



Asociația Națională
a Birourilor de Consiliere
pentru Cetățeni

2008 Annual report

NACAB and the Development of CAB Network



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EUROPEAN UNION

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a Birourilor de Consiliere
pentru Cetățeni**

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Advice Bureaux**

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„NACAB's Institutional and Operational Consolidation”, Phare Programme 2006/018-147.01.02 – Increasing the Role of Civil Society in Romania's Integration Process, Component 1 – Citizens Advice Bureaux, 1.2 Consolidation of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

This material is issued by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB).

Bucharest, March 2009.

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2008

**NACAB and the Development
of CAB Network**

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX**



**Asociația Națională
a Birourilor de Consiliere
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This material is issued under the project „NACAB's Institutional and Operational Consolidation”, implemented by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB), with the financial support of the European Union through Phare Programme 2006/018-147.01.02 – Increasing the Role of Civil Society in Romania's Integration Process, Component 1 – Citizens Advice Bureaux, 1.2 Consolidation of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

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NACAB in 2008

2008 represented for NACAB a contribution to the development of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) network. The NACAB's network of CABs was engaged in a process of public consultation with regards to the strategic directions to be pursued by NACAB in the future. By the same token, 2008 brought about a series of training sessions for the network of CABs – the CAB personnel acquired skills in offering information and advice to citizens, Management, PR & Marketing, strategic planning and organizational management, and accessing structural funds. Moreover, in 2008 the CAB network was promoted through the organization of a national event (*Forum of Public Information in Romania – One Step Closer to Citizens*) and a series of local public events on matters pertaining to the topic of the European Parliament and its impact on citizens (*Citizen Fora – a Parliament Closer to Citizens*).

NACAB's Strategy 2008 – 2012: Consolidating NACAB's capacity to offer, through its network of CABs, qualitative services of information & advice, and support to the CABs for the promotion of citizens' interest in the process of public policy making at the local and national level.

For an overview of the NACAB's activities in 2007, please see the Annual Report of NACAB at: <http://www.robcc.ro/raports/Raport%20ANBCC%20eng.pdf>.

In terms of institutional development, 2008 created the pre-requisites for NACAB's expansion of services delivery. The knowledge acquired by the CAB personnel, the public events in which NACAB and the CABs were involved – all these will undoubtedly contribute to NACAB becoming, on the long run, an important actor in public policy making, both at the national and local level.

NACAB Vision: In 2012, NACAB is a consolidated organization, renowned at national and international level, having extensive experience in services provided for citizens and being actively involved in influencing the public policy making at the local and national level.

Following the NACAB General Assembly (GA), on September 26-28, 2008, the network of CABs consists of 40 functional CABs that operate at the required standards. These CABs function in more than 60 localities in Romania (CABs' subunits included). The NACAB GA in 2008 elected new members for the NACAB Council of Directors (CoD) (Marian Daragiu – President, Alin Dumitru – Vice-President, Andra Dojană - General Secretary, Cristinel Neagu – member of CoD, Istvan Mihaly – member of CoD, Olimpia Neagu – member of CoD, Petru Olariu – member of CoD). Mr. Alexandru Blaj was elected NACAB's President of Honour.

CAB Geography

The CABs cover the majority of Romanian regions, functioning in: *Bucharest (2 CABs), Alba Iulia, Arad, Baia Mare, Berghin (Alba County), Botoşani, Brăila, Braşov, Buzău, Călăraşi, Cluj Napoca, Câmpia Turzii, Copşa Mică, Cugir, Focşani, Gheorgheni (Harghita County), Grădiştea (Brăila County), Gurahonţ (Hunedoara County), Iaşi, Jimbolia, Lipova, Ploieşti, Negreşti Oaş, Nehoiu (Buzău County), Odorheiu Secuiesc, Oradea, Piatra Neamţ, Piteşti, Roman, Satu Mare, Sfântu Gheorghe, Sibiu, Simeria, Târgovişte, Târgu Neamţ, Timişoara, Turnu Severin, Țigăneşti (Teleorman County), Vulcan.*

** Apart from the 40 CABs, NACAB has also CAB subunits covering, in total, more than 60 localities of Romania, both in urban and rural milieus.*

For an overview of NACAB members' activities in 2008, please see the brochure of NACAB in Romanian language at:

http://www.robcc.ro/publicatii_bcc/1043021044843751_ro.pdf.

NACAB Mission: Citizens should not be deprived of information about their rights and duties and about the social services they are entitled to use!

NACAB, in the Name of the Citizen!



2008 laid the foundations of a both thorough and necessary internal organizational analysis for NACAB. Following the regional meetings, NACAB members analyzed and agreed upon the priorities to be taken into account by the organization in the future. In the second part of 2008, the NACAB General Assembly adopted the strategy for developing and consolidating the activities of the network in the form agreed upon during the regional meetings.

We have tried, during this process of organizational analysis, to encompass and to observe the Mission of NACAB - Citizens should not be deprived of information about their rights and duties and about the social services they are entitled to use! And we have definitely succeeded in our endeavor. In 2009, we will continue to work in the name of the citizen!

