



AID & EASTERN EUROPE CONFERENCE / 14.12.09

*A one day Conference exploring challenges and opportunities facing
NGOs and voluntary groups working in Central and Eastern Europe and
the Former Soviet Union.*

*Monday December 14th 2009
Radisson SAS Hotel, Golden Lane, Dublin 8, Ireland*

Hosted by



Supported by

*IRISH AID
INTERNATIONAL ORPHANAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE
FOCUS ON ROMANIA
DÓCHAS
SCAPEGOAT DESIGN*

Conference Proceedings – Overview & Abstracts

1. CONFERENCE BACKGROUND

On December 14th 2009, 113 representatives from 51 not-for-profit organisations and institutions gathered in Dublin to celebrate 20 years of Irish aid to Eastern Europe.

The Conference was hosted by Comber – *for a future without orphanages* and supported by Irish Aid, International Orphanage Development Programme, To Russia With Love, Focus on Romania, Dóchas and Scapegoat Design.

This was the first conference focussing on aid and development in Eastern Europe held in Ireland and the first time so many NGOs and voluntary groups working in the region were represented at a single event within the country.

The Conference was held to mark the 20 year anniversary of the fall of the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, thousands of foreign volunteers and countless tonnes of aid flooded in to the region in an attempt to deal with the horrors of overcrowded conditions exposed in orphanages and disability centres. Today, there are over 60 Irish charities still active in Romania, Belarus, Albania, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and many other countries in the region.

Over the previous 12 months, Comber and others had identified a need for Irish groups working in Eastern Europe to increase networking and communication. The recent economic recession has also put pressure on voluntary groups across the sector and many charities are now considering closer working relations going forward. Comber hosted two open meetings in autumn 2009 for groups and had positive feedback from those that attended. This led to the establishment of Eastern Europe Aid & Development Network in November 2009, with the aim of bringing people together to discuss common issues, including local partnerships and de-institutionalisation. The 20 year anniversary of the fall of Communism and the end of Ceausescu's regime in Romania promoted Comber to organise the conference to celebrate what had been achieved by Irish organisations and to debate what is the best way to help going forward.

The goals of the conference were to:

- Acknowledge and celebrate the considerable contribution of the many Irish groups working in Eastern Europe.
- Provide a platform for representatives from the region to highlight the benefits and challenges of working in partnership with foreign organisations
- Provide a platform for volunteers and representatives to identify and discuss challenges and opportunities relating to working in Eastern Europe
- Gather feedback on issues arising and the establishment of a Network specific to work in Eastern Europe.

The Conference included individual presentations and a panel discussion, featuring 6 guest panellists and chaired by Mairead McGuinness, MEP. Following the conference, a reception was held at Iveagh House, St. Stephen's Green, hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The following organisations exhibited at the Conference: Dóchas; The Wheel; Comhlámh; Volunteering Ireland and Boardmatch Ireland.

2. PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

“Ireland’s Role in the Region”

Mr. John Gilroy, Deputy Director, Programme Countries, Irish Aid

Mr Gilroy gave an overview of the background to the new Republics and Ireland’s official role in the region as aid donor over the past two decades. He noted the dissolution of the former USSR in 1991 has been a catalyst for far-reaching change in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, though not all change has been positive. The multi-ethnicity of the new republics has seen the question of respect for minority rights move up the agenda, in the new countries of the region. Inter-community tensions have not been helped by widespread poverty, a general failure to diversify economically, environmental degradation, corruption and administrative weakness.

Mr Gilroy outlined how Ireland’s role in the region centres on enlightened self interest, as some of the countries are now neighbours of the EU and so Ireland is directly affected by events there.

Irish Aid’s engagement in the region aims at tackling poverty and assisting with the transition to democracy in the region. The Partnership Programme for Europe and Central Asia (PPECA) was established within Irish Aid in 2001 to promote Poverty Reduction; Sustainable development and the improvement of livelihood security; Building the capacity of Government; Democratisation and Human Rights; Strengthening the voice of civil society organisations.

Irish Aid funding to the region has encompassed some twenty countries which vary in economic strength, political stability and wealth of natural resources. Since 2005 Irish Aid has disbursed over €31 million to partner organisations and projects in 20 countries.

Irish Aid will continue to provide funding in appropriate cases in the Eastern European and Central Asian region where the overarching objective of poverty reduction, with a particular focus on support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, is met.

