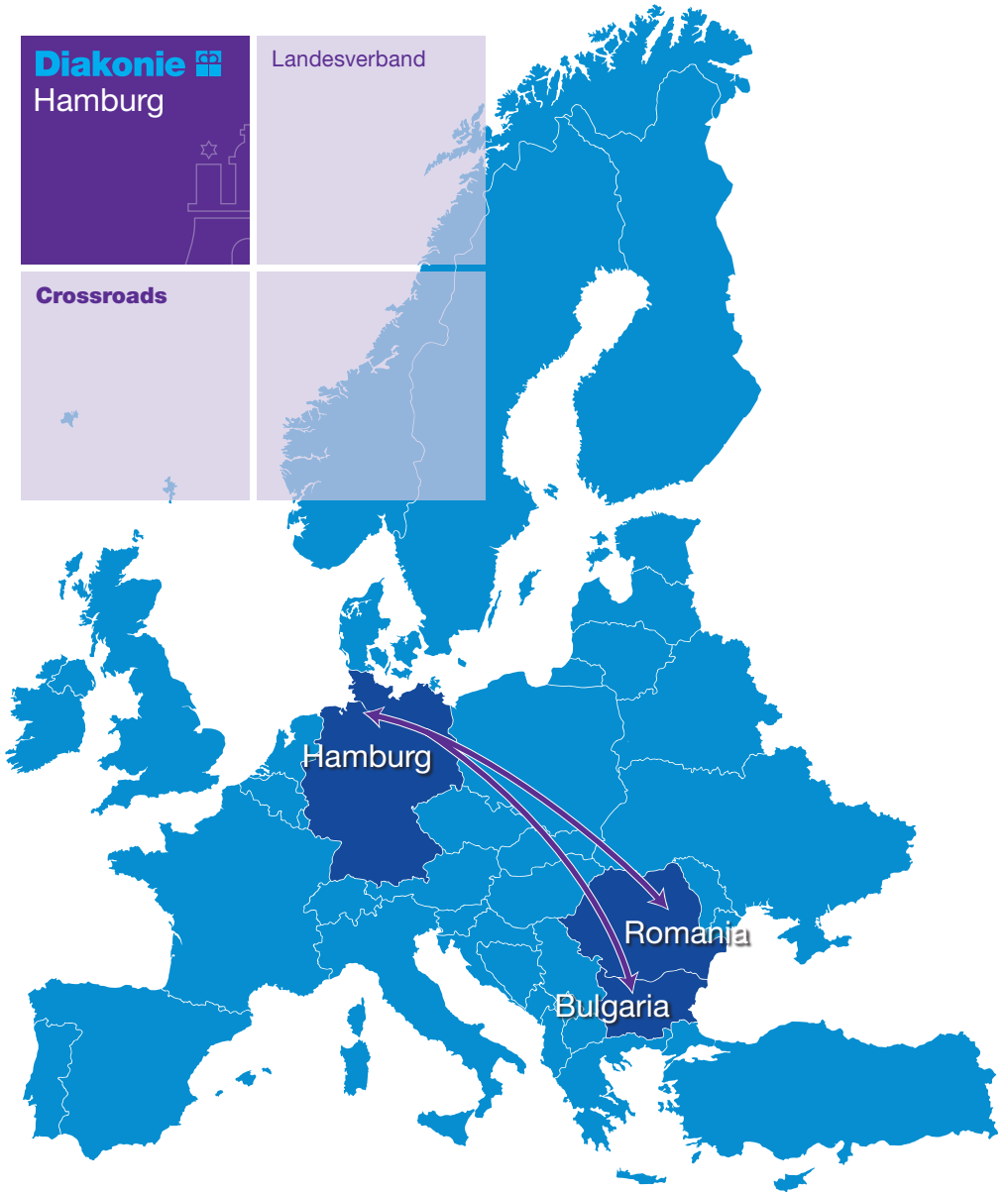




Landesverband

Crossroads



# Networking Social Work Across Borders

Impressions from the professional exchange between Bucharest/Romania  
and Hamburg/Germany, September 7-11, 2015 and February 1-6, 2016

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## Participating Projects and Organizations

