

Local engagement for Roma inclusion

Locality study Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), 2016

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1. Executive summary

During the last two decades, almost 350 Roma households settled in private land plots nearby 'Pine Wood' Public Park in the north-western outskirts of Stara Zagora city. This led to serious tensions between the municipal council and some private landowners, on the one hand, and the Roma community, on the other. The tensions escalated into the demolition of more than 50 illegal dwellings on 21–22 July 2014. The demolition did not come as a surprise, since towards the start of the LERI research in 2013 a series of evictions were already planned by the local authorities for the period 2014–2016, which put hundreds of people at immediate risk.

The main research question of this case study on LERI in Stara Zagora is how to find a solution acceptable for all stakeholders and what practical steps this solution would entail. The goal was more than challenging – as the deputy mayor put it during a discussion on the possible municipal commitment to the LERI research during the needs assessment phase, “it seems that you want to have the wolf sated but also keep the lamb intact” – which is the Bulgarian equivalent of the British proverb “you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs”.

Therefore the objectives of the LERI research, as the CEO of a local Roma NGO defined them, were ‘how to explain to the Roma that illegal dwellings are not acceptable’. A second – equally important – objective was find arguments ‘to convince them that it is better to demolish their own handmade illegal houses now and later rebuild them in compliance with the legal requirements, rather than to keep postponing and being dependent in the future’. An important set of related questions was repeated to address prejudice and discrimination against Roma at various levels. How to convince the municipal authorities that evictions without an alternative (social housing or land plots) are unacceptable? How to explain to the neighbouring non-Roma that the vulnerability of their Roma neighbours is not a result of their ethnic characteristic but an outcome of social circumstances? The ultimate message is that the Roma – as any individual in a vulnerable situation – need targeted social policies that will not only challenge the established perceptions of social equality, but will establish a practice of social justice.

The methodological approach chosen builds on three pillars. One is **urgent anthropology** research. Both the pattern of unauthorized settling (an example of unsustainable social practice exposed to permanent risk of eviction) and the social structures are vanishing due to evictions (dwellings built of with materials at hand, informal quarter stratification, social networking) are textbook examples of topics ‘urgent anthropology’ deals with topics. The second methodology used was **Rapid Assessment Procedure** (RAP) survey, since an urgent assessment of the knowledge, attitudes and practices in the current situation was needed in order to prevent the forthcoming evictions and to find quick solutions for those already evicted. Finally, the LERI research was a typical example of **Participatory Action Research** (PAR), since the local Roma community and municipal stakeholders were the drivers of its implementation in every phase: needs assessment, defining the research questions and objectives, as well as the fieldwork tools and their implementation.

The results of the LERI research and its sustainability are still to be seen because the interventions were contributing to a much more complex process that goes beyond the research's scope and control, and require considerable external resources. However, one immediate result is the very fact that it unblocked the entire process. Its intermediary results will endure and can be used in the next stages when resources flow in. LERI also resulted in a standardized modular construction plan reflecting local people's input, public bids for land plots voted on by the local municipal council in favour of Roma people, and an increasing number of households who are interested in engaging with the municipality in the near future.

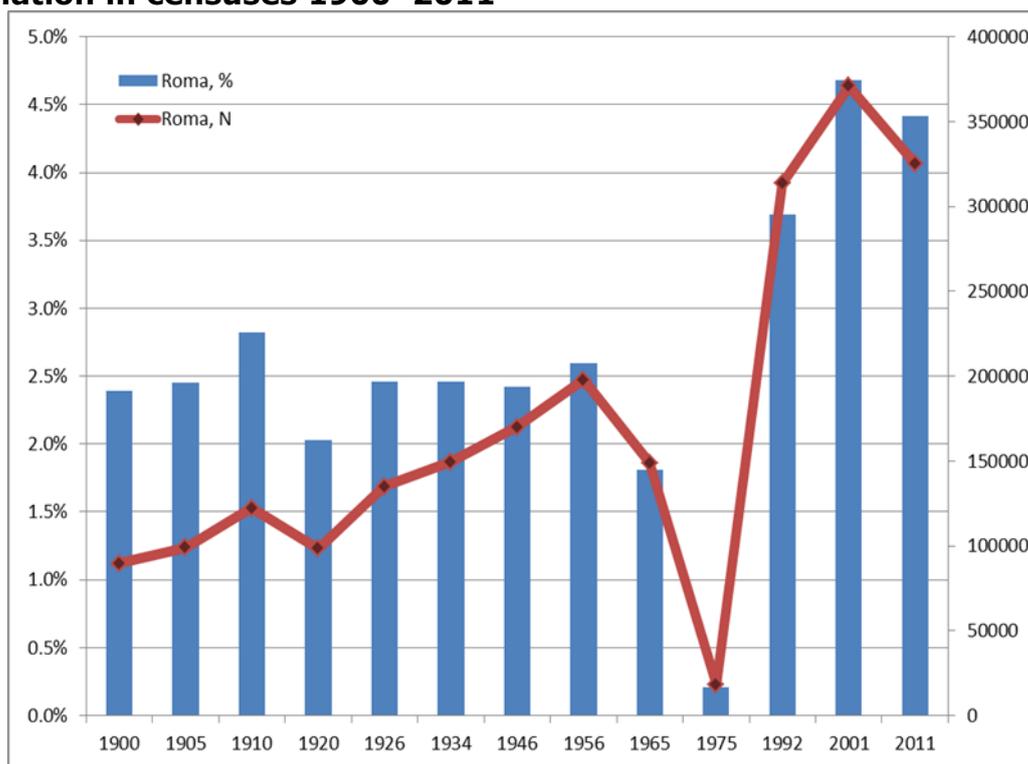
Keywords/Tags: housing, eviction, micro-census, consensus conference, Participatory Action Research.

2. Description of the local context

Overview of the country population

The Roma population in Bulgaria has been growing steadily throughout the 20th century, both in absolute numbers (since the end of the First World War) and as share of the total population (since the end of the Second World War when the country experienced its demographic transition, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Absolute number and proportion of Roma in the total Bulgarian population in censuses 1900–2011



Source: National Statistical Institute (2011), *Population and Dwellings Census 2011*

The 'vanishing Roma' phenomenon observed between the end of the 1950s and beginning 1990s reflected the assimilation policies of the communist regime, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s (1985 is missing on the graph above, because the ethnic identity question was excluded from the census due to the assimilation policy context of the so-called revival process¹). The policy swings resulting in data gaps and inconsistencies provide grounds for questioning the official statistics on the ethnic composition of the population. When the population census in 1992 registered 313,396 persons with Gypsy/Roma identity, some experts and scientists argued that the census underestimated the population size and quite an impressive array of population assessments have

¹ The label 'revival process' was used by the Bulgarian Communist Party and governmental institutions in the period 1964–1989 as a signifier for a set of assimilation policies such as the ban of some Muslim traditional clothing elements (such as the fez and *yaşmak*), a ban of the public use of Turkish and Romanes, and a step-by-step change of the Muslim names, starting with the Roma population in the mid-sixties of the 20th century, Pomaks in the late sixties and seventies and Turks in mid-eighties, as well as with the opening of the Bulgarian-Turkish border for "those who do not feel Bulgarians but Turks" in 1984.

since been produced. One of the first publications in that batch set the number of 'Gypsies'² at 800,000. Unfortunately, the researchers had no explicit and statistically verified methodology but used only "observations and considerations" (Marushiakova and Popov, 1993: 94). However, their estimation opened 'flood gates' for similar approaches. In 1994, the French researcher Jean-Pierre Liégeois published data about the Gypsy population in some European countries where the Roma population in Bulgaria was estimated at between 700,000 and 800,000 people (Liégeois, 1994). Unfortunately, he also neither explained his methodology, nor indicated his source, but probably obtained the data from his Bulgarian collaborators (i.e. Marushiakova and Popov 1993). A year later, Ilona Tomova (Tomova, 1995) made an estimation based on extensive fieldwork throughout the country, which indicated a much lower population size – between 577,000 and 600,000 people. The last expert estimation before the census in 2001 was done by Donald Kenrick whose estimate at 750,000 people is nothing more than the average of Liégeois's range (Kenrick, 1998).

The experts reacted in different ways when only 370,908 persons declared themselves to be Roma during the Population and Housing Census in 2001. Some of them, following their own logic, inflated the estimated number of the Roma population to 900,000 (Denton, 2003). Others merged the previous estimations, increasing the gap between the lower and higher assessments, and put the Roma population at between 500,000 and 800,000 (McDonald, 2006), which is rather confusing because the gap is more than half of the lower estimate. The third group of authors used the number 580,000 (Bogdanov and Angelov, 2006), i.e. simply rounding up Tomova's lower estimation, without explaining why after 11 years of population development the estimated size of population had not changed.

The Roma population may have vanished from the official statistics in the 1970s and 1980s but not from the registries maintained by the local Fatherland Front committees³ and the Ministry of the Internal Affairs (MIA). These institutions continued to gather ethnic identity information for the sake of state management (see 1). These reports were classified as 'highly confidential' at that time and became public knowledge only after the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s.

² It is not a politically correct term but it was used as such by the authors. Moreover, the same authors intentionally use it consistently as a denomination for Roma and Roma-like ethnic groups.

³ The Fatherland Front was established as a coalition of opposition parties during the Second World War but after the takeover of the Communist Party in the late 1940s, it became a kind of governmental 'civil organization'.

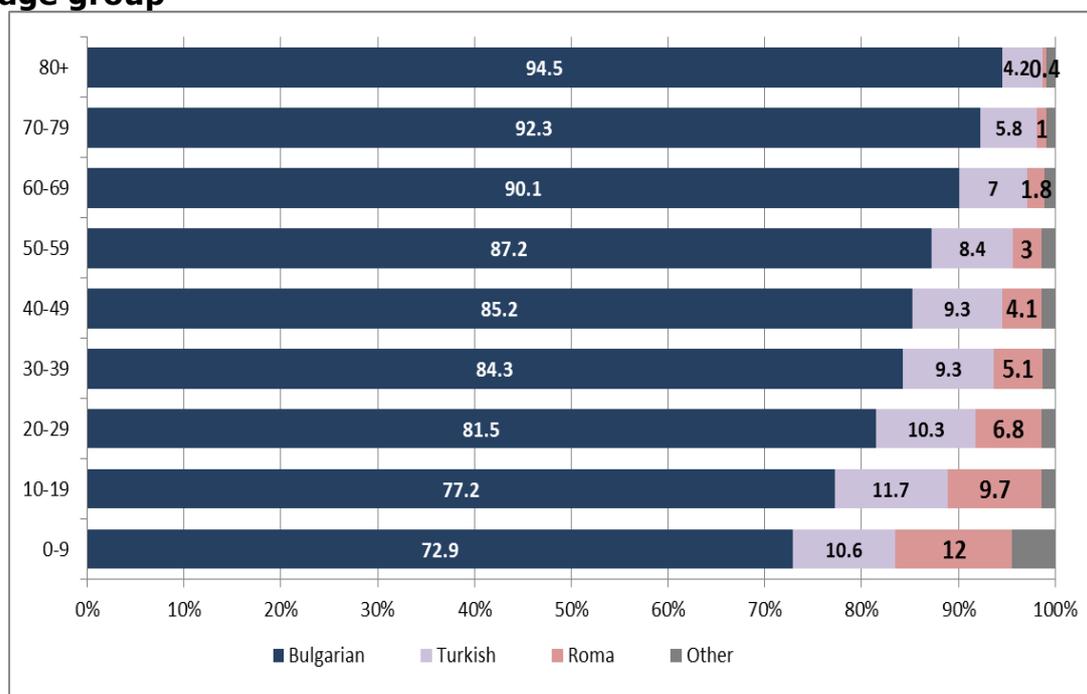
Table 1: Population size and proportion of Gypsies in the total Bulgarian population according to MIA, 1959–1989