Marian Daragiu, NACAB President

For NACAB, 2008 was a year dedicated to tackling challenges and implementing interesting projects. Although 2008 brought about few changes at NACAB – new members of the NACAB Council of Directors (CoD), new members of the NACAB Executive Secretariat – these merely contributed to our endeavor in continuing the implementation of the projects, in generating new project ideas, and in involving in advocacy activities, in the framework of coalitions in which NACAB takes part.

Taking into consideration the fact that one of NACAB's responsibilities consists in developing and supporting the network of CABs, in 2008 we continued to provide training sessions and promotion assistance for the CAB personnel. At the same time, we elaborated the strategy of NACAB through a consultative process.



In plus, since we are members of the EU, we succeeded to bring EU information closer to Romanian citizens through Citizen Fora organized with the support of the CABs. Thus, we offered the possibility of people taking part in the events to express their views with regards to the future of Europe.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all that contributed to the successes of NACAB in 2008! The accomplishments contained in this report could not have been possible without the support of NACAB members, CAB managers and advisors, CoD members, my peers from the NACAB Executive Secretariat, and of NACAB donors that helped us to envision a world in which information is as closer as possible to citizens. Together we can continue to provide information and assistance at highest standards to all citizens coming to CABs

Mioara Chifu, NACAB Executive Director

Project Implementation - A Synthesis

In terms of project implementation, NACAB implemented (is implementing) six distinct projects:

- **Strengthening NACAB's Capacity to Support Citizens Advice Bureaux – A Step Forward towards a Long Term Sustainability**, January 2007 – December 2008, financed by Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The project aims at improving citizens' access to information and advice services concerning their rights and duties. Total budget: 100 000 USD.
- **Public Information Campaign – Mine Closure, Environmental and Socio-Economic Regeneration Project**, January 2007 – June 2008, financed by the World Bank. The project aims at assisting the Romanian National Agency for Development of the Mining Regions (NADMR) in developing a communication strategy for over 100 local communities in the mining areas. NACAB's budget: 224 830 USD.
- **Citizens' Right to Know!**, March 2007 – March 2009, financed by CEE Trust, Trust for Civil Society in Central & Eastern Europe. The project aims at promoting equitable access of citizens to independent and free of charge advice and information services through increasing the support of the local and national authorities to NGOs providing independent, free of charge advice and information services for citizens. Total budget: 84 850 USD.
- **NetworCAB – Development of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux**, December 2007 – October 2008, financed by the European Union through Phare 2005 Programme. The project aims at supporting the NACAB member NGOs in order to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the services provided by the network of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Total budget: 91 000 EURO.
- **Discover the EP! - Citizen Forum**, September – November 2008, financed by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in Romania and the European Parliament Information Office in Romania (EPIORO). The project aims at raising awareness with regards to the role and

responsibility of the European Parliament (EP). The project was implemented in five localities in Romania. Total budget: 2 750 EURO.

- ➔ **NACAB's Institutional and Operational Consolidation**, December 2008 – September 2009, financed by the European Union through Phare 2006 Programme. The project aims at consolidating NACAB's institutional and operational capacity to respond to network and members' needs, in the context of EU accession. Total budget: 134 703 EURO.

Among the six above mentioned projects, one of them is a services contract (**Public Information Campaign – Mine Closure, Environmental and Socio-Economic Regeneration Project**); one is a general purposes grant offered by Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (**Strengthening NACAB's Capacity to Support Citizens Advice Bureaux – A Step Forward Towards a Long Term Sustainability**); one is the result of the cooperation between NACAB, KAS and EPIORO (**Discover the EP! - Citizen Forum**); and the other three are projects implemented exclusively by NACAB (**Citizens' Right to Know!**, **NetworCAB – Development of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux**, and **NACAB's Institutional and Operational Consolidation**).

The activities of any CAB are based on the following principles, whose purpose is to ensure maximum accessibility for any member of the community:

- Independence from political, religious, business or any other type of interest;
- Impartiality. CAB offers its services to all citizens, regardless of their social status, education, religious affiliation, gender, financial status, ethnicity;
- Free of charge. The absence of any kind of fee enables citizens from any social category to benefit from information and advice;
- Confidentiality. The advisers have the obligation to keep the confidentiality of the information shared with them by the citizens and the obligation not to share personal data outside the CAB.

Training Sessions for CAB Personnel - Knowledge for Developing Information & Advice Services

Information and Advice for CABs

On April 7 – 12, 2008 NACAB organized a training session for the CAB personnel. The training session aimed at providing the participants with basic skills in interacting with citizens that access the services offered by the CABs. The 16 CAB representatives participating in the session were familiarized with techniques for communicating with citizens, manners for providing the CAB services to beneficiaries. A great deal of the training curricula was dedicated to making participants aware of their role in the communities in which CABs function, as well as of their self-awareness with regards to the relationship between the citizens and the CAB advisors in the process of offering information and advice (e. g. principles of CAB services, techniques for interviewing, the process of verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening and supportive communication).

The training session was especially designed for those newly employed members of CAB team to familiarize them with regards to the manner in which the services of information and advice are to impact the communities in which they are delivered. Thus, the awareness and self-awareness components played a key role in the above mentioned training session. In plus, the trained participants had the chance to replicate the acquired knowledge upon their return in the CAB team.

