

Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion (LERI) Project

Community Summary Sokolov, Czech Republic

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,	England, UK

Sokolov, Czech Republic

Overview of the country context

The share of Roma in the Czech population is usually estimated at about 2% (200,000).¹

The situation of the Roma people in the Czech Republic is difficult. They face higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the population, and have often difficulties with housing.² These difficulties are both the result of ethnic discrimination and the low level of education of many Roma.³

The Roma population makes up a significant part of the socially excluded population. According to the FRA Roma Pilot Survey 2011 about 80% of Roma in the Czech Republic live in households below national poverty lines. The low level of education of the Roma is considered to be a key factor (in addition to other factors) of their labour market disadvantage, which is apparent in their low participation rate (around one third of Roma have paid employment.) and high unemployment rates⁴. Specifically, 74% of the Roma

have primary education at most, while in the overall population it is 20%.⁵ Their educational structure has improved within the past two generations in the sense that the share of those with no education dropped significantly; however, only to the extent of primary education⁶. One of the problems is the persistent segregation of Roma children into special schools and recently into 'practical' schools.⁷

The Roma population is more concentrated in cities and in the regions affected by higher unemployment and structural change (formerly centres of heavy industry).

The European Union and the Czech government have launched various initiatives to improve the situation of the Roma. As of 2015, the Czech Republic has a Roma Integration Strategy 2020, which was preceded by the National Concept for Roma Integration⁸. In practical terms the support to municipalities in developing strategies at local level has been provided by the

¹ Gabal, I. and Víšek, P. (2010), *Východiska strategie boje proti sociálnímu vyloučení: Východiska pro formulaci a implementaci politiky začleňování obyvatel vyloučených lokalit do české společnosti a její sociální a ekonomické struktury*, p. 4, available at: http://www.gac.cz/userfiles/File/nase_prace_vystupy/GAC_Strategie_soc_vyloucení.pdf

² FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) (2014), *Roma Survey – Data in focus. Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*, Luxembourg, Publications Office, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/poverty-and-employment-situation-roma-11-eu-member-states>.

³ Czech Republic, Ombudsman (2014), *Souhrnná zpráva o činnosti veřejného ochránce práv 2013*, Kancelář veřejného ochránce práv, p. 90, available at: www.ochrance.cz/fileadmin/user_upload/zpravy_pro_poslaneckou_snemovnu/Souhrnná_zpráva_2013_PDF_A.pdf; Sirovátka, T. (2011), *Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma - A Study of National Policies - Czech Republic*, European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, p. 2.

⁴ FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) (2014), *Roma Survey –*

Data in focus. Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States, Luxembourg, Publications Office, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/poverty-and-employment-situation-roma-11-eu-member-states>.

⁵ Sirovátka, T. (2011), *Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma - A Study of National Policies - Czech Republic*, European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, p. 2.

⁶ National Census (2001), Czech Statistical Office, available at: www.czso.cz/csu/edicniplan.nsf/

⁷ Amnesty International and ERRC (2012), *Five More Years of Injustice: Segregated Education for Roma in the Czech Republic*, available at: www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/five-more-years-of-injustice-november-2012.pdf

⁸ Vláda České republiky (2015), *Strategie romské integrace do roku 2020*, and Government of the Czech Republic (2009), *Roma integration concept for 2010-2013*, both available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/czech-republic/national-strategy/national_cs.htm

Agency for Social Inclusion⁹. A variety of projects have been launched to support the inclusion of Roma, funded mainly through the Structural Funds of the European Union. However, in most projects and initiatives until now Roma were not enabled to participate as active “agents of change”. One of the aim of the LERI project in Brno and Sokolov is therefore to strengthen the participation of Roma in the process of social inclusion.

Locality background information

The coal city of Sokolov (Karlovy Vary Region) is part of an area that has experienced economic difficulties since the beginning of the economic transformation. Its Roma population is about double (4%) the national average.¹⁰ Many of the local Roma have migrated originally from Slovakia, or are the descendants of those migrants who arrived to Sokolov for employment during the socialist era. Sokolov is a mining town, and although the industry’s significance diminished after socialism, mining still constitutes an important source of employment for citizens. At the end of 2013, the registered unemployment was slightly higher (10.7%) in the Sokolov than the national average.¹¹ Most Roma are concentrated in two areas in the city, but as a result of current gentrification, some have been pushed out to the outskirts of the town or nearby villages.

Reflecting the situation at the national level, in Sokolov many industrial jobs were lost and the unemployment rate is higher than the national average.



Sokolov streetview

Due to their lower educational background, Roma are in a particularly difficult situation, and the problem of social exclusion of Roma has many more dimensions aside from unemployment. Many Roma have difficulties with housing; in some cases, this has led to their moving to smaller places in the surrounding countryside, where job opportunities are even worse than in Sokolov. The city has started a number of initiatives to improve the situation of Roma, for example, a segregated school was closed and efforts are being made to ensure that this change will result in the integration of the children in other schools. Other positive activities were launched by the municipal police, which cooperates with crime prevention assistants from the Roma community. The police also supported a number of community events and cultural activities.

Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project

The objective of the Sokolov LERI project is to support Roma in developing their own initiatives, which could help to improve their standing in the community. While the thematic focus will be decided together with local Roma on the basis of the participatory needs assessment, it is the expectation that the LERI project will, among others, help Roma to develop skills in project management.

LERI will also aim to work with active parents, focusing on education through initiating dialogue between parents, teachers and schools.

⁹ Czech Republic/Agentura pro sociální začleňování, available at: <http://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/>

¹⁰ Agency for Social Inclusion, available at: www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/o-lokalite-sokolov

¹¹ Czech Statistical Office, available at: www.czso.cz/xk/redakce.nsf/i/nezamestnanost_v_kraji_k_31_12_2013

Activities implemented and people involved in the needs assessment phase

The LERI project will be based on a combination of working methods and formats, such as interviews, meetings, trainings or social events.

The key stakeholders involved are the social service provider at People in Need, the Municipal Police, the mayor of Sokolov, and the Roma NGO "Vizebudoucnosti Romů."

Throughout this process, the participants shall be given an opportunity to determine the exact goals and planned results of the project.

One idea is to encourage parents to take a more active position in regard to the education of their children through building an active parents group together with People in Need, the local schools, Roma parents and teachers. While the exact measures will have to

be defined in cooperation with the parents, this might include activities to build contacts with non-Roma parents, with the school as such (teachers etc.) or measures to promote children's self-esteem and at the same time limiting their frustrations (through becoming useful). The activities will focus on teachers, parents and their children.

Expected outcomes

The main expectation is that the project will improve the position of Roma and the quality of interethnic relations in the city of Sokolov, which will be achieved through a variety of methods and approaches, in particular through the focus on education and work with the local schools.

Suggestions and participation are welcome both by people living in Sokolov (Roma and non-Roma) and by institutions that professionally deal with social issues.

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