

Local engagement for Roma inclusion

Locality study Pavlikeni (Bulgaria), 2016

Author: Deyan Kolev

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1. Executive summary

Pavlikeni is a rural municipality that is characterised by a relatively high percentage of Roma inhabitants (especially among children and young people) who face multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination. Its Roma community is composed of four different groups, among which tensions and controversies exist. Certain preconditions for establishing strong integration policies at municipal level exist in Pavlikeni, such as the openness of the municipal authorities, the existence of the CDC and groups of Roma activists, and a well-formulated Municipal Roma Integration Plan. Nevertheless, the municipal Roma policy was not systematically implemented before the LERI research began.

The LERI research in Pavlikeni aimed to contribute to developing a comprehensive Roma integration policy at municipal level, as well as at establishing certain necessary preconditions for implementing the policy. This occurred through:

- researching the real needs of the Roma community;
- establishing models that could be continued: all LERI components were designed to establish such models (for increasing the number of health-insured people, for raising attendance in preschool education, for increasing the percentage of Roma with a university education);
- establishing partnerships and confidence among the key stakeholders.

The activities implemented within the LERI local intervention were organised around three components, namely: healthcare, preschool education and high-school education. The LERI implementation contributed to:

- raising the number of health-insured Roma, the number of Roma children who attend preschool groups in kindergartens and the number of Roma university students;
- establishing and testing models that could be continued with municipal or EU financing;
- establishing cooperation among the key stakeholders.

In addition, the intervention contributed to preparing municipal projects that could apply the interventions piloted within the LERI research.

Keywords/Tags: pre-school education; access to health; participatory research

2. Description of the local context

Pavlikeni Municipality and its Roma community

Pavlikeni Municipality is part of the Veliko Turnovo district, situated in North Central Bulgaria. It is composed of 20 settlements across two towns, Pavlikeni and Byala Cherkva, and 18 villages.¹ After the end of the communist period, industry in the town of Pavlikeni, as well as agriculture in the villages, collapsed resulting in high unemployment. Many of the economically active young people migrated to the city of Veliko Turnovo and Sofia. In this respect the entire municipality of Pavlikeni is a poor rural town with relatively limited possibilities for development.

Roma in Pavlikeni constitute 4.44 % of the total population according to the most recent census² and 15.39 % according to the data provided by the Municipality and the Roma Community Development Centre (hereafter referred to as CDC).³ The difference between the official figures from the census and the number provided by expert estimations is evident not only in Pavlikeni but also in all the other municipalities and regions of Bulgaria for the following reasons.

- Due to the strong anti-Roma stereotypes and discrimination, many Roma and other Bulgarian citizens prefer not to answer the question about ethnicity in the census. As a result, around 11 % of the country's population did not declare ethnic affiliation in the 2011 census. This makes official data on ethnicity unreliable.
- Due to the strong anti-Roma stereotypes and discrimination, many Roma self-identify as Bulgarian or Turkish.⁴ This 'concealed identity' has more widespread implications than the accuracy of census data: these persons and families are also unwilling to take part in Roma integration activities in general in order to avoid the 'Gypsy schism', i.e. the discrimination and negative stereotypes held by many people towards Roma. This 'concealed identity' is more prevalent among the most educated Roma people.
- The cultural specifics of some Roma groups compel them to self-identify in an alternative way in the census: for example the *Millet* group (Turkish-speaking Roma Muslims) self-identify as Turks, the *Rudari* group (Romanian-speaking Roma) self-identify as *Wallachians* or Bulgarians, many Bulgarian-speaking Roma self-identify as Bulgarians, etc. They have a 'preferred identity' that is usually dual: they acknowledge their links with the Roma community and sometimes participate in Roma integration activities, especially if the activities benefit them (for example, applying for scholarships from the Roma Education Fund, etc.). These groups are well-represented in Pavlikeni.

¹ All hyperlinks were accessed on 20 December 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pavlikeni_Municipality

² National Statistical Institute (2011), *Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria 2011*, accessed on 24 November 2015, available at: www.nsi.bg/census2011/indexen.php

³ Municipality of Pavlikeni (2013), *Municipal plan for implementation of the Roma integration policy in the Municipality of Pavlikeni*, Pavlikeni, Municipality of Pavlikeni, available at:

www.pavlikeni.bg/index.php?option=com_jdownloads&Itemid=79&task=view.download&cid=3933&lang=bg

⁴ *Interview with city councillor*

This share of Roma in Pavlikeni municipality is similar (or slightly higher) to the level in the other rural municipalities in Bulgaria. Due to the urbanisation and post-communist transition in most of the rural municipalities, the percentage of Roma (especially young Roma) is higher compared to the country average.

Roma people in Pavlikeni belong to four different groups. The majority are Turkish-speaking Roma Muslims (*Millet*, meaning 'people' in Turkish). They have lived in Pavlikeni for generations. *Millet* communities also live in most of the surrounding villages. In Varbovka and Batak, they form the majority of the population, in Stambolovo they represent one third. Most of them have a preferred Turkish consciousness, (i.e. they declare themselves to be Turks in the census and to outsiders) while the other sections consider themselves to be Turkish Roma/Gypsies.⁵

The *Kaldarashi* and *Burgudjii* Roma settled in Pavlikeni between 1962 and 1968; they were nomads until the end of 1950s when the communist government settled them through Decree 256/17.12.1958. In the past, they had specific traditional crafts/occupations: the *Kaldarashi* were coppersmiths while the *Burgudjii* were blacksmiths and knife-makers. They have not formed large, segregated neighbourhoods but live dispersed among the ethnic Bulgarian population or in small neighbourhoods.

There are also several Orthodox Christian Roma families, *Dassikane* Roma, who have lived in Pavlikeni for centuries. They also live in some of the villages. The number of *Dassikane* Roma in Pavlikeni municipality is small and they are relatively integrated.

In addition, in the town of Byala Cherkva, located 4 km from Pavlikeni, which is part of Pavlikeni municipality, there is big community of Rudari – Romanian-speaking Roma. They are Orthodox Christians who differentiate themselves from all other Roma groups.

As a whole, there is mistrust between Roma Christians (*Kaldarashi* and *Burgudjii*), Rudari and Roma Muslims (*Millet*) who seldom interact with each other. This sometimes leads to conflicts among the groups and could therefore pose certain problems for the overall implementation of the integration policy. That is why within LERI we addressed this challenge through trust-building activities.

Although Pavlikeni is a relatively small town, it has a segregated Roma neighbourhood, *Daskotska Mahala* (neighbourhood), where some 1,199 Roma live (predominantly from the *Millet* group). The Roma in the segregated neighbourhood constitute more than 96 % of the population. It is cut off by poor transport facilities, bad services, etc. Very often, there is conflict among the inhabitants. Until 2008, Roma children attended a segregated school. In 2008, the school closed and now they attend an ethnically mixed school (*Kliment Ohridski Primary School*) situated in the centre of Pavlikeni. Nevertheless, gradually this school is becoming 'secondary segregated' because of so-called white flight (i.e. ethnic Bulgarian parents have moved their children to *Bacho Kiro Secondary School*).

