Local engagement for Roma inclusion

Locality study
Lille (France),
2016

Author: Aurélien Dierckens

DISCLAIMER: This document was commissioned under contract by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) for the project Local engagement for Roma inclusion. The information and views contained in the document do not necessarily reflect the views or the official position of FRA. The document is made publicly available for transparency and information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or legal opinion.
Contents

1. Executive summary........................................................................................................................................... 3
2. Description of the local context.................................................................................................................. 3
   Challenges associated with the “inclusion villages”............................................................................... 6
   Overview of local stakeholders ............................................................................................................. 7
   Overall aim of LERI in the Lille metropolitan area.............................................................................. 10
3. PAR methodology employed .................................................................................................................. 12
   1st PAR Cycle: participatory needs assessment .................................................................................. 13
      1. Interviews and visits....................................................................................................................... 13
      2. Community visioning .................................................................................................................. 14
   2nd PAR cycle: designing the expression groups.................................................................................. 16
   3rd PAR cycle: Implementing the expression groups .......................................................................... 18
   4th PAR cycle: training for Roma and non-Roma working with/for Roma to enhance Roma participation........................................................................................................................................ 18
4. The local interventions - goals, partners, process and results ................................................................. 20
5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned ..................................................................................................... 22
6. Conclusions and recommendations......................................................................................................... 24
1. Executive summary

The actions implemented under the LERI research in the Lille metropolitan area focused on building the confidence and empowerment of Roma originating from EU member states, primarily from Romania, living in “inclusion villages”. These are mobile houses (in some cases apartments) developed by the municipal and regional authorities of the Lille metropolitan area to house Roma families in seven municipalities: Lezennes, Hellemmes, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Lille, Halluin, Faches Thumesnil. Early on in the establishment of the ‘inclusion villages’, attempts were made to facilitate the participation of the Roma in consultative structures set up by the association administering the sites. However, little progress was made. Using various participatory action research (PAR) techniques, the LERI research in the Lille metropolitan area aimed a) to understand the barriers, which were preventing the Roma families from participating in these structures; and b) to create more conducive circumstances for their participation to begin. In practice, this was approached through the implementation of ‘expression groups’, a series of informal meetings between the Roma families and the association managing the ‘inclusion villages’ which the Roma were invited to organise themselves. By monitoring and evaluating the evolution of the meetings, the LERI team identified key obstacles and drivers affecting the integration of the Roma families in the ‘inclusion villages’ and formulated a series of recommendations with implications not only for the integration of Roma in the Lille metropolitan area, but also in other parts of Europe.

Keywords/Tags: participation, housing, inclusion, expression, training.

2. Description of the local context

The Lille metropolitan area is situated in the region of Nord-Pas de Calais and is well integrated into the urban environment in terms of infrastructure, transport networks and economic activities. Today it is estimated that there are 3,116 Roma migrants living in slums in the region of Nord-Pas de Calais, the majority originating from Romania. The Lille metropolitan area (where 92.5% of the population in the region lives) has a significant Roma presence.¹

Efforts have been made at various levels of administration to address the difficult situation of Roma living in slums in the Lille metropolitan area. The national Roma integration strategy, adopted by France in 2011, saw a number of positive initiatives at national level to address the needs of all marginalized populations, including the Roma.² The strategy is mainstreamed into local plans in order “to

¹ Réseau associatif Româ Nord-Pas de Calais (2013), *Etude régionale des besoins en formation et en insertion professionnelle des personnes de nationalité roumaine de culture rom*, Lille.
² France’s National Roma Integration Strategy defines policies focused on the gradual elimination of poverty and social exclusion among all marginalised groups, including Roma and Travellers’ communities, in particular in the areas of education, employment, health and housing. The strategy emphasises the importance of developing measures designed to give Roma and Travellers’ communities access to common law policies.
help secure the integration of Roma migrants, with special efforts in access to housing, health, education and employment, and also more broadly in the fight against discrimination”. The strategy also made financial commitments to support the implementation of Roma integration projects. Also noteworthy was the setting up of an Inter-ministerial Delegation for Housing, responsible for advancing an inter-ministerial strategy for slums reduction.

In November 2011, a regional contribution to the national Roma integration strategy was presented by Michel-François Delannoy, Vice President of Lille Métropole³. Housing and inclusion were two important components of the Nord-Pas de Calais Roma integration strategy. As regards housing, the regional strategy’s objective was to eliminate the slums and provide solutions to accommodation and integration. The strategy foresaw the creation of 200 places in “villages d’insertion” (“inclusion villages”). The “inclusion villages” are a dedicated housing social service for Roma migrants coming from Romania. They are a temporary social service provided to families who wish to stay in France and integrate into French society. The families who are selected to join these “inclusion villages” need to agree to certain conditions and responsibilities, including respecting the certain rules of accommodation and agreeing to learn French, to search for a job and to put their children in school.

The origins of the “inclusion villages” can be traced to a needs assessment (‘mission de coordination’) conducted in Nord-Pas de Calais from November 2007 to October 2008 by the association AFEJI on behalf of the Departmental Direction of Social Cohesion. This revealed the need to create a specific place of accommodation and support for a part of the EU mobile citizen population. The civil society organization AFEJI proposed the creation of ‘inclusion villages’ at the end of 2008, and the first ones began to be implemented in 2009. In the context of the adoption of the regional integration strategy, the President of Lille metropolitan area, Martine Aubry, announced the decision to support the development of further ‘inclusion villages’ in the different municipalities of the metropolitan areas (there are 81 municipalities). Seven municipalities answered the call and today an ‘inclusion village’ exists in Lezennes, Hellemmes, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Lille, Halluin, Faches Thumesnil.

The "inclusion villages“ are small units of accommodation, predominantly in mobile houses, but also in apartments. In 2013, the city of Tourcoing chose to participate in the initiative by making available a house organized in the form of three apartments. The sites are well integrated into the urban environment, often centrally located, and, upon arrival, the families living there receive support to help them familiarize themselves with their local environment and with the different institutions and interlocutors who will provide them with services on a daily basis. This type of support is necessary as, owing to their situation as mobile EU citizens, the families often have difficulties understanding French administrative procedures. The support includes the provision of information on the rights and duties associated with residence in the "inclusion villages”. It takes the form of individual or collective mediation and continues

---

throughout the period of residence of the families. It aims to facilitate exchange of information and good cooperation.

The Roma integration project “inclusion villages” hosted 134 people at the time that the LERI research was implemented, and provides the Roma families living there with stable accommodation. The accommodation is composed of individual, furnished rooms, a kitchen corner and a bathroom. The sites offer a safe environment for the Roma families including all basic needs, including respect for their privacy. By situating the “inclusion villages” in the heart of each municipality, rather than in faraway locations, the project also aims to foster contact between the Roma and non-Roma members of the neighbourhood, thus addressing the isolation, which so often affects Roma communities. By meeting the basic needs of the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages”, the project aims to encourage them to reflect and act on their longer-term needs, in particular their search for a job (and through a job, long-term housing outside of the “inclusion villages”).

