



COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD) FOR ROMA INCLUSION

Synthesis Report 2019

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Partners

Bulgaria: *Integro Association*
Czech Republic: *Slovo 21*
Hungary: *Autonómia Foundation*
Romania: *Nevo Parudimos*
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1. INTRODUCTION

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) is an initiative for involving citizens at local level in developing responses to today's social, environmental and economic challenges, and a promising tool for investing in Roma inclusion. The European Commission expects CLLD to facilitate implementing integrated approaches among the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) to achieve the 11 thematic objectives set out in the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) at local level. It aims to give ownership to beneficiaries, with a special focus on marginalized communities, through capacity building, empowerment, full transparency, and sharing of the decision-making power. The Commission encourages the use of CLLD to allow local communities to take ownership of the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Main elements of CLLD and relevance for Roma Inclusion

- ❖ **Bottom-up approach:** *Local people should take the lead to design and implement an integrated development strategy. CLLD has a clear eye for the need for capacity building, coaching and networking in order to empower actors. This bottom-up approach can set the right conditions for local actors to become active partners and drivers of their development.*
- ❖ **Balance of power:** *CLLD insists on cooperation between different stakeholders that form a local partnership (a 'Local Action Group' or LAG). LAGs always include public authorities (local municipalities and relevant government agencies), the private sector (local businesses and employers) and civil society (NGOs, community associations or representatives). To ensure that there is balance of power between these actors, municipalities cannot hold more than 49% of the power and the decisions made by the LAGs should be made public.*
- ❖ **Long-term investment, flexibility and capacity-building:** *LAGs will be supported to implement local development strategies for generally 7 years, and there will be investment in the capacity of the actors. This long-term funding is unique, as it goes beyond the regular EU funding of predefined short-term projects. CLLD funding will also be more flexible and will follow strategies tailored according to the needs and specificities of regions.*
- ❖ **Innovation:** *CLLD promotes innovation. It allows LAGs to take enough time to develop their strategies, to come up with new ideas and learn from others.*
- ❖ **Territorial and thematic:** *CLLD has a "territorial approach": the strategy targets a certain area that has common issues or problems. This can be deprived parts of large cities or addressing the needs of a rural area. Funding can be used to invest in hard (buildings, roads) and soft (training, raising awareness) measures. The area should have at least 10.000 and maximum 150.000 inhabitants, but not all are necessarily beneficiaries.*

Unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, the most important topics from the perspective of the Roma, are among the challenges that the EU has identified for CLLD. However, it is the task of national Government to decide which themes they want to support financially through CLLD. Approved CLLD strategies can mean that significant EU funds are available for several years to support those activities and investments that matter most for Roma.

In this context, ERGO Network wants to invest and support (pro-) Roma NGOs, community-based organisations, and Roma activists to become involved in CLLD initiatives, so that as many as possible CLLD strategies will tackle Roma exclusion. Already in 2014, ERGO Network started to promote the CLLD principles as a powerful means to promote Roma inclusion in Europe. We consider the bottom-up approach promoted by CLLD to be one of the most effective, open and transparent processes of civic involvement and participation put in place by the European Commission.

The way the national governments are designing CLLD will differ from country to country. The Partnership Agreement concluded between national Governments and the European Commission define the priority themes of EU financial support for the 2014 - 2020. Then ministries design Operational Programmes, which contain the concrete action foreseen. These are managed by the “Managing Authorities”, which can be, depending on the country, a department of a Ministry (e.g.: Social Affairs, or Regional Development) or a separate agency (e.g.: a Regional Development Agency).

Any municipality or organisation can create an informal *Local Action Group* (LAG) to produce an expression of interest to respond to a Government call under CLLD. If approved, funding will be provided to elaborate a full local development strategy, as well as formalise the structure and rules for the LAG. Active involvement of all actors is an important criterion for getting the full strategy approved by the Management Authority, who will select several strategies to be supported. These receive support for the duration of the programming period (which lasts for 7 years), with an amount of between 1 and 4 million euro, depending on the country. The LAG will be responsible for implementing the strategy, overseen by a steering committee composed of different actors in the territory (municipality, business and civil society). Community participation and animation/mobilization (community outreach activities) should be a mandatory component of the entire process.

