

Local engagement for Roma inclusion

Locality study Aiud (Romania), 2016

Author: Simona Ciotlăuş

DISCLAIMER: This document was commissioned under contract by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) for the project [Local engagement for Roma inclusion](#). The information and views contained in the document do not necessarily reflect the views or the official position of FRA. The document is made publicly available for transparency and information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or legal opinion.

Contents

1. Executive summary	3
2. Description of the local context.....	3
Key problems and issues identified by the LERI research in Aiud	9
3. PAR methodology employed	11
4. The local intervention description - Goals, partners, process and results	13
The main goals of the LERI local research.....	13
Description of the interventions carried out.....	14
The legalisation of an informal settlement: the case of Bufa in Aiud	14
Seeking alternatives to prevent a forced eviction: the case of Bethlen	
Gabor in Aiud	25
Challenges faced in the course of implementation	28
Milestones and timing	30
Involvement of stakeholders.....	31
Monitoring, evaluation and participants' feedback.....	35
5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned	36
Formation of an effective local team	36
Involvement of local administration and its representatives	37
Participation – in political terms.....	39
Barriers to securing tenancy	39
6. Conclusions and recommendations:	40
7. Additional Information	41

1. Executive summary

Drawing on the LERI experience in Aiud (Romania), this study presents different approaches in tackling the housing insecurity of Roma in Romania, a key driver in the (re)production of Roma exclusion. The local LERI research employed a particular understanding and practice of participatory action research (PAR), focused on actions with tangible outcomes and committed to strengthening the political participation of Roma in the local decision-making process. The LERI research focused on barriers, deferrals and on the involvement of the local administration in a small-scale action research to increase housing security for Roma, mainly through the regularisation of an historical informal area.

This study describes and analyses the locally organised activities, which were aimed at finding and implementing solutions to different types of housing insecurity. To carry out these activities, a local LERI research team was formed consisting of Roma community co-researchers, a Roma councillor, a trainee project manager and a topographer, who held regular planning sessions. Generally being open and willing to collaborate with the LERI research, the local administration had mixed responses to the housing problems of Roma, brought up by the team throughout the implementation of the LERI local project plan (LPP). In addition to providing a guide for future local or national initiatives, the added value of this regularisation activity could serve future infrastructure improvements at the settlement. Nonetheless, full commitment to the political and social inclusion of Roma is needed on the part of the local administration.

Keywords/Tags:

Housing inclusion/exclusion, informal housing, legalisation of informal settlements, social housing, prevention of evictions, Roma councillor, capacity building, political participation of Roma, local Roma action group.

2. Description of the local context

Aiud is a relatively small town located in Alba County in the centre of Romania, having a population of 22,876 inhabitants, of which 4.06 % are Roma¹. With a strong industrial past, the collapse of factories and the accompanying deterioration of economic activity over the past 25 years have severely affected the town's inhabitants. This has especially affected the Roma given the fact that they were usually employed as unskilled labourers, and amongst the first to be laid off during the privatisation process. Despite these negative trends, the official general unemployment rate in Aiud has been around 5 %, with slight fluctuations over the past three years. Locally, the restructuring phenomenon of the former industrial platform of Aiud (IMA – *Întreprinderea Metalurgică Aiud*) was somehow counterbalanced by the growth of the tertiary economic sector (services, commerce, banks and administration). However, this low unemployment rate might actually signify a case of hidden unemployment,

¹ National Institute of Statistics (2011) *Romanian Census*; data available at <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/>

meaning that people are not registered with the County Employment Office (AJOFM - *Agentia Judeteana pentru Ocuparea Fortelor de Munca Alba*), are formally unemployed and do not benefit from any kind of income, thus relying on informal labour for a living.

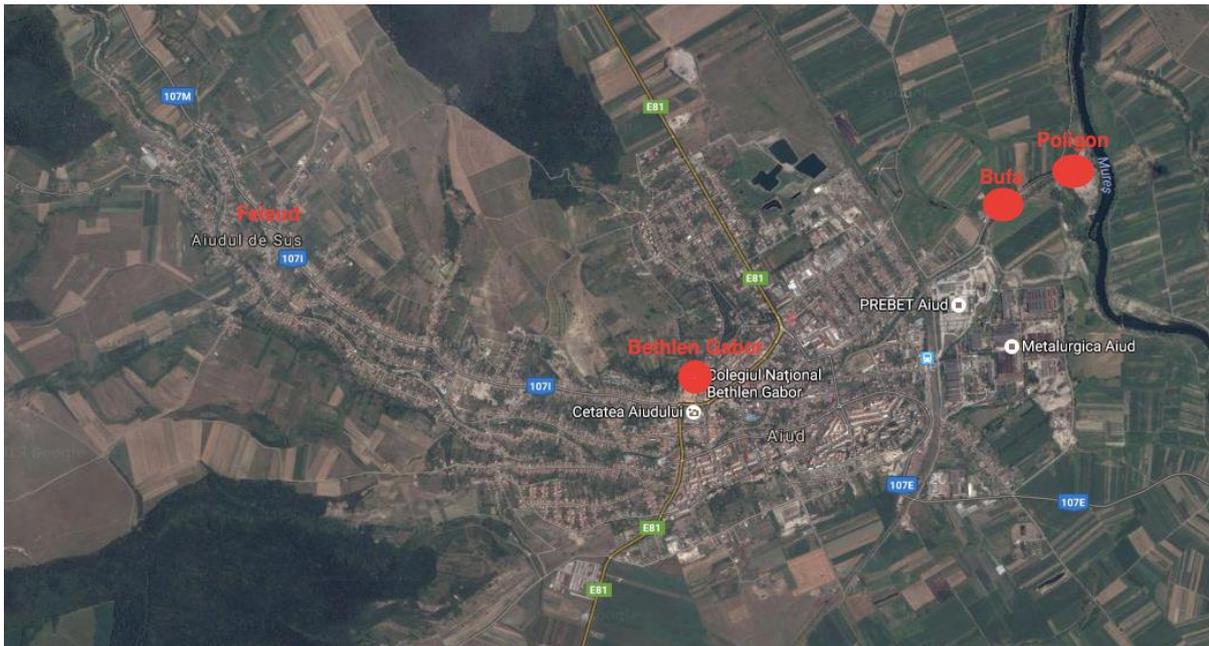
Most of the ethnic Roma in Aiud are residentially segregated, living in **Feleud** (a former village, also called Aiudul de Sus), **Bufa and Poligon** (see map on next page). There is no formal history about the constitutions of these areas, each of them being formed under different conditions and political regimes, but at the same time a product of similar exclusionary tendencies. For example, a prior multi-annual investigation on the elements and causes of Roma marginalisation chose to focus on Aiud as a type of settlement “with mainly exclusionary tendencies”² and described the eviction practices of the Municipality as well as the functioning of a segregated school (‘the Gypsy school’) in one of the areas. However, concluding the research the authors argue that “combinations of inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies” had better defined the local dynamics resulting in the socio-territorial marginalisation of Roma³ (Vincze & Pop, 2016).

Generally, in all of these areas, housing is precarious and insecure, as Roma do not possess registration documents for their houses, apart from a few residents in Feleud, thus making them extremely vulnerable to eviction. The Roma in Bufa built their own houses, and have been tolerated on this plot ever since settling here about 70–80 years ago. As time passed, families had extended and younger generations built their own houses. Thus, the marginal residential area significantly expanded without any parallel attempt from the Municipality to formally recognise this area and subsequently register the houses. Residents in Poligon erected their improvised shelters using remaining materials from the demolished houses in which they had used to live, after being forcefully evicted and relocated there, on the shores of Mureş River, from a central area of the town. In recent years, various centrally located buildings, in which some Roma live as social tenants, have been legally retroceded. Insecurity of tenancy defines the Roma who live on Bethlen Gabor Street in the centre of Aiud, who are former social tenants in buildings, which were retroceded over a decade ago. At present, none of the multi-ethnic (Roma, Romanian and Hungarian) residents of these buildings have formal tenancy rights for their apartments.

² Szalai, Julia, Violetta Zentai, Zsuzsanna Vidra, Katalin Kovacs, Eniko Vincze, and Slobodan Cvejic (2014) *Faces and Causes of Marginalization of the Roma in Local Settings: Hungary - Romania - Serbia. Contextual inquiry to the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011*. A joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Open Society Foundation’s Roma Initiatives Office (RIO) and the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion program, and the Central European University/Center for Policy Studies (CEU CPS). October 2012 – June 2014. <http://cps.ceu.hu/research/roma-marginalization>

³ Vincze Eniko and Florina Pop (2016) “Roma settlement formation in a small Romanian Town: Instances of Ghettoization and reduction to bare life” in *Intersections*. East European Journal of Society and Politics, 2 (1): 183-198.

Figure 1. Map of Aiud, with the Roma communities



Source: Google maps, 2016

Poor housing conditions define the way Roma live in all four areas, ranging from some who are a little better off in terms of amenities, but still have inadequate conditions, to the direst situation of ghettoised housing in Poligon, which is a spatially segregated informal settlement. It was improvised from scrap materials, lacks basic amenities, suffers from overcrowding and does not have formal tenancy papers, but residents still pay land taxes.

Although representatives of the Aiud local administration have recognised over the past years that Roma communities face harsh living conditions compared to the majority population, little has been done to reduce housing insecurities or to improve housing conditions in these areas. Previous projects aiming at the social inclusion of Roma were not only diverse, but were also carried out without the participation of Roma representatives and other members from the communities. Local and external NGOs were amongst the stakeholders, providing either human resources or funding. However, these projects relied almost exclusively on external funding and had little support from the local municipal budget. At times, they were perceived as not being transparent enough because Roma did not take part in decision-making processes of the design and implementation of the projects⁴. On the contrary, by relocating people from a central area to outside the town limits, local authorities have contributed to the segregation of Roma families, as the Poligon case denotes. Thus, housing is a crucial driver of the social exclusion of Roma people in Aiud, as in many other towns, cities and countries throughout Europe⁵.

⁴ Florina Pop & Rafela Maria Muraru (2014) Capitolul II Alba [Chapter II Alba] in Vincze & Hossu, eds., Efes:Cluj-Napoca

⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, FRA (2009) Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the European Union. Comparative report. Available online at: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/608-ROMA-Housing-Comparative-Report_en.pdf; accessed August 2015 and May 2016

In recent years, two important governmental programmes tackled the problem of the housing of Roma in Romania although, generally, few have systemically improved the situation. Through Social Housing for Roma – a Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration programme⁶ – specifically formulated to target the Roma and carried out by the National Agency for Housing together with the National Agency for Roma (ANR, *Agenția Națională pentru Romi*), the construction and distribution of 300 houses in different Romanian localities was planned. Data provided by the Ministry of Regional Development (MDRAP; Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și al Administrației Publice) in 2015 show that 280 dwelling units for Roma were under construction, and 154 of them were supposed to be finished during that year⁷. However, this is an insufficient number to cover the existing needs. Secondly, regarding informal settlements and the incumbent lack of identity (ID) and property documents for Roma, the ANR implemented the National Project for Property Documents, financed through the national budget⁸. Throughout 2015 and up to June 2016, the agency reports collaborating and co-funding 16 projects that targeted 1,922 Roma households⁹. Unfortunately, no progress and/or assessment report based on the implementation of these projects has been published by the ANR, not even a policy paper or a set of measures to be undertaken by local administrations, local NGOs or Roma to register houses and issue identity and/or property documents. Importantly, in the past year, the NAR has started to collect data on the number of informal houses in each locality of the country¹⁰, based on numbers reported by representatives of local administrations, which might serve future allocations of funding to tackle Roma’s (in)security of tenure, lack of IDs and precarious housing in informal settlements. However, for the time being, given the fact that settlements are still informal and expanding and that no national-level solution has been provided to improve Roma’s access to the existing, albeit small, social housing stock, one could say that the housing conditions of Roma have worsened. Neither of these two governmental programmes involved projects carried out in Aiud.

A recent report on the right to housing points to the fact that many Roma people, who for decades have occupied public properties in informal settlements, are most vulnerable to eviction, having no alternative accommodation in such a situation.¹¹ Concerning the protection of current or former social tenants, the report shows that legal provisions to ensure access to alternative housing or

⁶ The programme was initiated through Governmental Decision HG no. 1237/2008. See more details at: <http://www.mdrap.ro/proiect-de-hotarare-privind-aprobarea-programului-pilot-locuinte-sociale-pentru-comunitatile-de-romi> and the text of HG 1237/2008

http://www.mdrl.ro/documente/transparenta/consultari_publice/consultare44/hg.pdf; accessed August 2015

⁷ See more information in the attached presentation to this press conference:

<http://www.mdrap.ro/comunicare/presa/comunicate/conferinta-de-presa-prioritati-locuinte>; accessed October 2015

⁸ See more information here: <http://www.anr.gov.ro/index.php/proiecte-programe/proiecte-finalizate/programul-national-acte-de-proprietate>; accessed September 2015

⁹ See more details here:

<http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Site2015/ProiecteProgramme/Proiecte%20finalizate/Programul%20National%20Acte%20de%20proprietate/Table2014ANR.pdf>; accessed September 2015

¹⁰ Information produced through a discussion with a county representative of the ANR (National Agency for Roma), November 2015.

