



# A GOOD START



WITH SUPPORT  
FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

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## Roma Education in Europe

- Educational attainment of Roma children is very poor, with high numbers of school drop-outs.

“Pre-primary education has the highest returns in terms of the social adaptation of children. Member States should invest more in pre-primary education as an effective means to establish the basis for further learning, preventing school drop-out, increasing equity of outcomes and overall skill levels.”

*European Commission 2006  
Communication Efficiency and Equity  
in European Education and Training Systems*



- Despite attempts to promote inclusion, non-Roma children are leaving integrated schools.
- Disproportionately large numbers of Roma children are segregated in special schools and classes for children with learning disabilities.
- Quality early care and education for Roma children is essential to have a good start in life.

## What is the 'A Good Start' Project?

The 'A Good Start' (AGS) project was launched by the Roma Education Fund in summer, 2010. The project which is supported by the European Commission, targets Roma and non-Roma children aged 0-6 years and their parents, offering quality early care and development services in 16 locations in four countries of the Roma Decade.

## International partners of REF in the 'AGS'

The AGS is managed and implemented through a cooperative partnership between REF, as the main applicant, three international partners that are in Consortium as well as several local Roma NGOs and other local implementing Partners.

### Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG)

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FSG is a non-profit inter-cultural social organisation that provides services for the development of the Roma community throughout all of Spain and at the European level. It commenced its work in the 1960's and was constituted as Association in 1982 and as Foundation in the year 2001. The mission of the FSG is the integral advancement of the Roma community based on respect and support

for their cultural identity. The purpose of this mission is to support access of Roma persons to rights, services and social resources on an equal footing with all other citizens. To accomplish this, a wide range of actions are carried out focused on improving the living standards of Roma people and encouraging recognition, support and development of the cultural identity of the Roma community.

### International Step By Step Association (ISSA)

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ISSA is an innovative network of early childhood development professionals and organizations primarily in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia, working to make quality early childhood education accessible to all children. ISSA accomplishes this through: raising awareness of the importance of quality care and education, developing resources, disseminating information, advocating, strengthening alliances and building capacity to create conditions where all children thrive. ISSA's vision is that with support from the family and community, every child reaches his or her full potential and develops skills necessary for being a successful and active member of a democratic knowledge society. ISSA's services include: providing resources, technical assistance and training in ECD in such areas as diversity and social justice education, parent empowerment, bilingual education etc.; training, mentoring and providing support for reaching common understanding about quality pedagogy ECD, based on the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy.

## Slovak Governance Institute (SGI)

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SGI, a non-profit, non-partisan civic association, was spun off from one of the most important Slovak think-tanks INEKO (Institute for Social and Economic Reforms) in October 2001 to create an NGO with a clear focus on good governance and public policy. SGI has implemented number of projects in different fields related to policy-making. The assignments carried out by SGI include public administration assessments and changes, policymaking and policy implementation, human resources enhancement and capacity building.



**Within the AGS there are centre-, community- and home-based interventions. The breadth of activities includes supporting children to attend formal kindergarten, training teachers and support staff, providing informal classes for children, parenting classes and enrolment support such as helping children to get identity documents and vaccinations. The approach is tailored to the needs of the people, taking into account the varying quality of provision in the different localities. Where possible there is close collaboration with local authori-**

**ties and other providers. Roma Education Fund had tested these types of activities within the region with considerable success and now these experiences are being scaled up. In addition to service provision, advocacy will be undertaken at local and international level to promote the lessons learned from the project and Roma inclusion in pre-school education. The aim of the AGS is to improve early childhood development outcomes for Roma and non-Roma children, and create a precedent from the AGS pilot project which can be scaled up in all Decade countries.**

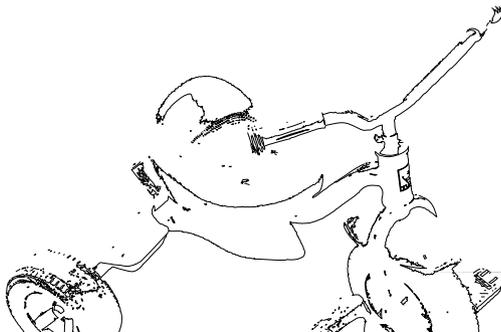


## Who does AGS help?

The AGS helps a total of more than 4350 Roma children and families as direct beneficiaries. Many more children and families will benefit as a result of advocacy at the national and international level. The AGS has an explicit, but not exclusive targeting.