This training session was delivered with the support of the NACAB pool of trainers. The NACAB trainers that delivered this session were: Iulia Mihali (former representative of CAB Sibiu) and Roda Niță (representative of CAB Bucharest, sector 6). All the materials were made available to NACAB members and are part of the NACAB training curricula.

Management, PR & Marketing for CABs

On March 31 – April 5, 2008 NACAB organized a training session for the CAB personnel in matters pertaining to management and public relations. The training session was destined to the representatives of the executive echelon within the CABs. During the 6 days of training, the session covered topics related to

organizational management, HR and financial management. At the same time, the participants were familiarized with elements of communication and PR (media relations and event management), coupled with a module on Marketing for the NGO sector. 15 CAB representatives took part in the training session on Management, PR & Marketing.

The training session was especially designed for those that already have a working background in a CAB. As compared to the previous training session, this training



was rather aimed at building upon the management strata within a Citizen Advice Bureau. Thus, the training session prepared the participants to better coordinate the activities of the CABs, as well as to propose strategic directions for the CAB activities in the future. The marketing module played a key role in the training session, as the participants were given the

theoretical tools for elaborating a marketing plan for the CAB services, especially tailored on the community specificities in which CABs function.

The training session was delivered with the support of the NACAB pool of trainers. The NACAB trainers that delivered this session were: Olimpia Neagu (representative of CAB Satu Mare) and Luminița Tășica (former representative of CAB Bucharest). All the materials were made available to NACAB members and are part of the NACAB training curricula.

Strategic Planning and Organizational Development for CABs

This training session was organized in the framework of regional meetings for CAB representatives. NACAB organized 4 such training sessions for the CABs in: Băile Felix (May 24 – 25, 2008), Brașov (June 7 – 8, 2008), Sibiu (June 14 – 15, 2008), and Târgu Neamț (June 28 – 29, 2008). All the above mentioned training sessions were aimed at providing the CAB representatives with the theoretical

tools for NGO strategic planning and organizational development. A number of 45 individuals (CAB representatives, NACAB Executive Secretariat representatives, NACAB CoD representatives) took part in the 4 training sessions.

During the training sessions, the participants were taught how to draw a vision and a mission for an NGO. Being designed as a contribution to the process of organizational development for NACAB, the training session touched upon the idea of creating and maintaining an organizational culture for bodies similar to NACAB. The participants were delivered knowledge on how to grasp and analyze an organizational culture, with a special focus on the status of NACAB, as an organization of organizations.

Furthermore, the participants were encouraged, within the broader framework of regional meetings, to propose a coherent vision for NACAB and to propose modifications to few of NACAB's official documents (NACAB's Strategy of Development, Functioning Standards for the CABs, NACAB Procedure of Adhesion, and NACAB Procedure of Exclusion).

The training sessions were delivered with the support of the NACAB pool of trainers. Olimpia Neagu (representative of CAB Satu Mare) delivered the sessions. All the materials were made available to NACAB members and are part of the NACAB training curricula.

Structural Funds for NGOs

On September - October 2008, NACAB organized a series of three training sessions on the issue of Structural Funds on which the CAB network is eligible as applicant. The three sessions were organized in: Târgu Neamț (September 12 – 14, 2008), Sibiu (September 19 – 21, 2008), and Sinaia (October 3 – 5, 2008). The training sessions were aimed at familiarizing the participants with the problematic of accessing structural funds in Romania. A number of 37 individuals (CAB representatives, NACAB Executive Secretariat representatives, NACAB CoD representatives etc.) took part in the three training sessions.

The training sessions took into account the details of the main financing programs within the structural funds on which the NGO sector is eligible as applicant. In plus, the participants had the chance to acquire specific techniques

entailing writing proposals on structural funds through exercising topics related to defining goal and objectives, and describing activities for few project ideas developed in the sessions. Moreover, the CAB representatives participating in the training sessions were put in contact with information related to budget elaboration on such financing opportunities.

Since the idea of partnership as a key in implementing projects on structural funds constituted a starting point for the three training session, the CABs representatives also took into account the possibility of concluding regional partnerships between the CAB supporting NGOs in order to submit project proposals on these financing opportunities.

The training sessions were delivered with the support of the NACAB pool of trainers. Ștefan Olteanu (representative of CAB Ploiești) delivered the sessions. All the materials were made available to NACAB members and are part of the NACAB training curricula.

All the above mentioned training sessions delivered by NACAB to its members are constitutive part of the organization's long term strategy, as they provide the CAB personnel with best skills and best knowledge in order to better respond to citizens' information needs. The training sessions covered subjects a CAB would need to attain in order to better its functioning: means and methods of interacting with citizens (Training on Information and Advice for CABs), management and execution (Training on Management, PR & Marketing for CABs), and particular subjects (Strategic Planning and Organizational Development for CABs; Structural Funds for NGOs).

The services of advice provided for citizens are based on the use of a national information management system that is constantly updated. The information management system contains all updates and changes made to legal provisions that are relevant to the domains administered by the CABs as well as specific information at local level.

Public Consultation at NACAB - Modelling a Collaborative Vision

During 2008, NACAB was engaged in a series of **network meetings** for its members. In these meetings, NACAB managed to achieve an unprecedented result, counting as one of the major organizational development and internal communications-related successes since its founding: changing three NACAB founding documents through an extensive consultative process with its members.