¹¹ FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless) – *Pilot project - Promoting protection of the right to housing - Homelessness prevention in the context of evictions*. Report, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7892&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>; accessed May 2016

shelter to evictees have not been effective, especially where Roma were the evictees.¹² Apart from existing legal provisions, which have not been enforced to protect the Roma, it is important to mention that the existing Housing Act¹³ does not include Roma or people from segregated communities amongst the social housing priorities. However, Governmental Decision 1275/2000, stipulating the rules and methodology of implementing the Housing Act, prioritises the current living conditions of applicants. In this sense, in considering the local situation of housing, local councils can decide to specifically include segregated residences amongst the priorities in attributing social housing from the public stock.

During the initial stages of the LERI research in Aiud, representatives of local authorities considered housing to be the most pressing issue, referring to the forced relocations in 2010 (to Poligon) and also to possibly forthcoming relocations from former social houses (Bethlen Gabor). They argued that the social housing project (*Locuinte Sociale pe Str Hotar*), which started in 2008, was developed with the aim of allocating these apartments to the Roma families currently living in Poligon, as well as to those currently residing in Bethlen Gabor. However, funding for this construction project was provided through a different programme of the Ministry, namely that of constructing dwelling units to the evictees from retroceded buildings¹⁴. Even if only a small number of the planned houses were built, representatives consider this project to be the most important and relevant with regard to social inclusion¹⁵. For the Roma in Aiud, the housing project lacks transparency. During interviews, they stated that they believe that the finalised houses should already be in use and that clear eligibility criteria should have been presented to them. By 2015, only two houses and a duplex house has been completed and rented to former social housing applicants. Last summer, the mayor talked about resuming construction work, and the intention to reopen construction work on Hotar Street was confirmed by Bufa residents who live nearby. However, there were no signs of development in this case. Only an updated technical report to reopen the project was passed through a Local Council Decision in July 2015¹⁶.

The local authorities demonstrated openness and willingness to cooperate in projects aimed at the inclusion of Roma. Moreover, the local Roma councillor was an important resource for prior projects and expressed his need for support from internal and external collaborators. There is also an active NGO, Casa Nadejdii (*House of Hope*), that provides afternoon schooling activities for children in Feleud, which is appreciated by community members. Previously, the NGO was

¹² The Vulturior case in Bucharest yet again demonstrates the lack of enforcement of these protective measures aimed at combating (the further) marginalization of evictees. is the clearest example. See more details here: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/michele-lancione/eviction-and-housing-racism-in-bucharest> as well as here: <http://fcdl.ro/100-people-bucharests-3rd-district-thrown-homes-evictions-vulnerable-continue-romania-capital-city/>; accessed May 2016; FEANTSA report - *Pilot project - Promoting protection of the right to housing - Homelessness prevention in the context of evictions*, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7892&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>; accessed May 2016

¹³ Law 114/1996, *Legea Locuintei* (Housing Act); see more details at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/8601>; accessed August 2015.

¹⁴ See more details here <http://www.mdrap.ro/lucrari-publice/-1763/-8348> and in the attached documents to this link; accessed August 2015.

¹⁵ Florina Pop & Rafela Maria Muraru (2014) Capitolul II Alba [Chapter II Alba] in Vincze & Hossu, eds., *Efes*: Cluj-Napoca

¹⁶ Local Council Decision no. 146/2015; see more at: <http://www.aiud.ro/AplicatiiOnline/Registratura/Hotarari/Consultare-Hotarari-Consiliu-Local.aspx>

involved in the implementation of smaller-scale projects, and recently it received a small allocation from the local budget to cover meals for children. Apart from being involved in the activities of the NGO, the local Roma councillor is well connected to national and international Roma-related programmes and is thus able to work in favour of the local Roma community. Both communities and the local administration recognise his contributions in this sense. Moreover, on and off, he has been involved in the local ROMED and ROMACT programmes, joint programmes of the Council of Europe and the European Union¹⁷.

In terms of local governance, the general openness to outside (external) expertise and the willingness of community representatives to express (even critical) opinions on previous projects, as well as prior involvement of local civil servants in project writing and implementation were amongst the strengths. However, the locality lacked a Roma expert at the town hall who could have supported the enforcement of policies targeting Roma as well as contributing to the implementation of specific measures. However, a previous mapping of past projects at the locality identified the acceptance of relocations (forced evictions) as inevitable given the retrocession of the buildings in Bethlen Gabor¹⁸. Moreover, representatives of the local authority (LA from now on) also promote these convictions in the local political discourse, without addressing the fact that they actually advance segregation through the current local housing policy, as denoted through the relocation of people from a central area to Poligon.

Consequently, the implementation phase addressed the following needs:

- capacity building of the local group to contribute to decision-making involving other stakeholders;
- reviving & strengthening the local action group (hereinafter referred to as LAG) originally established under ROMED/ROMACT, but not in operation at the start of the LERI research, to participate in local decision-making including the allocation of budgets;
- promoting transparency and increasing the trust/credibility of representatives of communities through consultations;
- encouraging members of the community to actively express their needs and to follow-up on how they are being addressed by the local administration.

From the initial stages of LERI to the needs assessment phase, the most significant point institutionally speaking was that the LAG has been officially (re)established and its Plan for Action was passed by the local council¹⁹. Originally formed within the ROMED/ROMACT initiative to better represent Roma issues in local political decision-making and to provide an organisational framework to run Roma-targeted projects, the group included 24 representatives from various quarters of Aiud as well as local Roma experts (school teachers, the school mediator, etc.). From the needs assessment phase, it became clear that even though the group had not been very active in recent years, members of the targeted communities knew this group. Apart from employment, health,

¹⁷ ROMED aims to train mediators between Roma communities and local authorities. See more information at: <http://coe-romed.org> ROMACT aims to build capacity of local authorities to develop and implement inclusive policies and public services, including Roma. See more information at: <http://coe-romact.org>; Accessed March 2015.

¹⁸ Florina Pop & Rafela Maria Muraru (2014): Capitolul II Alba [Chapter II Alba] in Vincze & Hossu, eds., Efes:Cluj-Napoca

¹⁹ Decision of Local Council, Aiud Municipality, no. 103/2014

education and social inclusion, the main areas of the LAG action plan also included infrastructure and housing, with the general objective 'to improve housing conditions and to provide access to utilities', overall comprising five different activities. The first two activities listed in the plan (inventory of unregistered houses and support for their registration; assuring the state housing fund for tenants who risk eviction, according to governmental ordinance no.74/2007) were directly relevant to the insecure housing at the locations chosen for the implementation of the LPP²⁰. While consulting the local co-researchers and stakeholders, the LERI local team informed them about the possible contributions LERI could provide in supporting the LAG. The actions planned for the implementation phase of the LPP focused on strengthening and empowering the LAG via trust and capacity-building activities. Initially presided over by the Roma councillor, the former secretary of the LAG was elected president in October 2015 after the Roma councillor stepped aside.

Key problems and issues identified by the LERI research in Aiud

The central activity carried out during the participatory needs assessment was mapping the housing (in)security amongst Roma in Aiud, which focused on generating day-to-day knowledge about the housing situation of people exposed to various forms of housing insecurity. Housing emerged as a central topic in the LERI research after discussions with local stakeholders. Aiming to plan significant actions during the next phase, more in-depth knowledge was produced jointly with community members as well as their representatives in each of the areas. Through this kind of collaboration, group discussions were intended to prompt participants both to clarify the housing problems they were facing and to identify possible bottom-up solutions that could mitigate housing insecurity, as well as to involve other stakeholders in discussions with the local administration and/or in the implementation of the local policy on social inclusion of Roma citizens. Key housing challenges of Roma in Aiud identified through the PAR needs assessment phase were:

1. **Possible forced eviction and risk of relocation due to the retrocession of the buildings** (Bethlen Gabor)

Given the urgency of the situation, the LERI field experts first clarified the circumstances in which these people dealt with formal or informal threats to clear the building. It involved threats from the building administrator, a representative of the bishopric; the refusal to extend tenancy contracts; the refusal on the part of the administrator to refurbish the building; other rumours the tenants heard while on paid mandatory duty for 'social benefits' at the town hall. Secondly, the LERI local team expounded the property status of the building, the restitution process to its owner, as well as the current tenancy status of the residents, including the dwelling histories of the people in each of the flats. Residents insisted on having had not received any formal notice from either the town hall or the owner (through local delegates) about their residential status or obligation to vacate the building, nor had they been offered any housing alternative by

²⁰ Amongst the responsible institutional entities to carry out these activities, the LAG is also cited, alongside the Local Council, the County Cadastral Office, the Roma expert, other NGOs, through the financial support of the national budget, NGOs, and European funding. See more details in Decision of Local Council, Aiud Municipality, no.103/2014

the local administration to prevent homelessness. At the time of documenting the Bethlen Gabor case, the local administration was not included in the mapping. Moreover, the residents also pointed to the owner's failure to carry out his legal obligations of improving the building and maintaining it in a proper and safe condition²¹. By considering this insecure situation (i.e. the lack of credibility of the administrator and the tension-ridden relationship with the bishopric), what resulted from the PAR needs assessments was that Bethlen Gabor residents first needed to officially contact the Reformat Bishopric Administration Bureau in Cluj to get reliable answers and. Subsequently, the local administration in search of alternative housing to prevent homelessness.

2. Lack of legal documents for informal houses, which equals a risk of relocation at any time, e.g. in the case of the development of the infrastructural mega-project (Bufa)

"If we really wanted to do something that improves the living conditions of Roma, it must start with houses' registrations and documentation. No [development] project [for European funding] can be submitted without that technical paperwork"²².

In this area, none of the dwellings has been legally registered and thus all the residents used to have their IDs issued with the same address. In the wake of the 2012 local elections, the local administration decided to issue IDs for different addresses, i.e. most of the houses on the former 34 Hotar Street address were issued different house numbers. Ever since then, residents have had their houses registered with the local Agricultural Record Office (Registrul Agricol), which involves paying taxes on the buildings and land; however, they have no legal titles for their houses and the settlement is not recognised as a housing area. Even though the Municipality appeared to carry out a building survey, these actions did not result in support actions for residents to acquire property documents for their houses. What seemed to be an initiative to recognise and legalise housing in Bufa stopped at this point. However, unlike other local authorities, the Municipality of Aiud tried to find possible solutions to the problem of informal housing (and insecure possession). From these examples, the LERI local team was able to understand the current situation in Bufa, including the mechanisms that produce housing insecurity. Given the favourable national context, including initiatives from the ANR as well as the National Programme for Cadastral and House Registration²³, the LERI field experts proposed to focus on legalising the

²¹ Romanian legislation does not include any provision to take legal action against owners who fail to improve the conditions of the buildings they rent out.

²² Member of the technical department, female, Field note, October 2015

²³ On the programme of the National Agency for Roma, see above. The National Programme for Cadastral and House Registration lists amongst its priorities settlements characterised by extreme poverty, which means segregated Roma communities are supposed to be amongst the first to be supported in having documents issued. This programme was approved through Governmental Decision 294/2015 and aims to systematically register buildings in an integrated system for Land and House registration, given that only around 18% of the buildings are currently registered. For more information about the programme please visit: www.ancpi.ro/pages/home.php?lang=en. During the course of 2016, the newly appointed technocratic government launched the National Anti-poverty Package which includes the problem of informal housing. However, it channels any initiative through the EU funding streams, meaning that any action depends on the

houses in Bufa. Construction of the Transylvania motorway, connecting Sebeş to Turda, started during the first part of 2015. The close proximity of the motorway, around 25–30 meters away from the eastern limit of the community, also raised concerns among people. They feared that they might face possible eviction because of a lack of land or house titles, which made people even more vulnerable.

3. Risk of further marginalisation of an already spatially segregated area with mostly Roma dwellings, through the construction of an infrastructural mega-project, i.e. a highway (Poligon)

For Poligon it was particularly important to reconstruct the conditions under which people were evicted from a centrally located building to a spatially segregated area, thus illustrating how the local administration generally treated Roma citizens from Aiud. Similar to Bufa, no residents have official, valid documents of tenancy rights for these houses, nor any other documents issued at the eviction. However, some residents who were registered with the Agricultural Registry (Registrul Agricol), consequently paying taxes for the plots. Again, this might be a favourable context considering that the national and local authorities have started to implement the National Programme for Cadastral Registration. However, given the position of this informal settlement, regularisation and titling might be controversial as it formalises segregation. Moreover, Roma can perceive legalisation both positively and negatively. If registration comes only with taxation and no investment in infrastructure, then it will definitely have a negative impact in the form of fiscal burdens on these already marginalised and impoverished Roma. However, the plots on which the houses are built are not within the inner area of the town (intravilan), thus any actions of registration might take longer and require structured action and political will on the part of the local administration.