## Roma Education Fund

The Roma Education Fund (REF) was created within the framework of the Decade of Roma inclusion in 2005. It's mission is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma people. In order to achieve this goal, REF supports policies and programs that ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems. REF runs five major programs in 14 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. For further information see the Roma Education Fund's website at <http://www.romaeducationfund.org>.



## How will success be monitored?

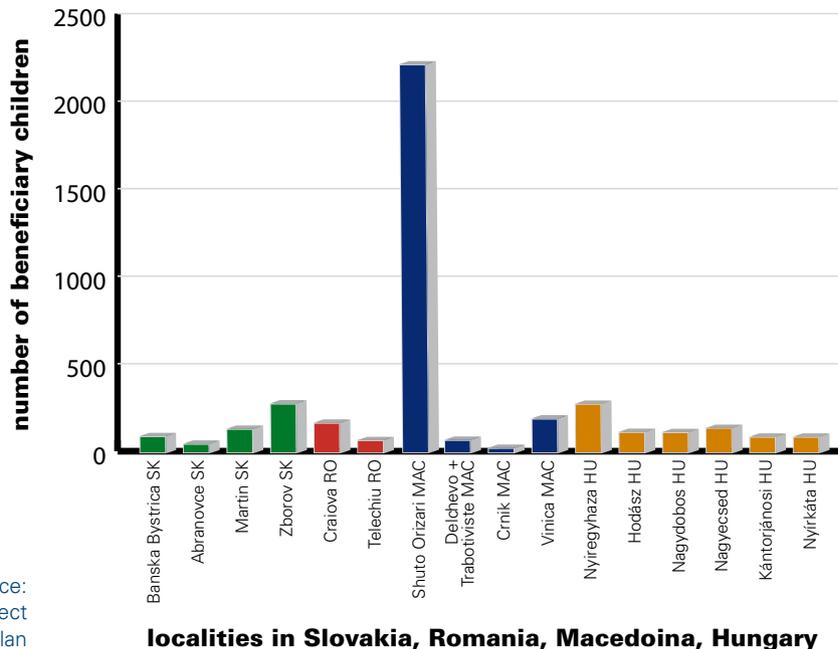
There is a lack of comprehensive and comparable data on Roma in the region. In order to have a baseline for each location, REF and its partners in the monitoring and evaluation team (Slovak Governance Institute, World Bank and UNDP) developed a Community Assessment tool. Partner NGOs carried out research on early care and development services in each project locality from primary and secondary sources. The Community Assessment data-tables show the gaps in early care and development provision, and what is needed to improve the situation.

The Household survey was designed to capture basic household information, and provide insight into

the education related expectations and attitudes of the Roma parents. The survey has been applied to the parents involved in the project (where they or their children are 'recurrent beneficiaries' participating in a number of activities). Below is a table illustrating the number of families that it is expected will be recurrent beneficiaries.

Partner NGOs will also collect data on children's attendance in schools and their results, and participation of families in activities amongst other data – inputting this into an interactive web-based database. As teacher training is one of the major activities in the project (carried out by International Step by Step Association and other NGOs), an observation tool will be used to assess improvements in teaching towards the Roma children.

**Graph:**  
Number of  
beneficiaries  
in AGS localities



Source:  
'A Good Start' project  
Project Implementation Plan



## An Introduction to Activities in Macedonia

The “A Good Start” project, targeting children aged 0-6 years, is being implemented in five localities in Macedonia. AGS involves over 2500 Romani and non-Romani children and their families and operates in Šuto Orizari, Vinica/Blatec, Trbotovište, and Delchevo/Crnik.

