



# **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion**

## **(LERI) Project**

# **Community Summary**

## **Megara, Greece**

This community summary forms part of FRA’s **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion** (LERI) project. LERI is a qualitative action research project under [FRA’s multi-annual Roma Programme](#). It was developed in response to the [European Commission’s Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#). LERI brings together local authorities and residents, in particular Roma, to investigate how they can best be involved in Roma integration actions, and identify which aspects of these actions work, which do not, and why. The aim of the project is to facilitate the engagement of all local stakeholders, including Roma, in joint efforts to enable Roma inclusion. The experience gained and the lessons learned during the process will help improve the design, implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies and actions at the local level.

LERI is the first FRA project to test participatory action research methodology. By identifying the key factors that lead to the success or failure of local integration activities, the project is helping to improve the planning of effective integration programmes for the future. At the same time, facilitating engagement at local level empowers all those involved, building their capacity to participate as equal partners with local administrations and civil society, and enabling a shared understanding of which measures need to be taken and how their implementation can be monitored. The project is being carried out in 21 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

**LOCALITIES**

Pavlikeni,	Bulgaria
Stara Zagora,	Bulgaria
Brno,	Czech Republic
Sokolov,	Czech Republic
Helsinki,	Finland
Jyväskylä,	Finland
Lille Metropole,	France
Strasbourg,	France
Aghia Varvara,	Greece
Megara,	Greece
Besence,	Hungary
Mátraverebély,	Hungary
Mantova,	Italy
Bologna,	Italy
Aiud,	Romania
Cluj-Napoca,	Romania
Hrabušice,	Slovakia
Rakytník,	Slovakia
Cordoba,	Spain
Madrid,	Spain
Medway,	UK

## Megara, Greece

### Overview of the country context

Greek Roma trace their roots back to the Byzantine times. They consider themselves to be both Greek and Roma and therefore, they reject the term "minority" or "ethnic group".<sup>1</sup>

There are no official data regarding the size of the Roma population in Greece, however it is estimated to be between 50,000<sup>2</sup> and 365,000.<sup>3</sup> The Greek Roma community is heterogeneous, and more and more are becoming sedentary. More than 50% of the Roma population has been living in the same place for more than 20 years.<sup>4</sup>

Roma continue to face social exclusion and discrimination, mainly in the areas of housing, employment, health and education. Housing is a particular problem as half of the Roma population in Greece lives in poor housing conditions without basic technical and social infrastructure. With regard to employment status, Roma rely mainly on seasonal jobs. As a result, the majority of Roma has an income below the poverty threshold. The majority of the population is also illiterate, particularly older generations, and attendance rates in all levels of schooling are low. Health is also an area of concern with Roma facing lower life expectancy and higher child mortality rate than the Greek national averages.<sup>5</sup> There are

localities in which the local Roma communities are not well integrated and face challenging living conditions: poor housing conditions lacking the most basic amenities such as electricity and water, limited access to health care services, employment and education.

However, not all Greek Roma face these challenges. For instance, there are localities in which the local Roma communities are well integrated. Here, most of them are employed, the children are enrolled in the educational system and they have regular access to health services. In these communities, the Roma face similar challenges as the mainstream population, such as limited employment opportunities.

### Locality background information

Megara is a historic city located in the western part of Attica, 42 km from the centre of Athens. It is bordered to the north by the Corinth Gulf and to the south by the Saronic Gulf. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Megara is 36,924.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the size of the Roma population in Megara, a survey conducted in 2001 estimates a population of 1,300–1,800 people or approximately 3.5% of the total population.<sup>7</sup> However, the number of Roma in this locality is a current issue since the Local Roma Association estimates a much larger population of 3,500 registered members.

<sup>1</sup> Ziomas D., Bouzas N., Spyropoulou N. (2011), *Greece: Promoting the social inclusion of Roma – A study of national policies*, Institute of Social Policy, National Centre for Social Research, p. 2, available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=8971&langId=en>. (All hyperlinks were accessed on 23 February 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Greece, Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2011), *National strategic framework for Roma*, December 2011, p. 3, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_greece\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_greece_strategy_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ziomas D., Bouzas N., Spyropoulou N. (2011), *Greece: Promoting the social inclusion of Roma – A study of national policies*, Institute of Social Policy, National Centre for Social Research, p. 3, available at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=8971&langId=en>.

<sup>4</sup> National Committee for the Human Rights (2002), *The situation of Roma in Greece (Η κατάσταση των*

*Τσιγγάνων στην Ελλάδα*), p. 5, available in Greek at:

[www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/greek/articles\\_2002/rep\\_25\\_02\\_02.rtf](http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/greek/articles_2002/rep_25_02_02.rtf)

<sup>5</sup> Greece, Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2011), *National strategic framework for Roma*, December 2011, p. 4, available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_greece\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_greece_strategy_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Hellenic Statistical Authority (2011), 2011 Population and housing census, Table B02: Permanent population by place of birth (municipality, country outside of Greece) in municipalities (*Μόνιμος πληθυσμός κατά τόπο γέννησης (Δήμος, χώρα εξωτερικού) Δήμοι*), available at: [www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SAM03/2011](http://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SAM03/2011)

<sup>7</sup> Estimation provided by the Municipal Social Services Department.

