



PHOTO & CAPTION

Roma Children: Ready, Willing, and Able



As Romania prepares to enter the European Union, many of its people still struggle with the challenges of poverty. A disproportionate number of Romania's poor are Roma, commonly known as Gypsies.

The *Gata, Dispus si Capabil* (Ready, Willing, and Able) project supported by USAID is designed to improve living conditions and educational opportunities for severely impoverished families through a multi-pronged approach that offers children educational and social support.

It also offers parents — primarily, but not exclusively, mothers — tools to provide for their families.

School picture time is usually a very serious matter in Romania, with students striving to look solemnly intellectual. These Roma students burst into giggles when the photographer lay down on the floor to get a new perspective on this USAID-supported educational program.

In 2001, Gata, Dispus si Capabil began working with a children's center in Bacau, where 20 impoverished children were at risk of abandoning school. The center supports schoolchildren aged 5-15 through both educational activities and social services.

The center houses a kindergarten and provides hot lunches and snacks, school supplies and clothes, and medical and dental care for some of the Roma population's most impoverished children. It also helps children who have fallen behind academically catch up to students closer to their own age. Roma schoolchildren at risk of leaving school are eligible for after-school tutoring, enrichment, trips, and clubs.

The project's goal is to help Roma children keep up with school and stimulate their interest in learning. As a measure of the program's successes, it has expanded to four children's centers in the cities of Bacau and Buhusi, and is preparing to open its first children's program in Bucharest.