



COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD) FOR ROMA INCLUSION **Evaluation Report 2014-2020**

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Partners



Bulgaria:
Integro Association



Czech Republic:
Slovo 21



Romania:
Nevo Parudimos

Prepared by Amana Ferro (ERGO Network) and Daniel Grebeldinger (Nevo Parudimos)

ERGO Network
Rue d'Edimbourg 26
1050 Brussels

www.ergonetwork.org



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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 equally encouraged the use of CLLD to allow local communities to take ownership of the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy (2010-2020).

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 is also more flexible and follows 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 address 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 governments 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 the most for Europe's Roma.

In this context, **ERGO Network invests in and supports (pro-) Roma NGOs, community-based organisations, and Roma activists to become involved in CLLD initiatives,** so that as many CLLD strategies as possible tackle Roma exclusion. Already in 2014, ERGO Network started to promote the CLLD principles as a powerful means to support 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 design CLLD processes differs from country to country. The Partnership Agreements concluded between national governments and the European Commission defined the priority themes of EU financial support for the period 2014 - 2020. Then ministries designed Operational Programmes, which contain the concrete actions 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 to 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 Managing Authority, which selects 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) are 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 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 a vital link between the CLLD partnership and the community. Contributing as a volunteer is also a possibility. The Local Development Strategy is implemented through projects by third parties, such as local NGOs, other civil society organisations, and even ad-hoc groups. Roma organisations and activists should take an active part in the monitoring of local strategies, in order to identify errors, make suggestions for improvement, and give feedback to the project coordinators, as well as hold decision-makers to account.



2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this report, ERGO Network members conducted research in three key countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Romania), based on a comprehensive questionnaire, filled in during Autumn 2020. The present evaluation concerns the CLLD cycle throughout the overall programming period 2014-2020, still under implementation at the time of data collection.

The exercise intended to assess 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, with the aim to formulate recommendations and proposals to increase Roma participation for the next cycle. At the same time, our intention is to bring up good practices and examples of successful initiatives that were implemented – or initiated and are still under implementation – under the CLLD umbrella. It is hoped that this research will ensure increased awareness of the CLLD process, leading to more Roma NGOs taking part, and that CLLD 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 process
- To assess the quality of Roma inclusion in development strategies and funded projects
- To empower Local Action Groups through increased knowledge of 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
- To showcase good practices of CLLD projects which put the Roma at their core.

The topics covered by this evaluation report include:

- The national CLLD context and structures
- Roma involvement with Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- Roma inclusion in local development and integrated strategies
- Lessons learned from the current cycle

The partners involved were:

- **Integro Association**, Bulgaria
- **Slovo 21**, Czech Republic
- **Nevo Parudimos**, Romania

This synthesis report was drafted in December 2020 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. It is based on the source material provided by ERGO Network national members, as above, as well as on ERGO Network's previous work on the subject.



3. MAIN FINDINGS

a) National CLLD context and structures

ERGO members consider the CLLD approach one of the most important existing instruments relevant to the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable communities at local level. As much as implementation difficulties are observed, this remains the only approach providing an opportunity for true bottom-up development in small areas. This research into its functioning covered 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.

CLLD activities began implementation in different countries at different moments. In **Bulgaria**, both rural and fishery CLLD were present in the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. In the **Czech Republic**, rural CLLD was kickstarted in 2015, preceded by LEADER. In **Romania**, rural and fishery CLLD were present in the 2007-2014 programming period, while urban CLLD began being implemented in 2014-2020. ERGO Network members began their involvement with CLLD from early on: in 2013 in the Czech Republic, in 2014 in Romania, and in 2015 in Bulgaria.

The type of CLLD ventures differs from country to country, indicating a variety of approaches:

Bulgaria: rural CLLD, fishery CLLD, multi-fund approach – but no urban CLLD or integrated approaches.

Czech Republic: only rural CLLD.

Romania: urban, rural, and fishery CLLD – but no multi-fund or integrated approaches.

In terms of local strategies, we also notice differences between our respondent countries:

Bulgaria: local development strategies implemented by LAGs / FLAGs (Fisheries LAGs) and multi-fund approaches with local / regional development strategies and plans, but no integrated strategies implemented by regions or municipalities.

Czech Republic: only local development strategies implemented by LAGs.

Romania: local development strategies implemented by LAGs / FLAGs (261) and integrated strategies implemented by municipalities (37).