Year	Population size	Proportion of Roma in the total population
1959	214,167	2.74 %
1976	373,200	4.26 %
1980	523,519	5.96 %
1989	576,927	6.45 %

Source: LERI Field expert, 2006

Taking into consideration both the census data (2001) and the MIA report (1989), Pamporov (2007) made a series of calculations to show that estimates of 800,000 Roma by 1992–1994 are highly exaggerated. In fact, even taking the highest MIA estimate and the highest ratio of natural increase (19.4 % for the period 2001–2003), the figure of 800,000 cannot be reached before 2007. In a follow-up publication based on the same extrapolations, Pamporov (2009a) made a projection for 2010, estimating the size of the Roma population to reach around 441,000. After all, the 2011 census counted up to 325,343 Roma, which is a decrease of 12.3 % compared to the census data of 2001 (370,908), while at the same time the National Statistical Institute was estimating the above-mentioned annual natural increase at almost 2 %. Moreover, the age structure of the total population shows that the Roma population is very young, i.e. a natural increase should be observed for sure (Figure 2). So, what happened then?

Figure 2. Ethnic composition of the total population of Bulgaria in 2011, by age group



Source: National Statistical Institute, Census 2011

Overview of the Roma identity

Similar to many other non-written cultures, the past of the Roma people in Bulgaria is full of unknown and blurred facts. There are some Slavic, Byzantine and Ottoman sources, but the information given there is rather disputable because the exonyms used at that time cover not a given group but a cluster of groups with similar cultural characteristics. There are different myths and assumptions about the arrival of the Roma people on the Balkan Peninsula (and in Bulgaria in particular) varying from Alexander the Great to the Ottoman invasion. However, the Ottoman tax registers show that at the beginning of 15th century, in what is now Northern Bulgaria, there were several towns with both Muslim and Christian neighbourhoods of settled Roma populations. As an attempt to escape slavery in Wallachia and Moldova, in the 18th and especially 19th century, there was a significant wave of immigrant Roma coming from these two principalities (Pamporov, 2006).

The different waves of migration and the different historical experience of the Roma communities in the past played a significant role in shaping the different identities of the Roma population in Bulgaria. In fact, if the six indicators of ethnic community are considered,⁴ it is appropriate to talk about several rather different communities with very different cultural patterns and social structures and not about one 'Roma community' (Pamporov, 2009). Therefore, some authors claim that Roma are quasi-diaspora and a community only in the eyes of the others (Tomova, 1995).

Currently, there are three different classifications of Roma people in Bulgaria. Influenced by the earlier works of Petulengro⁵ on Roma in Bulgaria, Marushiakova (1991) and Marushiakova and Popov (1993) give attention to the nomadic past and classify three groups: Yerlii (i.e. settled), Calderash (i.e. Romanes-speaking nomads) and Rudari (Rumanian-speaking nomads). Based on the existing communist archives, Tomova (1995) defines Roma people by their 'preferred' public identity under four groups: Roma Gypsies, Turkish Gypsies, Bulgarian Gypsies and Rumanian Gypsies. Pamporov (2004, 2006, 2009a) studied a variety of Roma dialects through the kinship terminology and, combining these varieties with the religious affiliation, defined five main groups⁶ as follows:

Daskane Roma who constitute the prevailing share of the Roma population in North-Western and Central Northern Bulgaria. There are two specific subgroups with a preferred Bulgarian identity that could be related to this group.

Horahane Roma – the term means both Turkish as well as Muslim Roma who constitute the prevailing share of the Roma population in North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Southern Bulgaria. There are some specific subgroups with preferred Turkish identity that could be classified under this group.

Calderashya – the name of this group relates to their traditional male occupation in the near past – coppersmith. Unlike the most of the other Roma

⁴ A commonly shared endonym, a myth for common ancestors, commemoration of a common past, element of a common culture (religion, language or costumes), attachment to a common fatherland, sense of population solidarity (Smith, 1996).

⁵ Petulengro was the academic pseudonym of Bernard Gilliat-Smith, a consul of the United Kingdom in Varna

⁶ For a detailed description, see the Annex.

groups, Calderash people live dispersed among mainstream society and not in segregated neighbourhoods. There are about sixteen subgroups of Calderash people in Bulgaria sharing some clan features and structure.

Kalaydzhes – the common feature among the different Kalaydzhes groups is the traditional male occupation – tinsmith (hence the name of the group from the Turkish 'kalay' – 'tin'). The Kalaydzhes subgroup is placed as a part of the Daskane, Horahane or Calderashya. This is due to the fact that Kalaydzhes living in North-Eastern and South-Western Bulgaria are Muslim, but the Kalaydzhes living in South-Eastern and Central Southern Bulgaria are Orthodox Christians.

Ludari (a.k.a. Rudari) known also as Kopanari (whittlers) or Mechkari (bear trainers), which correspond to the self-labels of Lingurari (spoon makers) and Ursari (bear trainers). The Ludari people live in segregated neighbourhoods but do not differ from the local Bulgarian population as far as the level of education, employment rate and household size are concerned.

Overview of discrimination and prejudices

The centuries-old segregated living of Roma people in ghettoised poverty pockets contributes to the association of Roma people with marginalisation, which results in the ethnic Bulgarian population transposing the stereotypes related to a ghettoised lifestyle on Roma (Pamporov 2009b). Although attitudes towards Roma improved during the period 2008–2012, as

Figure 3 shows, the current political developments dissipated this positive tendency. The percentage of people who would agree to live in the same neighbourhood with the Roma decreased again, reaching the levels below those of 2008, both among ethnic Bulgarians and as a country average (including other ethnicities, such as Turks).

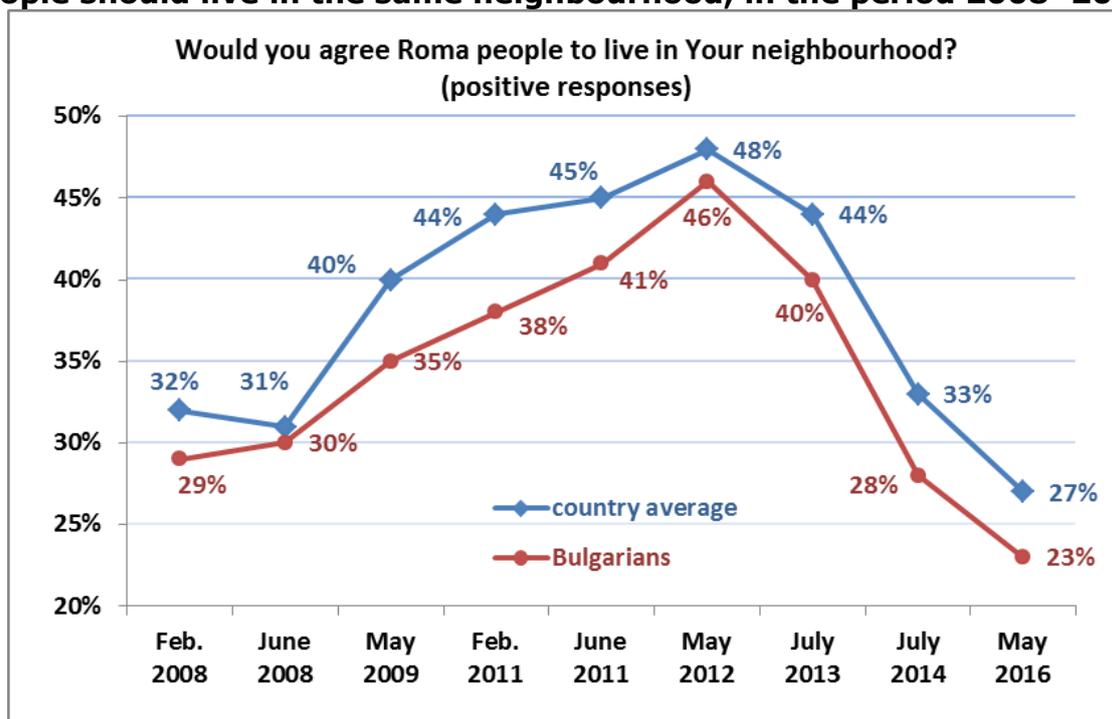
In fact, Roma people are caught in the vicious circle of secondary segregation, not only in residential areas but also in education and the labour market. The prejudices in various areas⁷ leads social exclusion and discrimination in education, healthcare and the labour market⁸ and deteriorates the precarious living conditions⁹ boosting prejudice further.

⁷ Pamporov, A. and Kabakchieva, P. (2012), 'Social inclusion and discrimination of Roma in four EU countries' in: Tarnovschi, D. (ed.), *Roma from Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain between social inclusion and migration*, Romania, Soros Foundation, pp. 17-32.

⁸ Kolev, D., Krumova, T., Pamporov, A., Radulescu, D., van der Zwaan, S. and Balcik T. (2013), *Beyond anti-Roma Stereotypes: the world is not just white and black*, Plovdiv, Astarta.

⁹ FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) (2012), *The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States – Survey results at a glance*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union (Publications Office).

Figure 3. Proportion of Bulgarians and country average who agree Roma people should live in the same neighbourhood, in the period 2008–2016



Source: LERI Field expert, 2016

Overview of the local population and identity

Stara Zagora is located in Southern Bulgaria, and is the administrative capital of the municipality and administrative province of the same name. In comparison to other administrative units in Bulgaria, the Stara Zagora municipality has a rather large population. It corresponds to the definition of a medium sized local administrative unit (LAU1) within the EU.¹⁰ According to the information obtained by the LERI field expert from the local statistical office of the National Statistical Institute, in 2012, 86.4 % of the population was urban – higher than the national average of 72.8 %, as estimated by the National Statistical Institute.¹¹ The city is a nationally significant economic centre among the few cities in Bulgaria that have shown significant population and economic growth in the last several years.

According to the population census of 2011, Roma constituted 5.8 % of Stara Zagora municipality, and 4.3 % of the city of Stara Zagora (of those who declared their ethnic identity).¹² Due to the existing doubts in census accuracy, an expert assessment was made based on personal estimations of some stakeholders included in the LERI needs assessment. The estimation referred to all segregated (Gypsy) neighbourhoods in Stara Zagora city. The generalised data from the expert assessments (see Table 2) shows that the number of Roma in Stara Zagora city is four to six times higher than captured by the census.

¹⁰ For further information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/local-administrative-units>.

¹¹ National Statistical Institute: Population by districts, municipalities, place of residence and sex, available at: www.nsi.bg/en/content/6704/population-districts-municipalities-place-residence-and-sex.