AGS emphasizes the building of lasting partnerships among Romani parents, education authorities and institutions, local government and civil society. Project activities in Macedonia employ the experience and resources of REF and its partners to strengthen pre-school education and facilitate successful transitions into the primary education system. By increasing the enrollment of Romani children into pre-school education from the age of three, AGS ensures that children benefit from pre-school education, both for the educational and social benefits and as a stepping stone to primary education.

In addition, AGS draws attention to key aspects of preventive healthcare and early childhood development. As a result of the success of AGS, the education system in Crnik will be expanding with the opening of a new pre-school institution and the pre-school education for the children from Trbotovište will be ensured in Delchevo.

A Good Start includes a common set of activities facilitated in all countries, including awareness raising and enrollment assistance; need-based material support; preparation for transition to primary education; diversity training for teaching staff; and training for Roma community workers (mediators). In addition, unique program components are developed to meet the specific needs of each locality.

## Implementing partners in Macedonia

### **National Roma Centrum (NRC)**

NRC was founded in Kumanovo in 2005 as a civil and human rights based organization, aimed at combating anti-Romani sentiment and human rights abuse of the Roma people. NRC represents and stimulates the active participation and integration of Romani people on the principles of the modern multiethnic European society. The needs of Romani women and children are priority concerns. NRC works on a national level, implementing activities related to Roma inclusion in mainstream education across Macedonia. NRC programs also seek to ensure access to health care and address a number of additional issues affecting the Romani community. NRC continues to work towards Roma inclusion and equitable representation in all areas of Macedonian society.

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### **AMBRELA**

Ambrella was founded in Shuto Orizari (Skopje) in 2007 and stands for social integration and empowerment of the Romani population in Macedonia, prioritizing education, human rights and gender equity. The organization primarily focuses on Romani children and women as the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society. Ambrella is a professional non-governmental organization whose independent consultants offer expertise, experience and know-how on issues relevant to Romani integration.

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## KHAM

CAR “KHAM” is non-governmental organization established in 1999 in Delcevo. KHAM’s mission is to raise the educational level and improve the social and economic situation of the Roma population and to strengthen the capacity of NGOs in the East Bregalnica region to cooperate with home and foreign organizations and institutions. The organization’s main activities focus predominately on Roma youth, working to ensure their inclusion in all spheres of social life. The organization has 150 members and has implemented more than 50 projects.

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## Step by Step in Macedonia

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## Impressions of Suto Orizari

*by Zoe Gray*

Suto Orizari is one of the biggest Roma settlements in Europe. I have long been aware of it so am very interested to visit. Of the people who live here (17,000 plus in last census), about 3/4 are Roma and the rest are from other ethnic groups. Approaching Suto Orizari I am struck by how it resembles shanty-type towns in Asia or Africa: with its many small shops where you can buy the likes of soap, tobacco and sweets; the dustiness; the partially built buildings; the smell and sight of fire burning at the edge of the street. Although not all families are poor here, many of the Roma earn as little as 40 EUR a month.

Gordana Rodic and Ljatife Sikovska, of Ambrela NGO, bring us to meet a family in their home. There is a smell of warm bread as an elderly lady cooks on an old wood stove. Lying in the corner is a baby, only three days old. The mother, beside the child, is beaming with pride. Their home is very small and as a group we take up almost the entire room. It is very basic with no running water and no toilet. We pass by small mountains of rubbish to visit some more houses. In one a colleague thinks he sees toxic asbestos and in another the family are burning plastic as they cannot afford wood. It is hard not to feel like we are imposing, but the people are very welcoming and tea is offered. I have a short conversation in German with the man of one house, a former gastararbeiter (or guest worker) in Switzerland.