In **Bulgaria**, the CLLD approach is only applied in **rural or fishery regions**. In the programming period 2014-2022 (unlike in the previous one), local strategies could include funding not only from the Rural Development Program, but also funds from the Programs Human Resources Development, Science and Education for Smart Growth, Innovation and Competitiveness and Environment. The strategies including measures from the other Operational Programs are called **multi-funded**. Another new element in the current period is the possibility to have more than one municipality in a LAG. This does not bring them additional funding, but it increases the possibility of their strategy being funded.

The rule for establishing a LAG is to set up a partnership between local government, local business, and local civil society, where neither of the three should have a majority stake in the general assembly. In theory, the representatives of the municipalities make up 40%, of businesses 30%, and of NGOs 30%. The same principle is applied for the LAG Management Board. In practice, things happen differently. There are no NGOs in many LAG areas and citizens generally do not sufficiently understand the role of the LAGs. Sometimes, community centres are involved instead of NGOs – however, they lack the capacity and an understanding of civic participation. Very often, NGOs or business representatives close to the local government are registered, as it is the local government who controls the leadership in the case of most LAGs. There are small exceptions in which the principles for establishing the LAG are followed according to the rules.



In the **Czech Republic**, the **rural CLLD** is delivered by LAGs on the basis of integrated and multi-sectoral local development strategies. Development strategies are designed with local needs in mind. The approach is used in rural areas, specifically LAGs formed by administrative territories of municipalities with less than 25.000 inhabitants, where the maximum size of LAGs will not exceed 100.000 inhabitants and will not be less than 10.000 inhabitants.

Main topics addressed:

- Addressing high unemployment in rural areas and increasing the employability of jobseekers by increasing the number of jobs in rural areas, reducing internal labor market differentiation between urban and rural areas, by increasing the share of jobs in rural areas.
- Increasing and changing qualifications and providing employment opportunities in rural areas.
- Support for business opportunities, support for the establishment of new business entities in cooperation with local actors. Stopping the outflow of skilled and young labor into more lucrative non-agricultural businesses outside rural areas.
- Utilization of rural development potential (eg, human potential, attractiveness of the environment, alternative services, ability of the population to cooperate, restoration of cultural heritage and revitalization of cultural life).
- Creating conditions for cooperation between primary and secondary schools in rural areas.
- Increasing the functional equipment of the countryside, creating conditions for cooperation in improving the quality and availability of service networks (eg social, health and follow-up).
- Support for the development of the local economy (incl. social enterprises) in rural areas, support for the development of mutual cooperation between companies, firms and schools and other relevant actors, support and development of services in the field of technical and non-technical innovations.
- Implementation of land improvements and at the same time the implementation of other measures to improve biodiversity.
- Reducing the number of small sources of pollution, supporting the regeneration of brownfields, increasing the share of waste reuse, recycling and supporting the replacement of primary sources with secondary raw materials.
- Implementation of projects for the use of local potentials for energy savings and energy production from renewable energy sources.
- Preservation and restoration of the interconnectedness and permeability of the landscape, strengthening the retention capacity of the landscape, including protection against floods, coordination of agri-environmental measures to improve the appearance of the landscape.

In **Romania**, the **urban CLLD** functions under the Ministry for EU Funds and is financed from two sources (**multi-fund integrated approach**): part of the investments come from DG REGIO funds, and the other part (which also includes the funds needed for the urban LAG to function) come from the European Social Fund (ESF). Initially, urban LAGs (ULAGS) were created in towns with more than 20.000 inhabitants. They operate like NGO (under the NGO national law), and have as founding members the local authority, civil society, companies, public institutions, and individuals from disadvantaged communities, none of them having more than 50% of the votes.

The ULAGs were created with the aim to contribute to the improvement of quality of life for the people living in the most deprived urban areas. In most cases, the ULAGs were created at the initiative of the municipalities or consultancy companies, while the participation of the local communities where they worked was very superficial. In theory, the relationship between the ULAG and the local community is supposed to be very close, given that representatives of those communities are members in the ULAG. However, in practice, this is not the case and there are big representation gaps between the ULAG and the local community it works in.



The ULAGs prepared an integrated strategy, for which they received up to 7 million Euro from ESF and REGIO for projects and measures to deliver an integrated approach for the inclusion process in disadvantaged communities. The role of the ULAGs is to be an intermediary management authority for the projects developed by different beneficiaries from the communities, aiming to tackle the issues those communities are facing. The projects selected by the ULAGs proceed to a second evaluation by the Managing Authority of ESF or REGIO funds. While this was initially supposed to be just a formality, now it is at this very level that funds are blocked, and the role of the ULAGs in the evaluation process is merely formal.