¹² National Statistical Institute (2011), *Population and housing census 2011*, available at: www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011_ethnos.xls

Thus, the actual proportion of Roma in the total urban population is actually two to three times higher.

As shown in Graph 2 above, the Roma population in Bulgaria is younger than the other populations in the country. This is due to extremely high adolescent fertility rates, to relatively higher fertility rates in the age group 20–29 and to extremely high mortality rates in the age groups above 40.¹³ In that respect, Stara Zagora municipality is not an exception, and similar demographic situations can be observed elsewhere in Bulgaria. During the last census (2011), the proportion of Roma under the age of 20 was around 36.3 %, while the proportion of the Stara Zagora population as a whole under the age of 20 was around 18 %. At the other end of the scale, the Roma population aged 60 and over was 8.4 %, while the proportion of this age group in the total population of Stara Zagora municipality was 24.3 %.¹⁴

Table 2 summarises the core characteristics of the segregated neighbourhoods of Stara Zagora (estimated number of inhabitants, population distribution and the legal status of their dwelling).

Table 2. Expert assessment about the Roma population living in the segregated neighbourhoods of Stara Zagora city

Roma neighbourhood	Total dwellings	(of which) Illegal dwellings	Total settlement population	Total neighbourhood population	'Gypsies' ¹⁵	Roma	Turks
Lozenetz	3,400	1,150	135,000	21,000	21,000	14,500	6,500
Chumleka	1,100	50		6,000	6,000	4,500	1,500
Zora	490	0		3,300	1,200	1,200	0
Chadâr	140	0		250	100	90	10
Mogila							

Source: LERI Field expert's average calculations based on informal estimations of Roma leaders, local authorities and local experts (rounded figures), 2016

Before 1989, Lozenetz used to be an ethnically mixed quarter with a total population of about ten to eleven thousand. After the fall of communism, as an outcome of the closure of the industrial and agricultural enterprises, a wave of incoming Roma from some neighbouring municipalities (Kazanlak, Maglizh, Kotel, Chirpan and Nova Zagora) arrived, searching for new jobs. The sharp increase in the proportion of the Roma population caused secondary segregation, since the ethnic Bulgarians began to sell their houses and move out of the quarter.

¹³ European Commission, Matrix (2014), *Roma health report – Health status of the Roma population: Data collection in the Member States of the European Union*, Brussels, European Commission, available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/docs/2014_roma_health_report_es_en.pdf

¹⁴ National Statistical Institute (2011), *Population and housing census 2011*, available at:

http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/spp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FullOpen/P_22_2011_T1_KN2.pdf

¹⁵ The segregated neighbourhoods where most of Roma population live are known as 'Gypsy quarters' (Bulg.: Tsigamski mahali [Цигански махали]). In that respect, the column 'Gypsies' reflects the total neighbourhood population that is considered by the outsiders to be Roma. The next columns reflect the distribution of this population by its actual minority identity, which in fact reduces the real number of Roma due to the fact that some Turks live in those quarters, too.

Despite the fact that all five main Roma groups live in the Stara Zagora region, the neighbourhood welcomed only Daskane and Horahane Roma, while the Calderashya, Ludari and Kalaydzhes remained in the surrounding rural areas. The Fichiri represent the biggest ethnic aggregate in the quarter. They are a subgroup of the Horahane Roma, speaking an eastern-Bulgarian Balkan dialect of Romanes, heavily influenced by Turkish vocabulary. This is the dominant Romanes patois in the quarter and the preferred Romany subgroup identity. Although during some previous ethnographic fieldwork studies by the LERI field expert in Lozenetz, several given families of Sepetçi (basket-makers), Davulçi (drummers), Cilingiri (locksmiths), Uluchari (outfall makers), and Zagundji¹⁶ were listed within the Horahane Roma group, a current tendency for identity change towards the dominant Fichiri can be observed.

For the sake of the industrial development of the city, in the 1960s about twenty households of Daskane Roma had already been relocated from the surrounding villages to the quarter. Most of them belonged to the so-called Laho Roma. The youth prefer speaking Bulgarian and use Romanes as their cant speech. The elders speak both Laho and Fichiri patois; it is very indicative of their identity that these Roma do not speak Turkish. Since the Laho moved into the quarter due to state planning, they have lived in the central part of the neighbourhood, dispersed among the Fichiri.

The Turks represent about a third of the neighbourhood population and live mainly in the southern part of the quarter. A proper urban infrastructure exists; most of the dwellings are legal and built before 1989. Employment rates are above the average for both males and females and it is the most prestigious identity. In fact, the Turkish language is the *de facto* lingua franca of the quarter and only Laho Roma do not speak it.

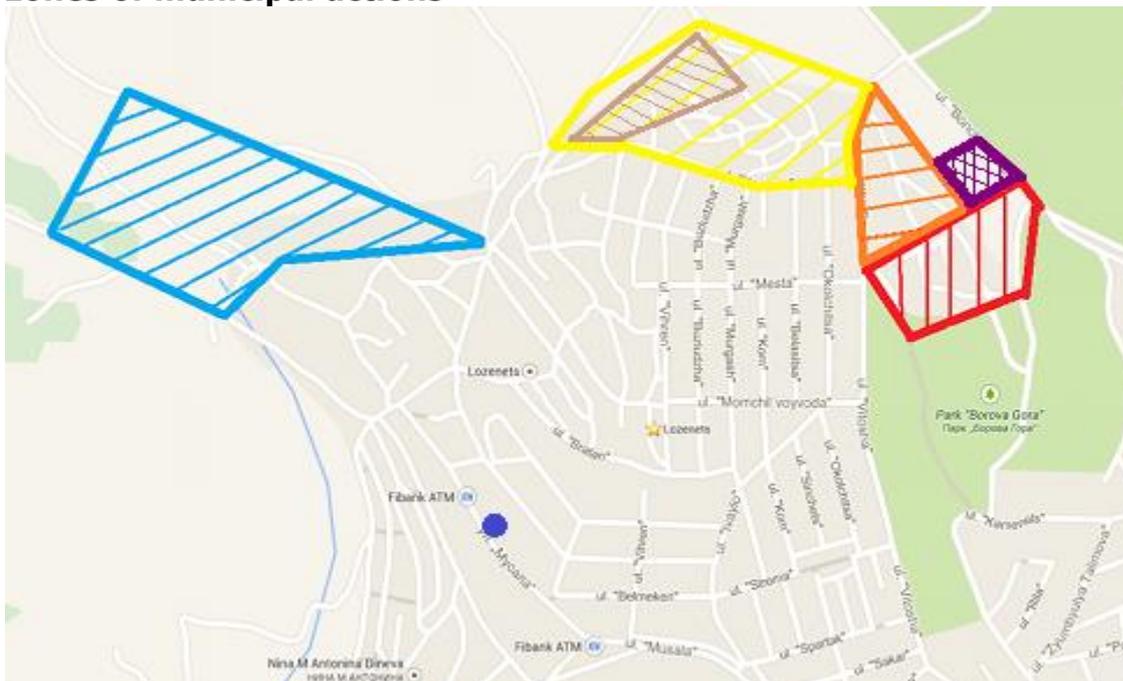
Last but not least, what is the Millet subgroup? As native Turkish speakers, they additionally boost the importance of the Turkish language. Although fluent in Turkish, Millet people suffer higher unemployment rates and live in the worst living conditions, in out-of-town regulation terrains.

During the last two decades, almost 350 Roma households have settled on private lands and the nearby Pine Wood public park in the north-western outskirts of Stara Zagora city. Most of them are migrants from the surrounding municipalities but there are also local-born people who moved into illegal dwellings due to the expansion of their families of origin and the need for additional living space. On the map in

¹⁶ Unclear meaning: Petulengro described them as the most outcast, in 1915 (Petulengro [Gilliat-Smith, B.] (1915–1916), 'Report on the Gypsy tribes of North-East Bulgaria', *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, New series, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 1-109.

Figure 4 the areas illegally settled by locally born Roma are indicated by red and orange and the area settled by migrant Roma by yellow. However, the map does not illustrate the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood, but the future eviction and development plans.

Figure 4. Map of Lozenetz neighbourhood in Stara Zagora, with indicated zones of municipal actions



Legend: red (actual demolition July 2014), orange (planned demolition May 2015), yellow (planned demolition 2016), brown (actual demolition July 2016), blue (planned land plots for development), purple (actual construction of Catholic boarding school), blue point (planned social housing building 2017).

Source: LERI Field expert and Google maps, 2015

In the period after 1999 serious tensions between the municipal council and some private land owners, on the one hand, and the Roma community on the other, emerged. As a result, there were several cases of anti-Roma demonstrations and planned evictions as an authorities' response. Following the 2011 election campaign promise, the current mayor and his administration set up a plan for mass eviction of all illegal Roma dwellings in the Lozenetz quarter and reforestation of the area in the period 2014–2016. It started with the demolition of more than 50 illegal dwellings on 21–22 July 2014, which corresponds to the red area on the map in

Figure 4. However, by the field visit of the FRA representatives in December 2014, the land had not been reforested, and two years later, it was still not reforested, but the purple zone (the actual construction of Catholic boarding school) emerged (

Picture 11). Due to the fact that in the orange zone local Roma live with relatives in the neighbourhood and officially registered there, so far the demolition scheduled for 2015 has been postponed for an undefined period. A self-organised group of residents has sent a letter to the National Ombudsman's office, with a query about their status. In July 2016, only the brown zone within the yellow zone was demolished. These were houses of Roma migrants from neighbouring municipalities, with no relatives and no support or solidarity from the surrounding population. Most of those households were Millet. Seventeen of the dwellings were destructed by their owners in order to be able to reuse the construction materials. Nine of the households abandoned the site and returned to their places of origin. They let the municipality demolish the dwellings.

Picture 1. The red zone: demolished but not reforested



Source: LERI Field expert, December 2014

Picture 2. The red zone (in front) two years later, the orange zone back left, and the purple zone (back right on

Figure 4)



Source: LERI Field expert, April 2016

Overview of the local political context

Between the last week of September 2015 and 1 November 2015, Bulgaria was involved in an active local election campaign (first round on 25 October and the runoff on 1 November). However, on 14 September the municipality distributed orders for the voluntary demolition of illegal houses in the orange zone, with one-month notice. It was undertaken in compliance with the national regulation and the recommendation of the State Agency for Child Protection issued after the evictions in 2014. The position of the municipality was that the international human rights laws were complied with by giving one-month notice, since those people are migrants or have a second dwelling in the neighbourhood. The official position was that *"They should go back to wherever they came from"* (municipal officer). Therefore, the actions and decisions related to the demolition of the illegal housing and relocation of the Roma households seemed to have been postponed, but approximately four hundred people were facing an increasing risk of living on the streets right before winter.

However, this turned out to be just a power play by the local administration during the campaign. Because of the distributed notices for demolition, the opposition was not able to use 'Roma illegal dwellings' as an argument against the mayor who was running for a second mandate. The 2014 evictions and the eviction notices in 2015 were featured in the campaign as 'solving the issue' (i.e. the Roma will be evicted), and the topic was omitted from public debate during the campaign. At the same time, after the elections, the mayor started to speak about humanity during the winter and the municipal authorities postponed demolitions until spring 2016.

