



Sign of Life

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2022**

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**Support for Mothers & Children
Shelter for Refugees**





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FOREWORD

Dear Friends and Partners,

We will soon be celebrating 20 years of activity of the Sign of Life Association. Our journey thus far has been filled with challenges, but also with achievements and blessings. The Sign of Life Association has come to be recognized as a stable organization offering quality services.

During this time we have learned to work together as a team, both in times of crisis and in good times. The pandemic crisis and the war in Ukraine have been the two major challenges we have faced lately.

We are grateful to all those involved in the work of the association, who have contributed to the well-being of mothers and their children, giving them the opportunity for a good start, a healthy environment and an encouraging climate. Thank you for your support and for joining us on our mission. Special thanks to Auslandshilfe. Above all we thank God, who has called us and helped us to bring comfort and healing to those in need.

May reading this annual report bring you joy, hope and the desire to continue to support those in need.

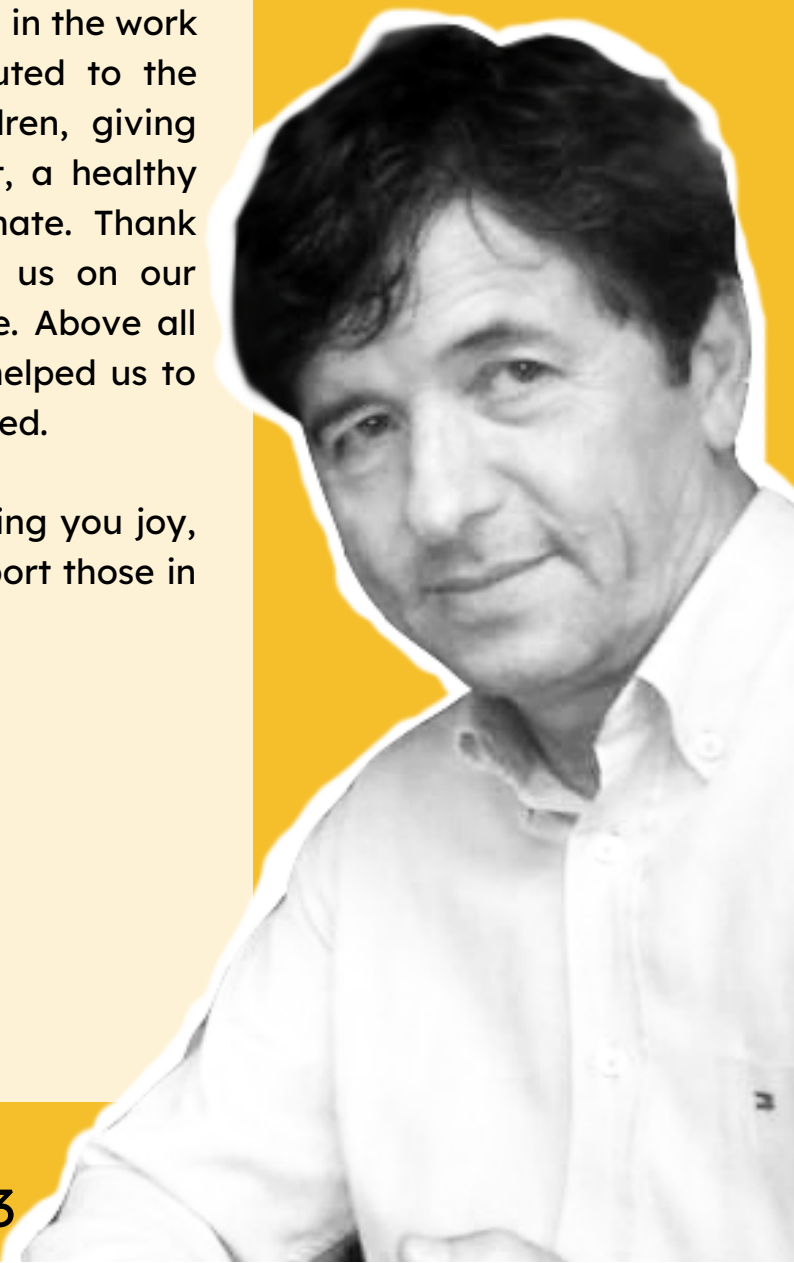
Sincere Appreciation,

PAVEL CHIRIȚESCU

President - Sign of Life Association



ANNUAL
REPORT
2020



ABOUT SIGN OF LIFE

The Sign of Life Association is a non-governmental organization, founded in 2003 as a response to the needs of Romanian society to solve the phenomenon of abandonment of newborns. We provide social services and social assistance to children at risk of abandonment and to other categories of disadvantaged people in Bucharest and its surroundings.