Mr Gilroy’s full presentation is available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/Irelandsroleintheregion.ppt>

“Challenges & Opportunities of setting up an NGO in Georgia”

Ms. Jane Corboy, Founder, First Step Georgia

Ms Corboy presented on her experiences of establishing an NGO, First Step Georgia, in Georgia in the mid-nineties. In partnership with the Georgian government, FSG went on to play a crucial role in the closure of Kaspi, an orphanage for children with disabilities, in 2008. Today FSG continues to provide a range of disability services and has a strong role in reforming disability and child care policy in the country.

Ms Corboy first visited Kaspi orphanage for disabled children in March 1995. At the time there were 75 orphanages in Georgia home to over 8,000 children. Four of these orphanages were for disabled children. A whole new approach had to be found in the care of special needs children and young adults. Nino Zhvania, the wife of Georgia’s leading reforming politician, co-founded the NGO First Step Georgia with Ms. Corboy in 1998.

FSG went on to provide a range of new services for children with disabilities in conjunction with the government, including; De-institutionalisation; Preventative services; Capacity Building. In November 2008 the last remaining young adults left Kaspi and the orphanage was finally closed.

Ms Corboy identified the following learnings and conclusions from her experience in Georgia. The short term action needed is to save children's lives. Important long term actions bringing about lasting change include: working with Government on developing appropriate policies; capacity building and training in the sector; raising awareness; constant assessment needed to take account of political and economic reality in the country.

Ms Corboy's full presentation is available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/JaneCorboyDec09.ppt>

"Challenges & Opportunities in Building Local Partnerships in the Region"

Ms. Tanya Buynovskya, Programmes & Partnerships Manager, HealthProm UK

HealthProm is an international development NGO, based in London, working with local communities to improve health and social care for vulnerable women and children in the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Established in 1984, HealthProm works to promote best practice in health and social care through programmes such as Safe Childbirth and Newborn Care; Health and Social Care of Children; Infection Control; Care and Rehabilitation of Children with Disability.

Ms. Buynovskya gave an overview of HealthProm's work in the region, and examples of successful local partnerships in Russia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic and Afghanistan.

She defined partnership as a formal agreement and cited some key elements of successful partnerships; including trust, openness, respect and equal involvement. Ms. Buynovskya went on to discuss the challenges and opportunities for international NGOs seeking partners in the region.

Ms. Buynovskya went on to discuss some of the 'lessons learned' by HealthProm during the course of its work. These include investing in feasibility studies, being clear about roles and responsibilities, avoiding patronising local partners and keeping sustainability in mind through the project.

Ms. Buynovskya's full presentation is available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/BuildingpartnershipspresentationFINAL.ppt>

"Motivation for Change: International Models & Support - Local Commitment & Perseverance"

Mr Cristian Ispas, Director, Motivation Romania

Ms Ispas introduced the mission and programmes of Motivation Romania Foundation (MRF), which was created in 1995. Programmes include: Wheelchairs adaptation, provision and fitting; Peer group training for user, family, care giver; Employment. A social enterprise was established as a sister company - Motivation Limited Liability Company - where > 30% of employees are people with disabilities. MRF operates nationally at 12 locations across Romania.

Ms Ispas gave examples of international partnerships with Motivation Romania over the past number of years.

Mr Ispas identified opportunities for local partners when working with international partners, and for international partners working in Romania.

He detailed key challenges for local and foreign partners including difficulties due to cultural differences, foreign partners can = money; attitude of State institutions; low advocacy and reliance on external funding.

Mr Ispas's full presentation is available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/MotivationRomaniaandInternationalPartnersDublinDec09.ppt>

"Formation of national work strategy on maintenance of successful socialization of boarding schools pupils in Belarus"

Ms Alena Halauniova, Specialist, Ministry of Education, Belarus

Ms. Halauniova presented on the reform of the child care system in Belarus from 1993 and the formation of a national strategy for the successful socialisation of boarding school pupils in Belarus. She highlighted the key directions of the reform of child care system which have led to a reduction in the number of orphans and children without parental support, and the number of boarding schools pupils.

The key elements to the strategy include:

- reducing the quantity of boarding schools for orphans and children without parental support;
- enlarging the functioning boarding schools;
- improving of system of social, educational and psychological help to boarding schools pupils;
- creation of conditions for preparation of boarding schools pupils for an independent life;
- improving the system of labour education, professional preparation and vocational guidance of pupils;
- creation of a support system for boarding schools graduates;
- development of the legislation providing successful integration of graduates.

Ms. Halauniova went on to detail statistics relating to the strategy, showing a decrease in the number of institutionalised children in Belarus. She also thanked organisations present for their work in Belarus and gave examples of how foreign aid within the country had assisted those in need.