The incumbent mayor (Mr Zhivko Todorov) won the majority elections in the first round with the impressive support of 79 % of the voters – some 33 % over GERB (the party supporting him) got during the local elections for municipal council in 2015 (Table 3). Given the fact that GERB's 46 % translated into 27 seats out of

51 after redistribution, he is one of the mayors with close-to-absolute power. The legitimacy from the enormous public support through the majority vote matched by the majority his party gained in the municipal council allows him and his team to adopt almost any desired policy within the country's legal framework.

Table 3. Turnout of local elections for municipal council in the Stara Zagora municipality, 2015

Party	Vote	Seats
GERB [European People's Party group member]	46.03 %	27
BSP [Party of European Socialists group member]	10.62 %	6
People's Union [European Conservatives and Reformists group related]	7.61 %	4
Reformist Block [European People's Party group member]	7.18 %	4
The Truth for Stara Zagora [local initiative]	3.32 %	2
ABV [split from BSP]	2.72 %	2
MRF [Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group member]	2.72 %	2
ATTACK [Far-right, Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty affiliated (2007)]	2.20 %	1
NFSB [Far-right, split from ATTACK]	2.18 %	1
BSDP [Centre-right social democrats]	2.13 %	1
Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Bulgarian National Movement - [The European Conservatives and Reformists Group member (IMRO-BNM)]	1.97 %	1
Other	11.30 %	0

Source: Central Election Commission¹⁷, 2015

In Bulgaria, some twenty-nine Roma parties exist. The most active are Euroroma, DROM, European Security and Integration (previously called 'Roma') and Solidarity, due to the personal activities of their leaders. In the last local elections in Stara Zagora, there were only two Roma political formations running for the municipal council: the Euroroma party and a local coalition between two other Roma parties, Solidarity and Shield. Euroroma was not successful; the party won only 0.09 %. The coalition, Solidarity–Shield, won 1.31 % of the vote, i.e. it was very close to winning a seat. Worth noting is that the main point in the political programme of this coalition was the promise that they were going to

¹⁷ Available at: <https://results.cik.bg/minr2015/tur1/mestni/2431.html>

work for a moratorium over the demolitions of the illegal dwellings and was supported mainly by people living in such dwellings within the Roma Lozenetz neighbourhood.

Although the so-called patriotic (i.e. far-right) parties won only three seats in total, due to the fact that they are a national partner of the GERB, the municipality kept pressing the Roma on the illegal housing issue. On 8 April 2016, within the LERI consensus conference,¹⁸ the deputy mayor of social affairs and chief illegal dwellings officer announced that not a single household would be evicted before finding a proper housing solution. However, on 19 May (i.e. just a month and a half later) during a session of the municipal council, the mayor announced that “*forty ramshackle houses* [located in the western part] *will be given 30-days’ eviction notice*”, i.e. would be demolished by the end of June 2016. This zone appears as the brown sector within the yellow zone on the map. Due to an immediate ad hoc reaction from the local Roma community, the next day (20 May 2016) the mayor announced that within the ‘Regions in Growth’ Operational Programme, an out-of-use municipal building (blue point) would be transformed into social housing before autumn 2017 to serve as alternative accommodation for those affected by the evictions. As described above, by 24 July 2016 about twenty-six households of migrant Millet people were evicted.

General need

The general need of the local communities in Stara Zagora, as identified by the LERI research, was the decrease in interethnic tension and the achievement of a basic, common understanding about Roma housing integration, which takes on board the points of view of all stakeholders. Through the application of the research activities listed below, it was expected that a consensus would be achieved regarding the eviction plan, the area where the Roma would be resettled, as well as about improving their living conditions and housing regulations. The needs assessment was carried out through direct fieldwork observation, expert interviews with public authorities, NGO activists and social workers, and by informal interviews with at-risk people in their homes.

Local stakeholders

The LERI local team was led by the LERI field expert, Alexey Pamporov, along with several co-researchers and local partners. The LERI local team identified the following list of key local counterparts applying the method of stakeholder analysis and participatory needs assessment:

- **World Without Borders** (WWB) – a NGO very well-positioned both among the Roma community and the public authorities. It is responsible for the implementation of many educational and healthcare integration projects at national level, and experienced in cooperating with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour.
- **Municipal elected authorities** (the mayor and deputy mayor) – they have responsibility for finding a legal and human rights solution for solving the problem with illegal housing of Roma people. The absolute win of Mr

¹⁸ The consensus conference was the milestone event when all stakeholders’ points had to be presented and a consensus achieved.

Zhivko Todorov in the local elections, and his party having more than 50 % of the seats, means that, to be implemented, any public policy has needs his endorsement.

- **Municipal experts** – municipal officers subordinated to the authorities but not elected, i.e. taking their positions as permanent experts and directly responsible for the respective portfolios.
- **Roma community members, who were affected** by the demolitions – they are dispersed. Most of them still live in the neighbourhood, sheltered by relatives or renting a room.
- **Roma community members, who were at risk** of eviction – live in illegally built dwellings, although sometimes these are not ramshackle hovels and adobes but solid houses, made out of bricks, concrete and with energy-efficient PVC windows.
- **Roma community members, who settled** legally – on regulated plots of land and with houses built in accordance with state regulations. However, they were at potential risk, too, since their extended families could run out of space and need a new house/plot of land.
- **University assistant professor** in social work and several social work students – in charge of the pilot enumeration fieldwork and, later, for the micro census. The illiteracy among the Roma community is very high and the first attempt to use only local Roma fieldworkers failed.
- **Regional authorities and experts** – the state administration has its expert representatives in education, healthcare, labour, housing, etc. at local level and had supervisory competence with regard to the local authorities and experts.
- **Bulgarian neighbours** – the western part of Lozenetz neighbours a residential area comprising blocks of flats, where mainly Bulgarians live. They will be directly affected by any additional development of Lozenetz in a north-western direction, as is planned (the blue area on the map above).
- **Local media** – given the high public interest, the media are interested in the topic and broadcast the developments in the housing issues.
- **Other stakeholders** – potential stakeholders to appear during the needs assessment and implementation phases (for example – urban and building construction architects).

Focused LERI needs and methodological approaches

The interventions addressed the following concrete needs identified:

1. Limited information about the affected households

As far as the demolition of illegal dwellings, built outside of town planning regulations, is concerned, there is very limited information about the affected households, which the public authorities actually need for policy action. The deputy mayor said: “*We know nothing about these people. We know only that they keep coming and coming*” (deputy mayor, interview, 2014). Moreover, there are about three hundred households at immediate risk of eviction, of which very little or nothing is known. In fact, when municipal officers were asked for an unofficial estimation about the population size of the Lozenetz neighbourhood, sometimes the number 100,000 was mentioned, which was grave exaggeration since the population of the entire city is about 130,000. However, this figure

reflects the fears among the ethnic Bulgarians and shows the importance of reliable data.

To address this problem, the LERI local team designed Local intervention 1: The Micro census.

It aimed to gather information about the exact number of households– both affected by demolition already or at risk of eviction. It generated data on the detailed number of children and other dependent household members, about the exact number of households facing each of the possible solutions and the associated risks, as well as on the household income and risk of poverty.

2. Lack of information about the legal framework for building a house

Many Roma households living in illegal dwellings are not aware of the legal framework and the steps needed in order to bid for a building plot, to design a house, and to build it legally (meeting all required infrastructure and safety requirements). Moreover, there were also some long-term legally settled households, which had grown and for which the only option of addressing their housing needs were either illegally building a new dwelling or illegally expanding the existing one.

To address this problem, the LERI local team designed Local intervention 2: The information campaign.

The campaign provided the affected Roma households, as well as Roma households at immediate risk, with information about the legal framework with regard to construction, town planning and communal services. The people were also familiarized with the new municipal decisions with regard to town planning and bidding for land plots in the Roma neighbourhood as well as with the bidding documentation needed. Additional information about microcredit and other options for buying a legal house and on social housing and human rights was provided.

3. Limited income and/or lack of motivation

There were Roma households that did not apply for a legal land plot at the time due to their limited savings, and the potential risk of not finishing construction of the house within the three-year period defined by law. There were also other households that needed microcredit with low interest rates for bidding and building a proper house. Both types of household were apprehensive of the need to have legal construction plans of the house. In the case of the Lozenetz neighbourhood, such a plan costs twice the price of a plot of land.

To address this problem, the LERI local team designed Local intervention 3: The standardised house.

A standardised construction plan was designed after public discussions (focus groups) with the affected Roma households and were provided to the target households.

4. Limited community consensus

The attitudes towards Roma illegal housing were far from consensual. On the one hand, the ethnic Bulgarian community, in general, totally supports any form of demolition and eviction. On the other hand, the Roma community does not

understand the concept of town planning and why such demolition may be justifiable, even when sanitary risks exist. Some of the illegal dwellings actually border the water catchment area of the city and the lack of infrastructure and community services put the entire city at risk. Political interests also play a decisive role with some municipal experts acting as community members and not as experts, neglecting Roma's basic human rights, just to make sure that the evictions will take place.

To cope with this problem, the LERI local team designed Local intervention 4: The consensus conference.

The team envisaged the consensus conference to provide a common ground for understanding the needs and fears of all stakeholders, and to provide an understanding of the human rights dimension, while complying with the legal framework.

3. PAR methodology employed

How to make an omelette without breaking the eggs. This was the de facto research question of the LERI PAR case study in Stara Zagora. The issue of the Roma illegal dwellings was potentially explosive, and the aim of the local research was to find a solution acceptable for all stakeholders. The research sub-questions were:

- How can the LERI research interventions enable Roma in the Lozenetz neighbourhood to understand that illegal dwellings are not acceptable?
- What can we do to convince the municipal authorities that Roma people should not be evicted without an alternative (social housing or land plots) and with sufficient time for demolition and rebuilding?
- How to persuade Roma that demolishing their handmade illegal houses and building them legally from scratch is better than postponing the issue indefinitely and being dependent in the future?
- How can neighbouring ethnic Bulgarians be convinced that the vulnerability of the Roma is an outcome of social circumstances and not a natural ethnic characteristic? How to explain that these people need targeted social policy challenging the established perceptions of social equality – and ultimately leading to social justice?

Due to the complex nature of the needs, a set of PAR techniques was implemented and each method was applied according to a different rationale as follows.

Micro-census

On 21–22 July 2014 about fifty-five illegal dwellings were demolished in Stara Zagora's Roma neighbourhood, Lozenetz. Evictions that ran in parallel with the demolition affected 57 households. The preliminary LERI needs assessment showed that about thirty-eight of those households still live in the neighbourhood, sheltered by friends or relatives. The demolition resulted in the displacement of 124 children. It has been more than a year since the families were displaced, and the micro census could show them, that someone was concerned about their living conditions and wanted to do something for their benefit.

