



Comber's Volunteer Information Pack Romania - 2010

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Overview & History of Comber

Comber was established in 1990 in Comber, Co. Down as 'Comber Romanian Orphanage Appeal' in response to the appalling conditions in Romania's over crowded orphanages at the time. For many years, Comber worked to alleviate conditions in 4 orphanages for children with disabilities, particularly Gradinari Children's Home in Giurgiu County. From 1990-2006 we

- Provided over 500 multi-disciplinary Irish volunteers to work with Romanian children and their carers.
- Completely refurbished four orphanages.
- Provided hands on development support to over 800 children, many with disabilities.
- Trained Romanian care staff in all aspects of caring for people with disabilities.

Huge changes have taken place in Romania since we started working there. Perhaps most importantly, Romania has joined the EU and is now able to tap into a huge pool of resources to support the development of disability services at a national level. Most children's orphanages are closed, and now residential services for children can not house more than 12 individuals. However, no specific plans were put in place at accession to deal with the ongoing problems of adults with disabilities remaining in poor conditions in large residential institutions.

Having initially focussed on aid and renovation work in orphanages, we grew to realise the limits of hands-on work in Romania. In 2006 Comber was re-structured and appointed its first paid Executive Director in Ireland. Since then, Comber has focussed on supporting Giurgiu Local Authorities to close its remaining adults institutions. We do this in the following ways:

- Providing homes in the community for adults with disabilities still living in institutions
- Helping families to keep children with disabilities at home
- Education & Training with our Romanian partners

Our projects are sustainable as we do not provide ongoing funding for services. The local authorities in Giurgiu County pay for staff and overhead costs of our small groups homes.

Volunteer Programme Ethos

Comber believes that volunteering at home and overseas can be both a rewarding and challenging experience. We encourage volunteers to adopt a three fold approach to their placement including:

- Contributing your skills and experience to the project;
- Learning from Romanian experience and colleagues;
- Bringing your experiences home and using them to educate others.

Purpose of the Volunteer Programme (2010)

Comber was established as a volunteer organisation and we still rely heavily on our extensive volunteer network today, both in Ireland and in Romania. Since it was established in 1990, Comber has sent over 500 professional volunteers to work in Romania. In recent years, we have re-structured our volunteer programme and focus on sending small groups for specific time-limited projects.

The purpose of the placements in 2010 is to:

- Support beneficiaries in Comber's homes to develop their personal potential
- Carry out a full assessment of the needs of children in local authority residential homes in Giurgiu and initiate implementation of programmes
- Support the establishment of day care services centre, the first of its kind in the area
- Support adults with high level needs to access equipment and support needed for their transition from institutional care to the community

Volunteer Placements Centres (2010)

Volunteers will be based in Giurgiu County, which is located one hour south of Bucharest. Volunteers will be working in one or more of the following services, which provide for children and adults with physical and intellectual disabilities:

- Comber's group homes, Giurgiu city, Romania. Comber supports 38 residents in 2 homes and 4 apartments. The homes are located at different sites, but within a 15 minute walk of one another.
- Newly established Comber Group Homes in Gradinari and Izvoarele villages for high level needs
- Day care social inclusion centre in Giurgiu city (which is currently under development)
- Local authority residential Children's Group Homes in Giurgiu Town
- Support group for parents of children with disabilities

Volunteer Roles (2010)

Positions

Applications are being sought from professionals in the following areas*:

1. Allied Health Professionals

(including Occupational Therapy, Psychology, Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Social Care Work, Social Work)

2. Intellectual Disability Nurses

3. Educators and trainers with experience of working with people with disabilities

(including teachers, adult education and training providers and others with relevant experience)

**Newly qualified applicants welcome.*

There will be maximum of 20 volunteers per group.

Responsibilities and Duties

Volunteer tasks may include (depending on specific placement):

- Develop and help to implement personal development plans with residents of group homes
- Independence skills training, to include helping to establish small income generation / livelihood project with residents
- Training and support for staff in children's group homes including introducing behavioural modification programmes, planning and developing day activities & accessing the local community
- Day centre activities including skills training, IT, employment support, day activities, setting up groups-music, art, PE etc.
- Assessment for equipment, day activities and training in managing residents with high level needs

***Specific roles within these areas will be assigned in consultation with a volunteer, after acceptance on to the programme.*

Qualifications and Experience required

- Third level qualification (degree or equivalent);
- Experience of working with clients with disabilities;
- Experience of working as independent decision makers/working autonomously with clients

Please contact us if you have any questions about your eligibility.

Desirable Qualities and Skills

- Ability to work through an interpreter
- Motivation to contribute to the development of under-developed and under-resourced disability sector in Romania
- Able to manage the challenges involved in an overseas placement

Commitment needed

Placements are 6 weeks in length during July-October 2010. Volunteers will work an average 40 hour week, with Sundays off. Flexibility with hours and days is required.

Volunteers need to raise €2,800 euro (minimum) in order to take part. This includes the costs of insurance, accommodation, return flight and a contribution to Comber's ongoing work.