⁵ Interview with community moderator

Problems and needs of the Roma community

LERI implementation in Pavlikeni began with a participatory needs assessment to identify the core problems related to local-level inclusion of Roma. It involved all key stakeholders of Roma integration at municipal level, both within and outside the Roma community: Roma community moderators and leaders, school principals, medical doctors, local mayors, municipal administration and authorities. The needs assessment identified five core problems composed of several more sub-problems and needs. These identified areas served as the basis for the design of small-scale local research interventions that made up the following phase of the LERI research (described later on in section 4). The core problems identified and selected for the LERI intervention were considered to be of high importance for the community in Pavlikeni. This was also confirmed by the stakeholders engaged in the Roma integration process. The first four core problems, presented below, are addressed in the Municipal Roma Integration Plan, while the fifth has been taken up by Roma activists.

Low educational level of Roma: generally, the educational level of Roma in Pavlikeni municipality is very low. According to the Municipal Roma Integration Plan the number of citizens without an educational degree totals 3,250; of these, 1,943 attended only elementary education (or 4th grade, which does not lead to an educational diploma); 1,039 did not complete elementary education. Therefore, according to the Public Education Act, they are considered illiterate and cannot pass any training leading to a professional qualification. 268 have never attended school and are in the same situation.⁶ Although the statistics do not differentiate by ethnic group, the majority of these people are of Roma and Turkish origin. Information provided by the CDC gathered through the community survey conducted 'door-to-door' confirms the low educational status of the Roma community: only three Roma hold a university degree and six are students currently studying at university.

Several sub-problems contribute to this situation:

- *Low enrolment in preschool education:* Roma attendance in preschools is very low for two reasons: the existence of fees and of certain cultural barriers, such as the lack of confidence in kindergartens. It is common knowledge that preschool is the best prevention of early school leaving and the best guarantee of success at school. In Bulgaria, kindergartens are partly paid for by the parents and the fees are collected based on a child's daily attendance. Although two years of preschool are compulsory, fees are also due, even if the compulsory preschool is undertaken in kindergartens. These fees are small for average income household but could pose a problem for poor families. The kindergarten fees vary across municipalities as each municipal council defines their amount. Fees also exist for the compulsory preschool age (the so-called preparatory groups). They reach up to €35 per month in the largest municipalities – again, bearable for average household but problematic for the poorer families, particularly those with more children. Among the cultural barriers outlined are the lack of confidence of many Roma parents in the kindergartens and the belief that grandmothers should take care of their grandchildren.

⁶Municipality of Pavlikeni (2014), Action plan of the Municipality of Pavlikeni for implementation of the integration policies 2013–2014, Pavlikeni, Municipality of Pavlikeni, pp. 4-5.

In addition, the quality of preschool education and care in the kindergartens, especially in the villages, is low. They lack educational and pedagogical methods and materials, and the premises need renovating.

- *A clear tendency towards segregation in primary education:* Most Roma children attend St Kliment Ohridski Primary School. Roma children from the village schools that were closed were also transferred to this school. As a result, some ethnic Bulgarian parents moved their children to the other school (Bacho Kiro School). This tendency could convert St Kliment Ohridski Primary School into a secondary segregated 'Gypsy' school.

- *Very low numbers of Roma with a university education:* As pointed out above, only three Roma in the municipality hold a university degree, and six more are studying at university at present. They are still to become role models for the community.

Very low employment rate: many Roma are unemployed or work in the grey economy. The local entrepreneurs do not employ Roma mainly for two reasons: their lack of professional qualifications and prejudices/stereotypes about Roma lacking working habits. There are several Roma entrepreneurs, however their businesses encounter certain difficulties and they employ few people. Some Roma from Batak and Pavlikeni are self-employed as farmers but their numbers are low, as is their income. The majority of working Roma is employed in agriculture where the income is very low. The Municipal Roma Integration Plan stresses, *"there has been an increase of the registered long-term unemployed – 9.45 % in 2010 to 12.5 % in 2011, 14.65 % in 2012. The main sectors of employment for the vulnerable people are agriculture, low-income communal services, construction industry."*⁷

Access to and the quality of the healthcare services offered to Roma is poor: this problem is composed of several sub-problems.

- Many Roma do not have health insurance. As a result, they use only the emergency services.
- Service providers – such as general practitioners, doctors – often request informal additional payment.
- Most Roma women have not undergone gynaecological screening and, as a result, many of them may be suffering from gynaecological conditions.
- Preventive healthcare habits in the Roma community are not widespread, mainly due to not visiting doctors but also to certain hygiene practices. Such problems exist also among elderly generations of ethnic Bulgarians, especially in rural areas.

Lack of public support for the integration policy: anti-Roma stereotypes are embedded among certain social layers in the majority population. This limits the access of Roma to basic services and leads to segregation at school. The lack of public support is one of the key obstacles that hinder the implementation of any Roma-related action.

⁷ Municipality of Pavlikeni (2014), *Action plan of the Municipality of Pavlikeni for implementation of the integration policies 2013–2014*, Pavlikeni, Municipality of Pavlikeni, p. 9.

Intra-community tensions: there are controversies among the various Roma groups in Pavlikeni, as well as between different clans within the same group. The Roma community is still not well organised: although civic community structures were found (CDC and local clubs), only a few Roma engage in them. Most Roma do not take part in any community activities. A significant part of the Roma community is still traditional and patriarchal, not modernised. For example, certain traditional practices, such as early marriages or early school dropout of girls, are still widespread. They result in the limited participation of women in economic, public and political life. As a result, there are few educated Roma women and they do not create a critical mass to positive impact on the community.

Roma integration policy

Pavlikeni is a municipality that is characterised by a relatively high percentage of Roma inhabitants (especially among children and young people) who face multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination. On the one hand, certain preconditions for establishing strong integration policies at municipal level exist in Pavlikeni, such as the openness of the municipal authorities, the existence of the CDC and groups of Roma activists.

A key strength that characterises Pavlikeni, regarding the Roma integration policy, is that in March 2013, the City Council approved its Roma Integration Plan for 2013–2014, and in April 2015, it approved its Roma Integration Plan for 2015–2020. Roma activists, especially the community moderators, took an active part in the development of both documents. The 2015–2020 Plan contains clear references to possible sources of financing, including new EU-funded programmes. The Integration Plan has broad coverage and reflects the problems that the Roma are facing. In the meantime, the municipal administration is open to interacting with the Roma community activists and seriously considers their suggestions.

On the other hand, there are certain weaknesses. One of the main weaknesses is that the integration policies lack the necessary financing. Furthermore, the controversies among different Roma groups prevent them from acting together and weaken their voices, while anti-Roma attitudes among ethnic Bulgarians exist and create an unfavourable environment for the integration policy. Additionally, the low educational level among the Roma community (an insignificant number of Roma hold a university degree) is also a barrier that prevents effective advocacy from the Roma community.