The Sign of Life Association's main activity is to protect and promote the rights of children and young people, aiming to prevent the separation of children from their mothers.



MISSION
VISION
MISSION
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VISION

OUR MISSION

Increasing the quality of life for disadvantaged groups, focusing on children at risk of abandonment.

OUR VISION

To provide a suitable environment for a harmonious physical and psychological growth of children in need.



2003-PRESENT RESULTS

Since 2003 the Sign of Life Association has been involved in the following activities:

600

abandoned children - cared for in hospitals

270 321

mothers and children have been helped to stay together through residential services

438

mothers were supported through the Mothers' School programme

616

families were supported in accessing social aid to raise their children



FAMILIES
FOSTER
MOTHERS
SOCIAL AID

INTRODUCTION

After a pandemic with an increased number of coronavirus cases, the year 2022 also brought the news of war on the Romanian border.

The effects of the war were both emotional and economic. These effects include explosive price rises, rising inflation, raised living expenses overall. Despite these difficulties, we decided to reorganise our resources and adapt to the situation in order to continue our work. We have striven to move forward and fulfil our mission.

In addition to the mothers and babies who were already residing in the centre, we provided rooms for families in Ukraine who had been affected by the war: women who had left their husbands behind to fight in the war, not knowing if they would see each other again; children displaced from family, home, school. We learned a lot from the life experiences of these struggling mothers, the uncertainty and insecurity they faced, and the emotional wounds and separations - not knowing if there would be a reunion.

We could say that our mission has expanded, as we also focused our attention and availability towards assisting Ukrainian babies and mothers in crisis situations. We gave our best to meet their basic needs, as well as provide emotional support to help them resist through these traumatic situations. We hoped to be able to transform the time spent in the centre into beautiful moments, and make Sign of Life a strong link in their transition to new opportunities in a secure future.



THE OTHER CHILDREN REFUGEE

RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS

The Association is running two residential programs, the "St. Michael and St. Gabriel" Maternal Centre and the "Social Housing".

ST.MICHAEL & ST.GABRIEL MATERNAL CENTRE

is a holistic programme that aims to prevent children from being separated from their families.

We offer residential care, which is the first important step towards a secure, family-like environment, and the support needed to overcome crisis situations. Our services are shaped into individualized programs for each mother-child couple according to their needs. We meet these needs with the bio-psycho-social model, providing ongoing medical care, psychological counselling, social counselling.

Mothers also learn and/or develop independent living skills. They learn how to plan and organise and conduct housekeeping activities.

We highly value the mother-child relationship, which is the most important factor for developing attachment in the early years. Mothers regularly take parenting, childcare and baby club lessons. We also consider the spiritual aspect to be particularly important in the process of overcoming a crisis situation, as it proved to be a regulating factor for the mothers who attended the spiritual meetings .



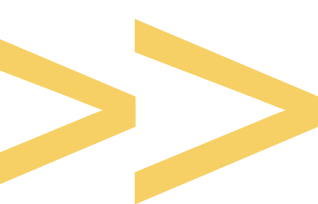
SOCIAL HOUSING

is a continuation of the maternal centre programme. After regaining their strength and developing resilience, the mothers are assisted in their integration into the work field, by helping them to find and keep a job. Mothers continue to receive support from the association by being allowed to live rent-free in a small apartment, they continue to receive counselling and material support.

After they have saved resources and have been helped and equipped to raise their children, they will integrate into the community or back into their families, as healthy, independent and reliable adults.