Any active Roma NGO can take the initiative to start a Local Action Group or be represented in one. The LAG will also organise community councils or ad-hoc groups or meetings, or hire community facilitators, animators or coordinators. Roma activists can play a crucial role, as they provide the vital link between the CLLD Partnership and the community. Contributing as a volunteer is also an important possibility. The Local Development Strategy implemented through projects by third parties, such as local NGOs, CSOs and even ad-hoc groups. Roma organisations and activists should also take an active part in monitoring local strategies, in order to identify errors, make suggestions of improvement, and give feedback to the project coordinators, as well as hold decision-makers to account.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

ERGO members conducted research in four key countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania), aimed at assessing the extent to which Roma inclusion was mainstreamed throughout the CLLD processes, in what concerns both the content of the activities, as well as stakeholder involvement. The research was funded through the International Visegrad Fund.

This research was aimed at ensuring increased awareness of the CLLD process, leading to more Roma NGOs taking part in CLLD. Another aim was that CLLD, as a good practice tool, would be continued after 2020, with 10% of EU funds being distributed according to CLLD principles.

The objectives of the exercise were:

- To provide evidence on the inclusion of Roma in all stages of the CLLD
- To assess the quality of Roma inclusion in development strategies and funded projects
- To empower local action groups through increased knowledge of the CLLD and strengthen accountability mechanisms at local level
- To empower Roma to take part in the CLLD processes
- To provide recommendations on improvements in the CLLD process to foster Roma inclusion for the next programming period.

The partners involved were:

- Integro Association, Bulgaria
- Slovo 21, Czech Republic
- Autonomia Foundation, Hungary
- Nevo Parudimos, Romania

ERGO members conducted research in the following LAG areas in their countries:

- Bulgaria: Byala Slatina, Hisarya, Kotel-Sungurlare-Varbitsa, Isperih
- Czech Republic: Opava
- Hungary: Hatvan, Bátorfytereny, Csongrád, Ózd, Szentes
- Romania: Corvinia West, Reșița, Timișoara (2 urban LAG's).

ERGO members in Romania and the Czech Republic produced a detailed quality audit analysis of the CLLD activities in their countries, following the tried and tested ERGO methodology above. Our members in Bulgaria and Hungary further complemented the analysis with narrative reports from the CLLD implementation.

This synthesis report was drafted in September 2019 by *Amana Ferro*, Senior Policy Adviser with the ERGO Network office in Brussels, and *Daniel Grebeldinger*, Project Manager with Nevo Parudimos in Romania and CLLD expert, based on the source material provided by ERGO national members, as above, as well as on ERGO Network's previous work on the subject.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

a) General considerations

ERGO members consider the CLLD approach, implemented under the Rural Development Program, as one of the most important existing instruments relevant to the social inclusion of vulnerable communities at local level during the current programming period. As much as implementation difficulties are observed, this remains the only approach that gives the chance for a true bottom-up development in small areas. The research into its functioning covers two main dimensions: the degree and quality of involvement of Roma communities, and the civil society organisations representing them, in CLLD structures and processes; and the extent to which proposed CLLD initiatives support Roma rights and inclusion. These two dimensions are explored in detail in the sections below, while we provide here a general overview of concerns.

For **Bulgaria**, although implementation had to start still in 2016, there are serious delays in the launch of the measures. However, studies show that despite the difficulties, all funded LAG implement their strategies. One important deterrent are administrative and technical obstacles, due to insufficient administrative and human resources in both LAGs and the Managing Authorities, as well as frequent changes in rules and regulations, which lead to delays in approvals and financing. At present, there is a separate Managing Authorities for each Operational Programs providing funding for Local Development Strategies, which places an undue burden on the LAGs to meet the different requirements and deadlines. Working with the EUMIS 2020 electronic platform system is an additional obstacle for most stakeholders.

Another important obstacle is that bottom-up planning is not always reflected in the measures, which tend to replicate existing national strategies, which means that real needs identified on the ground go unanswered. This goes against the very spirit of CLLD. Often, local authorities see the LAG solely as a source of funding for infrastructure projects, not as a potential for overall territorial development. Local authorities need to involve local stakeholders much more in the design and implementation of projects, to ensure that all needed skills, as well as all relevant voices, are on board. It is necessary to invest in capacity building activities in vulnerable communities, as well as remove the requirement for measures to be implemented only by NGOs registered in the territory of the LAG, because there are small communities where such civil society organisations do not exist.

