Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion
(LERI) Project

Community Summary
Hrabušice, Slovakia

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 21 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

LOCALITIES

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<th>Pavlikeni,</th>
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<td>Stara Zagora,</td>
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<td>Cluj-Napoca,</td>
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Hrabušice, Slovakia

Overview of the country context

Roma are the second largest minority group in Slovakia after the Hungarian minority. Although only 2% of the population declared Roma as their ethnicity in the 2011 Census, according to data from a socio-geographic mapping of Roma communities in 2013, the number of Roma is close to 403,000 or 7.45% of the total population.

Findings of the Atlas of Roma communities 2013 show that the living conditions of Roma are very heterogeneous. Approximately half of Slovakia’s Roma or 46% live in integrated areas with the mainstream population. Another 13% (52,000) live in concentrated urban areas, 24% (96,000) in settlements located on the fringes of villages and 17% (69,000) live in one of the 231 segregated settlements scattered around 195 municipalities. The majority of segregated Roma settlements are located in Eastern and Central Slovakia, specifically in the region of Košice, Prešov, and Banská Bystrica.

In general, Roma are considered the most vulnerable population group in Slovakia that is affected by poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. As many Roma live in Slovakia’s marginalised regions, they face “double marginalisation”. According to the findings of the 2011 FRA Roma Survey, only 15% of Roma in Slovakia completed secondary school education or higher, compared to 79% of the non-Roma population living in close proximity. Moreover, 18% of Roma men and 24% of Roma women were in some form of employment while employment rates among the non-Roma men and women living in close proximity were 59% and 46%, respectively. These results include the total number of respondents engaged in full-time, part-time, and ad-hoc jobs as well as self-employment. Approximately half of the Roma households surveyed received material need benefits and two thirds received childcare allowances and family benefits. Besides unfavourable

1 Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2015), The 2011 population and housing changes: Facts about changes in the life of the Slovak population, December 2015, p.77, available at: https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/!ut/p/cr/HJcqNAEES_xR8gO82uY6NnmNWCWzR0qULceVCHyQD9brH5nXZ072Ikkq4mVUZCAvJlIYJGVd4vcnJH3Xd58t0-cwVdFGS1A34DDQJOC7zr-HqAUBkGwA-GYQ-Fcv2p4Md1c1TPYc9REeWTcHuHwC-vyIDQnMqzaZk30qigZx5ipEcJn6LnOS5Cq2RKKE712O1Vq2xTXpyvylQnNUm6n2zCtdDFyLDcoTnmbmqcH1HqJ44S911TJFL9dKzdB-6udm_rzGS1ehcKc3Qw0hH1tt5dN91JPIEqe3iYPUc8rIIT5s4VbXW5PaWllG0m9vHx5_sHufzKLqPQPLL6QRxqAKKpcckBHwuyiXYjBPcKcOjvlq2v0yyo5IFnb5990ZThIoBm_xczvFrf63tEJxgyYZu8qLhGtEPJlINZEhsz7ayYUMtAR8Hqy1faVBofUwnWPoBKS0NHpG9qopoq05evoOwkb8YFnpJUhK-5pZtupkJcDPhu_dY7C1Um0g6v0y4f1c1SRc2IMZEdi6reOJ2HwDqg4tVsh1QhGe8smHu20RV7u7xUNxKwa2xIQ09Qi1Kw7BPn-cR-BTB7Sw6TIQM4GwvV7XJ9584sbyBcwTW7HirKZD-XcrrJ11-HsUbE0z2C8cU8BfmlYSliujOYxMjуютQ0F7R0DDpia/4ld/d5/S/LzdIBsEv2OFPB59nQSEH/ (All hyperlinks were accessed on 23 February 2016)


3 The Atlas of Roma Communities is the joint project of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the UNDP, aimed to map and monitor the living conditions of Roma population in Slovakia. The research was first conducted in 2004 and then repeated in 2013. The results are available at: www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/socialne-sluzby/socialne-vylucene-spolocensvata/dokumenty.html


economic and social conditions, Roma face racism and ethnic discrimination. Racist and anti-Roma discourse is still common among mainstream politicians in Slovakia. In addition, Anti-Roma sentiments often surface in the media.\textsuperscript{7}

The Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Roma Communities is in charge of Roma integration policies and issues. This office operates under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic and is meant to act as an advisory body for the government.

The improvement of the quality of life in marginalised Roma communities is the subject of two measures of the new EU Co-funded Human Resources Operational Programme with a total allocation of €450 million for the period 2014 – 2020. These measures, which explicitly target the Roma are derived from the National Roma Integration Strategy.\textsuperscript{8} The National Roma Integration Strategy was approved by the Slovak government in 2012 and represents a key document for Roma inclusion in Slovakia.\textsuperscript{9}

\textbf{Locality background information}

Hrabušice is one of the “entry gates” to an attractive and well-known natural reserve in the North-Eastern part of Slovakia. However, Hrabušice is located in the region Spiš, which is known for its high rates of unemployment and poverty. Employment opportunities in the village are limited to summer tourism (e.g. accommodation facilities and a horse-riding centre) and small wood-processing companies. Despite its high potential for tourism, Hrabušice is located in the proximity of other tourist destinations with better infrastructure and a variety of services, such as ski parks, spa centres and a wide offer of accommodation services.