The network meetings (regional meetings) were organized in 4 regions in Romania: **North** - Băile Felix (May 24 – 25, 2008), **South** and **South-East** - Braşov (June 7 – 8, 2008), **Center** and **North-West** - Sibiu (June 14 – 15, 2008), and **East** - Târgu Neamţ (June 28 – 29, 2008). During these meetings, NACAB proposed a consultative model for its members in two distinct areas: drafting a strategy of development and proposing modifications on few of NACAB's official documents (Functioning Standards for the CABs, NACAB Procedure of Adhesion, and NACAB Procedure of Exclusion).

The methods used in the consultative process were: brainstorming sessions, facilitated discussions between CAB representatives, exercises of strategic thinking, impact analysis of the NACAB's official documents. The regional meetings benefited from the presence of 45 persons representing the NACAB Executive Secretariat, the NACAB CoD, the CABs, and the NGOs supporting CABs.

The regional meetings were aimed at creating a framework of consultative process, thus contributing to the consolidation of a participatory organizational

NACAB Vision: In 2012, NACAB is a consolidated organization, renowned at national and international level, having extensive experience in services provided for citizens and being actively involved in influencing the public policy making at the local and national level.

culture at NACAB. On short term, the meetings envisaged a common vision for the development of NACAB. On long term, NACAB is committed to replicate the model of consultations in matters related to the development of the organization.

With regards to NACAB's Strategy of Development, the consultative process

was proved to be conducive to a coherent vision for the development of the organization. All participants were stimulated to create a vision for NACAB on medium run, taking into consideration the statutory mission of the organization, their expectations and their experiences in working in the field of information and advice for citizens.

As a result of the four regional meetings organized in 2008, the members also proposed modifications to the Functioning Standards of the CABs, NACAB Procedure of Adhesion, and the Procedure of Exclusion from NACAB. As the above mentioned documents were elaborated in 2003, the NACAB members managed, through a process of impact analysis organized in the framework of the regional meetings, to propose modifications to the above mentioned documents.

The modifications, being put forward to the decision of the NACAB General Assembly were concerning: lowering the standards for CABs (mainly with regards to requirements related to infrastructure) as for all the CABs to be able to expand their services to as many communities as possible; creating reinforcements for the provisions contained in the Procedure of Exclusion from NACAB; redrafting the stages for adhesion to NACAB to easily permit to other interested NGOs to take part in NACAB (the modification merely concern surpassing few of the administrative stages in which an organization was supposed to pass through, prior to its accession to NACAB).

Undoubtedly, the consultative process organized in the framework of regional meetings counts for one of the most notable successes NACAB registered in 2008, as far as organizational development and membership cohesion are concerned. The resulting strategy of development, together with the proposals of modification was endorsed by the NACAB GA in its September session.

The NACAB GA was organized on September 26 - 28, 2008 and represented a strategic turn in the organization's development. Taking into account the context in which the NGO sector functions in Romania (diminishing of funding opportunities other than the EU ones; fostering of large-scale programs with the accession of structural funds etc.), the NACAB GA was engaged in a process of strategic thinking & planning with regards to the development and challenges NACAB will face in the future.

On the one hand, the members were proposed a Strategy of Development for NACAB in 2008 – 2012 and a Strategy of Development for the CABs in small cities and urban milieus. The latter one aims at acknowledging the differences in services provided by the CABs functioning in small cities and urban milieus and proposes in consequence specific strategic directions, in line with the CAB functioning standards and the NACAB overall strategy (e.g. activities to stimulate local development, partnerships with public institutions at County level etc.).

On the other hand, the members took into account the modifications to NACAB's official documents - Functioning Standards of the CABs, NACAB Procedure of Adhesion, and the Procedure for Exclusion from NACAB. Following the consultative process, the members of NACAB CoD assigned a special committee (formed of both Executive Secretariat representatives and CoD representatives) the responsibility to synthesize the proposals and to draft the new versions of the documents to be put on GA's agenda. After the GA debates, the above mentioned documents were voted in the new version.

At the General Assembly, the NACAB members took into account both the activities of the successful CABs within the network and the activities of those CABs that did not meet the minimum standards for functioning due to last years' financial constraints. The topic of CAB sustainability was discussed after a thorough evaluation of the services offered by each CAB. Following the GA, 9 members (NGOs supporting CABs) were withdrawn the membership status within NACAB.

Moreover, in order to enhance the network's efficiency, the NACAB members reiterated the idea of observing the CABs functioning standards, both with respect to quality of services provided and to minimum requirements for functioning (i.e. Functioning Standards of the CABs).

NACAB members all agreed that the network of CABs reached the level of development in which it could develop on the statistically significant cases from citizens, turning them into issues on the Romanian public agenda. NACAB has both the potential and capability to act as an actor in influencing the public policy making through the direct contact it entertains with citizens and their needs of information.

