

## Case Study Report for MERI Network Kavarna Municipality, Bulgaria

### Mayor- idealist who realizes his ideas.....

1. *Identification of good practice:* 'Roma integration is not an end, it is mandatory for the success of the strategy of the municipality for local development'.

2. *Areas:* Housing, education, health, employment

### 3. *Local context and key issues:*



'Nine years ago Kavarna was a small town in northeastern part of Bulgaria, for which no one knew anything except that it is located on the coast of Black Sea. But today our town is popular in Europe and around the world, because every year here come rock stars from world-class ...' Thus began the story Milen Bashev, Chief of sector 'Integration of minorities' in municipal

administration Kavarna. He outlined also that, for nine years Kavarna not only became the capital of Bulgarian rock, but also is municipality - a model for good governance. Management created 'good conditions for peace living of Bulgarians and Roma'. According Mr Bashev, 'all this is due to one factor- human attitude that our mayor invests in his work'. According to the latest national census in 2011 Kavarna municipality has 15,358 inhabitants. Official statistics indicates that as from Roma origin self-determined 2 075 people, of whom the majority live in the district 'Hadji Dimitar' of the town of Kavarna. 'We are 'turkish gypsies', we speak - Roma, Turkish and Bulgarian, but at home we speak mostly Roma and Turkish', states Mr. Bashev. Up to 2003, the Roma life in the town was not significantly different from that of many other representatives of this ethnic group- they live in a separate district on the outskirts of the town, near which rises trash pile of unregulated landfill, no sewage system exists, no paved streets, no street lighting. In the elementary school in the district all children are enrolled, but many of them pass from class to class without going at all to school, without being able even to read and write in Bulgarian. Between Bulgarians and Roma has a barrier in communication. Roma are unwelcome in restaurants in the town center, at the pool, even on the beach ...

### 4. *Background of good Practice*

In late autumn of 2003 for town mayor was elected Mr. Tsonko Tsonkov, a lawyer who deals with civil cases. He was good known in Roma district: his mother was a teacher and director of the school in which studied Roma and he was kicking a ball with them on the football field while he was a child, or defended pro bono poor Roma youth against whom proceedings were conducted ... Since this year began the changes in the district and also of interethnic relations in the town.

First step taken by the mayor Mr. Tsonev is the inclusion of Roma in the management and implementation of decisions. At the beginning of the next year the new mayor invited in the municipal administration three Roma and assigned them in the intentionally formed Sector 'Integration of minorities' to the Directorate 'Civil Registration, religious and social activities, international cooperation and integration'. In the municipal council were elected also four Roma, representatives of the major national parties. Together with them and with men in the district mayor identified the main problems for that Roma in the town asked for quick solution. Tsonko Tsonkov deeply respects his colleagues Roma and does not take any decision related to resolving the problem in the district without they have it prior initiated and agreed to solve the problem. *Gradually, all employees in the local administration and in institutions accept as natural huge delegation of rights and obligations to Roma in local government.*

Parallel first steps taken by the mayor at the beginning of his mandate aimed at changing the quality of service to Roma and the attitude towards them. One of the Roma- expert on ethnic and demographic issues in the municipality, with a smile tells how at the beginning of his first term as mayor Tsonko Tsonkov gathered all the employees of local administration and informed them that will impose fines for rough or neglect attitude, undermined the sense of dignity of any of the citizens asked for service. Then he 'had talks' with owners and managers of establishments that do not accept Roma ...

**Important factors to improve the attitude to Roma from officials and public are:**

**A) The introduction of the position of the Municipal public mediator. Local Ombudsman Institution, unanimously elected in 2004 by all councilors with the strong support of Mayor Tsonev contributes significantly to improving the quality of service and attitude of the administration to all citizens of Kavarna Municipality. With the support of the specialists from sector 'Integration of minorities' local Roma also gradually learn to address to him their complaints and**

signals for bad treatment from various administrative agencies and companies-suppliers of electricity, water, gas, telecommunications, etc.

