



# **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion**

**(LERI) Project**

## **Community Summary**

**Pavlikeni, Bulgaria**

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

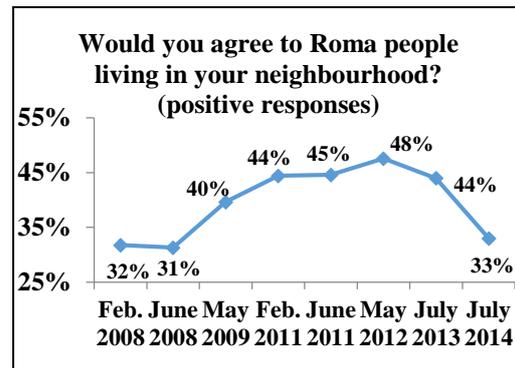
## Pavlikeni, Bulgaria

### Overview of the country context

Roma constitute the second-largest minority group in Bulgaria after the Turkish minority. According to data from the 2011 Census, Roma comprise almost 5% of the total population or approximately 325,000.<sup>1</sup> However, unofficial sources estimate a figure of 700-800,000 Roma, which is around 10% of the total population.<sup>2</sup> Most Roma live in segregated residential areas labelled as "Gypsy quarters" despite the fact that in most cases the population in these neighbourhoods does not identify as Roma but as Turks, Millet, Wallachians or Bulgarians.

The association of Roma people with poor ghettoized areas is reflected in the negative attitudes of non-Roma toward their Roma neighbours. Although attitudes towards Roma improved between 2008 and 2012 (see Figure 1), the recent political crisis reversed this positive trend. Since 2012, the percentage of those who feel positive about living in the same neighbourhood with Roma has decreased to the same level as noted in the time of the 2008 economic crisis.

Negative perceptions of Roma often translate into prejudice and discrimination, particularly in the area of education, healthcare, employment and housing.



*Open Society Institute (2014)*

### Locality background information

The town of Pavlikeni is the regional capital of the Pavlikeni municipality, which is part of the Veliko Turnovo District in northern Bulgaria.



*Pavlikeni Central Square (2014).*

Following the collapse of communism, the town's economy went into decline and the unemployment rate in Pavlikeni increased. Consequently, many young people migrated to Veliko Turnovo, Sofia or abroad. Today, Pavlikeni, along with the entire municipality of Pavlikeni, is considered a poor rural town with limited opportunities for development.

According to the 2011 Census, the Roma population in the municipality of Pavlikeni

<sup>1</sup> National Statistical Institute, *Population and housing census in the Republic of Bulgaria 2011 – Main results*, p.3, available at: [www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final\\_en.pdf](http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final_en.pdf) (All hyperlinks were accessed on 23 February 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Pamporov, A. (2009), 'Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria' in: Schleinstejn, N., Sucker, D., Wenninger, A. & Wilde, A. (eds.), *Social*

*Sciences Eastern Europe: Roma in Central and Eastern Europe*, Berlin, GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, pp.27-32, available at: [www.gesis.org/fileadmin/upload/dienstleistung/fachinformationen/series\\_ssee\\_01/Roma\\_in\\_Central\\_and\\_Eastern\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.gesis.org/fileadmin/upload/dienstleistung/fachinformationen/series_ssee_01/Roma_in_Central_and_Eastern_Europe.pdf)

comprises 2% of the total population (i.e. 439 people).<sup>3</sup> However, the data provided by the municipality and the Roma Community Development Centre (CDC) suggest a far higher number of 15.39% of the total population (6,360 Roma in the entire municipality and 1,521 Roma in the town itself).<sup>4</sup> Due to the urbanisation process and the post-communist transition, many non-Roma moved to the cities in search of jobs. As a result, most rural municipalities experienced an increased share of Roma, particularly Roma youth, which is higher than the country average (4.9%). In the case of Pavlikeni, the proportion of Roma is even higher than in most rural municipalities in Bulgaria.

The Roma community in Pavlikeni is composed of four groups. The largest group are Turkish-speaking Muslims (*Millet*) who have lived in Pavlikeni for generations. *Kaldarashi* and *Burgudjii* Roma arrived in Pavlikeni between 1962 and 1968. They used to be nomads until the end of the 1950s when the government adopted Decree 256/17.12.1958 on obligatory settlement. There are also several Christian Orthodox Roma families, namely the *Dassikane* Roma, who have lived in Pavlikeni for centuries.