NACAB - Surfacing the Expansion of Services Delivery

In 2008, NACAB was engaged in a long-term process of services delivery expansion for the network of CABs. The process aims at creating new means of interacting with citizens (i.e. activities that could go beyond the framework of providing services of information and advice) and new areas for CAB activities (i.e. advocacy on the issue of public information in Romania, advocacy on free movement of workers within the EU). The idea of services delivery expansion was surfaced in 2008 through launching of studies and launching of public campaigns in the above mentioned fields.

On January 15, 2008 NACAB launched in Romania the study of European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) *Who's Afraid of the EU's Latest Enlargement?* The study was simultaneously launched in Bucharest, Sofia, and Brussels. NACAB was ECAS's partner in the launching of the study in Romania. The study was launched in Sofia by the International Association for Peaceful and United Europe (IAPUE), Bulgaria.

Having a special focus on free movement for workers within the EU, the study analyzes the impact brought about by the newcomers Romania and Bulgaria at the level of the EU labor market. ECAS's study highlights that the flow of Romanian workers migrating to other member states is almost the

same as in the pre-accession period. In plus, the study *Who's Afraid of the EU's Latest Enlargement?* acknowledges a change in the composition of the determinants for a person wanting to obtain a job in out of her/his home country. Cultural proximity and language affinities with the host country are as important as the main pre-accession determinant, which marched on the idea of financial gains.

"This report [i.e. ECAS's study] ought finally to put to rest the myth of the Polish plumber. There is no need to fear the EU's latest enlargement, any more than the previous one. [...] Restrictions based on exaggerated predictions of an influx of job-seekers or a deviation of mobility to countries opening up their labor markets proved unfounded. Transitional measures were taken after the horse bolted."

Tony Venables, ECAS Director

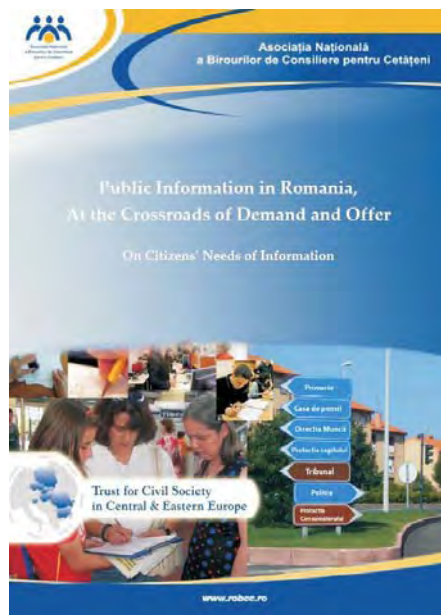
The launch of the study is part of the NACAB's long term strategy with regards to supporting the rights of Romanian citizens exercising free movement. NACAB has an experience of almost 3 years in the field of supporting EU citizenship and EU rights. With the launch of the study, NACAB becomes a relay in communicating the EU problematic and EU affairs to the Romanian public sphere.

On March 31, 2008 NACAB launched its study *Public Information in Romania, at the Crossroads of Demand and Offer – On Citizens' Needs of Information*. NACAB's Study represents an analysis on a survey in October 1-20, 2008 on a representative sample of 1050 individuals from 60 localities in Romania (both in urban and rural milieus) and 3 districts in Bucharest.

Starting from the idea that there is a market in the realm of providing information, with demand and offer, the study takes into consideration Romanians' perceptions with regards to the services of information provided by the public institutions. Which are the most accessed institutions for receiving information? How satisfied are Romanians with regards to the system of information provided by the public institutions? What domains of information do Romanians prefer? – these are the questions to which the NACAB's study tried to offer answers.

The most accessed institutions by Romanians are: the Family Practice (78% of the population) and the City Hall (67% of the population). With regards to the satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the services of information, the City Hall represents a peculiar case in itself: out of those 67% that accessed the services of information provided by this institution, 12% declare that they had difficulties in interacting with it.

Moreover, NACAB's study analyzes the most accessed domains of information, as reflected in citizens' needs of information. An evaluation of the services existing on the market of public information shows



that the offer of information can be structured in two distinct packages of information: the social package (health, medical services, pensions, children protection etc.) and the development package (education and opportunities related to professional development, consumer's protection, accession of EU funds, loans etc.). From the total population, 22% of the citizens declare that they do not have any needs of information, 22% of the citizens prefer the development package, and 56% of the citizens prefer the social package.

Following the launch of the study, NACAB engaged in a public campaign advocating for a coherent system of public information in Romania. The campaign is scheduled to continue in 2009, involving nine localities where CABs function: Brăila, Bucharest (sector 6), Cluj-Napoca, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Focșani, Gheorgheni, Ploiești, Satu Mare, and Timișoara.

Considering that a substantial service of public information could be delivered by public institutions well aware of the citizen's needs of information, the NACAB's campaign seeks to: determine public institution to thoroughly analyze their own activities in the realm of providing information; raise awareness with regards to elaborating comprehensive strategies to meet citizens' needs of information (on a needs-based approach); raise awareness with regards efficiency-driven mechanisms in providing services of public information, mechanisms that should entail a framework of structuring all the information-related expenses within the institutions' budgetary schemes.