We make our way to visit the community centre that Ambrela runs. It’s full of parents (mostly mums but a few dads too) and young children who are enjoying some after-school time, a place to do their home work. Within ‘A Good Start’ Ambrela will work with hundreds of families in Suto Orizari to help them get identification documents and vaccinations for the children and provide other support as needed to help the children enroll in pre-school. Amongst the enormous obstacles impeding the Roma children’s chance to have a decent education are money and politics, and the more immediate basic facilities. A boy of about seven or eight keeps pulling faces at me, I can’t resist and do the same. I wonder what are his options?, will he get to stay in school?



## An Introduction to Activities in Slovakia

The “A Good Start” (AGS) project, targeting children of 0-6 years, is being implemented in 4 localities in Slovakia involving over 500 Romani and non-Romani children and their families. It operates in two urban localities in Central Slovakia (Banská Bystrica and Martin) as well as in two rural localities in Eastern Slovakia (Abranovce and Zborov).

With an emphasis on building lasting partnerships among Romani parents, education authorities and institutions, local government, and civil society, the project activities in Slovakia bring together the experiences of REF and its partners in pre-school education and the transition to primary education. At the same time, the project adds attention to key aspects of pre-

ventive healthcare and early childhood development. Focusing on increasing the enrolment of Romani children into pre-school education from the age of three, the project also aims to ensure that children in the two rural localities who cannot be enrolled in pre-school education for reasons of institutional capacity receive adequate preparation in the home environment so that they can make a successful transition into primary education. Where institutional capacity is a problem REF and its partners lobby for an increase in spaces or facilities.

Notwithstanding variations among the project localities, the project includes a common set of activities, including awareness raising and enrolment assistance; need-based material support; preparation for transition to primary education; after-school instruction in the first year of primary education; and diversity training for teaching staff.





## Implementing partners in Slovakia

### Equalizing Opportunities

The Civic Association Equalizing Opportunities was founded in Prešov in 2005 with the mission of providing educational activities for children of pre-school age and their parents from a socially disadvantaged background. Within AGS, Equalizing Opportunities serves as the local partner for the localities of Abranovce and Zborov.

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### KARI

The Regional Association of Romani Initiatives was established in 2000 in Banská Bystrica. KARI's main activities in the area of education have included mentoring and tutoring of Romani pupils in primary schools, establishing and supporting Romani assistants in primary schools, and creating conditions for Roma youth to spend their free time actively and constructively. KARI serves as the local partner for AGS activities in Banská Bystrica.

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### KZRSR

Established in Banská Bystrica in 1994, the Cultural Association of Roma of the Slovak Republic has been active throughout Slovakia, with Central Slovakia the region in which KZRSR has conducted the largest number of activities. KZRSR has implemented projects on numerous themes, including but not limited to field-based social work and advisory services to persons with limited access to institutional support. KZRSR's responsibility in AGS is for the city of Martin.

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### MPC

Methodological-Pedagogical Center Bratislava – Regional Branch Prešov provides and guarantees expert methodological activities in the field of in-service training of pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff, also carrying out research in this area. Under the Slovak Ministry of Education, MPC also exercises competencies state-wide in the fields of Romani issues and in-service training for teachers of children belonging to national minorities. MPC's role in AGS is to provide additional trainings to teachers to complement those delivered by the International Step by Step Association.

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### Step by Step in Slovakia

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## An Introduction to Activities in Hungary

The “A Good Start” (AGS) project, targeting children of 0-6 years, is being implemented in 6 localities in Hungary involving at least 850 Roma and non-Roma children and their families. It operates in Nyíregyháza and five settlements of the Mátészalka Microregion: Hodász, Nagydobos, Nagyecsed, Nyírkáta and Kántorjánosi. The project also aims to impact practical knowledge on educational inclusion to university students, mainly to those in pre-service teacher training, prior to graduation and insertion into the labor market.