In 2022 the social housing was made available to Ukrainian refugees. The rooms were prepared for these families and they were provided with the necessary items: bed linen, hygiene products, clothes, children's toys, water, food, wi-fi connection, and financially - they would regularly receive an amount of money to support themselves during their stay in the centre. They also had access to our car and were accompanied to the embassy to apply for visas, or wherever they needed to submit their documents, and were also helped with translation. They received guidance, advice and support whenever they needed it and we tried to adapt, change or find solutions to some of their needs. We created the necessary spaces for their children to be able to study quietly and take their online classes, and our IT technician installed a new router next to their rooms so they can have a better connection. Mothers and toddlers were invited to join us in our daily outdoor and indoor activities. Each family confessed to us before leaving that they were very grateful for everything they received at Sign of Life and that they would never forget the support they received here.

PROZ
REZIL
SOCIA



The Sign of Life Association hosted
in 2022 18mothers and 25children.

INTERVENTIONS

457

social counselling meetings

306

psychological counselling meetings

173

educational meetings

287

medical appointments/interventions

185

devotional/spiritual meetings

120

telephone enquiries/directions

INTERVENTIONS
SIGN OF
INTERVENTIONS
PROVIDE
SIGN



RESULTS

INTEGRATION / REINTEGRATION

11 mothers are now independent: 9 have moved into rented accommodation, 1 was reintegrated into her family and 1 continued the Social Housing programme .

SOCIAL BENEFITS

9 mothers have been helped to obtain social benefits such as allowances, financial incentives, survivors' pensions and personal savings;

EDUCATIONAL

1 mother completed high school, got her high school diploma and enrolled in college;

1 mother started taking tutoring lessons for the baccalaureate exam;

1 mother resumed her high school classes, 1 mother resumed her secondary school classes through the Second Chance Program.

3 children were integrated into the nursery, 3 children were enrolled in school,

1 child enrolled in kindergarten, 3 refugee children continued their studies online.

PROFESSIONAL

1 mother was integrated into the job market;

MEDICAL

2 mothers got health insurance;

4 mothers have undergone mental health investigations and are following the treatment /therapy recommended by the psychiatrist.

4 children have had their diagnosis determined, obtained a disability certificate and are attending therapy sessions.

NON-RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS

The Sign of Life Association runs two non-residential programs, namely: the "Mothers' School" Program and the Social Aid Program.

PROJECT
NON-RESIDENTIAL
SCHOOL
MOTHERS
CHILDREN
SOCIAL

MOTHERS' SCHOOL PROGRAM

is an educational and social project that was launched in 2013 and is aimed at families that have underage or adult mothers with children aged 0-12 months, where we offer parenting lessons and counselling.

Beneficiaries also receive monthly material support for a period of 6-12 months consisting of: provision of formula milk, disposable diapers, clothing and footwear within the limits of possibilities, non-perishable and hygienic food.

>> **48** vulnerable and at-risk families benefited from the Mothers' School Programme in 2022.

SOCIAL AID PROGRAM

is aimed to families who have benefited from the residential services offered by the Sign of Life Association. They receive monthly aid consisting of non-perishable food, powdered milk, diapers, clothing and shoes - if available, household items, and social and psychological counselling when needed.

>> **39** families were supported on a monthly basis through the Social Aid Programme for the community in 2022.



ACTIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

INTERNATIONAL MOTHERS'/WOMEN'S DAY

On this holiday mothers are more aware of their role as mothers and are more appreciated by those around them through small and meaningful gestures, such as flowers or symbolic gifts. Because most of us (staff and residents) are women, this is a meaningful celebration. We had a special meal together and then enjoyed games and social activities, where we encouraged each other with words of appreciation.

EASTER

In April we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus together with the mothers and their babies. We enjoyed the pleasant moments and the sunny day in a family-like environment, with traditional dishes. In order to better understand the meaning of the Easter celebration we went on an Egg-Hunt and searched for symbols of the events before the crucifixion of Jesus. This hunt brought many smiles to the mothers' faces. Once we found the eggs, we brought them together to fill in the course of events and took a few moments to reflect on them.

SIGN OF
WOMEN
MOMENTS
2022
HIGHLIGHTS
MATERN





MARLIES LOUISE'S PAINTING WORKSHOP

Marlies Louis, a painter from Germany, and her husband, visited our centre. Her painting workshop was a therapeutic moment of relaxation, well received by both staff and beneficiaries.