More specifically, the “inclusion villages” provide their inhabitants with the following services, which should support their integration:

- Cultural and leisure services: in practice, a number of the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” make use of the media libraries, the youth centres (‘Maisons des Jeunes et de la Culture’) and/or practice sports activities such as swimming, dancing or football. As these activities often take place alongside the members of the association administering the “inclusion villages”, they also serve to strengthen the links between the Roma families and the administration.
- Health services: there is a doctor in close proximity to all of the “inclusion villages”. The families have the right to perform general health checks and to receive guidance as regards access to specialized doctors/medical institutions that are able to provide them with tailored support.
- French language: the families have access to free-of-charge language classes as it is recognized that proficiency in French is often a precondition for finding a job.
- Education: access to stable accommodation provides the families with the opportunity to initiate, resume or continue the attendance of their children at school. School attendance is possible from the age of three and compulsory from the age of six. In partnership with the town hall, the administrators of the “inclusion villages” provide Roma parents with support to register their children for school and to help them understand the school system.
- Access to the labour market: before 2014 (when ‘transition measures’ were still in place, affecting access for Romanians and Bulgarians to the French labour market), the “inclusion villages” provided the families with work permits and assistance submitting job applications. From 2014 onwards, and the lifting of the ‘transition measures’, Romanian citizens have the right to register with the public employment services. Nevertheless, the “inclusion villages” continue to provide the families with other employment-related support, namely: information about French labour market institutions, writing CVs and job applications, using job searches, mediation with employers, progress updates, access to training,
needs identification, and information concerning the rights and duties of workers and job candidates.

The main limitation of the Roma regional strategy of Nord-Pas de Calais lies in its exclusive focus on the Lille metropolitan area, to the detriment of Roma living in other parts of Nord-Pas de Calais. It is also important to note that, as a project, it only provides support to a portion of the region’s total Roma population. The President of Lille Métropole declared that the metropolitan area will offer integration solutions to 1,500 Roma. Indeed, the assumption is that the remaining Roma will relocate to other regions of France. In this context, the President made a call for local authorities in other areas of France to show national solidarity and to offer shelter to the others.

So far, the “inclusion villages” can be said to be an incipient success story, measured at least in terms of the willingness of Roma to take part in the project. At the time of preparing this report, the list of Roma families in the Lille metropolitan area applying for accommodation in such “inclusion villages” far exceeded the numbers, which can be accommodated. While this presented challenges in itself, with Roma families living in slums in the same municipalities, hoping for an opportunity to move into the villages, it is also testament to the benefits of the “inclusion villages” as perceived by their main beneficiaries. At the same time, the implementation of the “inclusion villages” has not been without difficulty.

Challenges associated with the “inclusion villages”

As already mentioned, there are significant variations in the living conditions of Roma in the Lille metropolitan area. The majority of Roma migrants continue to live in slums and are regularly victims of evictions from their camps. Besides the “inclusion villages”, there are other integration activities being implemented for the Roma families living in slums, mostly by civil society associations working in the areas of health and poverty reduction. These efforts take place in the context of a regional support plan for slum reduction, which focuses on ensuring the continuity of social support, access to public services, and proposals for alternative housing solutions as planned by the inter-ministerial circular of 26 August 2012. Another important dimension of the afore-mentioned Nord-Pas de Calais regional strategy is the development of mediation services, notably in the field of healthcare with professionally appointed mediators. While these efforts are providing critical help to individual Roma families, who often face extreme living conditions, the evictions of Roma living in slums which continue to take place in the Lille metropolitan area have become an emotive issue which affects the provision of support. The inhabitants of the slum ‘Chemin Napoléon’ in Hellemmes (at the border with Lezennes site) were evicted (June 3rd 2015). The existence of the “inclusion villages” has enabled a number of Roma families to secure stable accommodation and has facilitated and supported their

5 Circulaire interministérielle NOR INTK1233053C du 26/08/2012 relative à l’anticipation et à l’accompagnement des opérations d’évacuation des campements illicites.
6 Interview with Patrick Vigneau, director Aréas – La Sauvegarde du Nord (2015)
7 Available at: http://circulaire.legifrance.gouv.fr/pdf/2012/08/cir_35737.pdf
integration process. The Roma families who moved into mobile homes and apartments (twenty-three chalets and three apartments), now live in a much better area of Lille and have access to all basic services. However, the project is still subject to criticism and has created tension in the neighbourhood. Indeed, Roma-related news are mainly about the local opposition to the “inclusion village” project, about legal procedures on how to close the villages, with opponents confusing the inclusion villages with informal camps. The community conflict is reflected in expressions of intolerance and public demonstrations against Roma integration projects. In daily life, the associations contribute to reducing the stereotypes and prejudices by providing information to the various stakeholders. This is important, as there are many people within the local non-Roma population who are not aware of the provisions in French legislation that provide equal rights for Roma to access education, housing and employment.

The challenging circumstances affecting the implementation of the “inclusion villages” worsened during the regional elections, which took place on 6-13 December 2015. Marine Le Pen was the National Front’s party candidate during the elections. Political tension was intense with the polls predicting a win for Marine Le Pen. The political debate was affected by populism, with the Roma constituting an important focus of criticism and stigmatization. In particular, the Roma were presented as a major problem to eradicate, rather than as a social challenge to be address through integration measures. This in turn had an impact on the content of political strategies developed at local, regional, national and European levels. The region of Nord-Pas de Calais was and remains under the spotlight due to the media impact of Marine Le Pen’s candidacy. The region remained affected by high levels of political tension until the electoral results were known: the Xavier Bertrand centre-right list won the regional elections and Xavier Bertrand became the new President of the new region Les Hauts-de-France.

Overview of local stakeholders

This section provides an overview of the local stakeholders who had an important influence over the way the LERI research was designed and implemented in the Lille metropolitan area. The main local stakeholder was a civil society organisation called AFEJI which was selected, through a competitive tender, to manage the project “inclusion villages”. In 2007, AFEJI submitted an application for funding to develop a project for the remodelling of slums in the Lille metropolitan area. The project involved the creation of small units to accommodate and support the Romanian Roma population. This project was

9 La Voix du Nord, A Lezennes, le nouveau village d’insertion attise les passions, 31 August 2015, available at: www.lavoixdunord.fr/region/a-lezennes-le-nouveau-village-d-insertion-attise-les-passions-jna0b0n658790
selected for funding by the Métropole Européenne de Lille, the regional body in charge of the Lille metropolitan area.