On a brighter note, several changes in the current programming period have led to a broader and more effective implementation of the CLLD approach. For example, it is now possible to create Local Development Strategies in the territories of two and three municipalities. Also, LAGs were able to use resources from other Operational Programs, combining funding from the Rural Development, the Maritime and Fisheries, the Environment, the Innovation and Competitiveness, the Science and Education for Intelligent Growth, and the Human Resources

Development Programs. Finally, in order to ensure the social inclusion and involvement of vulnerable communities, additional points have been awarded in evaluating strategies for social inclusion measures, which made it possible to target the Roma as a vulnerable group.

In the **Czech Republic**, no cooperation between the LAG in the researched area (Opava) and Roma communities or NGOs has taken place. The LAG has expressed openness to start a dialogue, and a first cooperation meeting already took place. However, the necessary tools are still lacking for the LAG to adequately reach out to Roma communities and their representative. To remedy the situation, ERGO Network member Slovo 21 applied for membership in the Opava LAG, and the bases have been put in place for future cooperation and consultation on new projects developed under CLLD. However, these will only begin in October 2019.

For **Hungary**, based on the five localities surveyed, it was concluded that the calls for tenders were published with a significant delay for the most part, thus strategies had to be modified in multiple cases (mainly because of the lower amount of financial aid, secondly because of new needs that arose after the initial planning stage). Reaching out to local organizations (especially NGOs), involving them in the planning process and local tender opportunities was not successful at all, or only to a very limited extent. The main reasons are that these organizations are unable to meet the criteria specified by the tenders and lack the resources for realizing these projects. There are very few Roma representatives in the local task forces, who all belong to the local Roma government, therefore citizens and NGOs are not present and did not take part in planning of the CLLD strategy and the local tenders. (Pro-)Roma organisations do not appear in the CLLD as local applicants or project managers, with the rare exceptions, again, of those who belong to the local Roma government, which does not operate as an NGO. There is an obvious lack of Roma organizations and communities in Hatvan, and, based on less information, this is likely to be true in Bátorjén, Ózd and Szentés as well. Csongrád seems to be the exception, where the local Roma government is not only a member of the local taskforce, but it is among its first winners as well, carrying out a series of cultural event.

For **Romania**, the CLLD processes are not known enough, which leads to an underuse of their potential for Roma inclusion. There is a high level of mistrust and scepticism in Roma communities that the quality of life of people will improve as a result of these initiatives. Issues related to transparency and lack of information about the state of the project and the LAG's management activity persist, which is why there are strong calls for clear and complete information to be made available in a pro-active, timely, and accessible fashion. Such an approach would foster trust between local authorities and Roma communities and their representatives, leading to both more relevant initiatives for Roma inclusion, as well as more ownership and involvement on behalf of Roma in CLLD processes and structures.

b) Involvement of Roma communities and their civil society organisations in CLLD structures and processes

In **Bulgaria**, changes introduced this programming period made it a prerequisite for Roma as a vulnerable group to be engaged at all stages of the CLLD process. However, it is not always easy for Roma communities to make their voices heard. In Byala Slatina, there is a lack of an active citizen sector in the municipality, while NGOs outside the LAG's territory are not allowed to participate in the implementation of the strategies. Roma have participated in the development of the local strategy, however not very actively, given the lack of knowledge regarding the strategy, the lack of confidence, and, to some extent, the lack of openness of the LAG itself. In Hisarya, the LAG has not taken any specific action to include the Roma in the planning. However, the views of NGOs and schools on existing problems and ways of solving them have been considered. In Kotel-Sungurlare-Varbitsa, LAG representatives maintained active contacts with local activists, and Roma have been involved in the planning of the strategy and are expected to participate in the implementation. The problem is, once again, that there are no Roma NGOs working in the LAGs territory, which means that they will be dependent on the implementation of measures by other NGOs. However, their participation in general measures is a good indicator of Roma inclusion. Finally, in Isperih there are no difficulties with regard to Roma participation in the planning and participation of Roma in the implementation of the LAG strategy, which is planned with the active involvement of the local Roma community centre, which will also be the implementer of one of the integration projects.