B) Adoption of the Customer Charter of the Municipality of Kavarna; On the basis of Article 21 from the Regulation on common rules of the organization of administrative services, Mayor Tsonev issued an order № 176 / 02.02.2007, according that he approved the Charter of the Municipality of Kavarna. It states clearly the will of the municipal administration - Kavarna to efficiency, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of citizens of the municipality and in undisputable way there is stated the commitment to customers of municipal administrative services from the municipality ' ... To receive equal treatment in providing services , regardless your social status, education, age, gender, ethnic origin or religious beliefs ...'

C) The regular monthly visits to the regional representative of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD). Kavarna Municipality has provided the regional representative of the CPD workplace and assists him in the implementation of his activities in the municipality.

*Now Roma are welcomed clients in all public places and cultural institutions in town.*

Further steps to improve infrastructure and housing for Roma were taken.

This was really hot problem for Roma population, as for nearly three decades the district infrastructure was not renewed by any of the previous local administrations. In the district are encountered illegal buildings and the need for new housing is pressing. In the period 2004 - 2005 primarily needs were identified, goals were formulated and activities planned for future projects, but also the municipality began to make capital investments for 'replacement and reconstruction of infrastructure in areas with high concentration of Roma'<sup>1</sup>. So with funding from the municipal budget water pipes were replaced, sewerage system was built, sidewalks were fixed, streets were asphalted, playgrounds were built. For the first time there was streetlighting, large garbage bins, and ones for separate waste collection. Quality of life in the Roma district was changed dramatically. *One of the unplanned result was the sharp reduction of pilfering and domestic burglaries.*

The real boom in the positive changes in the Roma district began after 2007. Then except municipal funds were attracted large amounts of funds through different projects under operational programs. One of the problems that must be resolved is housing- many Roma need new homes. In 2007, with the financial

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<sup>1</sup> This is evident from the annual financial statements of the municipality of Kavarna in the period 2004-2006.

support from the municipality, two-story office building was converted into a dormitory, where 10 of the poorest Roma families were accommodated. For the rest the mayor took another approach- they had opportunity to build their own homes. For this purpose, in 2008 began an information campaign among Roma population for the possibility to benefit from the established right of construction; in result to that during the same year 57 Roma families received such right. Also, in 2008 Kavarna municipality won project for over 11 million lev under OP Environment. The funds are invested in improving and developing infrastructure for water and wastewater in the Roma district 'Hadji Dimitar'. This project allows removal of unauthorized landfill to the district and re-cultivation of land. Then these terrains were included in the urban development plan, plotted and 310 families received half acre, on which they can build their houses. Over a third of them are Roma. To encourage and support them to build their homes, municipality elaborated designs for standard houses and make them available for free.

With money from the project and co-financing from the municipal budget new streets were constructed and all needed infrastructure for new owners in almost vacant new district was built. Legitimized were the most buildings in good shape that were built illegally in previous years and strict control was *applied for all new houses, construction to start after authorized permission and approved architectural plans*. For several years, were built dozens of beautiful small and big houses and two new hotels in the district, as well as many shops, eateries, cafes. The new part of the Roma district is one of the most urbanized areas in the town. *Currently, all families maintain perfect cleanliness in the district and are proud for it landscape.*

Steps to improve access of Roma children to quality education were not delayed. Impetus to these initiatives gave the mayor himself, because he was convinced that *the development of Kavarna passes through the integration of Roma.* 'To achieve real development of municipality we need not only good infrastructure in all town districts and settlements, but also and qualified human resource. This can not happen if one part of children from the municipality can not explore their right to quality education'- said mayor Tsonev. Since 2005 the municipality launched a series of systematic and consistent actions to ensure that Roma children receive quality education. Municipal funds were invested; attracted were funds from EU projects and other donors; as well as funds under all national programs. 'Primarily, under the influence of national policies for the desegregation of Roma pupils I decided that kindergarten 'Clover' and primary school 'Miladinov Brothers' in which almost 100% of attendances' are Roma should be closed', said the Mayor. But after discussion with

parents and negotiating with them, the mayor gave up his original idea to close these two educational institutions. 'Parents told me that, as all Bulgarian parents and they wish the school and kindergarten to be near their homes to be comfortable and safe for children. They turned mine attention to that rather than to close them, is better the municipality to repair them and make them look like other schools and kindergartens in the town. I understood their desire and decided that we should respect it, but meanwhile I agreed with them: OK, I maintain these institutions and rehabilitate them, but you have the obligation children regularly to visit school and motivate other parents to send their children also ...', continued the Mayor. So, with funds under the European pre-accession programs were repaired the kindergarten and elementary school in the district, were built playgrounds and two Internet clubs.