Ms. Halauniova's presentations are available at:

- PowerPoint - <http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/AlenaHalauniova-PPTDec09.ppt>
- Paper - <http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/AlenaHalauniova-PresentationDec09.pdf>

"Deinstitutionalisation in Central and Eastern Europe: Responding to children's needs"

Dr. Delia Pop, Director of Programmes, Hope and Homes for Children, UK

Dr Pop gave a background to the work of Hope and Homes for Children, a British NGO established in 1994. H&H has created an internationally recognized model of deinstitutionalisation (DI) and closure of children's orphanages and operate in Eastern Europe and Africa.

Dr Pop summarised the key components and rationale of a national DI strategy.

- The reform of the childcare system should be focused on children, their wellbeing, their rights and most important the right to live in a family.
- Comprehensive DI starts with the closure of all institutions for babies.
- DI means the closure of institutions; institutions defined as residential care facilities for more than 12 children.
- DI is a complete shift in mentalities and ways of providing services for children.
- DI should be planned at regional level by documenting the specific reasons for institutionalisation.
- All childcare personnel and professionals should be trained in DI as the most important building block for changing mentalities and enabling the wider reform process.
- The development of disability day care and comprehensive social services goes hand in hand with closing institutions.

Dr Pop outlined some of the progress in Eastern Europe towards DI, but noted there were still many problems including; lack of funding; DI has become a highly politicized issue; Lack of management experience in childcare services; Increasing numbers of children at risk at community level; resistance to the process and delays in the implementation of DI plans.

Dr Pop outlined profiles of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Romania, highlighting child care statistics, as well as country specific opportunities and challenges. Dr Pop finished by noting resources available from H&H in relation to DI, including DI toolkit and good practice guide, as well as specialist training manuals.

Dr Pop's full presentation is available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/DeinstitutionalisationinCEEDecember2009presentation.pdf>

3. PANEL NOTES

Chair: Mairead McGuinness, MEP

Panellists: John Mulligan, Focus on Romania; Dr Delia Pop, Hope and Homes; Debbie Deegan, To Russia With Love; Brenda Dinsdale, Chernobyl Continuity; Fiona Dowling, Comber

The panel focussed on the following themes:

Achieving de-institutionalisation

Achieving de-institutionalisation is dependent on political will for reform. There is a need for NGOs to work together to have one voice to lobby governments. Training is crucial to transform the system. The chief barrier to achieving de-institutionalisation is a lack of resources and political will.

Role of EU

The EU encourages reform of child care systems but does not make it compulsory for membership. The belief is that reform will be easier to achieve with EU resources and structures that without.

Community Development

Many of the organisations have experienced resentment over the years from local people who felt too many resources were directed at institutions. Supporting

community development and day care disability services goes hand in hand with the closure of institutions.

Funding

There are new funding sources emerging within the region, and many of these countries are now aid donors themselves. The reduction in funding in Ireland might encourage smaller, more participative work on the ground.

Role of Foreign NGOs

There is still a real need for foreign support for development in the region. One key role identified was promoting advocacy and political lobbying, in order to make sure the voices of institutionalised and vulnerable people are heard. The importance of transferring these skills to local people and groups was emphasised.

NGO Co-operation

There is a need for better communication and co-operation between groups working in the region. Collaborative work needs to be well managed in order for it to be effective. There is strength in numbers for lobbying purposes.

Conclusion:

There is a need for a communication forum and network in the future.

Full panel notes are available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/PanelNotes-Final14.12.09.pdf>

4. FEEDBACK SUMMARY

49 feedback forms were received from 113 attendees at the conference (43%), as well as informal feedback and post-event correspondence. Overall, respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the conference and cited networking and content as the highlights. Suggestions for improvements include greater diversity of topics and space for smaller group discussions and workshops.

Overall, feedback indicated that there was a real need for a forum for groups working in Eastern Europe to discuss region specific issues and develop closer communication in the future. All but one respondent indicated they would attend a conference on the same theme next year.

Key suggestions for future conference topics were:

- Community & rural development
- Humanitarian Aid
- Policy & Government
- Childcare & disability
- Organisation partnerships & governance

The majority of respondents (37) indicated that overall they found the event 'excellent.

The full feedback report is available at:

<http://www.comber.ie/conference/documents/Feedbackanalysis-summaryversion.pdf>

5. ATTENDANCE

AID & EASTERN EUROPE CONFERENCE 14.12.09 Radisson SAS Hotel, Dublin

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Total numbers attending: 113