### German Projects

**Diakoniezentrum für Wohnungslose  
Tagesaufenthaltsstätte &  
Straßensozialarbeit**  
[www.diakonie-hamburg.de](http://www.diakonie-hamburg.de)

**Fachstelle Zuwanderung Osteuropa**  
[www.diakonie-hamburg.de](http://www.diakonie-hamburg.de)

**Sperrgebiet**  
[www.sperrgebiet-hamburg.de](http://www.sperrgebiet-hamburg.de)

**verikom**  
[www.verikom.de](http://www.verikom.de)

**Großstadtmission SOS**  
[www.grosstadt-mission.de/esf-projekte/  
articles/sos.html](http://www.grosstadt-mission.de/esf-projekte/articles/sos.html)

**Hoffnungsorte Herz As**  
[www.stadtmission-hamburg.de](http://www.stadtmission-hamburg.de)

### Romanian Projects

**Carusel**  
[www.carusel.org/en](http://www.carusel.org/en)

**Aidrom**  
[www.aidrom.ro](http://www.aidrom.ro)

**Casa Ioana**  
[www.casaioana.org/en](http://www.casaioana.org/en)

**Adpare**  
[www.adpare.eu](http://www.adpare.eu)

**Impreuna**  
[www.agentiaimpreuna.ro](http://www.agentiaimpreuna.ro)

**Samusocial**  
[www.samu-social-international.com/en](http://www.samu-social-international.com/en)

**C.N.A.S.**  
[www.cnasr.ro](http://www.cnasr.ro)

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## Europe is mobile.

### Challenges for social outreach programs

*I observe that this project is a huge help for the citizens who become destitute in another EU country.*

*Cristina Enache*

Many Romanians and Bulgarians use the free movement of persons in the EU to migrate to Germany to work. However, not everyone is successful or does this of their own free will. In certain cases, this has created a new demographic that seeks help at outreach centers dealing with migration, women's issues and homelessness, and this has changed the daily routine at social outreach centers in Hamburg. These issues, such as clarifying rights to basic social care, health insurance and family-related aid, have pushed the counseling centers – despite their high degree of professionalism – to the limits of their capabilities. The mobility of this demographic is a challenge that German counseling services are insufficiently prepared to deal with. The Romanian social aid network faces similar difficulties. They experience the dark side of mobility which includes families who are torn apart, exploitation, human trafficking and debt. They also lack the knowledge and tools to prepare people who migrate for work-related reasons.

As initiator of the Crossroads project, the Diakonische Werk Hamburg came to the conclusion that social outreach programs should follow this development and be organized transnationally. The purpose of the Crossroads project is to network social projects across national borders and continue to improve the aid they provide. It provides a framework for staff at social outreach facilities in Romania and Germany to get to know each other and the work they are doing in their respective countries, regularly exchange expertise, and develop new approaches. This was the starting point for an exchange between staff at social outreach facilities in Bucharest in September 2015 and in Hamburg in 2016. In order to experience the daily routine first hand on location, each group shadowed a staff member for two days in projects similar to their own work back home.

## Getting to know the background.

### On-site visits

Before their departure, the expectations and central issues of the two groups focused on different areas in accordance with their location in the migration process. The social workers from Hamburg were interested in becoming acquainted with their Romanian colleagues and what they did on-site, gaining more in-depth information into the health insurance system, becoming acquainted with the Romanian welfare system, and understanding why so many people are leaving the country.

The subject of human exploitation was the main focus of the Romanian group. They wanted to learn more about the living and working conditions of the victims and become acquainted with the aid provided in Hamburg. Access to aid and the prerequisites and hurdles for receiving it were important. They were also interested in the documentation system and, in particular, how the projects are financed. Other areas included how aid systems are set up and networked, the role of the government, and contact to the authorities.



### Experiences and impressions in Bucharest

Meetings with institutions in similar fields such as national health insurance and the professional association of social workers, as well as the project visit to a Roma village gave the Hamburg participants deeper insights and greater knowledge of the Romanian welfare system. Participants were concerned with the extent of poverty, corruption and exploitation in Romania. This is where many see answers that address the cause of inner-European migration.