In the **Czech Republic**, there has been no cooperation so in the design, implementation, or monitoring of activities through the CLLD framework in Opava. Roma communities are not represented in the structure of the LAG, and subsequently, Roma organisations did not participate in LAG meetings, where not consulted on the preparation of Specific guidelines. The NGOs present in the LAG are only able to a limited extent to represent the interests of Roma communities. Equally, Roma organisations did not apply for projects to the LAG, and no support was offered to these NGOs to do so, while the LAG members also did not actively consult Roma organisations who are not in the LAG during the implementation. Similarly, Roma communities present on the territory of the LAG were not informed, nor consulted as part of the consultation stage, and were not approached by the LAG team to plan and develop projects to be applied, nor were they represented in the evaluation committees of the projects. It is also concluded that the Roma in the LAG area are not well organised to voice their needs and concerns.

In **Hungary**, in Hatvan, the local Roma government or other Roma organizations are not part of the taskforce, though there are good relationship between the Roma government and local authorities. (Pro-)Roma organisations did not participate in the planning stage, though the local taskforce leader claims to have contacted them, and did not submit tenders, as the implementation considerably exceeds the capacities. There is an initiative to group NGO in consortia that can submit joint tenders. In Bátorjénnyé, the local taskforce includes only the town's Roma government. The region's largest Roma NGO Nógrád Megyei Cigány Kisebbségi Képviselek és

Szószólók Szövetsége) states that they are excluded from such developmental opportunities. There is no information on any Roma organization or community being a part of the planning process, and no information is available concerning the tenders. In Csongrád, similarly, the local Roma government is part of the taskforce, and there was a pro-active, comprehensive effort to involve stakeholders, including disadvantaged target groups and those living in peripheral, remote areas. The local Roma government organised for a where people living in places of segregation could participate and make suggestions. In Ózd, there are no Roma NGOs among the taskforce members, not even the local Roma government, and the partner NGOs are not Roma-focused either. There is no sign of the targeted involvement of Roma communities in the CLLD planning documents, using any kind of CLLD methodology. Finally, in Szentés, the local Roma government is a 'consortium member', covering hard-to-reach communities. The CLLD documents, however, contain no information on whether the Roma community was targeted and reached or not during the planning, brainstorming and service processes. There is no information about tender winners yet.

In **Romania**, community representation and participation in CLLD planning and implementation processes were deemed good and very good for the three localities surveyed. It is considered that Roma communities in these areas are efficient and can properly and actively represent the interests of Roma people. However, it is often the case that local authorities are reluctant to publicly speak about, and tackle, Roma problems and needs. Subsequently, there is little ownership and control of the Roma over the Local Development Strategy, at least in Corvinia West and Reșița). In Timișoara, there is more willingness and openness on the part of local authorities and there is a dialogue, but involvement of Roma stakeholders could be improved. Equally, and more transparency is needed on behalf of local authorities. The local communities are sceptical about public authorities' initiatives, but they trust their leaders to effectively represent them in the LAG.

c) CLLD initiatives supporting Roma inclusion

In **Bulgaria**, in Byala Slatina, the LAGs face a problem related to the simultaneous implementation of a national program and a measure embedded in the CLLD strategy in the same territory. For this reason, activities from the Human Resources Development Operational Program were not included in the Local Development Strategy, to avoid duplication of target groups, particularly as, in small municipalities, the target group is not large to begin with. This aspect, coupled with a lack of NGOs that can demonstrate financial capacity, and of community centres practically excludes the possibility of implementing measures for social inclusion and targeting of the Roma. The Roma can participate in the other measures, but in practice this does not happen because they do not meet the formal criteria or do not have enough information about the existing opportunities. In Hisarya, Roma are only passive users of services, participating in activities funded by OP SEIG or OP HRD. In Kotel-Sungurlare-Varbitsa, Roma participate in measures developed by other NGOs, which is however a good indicator for Roma inclusion.

Finally, in Isperih, there are difficulties with the participation of Roma in mainstream measures to encourage local farmers and businesses, due to insufficient capacity.