Since the mayor is concerned about the hidden children dropping out of school, he replaced the director of the elementary school, purchased school bus, introduced free breakfast before the national program has launched; supported the development of a network of extracurricular activities to attract children. Teachers pass various retraining courses for work in a multicultural environment. Every day a teacher on duty travels by bus and collects all children from their homes. Electronic system registers the self-excommunicated and teachers inform parents that the child has escaped from the hour or have any other problems. Emphasis is placed on identifying and developing the diverse skills of children from kindergarten age. To enhance responsibility to attend the kindergarten municipality appoints six Roma women as assistant teacher. In the summer together with Bulgarians from other schools, Roma children are on camps; deal with extracurricular activities, attend 'green schools'. Today more and more children are in first grade in other schools in the town and although they have visited 'Roma kindergarten' their performance in first grade is the same as of their peers ethnic Bulgarians. As a result of measures taken the success of students in the 'Roma' elementary school is good- the average grade of students in external evaluation in 2011 is higher than average one for the country. *Although the fact is that the first 7-8 girls continued to study after completing the eighth grade without special support and targeted projects. In the second term of the Mayor the first students from Roma origin from Kavarna became fact.* However, he sets his priorities for the coming years as follows: 'It's time to get more seriously into the education of girls. I do not post it as obligation and will not use punishments. I'll try to get along with teachers and psychologists appropriate incentives to motivate them to continue to study. Here another problem is related to early marriages- they withhold girls from school and married them at the age of 15-16 years ... *Now, I think they began to marry older- at the age of 16-18 years ... Already some families began to be*

*ashamed of being girls illiterate and young women, they compared themselves with the other ...'.*

Steps taken to ensure better health care for Roma began with provision of humanitarian aid in 2004, but as in other areas in the years following the well thought out, planned and systematic targeted actions followed, taking into account some peculiarities in health status and Roma access to health care facilities and professionals. Annual financial statements of the municipality showed that since 2004 municipality established fund for medical treatment of poor, paying annually 20 000 lev to take over the treatment of adults, poor and vulnerable citizens. 'In the early years, over 50% from this fund benefited representatives from Roma community, but over the years their number has dropped down and now Roma beneficiaries of the fund are about 20-25% of all users', said expert from Sector 'Social activities and health'. More targeted to the Roma community activities started in 2007 when began the project 'Health prevention and health promotion in maternal and child health' under which until 2009 were implemented a series of screening for women and children using special mobile cabinets. Then to the municipality was appointed health mediator who assists till today the work on improving the health status of Roma from Kavarna. From 2007 until today continue the joint projects on health issues in the municipality with RHI-Dobrich. Systematically are implemented many preventive and health promoting activities in neighborhoods where is concentrated population from different ethnic origin. Carried out are information campaigns, lectures and prevention activities with youth, women, children and people at risk of socially significant diseases. These activities are in the annual plans of RHI- Dobrich<sup>2</sup>.

Roma themselves considered as a great relief the existence of a municipal hospital in Kavarna. One of the Roma, who was a municipal councilor in the previous two mandates said: 'We have young children and the elderly who often are ill. In past years there were very high mortality rates among our children, so for us it was very important not only our hospital to function, but also to function efficiently. Therefore, when we had to decide whether to support with municipal finance the hospital all four Roma who were municipal councilors then voted 'For'. *Now I think we have much lower infant mortality ...'.*

A system of activities undertaken by the municipality to address the high unemployment among the Roma community. 'When I came to the municipality in 2003, unemployment was very high in Kavarna -over 22% and amongst Roma it was straight record ones- perhaps over 70%', said TsonkoTsonev. However, he noted that