The partners of NACAB in implementing the campaign are: Lumina Foundation (Brăila), The Romanian Group for Defending Human Rights - GRADO (Bucharest), Citizens Advice Bureaux in Cluj-Napoca, EquiLibre Association (Drobeta Turnu Severin), The Association for Community Partnership (Focșani), Pro Cive Association (Gheorgheni), The Scientists' Foundation in Prahova (Ploiești), Romanian League for Defending Human Rights - LADO (Satu Mare), The Lodgers' Association Federation in Timișoara.

The campaign is part of the project "Citizens' Right to Know!", implemented by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB), with support from CEE Trust, Trust for Civil Society in Central & Eastern Europe.

2008 - Year of Fora @ NACAB

In 2008, NACAB organized a series of public events both at local and national level. All events were constructed as fora – public meetings for open discussions. All these events undoubtedly contributed to NACAB's image as interlocutor in the debate involving citizens' rights and responsibilities and public institutions' responsibilities to meet citizens' needs.



On October 22, 2008, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux organized the national event *Forum of Public Information in Romania – One Step Closer to Citizens*. The event took place in Bucharest and focused on the idea of public information in Romania, with special focus on services of information provided both by the public sector and NGO sector.

The participants in NACAB's Forum were representatives of the central public institutions (Departments of Communication and Public Relations within the Romanian Ministries), representatives of the local public institutions (Bureaus of Information within the City Halls), and representatives of the non-governmental sector. Starting from the thesis that a stimulating civic participation can be achieved firstly by having in place a coherent system of public information, the participants in NACAB's Forum shared their experiences and good practices examples in communicating with the Romanian citizens.

The conclusions of the Forum brought about the idea of a strengthened relationship between the NGO sector and the public institutions' departments in charge with communicating with citizens, in achieving citizens' best interest. According to participants' opinions, this needs to be done especially with regards to organizing public debates and public consultations. Moreover, starting from the experience registered by the NGOs in their process of reaching out to citizens, the participants all agreed that the public institutions need to improve their mechanisms in directly communicating with citizens. In this respect, a special emphasis was made to mobilizing citizens in the decision making at the local level,

which institutions should learn from the NGO sector.

The *Forum of Public Information in Romania – One Step Closer to Citizens* grounds NACAB's interest in offering qualitative and reliable services of information and advice to Romanian citizens. Once Romania joined the EU, the citizens' needs of information are in continuous change with respect to domains of interest and sources of information. Thus, the concept of public information is linked to the idea of citizen information and citizens' needs of information.

“We need to do more with regards to communicating with citizens, especially since we are in the same boat: we all want Romanian citizenship to rhyme with consistent information and active participation.”

**Marian Daragiu,
NACAB President**

During September – November, 2008 the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, in partnership with the European Parliament Information Office in Romania (EPIORO) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in Romania, organized Citizen Fora in 5 localities in Romania, on the topic of the European Parliament (EP) and its impact on citizens.

The Citizen Fora were organized in: Târgoviște (September 18, 2008), Brăila (October 29, 2008), Braşov (November 4, 2008), Focşani (November 6, 2008), and Ploieşti (November 21, 2008).

Organized with the support of Citizens Advice Bureaux in the above mentioned 5 localities, the format of Citizen Forum took into consideration aspects pertaining to the future of Europe (the level of representation that the EP enjoys at the European level), the European citizenship and the European elections (the mechanisms entailing a concept of active/participatory citizenship). The Citizen Forum is a platform for debates organized in all the member states on issues pertaining to EU, with the participation of all stakeholders involved in the EU matters, in general.

The goal of the 5 Fora was to allow citizens to express their opinions with regards to the future of Europe. The presentations delivered by either the MEPs invited to the event or the representatives of EPIORO were followed by debates with the participants representing the local public authorities and the NGO sector in the community.

The concept of Citizen Forum represents the EP's contribution to the debate concerning the future of Europe.

The *fora* are meant to create a milieu for dialogue with citizens of Europe, thus contributing to civic participation in debating over the role and responsibility of the European Parliament, as the main representation institution at the level of the EU. By the same token, the *fora* facilitate a framework of interaction between the local, regional, and national authorities, focusing on themes of interest for the communities and being united through the same format for debate. Since September 2006, the *Citizen Fora* have become a correlative of decentralized communication strategies in Europe.

The Citizen Fora benefited from the participation of: Silvia Adriana Țicău (MEP), Dragoș David (MEP), Bogdan Munteanu (journalist on EU Affairs), and Raluca Viviana Huluban (European Parliament Information Office in Romania).

Online Fora for Discussions

On October 2008, NACAB launched an *online* platform (constructed as a forum) resembling the services offered by the CABs at: http://www.robcc.ro/anbcc_forum/. The NACAB Forum has sections in which a citizen, acquiring an ID and a password, can address her/his problems to one of the 40 CABs taking part in NACAB network.

By the same token, the online platform is vested with all the information fiches that the CABs administer on the 12 domains of information: *Health, Social Assistance, Social Insurances, Labor Regime, Consumers' Protection, Civil Rights and Responsibilities, Property Regime, Taxes, Education, Notary Procedures, Child Protection, Public Services*. Using the *online* platform, citizens may easily get in contact with the CAB services.