The rural CLLD or LEADER program is now in its second programming period, and it is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture – the Managing Authority responsible for the European Rural Development Funds (ERDF). The LEADER program covers more than 95% of the eligible territories in Romania (rural areas and towns with up to 20.000 inhabitants). The rural LAGS also

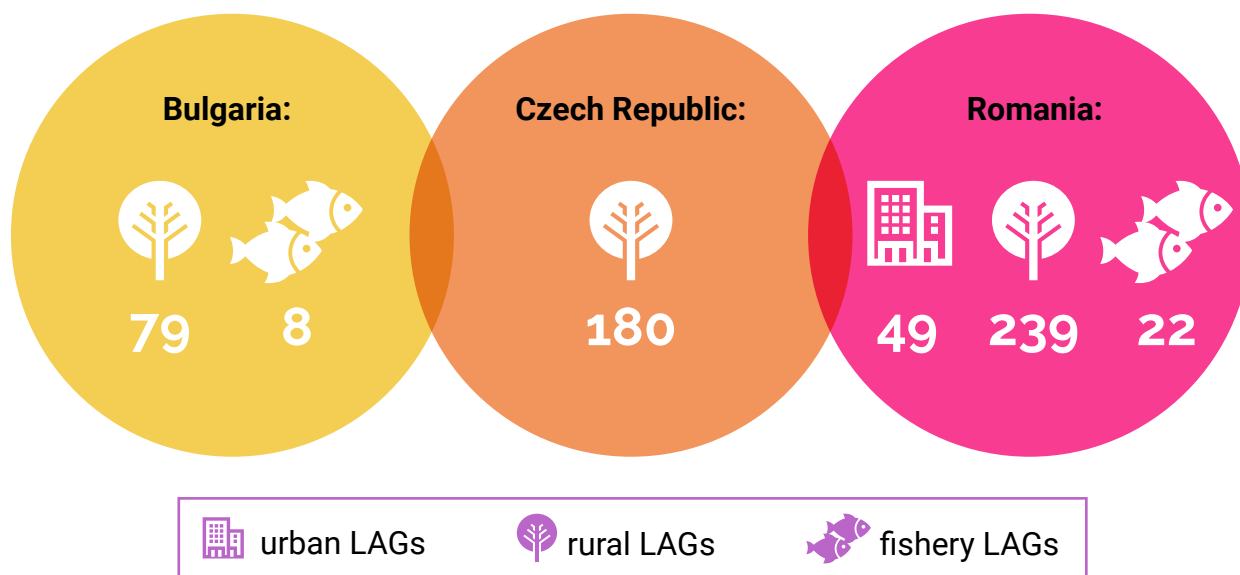
function as NGOs and operate in a defined territory, bringing several municipalities together. The territories cannot overlap, and one municipality can be a member of only one LAG. Members include public authorities, civil society and companies from the area in question. Like in the case of the ULAGs, no category can exceed 50%.

The rural LAGs develop and implement an integrated development strategy for the territory of the LAG, and their role is that of an intermediary management authority, evaluating project proposals and offering support in the delivery. Following a selection process, the LAGs can receive funds up to 2.5 million Euro to support projects in their area to implement the strategy. In reality, this is a huge task, as the LAGs are responsible for social programs, infrastructure programs, ICT programs, entrepreneurship development, networking and cooperation etc. Their relationship with public authorities is usually good, but it needs significant improvement when it comes to communicating with citizens.



b) Roma involvement with Local Action Groups (LAGs)

For the current programming period, the following **number of LAGs** were identified by ERGO Network members for their countries:



In terms of **national LAG federations**, in **Bulgaria** the National Association of Local Action Groups (Национална асоциация на местните инициативни групи в България – <https://vomr.bg>) was created for rural CLLD, and the National Fishery Network (Националната рибарска мрежа – <https://nrmbg.com>) for fishery CLLD. In the **Czech Republic**, there is a National Network of Local Action Groups (Národní síť místních akčních skupin České republiky – <http://nsmascr.cz/en/>). In **Romania**, the National Federation of Local Action Groups (Federația Națională a Grupurilor de Acțiune Locală - <https://fngal.ro/>) was set up for rural CLLD, as well as the Federation of Urban Local Action Groups (Federația Națională a GAL-urilor Urbane).

In what concerns **rural development networks**, there is a National Rural Network in **Bulgaria** (<https://ruralnet.bg>). This network was established as a unit of the Managing

Authority of the rural program, and it aims to strengthen the dialogue with civil society. The main activity of the network is to disseminate information and gather feedback on rural policies. However, there were long periods when this network was not active. In **Romania**, the National Rural Development Network (<https://www.rndr.ro/leader.html>) brings together the organizations and authorities involved in the rural development process, with the objectives to:

- increase stakeholder involvement in the implementation of the National Rural Development Plan (NRDP)
- improve the quality of NRDP implementation
- inform the general public and potential beneficiaries about the NRDP
- support and promote innovation in agriculture.