In the **Czech Republic**, in Opava, social inclusion was not included in the objectives of the new project ideas. Roma were not explicitly mentioned as a target group or beneficiary of these new projects, and the initiatives did not respond to real needs of the Roma communities. Subsequently, the impact of these measures for Roma inclusion is expected to be insignificant. The projects equally do not consider the diversity of and within Roma communities. Since local authorities did not invite Roma NGOs to be partner or coordinator for the new projects, and Roma communities have not been named as beneficiaries of the measures, there is little ownership of Roma communities of the proposed Local Development Strategies.

In **Hungary**, in Hatvan, the strategy defines four specific goals and four areas of intervention, none of which are directly related to disadvantaged social groups, and the 51 projects collected in the planning stage do not include Roma communities or underprivileged social groups. In Bányterenyé, the strategy mentions disadvantaged social groups, including the local Roma communities, only in vague terms, related to education, employment and the workfare program. Two out of the five goals might affect disadvantaged social groups as well as the local Roma community: “Increasing the social sensitivity of the local community and strengthening the connection between different generations and social groups through awareness-raising initiatives, education, events and network cooperation” and “Developments in order to retain young people and workforce, including programs that promote employment”. In Csongrád, the Local Programme for Equal Opportunities (HEP) includes goals such as equal treatment, providing equal opportunities, equal access to public services, non-discrimination, non-segregationist system, addressing issues that affect disadvantaged groups concerning social safety, healthcare, education and housing, and identified Roma among the five key target beneficiary group. The CLLD strategy is in sync with the measures above and contributes to their realization horizontally. In Ózd, the town development strategy has a separate chapter entitled “Anti-segregation program” that aims to mitigate and, in the long run, stop the segregation process. These goals are also mentioned in the CLLD strategy. However; community planning or the economical and structural development of Roma organizations through the CLLD program (empowerment) did not take place. Finally, in Szentes, the local taskforce involved the local Roma government in its membership, but the needs of the Roma community were not reflected in the development plans.

In **Romania**, the inclusion of Roma in objectives for all three localities surveyed has been deemed optimal. The only problem is that those objectives were not decided 100% using a CLLD approach. Some of them were just put there by the local authorities to fulfil the criteria of the guidelines. This was possible, first, because of the lack of experience in participative consultation processes of the local authorities, and second because of the low organisational and representativity capacity of the Roma community.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the Management Authorities:

- Improve the management of CLLD measures in order to respect timeframes, reduce lengthy waiting periods, and create the preconditions for the development and implementation of very good strategies that promote inclusion of Roma in rural and urban areas
- Simplify the bureaucracy of managing EU funds, particularly in the case of multi-fund or hybrid projects, in order to increase the access of hard to reach groups, especially Roma communities and their civil society organisations, to these funds
- Develop effective consultation, monitoring, and evaluation processes, in order to ensure that the voices of the Roma are taken on board, and that measures targeting them are adequately implemented.
- Support and invest in building the capacity of Roma stakeholders (Roma communities and their civil society organisations) to take meaningful part in these processes, as equal partners.

2. For LAGs:

- Provide more, better, and more timely information about available funding opportunities, as well as fostering a better understanding of CLLD principles among local stakeholders.
- Make sure that areas and municipalities with a significant proportion of Roma inhabitants are included in the LAGs.
- Pro-actively seek the involvement of both Roma communities and their civil society organisations and include Roma representatives in the LAG management teams.
- Based on real needs assessment carried out in Roma communities and with their full input, propose measures and projects that better support the social and professional inclusion of the Roma.
- Support and promote capacity-building and peer learning and put in place mechanisms to increase the capacity of small NGOs to access funds, as well as for Roma and non-Roma civil society to get involved in a meaningful way in CLLD processes.
- Increase the transparency and independency of the LAG's activities, funding and implementation process of the strategy, towards all stakeholders as well as beneficiaries.

3. For Local NGOs and Roma communities:

- Be more proactive towards LAG teams, ask for meetings and involvement and request information, even when it is not made easily available.
- Apply to become a member of the management bodies of the LAG in your area.
- In close cooperation with Roma communities in the LAG area, put forward their needs and concerns and contribute to the elaboration of solutions and measures.

- Identify key people in local Roma communities, who can be trained to work with the LAGs and make the link between needs assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Spread the information's about the LAG's activities and about the opportunities offered by the LAGs to the individual members of the Roma community in your area.