



# **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion (LERI) Project**

## **Community Summary** **Aiud, Romania**

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

LERI is the first FRA project to test participatory action research methodology. By identifying the key factors that lead to the success or failure of local integration activities, the project is helping to improve the planning of effective integration programmes for the future. At the same time, facilitating engagement at local level empowers all those involved, building their capacity to participate as equal partners with local administrations and civil society, and enabling a shared understanding of which measures need to be taken and how their implementation can be monitored. The project is being carried out in 22 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

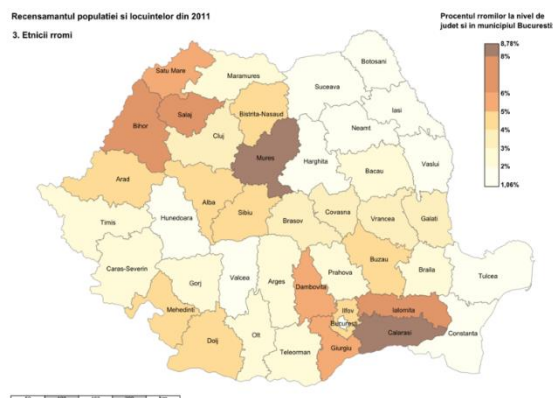
## LOCALITIES

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

## Aiud, Romania

### Overview of the country context

According to the 2011 Census 3.2 % of the Romanian population are ethnic Roma (619,007 persons)<sup>1</sup>. As shown by the map below, they are distributed unequally across the country.



*The percentage of ethnic Roma in Romanian counties according to the 2011 Census*

Mureș County has the largest percentage of ethnic Roma (8.78 % of the population). Among the counties with a significant Roma population, Mureș county is followed by Bihor county (6.13 %), the Southern counties Dâmbovița (5.06 %) and Călărași, (8.05 %), the South-Western county Dolj (4.37 %) and Cluj county (Cluj-Napoca, the county's main city is one of the two LERI localities), where the share of Roma is 3.46 % of the population. In Alba County, where one of the LERI projects is located, in the city of

Aiud, a significant share of the population (4.7 %) are Roma.

Roma face disadvantages in all areas of life including education, employment and housing. The enrolment rate of Roma in public education has traditionally been lower than that of non-Roma. This disparity can already be seen at the pre-school level (the enrolment rate in kindergartens is 31 % among Roma, in contrast to 70 % within the majority population) and continues to secondary education (17 % among Roma versus 69 % among non-Roma). As a result, illiteracy is much higher among Roma (69 %) than non-Roma (96 %).<sup>2</sup>

With regards to employment, men are usually the breadwinners in the Roma households. As survey data show, only 53 % of Roma men doing paid work are contracted workers, compared to 77 % of non-Roma men. Informal work is three times more common among Roma than for non-Roma people.<sup>3</sup> Besides low skills, high levels of discrimination towards Roma people constitute a further barrier to entry into the job market.<sup>4</sup>

Roma communities are mostly situated in rural areas or at the outskirts of towns, with significantly worse living conditions than non-Roma. Many Roma houses are overcrowded and on average host five to six people compared to the national average of three to four persons.<sup>5</sup> The number of people living in households without at least one of the basic amenities like indoor kitchen, shower or toilet is also higher among Roma families (above 85 %) than in the case of non-Roma (less than 60 %).<sup>6</sup> In addition, many Roma

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Statistics (Institutul National de Statistica) (2011), *Romanian Census*, available at: [www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/](http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/) (All hyperlinks were accessed on 9 October 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Radu, M. (2011), *Romania – promoting the social inclusion of Roma*, Brussels, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and inclusion, p.10, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1025&langId=en&newsId=1407&moreDocument=yes&tableName=news>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

(2014), *ECRI Report on Romania*, CRI(2014)19, Strasbourg, 3 June 2014, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Radu, M. (2011), *Romania – promoting the social inclusion of Roma*, Brussels, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and inclusion, p.14, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1025&langId=en&newsId=1407&moreDocument=yes&tableName=news>.

