Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion
(LED) Project

Community Summary
Rakytník, Slovakia
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
Rakytov, 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,¹ 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.²

Findings of the Atlas of Roma communities 2013 show that the living conditions of Roma are very heterogeneous.³ Approximately half of Slovakia’s Roma or 46% live in integrated or 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Approximately half of the Roma households surveyed received material need benefits and two thirds received childcare allowances and

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/b1/hZJH3q(NAEES_xR8g082uY6NmNWCW2r0QqLCExCyHOQbhr5mXZQ721Kkv4mVUZCaUJGVDvLcJH3xDr8zto-cwVdFGSI(AJ4DDQJC7q-HgAubkGWA-GYQ-Fcv2p4Mdlc1TPYTC99ERWTcuHwqC-yIDbgwMogaxZk30qixZx5ipECJu6LnOSRCq2RRKE7iZ01Vq2xTXpyvLYQntNJMUu6njztjDFvLcDofbmcqH1HoJ444591LTJF9dkZdb-6udm_rZS1e_hkC3rOwohT1tt5dN91JPEge31YPUc8rIrTSs4VBwcW5PawIlFGoTm9vHx5_sHJu/wLQpOPlcCRxaoAmAKKpckBHwDXYYBIpKcfoV1va2ovyuq051NFPb5990ZTh1oBM_mXz206F6135EvqY1ZU9h8LgHEFphJIN3Ehsz7axvYUCAHRB8Hqv1faVBgOfjwWnP0BRKSOIHpG89gpoX5eyfQWykbYFqJuhK-5pZtupkJS6Phu-dy7C/IMr6g6v0Y4fici15Rc2LMEidi6reOJ2HwOz4yvsh10NeGe8smHu2L0RV7uiXNwKw2x1XOp9Q1kW7Bnp-rC-BTB7Swq6TMqGmrYv77XJ908S4vBcwTW7H1rkDZ-XcrX011HSibfa2zC-GcuiBFlmIYSULjQVGrMju-JOF7LR0Dpn1d4/dl4/L2dBISFv70FB159OQ5Eh/ (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-sociale-pomoc/socialne-sluzby/socialne-vylucene-spolocenstva/dokumenty.html


family benefits. Besides unfavourable 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. 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. The National Roma Integration Strategy was approved by the Slovak government in 2012 and represents a key document for Roma inclusion in Slovakia.

**Locality background information**

Rakytník (Rakottyás in Hungarian) is located in the Rimavská Sobota district (an administrative region of Banská Bystrica). The village is located 4 km away from the main road between Bratislava and Kosice, close to the village of Bátka, which provides Rakytník with access to basic services and infrastructure (post office, general practitioner, educational facilities, and public employment services).

![Rakytník on the map of Slovakia (Google maps)](https://www.google.com)
The village faces difficulties regarding access to drinking water. There is no municipal water supply and the quality of the water extracted from private wells is not regularly controlled.

The village, as well as the entire region of Banská Bystrica, suffers from extremely low number of local job opportunities. The level of registered unemployed residents in the Rimavská Sobota district was 29% at the end of January of 2015.\textsuperscript{13} The region has a strong agricultural tradition, but since the collapse of “collective farming” in the 1990s employment in the agricultural sector has sharply declined. Few alternative employment opportunities have been created. In Rakytník there are two active micro-entrepreneurs, but their impact on employment opportunities is minor. To create new jobs, the mayor intends to start a municipality-owned social enterprise.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{rakytnik.jpg}
\caption{Houses of marginalized Roma on the village’s edge in Rakytník.}
\end{figure}

In general, relations between Roma and non-Roma populations in the South-Eastern regions of Slovakia including Rakytník, are much ‘smoother’ than in other regions. One of the reasons might be the difficult economic situation in the region that affects everyone.

\textbf{Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project}

Due to its size, Rakytník has a very limited access to financial resources. Hence its options for development are quite limited. The mayor is actively searching for adequate possibilities to raise additional funds for the local projects. One of the options is to establish micro-regional cooperation and to apply for support schemes under the Rural Development Programme co-financed by the European Strategic and Investments Funds.\textsuperscript{14} Due to programme’s criteria, the minimum size of the population from the covered territory must be 10,000 people. In the case of the intended micro-regional strategy, this includes the population of 27 municipalities. The mayors of neighbouring villages have been already invited to set up a local partnership. The initiative is the first of its kind in the micro region.

It is important to note that none of the local parties has had previous experience with participatory or strategic planning. The facilitation of the micro-regional

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{rakytnik.jpg}
\caption{Rakytník, central section of the village.}
\end{figure}

Some level of economic and social stratification is observable within the local Roma community. While a minor share of Roma (25%) live in brick houses among the mainstream population in the centre of the village, the rest are concentrated at the edge of the village in brick or wooden houses. On the mayor’s initiative, housing ownership rights were recently legalised.

\textsuperscript{13} EURES, Labour market information for Banská Bystrica, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eures/printLIText.jsp?imiLang=en&regionId=SK0&catId=2807

development strategy could be the key objective of the LERI project in the locality as it has the potential to trigger and advance other activities. It would also encourage involvement from the local population in a variety of areas.

The local priorities for Rakytník, as defined during the preliminary need assessment in the LERI project, were focused primarily on the issues of employment, engaging local people in education, especially in terms of access to pre-primary education. Support for local tourism and improvement of basic infrastructure could become additional focus points.

The details of the priorities were articulated during the needs assessment phase in the meetings with the local stakeholders. The local LERI team is also planning cross-border activities with other LERI localities (e.g. Hungary). The focus of these actions could be facilitating cooperation and participation of youth in local matters.

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

The key contact person in Rakytník is the mayor, who is respected both by Roma and non-Roma. Aside from the mayor, the local field worker and the field expert for municipal social enterprises are taking part in and supporting the work of the LERI team in the locality. In addition, the representatives of local associations have been approached.

The information necessary for the preliminary need assessment phase was collected through informal, semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and inhabitants. The identified priorities will be discussed and validated with the local community during the next phases of the LERI project in Rakytník, and then presented to all members of the municipality Council.

**Annual village festival in Rakytník.**

Community events were organised in order to engage with inhabitants and to gain their support for the developmental activities planned within the LERI project and beyond. These included an idea for community theatre and an artistic symposium where locals, supported by professional artists, will design and decorate public spaces. These activities will bring together diverse social groups, including Roma and non-Roma and create favourable conditions for future activities, such as participatory planning and other developmental activities.

**Expected outcomes of the participatory action research**

Local actors have expressed their strong interest in receiving assistance in applying a participatory action research approach to the planning of the micro-regional strategy.

The process of participatory planning will be supplemented with capacity-building training on the identification and elaboration of small local projects. In order to generate ideas, the LERI team plans to introduce the possibility for local people to organise their own local initiative based on a simple project proposal request, which could become the focus of the LERI project later on.

The LERI team will also support efforts to develop a business plan for the municipal social enterprise. The business plan explores the opportunities brought by businesses in agriculture, goats breeding and production of dairy products. At the same time, the municipality office will continue to receive assistance in planning and establishing a local pre-primary
education facility, which may have a positive impact on the chances of local children to enrol in high-quality public educational institutions later on. The facility may also provide a new impetus for initiating possible LERI activities for children and mothers in the future.