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<sup>2</sup> Annual plans of RHI – Dobrich are published on: <http://www.rzi-dobrich.org/index.php?node=po&sub=planove>

some Roma are not poor, and although they have no official business, earn good money<sup>3</sup>. And again, he applied the tested approach- to plan system, but various activities for different groups of Roma. For Roma entrepreneurs who sell clothes in Poland, but have difficulties with their stay there, because of restrictions imposed by the Schengen Agreement<sup>4</sup> in 2007, the mayor signed contracts with the mayors of four Polish cities in which are employed the majority of Roma from Kavarna- Poznan, Opole, Kielce and Radom, then Roma already worked there legally, register companies, pay duties and taxes. *Today these Roma are wealthy, they have nice houses in Kavarna, they spend money on modern furniture and expensive cars, and some of them have built hotels and entered sustainably in tourism businesses.* In 2007-2008, the municipality in partnership with Business Center Dobrich implemented project under PHARE 2004 program for sustainable employment in the agriculture of 100 unemployed Roma. Municipality provided 100 acres municipal land, which was turned into herbal plantations, the unemployed are trained in herbalism and farm business. *As a result, 25 Roma are registered as farmers and received per 4 acres from the created herbal array.* Followed the project for youth employment, under which 30 youth Roma received training and acquire qualifications for builder workers. 'Whoever had shown initiative and desire for independent business receives support from us- we provide them agricultural land under contracts, involve them in training projects for managing their own businesses, providing them with consulting services from farming or business center ... Such people are valuable because they create jobs not only for themselves, they create jobs in the community, that is extremely necessary', said Mayor Tsonev. And for those who can not handle their own business municipality provides with variety of municipal projects for training, qualification, or include them in national employment programs. These programs are especially needed during the winter, when work in agriculture and tourism decreased and people are left without livelihoods. *As a result of systematic and purposeful support, through which the municipality supports Roma employment and own business, today the number of Roma in Kavarna, who rely on social assistance has declined drastically and does not exceed 10%.*

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<sup>3</sup> In the early 90s a few people from the neighborhood began to sell cheap clothes on the border between Poland and Germany. Business is doing well, they were joined by relatives and neighbors. The problem is that most work without permission and are forced after every three months to cease work and then to return again.

<sup>4</sup> In 2007 Bulgaria joined the European Union but still Bulgarian citizens are not authorized to work in other member states, which determine the negotiation of special conditions with those cities in Poland.

One of the most important moments in the Mayor Tsonev policy regarding the integration of Roma are targeted system activities for Roma inclusion in the cultural and social life of the region. Annually is organized a lavish celebration of April the 8<sup>th</sup> - International Roma Day, with the participation of prominent and popular figures from the country. Organized are regular meetings between the Roma football team and football team composed of journalists, artists, politicians. The mayor believes that this is not just an enjoyable pastime or a way of showing successful Kavarna Roma. 'This is a way of placing Roma issues on the public agenda and discuss it properly. We can not hide our head like an ostrich and pretend that we do not see the problems that exist in the Roma community. Nor to do nothing, because we think this is cause perduta. We just need action, less talk and more action ...', summarizes the end of our conversation Mayor Tsonev.

#### **4.1. *Existence of political will at local level***

In Kavarna practices described are comprehensive and well divined policy, taking into account the need to respect the human right of everyone to a decent life, work, education, health and available social services. In conversation with the mayor, when he had to justify one or other of his action taken to Roma, he invariably used his main argument- 'people have the right' of this or that ... Not saying 'Roma have the right', but 'people' from his municipality with who he changes and develops Kavarna<sup>5</sup>.

Tsonko Tsonev believes in the potential of Roma and sees in them the creative power. From 2003 to 2011 4 Roma were elected municipal councilors from different political parties. Despite their different political beliefs, Tsonev always encouraged them and urged to be more active in local political process and more defending proposals affecting their district and community. Unfortunately, the recent elections have not been successful for Roma from Kavarna, as they have no representative in the municipal council. However, the Mayor believes, that he will not allow they to be ignored and will follow with extreme rigor the implementation of adopted in 2010 strategies for educational integration<sup>6</sup> and integration of minorities<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> In the municipal development plan of the municipality of Kavarna, updated in 2010 are no identified needs of Roma problems are treated per districts and according social status of different population groups. The objectives, tasks and activities are aimed at residents of individual districts, incl. those inhabited by Roma, and according to the social status of the population.

<sup>6</sup> Adopted with Decision № 146 under Minutes № 44 from the meeting of the Municipal Council on 02.11.2010.