Another important stakeholder working at grass-roots level was the association La Sauvegarde du Nord, which provides in particular, mediation services in the area of healthcare. The association provides information and healthcare support to people according to need, assists them in accessing their social rights and guiding them through the national health care system. This project has a national component through the support of the collective Romeurope and the General Directorate for Health (Direction Générale de la Santé – DGS). In addition to this project, La Sauvegarde du Nord runs other activities aimed at reducing poverty levels for persons living in slums: a platform to enable voluntary work by local residents (Observation et Veille Sociale), which has been in operation since 2002; and social workers providing individual assistance to persons in need (Diagnostic Global et Individualisé), since 2013.

Both associations have a significant influence over members of the local community with a pro-Roma attitude. Both associations are also able to influence decision-making and propose and develop new initiatives. The associations play an important role in identifying Roma needs and communicating them in the media. The associations have also developed the relevant skills and experience to contribute actively to professional integration projects. AFEJI was chosen as the local partner to implement the LERI local interventions in the Lille metropolitan area because of its close cooperation with other associations, which form part of the ROMA network, “Réseau Romá”.13 The links between AFEJI and this network of Roma associations renders AFEJI greater legitimacy in the eyes of the local community, including the Roma families.

The interventions developed under the LERI research (described in Section 3 below) were designed and implemented with, and on behalf of, the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” of seven municipalities – Lezennes, Hellemmes, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Lille, Halluin, Faches Thumesnil. These Roma families were therefore also key stakeholders of the LERI research. Given the central importance to the LERI research of the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages”, it is worth providing some more detail about the conditions of their residence. The Roma families who reside in the “inclusion villages” take on a number of commitments:

- They are not allowed to host any other people or bring any new caravans/vehicles into the village;
- Any children living in the “inclusion villages” need to be registered in school and need to attend school regularly; and,
- All families must commit to keeping the site in good condition, and to contribute a modest amount to running costs (water, electricity, catering).

---

13 This network brings together associations of the Nord - Pas de Calais (Secours Catholique Caritas France, and FNARS Nord - Pas de Calais) and NGOs from Maramures County in Romania (ASSOC and Caritas Satu Mare). The network also benefits from national expertise of the European Department of the Secours Catholique Caritas France. Established in April 2010, it operates in France and Romania to implement European projects and cooperation between the two countries. It develops the European dimension of social work through exchanges, seminars, training and research in social work. With the expertise of its members, the Romá network provides innovative solutions to social developments at the European level.
The modest financial contribution, which the families had asked for, is intended to help the families to transition towards living independently. The contribution is mandatory and represents 10% of any income the family might receive. This income is in most cases made up of a salary (temporary, assisted contracts, Contrat à durée indéterminée - CDI, Revenu de Solidarité Active - RSA, Allocation Equivalent Retraite - AER, daily allowances, adult disability allowance, disability pension, and minimum old-age pension). In the absence of any income, the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” are required to contribute towards the costs of their accommodation by paying a tax of 10€ a month. This contribution is required to allow families to make an investment in the “inclusion village” project without putting them in financial difficulty.

In return, the municipality commits to support the Roma adults in finding long-term employment, obtaining the necessary documentation, and, further down the line, in obtaining more sustainable housing. In concrete terms, the commitments, which the Roma families undertake mean that they must make significant effort to integrate. This is not a straightforward endeavour for the persons involved, bearing in mind their previous precarious living conditions, the fact that many of them are illiterate and their origins in some of the poorest regions of Romania.

At the start of the LERI research, the possibility was considered to also include Roma families living in slums. However, early on it was decided that this would raise too many practical challenges given the precarious situation of these families, who often do not have the most basic needs met (water, food, education, etc.) and are at high risk of evictions. It was therefore decided to implement the local interventions only with regard to those Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” and to use the results of the intervention to develop a common methodology to be used in other areas, once the risk of evictions has dissipated.

There were no Roma political parties nor Roma elected representatives (in local, departmental or regional councils) during the period when the LERI research was implemented. Initially, only a few members of the Roma community were involved in the local governance structures set up by AFEJI to help administer the “inclusion villages”. This can be understood by taking into consideration the precarious situation of the Roma families and the conditions, which they need to comply with in order to reside in the “inclusion villages”. During the LERI research, some of the Roma living in the “inclusion villages” were involved in civil society organisations and developed links with social workers at every step of the decision-making process regarding their integration. They also participated in many initiatives/events organised in the municipality. However, despite the involvement of individual Roma in civil society organisations, the degree to which the latter could be said to represent the wider Roma community is limited.

The local and regional authorities of the Lille metropolitan area must also be mentioned. The Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL), a regional body made up of representatives from the 85 municipalities, which form part of Lille Metropole, was initially assigned the task of managing the regional contribution to the Roma national integration strategy, presented in November 2011. The MEL also oversees the implementation of the integration project “inclusion villages”, in partnership with the Direction Départementale de la Cohésion Sociale (DDCS),
the Departmental Direction of Social Cohesion. As such, the MEL works closely with AFEJI, who is in charge of the day-to-day management of the “inclusion villages”. Following the local elections of 23 and 30 March 2014, a new MEL presidency was appointed which gave rise to a new political orientation regarding Roma integration in the urban area. In practice, this meant that the MEL decided not to get too involved in the Roma strategy. From then onwards, they continued to monitor the “inclusion villages” from a technical point of view only. The political part of the administration is completely managed by the Prefecture du Nord, which represents the Ministry of Interior at local level, and more specifically by the Prefect délégué à l’égalité des chances, the prefect in charge of equal opportunities.

Having said this, the municipal authorities representing the territories concerned played an important permissive role, beginning with their decision to set up the “inclusion villages” and to provide, in cooperation with AFEJI, the basic needs of the families living there (water, electricity, waste removal, leisure activities, etc.) This role was not a straightforward one to maintain by the municipal authorities, in particular at the start of the LERI research, given the widespread resistance to setting up the “inclusion villages” among non-Roma residents. However, it is testament to the openness of the municipal authorities of the seven municipalities, as well as to the political sensitivity with which AFEJI and the LERI field expert implemented the initiatives, that the political backing for the initiative from the municipal authorities (albeit never overt) was not withdrawn. This aspect of the implementation process is considered in more detail in Section 3.

The LERI local project team consisted of the field expert, AFEJI social workers and managers, and the Roma housed in the “villages d’insertion”. The main co-researchers were the field expert and the “village d’insertion” team manager. The Roma families and the AFEJI social workers were mainly involved in the research during the implementation of the interventions and subsequent PAR cycles.