One of the main activities of the AGS project is the Mesed (Your Tale) program, which aims to strengthen the reading-, writing and communication skills of Roma mothers by means of read-out tales, which they can then deliver to their children. Furthermore the program prepares mothers for tasks related to preschool education and for the enrollment procedures of preschool institutions. Around 30 students from the College of Nyíregyháza’s pre-service teacher training program will be involved in the project, gaining experience on adult education. Additionally, the project will focus on increasing the enrolment of Roma children into preschool education from the age of 3, and on ensuring their regular attendance through the work of 7 mentors and 65 students from the Faculty of Economics and Social Science.

The Home School Community Liaison program was introduced in Ireland (<http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=17216&ecategory=34291&language=EN>), and it aims to establish collaboration between parents and teachers on matters of children’s education, targeting families and/or neighborhoods

identified as being ‘at risk’ (due to poverty, unemployment. AGS adopted the tools of the Irish model. Once a week during a period of six weeks, parents will come to selected preschools and give classes (art, tales, sport, etc) to preschool children, divided into small groups. This highly beneficial scheme will enable both pedagogs and parents to acquire an understanding of the work of each other through building a better relationship with the preschool based on trust and knowledge.

In addition to that, the AGS project would like to facilitate the transition between the university, academic education and kindergartens. The focus of this activity will be on parent-teacher communication, and to this end, REF in partnership with the College of Nyiregyhaza will organize joint seminars and lectures on communication and conflict resolution for students and preschool staff twice per semester. Students will also visit the preschools and participate in parental meetings.



## Implementing partners in Hungary

### College of Nyíregyháza

University College of Nyíregyháza was found in 2000 by integrating two higher education institutions: the György Bessenyei Teacher's Training College and the Faculty of Agriculture of the Agricultural University of Gödöllő. The result of this merger was a new institution that comprises five faculties and several background institutes assisting education, research & development. With its 12,000 students, 365 academic staff, it is one of the largest higher education institutions in Hungary. The AGS project would like to offer its students the opportunity to fulfill their mandatory practicum requirements in mixed or segregated kindergartens or to fulfill their field work obligations through the project.

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### Unity in Diversity Foundation

It is a nonprofit organization with the mandate of providing educational projects and programs for the purpose of development and integration of the Roma, other minorities and disadvantaged populations in Hungary. The organization is responsible for the implementation of the Mesed program in the AGS project, which has been already tried and piloted in other localities in Hungary.

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### Hope for a Better Future National Charity Association

The charity association was officially registered in 2006, although members of the organization were already active before the registration date. Its members organize many volunteer-based events (such as meal distributions and the organization of Roma days), and it serves as a contact organization to the local Roma community. The community mentoring of the AGS project will be ensured by the charity association. Alongside the community oriented events, mentors will provide updated information about local Roma families, and the number and situation of Roma children.

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### Step by Step in Hungary

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## Working in ‘A Good Start’ A Mentor’s Perspective

Mariann Koka, one of the mentors participating in the AGS project, working as a connector between the Roma parents, children and the non-Roma community, has kindly offered to share her success story with REF and its readers.

My name is Mariann Kóka, I am a Romani woman and I am 26. I live with my family in Tiszavasvári, a small town in the East of Hungary. I was very happy when Szilvia Pallaghy and Anasztázia Nagy, program managers of the “A Good Start” project, invited me to take part in the program as a mentor. A Romani settlement known as the Guszev area in the city of Nyíregyháza was assigned to me. The goal of the project is early child development for those children who live in deep poverty in Romani settlements, often in inhuman conditions.

In the framework of the program, my task is to visit the families and persuade them how important it is for a child to start attending pre-school from the age of 3. This task is very close to my heart since I myself used to be a child, but I was ‘lucky’: my parents realized that it was important for a child to grow up and develop in a community from a very early age. I was as little as 2 years old when I was enrolled in a day-nursery. What I can say is that my life developed differently from the lives of those peers of mine who did not attend preschool, because by the time I started school I had obtained knowledge of many things, so I was able to learn with non-Roma throughout the 8 grades of the elementary school.