ANKE AND JOST

In May we enjoyed the visit of our partners from Germany, Anke and Jost.

Anke shared with us her experience of working with children and gave us a new perspective of the educator. Jost also spent time with the beneficiaries, showing his interest in getting to know the life stories of the mothers more closely.



JUNE 1ST - INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DAY

It was a day of joy, and the mothers did creative activities with their children, such as drawing, face painting, decorating photo frames, and also received gifts from Sign of Life.



WORKSHOP
VISIT
PAINTING
MOMENTS
CHILDREN'S
DAY

UKRAINIAN CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAYS

VERONICA

On the first day the refugee family arrived at Semn de Viață, it was the birthday of their 12-year-old daughter. It was an unexpected surprise for her to receive a gift from us and celebrate her birthday in this way. But under the circumstances, it was a nice moment she enjoyed, and her mother was very grateful for it.

ABEL ALEXANDER

Little Abel turned 1 year old at our centre. The team brought a cake and a present for the little one to their room and sang "Happy Birthday" to him. Not expecting such a surprise, the mother was particularly excited. She was very pleased with the pleasant and warm atmosphere and the surprise on her little boy's first birthday.

WORKSHOPS

In 2022 we diversified our programmes, and included workshops held by specialists from different fields: medical, legal, parenting, spiritual, financial, psychological, social, protection and respect for freedoms and human rights. Topics discussed included:

- Stop Human Trafficking,
- Mechanism for the identification and referral of victims of human trafficking,
- How to obtaining a restraining order,
- The importance of proper money management,
- The importance of hygiene and following specialist recommendations for treatment,
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect,
- Questions and answers about guilt, forgiveness, healing,
- Personal development,
- Confidence-based education, etc.



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LEISURE TIME SOCIAL TIME



ACTIVE
OUTDOOR
FOR
PICNIC

PICNIC IN THE PARK

We took some time to go out and enjoy outdoor activities with both the mothers currently in the centre and former residents. We had a wonderful time where we shared experiences, socialized and participated in games.

VISITING TO THE ZOO

We went to visit the zoo and did various activities at the forest and in the park. It was the first time at the zoo for some of the mothers and they enjoyed the opportunity. The recreational activities helped us relax and get to know each other better.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Volleyball in the park, table tennis, badminton, picnics at the swimming pool were some of the activities the mothers enjoyed in our outings.



CAROL CONCERT

We decided to surprise the mothers and our volunteers, knowing that many of them have never had the opportunity to go to a carol concert. We booked tickets for each of them and went along. The mothers told us it was really nice, but they were especially touched by the words of the songs. We are glad that this event had an impact in their lives from a spiritual point of view as well.



CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

In December the mothers participated in holiday themed craft workshops and learned how to create greeting cards, they decorating the tree together, decorating the centre and their rooms, and also learned how to prepare the traditional Romanian Christmas menu. During this period, we also welcomed groups of carollers who brought us the good news and delighted us with their voices. They also offered presents to the mothers and children.

We also prepared the annual Christmas celebration, where we were able to share presents and sweets with 165 children in the community. It was an opportunity for us to give a little joy to the needy and to let them know the true meaning of Christmas.

THE TEAM SIGN OF LIFE

INCREASED

In 2022 we welcomed to our team Hannah (18) and Sophie (19), two young volunteers from Germany. They showed great warmth, gentleness and sensitivity in their interaction with the mothers and children at the centre. Together they created beautiful memories that will last for years to come.

Hannah and Sophie were a meaningful support in all practical activities: accompanying the mothers to the doctor, cooking with them, looking after the children when the mothers went to therapy or counselling, talking and empathizing with them in moments of fear and distress or accompanying them to the park. We really appreciate their involvement and the effort they put into supporting mothers and babies.

Simona joined the team in April on the administrative position. We like the warmth, enthusiasm, and optimism she shows in her relationship with people and in the activities of the centre. Simona tells us that she has integrated well into the team and enjoys the warm atmosphere.