Overall aim of LERI in the Lille metropolitan area

The process of defining the overall aim of the LERI research involved several stages:

- A preparatory stage, through a feasibility and stakeholder analysis, including initial scoping interviews with the local stakeholders;
- The development of a preliminary Local Project Plan (LPP) which provided tentative ideas on possible activities to implement based on the initial scoping interviews;
- A participatory needs assessment, which subjected the initial ideas to thorough review based on a bottom-up approach to identifying the needs of the local area;
- Subsequent revision of the LPP to include design of local interventions which appeared the most adapted to the needs of the local stakeholders;
- Implementation of the local interventions;
- And (alongside each of the above listed stages) monitoring and evaluation of outputs and results.
The processes involved at each stage are described in more detail in sections 2 and 3 of this report, which focus on the methodological approach and the nature of the interventions, respectively. Here we ‘fast forward’ by summarizing the overall aim of the LERI research, as determined through the participatory needs assessment.

This aim was to enhance the support that was already being provided to the Roma families by AFEJI in the context of AFEJI’s decision to set up a so-called council of social life (CVS). The purpose of this council is to encourage the inhabitants of the “inclusion villages” to express their concerns and views about the administration, and to involve them in the development and modification of the rules of the village. AFEJI’s decision to set up such a council was inspired by a provision in the French Code of Social Action and Families. The Code specifies that users of a service or facility shall be given the possibility to participate in the administration of the service or facility through the setting up of a council. Whilst the type of services provided through the “inclusion villages” are defined in French law as “emergency services” and are therefore not subject to the obligations under Act 2002-2, AFEJI decided that it would nevertheless encourage a participatory approach in its administration of the “inclusion villages” in any case.

AFEJI’s reasons for doing this were pragmatic. Aware of the rift, which existed between the administrators of the “inclusion villages” and the Roma families concerned, AFEJI considered that setting up a council would encourage the flow of information between the two parties, which would reduce misunderstandings and make administration of the sites smoother. However, setting up a council of social life in the “inclusion villages” met with challenges from the start. These were partly due to the nature of “inclusion villages”, which are scattered across numerous sites. Other challenges related to the turnover among the inhabitants, which made it difficult to build relationships of trust. However, the main obstacle was the fact that the Roma families concerned had no experience in participating in such structures. These issues are returned to later in this report.

The overall aim of the LERI research was to contribute to the development of more conducive circumstances for AFEJI’s council of social life to succeed in the “inclusion villages”. It would do this by strengthening the ability of the Roma families to express themselves, to develop their self-confidence and ultimately to engender in them a new interest in and awareness of their rights and obligations as citizens. The assumption underlying the LERI research was that the new awareness and self-confidence of the Roma families, combined with growing skills and competences, would help AFEJI administer the “inclusion villages” more smoothly. In addition, it would also serve a more permanent, long-term function, namely, to strengthen the prospects for the social and professional integration of the Roma families, by providing them with crucial skills needed to lead autonomous lives.

The thematic focus of the LERI research in the “inclusion villages” of the Lille metropolitan area was three-fold:

---

• **Housing**: the LERI interventions aimed to engender in the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” a greater sense of ownership and belonging, with corresponding rights and responsibilities.

• **Inclusion and empowerment**: by facilitating the participation of the Roma families in the governance structures of the “inclusion villages”, the LERI interventions aimed to encourage the Roma families to take a stronger role in defining the terms of their integration.

• **Citizenship**: the increased self-confidence and awareness of their rights and responsibilities aimed to engender in the Roma families concerned a new sense of citizenship and connection with the wider neighbourhood, beyond the “inclusion villages”.

Better interaction between Roma and non-Roma residents in the different municipalities in the Lille urban area is essential to reduce tensions. This is especially relevant given the ripple effects of the negative media coverage on migration in the EU, and the increased anti-Roma attitude in the media. AFEJI professionals provided the interface between the Roma families in the “inclusion villages” and the wider neighbourhoods. Their contribution to reducing mutual prejudices and misinformation therefore cannot be underestimated.

Migration presents a major challenge for Roma inclusion efforts in the Lille urban area, as the arrival of new groups of Roma from Eastern Europe has increased the number of people in need within the metropolitan territory. Current integration policies do not address or cover all Roma citizens from Eastern Europe. The “inclusion villages” can only accommodate a small number of families, relatively speaking, with the majority continuing to live in segregated and disadvantaged areas of the territory. In this context, while the LERI research focused on those Roma living in the “inclusion villages”, the objective was to test a participatory approach through the LERI research which could later be used in other locations. Most notably, in Roma camps, which have been ‘stabilized’, in the sense that evictions are no longer imminent and the families concerned have access to social interventions provided by civil society and supported by the local authorities. The PAR methodologies tested with the “inclusion villages” may in this sense provide a model for planning and managing Roma integration measures in the Lille metropolitan area more widely.

### 3. PAR methodology employed

An explicitly participatory action-based methodology was employed throughout the LERI research in the “inclusion villages” of the Lille metropolitan area. This section describes the Participatory Action Research (PAR) techniques that were applied during the LERI research. The description is divided into four sub-sections, each dedicated to a separate ‘PAR cycle’ through which the LERI research was organised. Each ‘PAR cycle’ included its own set of objectives and corresponding activities. The PAR cycles were implemented sequentially, with the results of each ‘cycle’ feeding into the organisation and objectives of the next.

---

15 Interview with Municipality of Lezennes, Mayor cabinet representative, 2015.
16 Ibid.
1st PAR Cycle: participatory needs assessment

A participatory needs assessment was organised between June 2015 and the end of October 2015 with the aim of involving the Roma families as well as AFEJI in the identification of the main priorities for the LERI interventions. The needs assessment started in the municipality of Lezennes,17 and then moved on to the other six municipalities, which host “inclusion villages”. In order to implement a participatory needs assessment in the Lille metropolitan area, the LERI local team ran two sets of activities:

- Interviews and visits with the different local stakeholders;
- A community visioning exercise.

1. Interviews and visits

The needs assessment began with a series of interviews conducted by the LERI local team with different local stakeholders. The interviews were unstructured in order to encourage the identification of problems and concerns by the stakeholders without too many prompts from the LERI local team. During the interviews, the goals of LERI were presented and discussed with the different stakeholders. The aim was to encourage a free conversation, to facilitate the self-expression of each interviewee and to orient the discussion though the presentation of the LERI research.

The presentation of LERI was adapted to the needs of each stakeholder. In the interviews with the local and regional authorities (Métropole Européenne de Lille, and the Direction Départementale de la Cohésion Sociale (DDCS) du Nord), the LERI local team explained the role of the FRA, and the goals of the LERI research with its emphasis on participatory action research methodology and participatory activities. The views of the local authority representatives as regards the most pressing needs of the groups concerned were then requested. A similar approach was taken during the interviews with AFEJI representatives.

The approach was adapted during the interviews with the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” and in the slums of Lezennes municipality. During these interviews, the LERI local team presented the objectives and nature of the project in much simpler terms. The idea of ‘Europe’ was familiar to the Roma families and they could relate to questions such as ‘What could Europe do to help you?’ Notwithstanding these adaptations in communication, the outcomes of the interviews with the Roma were limited. Whilst an effort was made to schedule the interviews at convenient times for the Roma, few Roma agreed to participate. When the LERI local team did manage to schedule an interview, the responses to prompts by the LERI team were usually brief and not very informative. It was not clear whether the Roma families understood the purpose of the interviews, and if they did, they appeared to feel uneasy in an interview situation.

