Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion
(LERI) Project

Community Summary
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
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
Rakytnik, Slovakia
Cordoba, Spain
Madrid, Spain
Glasgow, UK
Medway, UK
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Overview of the country context

According to the 2011 Census 3.2 % of the Romanian population are ethnic Roma (619,007 persons). 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 %).

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. Besides low skills, high levels of discrimination towards Roma people constitute a further barrier to entry into the job market.

Roma communities are mostly situated in rural areas or at the outskirts of towns and cities, 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.


3 Ibid, p.11.


higher among Roma families (above 85%) than in the case of non-Roma (less than 60%). In addition, many Roma 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.

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.

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).

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.

In 2000, the first governmental strategy focusing 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.

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, and

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8 Romania, Romania’s Constitution, revised and republished (*Constituția României, actualizată și republicată*), 31 October 2003, available at: www.usuuc.ro/data_/uploaded/downloads/co

stitutiona-romaniei-actualizata.pdf.


11 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*
are often influenced by the mainstream political parties.

**Locality background information**

The city of Cluj-Napoca is the administrative centre of Cluj County, hosting the Prefect’s Office (**Instituția prefectului**) and the County Council (**Consiliul Județean**). It is considered as the economically strongest and most competitive city of the North-West Development Region. Cluj-Napoca and the surrounding localities are called the Cluj Metropolitan Area (**Zona Metropolitană Cluj**) and was designated as one of Romania’s Growth Poles by the Governmental Decision 998/2008. Among the 324,576 inhabitants of the city, 1 % (3,273 persons) declared themselves as ethnic Roma. The marginalisation of impoverished Roma in Cluj-Napoca is exemplified by the segregated neighbourhood at Pata Rât near the city’s landfill, as well as other more centrally located Roma groups, including the families living on Stephenson Street, who face the risk of eviction. The emergence of segregated Roma neighbourhoods like in Pata Rât is not unique in Romania, however, it is one of the most complex cases, cumulating the effects of polluted environment, geographical isolation, socio-territorial segregation, housing deprivation and cultural stigmatisation. The population of Pata Rât is approximately 1,500, the vast majority of whom are self-declared as of Roma identity. The area is informally divided into four smaller communities: Dallas, the Landfill, Cantonului Street, and the modular housing area. The inhabitants of these communities face significant difficulties in participating in public life, accessing good quality public education, job opportunities, and adequate healthcare services. Recently, some public development projects have targeted this area.

The North-West Regional Bureau of the National Agency for Roma (**Biroul Nord-Vest al Agenției Naționale pentru Romi***) is located in Cluj-Napoca. Given the limited human and material resources available, it struggles to cover the region’s six counties and ensure the proper monitoring of the implementation of the social and cultural formation of ‘gypsy ghettos in Romania in a European context, Cluj-Napoca, Studia UBB Sociologia, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, p. 5-21; Vincze, E. (2014), *Faces and causes of Roma marginalization: the case of Romania, Faces and causes of Roma marginalization in local contexts*, Budapest, CEU Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, p. 67-97.


14 Vincze, E., Rat, C., (2013), *Spatialization and racialization of social exclusion. The*
national Roma inclusion strategy. There are only two Roma school mediators and some Romani language teachers in the city, while a Roma school inspector was recently re-hired at the County School Inspectorate (Inspectoratul Scolar).

The municipality does not have an employed Roma expert, nor does it have an elected Roma local councillor. It also currently lacks a local strategy for Roma inclusion. However, as part of its Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 (Strategia de Dezvoltare Locală 2014-2020), the Local Council is expected to adopt a social inclusion plan including measures for the socio-territorial inclusion of the Pata Rât area as well as for assuring access to public services for vulnerable groups, including impoverished Roma.

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

In Cluj-Napoca LERI is planned to be a small-scale local initiative focusing on the local housing needs, such as the need for increasing accessibility to social housing, improving living conditions and preventing forced evictions. The local LERI project acknowledges that housing exclusion is one of the main and minimally addressed challenges at the local level.

The objective of LERI here is to strengthen the local engagement towards Roma inclusion, within the frame of the mainstream social inclusion policy to be adopted by the municipality in the next strategic development period (2014-2020).

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• Ensure that the marginalised Roma communities will participate in and benefit from these funds;
• Document the LERI processes in order to elaborate an evidence-based analysis of local initiatives regarding the social inclusion of disadvantaged ethnic Roma and the use of EU structural funds.

As a result of these actions, and with the help of community and academic co-researchers, knowledge will be produced about people’s housing needs, problems and options as well as on their experience in accessing social housing in Cluj-Napoca.

Next, the LERI team will evaluate the impact of the existing system of the distribution of social housing on the access of the most disadvantaged to the existing social housing stock. The plan is to run discussions with relevant City Hall staff, analyse existing statistical data, and run public consultation forum with people from the Pata Râță area (Cantonului Street and modular houses) and from Stephenson Street.

In the second phase of the LERI project, options for improving existing housing conditions and settlements will be identified, with special emphasis on preventing forced evictions. The planned actions are:

• Documenting existing legal ways to prevent forced evictions and formulating recommendations accordingly;
• Documenting the condition of informal housing in Stephenson Street, and in the Pata Râță area (in particular Cantonului Street, Dallas and the landfill);
• Addressing official letters to the City Hall, Prefecture, and to other public agencies, prepared in a participatory way with people from the focus areas;
• Participating in meetings dealing with local housing at the City Hall, at the Prefecture and other institutions.
Expected outcomes of the participatory action research

The information and knowledge generated by the planned activities will be shared with the planned to be established local action group for housing inclusion. The local action group will include representatives of the targeted stakeholders, academics and community co-researchers. In the second half of 2015 the group will develop an action plan for the period 2016-2020. This action plan will be aimed at the socio-territorial inclusion of the marginalised, predominantly ethnic Roma from the Pata Rât area and the Stephenson Street, with a special focus on housing inclusion, as part of larger local housing policy measures. This action plan will strive to operationalize the general provisions of the "Cluj 2020 - inclusive city" social inclusion strategy. The elaboration of specific development projects proposals to be supported by EU funds will be explored together with the municipality.