<sup>6</sup> FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) (2012), *The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union (Publications Office), p. 23.

have difficulties regarding the legal status of their housing. Only 3 % of the Romanian population do not own their own home, compared to 21 % of people of Roma origin.<sup>7</sup>

Since 1990, the Roma have been recognised as an ethnic minority in Romania. Article 6 of the Romanian Constitution affirms that the state recognises and guarantees the rights of persons belonging to national minorities to maintain, develop and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity.<sup>8</sup>

The Party of the Roma (*Partida Romilor*) was created in 1992 as a non-governmental organization according to Law 68/15 June 1992, and has the right to enrol in local and national elections. As with other ethnic minority groups, it is guaranteed one seat in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies (*Camera Deputaților*).<sup>9</sup>

The National Office for Roma (*Oficiul național pentru romi*) was established in 2000, and was subordinate to the Ministry of Public Information (*Ministerul Informațiilor Publice*). In 2003 it became the Office for Roma Issues (*Oficiul pentru problemele romilor*), and finally, the National Agency for Roma (*Agenția Națională pentru Romi*), which has functioned under the General Secretary of the Government (*Secretariatul General al Guvernului*) since 2004.<sup>10</sup>

In 2000, the first governmental strategy focussing on "the improvement of the condition of the Roma" was approved. A

second strategy was adopted in 2011, which targeted "the inclusion of the Romanian citizens belonging to Roma minority", and reflected a considerable shift in governmental attitudes toward the inclusion of Roma. Related to these government strategies, a multilevel governance structure at both local and county level was established with the creation of a network of Roma experts, Roma school mediators, school inspectors, Roma language instructors and Roma health mediators. However, the members of this network are usually not in the position to have effective (co)decision rights within public administration, either at the central or local level. Moreover, the network is not supported by proper institutional mechanisms and financial framework that are needed to ensure and support *de facto* implementation of "Roma inclusion policies".

Roma civil society organizations have been involved in the initiation and support of important policy measures taken by Romanian governments since the 1990s. EU-accession programmes gave the impetus for a large number of integration projects, but of these only a few become sustainable in the longer term. EU accession has opened up new funding opportunities to non-government organisations, however, in many cases this has also transformed them into 'service providers' and exposes them to the risk of losing their ability to act in a critical or political voice due to their increasing "fund-dependency". Public consultations with Roma NGOs are reported to be mostly very formal,<sup>11</sup> and

<sup>7</sup> Radu, M. (2011), *Romania – promoting the social inclusion of Roma*, Brussels, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and inclusion, p.14, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1025&langId=en&newsId=1407&moreDocument=s=yes&tableName=news>.

<sup>8</sup> Romania, Romania's Constitution, revised and republished (*Constituția României, actualizată și republicată*), 31 October 2003, available at: [www.usuuc.ro/data/\\_uploaded/downloads/constituția-romaniei-actualizată.pdf](http://www.usuuc.ro/data/_uploaded/downloads/constituția-romaniei-actualizată.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Oprescu, D. (2011), *Minoritățile naționale din România*, In *Sfera Politicii*, No. 158/ April 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Preoteasa, A.M., Cace, S., Duminiță, G. (2009), *Strategia națională de îmbunătățire a situației romilor: vocea comunităților*, Bucharest, Editura Expert, available at: [www.agentiaimpreuna.ro/files/publicatii/10-RAPORT\\_tipar-p-ro.pdf](http://www.agentiaimpreuna.ro/files/publicatii/10-RAPORT_tipar-p-ro.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Moisă, F., Rostaș, I.A., Tarnovschi, D., Rădulescu, I.S.D., Andersen, T.S. (2013), *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Romania*, Budapest, Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, available at: [www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270\\_fi](http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_fi)

are often influenced by the mainstream political parties.

### Locality background information

Aiud is located in Alba County in the centre of Romania. Aiud has 22,876 inhabitants, of whom 4.06 % are Roma<sup>12</sup>. The locality has a strong industrial history. The collapse of factories and the accompanying deterioration of economic activity have heavily affected the local economy. The unemployment rate in Aiud is around 5%, which is slightly higher than the national average. The combination of growth of the tertiary economic sector and migration have counterbalanced the negative effects of the weakened labour market. In addition, an increase in informal labour may have also decreased the likelihood of citizens registering as unemployed.

Most of the Roma communities in Aiud live in three segregated areas: Bufa, Poligon and Feleud (Aiudul de Sus). Bethlen Gábor, which is situated in the city centre, is another area which will be covered by LERI.

In Bufa, the Roma self-identify as Romunguri, whose ancestors migrated to the region from Hungarian-speaking areas of Romania. Today, only elderly Romunguri speak Hungarian. Due to lack of public transport from the town centre to this marginalised area of Aiud, access to employment and public services is restricted, however there is one bus offering transportation to schools. An informal local Roma leader who was also formerly a member of the local Roma party, acts as the representative of this community in all interactions with the Town Hall.

Poligon is a community close to Bufa, which was established in 2010 after approximately 25 Roma families were evicted from a social housing unit in the centre of Aiud, and relocated in a derelict building on the shore of Mureş River. This community is considered to be the poorest

in Aiud. Few of the children are enrolled in school or kindergarten, where their attendance is irregular.