17 It is worth noting that the initial selection of locality for the LERI research was the municipality of Lezennes. However, through the preparatory phases of the research, it became clearer that the focus of the LERI interventions would be on the “inclusion villages,” leading to a broadening of the scope of the research coverage not only within the one locality, but to include the “inclusion villages” located in other six municipalities within the Lille metropolitan area. As such, the initial locality selection of Lezennes was altered during the project implementation and redefined as Lille metropolitan Area.
Meetings were held with Roma living in the “inclusion villages” in Lezennes and in the other six municipalities in the Lille metropolitan area with “inclusion villages”. The meetings were conducted in cooperation with AFEJI and La Sauvegarde du Nord. By the end of the process, all of the persons living in the seven “inclusion villages” had either been informed or consulted about the LERI research. These concerned a total of 141 persons living on the different sites:

- Lezennes – 16 persons
- Hellemmes - 31 persons
- Roubaix - 26 persons
- Tourcoing - 12 persons
- Lille - Fives - 29 persons
- Halluin - 11 persons
- Faches Thumesnil - 16 persons

Meetings were also held with Roma living in deprived areas of the Lille urban area. These meetings were even more difficult to organise, given the precarious living conditions of the persons concerned.

2. Community visioning

Given the limited results of the interviews conducted with the Roma families, it was decided to continue the needs assessment using a more action-based approach known as community visioning. Community visioning involves a group of people coming together to develop ideas about what they would like their community to be like. Assisted by a facilitator, groups meet to agree on a vision for their area and look at ways of achieving this vision. The LERI field expert, in cooperation with AFEJI, decided to implement community visioning through an existing project called Créutile, meaning "giving new life to what you throw away". This initiative involved the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” in an exercise with social workers of the association AFEJI. In total, the project saw the participation of twelve Roma and five professionals of AFEJI. It was funded by AFEJI. The Créutile project enabled the participants to perform a civic action not only by reducing waste, but also by recycling waste products, giving them a new lease on life. This was done by creating a piece of art or a useful object from miscellaneous packaging, old newspapers, or unused objects. Another part of the activity was to support local stakeholders by hosting a contest and organising different activities with Roma children and families. The contest included a presentation of the project, an area for recycling and re-using various objects, the creation of an evaluation grid, and the identification of winners of the contest. Through these interactions, the LERI field expert and AFEJI social workers aimed to develop a common set of goals and priorities (a common vision) for the “inclusion villages”. The Créutile project also served to introduce the AFEJI social workers to PAR-based approaches, and to promote a common identity and sense of belonging among the project’s participants.

The LERI local team contributed to this activity by monitoring and evaluating the entire process and its results. At this stage, the monitoring was mostly conducted by the LERI field expert, who participated in the team meetings and met individually with the AFEJI professionals and Roma involved in the community visioning, to obtain their views of the process. The monitoring did not involve the participation of the Roma families at this stage. The evaluation of this
activity was co-written by the LERI field expert, with the help of AFEJI. The following observations of the process can be highlighted:

- The Roma who participated in the community visioning exercise perceived most aspects of the project with enthusiasm. They actively sought participation and commented positively on the experience afterwards.
- At the same time, the exercise was marked by a number of challenges. In particular, none of the activities were initiated by the Roma. High levels of energy and organisation on the part of AFEJI were necessary in order to pull the whole exercise off the ground.
- Notwithstanding these efforts, the community visioning exercise encountered a number of delays, which AFEJI professionals attributed to a lack of follow-up by the Roma.
- The lack of follow-up by the Roma had multiple drivers. One was the perception among the Roma participants that the activities had been organised without consulting them; another was a different set of priorities. The exercise was organised during the months of July and August, when many Roma prioritized returning to Romania.

As regards the outcomes: the interviews, and in particular the community visioning led to the following findings regarding the most important needs of the Roma families living in the “inclusion villages” and of AFEJI with respect to the administration of the “inclusion villages”:

- The Roma families remained passive in the face of adversity: they needed to increase their self-confidence and awareness of their rights and obligations, in order to shape the terms of their integration (look for jobs, find housing, etc.) In the words of one AFEJI social worker: “The Roma families we worked with were not used to being consulted. In the case of some of the families, I really believe it was the first time that they had ever been asked what they want in their life. As a result of this lack of experience, their responses veered between two extremes. First, they would say everything is great. And they would thank us effusively. They even used to kiss our hands, as if we were kings. After a few months they started to complain. Nothing was good anymore. We would then try to discuss and suggest different arrangements. Immediately, however, they would say everything is great, they would thank us and want to kiss our hands again. This passivity is borne out of the severity of their living conditions over so many years, together with their reliance on social workers to bring about change.”
- Roma competences and know-how were very low, including their ability to express their views, and this in turn acted as a barrier to their active participation in the administration of the “inclusion villages”. All stakeholders insisted in particular on the barrier represented by the Roma families’ low command of French: “the principal difficulty we face is to understand each other...There are so many misunderstandings, because of language, but also culture, the way of seeing things, habits, living conditions...”

---

18 AFEJI social worker, personal interview, 11/12/2014, Male.
19 AFEJI social worker, personal interview, 24/05/2015, Female.
The social workers of AFEJI needed training and a change in perceptions as they, too, were unaccustomed to planning and implementing their activities in a participatory manner, to treating the Roma as partners. This was openly recognised by the AFEJI manager: “There was a mutual interest in developing a participatory approach in the inclusion villages: on the Roma’s side, the project was an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process in the inclusion villages; on our side, the project was the perfect opportunity to reintegrate the dialogue with the Roma that we had been losing for some time. We were forced to admit that we were really frustrated by our relationship with the Roma. Until now, our dialogue had focused on the fact that they did not always respect certain rules of communal living.”

In short, following the participatory needs assessment, it was decided to focus the LERI interventions on strengthening the conditions that would a) permit the Roma families to participate actively in the council of social life that had been set up by AFEJI (see also Section 1 above, on the aims of the LERI research); and b) permit AFEJI to properly support this process.

Another important outcome of the participatory needs assessment was the decision to extend the scope of the LERI research. At the start of the research, the intention was to focus the PAR based activities on the municipality of Lezennes, which was one of the first municipalities in the Lille metropolitan area to agree to set up an “inclusion village”. Lezennes also had a sizeable population of Roma living in slums scattered across its territory. However, during the PAR needs assessment, as it became clear that the research would focus on the needs of the families in the “inclusion villages”, and not on those living in the slums, the decision was taken to follow and support this initiative in the seven municipalities across the Lille metropolitan area. There were powerful reasons for doing so: from a political point of view, it avoided favouring one municipality over another; it was also considered important from a methodological point view, in order to increase the number of Roma families participating in the LERI research, since only a small number of families (four or five) live in each “inclusion village”.