A significant development following the local elections in October 2015 was that three Roma were elected as city councillors. One of them was elected Deputy Chair of the City Council while the other two are Roma activists, members of Roma NGO Amalipe, and are highly committed to working towards Roma integration.

To conclude, there are certain positive preconditions for developing a municipal Roma integration policy in Pavlikeni: active Roma groups (around the CDC and Roma organisation Amalipe), partnership with municipal authorities and local institutions (especially schools, kindergartens, the municipal hospital), the Municipal Roma Integration Plans and Roma who are city councillors. At the same time, the Pavlikeni Municipality lacks a comprehensive, well-developed

Roma integration policy that covers all areas. Only some areas have been developed and public consensus achieved – these are mainly education and partly healthcare. In other areas, there is no progress at all, while some comprise only a few pilot initiatives. This is also evident in the Municipal Roma Integration Plan that comprises well-developed education and healthcare chapters, and a special chapter 'Creating the necessary preconditions for implementing the Plan' (suggested by the local Roma activists), but poorly developed chapters on employment and living conditions.

The LERI research had the chance to contribute significantly to the development of a comprehensive Roma integration policy at municipal level, as well as to establish certain necessary preconditions for implementing the policy. This occurred through:

- establishing models that could be continued and replicated: all LERI components were designed to establish such models (for increasing the number of health-insured people, for raising attendance in preschool education, for increasing the percentage of Roma with a university education);
- establishing partnerships and confidence among the key stakeholders.

Counterparts and stakeholders

Primary counterparts

The main Roma counterpart in Pavlikeni was the Community Development Centre (CDC). The Centre employs two Roma community moderators, who have a different role to mediators and are based within the Centre, and three more in the local clubs in the surrounding villages (Batak, Varbovka and Byala Cherkva), while three groups function around the Centre: a) the leaders' group, b) the youth club and c) the women's club. It should be noted that the CDC is a structure of the Roma organisation Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, and is supported by the municipal administration.

The Centre was created as a meeting place for all the key stakeholders in the Roma community: informal leaders, activists, women, youth and city councillors. As a result, the Centre has a leader's group, a youth group and a women's group that unite the activists on a voluntary basis. For this reason, the CDC was identified as the main Roma counterpart. It needs to be pointed out that the informal Roma leaders and the most influential activists needed to be contacted and approached separately.

Key counterparts

The municipal administration was the key counterpart outside the Roma community, as it has certain responsibilities in all fields of the integration policy. The municipal administration was the main stakeholder in education, especially preschool education since all kindergartens and primary schools are municipal ones. The hospital in Pavlikeni is also municipal. Since Pavlikeni is a relatively small rural municipality and the Municipality is the main employer, it has a certain role in employment.

Furthermore, a number of other local institutions were defined as key counterparts in each field. More indicative, in the field of school education the

key counterparts were Kliment Ohridski Primary School and Bacho Kiro School. Regarding preschool education, key counterparts were Kiril and Methodius Kindergarten (in Batak), Colourful Dreams Kindergarten (Varbovka), Atanas Nedelchev Kindergarten (Byala Cherkva) and Buratino Kindergarten (Stambolovo). The Municipal Hospital of Pavlikeni was a primary counterpart in healthcare, as were the local GPs.

Local LERI team

The local LERI team was composed of the LERI field expert, Deyan Kolev, and a team of local co-researchers, including Teodora Krumova, and several community moderators from Pavlikeni, Batak, Byala Cherkva and Varbovka.

3. PAR methodology employed

The LERI research in Pavlikeni began with a participatory needs assessment, which covered not only Roma activists and leaders but also the majority population and its opinion leaders, since any integration policy should involve both sections of the local community – Roma and non-Roma. That is why targeted activities for researching the views of different stakeholders among ethnic Bulgarians, such as teachers, representatives of municipal administrators, etc. were undertaken.

Regarding the Roma community, the needs assessment included all Roma groups, and special activities were undertaken in this direction. Particular efforts were made to reveal the diverse views held by Roma Muslims, as well as within the Kaldarashi and Rudari groups.

In addition to the town of Pavlikeni, the needs assessment also took place in the surrounding areas with significant Roma populations: Byala Cherkva, Stambolovo, Varbovka and Batak. This was important since the villages in Pavlikeni municipality are populated by many Roma and in two of them – Varbovka and Batak – Roma constitute the majority.

Furthermore, the needs assessment included a diverse set of representatives: municipal administration, other local institutions, civil society activists and community activists.

The following methods were used:

a. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with the purpose of revealing the views and motivations of the key stakeholders. Overall, 12 face-to-face interviews were undertaken. The following stakeholders were interviewed:

- the community moderator from the CDC and Roma activist from the village of Stambolovo;
- the mayor of Stambolovo;
- the local moderator and Roma activist from the village of Batak;
- the mayor of Batak;
- the local moderator and Rudari Roma activist in the town of Byala Cherkva;
- the leader of the women's group in Byala Cherkva;
- the mayor of Byala Cherkva;
- the school principal of Kliment Ohridski Primary School;
- the school principal of Bacho Kiro Secondary School;

- a popular teacher and NGO activist from Pavlikeni;
- the leader of the Kaldrashi Roma community;
- the mayor of the municipality of Pavlikeni.

The LERI field expert carried out face-to-face interviews in the period June–October 2015. They covered two main questions:

1. What are the main problems preventing Roma integration?
2. What are the possible actions that could be included in the local research?

In addition, some of the respondents were asked about the contradictions among the Roma groups in Pavlikeni and how to overcome them.

The face-to-face interviews identified the scope of the needs of the main stakeholders and their ideas for the local LERI research.

b. Focus groups were carried out in order to reveal the motivations of two key groups: Roma activists and teachers. In the focus groups, the following took part:

- Roma community moderators, as a structured sample of Roma activists;
- principals of schools and kindergartens, as a sample of the teachers who are traditionally important opinion shapers.

The focus groups were carried out in September 2015. The LERI field expert and the local co-researcher moderated them. The main topics discussed were:

1. What are the key problematic fields/areas to be addressed through the local research?
2. What activities should be included in the local research?

The focus groups identified the main needs to be addressed and possible local interventions.

c. A consensus conference was organised for gaining consensus among the leaders and activists of different Roma groups regarding the interventions that were necessary to meet the key needs. It brought together leaders of the Millet, Kaldrashi and Rudari Roma groups from Pavlikeni, Byala Cherkva, Stambolovo, Varbovka and Batak. It was held in September 2015 and was moderated by the LERI field expert. The main topics discussed were:

1. what the key problematic fields/areas are, to be addressed through the local research;
2. what activities to include in the local research;
3. how to ensure the fluent interaction and participation of representatives of different Roma groups in the local research.