3. PAR methodology employed

The overarching question of LERI in Aiud drew on the general LERI research questions: what worked for the particular Roma inclusion efforts in this locality, and why? What does not/did not work, and why? More specifically, this local intervention focused on documenting the supporting mechanisms as well as the barriers to housing inclusion while carrying out specific actions, generated from the needs assessment, together with local stakeholders.

In light of the participatory action research (PAR methodology), the LERI field experts stressed the importance of working with peers as research staff. As members of the local LERI team, local Roma co-researchers maintained contact with dwellers of each area of intervention, thus had an important role in empowering the participation of local Roma. The PAR activities (meetings, consultations, workshops, public hearings, etc.) were envisaged in agreement with local co-researchers and members of communities. Amongst the methods

political decision and capacity of local administrations to apply for such funding. See more information on the Anti-poverty package here: http://gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/16-02-18-06-29-39160217_Pachet_integrat_pentru_combaterea_saraciei.pdf

proposed, there were stakeholder and local co-researcher **consultations**, meetings, discussions, and planning for the proposed actions in each of the communities; and **scenario workshops (planning sessions)** during community consultation and LERI local team workshops, envisaged as capacity- and trust-building PAR activities. These were prepared based on issues raised in previous meetings (and are explained below).

Based on decisions taken during the workshops, the LERI field experts proposed also **public hearings** at the town hall as a PAR method because this would include LERI local team members and LAG delegates who could present the housing situation from a bottom-up perspective and take part in decision-making for possible solutions. Given that letters of intent were sent to the Municipality, public servants involved in LERI learned about the research nature of the implemented activities through these addresses, thus agreeing to take part in the actions proposed. Members of communities learned about LERI through their meetings with the LERI local team. Finally, to complement and raise the effectiveness of the proposed action, LERI field experts mobilised also legal and cadastral expertise for the successful outcome of actions.

As the literature on participation in development projects has shown, often 'participation' is rather an external concern easily manipulated by facilitators, practitioners and donor agencies.²⁴ Moreover, these same external experts claim that participation enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of projects, but there is little evidence of "long-term effectiveness in materially improving conditions of the most vulnerable people or as a strategy for social change"²⁵. Acknowledging the criticisms of participation discourse and practice, especially in development projects²⁶, the choice of methods both during the needs assessment and the implementation phases took into consideration a more consistent focus on action.

Thus, the main actions consisted of tackling the legalisation of informal housing in Bufa, supporting Bethlen Gabor in actions to prevent forced evictions, and capacity building for the LAG's future community development projects. In this sense, the choice was to implement more action-oriented measures, as responsibility towards people generates more concrete results in improving housing security, unlike focusing too much on the technicalities of running participatory research, such as recording higher numbers of people attending meetings so as to render actions as more 'legitimate' because they were based on seemingly consensual decisions. Instead of focusing on the technicalities of participation, the LERI local team was more attentive to assuring as positive an outcome for the implemented actions as possible – positive in the sense that these actions could contribute to increasing the housing security of Roma in Aiud.

²⁴ Mosse, David (2001) 'People's knowledge', Participation and Patronage: Operations and Representations in Rural Development, pp. 14-35, in Cooke & Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, New York and London: Zed Books

²⁵ Cleaver, Frances (2001) Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development, pp. 36-55, in in Cooke & Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, New York and London: Zed Books

²⁶ Hailey, John (2001) Beyond the Formulaic: Process and Practice in South Asian NGOs, pp. 88-101, in Cooke & Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, New York and London: Zed Books.

Cooke, Bill (2001) The Social Psychological Limits of Participation?, pp. 102-121, in Cooke & Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, New York and London: Zed Books.

Mosse, David (2001) 'People's knowledge', Participation and Patronage: Operations and Representations in Rural Development, pp. 14-35, in Cooke & Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, New York and London: Zed Books

Given the general questions of the LERI research, the research looked at the concrete barriers which hindered the legalisation of an informal settlement, or the barriers to Roma accessing social housing as an alternative to homelessness in cases of eviction. However, it is relevant to highlight that the entire process of identifying needs and planning the scale and extent of intervention was also shaped by what LERI could accomplish within the research framework: namely a short-term action research project focusing on 'soft measures' such as capacity building. In other words, the limits of participation were also set through the design of the research, not allowing, for example, the unlimited availability of team members. A commitment to continuous engagement, in a sustainable and long-term sense, as participatory methodologies presuppose²⁷, was not possible within the frames of the LERI research in this locality.

The main methodological limitations of PAR arose from the fact that most of the methods are very time-consuming. The limited time span of the research and the constrained budget did not allow for long-lasting presence of the team in the locality, which would be necessary to make full use of the advantages of the PAR methods.

Considering the ethics of this action-research, residents in Bufa were informed about the action of the LERI local team on an ongoing basis. Namely, they learned why the information was needed in order to prepare the documentation for the regularisation of the area (the information was issued to the topographer and members of the LERI local team, but subsequently passed to the people living in Bufa).

4. The local intervention description - Goals, partners, process and results

The main goals of the LERI local research

The overall objective of the local LERI research was to improve housing security for Roma through two main interventions running in parallel, contributing to increase the capacity of local Roma to participate in and influence local decision-making on their inclusion. In Bufa, the lack of security of tenure has become more acute in recent years, reaching a peak with the ongoing motorway constructions. Bethlen Gabor residents have become increasingly vulnerable to eviction in the absence of adequate alternative accommodation being formally provided for them. However, Roma in Poligon live in the direst of conditions given the increasingly marginalised conditions following the construction of the highway.

Resuming the LERI research in Aiud around mid-October 2015, the country-level LERI team conducted in-depth discussions with the local Roma councillor and delegates from the communities over the proposed LPP, focusing on how it covered the existing needs within the Roma communities. Secondly, communication with the local administration was also resumed and the meetings gave positive feedback on the proposed actions, especially the activity aimed at

²⁷ See more details at: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/research-teams/participation-team/research-themes/participatory-methodologies>; accessed October 2015.

the regularisation of Bufa. Taking into account the negotiations and agreements made with the local Roma councillor, a gatekeeper as well as a key person for the LERI research in Aiud, Feleud was included in the local research. These meetings resulted in a revised version of the LPP, which mainly involved more concrete support for the LAG through adding the following actions/activities:

- increasing the capacity of the LAG²⁸ in drafting projects proposals for various funding bodies (national and international, based on a grass-roots assessment of community needs);
- renting space in the central area of Aiud to be used by the GCIA (*Group for Community Initiative in Aiud*) group to run meetings, workshops and planning sessions within the frame of LERI;
- adding a delegate from Feleud to the LERI local research group as a Roma community co-researcher who would also provide a reliable link with the Poligon area;
- allocating the funding initially envisaged for the legal expert to the technical documentation needed in the regularisation and titling of informal houses in Bufa as well as to the activities needed by the GCIA (expertise on writing fundable projects);
- maintaining cadastral expertise in allocations from the local fund to carry out measurements and documentation to more (if possible, all) Bufa residents, and detailing the topographer's contributions to the intervention;
- monitoring the implementation of the project Social Housing at Hotar Street, through which the local administration is supposed to meet the housing needs of residents at Bethlen Gabor.

Description of the interventions carried out

The legalisation of an informal settlement: the case of Bufa in Aiud

Emerging as a possible action during the needs assessment, the regularisation of the informal houses in Bufa started with prior documentation of legal provisions and available procedures to carry out this action, which included desk research conducted by the LERI field experts over the course of 2015. Law 50/1991²⁹ for the authorisation of construction works (including a subsequent amendment) bans constructions in the public domain unless they can be transferred into the state's private domain administered by local authorities. According to the same law, houses erected prior to 2001 can be registered for construction without authorisation only if: (1) they are declared to local authorities (which can issue a 'fiscal certificate'), (2) they are technically documented (through a topographer's measurements), (3) there is a legal basis on which the land is used, while (4) a personal statutory declaration (*declarație pe proprie răspundere*) about the year in which the house was erected is optional. Houses built after 2001 need to have authorisations for construction issued, which are significantly more costly³⁰. Importantly, regularisation is not synonymous with granting property rights on

²⁸ Originally called the Group for Community Initiative (*Grupul pentru Inițiativă Comunitară*, G.I.C.)

²⁹ See the Romanian version of the Law 50/1991 for the authorisation of constructions here:

http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act?id=1322

³⁰ Law 50/1991 for the authorisation of construction; see here:

http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm_act_text?id=58781

either the land or the houses. Moreover, in the regularisation of informal settlements, there are two different interconnected aspects: one concerns the titling over land, the other issuing legal titles on the houses. For the issuance of property documents, various legal mechanisms were identified, the easiest and most promising one being acquisitive prescription (*uzucapiune*). Depending on the length of occupancy, inhabitants are more or less able to formulate legitimate claims for legal titles issued for useful and 'unvitiated' tenure (*posesiune utilă și neviciată*), if there has been no prior claim from a third party. Short-term acquisitive prescription refers to useful and "un-vitiated" tenure of 10 to 20 years, while long-term involves over 30 years of useful and "un-vitiated", according to Art. 1049-1053 in the New Code of Civil Procedure (2010), for each of them exists different legal provision to register immovables/property. The typology of informal housing as well as settlements depends on the legal status of the land, the length of occupancy, the 'status' of papers, and the formation of the informal settlement³¹. Thus, no prior solution could be planned before taking into account the particularities of the situation in order to adapt the intervention to the local context.

Mapping the housing situation of the informal settlement

The implementation of this action started through discussions with local stakeholders – community members, leaders and the Roma councillor. The positive feedback of the technical department director gave a consistent impetus for planning the activities. Subsequently, local co-researchers carried out visits to members of the community to let them know about the legalisative initiative. Moreover, during subsequent weeks, the local team mapped the general situation of each household, including the production of relevant data regarding the status of the house, especially its year of construction. The aim was to produce information about the number of houses, the year of construction and other useful information that could not only provide LERI with data, but could also be useful for contracting a topographer (to estimate costs). Training was carried out with the Bufa community co-researcher: answers and possible solutions to queries people might have regarding this LERI intervention. The other co-researchers offered to accompany her during the initial meetings so that residents could meet them as a team. Using a basic form to complete this general survey, the local co-researcher recorded information on the number of houses, whether these houses were informally enclosed or not, the number of rooms, amenities available, the year of construction, whether the house was declared with the local administration and whether the person paid taxes. In addition, the local co-researchers also sought to learn (and double-check) people's willingness to take part in this regularisation procedure. The majority agreed to be included in the action, apart from three households who said they would undertake this separately.

³¹ Florea, Ioana *et al.* (2007) *Metodologie pentru solutionarea problemei lipsei actelor de stare civilă, de identitate și locative* [Methodology to solve the problem of lack of identity, marriage status and property documents], elaborated under the programme PHARE RO 2004/016-772.01.01.01 – Consolidarea Capacității Instituționale și Dezvoltarea de Parteneriate pentru Îmbunătățirea Percepției și Condițiilor Romilor [Consolidating Institutional Capacity and the Developing Partnerships to Improve the Perceptions and the Conditions of Roma].

Suditu, B. and Daniel-Gabriel Valceanu (2013) "Informal Settlements and Squatting in Romania: Socio-spatial Patterns and Typologies" in *HUMAN GEOGRAPHIES – Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography*, 7(2):65-75

Bringing the regularisation action to the local administration

With the information produced by the local co-researchers, the team requested an appointment for a formal meeting (hearing) with representatives of the local administration. The LERI local team sought to reach an agreement to collaborate on the regularisation of the informal settlement. The entire local LERI local team attended this meeting, while the Municipality was represented by the director of the technical department, the secretary of the town hall, the Roma expert, and representatives from the Population Registration (*Evidența populației*, subordinated to the local police) as well as a representative of the urbanism department; later, a representative of the technical department, who is in charge of the administration of the social housing stock, joined the meeting. The LERI local team wanted to present the intervention's contribution to the implementation of measures to secure housing in areas of intervention specifically in the context of a Local Council Decision over the plan of actions towards the inclusion of Roma citizens³², thus denoting that LERI was building on previous inclusion attempts at the local level. Bringing the discussion to the actual situation of households in Bufa, representatives of the local police mentioned completing a census of houses in July 2015. At the time, several municipal workers, including the Roma expert, visited the community to carry out measurements of plots and also to register all the residents in the community. This dataset was compared with the data produced by the local co-researcher, with the conclusion that some of the official data was partly inaccurate. The representatives of the urbanism department also confirmed that the action aimed at measuring the plots – but not the houses – was part of revising the project to build social houses in the vicinity of Bufa³³. Discussions then advanced to the technical aspects of the regularisation involving the measurement of houses in their current form. However, members of the LERI local team also pointed to the legal part of the procedure, pressing the representatives of the LA to openly discuss the available legal means to carry out this action. The LERI local team was informed that a Local Council Decision needed to be passed, through which the plots beneath the houses are legally attributed to the registered inhabitants of these houses (*atribuirea terenurilor*). According to the existing legislation, the LERI local team suggested free usage rights over the land on which houses are built, namely the 'surface right' (*drept de suprafață*). However, representatives of the LA seemed to prefer direct concession of land, on which houses have been erected, for a monthly rental fee. In other words, the procedure involves the local administration recognising the area as housing in the General Urban Plan (PUG), and not as agricultural land as it currently was. After this formal recognition and legal attribution to use the plots, residents would be able to register their houses in the Real Estate Register, transforming them from informal possessors into owners.

