of child welfare reform.

Other email-based communications such as listservs and news groups, which have lower connectivity demands, are being established to provide a means by which professionals can exchange information and carry out substantive discussions online on practical matters regarding child welfare. Moreover, joining pre-existing listservs related to

social work and child welfare will further contribute to the creation of a solid child welfare community in Romania.

Training is key. LearnLink is adapting an existing face-to-face training module (Foundations of Social Work) to a computer-mediated environment using the Internet, the World Wide Web (WWW), and/or CD-ROM, which will reach a greater number of Romanian child welfare professionals and enable them to participate in training while working.

Current training programs reach only the highest levels of personnel in the child welfare system. The question is how to expand the training to lower





LearnLink staff member Sonia Arias meets with CRIPS.

levels of the system while maintaining-or even improving-the current quality and lowering the cost enough to reach a greater number of people.

THE TECHNOLOGY

If you're reading this on a Monday, chances are that the technology for delivering distance learning will have improved by Tuesday.

By definition, distance learning covers a wide range of media, some of which have been in use for decades, such as correspondence courses my mail. Later

courseware includes radio broadcasts, and most recently, multimedia interactive courses on the Internet and WWW.

All over the world, private sector investment in distance learning infrastructure and bandwidth allocation are dramatically increasing. Universities and for-profit firms are developing excellent instructional materials, and distance learning providers are increasing their sophistication in tailoring comparative formats and modalities to the specific instructional or logistical needs of varying target audiences.

In this activity, LearnLink is using the more specific "computer-mediated training"-

meaning the specific use of computers with the Internet and other interactive multimedia—as the principal mode of delivery. The use of CD-ROM is also of note here. Traditionally, educational technology experts associate CD-ROM-based training with pre-programmed material whereby the learner interacts solely with the computer, and there is usually no direct contact with a tutor, instructor, other participants, or other materials.

With computer-mediated training, on the other hand, the learning materials are designed and developed for delivery via the Internet as HTML files. The Internet is an open system where the learner can move outside his/her environment and is not confined to areas pre-determined by the instructional designer (as on a pre-programmed CD-ROM). Because many of the participants do not have access to sufficient telecommunications infrastructure, this allows them to read the course on CD-ROM using a web browser and make full use of its hypertext without actually having to go online. The participant can still communicate and interact with colleagues and tutors via email, listservs, and newsgroups, which have fewer connectivity requirements than the Web.

In Romania, technology is a phenomenon associated with urban areas, youth, and higher education. The more urban participants in a focus group conducted in Bucharest viewed technology as “having no downsides,” while the rural and less educated participants were far less enthusiastic, perceiving technology as an obstacle rather than an advantage. It is likely that the reality of the experience will be different for both.