EMPLOYEE TRAINING

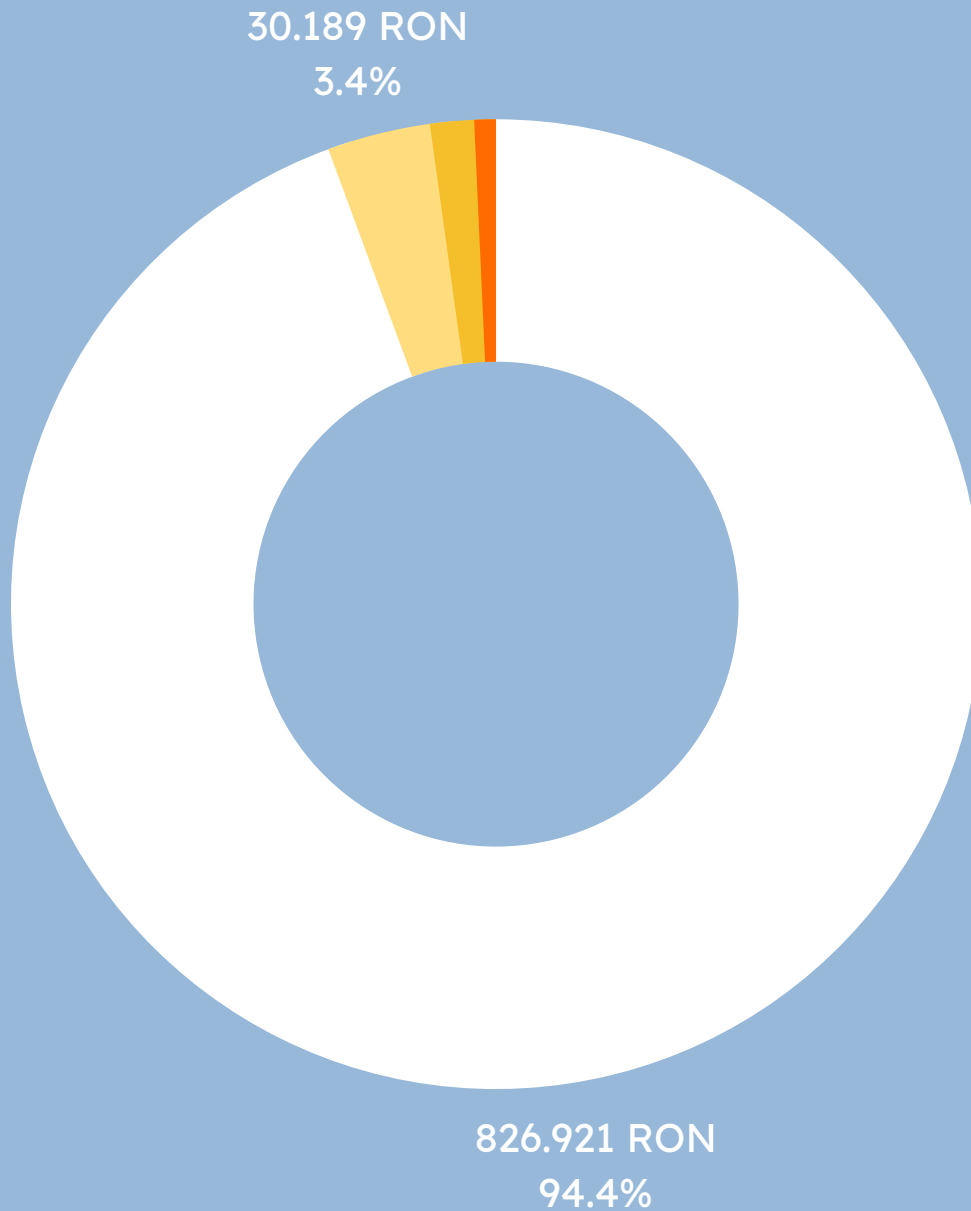
In the type of work carried out at Semn de Viață we encounter all kinds of challenges. Our team constantly needs specialised training in order to respond effectively in every situation. All team members have had the opportunity to attend training courses. By investing in the team, we can provide better help to those around us.