No such network was reported for the **Czech Republic**.



In **Bulgaria**, only 8 of the rural LAGs include **Roma stakeholders** (be they individuals, civil society organisations, or private companies) in their membership. ERGO Network member Integro Association is not a LAG member because they are registered in an urban region. However, they support their members and local activists to become a part of their respective rural LAGs. It was deemed by our members that the LAG national network in Bulgaria was not very active, and hence they established no partnerships with them.

In the **Czech Republic**, this information is not publicly available, but ERGO Network member Slovo 21 is part of two rural LAGs (Opavsko and Stolové Hory). In these LAGs, they are planning several activities focussing on Roma inclusion, and have

equally participated in the development of the Strategy for Community-led Local Development (SCLLD) 2021-2027. They also feed Roma concerns through working closely with the National Network of LAGs mentioned above.

More encouragingly, in **Romania**, there are 49 Roma representatives in the urban LAGs, and as many as 153 in the rural LAGs, but none in the fishery LAGs. ERGO Network member Nevo Parudimos is member in one urban LAG (Reșița). They also have a partnership agreement with the National Federation of Urban LAGs since 2019, and several ones with the National Federation of Rural LAGs. Under the latter, a capacity-building project is currently carried out, funded by the Norway Grants.

Nevo Parudimos was one of the NGOs supporting the creation of the urban LAG federation in Romania. They routinely cooperate with the federation on a number of projects and activities. Nevo Parudimos CLLD expert Daniel Grebeldinger is a member of the inclusion department of this network, and he represented the network in the consultation process with the Romanian Government for the planning of the next programming period. Nevo Parudimos has also carried out a capacity building project together with the urban LAG network, as well as developing training packages, delivering trainings and providing input to the Romanian Government on Roma inclusion issues.

Nevo Parudimos equally cooperates since 2014 with the national federation of LAGs from rural areas. In 2015, they organised regional meetings all around the country to offer support and advice to all rural LAGs regarding the development of strategies

for the 2014-2020 programming period. They equally contributed Roma inclusion measures to the Romanian Government. The inclusion department of the federation is also coordinated by CLLD expert Daniel Grebeldinger. In 2016, a training package was developed for the rural LAGs and Roma from their areas, to encourage and support the involvement of Roma in the LAGs, and a number of trainings have since been delivered. From 2021, a capacity building project in partnership with the rural LAG network will fund trainings for all LAGs and their Roma members in Romania.

All ERGO Network members in the three countries falling under the scope of the present report have organised **trainings for Roma and pro-Roma stakeholders and civil society** who wished to implement projects targeting Roma communities in the 2014-2020 programming period.

In **Bulgaria**, 4 such trainings were organised for rural CLLD, with the following numbers of participants attending:

Year	Urban / Rural / Fishery	Total number	NGO staff	LAG staff	Local authorities	Roma NGOs	Roma individuals
2015	 rural	20	16	2	2	10	
2016	 rural	30	14	4	6	12	6
2017	 rural	20	20			4	
2018	 rural	15	15			5	1

In the **Czech Republic**, our members organised 30 such trainings, also for the rural CLLD, with the following numbers of participants attending:

Year	Urban / Rural / Fishery	Total number	NGO staff	LAG staff	Local authorities	Roma NGOs	Roma individuals
2017	 rural	67	11	5	5	6	40
2018	 rural	80	10	5	8	10	47
2019	 rural	72	4	6	6	10	46
2020	 rural	98	15	5	3	15	40

In **Romania**, our members have implemented multiple trainings for urban and rural LAGs, in order to support LAG members to get in touch with Roma civil society as a means to increase participation and ownership of Roma communities. These trainings occur at a rate of two a year since 2019 for the urban LAGs, and since 2017 for the rural LAGs, with the following numbers of participants attending:

Year	Urban / Rural / Fishery	Total number	NGO staff	LAG staff	Local authorities	Roma NGOs	Roma individuals
2017	 rural	37	11	12	2	7	5
2017	 rural	43	11	10	4	6	12
2018	 rural	22	4	7	1	5	5
2018	 rural	22	3	8		4	6
2019	 urban	30	4	3	2	7	14
2019	 urban	22	3	3		6	10
2020	 urban	24	2	2	1	10	9
2020	 urban	21	2			4	15

c) Roma inclusion in local development / integrated strategies

While part of the strategies put forward by LAGs in **Bulgaria** are multi-funded, hence receive financial support for implementation from several Operational Programs, there are no integrated strategies. Currently, 64 strategies are funded in the current programming period for rural CLLD (of which 15 multi-funded), and 8 for fishery CLLD. Only 15 rural strategies contain social inclusion measures, out of which only 12 feature specific Roma inclusion measures.