It was designed to yield the information that the public authorities and NGO officers needed in order to develop and propose proper public policy. With no knowledge of the basic social demographics of the population at risk and without awareness about the views and attitudes of the affected people, any such policy would be inevitably general and vague. These data needed were as follows:

- exact number of affected households, number of children and other dependent household members detailed;
- exact number of households according to the possible solution in each case, based on the household income;
- share of households with available savings to bid for land and to build a new house following the standard procedures of the real estate market set in Bulgaria;
- share of households with available savings to bid for land but potential at risk of not finishing the house construction within the legal three-year period;
- share of households with that may need low interest microcredit to bid for and build a proper house;
- share of households with no available savings and income, i.e. those who are not able to benefit from the access to municipal plots and, therefore, may need social housing.

The intervention started with a pilot fieldwork training workshop facilitated by the LERI field expert. The trainees were local Roma people, including some 'transformational' actors, the potential protagonists of change from the affected households. The aim of the workshop was to build capacity for enumeration and data gathering and – in parallel – to build trust among the people from the community by informing them what this activity is about and why it is important and necessary. Building trust was essential since, very often, Roma people fear external interventions, especially enumeration, mainly because they are afraid it might lead to loss of social benefits and as a result – to losing their social status.

The workshop was held on 11 July 2015 in the premises of NGO WWB in the Lozenetz neighbourhood.

In order to evaluate the efficiency of addressing needs, one has to compare the input of time and funding with the input of time and funding of comparable activities. The micro-census was the most efficient procedure as it was also a participatory action. In fact, the municipality failed to find any displaced persons and had no idea about the households' status after the eviction. Having new addresses, the households from the first demolition had changed location and dispersed (including 12 households abroad and three elsewhere in the country). In order just to find these people, the municipality would need a troop of police officers and social workers, additional budget – perhaps even assisted by international cooperation partners.

The micro-census, on the contrary, relied on snowball sampling and community networking, therefore the scattered and displaced persons easily 'appeared' in a very efficient manner (i.e. it was a time and money-saving procedure concerning the fieldwork of the enumerators). Moreover, this snowball sampling approach was a very participatory tool: firstly, because the fieldworkers belonged to the local community, i.e. they were all well-known, which facilitated access.

Secondly, the respondents became referents for other target households and thus were actively engaged in the sampling procedure.

Bearing in mind the current national legislation concerning census activities, the municipal experts could only get information about the current address of a household; members of the household may refuse to answer questions about identity, income, household composition, attitudes, etc. Employing people from the community working for the community, improved access to the affected households and secured mutual trust between the enumerator and the respondents. Existing studies about Roma identity show that an unknown person is perceived as a 'durutno' (stranger), 'gomi' (person in power) or 'savuno' (executive officer), i.e. as a danger in some form or another. However, even a 'gadzo' (non-Roma) is treated and labelled more positively if already known (Pamporov 2004; Pamporov 2006; Pamporov 2008). Actually, the micro census succeeded in contacting all households already affected still living in Stara Zagora city.

For the same reason, the micro-census was also very efficient in relation to the households at risk of eviction. The municipality had sent police officers and social workers to deliver prior notices of eviction. It was a successful action from a bureaucratic point of view but failed from the social perspective. The households at risk simply denied they owned the houses, refused to open the yard gates, etc. The municipal experts were forced to stamp the prior notices on the front doors and to take pictures (as proof for the court, in case of objections). These experts lost the trust of the community from the outset and also could not get valid personal data or information about the attitudes. The micro census did not succeed in covering all households at risk due to high refusal rate (about 80 %) but was extremely effective in finding dispersed and vanished already affected population. 45 households were enumerated – something the municipal authorities failed to achieve at all.

Two factors determined the quality and extent of the local stakeholders' participation in the micro census:

- the enumerators belonged to the local community and therefore were not 'outsiders';
- the respondents in the first wave of sampling were well-informed in advance, belonging to the group of affected households or to the group of households at risk. These respondents were the starting point for applying the snowball sampling technique.

Error! Reference source not found. **visualizes the theoretical scheme of the snowball methodology applied.**

1. Initial information (run in parallel with the micro census) – this was about the LERI research and the new municipal decisions.
2. Standardised housing information (following the end of activity 3, see paragraph 2.3. below) – this was about the standardised construction plan, the possible modifications (if any), and the next legal steps.
3. Current campaign – information about legal steps, microcredit and social housing. The campaign is ongoing and it is the most sustainable outcome of LERI. People are visiting the WWB office on daily basis, look for and receive information related to legal procedure and housing and about the ready-made construction plan.
4. Ad hoc – in case there was a sudden change of policy context and/or regulations.
5. Individual cases – it turned out that the above four tools were not relevant and applicable to all households. In such cases, WWB consulted individually on specific cases. For example, a group of affected households received 'cadastral notice' about where the land plot for their future legal house would be located. Some had actually started a construction procedure. Then it became clear that without a public bid for the plot the notice is nothing more than 'dust thrown in the eyes of the evicted Roma'.

Standardised construction plan with focused group discussions on 'ideal housing'

According to the initial needs assessment procedure of the LERI research, the affected households and households at immediate risk could be classified under four household types with regard to their income, possible policy interventions, living conditions and the dwellings, as follows.

- Type A: Possessing savings to bid for land and to build a new house as in the mainstream housing market.
- Type B: Possessing savings to bid for land, but running the potential risk of not finishing the construction of the house within the legal three-year period.
- Type C: In need of microcredit with low interest rates for bidding and building a proper house.
- Type D: With no savings or income, i.e. not able to use the municipal plots and needing social housing.

Type A households required only a public bid and municipal right of construction. During the last year of the research a lot has been done in that respect, so such Roma households will be able to build their houses (so far only six families are in this group). Types B and C need minor assistance and little push to build their houses legally. The needs assessment procedure showed that a standardised construction plan could be a trigger for this process. In fact, at the end of the consensus conference (see the next activity below), there were four young Roma families who expressed their desire to take advantage of this opportunity.

There were two phases in this activity and the first one was completely participatory. The NGO WWB organised two focus group discussions with the affected people on the topic of 'ideal house': how many rooms a family would

need, what the setting should look like, how many floors and rooms, what would be the desired spatial orientation, etc. This phase was grounded in the understanding that people are more willing to live in something built according to their wishes. The outcome of these discussions was an 'ideal' type of dwelling the group provided later on to the architects for consideration. The architectural plan reflected both the quantitative outcome of the micro-census survey and qualitative attitudes.

Picture 3. Focus group discussion on ideal housing and in-house spatial distribution, facilitated by the LERI field expert (on the left) and 'zoomed' outcome of the discussion (on the right)



Source: World Without Borders, February 2016

The second phase involved finding a qualified architect to design the standardised construction plan (if possible of 'modular' type, i.e. permitting variations). The NGO WWB succeeded in convincing a team of two university professors, one construction tutor and two MA students to prepare such a plan pro bono (

Picture), covering only their travel costs and stationery, with the option to pay only for any adjustments to the plan needed in a specific geodesy of given land plots.

Picture 4. A visualisation of a modular semi-detached house, presented at the LERI consensus conference



Source: Architectural team of The University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia, with leader Prof Valeri Ivanov, April 2016

Consensus conference

The decision to provide new plots in the Roma neighbourhood at a discounted price was adopted by the municipal council with 37 'Agree' and 2 'Abstained' votes on 18 September 2015. However, bearing in mind that the earlier three attempts were censured in earlier votes in the course of the annual sessions, there was no certainty that the current decision would last and, obviously, it was not implemented in a timely manner. The possibility of a 'patriotic' (i.e. anti-Gypsy) party coming to power in the locality after the next local elections in four years (around September 2019) could again raise similar tensions around the issue of the Roma dwellings. Therefore, mediation between Roma and ethnic Bulgarian communities and the local authorities was needed in order to achieve permanent and shared consensus.

The aim of the consensus conference was to bring all stakeholders together.¹⁹ It gave voice to the voiceless and at the same time gave the authorities a chance to explain the legal concerns, avoiding the gossip and 'resistance' of some informal leaders. The consensus conference was a good place to involve all stakeholders in the standardised construction plan policy. In fact, the consensus conference responded to certain mediation needs, namely:

- public authorities needed to reach consensus with both Roma and Bulgarian communities about the framework and implementation of the housing policy towards Roma people and other vulnerable groups in the municipality;

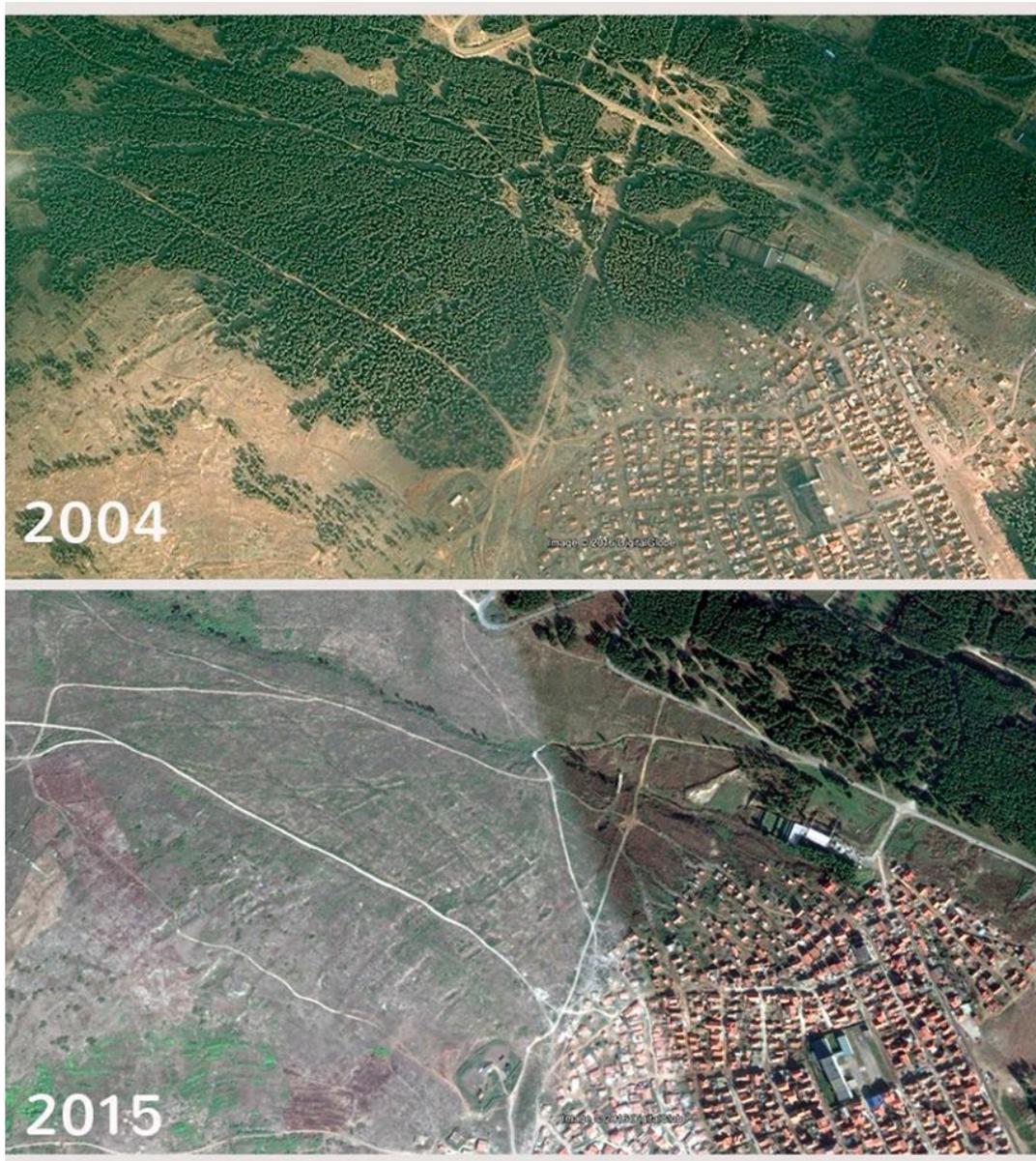
¹⁹ See Local stakeholders above.