Finding the legal and technical measures to complete the regularisation procedure

The next step involved the completion of technical measurements, covered through the small-scale LERI intervention. The technical director, Mrs Florea, estimated that the entire procedure could last around four months, to which LERI

³² Local Council Decision, Municipality of Aiud, no.103/2014.

³³ See above for more details about this project, *Social houses on Hotar street*.

field-experts responded by asking for this to be hastened. Moreover, she also required the LERI local team's support in mediating between the residents in Bufa and the local administration, saying that she hoped no unauthorised houses would be erected after the procedure was implemented and the houses became the properties of the residents. The formal meeting ended with Mrs Florea's suggestion to submit a letter of intent to formally introduce the LERI intervention to the local councillors and to detail the activities carried out during the implementation, the role the research project could play. It also served the purpose to express a formal request for the support of the local council for this initiative (meaning a positive vote on the decision to attribute the lands).

The letter was immediately drafted and submitted, acknowledging the local administration's availability to carry out this procedure that would result in the improved security of housing for residents of Bufa. There was no formal written response, but the formal acceptance to collaborate in regularising informal housing in Bufa. During the next stage, the local team focused on the technical aspects of the regularisation, namely, finding a topographer to carry out the measurements of plots and houses in Bufa. As per the suggestion of the Roma councillor, a local topographer met the local LERI team at the office during mid-November 2015. Using an older plan from the urbanism department of the entire area, dating back to 2004, the topographer explained the need to consolidate the existing five plots of land with different cadastral numbers through a Residential Deed of Consolidation (*alipirea parcelelor*), if the coming Local Council Decision referred to the entire area. Secondly, the topographer pointed out that measurements of both the entire plot of land as well as the houses were needed in order to compare the current situation with the one in older formal documents at the town hall (plans, maps, registered houses on which people pay taxes). Another uncertain aspect involved houses built outside the plot of land currently delineated as Bufa. In this case, the Municipality would have to 'replot' these surfaces, which was possible through the local council's allocation decision. Finally, in addition to housing, the issue of courtyards was brought up. The topographer and Bufa co-researcher observed that some of the residents enclosed some of the land around their houses, but not all of the residents. In some cases, there were households with consistent terrain for courtyards. The local councillor suggested that a procedure to buy the land could also be envisaged. On the one hand, these issues were to be subsequently clarified during the field visits for measurements, while on the other, the proper legal procedure had to be identified and agreed on by the local administration (esp. the director of the technical department).

At this point, to assure the successful completion of this activity, the team needed to make sure not only that the Municipality found the legal means to carry out the regularisation process, but also that the local administration and council demonstrated the political will to carry this out. To this end, the local LERI team decided to maintain constant communication with the director of the technical department. Thus, in the following week, the local LERI team had a formal meeting with the director again, as well as with a legal expert from the town hall. During this meeting, a more focused discussion took place on the next steps to be taken regarding the legalisation of houses in Bufa. Initially, a general plan of the area reflecting the current situation was needed. Moreover, the director highlighted how it was the duty of the local administration to identify the means through which it could allocate the plots beneath the houses (through concessions), without selling any of these lands. She also suggested that the

LERI local team submit another letter of intent to the local council describing the steps taken by this research and what it could cover, as well as asking the councillor to support this action and agree to allot the lands to people for whom the LERI research provides documentation. In other words, a persuasive argument to the local councillors to vote in favour of the attribution was the acknowledgement that measurements were not financially covered by the resources of the local administration. The technical director reiterated the difficulties the public authority had in keeping track of the houses Roma build (without authorisation), and was insistent that after these houses are legalised residents needed to acknowledge that no subsequent houses erected without authorisation would be permitted. She brought up the idea of compiling a set of land usage rules and asked the LAG to present these rules to the residents. Other representatives remarked that Bufa residents "are more civilised than those in the other areas" (member of the local administration, female, approximately 55 years old), and that she finds it easier to collaborate with them as public servants³⁴. A mutual agreement was reached to use Law 50/1991 (and its subsequent amendments through Law 453/2001³⁵), according to which houses built prior to 2001 can be legalised without construction authorisations, but based on a personal statutory declaration (*declarație pe proprie răspundere*) regarding the year of erection. In addition, a proof that taxes on the house had been paid for the period of five years before. The situation regarding payment of taxes is murky: even though the area is not recognised as housing, people are nevertheless expected to pay taxes on the land and buildings. At this point, the Municipality's legal expert suggested requesting this data from the local tax department. However, according to what the LERI local team learned while completing the household survey, some of the residents paid taxes and other charges on land and buildings for smaller surface areas than they actually used. Finally, the legal adviser mentioned that the whole procedure might take longer (12 months maximum) than the period of the LPP implementation due to complications that might be legally invoked by the county prefecture after the Local Council Decision. Without proof of tenancy over the land, which in this case is the Local Council Decision of attribution, houses cannot be recorded at the Property Registry (*Cartea Funciară*).

Completing the technical steps: measurements of houses in Bufa

During the following days, the local LERI team met another topographer who agreed to take part in the research. Another discussion on the existing plans and the steps to be carried out took place. She agreed with the previous idea of plot consolidation, mentioning that conjoined plots would have the same legal regime after the Local Council Decision, and agreed to bring this option up during meetings with municipal representatives. After the advisers identified the legal procedure, the topographer insisted on compiling legally correct documentation,

³⁴ The director also mentioned that whenever the local administration needed to submit data on poor/informal housing areas, unlike other Municipalities such as Cluj, she never avoided to transmit data and included Bufa. For example, such is the case with reporting data for the compilation of the *Atlas of the marginalised urban communities* of the World Bank. This aspect is consequential given that other municipalities avoid to recognize such informal areas and thus do nothing to improve the living conditions of these people). See more details at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/857001468293738087/pdf/882420WPOP1430085232B000UO0900Atlas.pdf>; accessed May 2015

³⁵ See more at: http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.htm?act_text?id=58781

otherwise the county registry could send it back, refuse to record the houses and thus block the entire regularisation procedure³⁶. To her knowledge, the topographer mentioned, recently erected houses outside of the five plots of land were delineated in 2005. To this, the Bufa co-researcher responded that people had no idea about the limits of these plots and no municipal representative had ever come to the area to show the limits of plots on which people could build, thus turning the situation into what could be referred to as a tolerated informality. Moreover, she also pointed out that only some of the houses in Bufa could be legalised given the provisions of Law 50/1991, according to which legalisation is only possible without full documentation for houses built prior to 2001. Thus, more funding would be needed to cover the technical documentation of these buildings, specifically, paperwork as if the constructions were new, including plans and authorisations. This might pose several risks regarding the other residents' relation to the intervention, which needed to be tackled in advance; the community co-researcher and the topographer addressed these issues with the residents during their visits for measurements. Unfortunately, these costs could not be covered through the LERI local fund³⁷. Based on a rough estimation, some legalisation costs for the older houses erected without authorisation could exceed the cost of legal construction because they would have to include fines for breaching the law. After a planning session with the local LERI team, as suggested by the director of the technical department, the team drafted and signed a letter of intent detailing the actions in Bufa.

At the beginning of December 2015, the topographer began taking measurements; her access to the community was facilitated by the co-researcher. During these visits, they presented the regularisation procedure to the residents, explaining the steps of the action as well as the possible future barriers caused by current legislation, which might be encountered.

Clarifying eligibility of houses included in the regularisation action

At a subsequent progress and planning session, the topographer insisted that houses built prior to 2001 would be easier to register. However, those erected after this year would be more problematic; there was no option for legalising them, apart from demolition and then obtaining construction authorisation, which involved significant costs. Moreover, taking into consideration comparisons with the 2005 plan of the neighbourhood, the existing situation was slightly different because in the meantime some people had enlarged their older houses by additional rooms. Those that did not exist in the older plan could not be included in the legalising procedure. Importantly, the topographer also confirmed with the Country Registry the existence of a document proving this entire plot had already been under the property of the local administration in 1939, which facilitated the procedure of allotting the plots beneath the houses. Moreover, the consolidation of the five plots was also possible. Thus, after processing data and digitalising the measurements, the topographer had several meetings with representatives of the technical department to compile the documentation and subsequently

³⁶ The topographer remembered a similar initiative of land regularisation and titling in Sebes (town in Alba County) which was blocked by the County Registry (Oficiul judeţean de cadastru şi publicitate imobiliară). Unfortunately, she didn't know the reasons.

³⁷ At the time, when asked about estimations of these costs, the topographer could only communicate standard costs given the fact that general measurements had not been done yet.

submitted the updated plan on the general existing situation to the Municipality, which was needed during the coming Ordinary Local Council Meeting of December 2015.

In addition to the local councillor, the academic co-researcher and topographer also attended the meeting. They presented different parts of the LERI activity in Bufa to request the local council's support in attributing the lands. The LERI local team hoped to have a formal agreement (*acord de principiu*) supporting (thus voting for) the regularisation procedure. The councillor introduced the research intervention by highlighting its importance for the Roma community and the possibly upcoming social inclusion and development projects carried out by the local administration. The academic expert welcomed the LA's openness to collaborate, while the topographer answered the councillors' technical questions on measurement, regularisation and titling.

In the coming month, during a local LERI team meeting with the topographer to discuss progress on the documentation, the team learned how the legalisation procedure based on Law 50/1990 could apply and more specifically, to whom, in Bufa. The topographer concluded that out of all the houses in the survey, she could identify three categories: those erected prior to 2001, houses partly erected prior to 2001 (with newer extensions) and houses erected after 2001. Thus, 10 could confidently be included, and another four could be if people paid due taxes, all of them being built prior to 2001. Given that some residents were excluded from the procedure, the field expert insisted on doing everything possible to include more houses, for example, the older houses with extensions, which could be recognised in the older plans. The topographer then agreed to double-check this possibility with representatives from the technical department, as there was a strong and trustful relationship with the public servants in the local administration. Towards the end of the month, the topographer was also given the older PUG from the technical department.

In February, the topographer reiterated the need to include the statutory declarations (*declarație pe proprie răspundere*) of each person who would have the house legalised in his/her name in the Titling Dossier. The topographer mentioned that, included in the project for the Local Council Decision on the attribution of plots, there should be declarations made by people regarding the year of construction and the total current surface area of the house. The team drafted a declaration form and went through the entire list of residents in Bufa, irrespective of the year in which the house was built (prior to or after 2001), because the Municipality ended up wanting all people to make such declarations. After discussions, the LERI local team decided that it would pass the declaration form to those with houses built prior to 2001 (16 declarations in total), but not to those whose houses could not be included in the Local Council Decision and the LERI intervention. However, co-researchers let the others know that the Municipality expected them to make this declaration. Afterwards, the entire team went to Bufa where they met the the community co-researcher with whom the team discussed this further step of signing the declarations as well as identifying the most appropriate way to do this. The team ultimately decided not to hold a community meeting but rather to let the co-researcher visit each household to discuss this individually.

Over the next two days, the community co-researcher ran a series of meetings with her neighbours to present the next step in legalising and titling the houses: signing the mandatory declaration on year of construction and documenting the

total surface area of the buildings. Bufa residents signed the declarations needed for the legalisation documentation to be submitted to the Municipality. Except for those who were not present, over half of the residents in the neighbourhood were involved in this action and signed the declarations, hoping that the Municipality would issue the required documents ('contracts' as they called them). There were some concerns from members of the community because they feared another obligation to change all of their IDs. This might occur at some point given the fact that the documentation also presupposes that the local administration will number the houses differently, based on the general plan prepared by the topographer.

The local LERI team had another meeting at the office and the co-researchers brought the signed declarations. The topographer also provided clarification regarding the forthcoming stages of this action so co-researchers could pass the information on to the residents. Moreover, after consultations with the LA representatives, the topographer announced that another seven houses could be included in the procedure but only if the parts of the buildings prior to 2001 were included, without the newer annexes attached to them.