2nd PAR cycle: designing the expression groups

The second PAR cycle started in October 2015 and finished in December 2015. The aim of this cycle was to build on the findings of the participatory needs assessment and design a series of activities that would help to address the needs that had been identified. Namely, the need to increase the self-confidence of the Roma families, and their ability to express their needs, and the need of AFEJI social workers to increase their understanding of how to support this process.

This objective was achieved and a methodology to sustain Roma participation and self-expression was proposed based on the notion of ‘groups d’expression’ or ‘expression groups’. The expression groups were conceived by applying LERI’s participatory methodology to AFEJI’s initial efforts to set up a council of social life. The idea was to set up a series of meetings, which would be organised by the Roma families themselves, including such issues as the timing, the location and even the agenda for discussion.

During this preparatory design stage, two sets of meetings were organised:
1) Meetings with Roma families living in the ‘inclusion villages’:

The Roma families requested meetings where they could express their concerns. Concretely, every time the LERI field expert and accompanying AFEJI social worker met them, they asked the social worker for concrete things. Most frequently, this concerned every-day, material needs, such as repairing a television or a fence. However, on two sites, those of Tourcoing and Lezennes, other ‘higher order’ issues were put on the agenda by the Roma families attending the meetings. These included questions regarding parenting and education for their children.

The discussions were interesting and allowed the LERI field expert to discuss with the Roma families what “Europe” has done for them (the ‘inclusion village’ is financed by the European Social Fund for instance). Through these meetings, the main needs of the Roma families tended to be expressed as follows:

- To give housing to Roma living in France (who face very difficult living conditions, often with nowhere to stay);
- To improve the living conditions of Roma in Romania (where many families do not even have food).

This set of meetings was carried out in close cooperation with the technical services of the regional authorities. This was necessary because a significant number of requests from Roma families were related to technical aspects of the “inclusion villages”, such as the need to fix a roof or unblock a sink. The assumption during these meetings was that, only when the concrete and visible needs of the Roma families are met, would their concerns begin to evolve towards higher order issues, including exchanges with the wider community, access to the labour market or social counselling.

2) Meetings with the AFEJI team and team leader and interviews with the team leader and two line managers

The objective of these meetings was to determine the role and position of the AFEJI professionals in the “groups of expressions”. The team leader and the professionals working directly with the Roma families needed to adopt a different approach to their work, one that was less prescriptive in order to start treating the Roma families as equal partners in a common project. The AFEJI team leader acknowledged the challenge, which this presented. In his words, it was necessary to stop thinking in terms of top-down solutions and adopt a more tentative approach. “It concerned the ability to create dialogues around the demands of individual persons”, “to leave open the door”, “to leave more space for action to the individuals being housed, as actors and as citizens”, “to accept experimentation, feeling around in the dark until something works”, “to make attempts, to accept failures” – he stated.

Rather than providing solutions to problems identified in advance, AFEJI social workers needed to accept the role of “facilitator and motivator”, facilitating meetings, allowing the Roma to be the source of ideas and turning the efforts of AFEJI into responses to the demands that emerge from the Roma. Inside AFEJI, a debate was started on how to transform the status of persons living in the “inclusion villages” from users to citizens, with equal rights and responsibilities.
3rd PAR cycle: Implementing the expression groups

The implementation of the groups of expressions started in November 2015 and finished in August 2016. Once again the activity involved both the Roma families living in the ‘inclusion villages’ and AFEJI, with the aim of strengthening the participatory dimension of the governance of the inclusion villages.

This PAR cycle served to lighten the obstacles to participation, which Roma encounter on a daily basis. Whilst the AFEJI’s team encouraged the participation of Roma living in the ‘inclusion villages’, in reality, Roma were not given an appropriate platform in which they felt comfortable expressing their opinion. These meetings attempted to address this issue.

The Roma were invited to identify the dates, location and agenda for the meetings. In total, fifteen meetings were organised:

- Four in Lille Fives: 20 October 2015 (8 persons), 17 December 2015 (10 persons), 19 April 2016 (7 persons)
- Four in Roubaix: 10 November 2015 (8 persons), 15 March 2016 (10 persons), 10 May 2016 (9 persons), 29 June 2016 (10 persons)
- Three in Hellemes: 8 December 2015 (7 persons), 23 February 2016 (7 persons) 3 May 2016 (6 persons)
- One in Faches Thumesnil; 17 May 2016 (7 persons)
- One in Lezennes: 3 June 2016 (6 persons)
- Two in Tourcoing: 25 May 2016 (8 persons), 22 June 2016 (8 persons)

4th PAR cycle: training for Roma and non-Roma working with/for Roma to enhance Roma participation

The monitoring and evaluation conducted by the LERI coordinator during the course of the first three ‘PAR cycles’ suggested that the expression groups were "operating" well; they were meeting initial expectations. To capitalize on the preliminary results, the LERI local team, after consulting with the Roma families, decided to bring on board a third party, namely, a professional who could help the Roma families and the AFEJI professionals take the expression groups to a higher level.

A training company, called ‘Laisse Ton Empreinte’, or ‘Leave your mark’ was contacted and agreed to prepare a special training course for this purpose. In particular, the aims of the course were to build on the dialogue between the Roma families and AFEJI in order to:

- Develop the ability of AFEJI workers to “accompany” rather than dominate the proceedings;
- Develop the self-confidence of the Roma families, and their ability to communicate;
- Develop a common identity or culture among the Roma and AFEJI participants, and thereby strengthen mutual trust;

Three types or modalities of trainings were developed, for three different settings:

- Trainings addressed at the AFEJI professionals (three in total);
• Trainings addressed only at the Roma families (two in total); and,
• Trainings addressed at the AFEJI professionals and the Roma families together (one training).

The end product of these meetings was intended to be a written document or ‘Charter’ regarding the rules of the ‘expression groups’, and how these should be implemented. This Charter was to be developed consensually between all the participants, through numerous meetings and iterations.

The following box outlines the programme of the first three trainings, which focused on the needs of AFEJI’s social workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme of the first three trainings focusing on the needs of AFEJI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First training session:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making contact with the team;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presentation of the spirit and methodology of work;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing a compendium of expectations of each of the professionals;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the challenges encountered;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying the risks which need to be monitored; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing the rules for the training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second training session:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Validation of the methodology of the expression groups (document produced by “Laisse Ton Empreinte” to be validated by the team);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open discussion of the principles and rules of the expression groups;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection in small groups and then exchange in large group: what new way is there of presenting the groups of expression to the families? How can more families be encouraged to participate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The role of the chair animator of the expression groups; and,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Results of the second training session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third training session:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on the role of AFEJI in the expression groups in practice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How AFEJI professionals felt during and after the last expression group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Role playing exercise;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cooperative work in small groups and then sharing in large group: How do I see my mission within AFEJI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Results of the third training session.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three further trainings were scheduled on the following dates:

19 September 2016: training with the families, covering the practice of expression groups, Roma expectations concerning these meetings, the practical evolution of the meetings in the “inclusion villages”, the role of Roma in the meetings.