There were several of us, Roma, who started secondary school, but, unfortunately enough, it was only me who succeeded in receiving a secondary school certificate. I was the only Roma in the group who started and graduated from college. My parents were very proud of me. It was a really great thing since I was the second Romani person in town who had received college education. It was in the framework of the after-school activities program that I had an opportunity to mentor Romani children. During mentoring, the children kept asking questions about my college years. They thought they would never be able to make it. As I was telling them my story, I came to realize that it is exactly through my own example that I shall convince them to do it. Later, I was very happy when several of them, following a successful completion of secondary education, were admitted to colleges. A couple of years have passed since then, and soon these youngsters will become young Romani college graduates.

This is why I again agreed to take a role as a mentor in this program, because I understand that if, through the after-school activities, a certain proportion of students can receive help, even more positive results can be achieved. Through my own example, I am probably able to better demonstrate that they really can make a change, and that their children can have a better life, just let us help. I would like to see that, as a result of the program; all children in the Guszev neighborhood attend pre-school education and develop in a healthy way. If we manage to achieve this, we will be successful.



## An Introduction to Activities in Romania

The 'A Good Start' project, targeting children aged 0-6 years, is being implemented in two localities in Romania. AGS involves 500 Romani and non-Romani children and their families and operates in Mofleni neighborhood, from Craiova, Dolj County and Telechiu village, Bihor County.

AGS emphasizes the building of lasting partnerships among Romani parents, education authorities and institutions, local government and civil society. Project activities in Romania employ the experience and resources of REF and its partners to strengthen pre-school education and facilitate successful transitions into the primary education system. By increasing the enrollment of Romani children into pre-school educa-

tion from the age of three, AGS ensures that children in the two participating rural localities benefit from pre-school education, both for the educational and social benefits and as a stepping stone to primary education. In addition, AGS draws attention to key aspects of preventive healthcare and early childhood development. As a result of the success of AGS, the pre-school will be expanding with the opening of community centre in Mofleni and a new kindergarten group and early care for children aged 0-3 years in the community centre from Telechiu.

AGS is founded on a common set of activities facilitated in all countries, including awareness raising and enrollment assistance; need-based material support; preparation for transition to primary education; diversity training for teaching staff ; and training for Roma community workers (mediators). In addition, unique program components are developed to meet the specific needs of each locality.



## Implementing partners in Romania

### Romani CRISS – Roma Centre for Social Inclusion and Studies

A non-governmental organisation, which defends and promotes the rights of Roma in Romania by providing legal assistance in cases of abuse and works to combat and prevent racial discrimination against Roma in all areas of public life, including the fields of education, employment, housing, and health. The organisation was established on April 4th, 1993, in a period marked by the violent conflicts of the beginning of the '90s. Since its inception, the organisation addressed the problems faced by the Roma population from a human rights perspective, by using specific tools such as conflict resolution, mediation, litigation, and advocacy. Romani CRISS is structured on departments focused on different, yet interlinked, areas of activities. Along with the Human Rights, the social and the health departments, the education department works on improvement of Roma children access to education (pre-school, high school and universities), as well as on combating cases of segregation in education (along with the human rights department).

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### Ruhama Foundation

Ruhama Foundation is a non-governmental organisation, non-profit and apolitical, was established in 1996. It serves as an expert organization in social field with an interdisciplinary team which develops programs



and services in response to social needs of vulnerable groups and communities from the region in order to increase their quality of life regardless ethnicity, religion and gender.

The educational programs that target children from disadvantaged communities have been consolidated in 23 communities in Bihor County and have generated a series of worthy results as well as best practices promoted at a nation-wide scale by the Ministry of Education. In the last years, Ruhama also established a series of accredited social services to address basic needs of vulnerable social categories: Home Care Services for Elderly and People with Disabilities, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Counseling and Support Centre for Parents and Children, along with training and employment services, community development and housing.

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### Step by Step in Romania

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