<sup>7</sup> Municipal Programe for integration of minorities 2010 – 2015 is adopted with desicion № 28 under Minutes № 49 from meeting held on 29.03.2011 of the Municipal Council Kavarna.

#### 4.2. *Inclusion of Roma in the main programs for providing services*

In Kavarna Roma are included in all basic services, which ensure them a better standard of life. Implemented are many projects financed under the pre-accession and structural funds of the EU, as well as from other donors, under which was built the wonderful infrastructure in the Roma district, housing needs are met, accessible for households are utilities services, ensured is quality education for children, supported are successful employment schemes and improved is Roma access to health care. The projects are focused only on Roma and general ones in which Roma are part of the target group and planned activities targeting them.

#### 4.3. *Planning and availability of funds for Roma programs*

From the municipal annual financial statements and the review of the documentation of projects implemented, targeting Roma, from 2004 to 2011 has been allocated significant financial resources. This is a small part of planned and spent money:

- For construction of waterpipeline in the district 'H. Dimitar' - 751,350 Levs from the municipal budget;
- For sewerage - 1,746,000 Levs from the municipal budget;
- For asphalt and streets repair - 1,871,800 Levs from the municipal budget;
- For repair of sidewalks - 261,130 Levs from the municipal budget;
- For playgrounds - 49,880 Levs from the municipal budget;
- For infrastructure, sewage, water supply- 11 000 339.78 lev under OP' Environment' and municipal budget;
- For qualification and employment in agriculture-176,086 euros under Phare 2004;
- For Youth employment and training of young Roma people - 50,665 euros;
- Under OPHRD for educational projects- 400 000 lev

The municipality spends significant resources from its own revenues, with which co-finances projects or directly investes in various activities targeted to Roma community. According the words of the mayor and the former Roma councilors, in the early years of the mandate of the mayor Tsonev more capital expenditures were allocated for the Roma district because there for years nothing was done. During whole municipal sessions mayor reasonably persuaded council members why they should invest in the Roma district and in Roma community<sup>8</sup>. As main argument he

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<sup>8</sup> The mayor has been under intense pressure from MPs', businessmen, representatives of the 'Informal economy' to sell them cheaply the free municipal land to build hotels or luxury seaside summer homes. Tsonko devoted not only one session

used the fact that the budget of each municipality is formed depending on the number of inhabitants and therefore it should be distributed equitably between residents of the municipality. After Roma constitute  $\frac{1}{4}$  from the population,  $\frac{1}{4}$  from the budget is reasonable to be allocated to them. The municipality also benefit from national programs, especially in education, health and employment, to target through them the Roma community. The economic crisis from the recent years makes it difficult for the municipality to allocate greater amount of municipal funds for Roma integration. By adopting the budget for this year, the Municipal Council decided to drastically reduce funding for April the 8<sup>th</sup>. This decision of the Municipal Council was appointed by the Mayor as discriminatory one and with his assistance Roma activists made a complaint to the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, and also announcements to media were sent.

#### *4.4. Method of management, ensuring participation*

Any solution that addresses Roma, mayor takes it after meetings and consultations with Roma. Each week he is in Roma district and meets with people there. That way he personally gets acquainted with problems that arise and discusses possible solutions not only with leaders but also with wider range of people. A particular form for inclusion of Roma is decentralized administration- Sector 'Integration of minorities' is located in the Roma district. Currently, in this sector are employed three servants- two from Roma origin and one non-Roma. The purpose of the decentralized administration is not to limit the coming of Roma in the central building of the municipal administration (which also is in close to the Roma district, not far from downtown), on the contrary-through it to ensure better access and more efficient use of administrative and other services from Roma. The mayor noted that the majority of Roma do not like to deal with the institutions and tend to surround the administration. Recognizing that in the community are also adults who have difficulty in communicating in Bulgarian and do not know the administrative system in the country and after discussions with Roma leaders his ideas, formed sector 'Integration of minorities', situates it in the Roma district and appointed three officers in it. Employees in this sector are not just administrators- they can not use bureaucratic approaches in serving elderly Roma and those who are illiterate and not very socialized. Often they use methods of social work to motivate different customers to take advantage of one or another service or mediated access to various other departments and institutions. Through these officers *daily are identify needs, accepted suggestions and complaints, feedback from Roma on various issues is received.*

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of the municipal council to discuss the vision for future development and the decision whether they wish to preserve nature and to provide better conditions for their young citizens to build houses, not to emigrate, that they share his vision for the development of cultural, rather than of alcohol tourism. After this decision it was not difficult to provide land for 110 new homes to Roma families and to allocate greater resources from the municipal budget for the Roma district- they also are citizens of Kavarna.