- the Roma community needed to reach consensus with both public authorities and the ethnic Bulgarian neighbours about the framework and implementation of the housing policy towards Roma people and other vulnerable groups in the municipality;
- the ethnic Bulgarian community needed to reach consensus with both public authorities and the Roma community about the framework and implementation of the housing policy towards Roma people and other vulnerable groups in the municipality.

This conference was also needed because in the first months of 2016 a comparative 'before-after' satellite image started to 'warm up' anti-Gypsy attitudes again. The image, presented below, was widely broadcast by various Facebook groups, such as 'The Truth for Stara Zagora' and shows the expansion of the Roma neighbourhood beyond the urban regulated areas in 2015 – compared with an image from 2004 – which is accompanied by total deforestation of the surrounding area (

Picture 5).

Picture 5. A 'before–after' comparative satellite picture of the spatial expansion of the illegal dwellings and deforestation of the area, 2004–2016



Source: The Truth for Stara Zagora²⁰, 2015

The consensus conference provided a common ground for understanding the needs and fears of all the stakeholders, pointing out the human rights dimension (no eviction without alternative housing) yet complying with the legal framework of urban planning (no out-of-town dwellings planning regulation, i.e. without suitable urban infrastructure and sanitation). As it brought all stakeholders together, this event emerges as the major trust-building activity among the LERI interventions carried out in Stara Zagora.

²⁰ <https://web.facebook.com/groups/391539010952192/>

The people attending the consensus conference were diverse, listed in the order they signed the attendance list:

- affected Roma and Roma at risk of eviction (around 50 individuals)
- Regional Healthcare Inspectorate officer
- regional ombudsman
- Employment Agency officer
- Social Assistance Agency officer
- local Commission Against Delinquency officer
- deputy mayor on social issues
- Illegal Dwellings chief officer
- International Youth Centre officer
- Thracian University – Social Work Department officer
- University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy – two professors
- University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy – two MA students
- CEO of WWB.

Picture 65. The consensus conference at the Municipal Hall, facilitated by World Without Borders



Source: World Without Borders, April 2016

4. The local interventions - goals, partners, process and results

In the course of the LERI research (a little more than a year), the public authorities in Stara Zagora municipality changed the approach to the Roma illegal dwellings twice. The case started with the first wave of demolitions (21 July 2014), continued with the municipal decision to open a bid for six plots in

the Lozenetz neighbourhood (18 September 2015) and arrived at a new wave of demolitions and a social housing project (20 May 2016). This change was crucial for the human rights of Roma and for the Roma integration policies, not only in Stara Zagora but also in Bulgaria in general.

Within the LERI research, the local team implemented all activities in line with the preliminary timetable. The most significant milestones could be considered to be:

- 8 January 2016, kick-off meeting;
- 15 January 2016, when the actual fieldwork implementation began with the start of the micro census and info campaign;
- 13 February 2016, when the first focus group on the ideal housing started and gave insights to the architects;
- 8 April 2016, when the consensus conference took place.

Table 1 shows the implementation schedule. The dates in blue represent the activities performed in Stara Zagora (the fieldwork location). The dates in red represent the activities performed in Sofia (the LERI country coordinator's location).

Table 4. LERI Implementation timing in 2016 for the Lozenetz quarter in Stara Zagora

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
Micro census	15-start	28-end (failed)*	31-end (failed)*	Ongoing	Ongoing	30-end	
Info campaign	15-start	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	30-end	26-restarted
Focus groups		13, 20 (27 failed)*					
Meetings with team of architects	20	24	24	8, 14	(20 failed)*	(30 failed)*	
Construction plan			1-start	8-end			
Consensus conference				8			
StZ Team meetings (Pamporov + WWB)	8, 20	11, 12, 13, 24	24	7, 9	19, 20		2, 19, 30

* Note: 'Failed' means an event was planned but cancelled in the last moment due to fieldwork-related circumstances

Source: LERI Field expert, 2016

The capacity and trust building through the local implementation in Stara Zagora was grounded in the understanding that community social capital is very often based on trust relationships between the community members and its formal and informal leaders. On the one hand, the interventions in Stara Zagora aimed at securing participation of informal Romany 'transformational leaders' – those able to combine their own initiative (entrepreneurial skills) with a vision for the neighbourhood.²¹ "If we convince some entrepreneurial and successful young men with kids, such as Ahmed to join us and to serve as an example, many more will join us after. The personal success of someone is a key for convincing the rest of the people"²².

Unlike the global trend for erosion of trust in public administration,²³ the last local elections in Stara Zagora showed extremely high support for the mayor and their administration. Thus, the research activities aimed at public authorities' participation through transparent policy decision-making with respect to human rights: "We heard they have taken some decisions about the houses but what,

²¹ Purdue, D. (2001), 'Neighbourhood governance: Leadership, trust and social capital', *Urban Studies*, November Vol 38, pp. 2211-2224, doi:10.1080/00420980120087135.

²² CEO local Roma NGO WWB, interview, 2014, male. The name is changed for ethical reasons, but keeps the name system as subgroup indicator

²³ Denhardt, R.B. (2002), 'Trust as capacity: The role of integrity and responsiveness', *Public Organization review: A global journal*, Vol 2, pp. 65-76.

actually, we do not know. There is no one in the municipality who comes and talks with us"²⁴.

The implementation began with a kick-off meeting, which set up the entire implementation plan: actions, timing and participators. The LERI local team agreed that the consensus conference would be the place to bring all stakeholders together. WWB suggested that the best timing for this was on 8 April, the International Roma Day. Due to the political engagement and social focus of such an event, the municipal authorities and regional media would be 'obliged' to join and support an event devoted to Roma people. Once the consensus conference day was set up, all other activities were scheduled in order to fit this timing. The LERI local team agreed to finish the survey within a month and a half (by the end of February). In the face of huge mistrust in the community, the team decided on 24th February to move the end-date to 31st March, which would still allow for rapid data processing and presentation of the preliminary findings at the consensus conference. Unfortunately, this deadline was also missed. By the end of March, only 83 households had been covered out of the 300 estimated to be at risk during the needs assessment. In a meeting held on 24th March it was agreed that the enumeration walk in the neighbourhood would be halted and replaced by ad hoc enumeration. This meant that the fieldworker had to search on foot for the households at risk, however any household interested in the LERI research and housing opportunities would be enumerated on a voluntary basis during the info campaign. In fact all evicted families were covered by the snowball sampling approach. The highest refusal rate came from the orange zone, where some resistance was organised due to the expressed stereotype: *"If you are posing questions about my [illegal] house, it is because you want to help the municipality to demolish it!"*²⁵.

In parallel with the census, the local collaborators of WWB – social work students from Thracian University – accompanied by Roma from the neighbourhood, provided the affected households and households at risk with information about the future eviction plans and legal options for building a house. The information was also openly available at the office to the entire Roma community – not only the main targeted groups.

After the two focus groups on ideal housing, on 24th February a second meeting with a professor in architecture took place. During the meeting the views of the Roma were presented and discussed, together with some technicalities: the timing of the implementation, what was needed for a ready-made plan, how the MA student working on it would be involved. During the third meeting with the professor, an MA student of architecture and urban planning presented research on best practice of Roma living conditions in Europe and how this could be combined with the views surveyed in Lozenetz. The final design for the standardized modular house was discussed and the MA student working on it was given until 8 April to complete the plan and present it at the consensus conference.

²⁴ 58 year-old orange zone resident, informal interview, 2015, male

²⁵ 36 year-old Roma resident of the orange zone, an open argument for interview refusal, female. The lady is the wife of a person who has gained wealth through illegal activities. She is the one who submitted a help request to the national ombudsman.

The consensus conference brought stakeholders together. The process map below shows the flows of interaction between the different participants at the conference. The local authorities showed their commitment to the topic and to the LERI research by hosting the conference in the biggest conference room in the Municipal Hall. Since there is a remote municipal office in the Roma neighbourhood, this was the first time some of the Roma had entered the Municipal Hall. In that respect the LERI research literally has opened the institutional doors for Roma people, enabling the municipality to show its commitment to finding a proper solution. The deputy mayor on social issues and by the chief officer of illegal constructions control attended the meeting. Both of them made a presentation about future municipal plans and policies, and the idea about possible municipal social housing for the most vulnerable Roma was presented for the first time at a public event, and some official information about the planned infrastructural developments in the neighbourhood was disseminated to its target audience.