>> The Sign of Life team is a multidisciplinary team, consisting of an administrator, social workers, educators, a psychologist and a nurse who are involved daily in the activities and life of the mothers at the centre.

>> A network of volunteers has also been formed who get involved on a regular or occasional basis in the Association's activities when more people are needed; and a network of specialists in different fields who offer their services pro-bono to help the Association or mothers in their individual situations.

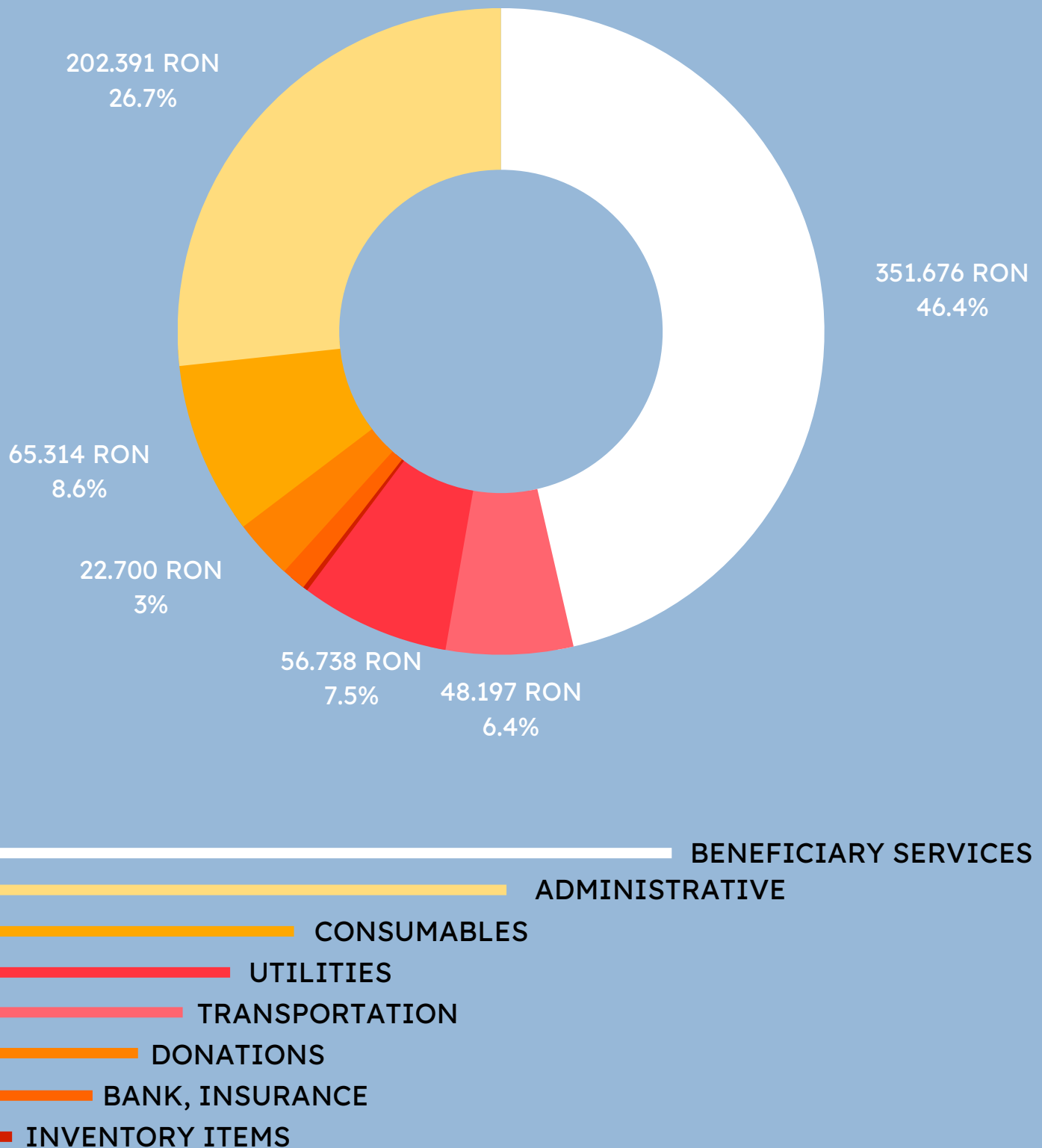
FINANCES



**BUND FREIER EVANGELISCHER
GEMEINDEN DEUTSCHLAND**

- ROMANIAN PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS
- FOREIGN PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS
- SOLD ASSETS

EXPENSES



CHALLENGES

UKRAINE

The key words of 2022 were CHALLENGE and ADAPTATION. During this period we adapted our work on how to respond to crisis situations and joined in the work to help our neighbors from Ukraine.