Training & Support

- Pre-departure: introduction to Comber's work; history of Romania's orphanages and disability services; induction to the role.
- In Romania: Comber staff located in Bucharest available for ongoing support. Additional professional supervision from Irish volunteer co-ordinator (visits/phone).

- Post-placement debriefing

Language support

Interpretation support will be provided for volunteers. Romanian is a Latin-based language and you will be able to recognise many words and hopefully learn to say the basics quite quickly.

Overview of Recruitment process

1. First of all familiarise yourself with our website and literature and decide whether you would like to apply with Comber. A good source of information is also available on www.volunteeringoptions.org which lists a wide range of placements through Irish and UK organisations.

Next, self-select by asking yourself **are you....**

- Qualified and experienced as required for the role?
- Able to raise 2,800 euro to cover programme costs?
- Available on the dates listed for travel, interview and pre-departure induction?
- Interested in and supportive of Comber's mission and work?
- Motivated to contribute to the development of an under-developed and under-resourced disability sector in Romania?
- Able to manage the challenges involved in an overseas placement?

2. If you interested, then we would love to hear from you! Please complete the application form and post/ email to us by the closing date.

3. Applications will be short-listed and successful candidates invited for interview (see dates below). The format will include some group exercises and individual interviews.

4. If you are accepted on to the programme, you will need to raise a minimum of 2,800 euro towards the costs of the programme. This covers the costs of your flights, insurance and accommodation, as well as a donation to Comber's work.

5. You will need to attend one full day of pre-departure induction before you leave with your group.

KEY DATES		
Activity	Programme 1: 15th July - 26th August	Programme 2: 16th Sept - 28th Oct
Closing date for applications	28 th April	16 th July
Candidates notified of outcome	30 th April	20 th July
Group & Individual interviews	8 th May (Dublin)	To be confirmed
Applicants informed of outcome	10 th May	To be confirmed

Successful applicants return confirmation of participation along with €200 deposit and completed Garda Vetting Form	By 17 th May	To be confirmed
Remaining fundraising target submitted (€2600)	26 th June	To be confirmed
Pre-departure induction day	26 th June (Dublin)	To be confirmed

Fundraising

Volunteers need to raise a minimum of €2,800 euro towards their placement. This covers the cost of:

- Flights; accommodation; insurance
- A donation towards Comber's work

We will support you as much as we can in Ireland towards making your fundraising successful. Please contact the office for sponsorship cards and leaflets, or if you have any questions. We are also on www.MyCharity.ie/charity/comber where you can set up your own fundraising page and invite your friends and family to sponsor you by email.

Living in Romania

- **Insurance**

We will book your insurance for the duration of your trip, to include cover against injury and accidents. Full details of your policy will be available when your place is confirmed.

- **Flights**

Flights will be booked by the Comber office and fly directly from Dublin to Bucharest. Flights duration is approximately 3.5 hours.

- **Arriving**

You will be collected from the airport by a Comber representative and driven to your accommodation in Giurgiu (approximately 90 km).

- **Accommodation**

Volunteers will live in rented accommodation in Giurgiu town, with the option of living for a period with a host family. There may be some travelling required if your placement centre is located in a different area to your accommodation. This will enable you to experience the real Romania and the wonderful hospitality of its people. You might even pick up some *limba romana*!

- **Money**

Volunteers are advised to bring some spending money, depending on how much you plan to buy! The cost of living in Romania remains relatively cheap, but prices have risen since Romania joined the EU. The average salary in Romania is 400-500 euro per month for a professional worker. You can live cheaply in Romania but be prepared to spend more if you want to go for meals, shopping or do any travelling.

- **Transport**

Driving is on the right in Romania. Public transport is an efficient and cheap way to get around.

Further information

More detailed information about the conditions and practicalities of the placement will be provided on the Induction Day.

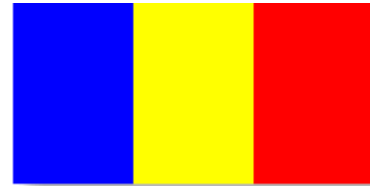
Meanwhile, if you have any specific questions, please contact Alison Enright on alison@comber.ie or 087-2222456.

To apply to the programme, please visit our website www.comber.ie/volunteer.htm and complete the Application Form and return by the relevant closing date:

- **Programme 1:** 28th April
- **Programme 2:** 16th July

We do hope you'll consider applying & we look forward to hearing from you!

Appendix 1: ABOUT ROMANIA



Key Facts

Population: 21.4 million

Time Zone: Two hours ahead of Ireland (GMT + 2)

Area: 237,502 sq. km – about 3 times the size of Ireland

Flag of Romania: Three vertical stripes: red, yellow and blue.

Ethnic Groups: Romanian 89%, Hungarian 7.5%, Roma 1.9%, German, Other 1.6%

Religions: Christian Orthodox 87%, Roman Catholic 5%, Protestant 5%, Jewish

Official Language: Romanian

Currency: Romanian Leu (RON)

Climate: Temperate, four distinct seasons.