Regarding a **Roma indicator or special Roma-related measures**, the inclusion of measures targeting vulnerable groups was worth an additional 10 points when applying for funding of the strategies. In the multi-funded strategies, the guidelines included Roma-specific measures aimed at socio-economic integration / temporary employment, qualification, social services, but also measures aimed at improving the level of education among students from vulnerable communities, additional school activities, hiring educational mediators, etc. The funding for measures targeting vulnerable groups came from the Operational Programs for Human Resources Development and for Science and Education for Smart Growth. However, the effect is not particularly positive, because the planned measures copy the ones from the corresponding national programs for these OPs, without taking into account the specific needs at the local level.

In the **Czech Republic**, Strategies for Community-Led Local Development (SCLLDs) were developed for each LAG (a total of 178) for the programming period 2014-2020. Similar strategies for the next programming period are currently being prepared, for a total of 180 LAGs. As of 2021, a Regional Development Strategy will also be operational.

A specific Roma indicator is currently being discussed under the National Roma Strategic Framework for 2021 – 2030, and ERGO Network members are pushing for a similar one within the SCLLD. While no explicit measures for Roma are currently included in the guidelines, disadvantaged groups and the Roma minority are mentioned in relation to support in employment and education.

In **Romania**, 310 integrated strategies were developed thus far, of which 49 urban integrated strategies, 239 rural LEADER integrated strategies, and 22 fishery strategies. Of these, all but 12 urban ones are implemented under the current programming period. 180 rural CLLD strategies and 37 urban ones contain social inclusion measures, with 153 and 37 respectively featuring specifically Roma inclusion measures.

For the urban CLLD, it was specified in the guidelines that one of target beneficiaries needed to be the Roma population, and one of the indicators was the number of Roma individuals targeted by the project. Also, it was mentioned that members of disadvantaged communities (including the Roma) had to be part of the LAG General Assembly. For the rural LAGs, 5 points were granted in the evaluation process if the strategies included measures which promoted Roma social inclusion.

All of ERGO Network's three national members who responded were directly involved in the planning process of these strategies, in **Bulgaria** through rural CLLD in Isperih, Avren – Beloslav, Kotel

– Sungurlare – Tvarditsa, and Tundzha, in the **Czech Republic** through the two rural LAGs of Opavsko and Stolové Hory, and in **Romania** with the Reșița urban CLLD, while other Roma representatives were involved in both rural and urban. However, while our Bulgarian members felt that the experience was positive (they had open discussions, four of their proposals were included), and our Czech members that the experience was very positive (their proposals were taken on board), our Romanian members felt that they were only invited to tick the participation box of the guidelines, but they didn't feel listened to. However, for the rural CLLD, our Romanian members prepared templates for Roma social inclusion strategies, which were taken on board by 153 rural LAGs.



d) Lessons learned from the current cycle

Regarding Roma involvement with the CLLD structures within the national Government, our members report mixed to negative experiences, highlighting that much more remains to be done in order to ensure true Roma ownership and participation in the management of CLLD processes designed to improve their lives.

In **Bulgaria**, for the current programming period, no Roma NGO is part of the Managing Authority of the Rural Development Program, which is the one overseeing the implementation of the CLLD approach in the country. In the **Czech Republic**, our members are not directly involved with governmental CLLD structures, but they feed their concerns through the National Network of LAGs. In **Romania**, no Roma NGO is officially part of these structures. However, involvement is achieved through intermediary bodies. For example, ERGO Network member Nevo Parudimos is part of the National Rural Development Network and was involved directly, through this membership, in the consultation process for the new LEADER programme. Equally, Nevo Parudimos feeds its concerns and proposals for Roma inclusion through the National Federation of LAGs, who is part of the governmental consultation committees. The only Roma stakeholder involved in the process of consultation from the institutional side is the National Roma Agency.

Another key issue identified by ERGO Network members is the **absence of a mid-term evaluation** of the CLLD cycle of this programming period in their country. No such evaluation was carried out in **Bulgaria**, nor in **Romania** for the urban CLLD, only yearly evaluations by the Managing Authority. For the rural CLLD in Romania, in addition to the yearly evaluation, a general intermediary evaluation was carried out, which offered a bonus to the LAGs who had been successful in implementing their strategies and had reached the initial indicators without making changes during the implementation. This evaluation also resulted in a cut in funding for the LAGs who did not do so. No Roma NGO was involved in this process in any official capacity, though they carried out their own independent shadow monitoring. No information was available from the **Czech Republic**, where our members are only involved with ongoing evaluation as part of two SCLLDs.