The presence of Roma in the village has been documented since 1827. Nowadays they make up 40\% of the village’s total population counting approximately 2,400 inhabitants.\textsuperscript{10} The situation in Hrabušice is not typical for Eastern Slovakia. The Roma population in the village is socially stratified. Only a small part of the local Roma face extreme poverty and social exclusion while middle-class Roma are active in local politics, social and business life. Unlike the general trend of growing anti-Gypsyism in Slovakia, the interaction between Roma and non-Roma populations in Hrabušice tends to be smooth and cooperative.

However, the village is located close to one of the most marginalised Roma communities in the region. The proximity of the fully segregated Roma community of Letanovce is perceived as a threat by both Roma and non-Roma in Hrabušice and they avoid any communication or interaction with this community.

View of the segregated Roma neighbourhood in Hrabušice.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Hrabusice, \textit{Local chronicle.}
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The biggest issue in Hrabušice is the high level of unemployment, which significantly affects the Roma community. Dropout rates of Romani students in secondary school education are also higher than among the non-Roma, which further worsens their employment prospects. Some Roma families also lack decent housing. Young people have limited opportunities for meaningful leisure activities and tend to be vulnerable to marginalization and antisocial behaviour.

Acknowledging these challenges, the local government of Hrabušice has been actively developing various local development and social inclusion initiatives. The local government developed a local strategy including a comprehensive approach to the integration of marginalised Roma. Some of the proposed projects have already been successfully implemented – such as social fieldwork, the extension of the local kindergarten, engagement with health assistants, the development of local tourism and several employment initiatives.

Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project

During the first needs assessment phase, we conducted interviews and focus group discussions with the members of the local community, which helped in identifying a series of core needs and development goals. Some of these confirmed the accuracy of the local Roma inclusion strategy, but others went beyond and generated interesting ideas, which could complement the local government’s plans. These ideas could be realised in the future with the active participation of Roma.

In line with the issues and needs articulated by the locals, the LERI project will focus on employment, community empowerment and capacity building. Initiatives in these areas can help empower local inhabitants, particularly Roma, in order to actively participate in planning and implementing projects that address the need for local development and social inclusion.

The establishment of a social enterprise will create job opportunities and help advance other initiatives, such as construction works, tourism and waste management. Community empowerment, including capacity building and youth participation, will encourage local inhabitants to generate new ideas for the improvement of their lives and will help them realise these on their own or with the support of the local government.

Through small local activities, the LERI project aims to contribute to Roma’s participation in local development and build a more positive climate and cooperation between the communities.

Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase

As part of the LERI pilot project, a continuous participative needs assessment was launched. The main partners of the project are the local government and EVIKA (a local NGO) but young people, teachers and other inhabitants are also consulted. The aim is to involve them into the activities planned within the LERI project or organised by the municipality. Local inhabitants have expressed their will to strengthen their capacities in project planning, development and management. In response, capacity building training was organised in November 2015 enabling local inhabitants to generate ideas and prepare small community projects.

Local inhabitants have decided to concentrate on the creation of an outdoor community-meeting place, which will serve for recreation, leisure activities of children and youth and for social and cultural events. The LERI project will assist local inhabitants in negotiations with the local authorities and ensure compliance with possible legal requirements, as well as facilitate the design of the meeting place.

The national team ran a special survey in the community with the active participation of pupils from the local elementary school, who surveyed village inhabitants on their needs and ideas about further development.
Special focus will be devoted to adolescents who will be offered the opportunity to participate in youth exchanges and internships at NGOs in other regions in Slovakia or abroad with the purpose of learning from their peers and exchanging ideas about community building activities (Spring-Summer 2015).

At the same time the local government will continue to receive assistance in planning and establishing a municipal social enterprise, which could create jobs and become a new motor for local development.

**Expected outcomes of the participatory action research**

LERI will provide evidence on how the target groups of on-going projects perceive the way these are implemented and understand how local communities, in particular Roma, can become more involved in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The process of participatory planning will be supplemented with capacity-building training on the identification and elaboration of small local projects.

It is also expected that LERI will build more positive climate and cooperation between inhabitants of Hrabušice belonging to different social groups, in particular Roma and non-Roma, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Through LERI, local inhabitants, particularly Roma, will be able to identify, discuss and assess more precisely their needs, interests and priorities in the future. They will also learn and be able to self-organise and deliver community-led initiatives. Furthermore, they will be able to effectively request local authorities’ and other stakeholders’ support. As such, a process of community development with active and more inclusive participation of diverse socio-economic groups can be achieved.