Feleud is a former village approximately 2-3 kilometres away from the city centre. It was annexed into the municipality as a result of a local development policy. In this area, there are three distinct Roma groups – *Caștalăi*, *Căldărari* and *Corturari*. An important feature of Feleud is the existence of the so-called “Gypsy School”, a segregated school in which 91 % of the registered students are of Roma ethnicity. There is a Roma NGO, the House of Hope Association (*Asociația Casa Nădejdei Aiud*) and a school mediator who are both very active in this community. The school mediator is recognised informally as the community leader and one of the spiritual leaders of Feleud. In 2012, he was elected as a counsellor to the Local Council on behalf of the National Liberal Party (*Partidul Național Liberal*). Public transportation from Feleud to other locations in Aiud is relatively good, linking the community, including direct links to the hospital and Town Hall.

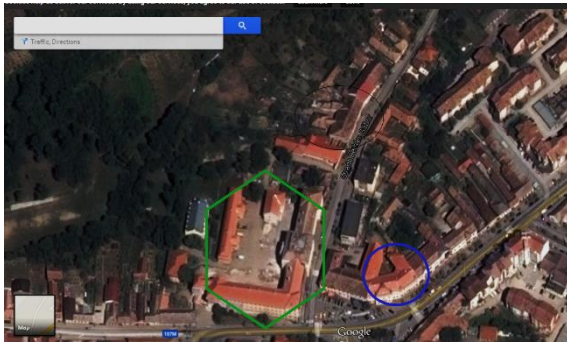
Bethlen Gábor is an area located in the vicinity of the Town Hall. The living conditions of the Roma and non-Roma living in social housing units here have continually worsened since the buildings were given back to their former owner as restitution. Recently, the owner has verbally requested that the inhabitants move out, however, no suitable alternative housing has been found. For the time of being, they are allowed to stay, but there is a high possibility that they will be forced to move out in the near future.

[le24.ro/civil-society-monitoring-report-en.pdf](http://le24.ro/civil-society-monitoring-report-en.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> National Institute of Statistics (Institutul National de Statistica) (2011), *Romanian*

Census, available at: [www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/](http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/).





*Location of the Bethlen Gábor buildings (circled in black) in relation to the Town Hall (circled in blue) and the Bethlen Gábor National College (the green polygon); the yellow line represents National Road 1 (DN1), connecting Bucharest to Budapest, via Brasov, Alba-Iulia, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea.*

The current version of the local Roma inclusion action plan<sup>13</sup> defines very few specific actions which could help to improve the situation of Roma people in the different areas of the community, nor does it provide adequate funding for potential actions aimed at securing housing for Roma residents. Housing is only an implicit objective, as one of the aims of the Strategy for 2014-2020 is to improve the living conditions and access to utilities for Roma people. This includes activities to ensure access to social housing for relocated tenants.

<sup>13</sup> Romania, Aiud Town Council, Local action plan for the inclusion of Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity from Aiud, for the 2014-2020 timeframe (*Plan local de acțiune privind incluziunea cetățenilor Români de etnie Romă din municipiul Aiud pentru perioada 2014-2020*) – Annex 3 of . Local Council decision, 28 May 2014, available at



*Map of Roma settlements in Aiud.*

As part of two previous projects, a Local Action Group (*Grupul pentru Inițiativă Comunitară*, hereinafter LAG) was established, bringing together representatives of local authorities, members of the Roma community and other relevant local actors, such as the school mediator and community nurses. In 2014, the LAG was restructured in the framework of the ROMED and ROMACT<sup>14</sup> initiatives, in order to contribute to the drafting of the new local inclusion strategy for Roma in Aiud. The group of participants was further extended to include informal Roma representatives of the three areas as well as the elected Roma councillor, who is considered to be the most important “pro Roma figure” in Aiud.

A large share of the Roma (particularly in Bufa and Poligon) has no formal certification of ownership for their homes, and only a few houses are officially registered. They have no legal and administrative documents for their shelters, and pay taxes to the municipality for the land on which the houses, which are mostly shacks, are built. The resulting situation is a constant source of conflict with local authorities, even if the Roma communities have regularly expressed their need and wish to find a resolution. Lately, the local public authorities have

[www.aiud.ro/AplicatiiOnline/Registratura/Fileo.aspx?id\\_registratura=1&registru=HOT&nr=3474&an=an&id\\_fisier=2561](http://www.aiud.ro/AplicatiiOnline/Registratura/Fileo.aspx?id_registratura=1&registru=HOT&nr=3474&an=an&id_fisier=2561)

<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe, Joint Programme ROMED and ROMACT, available at <http://romed.coe-romact.org/>.

confirmed plans to address the housing issue by applying for funding in the future.