*The situation of social outreach under the conditions of a non-existent or rudimentary welfare state is altogether ignoble and appears to be a neoliberal model for the future, one in which European aid policies are also to blame.*

*Christiane Tursi*

During the two-day observation visit, the social workers were able to experience everyday work in a project that corresponds to their main field. They were impressed with the commitment of the staff and the projects' international integration. At the same time, the challenges facing these projects were clear. The lack of governmental support and lowly status of social outreach programs in Romania not only cause major financial difficulties for the projects; on the contrary, the issue facing the participants is how such projects can continue to function at all. The staff's commitment is impressive in light of the enormous pressure they are under, their lack of employment contracts, and the bare minimum wage they receive.

*Even though our colleagues receive bare minimum wages and provide a great deal of volunteer work they are still motivated to change part of the system.*

*Doinita Grosu*

## Why people migrate

Participants gained an impression of what it means to be poor in Romania – especially in comparison to Germany. They saw the living conditions which cause people to voluntarily decide to leave their country in the hopes of a better life somewhere else.

*I now understand why women who decided for themselves to come to Germany and send money back to their children and families at home do not want to go back – even if their lives in Germany are very difficult and poor.*

*Silke Voigt*

## Welfare and health care systems

Participants in the exchange gathered valuable information about the Romanian health care system since they frequently need to explain claims in the course of their work. Major differences in the health care systems, which exist despite EU alignment, were identified. They experienced first-hand the details of settlement modalities, and discovered the conditions under and extent to which Romanian health insurance pays for medical treatment in Germany. Becoming acquainted with the theory and the practice of the health care system opens new possibilities, including procuring certificates from Romania. They learned valuable information on the care of HIV patients and immunizations for children. For the German participants, direct contact with government agencies responsible for health insurance will simplify the clarification of claims and questions in the future.

## Experiences and impressions in Hamburg

The Romanian group also visited several institutions in Hamburg corresponding to their field of work. At the Protestant University for Social Work “Rauhe Haus” they learned about the German welfare system, the principle of concurrent coverage, and the role of NGOs and churches/church outreach programs in social services. They learned background information regarding the living and working conditions of Romanians at the “Arbeit und Leben” outreach information center for the unrestricted free movement of labor. Participants gained an impression of the difficulties faced in accessing the social aid system and the institutional discrimination carried out against Romanians in Germany.

*The level of financial means will represent another difference between the German public social system and the Romanian one.*

*Flavius Ilioni*

During their two-day observation visits in projects, the social workers learned more about the situation of needy Romanians. They addressed the fact that the projects are generally financed by the government or city, allowing for enough personnel, a division of labor, and a focus on key activities, along with the high regard placed on non-governmental social organizations. However, the challenges of this form of support were also made clear, such as the excessive bureaucracy caused by EU, German and regional regulations. The Romanian guests were impressed by the solidarity and commitment shown by Romanian-speaking colleagues in Hamburg, who speak up for their fellow countrymen.



## Why people migrate to Hamburg

During meetings with Romanians seeking help, the participants asked about their motives for becoming migrant laborers. They learned that those who are well prepared and come to Hamburg of their own free will can make ends meet – for themselves and often for their families back home.

*I was surprised by the level of determination of the Romanian clients I have met. Both, ladies and children, were eager to integrate into German society, finding a job rather than to expect social benefits. Provided with professional counseling and being well informed by Großstadtmission SOS, the clients are empowered to perform their social inclusion with responsibility. The clients would not want to return to Romania, where, they claimed, they would live in poverty under the same circumstances.*

*Flavius Ilioni*

It became clear how difficult integration can be – for personal and structural reasons. Nevertheless, most have no wish to return to Romania, hoping instead that their living conditions and their prospects will improve their lives and that of their families. The group discussed what the effects of adapting the social standards in Romania would be. Would fewer people migrate to Germany due to poverty and instead develop possibilities in their own country? Several participants wondered whether the amount of aid affects the drive of people to take steps to improve their own situation.