In addition to the 8 mothers and 10 children who were already in the centre, we hosted 8 mothers and 12 children refugees from Ukraine. All the staff mobilized and we prepared the rooms for our guests in advance, and provided them with the necessary equipment for living and they were pleasantly impressed. The mother of a 1 year old baby burst into tears when she entered the room, as she did not expect to be welcomed like this. Every gesture for them generated emotions and helped them feel more confident and secure in our space. All families received food and a regular amount of money to support themselves during their stay at the centre. We also provided them with the car of the association and they were accompanied to the embassy, for the visa application of those in transit, or wherever they needed to submit documents, they were also helped with translation.

Each departure was emotional. When they left, they told us that they would be grateful for the help they received from Sign of Life for the rest of their lives. This reminded us once again of the importance of our mission and the way we intervene directly in people's lives, helping them to overcome certain barriers that arise in their path, and reach the peace and security they long for.



CHALLENGE

MANUELA



Another challenge for 2022 was also the admission of a young pregnant girl, a Swiss citizen adopted by a Romanian family at the age of 4. Due to her relationship with a Roma man, her parents cut off her financial support, left her without health insurance and without documents to help us obtain an identity card. The parents' refusal to cooperate with us in the procedures for registering with a family doctor, carrying out pregnancy tests, obtaining the necessary documents for marriage, visa extension, child allowance, as well as the legislation in force made our work with difficulty in all our dealings with state institutions.

In spite of all the difficulties, we are thankful to God that we managed to get her a private medical insurance because she had cardiological problems, was supported throughout the medical course for childbirth, hospitalization, helped with transportation to appointments at institutions and in mediating the relationship with the family.

When Manuela left the centre, her passport was renewed, she got the social child support and child allowance, she and her partner were gifted with household items for their new home. Today, Manuela lives with her daughter's father, they have managed to build and furnish a room for themselves and their relationship with their family has improved.

MANUELA 2022

ISOLATION

In September we faced another wave of Covid 19 infections among both beneficiaries and staff. The mothers, their children and one of our colleagues tested positive. In this situation the whole activity required changes in office layout and internet signal.

Another measure was to isolate all mothers and children with our colleague for a period of 10 days. During all this time we kept in touch with each of them, procured and provided them with medicines, fruits and everything necessary to restore their health.

Our colleague successfully coordinated daily activities with the mothers and it was gratifying to see that they were willing to continue and stick to the program activities related to cooking, cleaning, sleeping and relaxation times.

Despite their health condition and fears of getting sick and being isolated at home, it was a good time because under our colleague's coordination they invested relationships and friendships were formed, making them feel more like a family.



CHALLENGE LOCKDOWN

HIGH PRICES, CHANGING MENTALITY, RESOURCES



The greatest challenge of 2022 was the outbreak of war in Ukraine with socio-economic consequences for all countries. The wave of price increases we witnessed required restructuring and readjustment to a different lifestyle. We realised that the actions and activities we had in our daily routine are affected and it is necessary to be more responsible with our financial and material resources in order to be able to continue helping people in disadvantaged situations. We were not sure that we would be able to provide the necessary milk powder and food for the beneficiaries of the association's programmes.

Excessively high electricity and gas bills have led us to implement new resource management rules in both centres. Both the staff and the mothers worked daily to reduce electricity and water consumption, to stop throwing away cooked food and to ensure an average temperature inside the rooms and the centre. Another challenge was helping the beneficiaries understand and accept the importance of a new mindset about resource management, adapting to a different lifestyle. It was vital for the team to be consistent in supporting and monitoring the mothers in applying the new rules.

