



# **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion**

## **(LERI) Project**

# **Community Summary**

**Besence, Hungary**

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

LERI is the first FRA project to test participatory action research methodology. By identifying the key factors that lead to the success or failure of local integration activities, the project is helping to improve the planning of effective integration programmes for the future. At the same time, facilitating engagement at local level empowers all those involved, building their capacity to participate as equal partners with local administrations and civil society, and enabling a shared understanding of which measures need to be taken and how their implementation can be monitored. The project is being carried out in 21 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

## LOCALITIES

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

## Besence, Hungary

### Overview of the country context

According to the 2011 Census, there are 315,583 registered Roma people in Hungary or 3% of the total population.<sup>1</sup> However, unofficial sources estimate that Roma constitute as high as 7–9% of the total population. Although members of the community are dispersed all over the country, they tend to be overwhelmingly concentrated in the rural and poorer North-Eastern part of Hungary.

Roma in Hungary are not a homogeneous group. About 90% of the Roma population belongs to the so-called Romungro sub-group, which arrived in Hungary in the 15th century. This group is considered to be linguistically assimilated. Another sub-group is the so-called Oláh or Vlach group (about 5%). This group arrived in Hungary from Wallachia in Romania in the early 19th century and it has been internally differentiated on the basis of occupations. Members of this community still speak a dialect of Romani language known as Lovári.

The third Romani sub-group are the Beás. They were migrants from the geographical region of Banat situated on the border between Serbia and Romania at the turn of 19th and 20th century. They speak the archaic Romanian language. This subgroup lives mostly in Southern Transdanubia in the South-Western part of Hungary.<sup>2</sup>

All of the Roma communities have been settled in Hungary since the 20<sup>th</sup> century

and they often live in suburban areas or in the outskirts of settlements.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, the position of Roma in Hungary has worsened in all areas of life including education, employment and health. For example, the number of Roma who have not completed a primary school education is four times higher when compared to the non-Roma (23% and 5%, respectively). The number of Roma who obtain a tertiary degree is at least 18 times lower than the majority community (<1% and 18.5%, respectively).<sup>4</sup> The rate of unemployment among the Roma is two times higher than among the non-Roma (13% and 6%, respectively)<sup>5</sup> while life expectancy is shorter by 10 years among the Roma compared to the national average.<sup>6</sup>

There are two main public institutions which have the potential to represent the interest of the Roma community in Hungary. The first is the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights who is nominated by the President and elected by the Parliament. The Commissioner monitors and investigates cases of human and minority rights violations. The second option are the National Roma Self-Governments (NRSNG) that can be created on local, regional and national level if a number of people from the minority communities register to participate in the elections. The NRSNGs have the right to take decisions on issues related to language, media and culture, however, they lack effective executive rights.

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistical Office, *Population Census 2011: Table 1.1.6.2 Population by nationality, mother tongue, language spoken with family members or friends and affinity with nationalities' cultural values*, available at: [www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tables\\_regional\\_00](http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tables_regional_00) (All hyperlinks were accessed on 23 February 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Forray, K. (ed.) (2006), *Ismeretek a romológia alapképzési szakhoz*, pp.60-63, available at: <http://mek.niif.hu/04800/04867/04867.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Kováts, A. (2002), 'Local and international views on the migration of the Hungarian Roma' in: Kállai, E. (ed.), *The Gypsies/The Roma in the Hungarian society*, pp.126-149, available at: <http://mek.oszk.hu/06000/06025/06025.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015), *Education policy outlook: Hungary*, p.6, available at: [www.oecd.org/edu/Hungary-Profile.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/Hungary-Profile.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Central Statistical Office, *Population Census 2011: Table 2.1.6.2 Population by nationality, economic activity and sex*, available at: [www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tables\\_regional\\_00](http://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tables_regional_00)

<sup>6</sup> Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 (2013), *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy and Decade Action Plan in 2012 in Hungary*, Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, p.51, available at: [www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270\\_file8\\_hu\\_civil-society-monitoring-report\\_en.pdf](http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9270_file8_hu_civil-society-monitoring-report_en.pdf)

The Roma population is not represented by a Roma political party in the national Parliament. Political parties used to nominate Roma candidates to the Parliament but they didn't achieve any positive changes to the government's integration policy.

In November 2011, the Hungarian government adopted the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2011-2020, supplemented by the Action Plan for 2011-2014. The Strategy is based on the approach of "explicit but not exclusive targeting" which means that it targets Roma people without excluding others who live in similar socio-economic conditions. The Minister of State for Social Inclusion is responsible for its implementation.

### **Locality background information**

Besence is located in the Southern part of the Ormánság micro-region in Baranya County, South-Western Hungary. 132 people or approximately 50% of the total population are Beás Roma. They are very keen on differentiating themselves from the other two Roma groups: Oláh 'Vlach' and Romungro. Based on the results of the 2013 Census, only 21 people identified themselves as Roma but according to the mayor's estimate their proportion is significantly higher (50%).