On October 2008, NACAB also launched the blog *Lucrători UE* - <http://lucratoriue.wordpress.com/>. The blog is made in partnership with European Citizens Action Service (ECAS), Brussels and aims at creating a platform of communication and know-how exchange between the network of CABs and the ECAS's experts at the European level on issues pertaining to EU information. In addition, the blog <http://lucratoriue.wordpress.com/> will also contain relevant information concerning the EU and the EU Affairs, being a reliable source of information for all citizens and fora for debating EU-related matters.

The two above mentioned *online* platforms are designed to bring the CABs closer to citizens and their changing means of acquiring the information they need.



CABs offer two types of services:

- Information regarding legal provisions, where citizens should address their requests, contact and office hours of relevant institutions and specific forms to be filled in;
- Advice: the citizen is advised on how to choose the best way for solving her/his problem, after she/he is presented with the possible options and their consequences.

NACAB in Coalitions

Being member of a Romanian coalition militating for a coherent absorption of EU structural funds – **NGO Coalition for Structural Funds**, NACAB and its services received an acknowledgment of the public initiatives in which it was involved, as a viable partner of dialogue with the public institutions. The Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Housing invited two representatives of the NGO Coalition to take part in the Monitoring Committee (Steering Committee) for the structural funds it administers. The Executive Director of NACAB is one of the representatives to take part in this committee, with the status of permanent observer.

On September 2008, the NGO Coalition for Structural Funds was activated with regards to the implementation of the Operational Sectoral Programme – Administrative Capacity Development (OSP ACD), administered by the Romanian Ministry of Administration and Interior. The guidelines under the above mentioned structural fund did not list the NGO sector among the potential applicants for this financing opportunity. The NGO Coalition for Structural Funds, in which NACAB is member, managed to advocate for the NGO sector to be eligible within the above-mentioned program. Following the advocacy initiative of the Coalition, the Management Authority in charge with implementing OSP ACD issued a corrigendum to the guidelines enlisting the non-governmental organizations among the potential applicants.

On October 2008, NACAB involved, together with the NGO Coalition for Structural Funds, in another advocacy project to determine the Romanian Government and the Ministry of Economy and Finance to resolve the blockages incurred with implementing the projects on structural funds. In this respect, the NGO members of the Coalition, altogether with other siding NGOs, publicly asked for the modification and augmentation of the Methodological Norms enacting the provision of the *Governmental Ordinance 29/2007 concerning the methods of allocation for structural instruments, the pre-financing and co-financing from the national budget* in order for those contracted projects to start their implementation. As a result, the Official Gazette published in November the Order to establish the Methodological Norms for the condition of granting the pre-financings and co-financings on structural funds.

FOND (Non-Governmental Development Organizations Platform) is a platform of 34 Romanian NGOs that expressed their wish and intention to be actively involved in programs and projects related to international development cooperation. A fundamental reason in establishing the platform is the new responsibility Romania has as a new member state. Once part of the EU, the Romanian civil society is supposed to return the help received during the accession process and be actively involved in giving assistance to developing countries.

The Romanian NGDO Platform aims to promote the international development cooperation values in Romania and to develop the NGOs capacity of becoming actively involved in the field. FOND activities were carried out with the help of volunteer contributions of member organizations and TRIALOG (EC-financed project) assistance. FOND supports the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in developing local capacities in implementing development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects, thus contributing to European development cooperation policies.

On February 18 – 20, 2008 the Executive Director of NACAB participated in the seminar “Public Awareness Raising, Development and Education”, organized in Brno, Czech Republic for the New Members States platforms for education and development. This was an excellent opportunity of experience exchange and transfer of lessons learned to members of NGDO Platform.

Based on a partnership between a Local Public Authority and an NGO, a CAB is independent from both in implementing its activities. Depending on the needs of the individuals, a Bureau offers two types of services:

- Information regarding legal provisions, where citizens should address their requests, contact and office hours of relevant institutions and specific forms to be filled in;
- Advice: the citizen is advised on how to choose the best way for solving her/his problem, after she/he is presented with the possible options and their consequences.

NACAB's International Cooperation with CAB Networks in Europe

Citizens Advice International (CAI)

NACAB is one of the founding members of the Citizens Advice International – CAI (www.citizensadvice-international.org), undertaking the obligation of observing the standards, objectives and principles of this organization. Citizens Advice International was set up on March 31, 2004 in London. CAI represents the interests of national member organizations, which offer independent advice services, in front of the European authorities and the international donors.

**Citizens
Advice
International**

In terms of NACAB's representation within the Citizens Advice International - CAI network, on May 28, 2008 the NACAB Executive Director participated in the **CAI Board meeting and CAI Conference** that took place in Dublin, Ireland. The above-mentioned meeting proved to be an excellent opportunity for NACAB to promote its activities among the CAI members. At the same time, the meeting was followed, on May 29, 2008 by a conference – *The Citizen and the Lisbon Treaty* in which there was discussed the relationship between the CAI members, as the main promoters of citizen rights, and the EU unifying Constitutional project that was soon to be impaired by the Irish citizens. The NACAB Executive Director held the position of rapporteur in the first panel of the event – *The Charter of Fundamental Rights*. The objective of the respective workshop was to integrate the voting of the Constitutional project into the broader concept of citizens' rights. At the same time, the NACAB President participated in the **European Roma Summit**, which took place on September 16, 2008 in Brussels.