The main purpose of the consensus conference was to help the participants agree on the main set of local interventions, identify which of them were to be included in the LERI local intervention, and which should be presented before the municipal authorities for incorporating into the Municipal Roma Integration Plan and in various municipal projects.

d. Door-to-door campaigns were organised at grass-roots level in the Roma neighbourhoods. They aimed to raise the motivation of Roma parents to enrol

their children in preschool and school education, as well as to inform local Roma about their health rights and to increase their motivation for paying their health-insurance fees.

The campaigns were undertaken in the period January–September 2016 during the local research implementation. The community moderators from the CDC carried them out.

e. Community discussions were carried out at grass-roots level in the Roma neighbourhoods on important topics such as education, healthcare and early marriages. They strengthened the effect of the door-to-door campaigns. Community moderators and volunteers from the local Roma communities carried out both the discussions and the campaigns.

The discussions took place during the local research implementation, January–September 2016. They were carried out by the community moderators from the Community Development Centres.

4. The local intervention description

Needs and objectives

Based on the entire set of problems and needs identified in section 1.2., the local activists and stakeholders decided to address the following through local intervention.

Limited access to quality healthcare services: the majority of Roma are uninsured and as a result, they use only the emergency services. Furthermore, the majority of women have not undergone gynaecological screening and, as a result, many of them may be suffering from gynaecological diseases. It appears that within the Roma community awareness of the availability and benefits of preventive healthcare services is low.

To address this problem – although on a small-scale through piloting a model – the LERI local team together with the local Roma activists designed Local Intervention 1.

During the implementation phase, it appeared that trust-building activities were necessary to link the local Roma and the municipal hospital as well as activities to support the municipal hospital with equipment.

Tendency towards segregation in education and the low educational level of Roma: many Roma children do not attend kindergarten and are not well-prepared to enter the 1st grade. Roma children study in primary schools (the number of dropouts is minimal) but there is a tendency for segregation and low results in the Roma classes and schools. Only a small percentage of Roma continue their education into secondary schools and universities.

To address this problem – in all its aspects – Local Interventions 2 and 3 were designed.

In the course of the intervention, it appeared that the local educational counterparts were not able to access the opportunities provided by the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme due to two factors. Firstly, they lacked the skills to formulate good project proposals and secondly, the municipal administration had few staff with the capacity to work on

proposals. That is why as part of the local intervention the main educational counterparts were supported in preparing and submitting project proposals.

Intra-community tensions: There are controversies among the various Roma groups in Pavlikeni, as well as between the different clans within the same group. The Roma community is not well organised. Indeed, certain traditional practices that limit the participation of women and young people in the economic, public and political life are still widespread (such as early marriages, early school dropout of girls, etc.), and there are few educated Roma, who are not influential within the community.

To address this problem, the LERI local team made consistent efforts to engage members of all groups in the research activities.

LERI Activities

The activities implemented within the local intervention were organised around three components, namely healthcare, preschool education and high-school education. The ideas that emerged from them were formulated during the focus groups and the consensus conference held in September 2015. They were designed by the local LERI team and the community moderators from the CDC.

Healthcare intervention:

The life expectancy of Roma is 10 years lower than ethnic Bulgarians. The reasons for this are complex: poverty is only one of them (although the most significant). The healthcare intervention was designed to identify what the main barriers to Roma accessing the health-insurance system are, and what can be done to increase the number of health-insured Roma.

This component addressed a key factor leading to poor access to health services – the fact that the vast majority of Roma are not health insured. As a result, they use only emergency care (which is free but covers the provision of only very basic healthcare services). This has become a community acceptable model: people do not pay their insurances (since many of them work in the grey economy) and do not use healthcare services except emergency care and some services for children delivered by the GP. If someone has serious health problems and needs hospital care, the relatives and the entire community collect money to pay the three years' insurance in order to obtain the status of a 'health-insured patient'.

In July 2015, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted legislative changes – effective from January 2016 – that require everyone to have five years of prior health insurance in order to obtain the status of health insured. That is why the local activists in Pavlikeni decided to organise a pilot experiment: to identify up to 10 uninsured people and work with them in two directions:

- to convince them to pay their insurances for the three previous years in order to obtain health-insured status. Since the amount is relatively high, the LERI research could cover half of it;
- to convince them to continue to pay their monthly insurance after obtaining health-insured status.

The initial idea was that the CDC would sign a contract with every person participating in the pilot experiment. According to the contract, every person would participate on a voluntary basis in the awareness-raising campaigns, which

aimed to promote healthcare issues in the Roma culture as well as to increase the number of health-insured Roma. This campaign would be organised by the CDC in collaboration with the Regional Healthcare Inspectorate, the hospital in Pavlikeni, the GPs and the Municipality. The campaign would be implemented in Pavlikeni, Byala Cherkva, Stambolovo, Batak and Varbovka in all Roma neighbourhoods and groups residing in these areas. Simultaneously, the campaign would also target the service providers with the aim of informing them about the specific challenges that Roma face and to decrease the stereotyping of Roma. Thus, the campaign would build mutual confidence and trust among the Roma and the service providers.

The respective timeline for the intervention was designed as follows:

- in December 2015, the contracts with the 10 supported people were signed and their health insurances paid;
- during the period January to September 2016, the awareness-raising campaigns were implemented, targeting the Roma and non-Roma communities as well as the service providers;
- essential activities undertaken from January to September 2016 comprised working with the 10 supported people, to motivate them to continue paying their health insurance fees.

The activities were implemented according to the initial design. At the same time certain new (un-planned) activities emerged since it appeared that trust-building activities were necessary to link the local Roma and the municipal hospital, as well as activities to support the municipal hospital with equipment, especially ambulances, which were urgently needed.

- In the second half of December 2015, the community moderators from Pavlikeni, Byala Cherkva and Batak motivated and supported 10 active volunteers at the CDC in Pavlikeni to restore their health rights by paying half of their health-insurance fees for the period from January 2013 to December 2015. The other half of the fees were paid by the volunteers themselves. Through contracts with Amalipe they committed to regularly paying their health-insurance fees after 1 January 2016 and continuing to participate in the activities of the CDC.

The contracts were signed on 21 December 2015. It was organised in a very short period of time that proved the capacity of the community moderators to activate the local communities and the trust they have from the local people.

- On 17 January 2016 the Municipal Hospital of Pavlikeni invited Roma activists to organise 'Open Hospital's Day', i.e. to organise visits from Roma from the surrounding villages. The visits took place on 27 January. Thirteen activists from Pavlikeni, Stambolovo, Batak, Varbovka and Byala Cherkva took part. They visited Emergency Care, the hospital itself and had meetings with staff and the hospital director.