Voting for the Local Council Decision to Regularise the Informal Settlement

In the process of regularisation and titling in Bufa, another important formal meeting at the town hall took place in February, when a different delineation of the plot in Bufa was approved so that it included the houses, which were partly outside the former plot of land (three cases). Moreover, municipal representatives mentioned that they were seeking procedures to legalise all the houses from the three categories identified: erected prior to 2001, partly erected prior to 2001 (without the newer extensions), and erected after 2001 (through a different procedure to acquire late construction authorisation). The local Roma councillor and one of the co-researchers brought up the possibility that people buy the plots from the Municipality. Apart from this being unlikely, due to costs, the director of the technical department repeated that the Municipality had no intention of selling the land, only to rent it (through 50-year concessions). Comparing the existent data at the town hall with that produced through the LERI intervention, it was found that a consistent proportion of the houses had been declared with the tax department; however, in some cases, slight differences existed between the surface areas declared and the actual surface of the house. Moreover, this data available at the town hall included the year in which the person declared or acquired the house, which was not necessarily the year in which the house was built. This issue had to be subsequently clarified through the mandatory statutory declaration (*declarație pe proprie răspundere*) of residents. In parallel with people signing these declarations, the topographer compiled the entire documentation to formulate the report needed for the Local Council Decision based on her measurements, the PUG, and the information acquired from the tax department. Part of the report was submitted to the technical department so it could be included on the agenda of the February local council meeting. The verification of tax payments was sorted out by the LERI local team, including where houses had not been declared, which would then require people to retroactively pay taxes covering a five-year period.

Bottlenecks in completing the regularisation procedure

Bad news came over the next few days. During a meeting at the office, the topographer informed the team that the local administration expected residents in Bufa to cover all their outstanding balances (tax payments, including those

older than 5 years, as well as fines unrelated to the houses or the lands), arguing that the newly passed fiscal code stipulated that the local administration could only levy current taxes after older outstanding debts had been paid off, irrespective of the kind of debt. The local LERI team was only informed about this regulation a couple of days before the Local Council meeting, hence it was not possible to estimate whether local administration representatives knew or not in advance. This posed additional challenges to the actions, as the residents did not have the financial capacity to pay the fees and the continuation of the regularisation and title process was therefore at risk. Some of the outstanding debts were indeed not high, but there were some cases where the balance reached €450, considerably over the payment possibilities of people within such a limited amount of time (from the moment these people learned about this to the date on which the Local Council Decision was supposed to be voted on). For a moment, it seemed that the entire action had to cease, knowing that costs unrelated to the titling procedure could not be covered by LERI.

The next day, the LERI local team learned exactly what the individual costs were. The experts went to the technical department where a representative pointed us to the legal provision of Law 50/1991 with all its subsequent amendments, according to which people are obliged to cover debts to the local administration in full before having their houses legalised. The functionary passed over a list detailing the outstanding debts of the residents of Hotar Street. The list also included residents of Poligon because their houses were included in this street; these were deleted from the list. On the other hand, some people were missing from this list. Thus, an updated list including individual payment notices was later issued for all the people in the Project for Land Attribution. Later, at the office, the team communicated to the community co-researcher what had been learned from the municipal offices: unless people complied with the requirement to pay outstanding debts in full, the council would not pass the decision to legalise the houses. This was very difficult for people who did not have the money. The project team did not think that debts arising from fines should have been added to the outstanding balances. Uncertainty arose regarding the entire procedure considering that some people were unable to pay their debts. Out of the notices received, the team separated those that did not include fines. The co-researchers passed these notices to Bufa residents to persuade them to pay as much as possible within the remaining time.

In the meantime, the Project for Land Attribution was included on the agenda for the next local council meeting. A few days before the monthly local council meeting, councillors also met with their committees to discuss these proposals. According to the Roma councillor, over the course of these committee meetings, some councillors mentioned that they would vote against the proposal if residents did not pay their dues in full because they were not "willing to vote something which is illegal".

During the next local meeting, the team also confirmed that indeed according to the recent fiscal code (effective January 2016³⁸), outstanding balances from fines were included in the debts to local administrations. This late announcement partly blocked the legalisation process for the houses in Bufa. Over the course of

³⁸ See more information here http://www.monitoruloficial.ro/RO/article--CĂRTI_DIN_DOMENIUL_FISCALITĂȚIICONTABILITĂȚII--396.html; accessed February 2016.

discussions, members of the local team pointed out that the LA had revealed this matter of the outstanding balances to the LERI research quite late in the titling process. No matter how hard the local team tried to persuade people to pay the taxes, at least those owing lower amounts, only a few residents from Bufa managed to cover the outstanding balance in full, the others faced serious financial problems.

The next morning, according to the Roma councillor, some people from Bufa who wanted to pay part of their tax debt (amounts they could afford) were only permitted to do so if they agreed to cover the oldest debts from the total outstanding balance (including those incurred from fines). Consequently, people left without paying anything. In this circumstance, the local councillor thought that the mayor might withdraw the proposal and postpone it until all residents in Bufa had completely covered their debts. From Cluj, the country-level LERI experts talked to the local councillor and persuaded him not to give up on the proposal, but insist on a positive vote during the local council meeting. The field-expert reanalysed the debt situation and concluded that there might be at least 13 houses that could be legalised – people who had already paid their taxes or whose taxes were rather low (no fines). Thus, this was reason enough not to postpone the decision for legalisation, while the compiled situation could serve as an argument during the local council meeting in favour of passing the proposal. Moreover, it would not only have been a pity if the immediate local LERI activity in Bufa had been lost, but also the potential of this action to set a new direction and provide good practice for future regularisation and titling in informal settlements.

The final vote in the local council

Voting on the proposal was also eventful. Several councillors refused to vote on the proposal if the economic department failed to provide details of the outstanding balances for all people included in the decision. One of the councillor argued that the proposal should be withdrawn until every resident in Bufa paid his/her debts. Discussing the initiative was postponed to the second half of the meeting, when the economic department produced the list of paying residents. At this point, the local Roma councillor proposed an amendment to the initial proposal: that only payers were to be included nominally in the proposal. In other words, only they would be granted official rights to use the land beneath their houses. In this updated form, the initiative was voted on and passed by the local council. Thus, 11 of the 25 houses built prior to 2001 could be further legalised and subsequently titled, according to Local Council Decision no. 48 voted on 24 February 2016³⁹. However, the situation is still uncertain regarding the remaining residents: people living in houses built prior to 2001 who could not cover their taxes in full, and those who erected their houses after 2001.

Drawing on the experience of carrying out an intervention aimed at the regularisation and titling of houses located in the informal settlement, the entire activity (steps/actions) can be summarised for use in other initiatives to regularise and title houses located in informal settlements throughout the country. After finishing the LERI research, the local LERI team will be ready to

³⁹ See more information at: <http://www.aiud.ro/AplicatiiOnline/Registratura/Hotarari/Detaliu.aspx?registru=HOT-HCL&nr=48&an=2016>.

prepare a report on the local activities, including a series of practical and policy recommendations. This report is planned to be published on the Desire Foundation website (as project implementer) and will be sent to the relevant state agencies, such as Agenția Națională pentru Roma (National Agency for Roma), Agenția Națională pentru Cadastru și Publicitate Imobiliară (Agency for Cadastre and Real Estate Publicity/Property and House Registration), Ministerul Fondurilor Europene (Ministry for European Funding), Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și al Administrației Publice (Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration), as well as interested NGOs.

Table 1. Regularisation and titling of houses in Aiud

REGULARISATION AND TITLING OF HOUSES IN AN HISTORICAL INFORMAL SETTLEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Legal and procedural formal documentation (desk research); ○ Mapping local stakeholders (community members, leaders, Roma councillor); ○ Mapping the housing situation of each household & producing relevant data (legal status of houses, lands; year of construction); ○ Identifying categories of houses (regularisation relevant); ○ Assuring the collaboration of the local administration; ○ Formalising the regularisation and titling activities with the local administration (letter of intent); ○ Deciding upon the technical procedure with a professional topographer; ○ Informing residents about the regularising and titling procedures; ○ Measurements on site (facilitated by the community co-researcher/delegate); ○ Processing of measurements and creation of the area's plan; ○ Comparing older plans with the newly produced plan of the informal settlement; ○ Obtaining formal agreement on regularisation and titling from the local council; ○ Identifying and covering outstanding balances (due taxes), based on the collaboration agreement with the Municipality; ○ The signing statutory statements (year of construction and surface area of houses) by the residents; ○ Handing in the paperwork to the Municipality; ○ Processing and drafting the proposal for the Local Council Decision (incl. legal procedures and technical documentation) regarding the attribution of lands; ○ Negotiating the proposal in the relevant committees of the local council; ○ Debating and rectifying the proposal during the local council meeting (possible amendments to the draft proposal); ○ Voting for the proposal, turning it into a Local Council Decision; ○ Receiving subsequent approval on the Local Council Decision from the prefecture;

- **Compiling individual requests for the registration of houses;**
- **Handing in the paperwork to the local Property Registry;**
- **Issuing of titles by the Property Registry.**

Source: LERI Field expert, 2016

Seeking alternatives to prevent a forced eviction: the case of Bethlen Gabor in Aiud

Extensive documentation in this community was carried out during the needs assessment phase resulting in plans for activities in this area. Initially, the envisaged LPP included legal expertise, meaning that a lawyer could have joined the local LERI team to advise it regarding actions to prevent the forced eviction of these vulnerable tenants. However, as mentioned earlier, over the course of consultations with the key person at the locality, the Roma councillor, some changes were brought to the planned actions during the implementation of the LPP. Consultations and negotiations with the local councillor suggested focusing more on concrete activities. Given that no legal action could have been taken in the short course of the LERI implementation phase, the local team decided not to include legal expertise. Moreover, the retrocession decision had occurred too long before to be legally contested. Thus, in discussions with the local group, an agreement was reached not to pursue legal action but instead to focus on trying to mediate between the stakeholders: residents threatened with eviction, the LAG, and representatives of the local administration, including the social work department, and local and regional representatives of the bishopric.

Consequently, the local LERI team organised the first such mediation meeting at the beginning of November 2015, attended by two delegates for the Bethlen Gabor tenants and the local representative of the bishopric. One of the residents abruptly introduced the discussion by mentioning the ID problems faced because the bishopric refused to extend the tenancy contracts. Then, the local LERI team avoided open conflict by proposing a round of presentations, allowing each participant to introduce her-/himself. The bishopric representative introduced his prior experience working to support Roma children, which he subsequently contrasted with his conflicting existing relations with the residents of Bethlen Gabor. According to him, he could no longer communicate: "these Roma resemble no trace of civilisation," and blamed them for intentionally ruining the building: "they tore down the metal installations in the staircase to sell" (male, approx. 55 years old). Thus, the local research team learned that the breakdown between the two parties occurred when the administrator suddenly told the residents to leave the building and relocate to Bufa. Because his message was unclear, residents became rowdy, causing the representative to feel 'under attack'. He then cut off communication with all except two tenants⁴⁰. When pressed by delegates to explain why contracts had not been extended, the administrator claimed the residents "should have presupposed" it was valid as long as they paid rent, without any amendment to the expired contract. He also mentioned that the administration in Cluj had no intention of extending the

⁴⁰ One elderly lady died during spring of 2015; the second, an elderly woman as well, stopped paying rent during last summer, being extremely discontented with the administration of these buildings.

contracts, given the fact that there was an ongoing project of general refurbishment of the buildings (mainly the Bethlen Gabor College in the vicinity). Moreover, he added that there was no legal provision compelling the bishopric to extend the contracts⁴¹. Most people attending this meeting were appalled at what the representative said, but one of the Bethlen Gabor residents exclaimed – two or three times – that the representative’s words were utter lies. Annoyed with this reaction, the representative walked out of the meeting. Members of the local team tried in vain to persuade him to attend another meeting. However, after sharing the group’s intention to submit a formal letter to the Bishopric Office in Cluj, he gave the name of the bishopric councillor in charge of patrimony.

During the same consultation and planning meeting, the local LERI team revised an older draft of a letter to the bishopric, editing out some issues (such as the possibility that tenants buy the apartments), while adding information regarding the number of residents who had had tenancy contracts with the bishopric. In this document, the residents asked the bishopric to send an official position regarding their tenancy/occupancy status and also proposed to formally meet, if the bishopric agreed. All members of the local LERI team signed the letter. After leaving the office, the Bethlen Gabor co-researcher shared the content of the meeting with the neighbours. During the course of implementation, there were several attempts to contact the bishopric, but there was no response to the letter. Actions in Bethlen Gabor, like community consultations, were deferred in the hope that the bishopric would ultimately provide a response to the formal letter. According to the legal provisions stipulated in OUG40/1996 (*Ordonanța de Urgență a Guvernului* - Governmental Emergency Ordinance), local administrations are obliged to provide housing alternatives to former social tenants evicted or under the risk of eviction from buildings returned to their former owners.⁴² Unlike public authorities, the bishopric as a private entity has no legal obligation to formally reply to a letter or provide housing alternatives to evictees after the mandatory five-year extension of the contract expires. At the beginning of December, the field expert called the bishopric councillor. During the telephone conversation, the administrator reiterated that the bishopric had no intention of extending any contracts for those buildings because there were alternative refurbishment plans. As far as he was concerned, the bishopric had no obligation to the current residents, given that their contracts had not been extended. On the contrary, he argued, they were actually being tolerated there. The field expert then reminded him of the tenants’ request for a formal meeting. To this proposal, the councillor mentioned that he would get in touch with a legal advisor and call to schedule a meeting. After this telephone conversation, no other connection was established with bishopric representatives despite numerous other attempts by the field expert during December 2015 and January 2016, leaving the action without a clear resolution.