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is a public service and it relies on the citizens' needs of information by offering easy access to information regarding citizen's rights and duties and by providing services of advice for individuals taking best decisions with regards to problems they encounter.

The event benefited from the presence of Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the EC and Bernard Kouchner, France's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs. The event took into account the problematic of Roma communities from the standpoint of social inclusion and civic participation and the NACAB representative came forward with the Association's example in stimulating citizen participation through the services offered by the CABs in Romania.

European Citizen Action Service (ECAS)

NACAB cooperates with the **European Citizen Action Service – ECAS** (www.ecas.org), a renowned NGO in Brussels militating for European Citizen Rights. The collaboration between NACAB and ECAS consists in a mutual support in the endeavor to propose an unconditioned application of freedom of movement for all the workers on the EU labor market.



Following the January launch of the study *Who's Afraid of the EU's Latest Enlargement?*, NACAB signed together with ECAS and IAPUE a letter advocating for lifting the transitional arrangements with regards to Romanian and Bulgarian workers in quest for a job on the EU labor market.

The initiative concerned all the EU-based institutions and member states' institutions in charge with mitigating the effects of the transitional arrangements. However, the initiative did not register notable successes thus hinging on the fact that lifting those transitional arrangements on the EU labor market still faces political entanglements and decision dilemmas.

CABs offer information and advice in 12 domains of public interest: public health, Social Assistance, Social Insurances, Labor Regime, Consumers' Protection, Civil Rights and Responsibilities, Property Regime, Taxes, Education, Notary Procedures, Child Protection, Public Services.

NACAB in 2008 - Financial Data

Income

	Project	Funding Authority	Budget provided by the Funding Authority (RON)*	Period
1	Strengthening NACAB's Capacity to Support Citizens Advice Bureaux – A Step Forward towards a Long Term Sustainability	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	251.890	January 2007 – December 2008
2	Public Information Campaign – Mine Closure, Environmental and Socio-Economic Regeneration Project	World Bank	566.324	January 2007 – June 2008
3	Citizens' Right to Know!	CEE Trust	165.898	March 2007 – March 2009
4	NetworCAB – Development of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	European Union through Phare 2005 Programme	233.314	December 2007 – October 2008
5	Discover the EP! - Citizen Forum	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	1.0127	September – November 2008
6	NACAB's Institutional and Operational Consolidation	European Union through Phare 2006 Programme	347.249	December 2008 – September 2009
	TOTAL		1.574.802	

* Sums provided by the Funding Authority, except for the cost-share.

Income - Balance Sheet Data

	Income	Sum (RON)
1	Membership fees	11.335,09
2	Contributions	38.848,56
3	Sponsorships	37.348
4	Interests	284,77
5	Grants	633.084,85
6	Differences in the exchange rates	21.936
	TOTAL	742.837,27

Incomes from grants and non-reimbursable loans represent sums provided by the Funding Authorities, as registered in the balance sheet for the 2008 fiscal year.

Expenses - Balance Sheet Data

	Expenses Account	Sum (RON)
1	Inventory	2.055,78
2	Consumables	29.646,20
3	Utilities	7.606,67
4	Rent	40.900,00
5	Studies and Research	4.194,00
6	Collaborators	126.199,91
7	Bank fees	3.172,45
8	Protocol	1.136,74
9	Transportation	12.803,68
10	Visits	11.385,67
11	Communications (phone, fax, internet, mail)	34.544,18
12	Bank Guarantee costs	2.868,69
13	Services-related expenses	381.897,48
14	Taxes	236,00
15	Salaries	40.031,00
16	Taxes on salaries	8.572,00
17	Other expanses	9.625,49
18	Exchange rate expenses	15.599,60
19	Depreciations	11.273,22
	TOTAL	743.748,76

NACAB - Organizational Structure

NACAB is constructed as an Association of NGOs. The decision making body of NACAB is the General Assembly (GA). In the NACAB's GA, the member NGOs are represented (NACAB has 40 NGO members). The NACAB's Council of Directors (CoD) is in charge with the management of the Association and the NACAB Executive Secretariat is the coordination body of the network of CABs. The NACAB Executive Secretariat coordinates the activities of NACAB and of its network of CABs, under direct supervision of the CoD, in domains such as: network development, training, Public Relations and promotion, sustainability, both at the national level and at the international level.

NACAB's network is formed of 40 CABs that offer independent services of information and advice to citizens in more than 60 localities in Romania (CABs' subunits included), both in rural and urban milieus.

The NGOs that initiated CABs are members of NACAB. The Association was founded in 2002, with the emergence of the first NGOs that initiated Citizen Advice Bureaux in Romania. NACAB is a non-governmental, non profit organization, founded to support and to direct the activities of the CABs. NACAB aims at continuously improving the activities of the CABs as to confer accessibility to the CAB services for as many people as possible. NACAB coordinates the activities of the CABs, promotes the network of the CABs at the national level, and represents the network of the CABs in relation with public authorities and aims at elaborating documents with potential of impact in what concerns public policy making and social services sector, based on information furnished by the CABs.

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) are projects of non-governmental, non profit organizations, whose areas of interest are social services, human rights, property regime, community development, child protection, consumers' protection etc.