*Municipality event with the participation of the Roma community.*

The municipal integration plan for Roma was approved by the City Council on 25 April 2013 (Decision 329), thus,

<sup>3</sup> Municipality of Pavlikeni (2015), *План за действие на Община Павликени за интеграция на българските граждани от ромски произход и на други граждани от уязвимо социално положение, живеещи в сходна на ромите ситуация 2015-2017 г.*,

acknowledging Roma integration as one of the municipality's primary tasks. To this end, the municipal administration will cooperate with the local CDC to develop relevant activities.



*Photo taken during a health check by the Community Development Centre.*

The Roma organisation Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance *Amalipe* has been active in Pavlikeni for a number of years through its CDC. Its main office is in the regional capital, but since 2011 it has opened local branches in three villages in the municipality: Byala Cherkva, Batak and Varbovka.

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

The LERI project will address two core needs of the Roma community identified during the preliminary research stage:

1. **Limited access to quality healthcare:** The majority of Roma are uninsured and as a result they only have access to emergency treatment. The majority of women do not undergo regular gynaecological check-ups and are therefore, exposed to a number of health risks. Low awareness among the Roma increases their exposure to health risks.
2. **Intra-community tensions:** There are a number of conflicts between the various Roma groups in Pavlikeni as well as between different clans within the same group. A sizeable share of the Roma community continues to follow traditional practices that limit the participation of women and young

available at:

[www.pavlikeni.bg/index.php?option=com\\_jdownloads&Itemid=79&task=view.download&cid=4916&lang=bg](http://www.pavlikeni.bg/index.php?option=com_jdownloads&Itemid=79&task=view.download&cid=4916&lang=bg)

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by the local community moderator.

people in economic, public and political life. These include early marriages and little or no education for the girls. At the same time, there are only a few well-educated Roma in the community and this limits the influence of Roma on local policy.

The use of participatory action research aims to empower the Roma community and help overcome intra-community tensions. At the same time, it contributes towards improving the healthcare services. Furthermore, a community fund for facilitating the access of Roma to the health insurance system will be developed as a pilot initiative. The municipality will support the initiative once it has commenced by allocating EU funds and other financial means for its expansion.

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

During the needs assessment phase, a range of activities will be organised to ensure that all stakeholders, and especially the Roma community, engage and take ownership of the LERI project. In particular, the following techniques will be applied:

- **Face-to-face interviews** with all key stakeholders
- **3 focus groups** with the largest groups within the Roma community, namely *Millet*, *Kaldarashi* and *Rudari*. The support of the CDC will ensure the participation of women, young people and informal leaders in all focus groups
- **1 focus group** with Bulgarian stakeholders, such as school principals, religious leaders, officials from municipal administration, general practitioners and other medical staff

- **2 consensus conferences**, one of which will be organised with the participation of representatives of the *Millet*, *Rudari* and *Kaldarashi* groups. The other will be organised with the participation of representatives of the municipal authorities, Pavlikeni hospital, Bulgarian opinion-makers and the Roma community.

At the end of these activities, it is expected that the various Roma groups will overcome their differences and agree on a common action plan in the context of the LERI project with a particular focus on healthcare. The action plan will also be negotiated with the municipal authorities and the relevant stakeholders.

To this end, all parties will be encouraged to participate in the LERI project. These include informal Roma leaders from all Roma groups, community moderators from the CDC, general practitioners and other medical staff from Pavlikeni hospital and the emergency care unit as well as the municipal authorities.

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

A local action plan will be designed as a result of the common agreement among all key stakeholders. Its implementation should increase the number of Roma with health insurance who will subsequently be able to access the full spectrum of healthcare services. In addition, a community fund will be created as a tool for helping Roma join the health insurance system. A formal recommendation to the Ministry of Health will be made if the research demonstrates that the tool put in place for improving access to quality healthcare is effective.

Ongoing cooperation between municipal authorities and the local community will ensure the continuing sustainability of key LERI activities.

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