FREQUENT ILLNESSES OF CHILDREN

A worrying aspect was also the fact that during the autumn-winter period the negligence of mothers in caring for their children led to repeated illnesses among young children and even their admission for serious situations. The ambulance service was often called, mothers were given frequent medical advice and encouraged to go to the family doctor and administer recommended treatments correctly, avoid crowded places, provide food and clothing appropriate to the season for themselves and their children, be responsible in hygiene, rest and health progress, keep in touch and attend medical appointments.

The challenge for the whole team was to individually monitor the mothers on the correct and compliant administration of the treatment and diet recommended by the doctor.

The lack of responsibility of the mothers, the frequent illnesses of the children, their hospitalisation and the cost of the necessary medicines affected our budget, so we had to find a way to manage these actions. In this context, and with a view to making beneficiaries financially responsible, it was decided that each mother would contribute a percentage, depending on her income, to the payment of medicines for her children when they fall ill. The method applied has brought positive results, seeing that the mothers have begun to pay particular attention to their children's health.



PARTNERSHIPS

- General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection, sector 3
- General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection, sector 4
- General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection, sector 6
- PASTEL Association
- Salvation Army
- Lions Club International
- ANAIS Association
- SOLWODI Association
- Adventist Development, Rehabilitation and Relief Association, ADRA Romania
- SensiBlu Foundation
- Women's Association of Sibiu
- Reformed Church HOUSE OF HOPE
- German Christian Women's House Association, ESTERA
- TOUCHED Romania

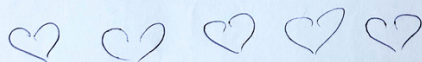


TESTIMONIES

OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

They were deeply impressed by the way Life Sign received them and offered them unconditionally all the necessary things. They felt safe, at home, in a new family that sheltered them when they were in the most desperate situation of their lives.

Nu știu și nu există niciun cuvânt care să-mi exprime recunoștința și sentimentele inimii mele. M-ai înconjurat cu fiica ta, atenție, grijă și sprijin în această perioadă grea a vieții. Ai ajutat cu produse delicioase, ai dat tot ce este necesar pentru viață, ca să nu avem nevoie de nimic și bani pentru a ne răsfăța. Sunteți oameni cu majuscule. Zâmbetul pe buze, ospitalitatea și bunătatea sunt de neuitat și sincer vă vom uita niciodată această primizie caldușoasă pe care ati oferit-o. Vă mulțumim foarte mult. Urias cu grozav. Mulțumiri



Im, Hettiia Liana (19.03.1979) lived with their children: Shchorchuk Inna (26.04.2005), Hettiia Aleksandr Abel (17.03.2021) in the center 'Sign of Life' from March 10 to April 9, 2022.

We leave the center because we are going to Spain for permanent residence. tomorrow 10.04.2022.

We are very grateful to the staff and volunteers of the center for their moral and material support. You are doing important work at such a difficult time for Ukrainians fleeing the war... Thank you very much for your help, may the God protect you óóó

09.04.2022

YOU CAN BE PART OF THIS CHANGE

By getting involved, you can give a child the joy of growing up in their family and a good start in developing into a healthy, confident and socially engaged adult.

INDIVIDUALS

Redirect 3.5% of your income tax

Any individual in Romania with income in the previous year can opt to redirect 3.5% of the taxes they pay anyway to a non-profit organisation.

Direct Donations

You can donate as much as you like, to support the cause of the Sign of Life Association our the bank accounts:

EURO: RO85BRDE445SV24630634450

USD: RO56BRDE445SV25252014450

Be a Volunteer

You can participate in changing a child's destiny by volunteering. You can use your time and support the cause by getting involved in charitable activities according to your abilities.

LEGAL ENTITIES, COMPANIES AND ENTERPRISES

- Redirect 20% of your income tax

Companies have the possibility to direct or donate funds, goods or services at no additional cost through sponsorship actions, using a tax facility provided for in Order 1679/2022 of the Fiscal Code.

SPONSORS & SUPPORTERS

FeG  Auslandshilfe



Biserica Evanghelică
AVIAȚIEI



PRIVATE ROMANIAN AND FOREIGN INDIVIDUALS