As a result of the visit, community moderators and the medical staff agreed to work together to raise the quality of healthcare services through:

- regular meetings: twice a year the community moderators will undertake a community survey regarding the levels of satisfaction with the services delivered by the hospital. They will present the main challenges and gaps revealed before the hospital director and municipal authorities. Together they will discuss certain activities to overcome the problems;

- the moderators carrying out special visits to the hospital once a month to observe how the activities for overcoming the problems are being implemented;
- advocating before municipal authorities and fundraising for improving the extremely poor conditions in the hospital: their only ambulance caught fire; their equipment is old and does not function well, etc.

Following this meeting, the local Roma activists and Amalipe managed to arrange a significant donation: a new ambulance was donated to the municipal hospital in Pavlikeni. The donation was granted on 29 February 2016 by the Sovereign Military Order of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta (known as the Order of Malta), through the assistance of the former Bulgarian king and prime-minister, Simeon Saksoburggotski, and the Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance.

In addition, on International Healthcare Day on 7 April 2016 the community moderators organised meetings with key staff from Emergency Care and GPs from Pavlikeni. During the meetings, they discussed the rights of Roma patients, cooperation with Roma activists for avoiding possible conflicts and how to improve service delivery in the Roma community.

Finally, the community moderators carried out periodic meetings with the people supported to re-establish their health-insurance status. The purpose was to check whether they were continuing to pay their monthly fees and to encourage them to do so.

Preschool intervention

Roma attendance at preschool is very low for the following two reasons. First, the taxes constitute a problem for many poor families and, secondly, certain cultural factors also affect the attainment rate. According to a recent World Bank report, while the average attendance rate in kindergartens in Bulgaria is 84 %, the rate for Roma children is less than 40 %.⁸

The Roma activists from Pavlikeni (community moderators and other activists) suggested three elements to be included in a pilot experiment. They were discussed with the other local actors – the principals of kindergartens, municipal civil servants in education and city councillors who also supported them. The elements were:

- 1) To pay part of the attendance fees for the kindergartens for children at the age for compulsory preschool in Byala Cherkva, Batak and Stambolovo (for all children – Roma and non-Roma) for the period of January–March 2016 and to negotiate with the municipality to pay the other part.
- 2) To carry out an intensive community campaign in order to convince parents to allow all children aged five or six to attend kindergarten. This campaign aimed to change the mentality of local people, to form a strong understanding that compulsory pre-schooling should be complied with and to build trust between the local communities and the kindergartens. This is why the campaign also targeted the teachers in the kindergartens, i.e. to

⁸ SABER (2013), *Bulgaria: Early childhood development*, SABER Country Report, the World Bank, p. 20, available at: www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/08/25/000442464_20140825135443/Rendered/PDF/900840WP0Box380IlgariaOCR0Final02013.pdf.

change their attitude towards Roma and to assist them in developing skills for working with Roma parents.

This pilot intended to show that if the kindergartens were free, Roma children would attend regularly. It might also show that certain targeted activities could build mutual confidence and trust between Roma parents and kindergartens.

In this regard, important new activities emerged during the implementation of the research. In order to facilitate the empowerment of Roma parents and their participation in the life of kindergartens, the LERI team encouraged active parents to form parents' clubs.

- 3) To implement an advocacy campaign before the newly elected city councillors for issuing a municipal decision to abolish the fees for children of preschool age (five or six years old). The campaign would include:
 - meetings with parents, teachers, Roma activists and key city councillors in order to explain the proposal for issuing the municipal decision for abolishing the fees for children of preschool age, its arguments and positive consequences;
 - organising visits by the city councillors to the kindergartens in order to show the positive results of the intervention and explain the proposal for issuing the Municipal decision for abolishing the fees for children of preschool age.

The Roma city councillors were particularly targeted in the campaign since they could provide further support for this Municipal decision.

The initial timeline for the intervention was as follows:

- the fees were to be paid for the period February–May 2016;
- during the period January–September 2016, the campaigns targeting the Roma and non-Roma as well as the teachers in kindergartens were to be implemented;
- the advocacy activities before the City Council were to be implemented in the period February–September 2016.

The intervention was implemented within this period through the following activities.

1. On 13 January 2016, the idea was presented before the local authorities and the general public on the occasion of a public celebration in Vasiltsa – the Roma New Year, organised by the CDC and Amalipe in the Cultural House in Byala Cherkva. More than 300 people from the entire municipality of Pavlikeni attended the event. The mayor of Pavlikeni, several city councillors (including Roma councillors) and principals from all the kindergartens and schools were official guests.

Taking advantage of this strong political presence, the community moderator from Pavlikeni presented the idea for the preschool intervention, and support from the municipal administration and the kindergartens was requested. The mayor congratulated the local activists and Amalipe, and expressed his support.

2. From February to June 2016, Centre Amalipe paid the kindergarten fees for all children in Batak, Varbovka, Stambolovo and Byala Cherkva who are aged five or six.

3. The community moderators organised meetings and other forms of community work with the parents to motivate them to enrol their children in kindergartens.
4. Parents' clubs were formed in three of the kindergartens: Batak, Stambolovo and Byala Cherkva. Until the time of the drafting of this study, efforts to form a parents' club in Varbovka have failed because of the migration of the most active parents abroad. As a result, grandparents usually take care of the children and they are significantly less motivated to form a parents' club.
5. Simultaneously, meetings between the parents' clubs and the teachers/principals of the kindergartens were organised as a form of trust-building activity. During the meetings parents presented their ideas and suggestions regarding the educational process.

High-school intervention

The number of Roma holding a university degree is extremely low, both at national level and in Pavlikeni. One of the reasons (among many others) is the university tuition fees, as well as other expenses. That is why the activists from Pavlikeni suggested:

- covering the fees for two Roma students from Pavlikeni;
- advocating before the newly elected Municipal Council for incorporating three scholarships for Roma students in the municipal budget 2017. At present, the Municipal Roma Integration Plan envisages one scholarship for a Roma medical student. The local activists intend to advocate for three more scholarships so as to also cover other thematic areas of higher education;
- signing contracts with the supported students to provide voluntary work in the Roma community: participation in awareness-raising campaigns among Roma students in the 12th grade, and with their parents, to motivate them to study in university.

The respective timeline for the intervention was designed as follows:

- the fees to be paid for the period January–February 2016, as well as for September 2016;
- the campaign targeting the Roma community to be implemented during the period January–September 2016;
- the advocacy activities before the City Council to be implemented during the period February–September 2016.

The activities were implemented according to the designed time frame. In the course of implementation it appeared that, there were four students who could receive support. Although the design was only for two, the decision was made to support all of them since the course fees appeared to be lower because the students were enrolled in distance learning.

On 5 February contracts with the four Roma university students from Pavlikeni were signed. Financial assistance in the amount of one student's fees for the second semester of academic year 2015/2016 for training in the University of Veliko Tarnovo 'St Cyril and Methodius' was given to the four students to attend the following courses:

- History and Presence of EU – European Integration Master’s degree, 1st year
- Social Pedagogy, 4th year
- Preschool and Primary School Education, 2nd year
- Social Entrepreneurship, 1st year.