Besides these officials, a Roma was appointed at a senior position in the municipal administration and two others are appointed as experts. They participate in the planning of strategies, projects and activities targeted to their community.

#### *4.5. Transparency and publicity of management procedures*

Information for the budget, for activities carried out, results achieved under projects is provided regularly as well as directly by the mayor at the regular weekly meetings with the people, and through numerous publications in the media and on the site of the municipality.

#### *4.6. Reporting of local government*

The Mayor reported with annual financial reports to the Municipal Council. All reports are published on the website of the municipality. The municipality has strict and clear rules for project reporting to donors, guaranteed is an independent audit of all projects. The achievements under the projects are reported to the Municipal Council.

#### *4.7. Main results and impacts of good practice*

- In Kavarna Roma enjoy the excellent facilities in the Roma district. People keep clean and are proud from the landscape of their district. Housing needs are fully met – to those who have possibility is allowed themselves to build homes, for those who can not- municipality provide refurbished social houses. These families are only 10, but there are still difficulties with their socialization and assumption of any responsibilities-they do not care for their repaired homes and if there is not constant support from the municipality and Roma leaders, they will turn the block they live in a rundown building. An important success is that the number of these families is only 10;
- Provided is a quality education for Roma children and good conditions for early childhood development. There is no dropped out from primary education, over 90% are covered in kindergartens and pre-school classes. The majority of parents are concerned, careful and actively involved in school life. Investment in early childhood development reflected in expected results as increased number of Roma in secondary education and Roma students in universities. Without targeted measures is achieved effect on girls' education- now there are girls in secondary education, which in turn will surely reflect on the early marriages. Still problem is the youth unemployment, especially among Roma youth;

- Good effect is that amongst Roma community is increasingly generated confidence-Roma are proud of their achievements, they compared themselves with non-Roma, they feel part of a local community – ‘citizens of Kavarna’ and proud of it;
- Enjoying success is the presence of wealthy Roma developing sustainable own business;
- Covered are 100% of Roma children with immunizations, reduced is infant mortality in Kavarna compared to 2003;
- As a result of systematic and purposeful support through which the municipality encourages Roma employment and own business, today the number of Roma in Kavarna, who rely on social assistance has declined drastically and do not exceed 15%;
- Unexpected effect is the reduced petty crime in the town;
- Gradually, all employees in local administration and in institutions accept as natural the huge delegation of rights and obligations to Roma in the local government;
- Currently there are no signs of overt discrimination to Roma, they are welcome customers of designers, vendors and restaurateurs because they spend solid amounts of money for furniture, weddings and so contribute to the local economy. Before the last local elections, however, under the influence of intemperate political discourse and national context established by the case ‘Rashkovi and Katunitsa’ in Kavarna also was manifestations of hate speeches against Roma by certain local politicians.

**As an overall result of the efforts of the mayor and his team has been formed** a prosperous little town with very good quality of life, with low crime rates, with a rich cultural life, with excellent conditions for growing children, town where all feel human beings.

#### 4.8. *Key factors for achievement of positive results*

- The mayor succeeded to unite the citizens for the realization of common goals;
- The mayor delegates the right to participate in formulation of priorities and implementation of tasks to wide range of people, including Roma;
- Roma integration is not considered an end in itself or under pressure from national and international context but as a condition for local development.

## 5. Comment for applicability beyond the local context

This practice is applicable in providing conditions for the mobilization of local authorities and territorial communities for local development and support for the development of responsible leadership in Roma communities.

## **6. Key findings, lessons learned and policy recommendations**

To develop methodological instructions and practical guidelines to assist local authorities to understand and apply better:

- Principles of good local governance;
- Aspects of inclusion policies;
- Set in the National Roma Strategy objectives and expected results.

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