On a more positive note, it was felt that the Roma communities where our members are active were informed about the opportunities offered by the CLLD approach. However, a number of obstacles still remain so that the Roma can reap the full benefits offered by CLLD.

In **Bulgaria**, ERGO Network member Integro Association held many meetings between the rural LAGs and the community to promote the opportunities provided by LAG strategies. Unfortunately, the Roma who take advantage of these opportunities are very few.

The reasons for this are:

- Local Roma NGOs do not have the possibility to use advance payments for projects funded by the LAG. They have to spend their own money and wait a few months for reimbursement. This effectively stops local NGOs to engage.
- Projects related to small business and agriculture must be implemented with 100% own funds and wait for verification until the costs are reimbursed.
- In many places, despite the rules, the local government determines who will receive funds from the Local Development Strategies.

Our Bulgarian members scored the effectiveness of Roma community participation a 3 (on a scale from 1 to 10), and even this score is only due to the fact that

many LAGs finance municipal projects for socio-economic integration and the Roma are hired for these projects.

In the **Czech Republic**, similarly, Roma communities are informed thanks also to the cooperation of ERGO Network member Slovo 21 with local coordinators and other NGOs, who strive to involve Roma beneficiaries in a wide range of CLLD-related activities and to keep them abreast of the opportunities offered by the approach. Our Czech members appreciated the effectiveness of Roma community participation as a 5 (on a scale from 1 to 10).

In **Romania**, while the information is there, the potential of CLLD is massively underutilized, because LAGs and local authorities often use this funding opportunity for projects that are not necessarily relevant for poor communities, such as the Roma. The effectiveness of Roma community participation received only a score of 2 (on a scale from 1 to 10) from our Romanian members, because real consultation processes are absent even in the case of social inclusion projects where the Roma are named among the main beneficiaries. More capacity-building is needed so that Roma representatives are more aware of the role they can play, so that their voice is heard at the decision-making table. Equally, a real, meaningful, bottom-up evaluation needs to be put in place, as well as increasing the capacity of the LAG teams to reach out to Roma beneficiaries and Roma civil society.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For the Management Authorities:

- Limit the dominant role of the government in the oversight, management, implementation, and monitoring of the CLLD approach, in order to allow for broader stakeholder ownership and for bottom-up involvement.
- Establish its own Managing Authority for CLLD, regardless of which European funds the strategy receives funding from. Often the rules of each management body are different, and this creates chaos in the management of the local strategies.
- Revise the rules for project implementation, in order to provide advance payments for NGOs, but also for small companies and farmers, thus improving their access.
- Introduce intermediary evaluations for all existing CLLD programs, together with a reward system for the LAGs that achieve the set targets (quantitative and qualitative) and don't modify their original strategies.
- Increase the funding available for the planning and implementation of CLLD strategies, and/or allow LAGs to apply for additional, external funding for the delivery of the strategies.
- Support and invest in building the capacity of all stakeholders (Roma communities, civil society, LAG members and staff, public authorities) to better understand the CLLD principles and processes and be engaged in a meaningful way, as equal partners.
- 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.



2. For Local Action Groups (LAGs):

- When planning multi-funded strategies, ensure that the plans are flexible and that they reflect real local and community needs, rather than just copy-pasting measures from existing national programs.
- Name Roma communities explicitly as direct beneficiary for all CLLD funded programs.
- Put in place an evaluation process regarding both the quality of implementation, as well as that of the participation and ownership of disadvantaged groups, including Roma communities and their representatives.
- Seek support (financial and political) for the establishment and activities of national LAG networks, which coordinate and support the work of LAGs, as this is a proven way to improve their functioning and increase beneficiary involvement.
- Provide more, better, and more timely information about available funding opportunities, as well as foster 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 independence of the activities of LAGs, their funding, and the implementation 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 information about the LAGs' activities and about the opportunities offered by the LAGs to the individual members of the Roma community in your area.



GOOD PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL ROMA CLLD INITIATIVES

Each of the three ERGO Network members who contributed to this report also provided a good practice from their country. They showcase successful initiatives that were implemented (or were initiated and are still under implementation) under the CLLD umbrella, and which have had a positive impact on Roma communities, by involving them directly in the planning and delivery.