The other main issue of concern for the local community is the plan to construct a national highway nearby Bufa and Poligon. The communities are worried about how this is going to affect their settlements.



*Proximity of the Infrastructural Project (an international highway) to the settlements in Bufa – approximately 15-20m away*

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

By using participatory action research methods, the LERI project in Aiud aims to enhance Roma participation in local governance processes, with a focus on increasing transparency in local social housing policy and supporting the creation of adequate institutional mechanisms to address this issue.

More specifically, actions will be aimed at clarifying the legal situation of informal housing, preventing forced relocations and eventually improving the living conditions and housing security for the Roma.

Informed by the local reality, the following actions, through the deployment of PAR methods and techniques, are suggested:

- Re-activating the LAG. through the participation of the co-researchers at the meetings in order to bring up issue related to housing insecurity;
- Formulating proposals in the view of updating the local Roma inclusion strategy to include clear objectives and actions in the field of housing;
- Proposing a common and transparent approach to housing in the view of avoiding forced evictions
- Preparing, proposing and monitoring a local allocation mechanism of social housing, which can be replicated for future interventions;
- Informing local stakeholders about the funding opportunities available through the 2014-2020 Operational Programmes, which allow for applications for integrated housing projects targeting disadvantaged communities in urban areas.

LERI will primarily focus on three communities – Bufa, Poligon and Bethlen Gábor-, where the community members expressed their interest and showed willingness to participate. Members of the community in Feleud will not be excluded, but their participation in the planned activities will be limited.

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

The local LERI team will include the country coordinator and fieldwork expert, three community co-researchers, the local Roma councillor, one academic co-researcher, one representative of the City Hall, one legal expert and one cadastre expert.

The local LERI team will conduct qualitative research to analyse the current housing situation of the Roma (informal settlements, evictions/risk of evictions, inadequate housing). Roma co-researchers from the three areas will participate in the research, facilitate data collection and learning by doing through these methods (esp. through documentation and involvement techniques). Current national legislation and local policies in the field of social housing and the attribution process of social houses will be analysed to increase Roma inhabitants' access to information. Information will also be collected from local authorities on the local social housing stock and its attribution procedure.

Once the research is completed, meetings and consultations with local actors will be initiated through the LAG. In order to discuss the findings and decide on the best actions to address the identified problems to be taken during the next phase.

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

LERI plans to re-activate and enhance the functioning and decision-making mechanisms of the LAG. The LERI team aims to facilitate the revision of the Roma inclusion strategy. The expected outcome is a local strategy, which properly addresses the local needs with particular focus on housing. The LERI team, the Roma councillor as key local counterpart, the LAG members as well as other Roma community members (including members of the fourth community Feleud), and other relevant local stakeholders are expected to participate in this activity.

As a result of the series of actions planned within LERI, the L.A.G will represent the local Roma community and their rights in the social housing domain at the local level. The national LERI team expects that by the end of the road, the local understanding of the legal aspects of social and informal housing problems and that of risks of (future) evictions will improve and there will be a common, shared vision on the feasible solutions.

The Local Roma Inclusion Strategy will be updated to include specific objectives, activities, time and budget for social housing. The research undertaken as part of LERI will also help to provide a detailed mapping and analysis of the housing situation and living conditions of local Roma.

Local actors will be informed about the funding opportunities as part of the 2014-2020 Operational Programme and be encouraged and supported in submitting

applications for integrated projects in the future, which include building/rehabilitation and modernisation of social houses. Steps towards the legalisation of the informal settlements will also be considered, especially in a national context favourable to this given recent legislation and national programs<sup>15</sup>. The detailed local mapping will be used for the preparation of these applications, as well as for further institutional and local actions.

The application of PAR techniques will enable local Roma to be active participants at the local decision-making processes. The main result of LERI will be improved access of the local Roma population to social housing.

<sup>15</sup> Romania, Justification Note- Governmental decision No. 18, 14 January 2015, the approval on the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (*Nota de Fundamentare- H.G. nr. 18 din 14 ianuarie 2015*), 14 January 2015, available at <http://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/procesul-legislativ/note-de-fundamentare/nota-de->

[fundamentare-hg-nr-18-14-01-2015&page=35](http://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/procesul-legislativ/note-de-fundamentare/nota-de-fundamentare-hg-nr-18-14-01-2015&page=35); Romania, National programme for cadastre and land registry (*Programul national de cadastru si carte funciara*), available at [www.ancpi.ro/pages/home.php](http://www.ancpi.ro/pages/home.php).



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