In the meantime, the local LERI team continued to press the local administration to find solutions that could prevent a possible repetition of the forced evictions and relocations similar to those resulting in the formation of the informal

⁴¹ Indeed, the law compels that tenancy contracts be extended for a mandatory 5-year period after retrocession, according to OUG40/1999 (*Ordonanța de Urgență a Guvernului* - Governmental Emergency Ordinance); See text of OUG40/1999 at: <http://www.legex.ro/BUG-40-1999-17421.aspx>; accessed August 2015.

⁴² See text of OUG40/1999 at: <http://www.legex.ro/BUG-40-1999-17421.aspx>; accessed August 2015.

settlement, Poligon. The LERI local team included the insecure tenancy of residents at Bethlen Gabor in the initial letter of intent submitted to the Municipality. During the first public hearing the group had at the town hall, this situation was briefly mentioned but no representative seemed to be willing to openly address it. However, at the end of the meeting, members of the team approached the representative of the technical department responsible for the administration of social housing stock. She mentioned that no current tenant at Bethlen Gabor had ever made a formal request for social housing. Considering the refurbishments at the neighbouring college are co-funded by the Municipality from the local budget, the Roma councillor addressed the question of the current tenants' insecurity, hoping he could gain support to mediate negotiations between the local administration and the bishopric. He raised the question during the December meeting of the council, when further funding to complete the refurbishments at the college and its extensions was approved through a council vote. However, again, the other parties had no interest in discussing this imperative housing issue.

Realising that the mayor had no intention of taking the initiative to organise a trilateral meeting between the bishopric, the residents, and representatives of the local administration, the local LERI team decided to start moving forward by compiling social housing requests for residents at Bethlen Gabor during a planning session in January. Thus, the team prepared formal requests for social houses which were given to the community co-researcher to pass them on to his neighbours. In the second half of the month, several individual and group meetings were carried out by the community co-researcher to explain filling in requests for social houses to all his neighbours; ultimately, 19 people, one per household, signed the requests which were then registered with the Municipality. During one of these meetings, the field expert also brought up the possibility of adding a covering letter to each applicant's request, which would describe the resident's situation and their request for support in organising a trilateral meeting (residents, local administration).

No later than the beginning of February, social workers carried out social inquiries (mandatory in the housing requests), leaving a list of documents needed in the application. After consultations with the co-researcher and other members of the community during group discussions, the local LERI team decided to further support people by covering the expenses of the mandatory notarial declarations⁴³. The co-researcher informed his neighbours about this. Moreover, the local LERI team also prepared individual statutory declarations on people's current housing situations, including the risks posed by a possible eviction. Compiling and submitting these request was one of the means of securing alternative housing for them if evicted.

During the next few weeks, more frequent discussions took place with residents at Bethlen Gabor. People had to provide copies of certain documents and once the dossiers were ready, they were appointed to make the notarial declaration. Of all the tenants in the three courtyards, ultimately members of 13 households

⁴³ Briefly, according the Law 114/1996 Law of Housing, people requesting social housing must prove they did not own property after 1990 and did not benefit of any state to construct/buy houses. Usually, notarial declarations are the documents which prove it, as specified also by the Local Council Decision on the procedure to attribute social housing in Aiud.

were supported to make these declarations. Six requests were submitted by members of the LERI local team on 29 February 2016. Upon submission, the public servant at the social work office mentioned that it was accepting requests because a new round of assessments had already been planned for the next month. Due to the fact that the signing, authentication and issue of declarations took longer than expected, the remaining seven were individually submitted by residents at Bethlen Gabor at the beginning of March 2016.

Challenges faced in the course of implementation

During the implementation phase, different challenges and unexpected issues arose, which partly (re)shaped the local team's activity from the initially envisaged actions. Firstly, there was the extent to which the main directions of the LPP were planned, which significantly exceeded the budgetary limits of such a small-scale research project. Even though all the proposed actions focused on improving the housing situation of Roma in Aiud, the specificities of each area required more resources than initially thought. Resources included time, budget and the availability to be physically in town.

On the other hand, the concrete developments and local dynamics also changed over the course of implementing the activities. The most serious circumstance, and regrettably so given the dire situation of Roma there, was that of Poligon. The housing situation is even worse than in Bufa, as most of the shacks were erected from scrap after the demolition of the buildings the people had lived in before. At the time of eviction and relocation, the local administration issued no official documents. The recent infrastructural project (construction of a highway) has only added to the isolation of this community.

Early on in the implementation phase, the local LERI team learned from representatives of the LA, that a similar activity of regularisation, like the one in Bufa, could not be run in Poligon because this informal housing area was not included in the inner territory (*intravilan*) or 'built' area of the town. Even though residents face the same ID problems, a similar activity of regularisation would have implied that the LERI research supported the legalisation and formalisation of a segregated area created after the eviction of residents from the town centre. This aspect raised serious ethical, civic and political concerns with the local LERI team. Unlike Poligon, Bufa is a historically informal settlement of Roma houses, documented for over 80 years. Dwelling here is more stable and residents are willing to remain here, but require better connections to town and improved infrastructure. The latter could be covered in the future after regularisation of the land.

Local co-researchers insisted on not forgetting the needs of these people. However, after the co-researcher's initial visit to Poligon, access to the community worsened. One of them reported some suspicion amongst residents after having previously been there to register over-aged children for a 'Second Chance' schooling programme. Ultimately, parents did not provide the necessary paperwork and he was met with reluctance upon subsequent visits, which made the co-researcher conclude that people were less willing to take part in any action. Unfortunately, these children lost their chance to be included in the programme. This was the reason why the local team decided to delay the community consultation. For local co-researchers, organising another meeting 'just to consult people' made no sense given that no concrete activity was going to be implemented. Without any consistent activity, co-researchers said they did not want to leave people with false impressions ('making waves for nothing', as a

Romanian saying goes), which would actually negatively impact on community dynamics and the people's relationships with members of the LAG.

The community co-researcher found the situation in Poligon the most severe and most difficult to tackle, which was also the position of local administration representatives. Given the fact that the area is outside the perimeter of the town (in the so-called *extravilan*, the land outside the built area), there is no means through which any project can be carried out by the local administration at the moment, and any initiative to regularise the area would be highly controversial. However, the LERI local team contributed to identifying the community needs that could subsequently be included in financing requests. Even though the LERI research has ended, there seems to be a commitment on the part of local LERI research group members not to completely disconnect from the forthcoming developments in Poligon.

Concerning difficulties encountered during the implementation of actions in the other two areas in focus, the regularisation of lands and titling met several turning points. First, there were the complications stemming from the local administration. Initially, the representatives of the LA made a rough estimate of four months to complete the titling action. However, towards the end of the LERI research activities, the legal adviser at the town hall mentioned that the procedure might take longer than planned. One of the constraints stemmed from the impossibility of legalising the entire informal settlement. Immediately after the first visits in Bufa to take measurements, the topographer mentioned that not all the houses could be legalised based on Law 50/1990, which contains provisions for legalisation without full documentation only for houses built prior to 2001. To cover the technical documentation of these buildings, including authorisations for demolition and construction, a significant supplement to the available funding would have been needed. This situation posed several risks regarding the other residents' relationship with the intervention. The community co-researcher and the topographer tried to tackle and prevent misunderstandings by reminding people of this legal provision during their visits in the community to carry out measurements.

Secondly, the completion of the procedure was also significantly altered because of the recent provisions to the fiscal code⁴⁴. Had the announcement on outstanding tax debts been made earlier, possibly more people could have covered their taxes in time. But when the local team learned about this mandatory requirement, little could be done both because of time constraints and because people were away for seasonal work. These challenges resulted in a significantly lower number of people getting attributions for the land beneath their houses. Titling was also deferred because the local administration wanted to wait for a possible contestation from the county prefecture on the legality of the procedure⁴⁵. Until the local administration issues the paperwork proving the land attribution, the topographer cannot complete the registration of the houses with the local Property Registry and thus have the property titles issued. Another challenge in Bufa referred to the coverage of the LERI intervention. Some residents raised questions regarding the impossibility of including all the houses in Bufa in the local council's decision to allot usufruct rights (e.g. the right to

⁴⁴ Read explanation in a previous section of the case study: *The description of the local intervention*

⁴⁵ According to Art. 3(1), Law 554/2004, Law of Administrative Courts and Legal Proceedings.

enjoy the use and advantages of another's property short of the destruction or waste of its substance) over the land. The local team tried to mitigate the risk of partly covering the area through various insistences with the technical department director and the topographer to find the legal means to complete the action for as many residents of Bufa as possible. However, the houses which were modified to such an extent that they are now very different from older plans of the area cannot be legalised through the elementary procedure and need to have authorisations issued which are more expensive.

Finally, the local administration seemed less willing to be involved in tackling the insecure housing situation of residents in Bethlen Gabor, even when the local councillor tried to lobby the mayor to organise a trilateral meeting. Apart from facing difficulties in obtaining any kind of formal position from the bishopric regarding their plans with the buildings, which was also formally requested by the LERI research, representatives of the local administration also avoided assuming any mediating position between the bishopric and the residents at risk of eviction. Their situation was partly handed over to the social work department and, given that at the time no social housing was available as an alternative, the housing insecurity of residents at Bethlen Gabor continues indefinitely.

Milestones and timing

As a result of the more than four months of implementing the LERI research in Aiud (mid-October 2015–end of February 2016), milestones of the LERI research in Aiud include the following:

- Bethlen Gabor:
 - the intervention proved that trying to mediate between stakeholders (insecure tenants, the bishopric, and the Municipality) was a dead end, neither of the latter two being willing to jointly find a solution;
 - to provide a housing alternative, 13 social housing requests were compiled and handed in to the Municipality, thus proving a temporary safety net in case of eviction.
- Bufa:
 - a database of the general status of the houses and households was compiled through the survey prepared by the team and completed by the local co-researcher;
 - a general plan of the area – land, plots, houses – was created by the topographer and formally approved by the local council;
 - a Local Council Decision was adopted through which 11 residents in Bufa have had their right to use the plots of land beneath their houses recognized. The attribution can subsequently serve in the registration of the houses with the Property Registry (Biroul de Cadastru și Publicitate Imobiliară Aiud). The activities of the LERI team in Aiud have finished in September 2016, however, the local administration still had to issue documents so that the topographer could then submit the registration requests to the Property Registry. There were also concerns shared by the local team members that the prefecture will not approve the Local Council Decision. Another reason for the deferral might be the local elections that took place in June 2016, and changed the dynamics within the local administration. Even though from the same political party, the new mayor did not include the Roma councillor on an electable position on the party's list. Consequently, by the end of the LERI research

period (September 2016) the local LERI team members were very skeptical on the planned continuation of the local registration process.

- Feleud:
 - a brief report on housing needs and problems was completed by the local co-researcher;
 - a concluding report on the activity of the LERI research was produced;
 - both reports include information which could serve future project drafts.
- Poligon:
 - a brief report on general needs and problems was completed by the local co-researcher.
- Trainee:
 - a brief report on the LERI research activities and that of the LAG;
 - two project proposals for small grants.

The extension of the implementation from the middle to the end of February was needed and welcome. During this month the LERI local team managed not only to push a local decision on the regularisation and titling of houses in Bufa, but also to support Bethlen Gabor residents in handing in social housing dossiers (totaling 13 requests), given that no formal response was received during the LPP implementation phase from either the bishopric or the Municipality.

The fieldwork experts continued to visit Aiud between March and September 2016, and carried out a series of evaluation discussions with residents at Bethlen Gabor.

Involvement of stakeholders

The local Roma councillor was the most important 'pro-Roma figure' for the Roma minority ethnics in Aiud. Not only was he formally included in the local public administration, but he also had several years of active and voluntary involvement in representing the rights of the local Roma community. Even though he participates in local decision-making, he was wary about the extent to which he could actually influence local budgetary allocations. The Roma councillor significantly shaped both the needs assessment and the implementation of the LPP phases, having significant input in reshaping the proposed actions⁴⁶ so that Feleud was included in the LERI small-scale action. Rather than representing this area, which he knows and is very much involved in the activities of the Educational Centre, he insisted on taking part in the LERI research as a Roma councillor – thus mediating and supporting the collaboration with the local administration.