BULGARIA

1. Name of the project / activity / initiative:

Empowering women from vulnerable communities by expanding the network of Mother Centers in Isperih Municipality

2. Who implemented this? (coordinator and partners)

Lead Partner - Community Center "Roma Vazovo 2007". Partner – Isperih municipality

3. When did the activity take place, and where?

The project started in October 2019, in the Isperih Municipality, North-Eastern Bulgaria

4. Who were the beneficiaries of this initiative? (number and description of community / individuals)

The project aims to create four Mother Centers in the town of Isperih and the villages around it. In the framework of the project, 8 Roma women were hired as heads of Mother Centers. The leaders of the Mother Centers create women's groups within each center, in order to stimulate self-organization and mutual assistance among Roma women. In addition, 80 women from vulnerable groups will be trained in key competencies.

5. Who financed this initiative (program, strategy)? Which was the budget?

The project is funded under the CLLD strategy of the Isperih LAG through the Operational Program for Human Resources Development.

6. Please describe the involvement of the local Roma community, from the planning process of the strategy until the implementation of the project.

Did they participate in the strategy planning process and needs identification?

The project was a pre-planned strategy by the LAG Roma community center.

Did they prepare the application?

The project was developed with the support of experts from the ROMACT program.

Did they implement the activity as coordinators / members of the paid team?

They are project managers. The leaders of the community center make up the project team.

Did they benefit as community / individuals from this experience?

The project is entirely aimed at Roma women in the municipality.

7. Please describe the results:

Tangible results (buildings, equipment, roads...)

The project focuses only on soft measures. Four Mother Centers have been built, but the project provides funds only for equipment, not for repairs and construction.

Non-tangible results (trainings, meetings, advocacy)

- Training in key competencies
- Thematic sessions with social experts
- Thematic advocacy sessions at local level
- Activities for the self-organization of women

Community development results (mobilisation, civic involvement...)

Skills for participation in the planning of municipal budgets and participation in the planning of municipal development plans.

Other results not covered above:

- Individual consultations on social issues for Roma from marginalized communities.
- Mapping and collecting information for the needs of the local Roma communities.

8. Please describe the impact:

How many people are in employment as a result of the intervention?

8 Roma women.

How many people are in education?

Non formal education – 80 Roma women.

How many people are receiving services, which services, and for how long?

Individual consultation and assisting – 150 Roma for 20 months.

9. Lessons learned from this initiative / activity / project:

From the perspective of the community

There is a great need for social work in the communities to support the poorest families. The regular social system does not support people. On the contrary, it tries to punish them for being poor. That is why the Roma do not trust the social services.

From the perspective of the coordinating team

The project team is facing difficulties due to the lack of advance payments for the project. They have to look for loans to implement the project. This may prevent them from participating in future projects funded by operational programs or LAGs.

From the perspective of the donor

Within the funding rules currently in place, it is easier for the donor to fund organizations with large financial capacity, because they assume there will be less problems with the implementation and reporting of projects. Funding rules put small NGOs at a disadvantage.

10. What about the future:

Sustainability – is this project sustainable in the long-run, or was it a one-off intervention?

The project will be sustainable because the premises of the Mother Centers are provided by the municipalities, they are equipped, capacity is built at the local level, which can be used in the future.

Replicability – can this project be replicated in another environment?

It is possible to replicate the project and the results. In fact, the current project is a multiplication of a project and result achieved by the Integro Association in the village of Vazovo. In 2018, in the village of Vazovo, a Mother Center was established. Through the current project, the network of Mother Centers in the municipality is expanding, as the local NGO is leading the project and the Integro Association provides them with methodological support.

Unique selling point – what makes the successful implementation unique or specific for your LAG?

The Isperih LAG strategy is the only funded strategy in Bulgaria that has “Social Inclusion” as a special strategic direction.

Please add pictures, website, Facebook, newspapers, videos etc

<https://www.facebook.com/Майчин-Център-Женската-Ръка-1964961393829500>

<https://www.eufunds.bg/bg/node/3377>

CZECH REPUBLIC

1. Name of the project / activity / initiative:

“Capacity building of Roma and pro-Roma actors to participate in the preparation and implementation of the program at the local level / capacity building / ESIF – the employment program”. The project, which only just began on 1 January 2021, is focused on providing support to Roma NGOs in four regions in the Czech Republic, by improving staff knowledge and competencies on the financial mechanisms of ESIF. It will also support these local NGOs and get them involved with the CLLD process. The impact and results described below are the expected – rather than the observed – ones, and there are no lessons learned yet.

2. Who implemented this? (coordinator and partners)

Slovo 21 is the coordinator, while the partners are local NGOs.