22 September 2016: training with AFEJI, involving return to the initial questions about the expression groups to consider what aspects enjoy consensus and which require adjustments; methodological aspects; ethical aspects;
development of a shared understanding of the role of the expression groups within the administrative structures of the “inclusion villages”.

31 September 2016: The Roma families and AFEJI social workers jointly produced a Charter of practice for the expression groups.

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

This section provides a more detailed description of important aspects of the LERI local interventions, identifying the key challenges, which were encountered as well as the results achieved. The next section (section 4) looks back at the PAR methodology and at the practical implementation of the interventions to identify lessons, which can be drawn from the LERI experience in the Lille metropolitan area for efforts to design and implement local Roma integration projects elsewhere. In a final concluding section (section 5), an effort is made to translate these lessons into recommendations for policy-making concerning Roma integration at local, regional, national and EU level.

The organization of the expression groups remained in the hands of AFEJI throughout the duration of the LERI research, notwithstanding the initial objective for the Roma families to take ownership over this process. On each occasion, AFEJI announced its decision to organize a meeting and proposed several possibilities: the meeting could be organized either in the offices of AFEJI, or at the Communal Center of Social Action (CCAS) of the municipality concerned, at the House of Neighbourhood, or in the “inclusion villages” themselves. The Roma families consistently voiced their preference for the meetings to be organized in the mobile houses of one of the families (or, in Tourcoing, in one of their apartments) within the “inclusion villages”. In one case, a meeting was organized in the premises of AFEJI, but it was clear that this setting was less conducive to the participation of the Roma families. Organising the meetings in the homes of the Roma families created a more familiar environment for the Roma participants, making them feel more at ease to communicate their concerns.

The fact that more than one expression group was organized in certain “inclusion villages” allowed the LERI local team to monitor developments over time in terms of the quality of participation. Whereas at first, the demands of the Roma families were very practical (e.g. new dishwasher needed, broken fence should be repaired, etc.) over time, the meetings began broaching more complex subjects such as relations with non-Roma neighbours. In one case, the topic of discrimination was discussed. However, this trend occurred very gradually and in a very limited fashion, with a tendency for one or two Roma individuals to do more talking and the majority to remain silent or simply agree with the suggestions made by the more vocal individuals.

Similarly, the organization of at least one expression group in each of the six municipalities hosting “inclusion villages” allowed the LERI team to draw inferences about the factors contributing to the relative success of the expression group initiative. The expression group organized in Tourcoing stood out as the most sophisticated of them all, with the discussion involving the greatest number
of Roma participants and covering complex issues confronting the Roma families (e.g. discrimination, access to education, etc.), rather than day-to-day material concerns. The evaluation conducted by the LERI local team suggested that several factors might have contributed to this:

- The fact that the Roma families in the “inclusion village” of Tourcoing enjoyed higher quality accommodation (living in apartments rather than mobile homes);
- The fact that a majority of the families concerned had a good command of French; and,
- The Tourcoing expression group was the last in the series, taking place after the initial training sessions, so that the AFEJI professionals involved were better equipped to moderate the meetings.

In contrast, the LERI local team observed a decline in interest in such expression groups in Fives, the municipality that hosted the first expression group. This negative development took place in the face of more pressing priorities, including a collapsing roof, and a mice infestation in the mobile homes, which may have affected the success of the expression groups.

Various challenges confronted the implementation of the expression groups. Firstly, it was not easy to secure the participation of the Roma families. Even where AFEJI made every effort to schedule meetings following suggestions from the families, very often, the individual family members did not show up. At times, the families were preoccupied with other things and simply forgot about the meetings. At other times, the Roma inhabitants of the “inclusion villages” changed their mind, and consciously chose not to participate without giving any notice to AFEJI.

This was aggravated by the fact that many Roma families found it difficult to understand the benefits of participating in the meetings. AFEJI attempted to address this challenge by inviting the Roma families to use the meetings to request concrete needs, such as a new television or fence. However, this led to a further, related challenge, namely, that the absence of a response or delays in responding to these requests, created frustration and disillusionment among the Roma families concerned. For example, a request for the installation of drying racks was made in three villages (Roubaix, Hellemmes and Fives). However, the request was met only in one of the villages (Roubaix) in July 2016, several months after the requests were made.

This dynamic was expressed eloquently by one of the AFEJI co-researchers, who noted that: “Our challenge as a LERI local team is to deal with the question of drying racks”. The failure to produce drying racks on the request of the Roma families gained a symbolic importance that went beyond the particularities of the individual cases: “It meant that we lost credibility in the eyes of the Roma families, resulting in an immediate drop in interest in participating in the meetings.”

Finally, after years of anti-Roma rhetoric at the political level and in the media, the entire initiative had to overcome resistance from the wider community. Non-Roma residents of the seven municipalities organised demonstrations and protests when the decision was announced to build the “inclusion villages”. It
was difficult for this population to understand why Roma migrants should receive such support, when unemployment and poverty also affected members of the non-Roma population. Although none of the municipal authorities withdrew their support for the "inclusion villages" or their support for the LERI research in the face of this resistance, the latter prevented them from expressing their support overtly.

The LERI local team managed this challenge by playing down the Roma-specific aspects of the "inclusion villages" so that the initiative was presented as a general effort to address poverty and social inclusion. This communication strategy proved successful. Throughout the course of the LERI research, no further demonstrations by non-Roma residents against the "inclusion villages" took place. While contacts between the Roma families and their non-Roma neighbours continue to be limited, the absence of overt hostility suggests that the non-Roma population have increasingly accepted the existence of the "inclusion villages".

5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

This section draws upon the previous sections to identify lessons learned from the LERI research in the Lille metropolitan area.