At the onset of the implementation of the LPP, the LERI field experts put forward certain key persons, including the local Roma councillor and other informal Roma leaders, who are held in good standing in their communities as trustworthy and knowledgeable (Bethlen Gabor, Bufa, Poligon), and with whom there had been a previous connection. Because they proved their willingness to support the needs assessment phase on a voluntary basis, the local LERI team invited them to take

⁴⁶ As described in a section above.

an active part in the implementation of the research as local Roma co-researchers, hoping that the experience would also increase the capacity of the LAG. Several members from communities, especially those in Bethlen Gabor, had been very open and willing to share their experience and opinions regarding the means to improve their housing situation; the LERI local team therefore also counted on them for the implementation phase.

Resuming contact with the local administration was a priority in the preparation of the implementation stage in order to discuss the results of the needs assessment and decide upon the concrete actions to take within the LERI research. The research team targeted representatives of the technical department, as it was the most relevant to the envisaged activities of the LPP. Finally, regarding possible stakeholders in the implementation, the field experts had several attempts at contacting the local Roma representative. In 2015, a Roma Party member held this position in the local administration, despite the Roma party not having a good standing at local level. The Roma community representatives identified during previous stages of the LERI research had all been members of the local Roma Party but resigned due to the difficulty collaborating with county level officials of the party. In their opinion, the county and local Roma Party leaders did not actually represent the local community, as they were appointed by members from higher-up, instead of representatives elected by the community. Likewise, the person was not in good standing amongst the Roma, most of them were disappointed and angry after a few meetings with her. Generally, they highlighted her lack of interest in the real issues of people in the communities, and her scarce presence both in the communities and at the office. Thus, she was not well perceived by local Roma due to her lack of willingness to be involved in the problems of communities, as her position requires. During one of the preparatory visits, the LERI local team sought to meet the representative to collect data on relevant local statistics. Other representatives from the town hall ultimately provided crucial information regarding the numbering of houses in Bufa, because the representative was out of office.

The LERI local team had several rounds of discussions and negotiations with the Roma councillor over the content of the LPP and the formation of the local LERI team at the beginning of the implementation phase. As a first step, more trust was built at the level of the Municipality (members of which welcomed the LPP activity regarding the legalisations of informal houses in Bufa), as well as with the local Roma co-researchers (they welcomed the team's availability to adjust the LPP according to more recent needs to capacitate the LAG). A balance was struck between the initial proposals (and their participatory rationale) and the needs according to the local Roma councillor, focusing on enhancing and capacitating the LAG. Towards the end of October, after two weeks of preparations, the core LERI local team was established, including the Roma councillor, three community co-researchers and the trainee. A brief workshop was held which included the presentation of the LPP activities, and training to carry out the first activities for each of the areas. The local LERI team acquired formal existence through signing the letter of intent to the Municipality.

Apart from the activities carried out in Bethlen Gabor and Bufa, the local research sought to the group's capacity and connecting housing actions within the LAG, settling connections amongst communities and preparing the LAG for drafting funding projects that would take into account the housing needs documented through the LERI intervention. As a means to increase the capacity

of members of the LAG, the co-researcher started to meet with community members at the beginning of November 2015. Apart from housing needs and issues identified through discussions with fellow peers, the co-researcher also produced data regarding the legal status of lands beneath houses in each of the communities – basic information needed in any attempt to legalise informal settlements. After meetings with community members, the co-researcher wrote brief descriptions for the neighbourhoods of Feleud, focusing on the housing situation of each.

In November 2015, during one of the initial formal hearings at the town hall, when members of the LERI local team presented the main intervention of the research, some representatives of the urbanism department turned the discussion. They lamented the “increasing number of illegal constructions people were erecting in Feleud”⁴⁷ opposite to the river (*Valea Aiudului*), mentioning the lack of means to stop this expansion. Rather annoyed by this intervention with racist undertones about ‘wildly expanding’ Roma families, the Feleud co-researcher intervened to clarify that most of those constructions were actually annexes to the households: sheds for stocking or pigsties for domestic animals. Moreover, he accepted the authorities’ invitation to attend the visit in the community planned for the coming week in order to mediate between municipal representatives and residents. Thus, the following week, local police ran an investigation on site with the aim of settling the situation as soon as possible. After this episode, with the support of the local co-researcher, 17 residents in Feleud submitted individual formal requests to the local administration to lease or purchase these small plots for courtyards. The LA’s response came a month later, advising the claimants to “first solve the legal status of their houses, and then ask for attribution of lands serving as courtyards”⁴⁸.

The general description of the areas in Feleud comprises the different histories of these neighbourhoods (when and how each of them was formed), the traditional crafts people used to be occupied with, and the current needs in each of the neighbourhoods. Most of these needs relate to uncertain tenancies over the lands on which houses are built, while some of the neighbourhoods are very poorly supplied with basic infrastructure (running water, electricity, heating, roads). One of the neighbourhoods is frequently at risk of being flooded as it is very close to the shores of a river (*Valea Aiudului*). Towards the second part of the implementation phase, further steps were taken to access information about the property status of the lands houses were built on. After this information was available, other actions could have been discussed and decided within the group. However, towards the end of the implementation phase, there were delays in carrying out community consultations given the fact that more information was needed over the legal status of the lands. At this point, local members of the LERI local team were not only focused on the activities in Bufa, but there was little time left and no resources to plan actions relating to improving housing tenancy in Feleud, an activity which could not have had concrete results given the time and budgetary constraints. At the end of February, the community co-researcher submitted his activity report, detailing all of his activities in Feleud,

⁴⁷ Field note, November 2015

⁴⁸ Response of Local Administration to Feleud claimants.

including the initiative of people from Feleud who asked for lands (presented in a previous monitoring note), as well as various visits in Poligon⁴⁹.

The team member responsible for the research project's management supported the other co-researchers during their visits to communities. In January 2016, discussions between the academic co-researcher and field expert started focusing on the available forthcoming funding. The local councillor also sent some older draft projects to the field experts and the academic co-researcher for further discussions, hoping to be able to amend them to receive funding. These projects were small-scale educational services, mainly focused on the after-school programme carried out by the Educational Centre in Feleud. Some of the projects were indeed submitted for small grants, but were not successful. During a visit to the community centre in Feleud combined with a discussion about the opportunities to write a project proposal on the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) national funding stream, both the local councillor and the field expert presented their activities at the centre in Feleud insisting that the centre needed more funding to complete the erection of a newer multifunctional social centre. The plan was well thought out, however, it was still difficult to identify the funding source given that any project under Operative Programmes (national or/and EU funding) required the local administration to be a stakeholder and there was no local group that could financially provide more money. However, more attention had to be given to the details of these Operative Programmes to identify the appropriate axis before the launch of calls for project proposals. The local LERI team has agreed, once the calls are launched (including the funding request templates), to prepare several requests based on the needs identified in each of the areas of intervention. However, such an opportunity was lost given that the new mayor refused to collaborate with the ROMED/ROMACT project, which could have constituted a means to implement a CLLD project.

In order to connect the documentation work of the co-researchers with possible future actions of the local administration in collaboration with the action group, the academic co-researcher sent details on the CLLD and the Applicants' Guide to the local councillor and field expert. When the templates were launched, the academic expert and field expert had a series of meetings in which they prepared drafts for requesting external funds. During one of the meetings, the academic expert presented the internal funding to which the calls had already been launched, as well as those opening soon, describing ways the existing community needs in Aiud could be integrated into project proposals. One of them is Priority Axis 4 – Social inclusion and poverty alleviation in marginalised Roma communities; the programme is called Integrated Local Development (*Dezvoltare locală intergrată* - DLI 360°) for which the local LERI team was given the Applicant's Guide in order to read and draft a project proposal. Apart from the internal funding competition, the academic expert and local team also referred to external funding⁵⁰. In the coming weeks, more focused discussions were held on possible interventions that could be proposed for these funding applications. After considering the details of the calls launched, it became clear that Priority Axis 4 - DLI 360° was the most appropriate funding opportunity because it could

⁴⁹ Read more details on the LERI activities in Poligon in a section below.

⁵⁰ For example the RIO Fund – Opportunity Fund of Open Society Foundations.

cover the needs previously identified by the local LERI team through the needs assessment. During another meeting, each point in the Applicant's Guide was carefully read and local needs were identified in order to be included in a possible application. Someone pointed out that these funding Axes involve projects budgeted to the level of millions – thus preventing smaller and/or inexperienced NGOs from applying for funding. Consequently, such projects can only be drafted in partnership with local administration and other private parties, including businesses. The LA was the coordinator for the entire project. The experts also handed out other documents detailing Priority Axis 6⁵¹. Both the local councillor and the field expert had already submitted some small-scale funding applications, thus influencing their approach towards EU funding. Between the EU-funding landscape and their expectations on how to solve social problems there was a sizeable gap. For them, calls which involved unpicking of the social situation seemed superfluous, as they stated they already knew what the social problems are, as well as the appropriate types of solutions.

Monitoring, evaluation and participants' feedback

The process of regularisation and titling of the informal houses in Bufa was still ongoing at the time of writing. Generally, people welcomed the initiative of titling houses, but those whose houses could not be included in the procedure were less satisfied, and at times became suspicious of the legal explanations they had been given. Thus, the perceived level of 'satisfaction' varies according to their inclusion in the procedure: some are satisfied, others are not because the legal provisions in the Romanian legislation hindered the inclusion of their houses in the LERI research activity. Even though the LERI field experts offered to hold general meetings to explain the formal reasons for this exclusion, the community co-researcher and the local Roma councillor preferred to explain the issue themselves, individually to each person who had agreed to take part in the activity when the census had been carried out. However, if housing is to be formally recognised in Bufa, local authorities could prepare development projects to provide these residents with the basic utilities that are still lacking (proper roads, public transportation, sewerage systems and potable water to each household). Moreover and in parallel, using the example and experience acquired through collaboration with the LERI intervention, further steps could be taken to legalise the remaining houses.

Concerning other areas of intervention, the residents of Bethlen Gabor, who were supported in submitting social housing requests, were on the priority list for the first time, which they much appreciated based on information received from local team members. At this time, their housing needs should legally be taken into account. As the local procedure in Aiud does not discriminate between applicants if they had not been formally employed for over 12 months before submitting requests (as the procedure in Cluj does), all the dossiers were assessed and given points. Following that, it is up to the local administration to find available apartments and attribute them to tenants who are at risk of eviction.

Regarding the actions carried out in Feleud, the main outcome appreciated by the local team was that more consistent data was produced for each of the neighbourhoods of this area, which was crucial information regarding the housing

⁵¹ This Funding Axis is dedicated to educational projects.

situation (tenancy, legal status of lands, etc.). Through the implemented actions, the local co-researcher has also improved his position as an informal leader and delegate for these communities. Should local capacity and political will emerge locally, this data can be used as background information to support development interventions.

Generally, the local group acknowledged that they have gained capacity to run community discussions and report on actions carried out, thus strengthening their position amongst the Roma and increasing the group's visibility at municipality level. The LERI field experts think that there is a good chance to continue this collaboration between the local stakeholders.

5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

Important lessons from this action research include the formation of a local, effective implementation team, the negotiations with key promoters of the interventions and their influence in shaping the research (the Roma councillor and the director of the technical department), a peculiar way of understanding and practising participation, as well as collaborating with a 'selective' local administration. The lack of local-level capacity on the part of the Roma community to draft and carry out consistent social inclusion projects was also confirmed.

Formation of an effective local team

Regarding the formation of the local team, the Roma councillor's suggestions were also useful to find local Roma community co-researchers, who are trusted by the community, especially in the area of Poligon. Moreover, the local councillor also shaped the collaboration with the local administration by persuasively arguing that people in the local administration are public servants and thus it is their duty to support projects aimed at the inclusion of Roma⁵². While initially having reservations over some of the activities and the proposed approach (through employing delegates from each community), the Roma councillor was subsequently persuaded that this method of work could also contribute to capacitating the LAG. Co-researchers found the methodology useful as some of the tools could be used in future community projects, in addition to the housing data already produced in the course of the LERI intervention. The chosen local co-researchers could also be a reliable link within the LAG. Subsequently, he argued that in order to be successful, the research had to offer concrete actions to motivate people to participate. He argued that support in writing projects would be highly welcomed in improving the living conditions of Roma in Aiud. While insisting on forging better relations with community members who had been involved in carrying out prior actions (such as documenting the housing situation in Bufa and at Bethlen Gabor), the team also welcomed the councillor's availability and willingness to be involved in the formation of the implementing team. The support of the director of the technical department also contributed to the shaping of the LERI interventions. With her

⁵² "they are public functionaries, it's their duty to be involved in these activities" (Roma co-researcher and community delegate, male, 47 years old), field note, October 2015

positive feedback, the house measurement activities in Bufa gained greater visibility for the coming implementation phase, not only because they were highly needed but also because they could feed into the ongoing actions of the Municipality to formally register the houses in the area. She highlighted that, the registration of houses is the first step in improving the living conditions of Roma. This was a persuasive argument, which emphasised, yet again, the urgency of finding solutions to the legalisation of informal living of Roma, a crucial step in the development of infrastructure to provide adequate living conditions for them too.

