

The Coalition of Women Business Associations (CAFA) in Romania

CIPE started to support the initiatives of the Romanian women business organizations during the 2000 – 2003 USAID-funded project that focused on building the capacities of the Romanian business associations. As part of the project, CIPE organized several meetings, conferences and roundtables for these associations that became increasingly aware of the importance of working together in order to change and influence public policies. During this period of time, CIPE helped strengthen connections and cooperation between women business associations in Romania, providing them with training in organizational development and advocacy.

In 2004 and 2005, CIPE supported the creation and development of the Coalition of Women Business Associations in Romania (CAFA) with funding from the National Endowment from Democracy. CIPE acted as a facilitator and focused on the needs of the newly-established Coalition. CAFA has now 19 members, which indicates that Romanian businesswomen are beginning to understand the importance of their role in the business and political arenas and how combining their efforts has a greater impact on local and central governments. The Coalition does not replace the particular activities of association members, but instead it gets involved in major initiatives and events that require grassroots support such as public hearings, public debates, legislative proposals, amendments, and participation in dialogue with government officials.

CAFA is an informal coalition with no president or officers and with a three-leveled membership system: founding members (the nine task force representatives), full members (any women business association that would like to join), and supporters (women associations that have a business program or agenda). The management of the Coalition is represented by a Secretariat that acts mainly as a coordinator and communication center. In the first two years CIPE took over the Secretariat role, but once CAFA became stronger CIPE's support diminished in order to increase the leadership role of the women business associations involved. Since January 2006 CAFA has been fully sponsored by its members.

Capacity Building

During the past years, CIPE and CAFA organized workshops on strategic planning, advocacy, public image, members' involvement, and the third and the fourth edition of the Women in Business Conference. Over 150 women participated in these trainings. Gaining corporate & association sponsorships, CAFA proved that it can work as a self-sustainable entity in the future.

Advocacy Efforts

CIPE and CAFA organized a public debate on salary taxes. More than 60 participants attended the event: CAFA members, other business associations (representing tourism and ITC sectors, as well as chambers of commerce), media representatives, Romanian Government officials (from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labor, National Agency for SMEs), Parliament representatives, as well as representatives of the Institute for Finance and Monetary Research. Prior to the event, CIPE and CAFA put together a draft comprehensive study on salary taxes and the Romanian Social Insurance System to assess the impact of future legislation: the amendments to the Fiscal Code that came into force at the beginning of 2005, and the new employment systems within the new Labor Code. The participants' opinions were included in a final document and forwarded for analysis to the relevant ministries per request of their representatives that attended the event.

To find about CAFA's current projects, please access the website www.cafa.ro.