There were six Roma university students from Pavlikeni at the time of drafting this study. Since two of them were supported by the Roma Education Fund, the LERI team in Pavlikeni decided to support the other four. The students agreed to participate in initiatives and campaigns of Centre Amalipe and the CDC Pavlikeni to activate the local Roma community. Their first initiative was the establishment of a volunteer group to support activities:

- motivating Roma young people to apply to universities, the aim being to rapidly increase the number of Roma students from the municipality of Pavlikeni;
- working with Roma parents to support their children who wish to apply to university;
- advocating on behalf of students to Pavlikeni Municipality to create a municipal fund to support students.

In addition, the students will take part in the LERI preschool component via working with parents whose children are five or six years old.

Concluding event

In September 2016, the concluding event was organised. It brought together the key stakeholders from the Roma (community moderators, informal leaders, activists) and the wider society (teachers, doctors), as well as representatives of the key municipal and district institutions. The main purpose of the event was to present the results of the research, to increase public support for Roma integration and to advocate for the sustainability of the research results. Participants not only from Pavlikeni but also from other municipalities in Veliko Turnovo district took part in the event.

Providing methodological support for educational counterparts

Initially, this activity was not envisaged under the LERI research activities. Nevertheless, during the implementation of the other activities, it appeared that the local educational counterparts (schools and kindergartens) were unable to access the opportunities provided by the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme because neither they nor the staff within the municipal administration had available staff with the skills and experience to prepare a project proposal. That is why as part of the LERI local intervention, the LERI team supported the main educational counterparts to prepare and submit project proposals.

The first opportunities for municipal Roma integration projects were made available in September 2015: the managing authority of the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme announced two calls for

proposals for projects that support the educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities at preschool and at school age.⁹

The projects were to be submitted by consortiums composed of municipalities, schools or kindergartens and NGOs. The first deadline was 30 November 2015, and the second 29 April 2016 (later extended to 3 May).

Since the first deadline was approaching, at the end of October the LERI field expert and a group of three local Roma activists met two experts from the education department in Pavlikeni Municipality with the aim of discussing the possibility of municipal projects within the two calls for proposals.

It became clear that the Pavlikeni Municipality was not interested since the timescales were short and there was lack of administrative capacity for preparing projects at that time: the new mayor's team had still not formed therefore they were not in a position to make those sorts of political decisions. However, the Municipality could be a partner if the schools/kindergartens or Centre Amalipe intended to prepare and submit projects.

As a second step the activists had a meeting with the principals of:

- Kliment Ohridski Primary School
- Bacho Kiro Secondary School
- Bacho Kiro Primary School, Byala Cherkva
- kindergartens in Byala Cherkva, Varbovka and five kindergartens in Pavlikeni.

The possibility of projects being submitted within the first deadline (30 November) was discussed. Bearing in mind that the human and financial capacity of the schools and kindergartens varied, the following possible options were agreed.

- Kliment Ohridski Primary School could prepare a project in partnership with Pavlikeni Municipality and Amalipe.
- Bacho Kiro Secondary School could prepare another project. Both schools could also prepare a joint project if they found common priorities and sets of activities.
- Bacho Kiro Primary School (Byala Cherkva) was not in a position to prepare its own project. The principal asked to take part in Amalipe's project, together with the schools in Batak and Varbovka.
- The kindergartens in Byala Cherkva, Varbovka and five kindergartens in Pavlikeni were not able to prepare projects: they had few teachers and none of them had experience in preparing projects. In addition, their budgets were small and they did not feel able to financially manage such large projects. The principals asked to be included in Amalipe's project if the organisation decided to apply.

Subsequently, the following methodological support was provided by LERI:

⁹ Roma NGO Amalipe (2015), 'Calls for project proposals for educational integration under OPSESG were announced', 23 September 2015.

- Supporting Kliment Ohridski Primary School to prepare and submit a project: the project included introducing intercultural education, introducing a set of diverse out-of-class activities for preventing early school leaving, working with parents, and other activities. The project was submitted on 29 November.
- Preparing a project for kindergartens that included kindergartens in Byala Cherkva, Varbovka and five kindergartens in Pavlikeni: the project was submitted on 30 November by the Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe. It included 22 kindergartens from five municipalities from the Veliko Turnovo district.
- Preparing a school project that included the schools in Byala Cherkva, Varbovka and Batak: the project was submitted on 30 November by the Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe. It included 10 schools from four municipalities from the Veliko Turnovo district.
- Supporting Bacho Kiro Secondary School to prepare a project: this was successfully submitted on 28 April 2016 within the second deadline.

The preparation of these projects was time and effort consuming. The moderators from the CDC also helped with the process.

Results

The following results were achieved through the LERI research:

For the healthcare intervention

- Overall, 10 people were supported and obtained the status of health-insured patient. They paid half of their fees while the other half was paid by LERI. As a result, they can now use the full range of healthcare services covered by the National Health Insurance Fund.
- All of them continue to pay their health-insurance fees and have the status of health-insured patient.
- Meetings between Roma activists and the director of the municipal hospital take place every month.
- A new ambulance was donated to the hospital.
- Improved confidence of Roma communities towards the healthcare system: given the short period of time it has been running, it cannot be stated that this outcome has been achieved as a direct result of the local intervention. Nevertheless, the intervention is contributing in this direction.

For the preschool intervention

- Increased enrolment in kindergartens: Thirty-seven children of preschool age enrolled in kindergartens. Half of them are enrolled for the first time.
- Established mutual confidence between the local Roma communities and the kindergartens: it is not possible to say that this outcome has been achieved as a direct result of the intervention, given the short period the local intervention has been underway, nevertheless, the intervention is contributing in this direction.

For the high-school intervention

- Supported four Roma students to study at university: they are representatives of different Roma groups and from different settlements. At present, all six students of Roma origin in Pavlikeni receive support.

- Increased the number of young Roma who want to study at the university.

For the methodological support for educational counterparts

The educational projects discussed with the counterparts were successfully submitted to the managing authority of the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme.

5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

In order to research the results achieved, the LERI field expert devised a feedback questionnaire for the participants in the healthcare component. The community moderators helped by contacting all 10 supported people. Structured interviews were carried out and a questionnaire (containing 11 questions) was administered to all participants. Three main topics were researched:

- the level of satisfaction from the LERI healthcare component and whether the activity had contributed to increasing the number of health-insured Roma;
- the role of community work and of the community moderators in the success of the healthcare component;
- the main obstacles that prevent the Roma from accessing the health-insurance system and how they could be removed.

Resulting from and summarising the experience and feedback collected, the following lessons learned were identified.

Healthcare component

The model for increasing the number of health-insured Roma patients provides enough evidence for success. The model contains four main elements:

1. facilitating the return/re-entry into the health-insurance system via the LERI research paying half the debt and the other half provided by the supported patients themselves;
2. individual work with the patient to motivate him/her to continue paying the monthly health-insurance fees: carried out by community moderator, health mediator or another community worker;
3. a community campaign at grass-roots level for informing about health rights and obligations and for creating confidence in the health-insurance system: carried out by community moderator, health mediator or another community worker;
4. trust-building activities for establishing cooperation between healthcare service providers and Roma community activists.