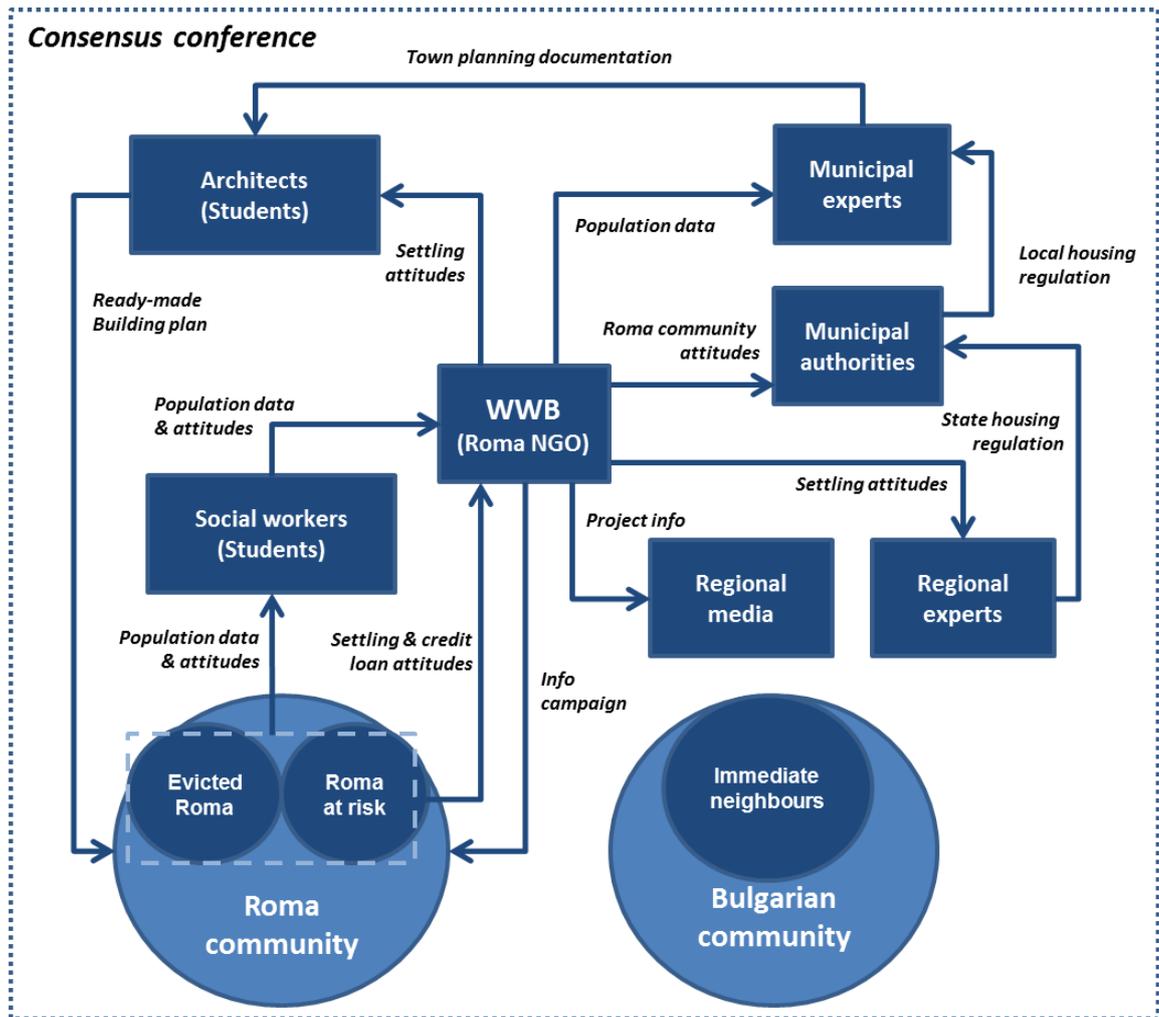
The presentations of the architectural team played a central role in the conference, since the standardized modular plan was the leading idea of the local community and most people came to see and understand what's on offer for them. Of course, there was the initial attitude: *"If it is for free – cannot be good"*²⁶; but the result was that four households that had the money for a plot of land wanted to use the plan. The local Roma NGO leader was extremely happy about this, because his understanding of the process was: *"If we succeed with four families now, there are many more to come. And snowball, by snowball, we are going to have a snowperson at the end"*²⁷, i.e. the political games with illegal housing will end.

Figure 6 presents the stakeholders, who participated in the consensus conference and the activities and interaction flows prior to the consensus conference. WWB played a core role of the LERI implementation facilitating the local implementation to a high degree.

Figure 6. Organogram of the LERI implementation model in Stara Zagora with all stakeholders who presented at the consensus conference mapped, and interaction flows prior to the conference indicated

²⁶ Roma resident of the orange zone, female, age 36. This is the same 'resistance lady' cited above. It is very indicative that she came with the intention to ruin the possibility of consensus during the consensus conference, but the male elders made her be quiet because they liked the modular house idea.

²⁷ Roma NGO leader, consensus conference, 8 April, male



Source: LERI Field expert, 2016

5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

All PAR methods in Stara Zagora were appropriate for the local context. However, running the micro-census in parallel with the info campaign could possibly be considered a mistake. This was undertaken due to the limited research budget, narrow implementation time due to contractual delays and challenging winter-time fieldwork, which increased the refusal rate enormously. If the micro-census had been first run, without disclosure of the aim, the expected refusal rate in Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria would have been about 5–10 %. The informational campaign reached 75 % among the households at risk of eviction. It came from misunderstanding that *"If we participate in your poll [the micro census] the municipality will evict us"*²⁸, i.e. because the local municipal officers would learn whom to give the eviction notices to. People who are used to living 'anonymously' at a given address will not trust any fieldworker that claims they will protect the resident's anonymity, even a fieldworker from the community. Moreover, people who are happy in their current house, although illegally built, want to keep it and are absolutely resistant towards *"eviction thoughts and talks"*. A common response to LERI's fieldworkers was: *"I do not*

²⁸ Roma resident of the yellow zone, male elder

want to talk about this. I do not want to think about this. Rather tell me what to do to keep this house as it is" (Roma residents).

The participatory standardized modular house-plan design was a very effective method of changing attitudes towards a new house: *"If it looks like that, I am going immediately to move in"* (Roma resident, consensus conference). In fact, this was a standardised procedure in civil construction building and interior design – the customer outlines their preferences and usually this is reflected in the design. So, it was necessary to start treating the vulnerable people as customers of social housing and to tailor the social housing to fit their criteria. Then, the level of resistance and social tensions decreased significantly.

The consensus conference was an amazing tool, dominated by the main topic – the standardized modular plan – although the 'Bulgarian neighbours' were rather 'invisible' at the discussions. In fact, anti-Gypsy rhetoric was curtailed since the question *"Is this house going to be available only for Roma, or could we [the Bulgarians] use it, too?"* (Participant, consensus conference, April 2016, ethnic Bulgarian man) was answered: *"No, it is a standardized modular plan for everybody and everybody will be able to bid for a land plot"*²⁹. The people who loathe or even hate Roma would not want to live in a Roma neighbourhood, so they are not going to bid for land plots in the new planned extension. However, it is a public procedure and therefore, open to anybody, so the answer was not misleading.

Despite its elements of success, the consensus conference was also a source of disappointment and lost faith. Some municipal officials who had been directly involved in housing integration depicted the LERI field expert as a *"white coloured, white-collar person"* and whispering into his ear provocative "jokes" like *"We should open more windows – it stinks of Gypsies too much"*. For the sake of consensus and in order not to ruin the discussion, the LERI field expert simply found a way to move to the opposite corner of the room but it was hardly a consensus reached. The latent racist attitudes are not a rarity in Bulgarian society, but tolerating them in a EU Member State administration – regardless central or local – is unacceptable. Until it remains like that, hate speech in Bulgarian society will continue to be a de facto normalised practice even in national parliament and in the Council of Ministers.³⁰ There is an urgent need for a rigorous EU law and prosecution with detention for such cases. Otherwise neither the LERI research, nor other similar projects, will be really successful.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment came from the expectations raised that were not possible to meet. It triggered a long and complicated process with numerous hurdles, each of which may derail the entire process of solving the housing deprivation of Roma in Stara Zagora. A failure of even one single element (like failure to secure funding electricity and sewage in the allotted plots, which is a precondition for legal construction permits) would derail the entire endeavour).

²⁹ LERI field expert, consensus conference, April 2016

³⁰ The political season at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 became very indicative as there was no prosecution procedures for the Minister of Health who called Roma people *"beasts, cattle"* and latterly, an MP from an ultra-right party called Roma people *"pongids"* and compared Romany women to stray bitches.

In that regard LERI was (and was supposed to be) just one of the many elements necessary to solve a burning issue. Reaching the ultimate goals would however depend on the success of every single step in the entire chain of elements, procedures and steps involved. And vice versa – a failure (even of one single element) would backfire, producing more resentment and pushing the people deeper in informality and illegal housing conditions – definitely undesirable but the only feasible.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The LERI research interventions had some impact on 1,500–2,000 people, although approximately 75–80 % of them did not want to provide any personal data. In fact, the micro-census exhaustively covered 100 % of those who were in most severe need – the evicted persons still living in the neighbourhood, but only about 10 % of the people at immediate risk of eviction. However, one could say that, indirectly, there are about 20,000 more Roma in this neighbourhood who are benefiting from the information campaign, and could benefit from the standardised modular house, and are actually benefiting from the new ‘no eviction without solution’ policy. The LERI local team implemented large-scale interventions with a small-scale budget, succeeding to do so mainly due to their absolute commitment and a lot of voluntary work from WWB’s staff, social work students and architecture students. At the time of writing this locality study, the sustainability of the results seemed to be very promising, and as well as the positive effects made on municipal policymaking.

Unfortunately, in this case ‘until the writing of the study’ are not just parasite words but a necessary analytical stipulation. Roma are still in the trap of anti-Gypsyism, prejudices, hate speech and political games. The local administration was smart enough to find a way to act ‘pro’ and ‘con’ simultaneously, thus blocking any reasonable public advocacy of both sides – pro-Roma and anti-Gypsy stakeholders. On a positive note, some municipal decisions were taken, such as offering land plots at a discounted price, and establishing a social housing structure (which did not exist before). On the negative side is the permanent threat of eviction stemming from the notices being distributed in some sub-areas of the neighbourhood, then postponing the action for an undefined term; then distributing new eviction notices in another sub-area, then postponing again, etc. It simply looks like a political game creating suspense and insecurity. As a result, there are defined and regulated land-plots but there are currently no public bids for them. Moreover, there is no proper public infrastructure and thus no interest from Roma people. The lack of interest has been used as an excuse for not having public bids, and the vicious circles is complete. It looks like a Catch 22 situation: in order to have a public bid, you need interested people; in order to get people interested, a proper infrastructure is needed, but to build an infrastructure, a set of public bids is needed to define the scope of the investments. As a result, nothing happens.

However, despite these games, due to the LERI research, there are four families committed to have houses on the new plots and there is a civil organisation that is able and ready to advocate for them. At the time of writing the study, it was not possible to evaluate its success, nor to forecast the future moves of the administration. On 1 July 2016, WWB initiated an official meeting with the mayor, the chief municipal architect, the local LERI team and the designers of

the standardised modular plan. The meeting failed to take place; instead, a new demolition wave took place on 24 July.

With regard to the research questions listed in section 2, the conclusion are mixed. The Roma people completely understood that illegal dwellings were not acceptable, but being uneducated and unemployed, they saw this as the only alternative to homelessness:

*"This is all that I can afford – one room. I do not want to live like that but I have a bank loan to pay. I quitted my job, because the bank blocked my salary. Now we live with whatever I earn for the day. And we need this house because I have two kids. I do not want to leave them in the rain."*³¹

From that point of view, the Roma completely understood that it was better to demolish your own handmade illegal house now and to rebuild it legally, rather than keep postponing and being dependent in the future. Unfortunately, most of them have no place to go after the eventual demolition and that is why they wait until the last moment. The case development on 24 July 2016 shows that most Roma are hopeful – 17 out of 26 deconstructed their own dwellings in order to reuse the materials later (hoping for a legal house on the new land plots or for an illegal house elsewhere).

And that is how the worst news came. Municipal officers are highly educated people and actually understand very well that people should not be evicted without an alternative: social housing or land plots. However, there are two reasons why this knowledge is not translated into practice. One is that some of the officers in charge are actually quite chauvinistic and racist, and do not care about Roma people, especially those who bear the stigma of multi-minority status, such as the Millet people from the brown zone: non-white, Turkish-speaking Muslim migrants. Secondly, even if they wished, it is not in their power to make decisions, therefore they are at the mercy of the political games of the elected administration. When a mayor is elected on the basis of a campaign promising to demolish the Roma neighbourhood, it is very hard for a single municipal officer to fight for the rights of Roma people without losing his or her job.