A. The local interventions, which have been implemented so far contributed to trust building within the community, as well as to capacity building in concrete terms. They facilitated a change in the relationship between Roma and the civil society organisations, in particular with AFEJI. "We can affirm that the relationship between us and them is much better. Of course, we still have some issues. But now, we deal with the issues differently; we try to find solutions together, we actively look for the knowledge which the Roma can bring to an issue, we want their suggestions. For example, we decided together to extend the time for visiting hours during the summer."20

B. The LERI objectives and PAR techniques are only possible if the Roma families have decent and stable living conditions. These conditions were met for the Roma families living in the "inclusion villages". This allowed them to develop a longer-term perspective and 'higher order' concerns. This point was made by both the AFEJI social workers and members of the Roma families. "Living in the inclusion villages gives them rest. They can relax for a few weeks, and then start to plan ahead, to think about a future for them and their children."21 "Before we could not think of anything other than food, and to find a place to stay. We have been expelled seven times. The kids are very afraid to go to the camps since we moved from there...". "My wife and I used to go all day to make some money. You don’t make much, but it takes all day. I was looking for iron, she was begging."22

C. Any attempt to extend this approach to Roma living elsewhere, e.g. in camps which have been 'stabilised' in the sense of their inhabitants no

20 AFEJI social worker, personal interview, 11/12/2016, Male.
21 AFEJI social worker, personal interview, 11/12/2016, Male.
22 Member of Roma family living in inclusion villages, personal interview, 24/03/2016, Male.
longer being in imminent threat of eviction, would raise many challenges. It would first of all be necessary to involve other local associations, such as La Sauvegarde du Nord. This was put eloquently by one social worker: “You can ask them [the Roma living in camps] however many times you want. It is clear what they need: to eat, find food, to warm their caravans during winter, to find wood or whatever they use, clothes, water, and whatever is needed for the kids at school. Besides their basic needs, they want to make money. So they ask for a job, but they want it immediately. Not tomorrow, because they need the money for today. They are clearly in a situation of dependence. So if you ask them if they agree with you, they will easily say yes, they will answer to please you, because they need you.”

D. The type of participation achieved has been limited (both in quantitative and qualitative terms) but a gradual evolution can be observed. Most of the expression meetings involve Roma insisting on small, mostly physical improvements that could be made in the ‘inclusion villages’ where they live, e.g. satellite dish, television, fence, building work, etc. Only gradually did the meetings begin to include other types of demands, in particular demands regarding the rules of integration e.g. a request to change the rules regarding visiting hours. "For the first 6 months, eighty percent of the subjects were material demands: internet access, television, fence, furniture, etc. Only gradually did the meetings begin to include other types of demands, demands regarding the rules of integration...After the training financed by LERI, the subjects changed: People started to talk about their past, about the way they were living before, in camps, in Romania. In other meetings, they were able to talk about the education of their children, or about discrimination in France.”

E. Increased participation on the part of the Roma will not happen on its own. It needs a conducive environment, and a ‘facilitator’. In this case, AFEJI was able to provide this role by providing a dedicated local team, who believed in the principles of open and free participation for the Roma. AFEJI was also familiar with the Roma families due to many prior months of interaction with them. This allowed AFEJI to build sufficient trust with the Roma families for them to consider participating in the expression groups. AFEJI also had the necessary contacts with the local authorities to be able to ‘act on the demands’ of the Roma families, as these often required involvement of technicians employed by the local authorities (e.g. a new fence).

F. Language presented a significant barrier for many Roma to participate in the meetings. The expression groups worked best in the municipality where the Roma families had a better command of French. Another important driver of success was the possibility for AFEJI to work in small groups, even in pairs to facilitate speaking. The possibility of using Romanian (through the LERI field expert) was also helpful. The presence of a translator is desirable in some circumstances. As one resident of an inclusion village explained to the LERI field expert, “It is very useful when you can translate. It is easier for us to speak in our language...I do learn

23 AFEJI social worker, personal interview, 11/12/2016, Male.
24 AFEJI social worker, personal interview, 5/12/2015, Male.
French, but they do not understand me very well. French is difficult. And you, you know Romania, how it is there for Roma.”

G. Regularity of contact was also important: the expression meetings were only one form of contact that AFEJI made with the Roma families. As the managers of the ‘inclusion villages’, AFEJI has daily contact with the families and this was an important facilitator, as it increased trust of the Roma toward the expression group facilitators.

H. Formal training of the kind which is being provided in this project is important, not just for the Roma families but also for the non-Roma stakeholders involved in the integration project as the PAR approach requires a change in mentality also on the part of those working with the less disadvantaged groups. The latter need to see the Roma inhabitants of the “inclusion villages” as citizens, with rights and obligations, rather than as ‘victims’ of injustice or simple ‘users’ of a service.

I. The deeper involvement of the local authorities would have been helpful. The local authorities in the Lille metropolitan territory were less involved in the project than expected. They did not obstruct any of the initiatives proposed, but they were not active players. This carried certain risks for the research and the LERI interventions, as ultimately AFEJI needed the local authorities on their side in order to act on the demands of the Roma families.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The experience of the “inclusion village” project can provide important lessons not only for other regions of France but also for municipal authorities across Europe, confronted by similar migratory trends. The experience of LERI in supporting and working within the “inclusion villages” to develop expression groups and support the Roma families living there led to various reflections on the success or failure of the “inclusion village” project as a whole. The external factors, which can affect the success of such an initiative have been reviewed in the previous section. Here we identify three sets of recommendations:

1) Integration policies and programmes need to be clear about the purpose of the activities and need to avoid generating unrealistic expectations.

In the case of the expression meetings, the purpose was clearly established and communicated to the Roma from the start. The aim of the meetings was to make adjustments to the balance of power within the “inclusion villages”, in particular by strengthening the capacity of Roma families to decide for themselves on questions affecting their well-being. Policy-makers and practitioners need to be modest about the changes expected from the integration programmes, or they will risk creating disappointment and disaffection. This risk emerged during the implementation of the expression groups. As one AFEJI co-researcher noted, “we have allowed the Roma to imagine a lot of things, we have even given deadlines to implement some concrete improvements in their daily life”.

__________________________

25 Member of Roma family living in inclusion villages, personal interview, 24/03/2016, Male.
2) Integration policies and programmes should be designed in a gradual, iterative manner, ensuring the possibility of adjusting the programme in light of new developments or needs.

Integration policies and programmes should be structured in a cyclical manner, for example, in 6 month cycles, followed by a monitoring and evaluation process to enable adjustments to the design of subsequent cycles. A concrete example of this was the decision to extend the scope of the LERI research from Lezennes to all seven of the municipalities in the Lille metropolitan area, which set up “inclusion villages”. Readjustments to the scope of the research were possible thanks to the cyclical and iterative nature of the PAR methodology applied through LERI. The possibility to re-plan and adjust activities during their implementation has particular benefits for projects concerning Roma integration, given the historical ‘distance’, which exists between Roma communities and project managers.

3) Integration policies and programmes should be implemented using a two pronged approach, involving professionalism and humility.

The experience of AFEJI in the Lille metropolitan area indicates that professionals with many years of experience working with Roma are necessary to manage the delivery of social services to families leaving in precarious circumstances. However, in their efforts to organise “expression groups”, it became clear to AFEJI that they had to marry their professionalism with a new approach towards the Roma families. AFEJI had to adapt its position towards the Roma inhabitants of the “inclusion villages” and to develop an innovative participatory approach considering Roma life courses, based on open-ended, group-based dynamics where Roma are treated as full citizens, and where project managers and administrators involve them fully in the decision-making processes.