The model has proved its efficiency and effectiveness: all of the supported people continue to pay their monthly health-insurance fees and to maintain the status of health-insured patient. It seems that the LERI research managed to contribute fully to increasing the number of health-insured Roma as well as creating a model in this direction. This is also evident from the feedback collected.

- In response to question 7, 'Have you continued to pay your health-insurance fees after December 2015?' five people responded "Yes, every month" and four

others with *"Yes, but I have missed one month"*. No one answered *"No"* and all of them continue to be health insured.

- Answering question 3, 'If there had been no support from the LERI research to re-establish your health-insurance status would you have done it?', only one respondent confirmed that he would have paid his health-insurance fees if the research had not taken place in Pavlikeni. Six of the respondents answered *"No"* and two others hesitated. It seems that without LERI, only one out of the 10 beneficiaries would have re-established their health-insurance status.

- The respondents intend to continue paying their health-insurance fees. This is clear from the answers provided to the question 'Will you continue paying your health-insurance fees?': six respondents answered *"Yes, for sure"* and three others, *"Yes, if I have the money"*. No one answered *"No"* or *"Most probably not"*.

The community development approach (i.e. the grass-roots empowerment work carried out by community moderators organised by the CDC) is an essential part of the model and an indispensable part of its success.

- As the answers to question 5, 'Are you familiar with the work of community moderators and the CDC?' showed, all of the respondents knew both the moderators and were aware of the work of the Centre.

- Nine out of ten supported people declared that they had taken part in campaigns and other Centre activities after being included in the research (question 6).

- All 10 grantees stated that they have had regular meetings with the community moderators after their health-insurance fees were paid (question 9).

- In answer to the question 'Would you pay your health-insurance fees every month without the interaction with the community moderator?' five out of nine respondents answered *"No"* while only one responded *"Yes"*. The other three hesitated. One respondent did not answer. These answers clearly show that the interaction with the community moderator is crucial for building a culture of paying the health-insurance fees, at least during the first months.

The model faces certain limitations. The requirement for the patient to pay half of the insurance debt limits the possibility to include the most vulnerable and poorest section of the Roma community. This section comprises around 11 % of the Roma community at national level¹⁰ and 8 % of the Roma community in Pavlikeni¹¹: the model is not applicable for marginalised families. Another limiting factor is linked with the need for intensive community work carried out by the community moderator, health mediator or other community workers. Without it the efficiency and effectiveness of the model would be significantly reduced.

¹⁰ According to a survey on the most marginalized groups of the Roma community, conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2011–2012.

¹¹ According to estimations by the Community Development Centre

The healthcare intervention is a good example of a trust-building activity since it provides the grounds for cooperation of the local Roma activists and the CDC, as well as of the service providers (GPs and hospital) and the institutions responsible for the provision of healthcare services (the Municipality and the Regional Healthcare Inspectorate). In addition, it is a good capacity-building activity given that it builds the competence of the local activists to mobilise the local community in health issues.

Preschool componentThe model for increasing the enrolment of Roma children in preschool education provides evidence for success. The model contains three main elements:

1. facilitating access to kindergartens: via paying the attendance fees in the kindergartens for children of compulsory preschool age for all children who are five or six years old;
2. changing the attitudes of local Roma communities towards preschools and kindergartens and forming a culture of active support: through intensive community campaigns in order to convince parents to allow all children aged five or six years old to attend kindergarten. These campaigns change the mentality of the local people, helping to form a strong understanding that compulsory preschooling should be complied with, and build trust between the local communities and the kindergartens. This is why the campaign also targets the teachers in the kindergartens, i.e. to change their attitude towards Roma and to assist them in developing skills for working with the Roma parents.
3. empowering parents to take part in the life of the kindergartens: via establishing parents' clubs and cooperation between them and teachers/principals.

A significant strength and added value of this model was that it is publicly acceptable, contributes to forming tolerant interethnic relations and gained support from the huge majority of citizens (both Roma and non-Roma). Free kindergartens (i.e. abolishing the attendance fees) are broadly supported by almost all citizens.

In order to better research the results from the preschool intervention, the field expert devised a feedback questionnaire for all the participants in the component. Structured interviews were carried out and questionnaires administered to parents of all participants: one parent per child. Overall, 47 parents were interviewed. The questionnaire contained 10 questions. Three main topics were researched:

- the level of satisfaction for the LERI preschool component and whether the research contributed to increasing the number of Roma children enrolled in compulsory preschooling;
- the role of community work and of the community moderators for the success of the preschool component;
- the main obstacles that prevent Roma children from accessing kindergartens and how they could be removed.

The feedback questionnaire revealed results that supported the preschool component as successful, as outlined below.

Regarding the level of satisfaction for the LERI preschool component, the research managed to contribute to increasing the number of Roma children from Pavlikeni municipality who attend preschool groups in kindergartens and do so regularly. As the answers to question 4, 'If there was no support from the LERI research, would you send your child to kindergarten?' showed that only 10 of the respondents (out of 47) answered "Yes". Ten others confirmed that their children would not have attended kindergarten without the LERI research's support. The other 27 hesitated to answer.

There was a strong, positive tendency for the children enrolled in kindergartens to be attending regularly. Answering question 1, 'Did your child attend kindergarten regularly from February to May?' 39 respondents answered "Yes, every day". One answered "No" and the other seven answered "Attended, but not regularly".

The significance of the support provided by the community moderators and the LERI research is also clear from the answers to question 2, 'Why does your child attend kindergarten?' (more than 1 answer was accepted for this question): overall, 34 responded "It is obligatory", 24 answered "It is good for the child", 12 people answered "I was convinced by the community moderators", and two more responded "I decided to be a modern man".

It appears that the component found a niche of people who had a notion that their children should attend kindergarten, but most probably would not have acted to make this a reality without the LERI support. The support provided within this component delivered the expected results in terms of raising the attendance of Roma children in preschool education.

Regarding the role of community work and of community moderators for the success of the preschool component: the feedback proved clearly **that work with the parents of the grantees, delivered by Roma community moderators, was an essential part of the model and its success.**

- As the answers to question five 'Are you familiar with the work of community moderators and the CDC?' showed, all of the respondents knew both the moderators and the Centre. Overall, 28 respondents answered "I have heard about the Centre" and 19 stated "I have been a volunteer". No one answered "I have not heard [of either]".
- Most of the supported people declared that they had taken part in campaigns and other activities of the Centre since their children were included in the research (question 6): 32 respondents answered "Yes", 13 responded that "There was not such an occasion" and only two answered "No".
- All parents confirmed that they have had regular meetings with the community moderators after their children were included in the component (question 10): 13 of them stated that they had had discussions with the respective moderator once, while the other 34 declared that they had met with the moderator many times.