*The main street in Besence.*

In recent years, a significant number of the non-Roma population left the village due to a lack of employment opportunities. Therefore, Besence is now considered a "Roma village". Another factor that added to this was the demographical trend. While the birth rate among the Roma was positive, it was negative for the non-Roma.

The mayor of Besence initiated an agricultural project seven years ago in order to cultivate the small lands with the funding of the National Employment Public Foundation. Later, the local people established the Okormente Non-Profit Ltd. in order to further develop this agricultural activity. Their focus was on "work-intensive" farming and growing vegetables that are marketable in the micro region. The biggest obstacle of the future expansion of the company was the lack of land ownership.

The mayor is fostering new project ideas using talent management and carrier management, but so far there haven't been any applications sent to the European Structural Funds for these activities.

Besence is currently lacking a kindergarten and a primary school. However, the situation of the municipality should be noted for its innovative project ideas, the self-reliance of the local community as well as the positive attitude of the mayor.



*Collection of Okormente Non-Profit LTD's own watermelons.*

The village and the mayor have recently received positive media attention for the construction of a tennis court in the village. It was a symbolic action rather than a real sport investment. Its purpose was to demonstrate that people in Besence want to connect to the "outside world".



*Training on the tennis court in Besence.*

The only company employing people in Besence is the Okormente Public Benefit Ltd. Its total income in 2013 was approximately HUF 15 million (almost 50,000 euro) with an annual budget of HUF 20 million (almost 65,000 euro). It employed 31 people in 2014 with public funds that they received from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The mayor has a good reputation in the micro-region and in the national network of rural development experts. The two development projects mentioned above gained him a nation-wide reputation.

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

The local municipality and the inhabitants are primarily interested in large scale local integration programs with a considerable number of job opportunities.

Following the preparatory phase of the LERI project, the mayor decided to endorse the "Besence model" and support its adaptation in other settlements as well. The components of the model include a proactive leader, a core group of local people who think and act together, their agricultural experience, local engagement in developing internal knowledge and avoiding possible dependency.

Participatory action research (PAR) activities were used for the needs assessment phase and community planning of the LERI local project plans.

In Besence and in the partner settlements, employment (i.e. farming) could be a key intervention area. Another focus area could be general mobilization and motivation of the local people as part of the local development strategy. This

could involve empowerment as well as awareness raising about their problems, needs and the potential solutions.

Last but not least, the local project implementation plan could also involve other activities, such as organising sport and leisure events.



*The main square in Besence.*

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

The key stakeholder identified in the preparatory phase was the mayor of Besence. The two mayors of Vajszl6 and Csányoszl6 attended a local meeting held in February 2015 in Besence. After this meeting, a local NGO organized a project-planning workshop in Vajszl6 where local Roma activists also took part.

The local physician responsible for the small region is also open to participation in the LERI project. He stresses the need of more activity in health prevention as a key issue in those settlements, which may also improve the employability of the local people. He could contribute to the community planning by adding additional activities into the local action plans.

Based on consultations in the preparatory phase of the LERI project, the following activities were realized:

- 1. Citizens' forum for local inhabitants:** The aim of the citizens' forum was to present the LERI project, to clarify the goals and expected outcomes, which are feasible within the LERI's time horizon in the given local context. Furthermore, a work plan with timing, methodology, places and conditions was established. These forums were expected to nurture the motivations of the local stakeholders

for more pro-active participation in the LERI activities.

**2. Citizens' consultations for local inhabitants and experts in order to facilitate community visioning:**

The local LERI team is composed of the local Steering Committee (SC) represented by the three mayors, the local doctor and representatives of the local Roma communities. The SC will be responsible for planning and approving the LERI local working plan (timing, methods and results), drafting the local development strategies, deciding in financial matters and defining the division of responsibilities and tasks related to conducting local LERI activities.

**3. Field visits in settlements where "benchmarking" activities could be identified and observed:**

Besence could serve as a benchmark for other participating villages. The LERI expert in partnership with the local LERI team gathered data on the recent socio-

economic situation in three villages by mapping the available resources (e.g. properties, HR and financial resources). The team completed desk research and interviews. Capacity building of local co-actors is strongly recommended.

**Expected outcomes of the participatory action research**

The LERI project may provide increased active participation of the local community with regards to community planning activities and may enlarge the number of pro-active local stakeholders (aside from the mayors). In addition, the local co-actors can be trained in communication techniques and other relevant skills.

As a tangible outcome, the local LERI may become part of the third local development strategy for Besence and the local project plans with a strategic focus on employment, social and health care and specific prevention actions.

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