The conclusion is directly related to the final research question. It is very hard for the neighbouring Bulgarians to understand that the Roma's vulnerability is not a natural ethnic characteristic but is due to poor social circumstances, that these people need targeted social policy. There are a series of public reforms to be carried out in order to achieve that goal. First, the educational curriculum needs improvement towards the inclusion of civic education classes and culturally diverse syllabi. Second, the hate speech in the media needs to be effectively tackled. The current ethical code is only advisory, not compulsory. And finally, a major reform of the prosecution practice is needed. Now, the national and regional prosecutor offices act as lawyers of the politicians using hate speech and refuse to start legal proceedings against them, although some civil society organisations submit relevant claims.

³¹ 28 year-old Roma resident of the brown zone, focus group, 2016, male

So far, such reforms are far from materializing in Bulgaria. However, here comes the good news. The LERI research in Stara Zagora – despite all minor setbacks – proved that participatory actions can build local consensus. Although the effect was temporary – and between 8 April and 24 July the administration changed its mind embarking on new evictions, without providing alternative housing – it was a good first step. The land plots are not only the subject of public debate but were voted on by the municipal council. A modular house construction plan also exists and everybody will be able to use it free of charge. Moreover, it was achieved through the active participation of the local Roma community, and there are families who already want to use it because they like it. Therefore, if these families succeed in having legally built houses on municipal plots, it may be the first step towards the mainstream society understanding that targeted policies bring about social justice and are an important step towards future social integration.

7. Additional Information

Acknowledgements

The LERI research in Stara Zagora would not have been possible without the participation of so many kind and devoted people.

First of all, I would like to thank the **BOLT International Consulting** team Eleftheria Koumalatsou, Dimitris Ntontis and Lucas Katsikaris for inviting me and making everything possible. Special thanks to the LERI linguist for the extremely valuable English editing of my deliverables.

My great acknowledgement is for the **architectural team**, which made our initial idea possible: Professor Valeri Ivanov, Kaloyan Kolev, Stefan Mirchev and Tzanko Todorov

Special thanks for the **regional and local experts** who found some time in their working schedules to meet the LERI team and to contribute to the research with ideas, comments and knowledge: Regional Deputy Governor Mr Manuil Manev, Deputy Mayor Mrs Ivanka Sotiriva, Angel Stomanyarski, Rosica Rancheva, Mircho Hristov, Diana Ivanova, Ana Todorova and Gergana Georgieva.

Special thanks to all **Roma community members**, who were brave to raise their voices and to help finding a proper housing solution:

Plamen Rusev, Ivanov, Tzacho Angelov, Zhivo Stoyanov, Aneta Mihaylova, Ivan K. Ivanov, Aylan Ahmed, Serhat Salim, Krasimir Gunev, Zlatka Ivanova, Rumyana Slavova, Boyka Gogova, Dimiter Dimitrov, Simion Simionov, Kolyo Ganchev, Ivan A. Ivanov, Gencho Stoyanov, Mitko Mitev, Lyubomir Penev, Nanka Karagyozova, Yulian Andreev, Ganka Stefanova, Stefka Ilieva, Asen Alexandrov, Atanas Asenov, Danko Angelov, Apostol Dimitrov, Anka Ivanova, Antoaneta Ivova

I would like also to thank **the field photographer**, Svetlana Bachevanova, and **the documentary film director**, Raycho Chaprazov. I really love their contributions!

Finally, none of this research could have been done properly without the fully dedicated hearts of Gancho Iliev and Milena Ilieva, and their **World Without Borders**' team and fieldwork collaborators: Stefan Evtimov, Diana Racheva, Antoaneta Stefanova, Vesela Mareva, Maria Gancheva, Mariyka Mineva, Julietta Alexandrova, Emilia Koleva, Zvezdelina Valentinova, Pavlina Delcheva. Thank you. Thank you with all my heart. *Oven bahtale, amale!*

Annex: Major Roma groups in Bulgaria

Daskane Roma

Translated to the letter, today Daskane Roma means both Bulgarian as well as Christian Roma. The word 'Das' was used during the Ottoman period to denote 'slave' or 'servant'. At that time it was related to the Turkish word 'Gyaur' (infidel, non-Muslim). Under this label there are about 26 subgroups, speaking different patois of the so-called Balkan-type Romany dialects. Daskane Roma represent the prevailing share of the Roma population in North-Western and Central Northern Bulgaria. There are two specific subgroups with a preferred Bulgarian identity that could be related to this group.

In South-Eastern and Central Southern Bulgaria, there is a group called 'Bulgarian Gypsies' by the Bulgarians, 'Daskane Roma' by the other Roma groups and 'Gyaur Çingenesi' by the Turks. The group members call themselves 'Asparukh's Bulgarians' or 'Old Bulgarians', but the surrounding local population most often labels them as '**Grey Pigeons**³²', *Demirdzhii* (i.e. blacksmiths from the Turkish word 'demir' meaning iron). This subgroup lives relatively amassed in the valley of the Maritza River. The Grey Pigeons prefer endogamous marriages within the group and used to avoid mixed marriages with other ethnic groups in the country. Except for Bulgarians – as far as this is their preferred identity. Usually the Grey Pigeons are Eastern Orthodox Christians but, due to the influence of the Pentecostal movement, in some rural areas they are changing their denomination. The curious fact about this group is that in some settlements the mother tongue of the group is Romany but in other settlements it is Bulgarian. Despite that, they recognise each other as members of the group and marriages between Romany and Bulgarian speakers is not an exception, however, the location of the post-marital residence defines the language that is used at home.

In North-Western Bulgaria, there is a group that Bulgarians label as Bulgarian Gypsies or 'Converted Gypsies' and Roma call them '**Tsutsumani**'. The Tsutsumani people are Eastern Orthodox Christians, neither accepted by the Bulgarians as 'real Bulgarians' nor by Roma as 'real Roma'. Their mother tongue is Bulgarian but there are some words of Romany origin in their patois and kinship terminology. Usually, the Tsutsumani do not live in ethnically segregated neighbourhoods but are dispersed among the Bulgarian population. They are much more integrated than other Roma in that region, for example, the household size, the level of education and unemployment rate are the same as for the Bulgarians in that region. The Calderash Roma (see below) use the word Tsutsumani as a pejorative label for 'rotten Roma' and also apply it to all subgroups of the Daskane group.

Horahane Roma

Horahane Roma means both Turkish as well as Muslim Roma. Under this label, there are about 36 subgroups, speaking different patois of the Balkan-type Romany dialects, lexically influenced to different degrees by the Turkish

³² It has the connotation of a 'mixed population'.

language. Horahane Roma represent the prevailing share of the Roma population in North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Southern Bulgaria. There are some specific subgroups with preferred Turkish identity that could be classified here.

In the provinces where predominantly Horahane Roma reside, some people call themselves '**Millet**'. The Bulgarians label them as 'Turkish Gypsies' and the Turks in the country as 'Millet Çingenesi' ('people's Gypsies'). The other Roma groups have an ambiguous attitude towards the Millet people. Some accept them as Roma but others consider them Turks. The mother tongue of the Millet is Turkish. However, in some settlements, the elders use Romany as 'a secret language', and in other settlements, the local Millet patois consists of a small set of Romany words.

In the Rhodopes mountain range, there is a group of people who call themselves, and are called by the others as well, '**Agoupti**'. This is a dialect form of 'Egyptians' (the same as the English word 'Gypsies'). In the mid-20th century, Bulgarian ethnographers classified them as Gypsies due to a folklore song, which defines a female Agoupti protagonist as 'a black Gypsy woman'. The Agoupti community is a good example of a group change in language and ethnic identity. In the years right after the Second World War they had an Egyptian identity and used a local Bulgarian dialect as their mother tongue. In the late 20th century, they already spoke Turkish and declared themselves to be Turkish in the population censuses in 2001 and 2011. Most probably, similar to the Millet people, a determinant factor in this case is their following Islam. Traditionally, the Agoupti people used to be blacksmiths, and the elders used Romany as a secret 'craft' language.

Calderashya

The name of this group comes from the Romanian word 'caldera' (a cauldron) and it relates to their traditional male occupation in the near past – coppersmith. Because of their craft and regardless of the state regulations during the early years of the communist regime,³³ they travelled across the country until 1975/76. Unlike most other Roma groups, Calderash people do not live in segregated neighbourhoods, but are dispersed among mainstream society. In the period after 1989 in the districts of the three biggest cities of Bulgaria (Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna) some micro-quarters of kindred Calderash families appeared which numbered around ten to twelve houses. There are about sixteen subgroups of Calderash people in Bulgaria sharing some clan features and structure.

The Calderashya speak a patois of the so-called Northern (or 'New') Wallachian-type Romany dialects that are under a strong influence from the Romanian language. Although most of the Calderash people around the world are Roman Catholics, in Bulgaria they are Eastern Orthodox, as is the majority of the Bulgarian population. The Calderash Roma are the most endogamous Romany group in Bulgaria and stick to strict rules regarding 'prestige marriages' between the subgroups (clans) based on bride price.

Kalaydzhes

³³ Law forbade vagrancy i.e. the nomadic life, after December 1958.

Within the classification of the Romany groups living in Bulgaria, the Kalaydzhes subgroup is placed as a part of the Daskane, Horahane or Calderashya. This is because Kalaydzhes living in North-Eastern and South-Western Bulgaria are Muslim, but the Kalaydzhes living in South-Eastern and Central Southern Bulgaria are Orthodox Christians. The Kalaydzhes living in North-Western Bulgaria have evidence of a Muslim past (such as the Muslim names of their ancestors and some Turkish words in their kinship terminology), but they do not follow Islamic rites and customs. On the one hand, the common feature among the different Kalaydzhes groups is the traditional male occupation – tinsmith (hence the name of the group from the Turkish 'kalay' – 'tin'). On the other hand, all Kalaydzhes speak a patois that belongs to the Southern (or 'Old') Wallachian-type Romany dialects. Despite these two similarities, there are no marriages between the different Kalaydzhes subgroups. Moreover, the Kalaydzhes from South-Eastern and Central Southern Bulgaria are also extremely endogamous. They practice 'bride trade' and have developed a bride market system based on annual gatherings in four locations – Bachkovo Monastery, Plovdiv, Yambol and Stara Zagora.

Ludari (a.k.a. Rudari)

In the rural areas of Central and Eastern Bulgaria, there are groups of people labelled by the others as Wallachian or Romanian Gypsies. According to the local patois, the members of the group call themselves Ludari in Southern Bulgaria or Rudari in Northern Bulgaria. Because of their traditional occupations, they are also known among the surrounding population as Kopanari (whittlers) or Mechkari (bear trainers), which correspond to the self-label of Lingurari (spoon makers) and Ursari (bear trainers). During the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the Ludari self-identified as Romanians, Wallachians or Bulgarians and never as Roma. Usually the elders are ready to accept that they are Romanian Gypsies because the words 'tsigan' and 'tsiganka' mean 'husband' and 'wife'³⁴ in their dialect. The mother tongue of the Ludari group is a dialect of the Romanian language. Although the Ludari people live in segregated neighbourhoods, they do not differ from the local Bulgarian population as far as the level of education, employment rate and household size are concerned.

³⁴ In fact, the words 'Rom' and 'Romni' in Romanes (i.e. the Romany language) bear the same meaning.