The main limitations of the model are linked with certain factors.

- The fact that many Roma parents are abroad poses a serious challenge for the education of Roma children: usually, when parents are abroad,

children live with their grandparents. Their major concern is the life and the health of the grandchildren, while educational achievements are 'second plan' (secondary). That is why intensive community campaigns and individual work are necessary to convince the grandparents of the importance of education.

- The migration of the most active parents abroad limits the possibilities for forming an active parents' club.
- The model cannot guarantee an immediate effect: the pilot in Pavlikeni shows that almost all of the Roma children who were at the age for compulsory preschool and had not attended kindergartens before the intervention were enrolled. Nevertheless, this took five months, and four children were still not enrolled, although a lot of effort had been made to convince their parents of the benefits. Obviously, the model requires more time or additional elements in order to ensure full attendance.

The preschool intervention is a very good example of both trust building and capacity building since it contributed to establishing alliances among the local activists, kindergartens and the Municipality and also supported the local activists in building their capacity for interacting with the local community.

High school component

The high school intervention represents a strategic investment both in the capacity of the Roma community and the development of the local communities and municipalities. In the case of rural municipalities that face huge migration and a lack of professionals with a university education, such kinds of intervention are greatly needed. The high school education component particularly was examined. In addition, the LERI local team researched the main obstacles that prevent the Roma from accessing a university education, and how these obstacles could be removed.

The feedback questionnaire revealed inspiring results, as illustrated by the following.

Regarding the level of satisfaction from the LERI high school education component: the LERI research managed to contribute to increasing the number of Roma from Pavlikeni municipality studying at university. It is worth noting that the overall level of education of Roma in Pavlikeni is low and that Roma with a university education are the exception in this municipality. That is why LERI's contribution and subsequent success are remarkable.

As the answers to question 4, 'If there was no support from the LERI research, would you have continued your education?' showed, not one of the respondents answered "Yes". One of them confirmed that he would not have continued his education without LERI's support; the other three hesitated to answer.

The strong, positive tendency was that the respondents had continued their university education successfully passing their exams: three of them answered with "Yes, I am continuing my education" to the question 'Are you continuing your education?' One answered "I graduated" and no one stated "I stopped".

It appears that the component found a niche of people who had only a weak notion about undertaking a university diploma and most probably would not have

acted to make this a reality without research's support. The modest support provided within the component is delivering the expected results in terms of helping the grantees to continue their education.

Regarding the role of community work and of community moderators for the success of the high-school education component: the feedback proved clearly **that work with the grantees delivered by the Roma community moderators was an essential part of the model and its success.**

- As the answers to question 5, 'Are you familiar with the work of community moderators and the CDC?' showed, all of the respondents knew both the moderators and the Centre.
- All of the supported people declared that they have taken part in campaigns and other activities of the Centre since being included in the research (question 6).
- All four grantees stated that they have had regular meetings with the community moderators since their university fees were paid (question 10).

Paying the fees for university is an important precondition for enrolling more Roma, but it is not enough. Awareness-raising campaigns among gymnasium students and their parents form the other obligatory component of the intervention.

Other key lessons

The intensive community work at grass-roots level in the Roma community is one of the obligatory preconditions for ensuring the success of any Roma integration intervention. The CDC and the work of community moderators are very good examples of this.

The capacity of the local stakeholders in rural municipalities to develop project proposals within the EU co-funded operational programmes is limited. As a result, they will not be able to access many good opportunities if additional methodological support is not provided.

The lessons learned from Pavlikeni are applicable to many other municipalities in Bulgaria, especially the ones situated in rural areas. The reasons for stating this relate mainly to two common factors shared by most of the rural municipalities:

- they share the same problems in a similar environment;
- the community development approach that appeared to be the crucial element of the models could be applied in the same way in rural municipalities: a few community moderators organised within the CDC were able to interact on a regular basis with all the beneficiaries. This could not be applied in the same way in urban municipalities.

The above points relate specifically to the preschool component. Two of the components – the healthcare and the higher education component – would also be applicable in urban areas.

Two factors are crucial for successful implementation.

- The existence of community moderators, mediators or other similar roles that apply the community development approach: the best possible approach is for these positions to be managed/steered by a community-based organisation or a local NGO. For introducing such positions and structures, the European Social Fund (ESF) or other EU financing could be used as well as national funds.
- Cooperation with the local institutions and authorities.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

At municipal level

Although the LERI research interventions were small-scale and of short duration, certain efforts for ensuring continuation and sustainability are recommended. At municipal level, certain relatively small but important steps could be undertaken in Pavlikeni as well as in many other municipalities.

1. Abolishing the fees for children at preschool age in kindergartens for all children who are five or six years old.
2. Providing scholarships for students from the villages who are committed to working in their settlements or municipalities after graduating from university.
3. Establishing a municipal health-insurance fund.

The existence of the Municipal Roma Integration Plan, as well as the possibility of obtaining EU funds, are preconditions for applying these steps at municipal level, even in the poorer municipalities. The other important precondition is linked to the confidence between Roma activists and the municipal institutions: this is an important framework for ensuring the success of all Roma integration interventions.

At national level

Roma integration is a national policy and cannot be achieved with efforts only at municipal level. The central institutions should provide favourable conditions for integration through:

1. Announcing operations/financial mechanisms, in the context of ESF co-funded programmes that would support the enrolment of Roma in universities as well as in preschool groups and classes, developing community work at grass-roots level and other elements from the local interventions. There are two ESF co-funded programmes in Bulgaria: the Human Resources Development Operational Programme and the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme. The advocacy efforts of the Roma NGOs resulted in the inclusion in both programmes of the investment priority 'Socioeconomic integration of marginalised communities such as Roma'. Thus, both programmes could support projects for continuing the pilot activities tested in Pavlikeni. More concretely, this could happen through:
 - ensuring that the operation 'Higher education_support for vulnerable groups' will include the special component 'Students of minority origin' and that this component will support course fees, dormitory fees and

other expenses. The operation was approved by the Monitoring Committee of Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme in October 2015. During the next months the concrete elements of the operation will be prepared. The high-school component of LERI provided evidence for ensuring that the operation 'Higher education support for vulnerable groups' will include the special component 'Students from minority origin' and that this component will support course fees, dormitory fees and other expenses.

- ensuring that the work of community moderators and the community centres are included within the operation 'Integration'. The operation was approved by the Monitoring Committee of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme in November 2015. During the next months, the concrete elements of the operation will be prepared.

2. Inclusive mainstream policies: the mainstream policies in the field of education and healthcare have important (positive or negative) effects on the efforts for Roma integration. Examples of inclusive mainstream policies that would support Roma integration could include:

- abolishing the fees for kindergartens at national level for all children regardless of their ethnic or social background;
- legislative or normative changes that make the return/re-entry into the health-insurance system easier.

7. Additional Information

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