As reported, among them are also around 10 Roma families who have arrived from other countries in the last few years. In Megara the Roma live in Vlycho, a neighbourhood in the east of the city and only one Roma family lives integrated in the other part of the city. The area is situated approximately 1 km away from the city centre. The majority of the Roma live in their own or rented houses and most of them have access to electricity and running water, but not drinking water. The settlement is characterised with a serious lack of basic road infrastructure. The roads in Vlycho are in poor condition and there are only a few street lights.

Concerning the local economy, the service sector employs 47% of the economically active population of Megara, 19% works in the secondary sector and only 11% in the primary sector. 560 small industries and 130 large industrial units operate in Megara.<sup>8</sup> According to the Local Employment Office (OEAD), 4,141 people were unemployed in October 2014<sup>9</sup> and it is estimated that this number will radically increase due to the economic crisis.

According to the Socio-medical Centre for Roma in Megara, the unemployment rate among Roma is high. In the past, Roma were mainly land workers and used to work in agriculture. However, many Roma lost their jobs recently as land workers and the Roma community has started to become more isolated from this sector of the labour market. Today, the majority of Roma work in breeding and rearing of poultry and in itinerant commerce.

Concerning education, 146 Roma children were enrolled in the local kindergartens and primary schools during the academic year 2012–2013.<sup>10</sup> However, many of them frequently miss school due to the long distance between the settlement and the schools. Thus, the problem of

illiteracy in the settlement remains a serious issue.<sup>11</sup>



*Houses in Vlycho (22 July 2015).*

Access to education, health and employment is in principle possible, but it remains insufficient due to the absence of a holistic approach for social integration of the Roma community. As many Roma people stated, the main problems of the community are the road infrastructure, unemployment and education.



*The main road of Vlycho settlement (22 July 2015).*

### **Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project**

The thematic focus will be decided together with local Roma and non-Roma representatives on the basis of participatory action research (PAR). It is expected for the project to be seen as an opportunity to examine the local needs and opportunities in an open and participatory way with the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Many possible actions have already been

<sup>8</sup> According to the Local Action Plan of the Municipality of Megara 2015–2019.

<sup>9</sup> Municipality of Megara (2015), Strategic planning: 2015–2019 (*Στρατηγικός Σχεδιασμός 2015-2019*), available at:

[www.megara.gr/dimosmegaron/PDF\\_ATTACHMENTS/FILES/01\\_DIAVOULEYSI/stratigikos-sxediasmos-2015-2019.pdf](http://www.megara.gr/dimosmegaron/PDF_ATTACHMENTS/FILES/01_DIAVOULEYSI/stratigikos-sxediasmos-2015-2019.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Data published in the context of the project: *Education of Roma children 2010-2013* implemented by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

<sup>11</sup> Information provided by members of the local Roma community and the municipality.

discussed in separate meetings with representatives of the Roma community and the municipality. Indicatively, some of the discussed actions are: improving the basic infrastructure, developing municipal social housing, improving the access to employment and education, training of Roma health mediators and promoting a cultural event as an opportunity to build trust and to boost community cohesion.

Since there is a clear lack of socio-economic and demographic data on the local Roma community, LERI will focus on providing support to the municipality in designing, collecting and analysing socio-economic data on the local Roma population with the participation of the Roma community. Ways of combining regional and local planning priorities with LERI will also be explored. This includes the possibility to consult on the upcoming funding opportunities and prepare proposals that will aim to improve the living conditions of Roma in the area.

#### **Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase**

The LERI project will utilise a combination of PAR techniques in order to ensure the active participation of all actors.

As part of the preparatory needs assessment phase, information was collected through informal meetings with the mayor, representatives of the municipality as well as community discussions with Roma representatives. During the next phases of the LERI project, the identified needs together with the possible interventions will be discussed again through a consultation meeting.

Under this framework, a number of informal meetings and community discussions will be organised with representatives of the local stakeholders as well as with members of the Roma community. These will be followed by a series of consultation meetings. Finally, a consensus conference will be organised, which will lead to the finalisation of the intervention that will be implemented.

At the first stage of the implementation, a local LERI research team will be established in order to ensure permanent collaboration of all actors involved. It is expected that the core actors in the LERI implementation will be the president of the Local Roma Association of Vlycho, the president of the Association of Greek Roma Mediators Roma, community members and representatives of the municipality. The implementation of the project will be supported by the Region of Attica and potentially, by two Roma women mediators and a number of volunteers registered at the municipality.

#### **Expected outcomes of the participatory action research**

LERI is expected to facilitate processes of participation where various members of the local community actively participate in the design and implementation of the project interventions. Through active engagement in all stages of the project implementation, trust and cooperation is to be built between community members and the local authorities, as well as between Roma and non-Roma. LERI will also address concrete needs of the community and contribute to gathering of socio-economic and demographic data on the local Roma community.

---

## **FRA – EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS**

Schwarzenbergplatz 11 – 1040 Vienna – Austria  
 Tel: +43 158030-0 – Fax: +43 158030-699  
[fra.europa.eu](http://fra.europa.eu) – [info@fra.europa.eu](mailto:info@fra.europa.eu)  
[facebook.com/fundamentalrights](https://www.facebook.com/fundamentalrights)  
[linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency](https://www.linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency)  
[twitter.com/EURightsAgency](https://twitter.com/EURightsAgency)