Capital: Bucharest (Bucuresti) – (population 2.2 million)

Head of State: President of the Republic, currently Mr. Traian Basescu

National Government: The government is led by the Prime Minister, confirmed by the Parliament on the nomination of the President of Romania.

Head of the Government: the Prime Minister, currently Mr. Emil Boc (Democratic-Liberal Party).

Geography

Located halfway between the Equator and the North Pole, Romania is the 12th largest country in Europe. Romania's terrain is almost evenly divided between mountains, hills and plains.



Although not as high as the Alps, the **Carpathian Mountains** extend over 600 miles in Romania, in the shape of an arch. Romania's mountains are a great destination for numerous outdoor activities including: climbing, hiking, biking and river-rafting. Some of the most popular ski resorts are Poiana Brasov, Sinaia, Predeal, Vatra Dornei, Lake Balea and Paltinis.

Europe's second longest river, the **Danube**, flows through southern Romania forming part of the country's frontier with

Serbia, Bulgaria and Ukraine. Its blue waters run along 621 miles, from Bazias to the Black Sea.

The Romanian **Black Sea Coast** stretches a little over 150 miles. Its wide, sandy beaches facing east and south-east become a major tourist attraction from May until September.

History

Romania's history has not always been peaceful. Over the centuries, various migrating people invaded Romania. Romania's historical provinces Wallachia and Moldova offered furious resistance to the invading Ottoman Turks. Transylvania was successively under Hapsburg, Ottoman or Wallachian rule, while remaining an autonomous province.

Romania's post WWII history as a communist-block nation is more widely known, primarily due to the excesses of the former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. In December 1989 a national uprising led to his overthrow. The 1991 Constitution established Romania as a republic with a multiparty system, market economy and individual rights of free speech, religion and private ownership.

Recent time-line

1968 — The condemnation of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia by Romania's communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu, earns him praise and economic aid from the West.

1980s — Obsessed with repaying the national debt and megalomaniac building projects Ceausescu orders a ban on importation of any consumer products and commands exportation of all goods produced in Romania except minimum food supplies. Severe restrictions of civil rights are imposed.

1989 — Romanians unite in protests against the communist leadership and local demonstrations sparked a national uprising that finally ousted communist ruler Nicolae Ceausescu and his cabinet.

1991 — Romanians vote for a new Constitution.

2004 — Romania joins NATO (The North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

2007 — Romania becomes a member of the European Union (EU).

Nicolae Ceausescu

Ceausescu was a Communist dictator who was President of Romania from 1974-1989. He banned contraception during his regime and encouraged women to have 5 or more children, in a bid to increase Romania's population. His legacy included hundreds of overcrowded orphanages across Romania where unwanted children lived an appalling existence. Comber began working in Romania in 1990, after its founders had seen the coverage of conditions in orphanages on television. For more information on this topic, please see the following useful articles and links.

Romanian Digest - Dec 09 – *Romania 20 Years Later*

<http://www.hr.ro/digest/200912/digest.htm>

BBC Coverage

July 2005 - *What happened to Romania's orphanages?*

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4629589.stm>

December 2009 - *What became of Romania's neglected orphans?*

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8425001.stm>

Economy

For many centuries Romania's economy was based on agriculture. In the 1930s Romania was one of the main European producers of wheat, corn and meats and it used to be called "the bread basket of Europe." There was a shift towards heavy industries since the 1970s but the agriculture is still economically important and employs about one-third of the workforce. Romania is one of the largest wine producers in Europe.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Romania started a series of political and economic reforms. After a decade of post-revolution economic problems, Romania made economic reforms such as low flat tax rates in 2005 and joined the European Union on January 1, 2007.

While Romania's income level remains one of the lowest in the European Union, reforms have increased the growth speed.

The average gross wage per month in Romania was 1,855 lei in May 2009, equating to €442.48.

Language & Culture

Romanian is a Latin based language with the 31-letter Latin alphabet in use. The literacy rate in Romania is 98%.

Many Romanians living in towns and cities are able to communicate in English, French or German. However, it is harder to find English speaking residents in smaller villages and towns.

Romania has strong cultural traditions and has produced some world renowned artists, writers and musicians. Examples include Gheorghe Zamfir, a pan-flute player who has sold 120 million albums worldwide, and sculptor Constantin Brâncuși, who has achieved the highest price for any piece of sculpture ever made (\$27.5 million in 2005).

Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci was the first Olympic gymnast ever to score a perfect 10, at the Montreal Olympics in 1976.

For further **general information and photos** of Romania, please visit:

www.romaniatourism.com

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/romania>

Appendix 2: Map of Giurgiu County, Romania



The volunteer placement centres are located in:

- Giurgiu city
- Izoarele village
- Gradinari town

The two largest adult residential institutions are marked on the map (near Bolintin Vale and Gradinari). Comber has been working to close these institutions since 2006.