

Community Impact Case Study FY21

Teach For Romania – partnering with the government to scale solutions and mobilizing alumni to build system capability

Teach For Romania is working to contribute to progress at the system level. TFR works in close partnership with the government ministries and institutional partners that are responsible for human resources in the system, helping to scale up quality teacher training and school leadership, and mobilizing alumni to develop the capacity and culture throughout the system to effectively deliver those interventions. The big question they are asking is: how to work with the government to scale what works from the Teach for Romania model in an affordable manner at the national scale?



The Basics

Teach For Romania currently has 119 fellows teaching in classrooms, and about 100 alumni that remain in the public school system, in a country where there are 200,000 public school teachers in total and 98% of children attend public schools.

The Romanian public educational system continues to be highly ineffective, with disastrous student-level results. In contrast to ease of access to education, the system has a dramatic quality problem, as proven by the high drop-out

rate of children in school and the scores they obtain in standardised tests, such as PISA. Levels of functional illiteracy are very high among students in Romania, with about half of all 15 year olds who attend school unable to interpret or work with the information they read in a paragraph.

The internal research conducted by Teach for Romania through its own network of fellows indicates that even in gymnasium (high school) there are between 2-3 students per class who have difficulties with basic reading (i.e. decoding letters and written words) and more than 15 who have difficulties understanding and operating with the information they read. Moreover, these statistics do not account for the over 300,000 children who are out of school in Romania, suggesting even higher levels of illiteracy.

Despite this, teachers in the system are poorly trained to work with students on their illiteracy, especially for remedial interventions, with primary school teachers receiving some training and secondary school teachers receiving none. Indeed, Romania has a significant shortage of well trained, qualified and motivated teachers, which is the key ingredient determining the quality of the education a child receives. The profession remains unattractive for graduates and the training and support system a teacher receives is especially inadequate for those who teach in vulnerable schools.

At the same time there is no plausible alternative to the public education system, with 98% of children attending public schools. Public school remains the most important chance for vulnerable children, which account for almost half of Romania's children, to have a better life. When it comes to public services, Romania remains a centralised, left-wing socialist country and education is seen as a public good that should be invested in and grown from within.

The Approach

Teach for Romania offers the only existing training and support programme for teachers teaching in vulnerable communities, and is currently working to grow the mass of teachers throughout the Romanian system who know what to do when they encounter issues of illiteracy in the classroom. Given the relatively small scale of Teach For Romania with its 120 fellows and 100 alumni in a centralised system of 200,000 teachers, TFR chooses to do this by contributing to reforming the system from within.

This means partnership with the Ministry of Education to deliver specific programmes. First, there is a partnership to train 200 existing teachers in the system in tackling illiteracy. Second, there is a project to pilot quality mentoring of beginner teachers within the system (NEST, an EC-funded project in partnership with 5 other TF partners), with TFR training 40 mentors to work with 200 teachers to test whether teacher retention can be improved. Third, TFR is becoming more vocal in public policy arena on specific topics, such as teacher quality, and has contributed to a new national assessment of public school managers.

The second pillar of the strategy is mobilizing alumni as a critical mass of leaders who are bringing capacity and energy to the system. Alumni are involved in all of the government partnerships work of Teach For Romania. For the literacy project TFR alumni are trainers for non-TFR teachers in the system, and for the mentor programme, alumni play a similar leading role. Although alumni are not yet directly involved in public policy work, 1 in 5 state that they would like a long-term career in policy making and they are already very active in NGOs, policy advocacy and in digital education, working with 1000s of schools and teachers across the country.

Finally, Teach For Romania is also contributing to progress at the level of communities. In a village on the outskirts of Brasov where children were abandoning school at 14 or 15 with low academic outcomes and low

motivation, the first 30 students to attend high school in a long period of time have now graduated from primary thanks to the contribution of TFR fellows. This is thanks to a shift in culture that has involved parents and restored trust in the value of education. In another highly vulnerable community in the county of Brasov, where many people have no electricity and no address, and children are married very young, children are staying in school longer, parents are more open to working in partnership with outsiders, and the community is beginning to see more value in education, with some students getting the grades needed to go to high school.

The Choices

- 1 Partnership with the Ministry of Education** in order to scale up Teach For Romania's approaches to teacher training and school leadership development throughout the system
- 2 Mobilizing a critical mass of alumni** to bring capacity and energy to the education system, working first from outside the system, but with a long-term aim of working from within
- 3 Community partnership** that sees TFR teachers placed in the country's most vulnerable communities over the long-term, and where mindsets are now shifting

The Insights

- Extract essential parts of the programme and then scale them up – either through networks in schools and beyond, or through partnerships with the ministry of education and other relevant institutional actors.