PAR methods were useful mainly in mapping the housing needs of the people in the chosen city areas, and also in approaching the local administration. Action was the main aspect of the PAR methods used in the locality. For the activities carried out in Aiud, it seemed more appropriate to organise them in the local communities in smaller groups. This suggestion of the co-researchers was based on the dynamics of the local community that would make it more difficult and also it would consume a lot of time and resources to come to a common solution, if the activities were organised as large community meetings. It was also important from the point of view of interpersonal dynamics to have the trust of the people in the community. The co-researchers were successful in communication with the local people mainly because they were trustful perceived by locals. People participating in the activities needed to know that they are represented by the researcher and that they can trust him/her.

A largely beneficial aspect of using PAR methods was that members of the local LERI research team by attending formal meetings with the local administration got a chance to be part of the decision-making process that affects them. Similarly, these methods helped in the identification and formalisation of the needs in the community. Engaging the local people in these processes and giving them a voice can also have positive impact on future projects.

Involvement of local administration and its representatives

Important factors favouring the outcome of the intervention include the local administration's willingness to regularise, as opposed to other municipalities, which are not only unwilling to address the problems but also decline any responsibility in the formation, reproduction and expansion of these informal settlements, especially the ghettos on the margins of bigger towns and developing cities. Generally open and willing to collaborate in the LERI research, the local administration had mixed responses to the housing problems of Roma, which were brought up by the team throughout the implementation of the LPP. If the action had not received consistent support from the technical department, the other departments of the Municipality as well as the local council, may have demonstrated even less willingness to find solutions. After the implementation phase finished, although important formal steps had been made towards the regularisation and titling of the houses in Bufa, uncertainty about a positive outcome increased, especially after the episode when members of the council proved to be reluctant to vote in favour of legalisation. Without the local administration issuing the legal basis for using the land, the registration of houses is impossible. In addition, in the words of the technical department director, without formal recognition of Bufa as a housing area, no other future wider project for the improvement of housing conditions (basic utilities, amenities) can be carried out. Given the nature of the LERI intervention, a small-

scale, short-term action research, as compared to the needs, the legalisation of tenure through titling relied on a narrow paradigm. A broader regularisation programme combining legal titling with upgrades of public services as well as other support structures⁵³ can only be carried out by a multiplicity of actors and an appropriate budget. However, the entire experience resulted in the elaboration of a brief guide for future initiatives of regularisation and titling of houses located in informal settlements throughout the county. Considering the initiative in a national context, it is important to highlight the crucial role of the Roma councillor, and his political position in the almost successful completion of the regularisation and titling procedure.

Concerning the ways in which the local administration carefully chose to back certain projects, their involvement in one of the neighbourhoods in Feleud is telling. The local administration had previously allotted plots of lands to young families (based on Law 15/2003: support given to youth for erecting private property houses), the houses were built 'irregularly' and not on the plots of land as had been delineated by the local administration. The situation caused a stir, however, the LA subsequently decided to change the plots and not to have these families demolish their houses. On the other hand, only one family actually lives in the house, as they are some distance away from the other houses and are not connected to electricity. The Feleud co-researcher mentioned that the electricity company refuses to expand the network through a pole because there are too few houses for the investment to be cost-efficient.

Thus, it is important not to over-emphasise the positive contribution of local administration representatives. The situation of Roma remains dire, especially in Poligon. Most probably, it will continue if opportunities such as those provided through the LERI local interventions continue to be side-lined by local authorities and the central governing bodies/the state. Moreover, considering the Bethlen Gabor case, there was limited responsibility from people in the local administration to finding solutions for the extremely insecure situation of the tenants. The other situation of housing insecurity faced similar disinterest from representatives of the Municipality and local politicians. There was little interest in the urgency of the situation when the local team brought up the risk of eviction faced by the residents. Moreover, looking at the political dynamics, it was impossible for the Roma councillor to gain the support of other members in order to mediate a formal meeting with the bishopric and persuade the institution to provide answers to residents' deeds and worries. However, through the activity accomplished together with residents, the LERI research managed to hand in social housing requests, which can at least be a temporary safety net. LERI also provided a reminder to the local administration about its legal obligation to provide alternative accommodation to tenants evicted from retroceded buildings, which formerly served as social housing. It has yet to be seen if the local social housing stock will extend during these months with the completion of other apartments within the project Social Housing in Hotar Street And. But more importantly, it has yet to be seen if the Roma who are at risk of

⁵³ Fernandes, Edesio (2011) Regularisation of Informal Settlements in Latin America. Policy Focus Report. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, available at: https://www.lincolnst.edu/pubs/dl/1906_1225_Regularisation%20PFR%20Rev%202012.pdf; accessed December 2015 and May 2011

eviction from the apartments in Bethlen Gabor will be allocated any of these apartments.

Participation – in political terms

This case study also provided a peculiar understanding of participation from the local authorities, as attention was drawn to the obligations of public servants. They need to be reminded that politicians do not only serve part of the society.

Concerning implementing a PAR-based plan, local co-researchers' views and input, as well as influence in organising community consultations, consistently shaped the planning and completion of local-level activities. Their insistence on concrete, factual actions, and having tangible outcomes that improve the lives of Roma had a crucial influence on the experts' own conceptualisations and practices of PAR. Moreover, local co-researchers' insistence regarding the (in)appropriateness of organising community consultations unless concrete actions are possible, provided persuasive arguments against holding meetings for the sake of it (and counting attendees). On the other hand, had the community meetings been carried out together with the field experts, they possibly could have had different outcomes, especially prior to, and at the point of people finding themselves in the situation of being unable to handle their long-outstanding dues. However, considering the very short amount of time people had before the Ordinary Meeting of the Local Council, there was little possibility to actually pay the money.

Barriers to securing tenancy

As a result of the experience in Aiud regularising property rights, public servants in local municipalities need to be more committed to finding solutions in order to support/facilitate Roma to gain documents proving and securing their housing rights. A methodology, plan of action, and/or strategy requires not only formulation, but must also rely on political backing at different levels of decision: local and national. Regarding a policy goal to improve tenure security, the LERI experience in Aiud highlights some barriers to supporting the security of tenancy, which can subsequently also mean improvements in housing conditions.

- Building standards constituted a barrier for legalising/regularising the entire informal settlement. Thus, what resulted from this experience is that these standards need to be reassessed and reformulated by taking into consideration both the existing situation and the extent (in Romania) of informal settlements, without further putting the lives of people at risk through failing to account for health and security measures. Given the fact that the problem is already so enduring, actions need to be taken that account for these impossibilities/barriers and that find tailor-made solutions.
- In the regularisation of informal settlements, there are two different interconnected aspects: one concerns the titling over land, the other issuing legal titles over the houses. Both need to be taken into account when planning such interventions.
- At the point of deciding interventions of regularisation and titling, it is important to address a controversial issue: whether and how segregated the informal settlement is. Issues to take into account are the formation of these settlements, their informal particularities as well as the security of

tenure and the worsening of housing conditions (for most, except persons who manage to migrate for seasonal employment/informal work).

- Regularisation of informal settlements also needs to remember that this step will be an instrumental one which can further ease other public investments to improve the housing adequacy and quality for Roma – not only amenities, but also improved public transportation to contribute to increasing the participation of Roma in local social and political life.

When compared to other municipalities, Aiud is an example which at least acknowledges the problems of the Roma, collaborates with NGOs in finding solutions – although at times delegating governance and responsibilities – but still lacks the political will to vote for decisions which could favour long-term social inclusion. Decisions, such as allocating the budget to hasten the completion of the social apartments and addressing the requests of residents in Feleud would already be a big step.

Aiud still seems to be lacking a consistent policy of social inclusion that is systematically followed and publicly assumed by the local administration. Moreover, the willingness to put forward a project for European funding was rather low, but perhaps this reaction was also in the context of the coming elections at the beginning of June 2016. However, the LERI research contributed to activities, which had been planned previously within the ROMACT intervention – more specifically, it carried out one of the actions set in the Plan for Action, simultaneously aiming to capacitate the LAG while the programme was inactive.

At the time the LERI field-experts were carrying out the needs assessment phase, there was no representative of the town hall to present the LERI research to. In the second half of February, the core team had a discussion regarding the opportunity to prepare certain projects to be submitted for financing, based on the activities and needs identified through the LERI research. The trainee submitted an activity report and funding proposals according to his expertise on preparing such documents. Ultimately, it became clear that the local team still needed more expert support to be able to manage European funding projects. As much as everyone is willing to be involved and carry out such projects, the local team lacks the required expertise to actually apply for and subsequently manage them. During the second half of the implementation phase, the RomAct national project was resumed. Given the steps accomplished to map community needs, these could be instrumental in future development projects that the Municipality and collaborating stakeholders might submit for funding. However, following the outcomes of the local elections in June 2016 (change of the mayor, lack of involvement of the Roma councillor in the local decision-making) local team members expressed their concern on future cooperation with the Municipality and on missing explicit political commitment to continue the legalisation process locally.

6. Conclusions and recommendations:

Aiud is a telling example of territorial segregation and ghettoisation generally faced by a significant percentage of Roma in Romania. In trying to address what works and what does not work in local Roma inclusion, this case study brought different activities conceived and carried out as measures to improve housing security of Roma. In the course of the LERI research, efforts were made to produce such a set of measures and the local research team witnessed a

problematic approach. Even though the local authorities displayed a favourable – even though reluctant and critical – take on steering Roma housing inclusion policies, a recurrent overarching principle underscored the policy discourse: the Roma in the different areas, be it Bufa, Poligon or Bethlen Gabor, had to have their problems solved as a group. While it seems to make sense in terms of policy efficiency, it brought up situations such as when some Bufa inhabitants had their documents ready for the property titles, but the local councillors claimed they had to wait for all of them to be ready. Moreover, the technical department laid down presumptive plans to include a set of ‘good behaviour’ rules for Bufa inhabitants along with the property titles. While goodwill on the part of the local administration had been present during the procedures and consultations, a general sense of reluctance resumed by ‘giving them too much at once’ had been present. Mixing this principle with a highly cautious legal approach yielded prolonged and sometimes unclear steps in the regularisation/legalisation process in Bufa.

Implementers need to clearly map stakeholders and include them in the design of the intervention; it is highly relevant that stakeholders are knowledgeable and have good local standing, especially amongst their fellow neighbours/members of communities. Crucially, a balance needs to be struck between needs as identified and viewed by the local partners and the plans designed in advance. Members of communities have already gained enough ‘experience’ of contributing knowledge to these projects and mostly expect projects that significantly and materially improve their (housing) conditions. Balance and fair distribution of resources are also needed concerning decisions over the implementation of interventions. Thus, it is not only fair but also just to remunerate Roma who work on projects and not to expect voluntary participation.

Not only is some legislation favourable to Roma not enforced, but there are also strong legal barriers, which can block initiatives of regularising informal settlements. These issues need to be brought to the fore in the relevant institutions (the government, Ministries of European Funding and of Regional Development, the National Agency for Roma, etc.) if further projects that attempt to secure and improve housing conditions in informal settlements are to be completed successfully. Without this central-level support, it will make no difference whether or not the Regional Development and Public Administration Ministry implements the National Programme for the Registration of Property, stipulating as a priority the regularisation of informal (mostly Roma) settlements.

It is important to highlight that, apart from key promoters of such projects, assuring the success of these projects depends largely on local-level political support for a Roma inclusion policy, as it is the responsibility of local politicians with the technical apparatus to serve all members of the community, irrespective of ethnicity and/or class. Local administrations need to be reminded more often of their legal obligations, especially those referring to inclusive and non-discriminatory policies. Such a commitment might mitigate the risks brought about by local elections, which can significantly alter the outcomes of projects, which are ongoing at the time.

7. Additional Information

Acknowledgements

The implementation of this action research would not have been possible without the involvement of the women and men living in the four neighbourhoods of Aiud; as well as of the following people: as co-researchers, Ioan Bogin, Luminita Muntean, Stefan Moldovan, Mircea Rostas have acted as kind and knowledgeable community liaisons; Ciprian Bogdan, local councillor at the Aiud Municipality at the time of the implementation of the research, was active in persuading members of the local administration to take the required steps for the regularisation procedure; Voichita Crisan carried out the topographic measurements and prepared the technical documentation; Delia Florea, Director of the Technical Department within the Aiud Municipality, was a conscientious supporter of the research, identifying and backing the technical steps to be taken by the local administration. George Zamfir acted as an academic expert. Florina Pop carried out the preliminary phase of the LERI research in Aiud as initial field expert. Adrienn Gyory, Julianna Orsos, Petra Reszketo and Veronika Vighova, all from the Budapest Institute for Political Analysis, assisted the local team, providing useful 'quick' clarifications and generous support throughout all the stages of the LERI research; Enikő Vincze and Simona Ciotlaus coordinated the implementation of the local research and LERI field experts; the case study was written by Simona Ciotlăuș.