## Human trafficking and labor exploitation

*I gained some strong insights regarding the human trafficking, especially after visiting the redlight district in Hamburg.*

*Flavius Ilioni*

The Romanian social workers were particularly interested in learning about the work place and working conditions of victims of human trafficking in Hamburg. On the one hand, this focused on labor exploitation in the cleaning and construction industries, but also on the major area of prostitution.

Many were surprised that prostitution is legal in several places such as St. Pauli in Hamburg. The participants held a heated debate on legalizing social (problem) areas such as prostitution and drug use at fixed locations, and the subsequent assistance provided by social work. What was irritating to some participants was seen as a possible solution by others.

*I had the opportunity to understand this phenomenon more than I had expected and in my opinion, for Romania it will be very hard to work at this high level, to provide quality and organized services for the women who prostitute themselves. It is impossible to stop or to eradicate prostitution, but just to find solutions to control it, to make it safer for both „sides”. I believe that the information received helped me to understand that it is necessary to have a legislative framework for this phenomenon.*

*Cristina Enache*

## Exchanging ideas

Both the Hamburg and Romanian colleagues actively exchanged ideas. During their observation visits, the social workers became acquainted with alternatives to their own processes and documentation systems and were inspired by new ideas. These include, for example, the type of social work carried out on the street and labor integration through car wash sites in Romania, and the aid network that emerged in Bucharest.

## Crossroads

### Off to a good start

*Shadowing allowed me to understand the way everything works in Hamburg better, and if I didn't understand something at first there was always someone willing to help answer a question.*

*Teleianu Ioan Colin*

The exchange experienced satisfied participants' expectations to the greatest extent possible. The social workers have gained partners and contacts on-site – a good foundation for further collaboration. They learned about the challenges their clients face in each country and experienced the competence of the aid provided on-site. They were able to develop new ideas for their own work and get to know practical approaches that they can apply themselves. The time participants spent together strengthened the networks between the projects in the two cities.

Social work participants from Hamburg and Bucharest demonstrated a great appreciation for each other. This professional exchange presents advantages and opportunities for a transnational network. Several projects have already gone one step further and are planning an exchange in the form of an internship on their own initiative. Transnational consulting has also already taken place.

#### **Experience social work through shadowing**

The shadowing experience proved its value. During the two-day observation visits, participants were provided with detailed insight into the organization, modes of operation, and project financing, and became acquainted with colleagues in the organization who will be available in the future for questions. The impact of these visits and the understanding gained provide a foundation for an in-depth exchange of ideas regarding contrasts and differences and identify questions and gaps, creating the prerequisites for further communication in terms of content and organization.

The Hamburg participants gained a better understanding of why people leave their homes. This serves as a motivation for their work with their Romanian clients and also strengthens their cross-cultural competence. Furthermore, they received concrete information on issues such as health insurance to facilitate their daily work.

Romanian social workers gained an impression of the problems facing their countrymen and were moved by their need for help. Their experiences and impressions as well as their encounters with partners provided them with motivation for their work. They can use this information to improve awareness in their own country and help prepare people who want to migrate more directly.

*My experiences from the trip to Hamburg can help me in my direct work with clients that may practice prostitution. It was very useful to understand the German social welfare system to help our beneficiaries to become more realistic when they decide to leave for a foreign country.*

*Cristina Enache*

The first Crossroads experience confirmed that social aid needs to be conceived and carried out transnationally. The project is off to a good start.

## Perspectives

A network has emerged from this professional exchange. How can we keep it alive and beneficial? How can we expand it? Participants in Bucharest and in Hamburg talked about this in regular meetings. Transnational issues will be discussed together at this level in the future. The Diakonische Werk will act as a bilateral communication partner for these projects and will continue to champion them as an intermediary and backer. At the same time, it plans to expand the network through upcoming exchanges with Bulgaria.

The Diakonische Werk will continue to lobby for transnational issues.



**Diakonisches Werk Hamburg**  
**Landesverband der Inneren Mission e. V.**

Weltweite Diakonie

Jan Westfahl

Königstraße 54

22767 Hamburg

[westfahl@diakonie-hamburg.de](mailto:westfahl@diakonie-hamburg.de)

[www.diakonie-hamburg.de](http://www.diakonie-hamburg.de)