3. When did the activity take place, and where?

The project is scheduled to run in the following localities: Náchod, Budišov nad Budišovkou, Rokycany, and Prague. Unfortunately, Prague is not part of the CLLD process, as there is no urban CLLD at the moment in the Czech Republic, which means that the challenges and obstacles that Roma and other disadvantaged groups face in bigger cities go unaddressed.

4. Who were the beneficiaries of this initiative? (number and description of community / individuals)

Four localities and their local Roma NGOs and Roma communities.

5. Who financed this initiative (program, strategy)? Which was the budget?

ESIF – the budget is 88 462 Euro.

6. Please describe the involvement of the local Roma community, from the planning process of the strategy until the implementation of the project.

Did they participate in the strategy planning process and needs identification?

Yes, through the local Roma NGOs.

Did they prepare the application?

Yes, the Roma NGOs did.

Did they implement the activity as coordinators / members of the paid team?

Yes, and they will be paid.

Did they benefit as community / individuals from this?

Yes.

7. Please describe the results:

Tangible results (buildings, equipment, roads...)

None.

Non-tangible results - trainings, meetings, advocacy work

Community development results (mobilisation, civic involvement...)

Improved competencies of the employees of Roma NGOs, improved CLLD participation of local Roma communities in the selected four regions.

8. Please describe the impact:

How many people are in employment as a result of the intervention?

300

How many people are in education?

16

9. Lessons learned from this initiative / activity / project:

From the perspective of the community

From the perspective of the coordinating team

From the perspective of the donor

Other lessons not covered above

10. What about the future:

Sustainability – is this project sustainable in the long-run, or was it a one-off intervention?

Yes, the capacity building activities for training Roma NGO staff will equip them with the needed skills to engage closely with EU funds and CLLD, as well as to apply for further funding.

Replicability – can this project be replicated in another environment?

Yes, similar trainings can be easily conducted in other regions.

Unique selling point – what makes the successful implementation unique or specific for your LAG?

For us it is very important to improve communication with the LAGs that we are cooperating with. Through meetings or phone calls, we keep them informed and we collaborate on next steps.

Please add pictures, website, Facebook, newspapers, videos etc to help disseminate this.

ROMANIA

1. Name of the project / activity / initiative

Integrated Measures for the Development of Marginalised Communities in the Territory of the Tecuci LAG Association, Galați County

2. Who implemented this? (coordinator and partners):

Tecuci LAG Association

3. When did the activity take place, and where?

The activity took place in Poiana, Galați County, starting in March 2019 and still ongoing.

4. Who were the beneficiaries of this initiative? (number and description of community / individuals).

Objective 1: Increased employability and access to the labour market for 80 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion from the marginalized Roma community in the Local Development Strategy (LDS)-covered territory of the LAG Tecuci Association, through their participation in integrated LDS employment and training programs, professional counselling, and placement on the labour market (32 people).

Objective 2: Increasing the employment of 46 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion from the marginalized community in the LDS-covered territory of the Tecuci LAG Association, through participation in entrepreneurship development and support programs of entrepreneurship of 2 businesses, in order to be self-employed.

Objective 3: Increasing the social inclusion of 250 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion from the marginalized community in the LDS-covered territory of the Tecuci LAG Association, through the development and implementation of integrated social services for the community.

Objective 4: Increasing the social inclusion of 124 children at risk of poverty and social exclusion from the marginalized community in the LDS-covered territory of the Tecuci LAG Association, by implementing specific programmes in the field of combating discrimination and promotion of multiculturalism.

5. Who financed this initiative (program, strategy)? Which was the budget?

a) Grant: 873,043 Euro – 100% ESF funding, call code: POCU/304/5/2/ *Reducing the number of marginalised communities at risk of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas and cities with a population of up to 20.000 inhabitants by implementation of integrated measures* / operations in the context of the CLLD mechanism.

b) Beneficiary contribution: 0 Euro

6. Please describe the involvement of the local Roma community, from the planning process of the strategy until the implementation of the project.

Did they participate in the strategy planning process and needs identification?

Did they prepare the application?

Did they implement the activity as coordinators / members of the paid team?

Did they benefit as community / individuals from this experience?

Other involvement not covered above:

The local Roma community was closely involved in all stages, from the strategy planning process and throughout the implementation of the project, as well as benefitting as community and individuals. None of them was a paid coordinator or member of the team.

7. Please describe the results:

Tangible results (buildings, equipment, roads...)

Non-tangible results (trainings, meetings, advocacy)

Community development results (mobilisation, civic involvement...)

Other results not covered above:

The main results of the project are:

R1: Efficient and functional project management team

R2: Service contracts / goods / works concluded

R3: Minimum 500 informed persons about the project and its results

R4: Implementation of the project in quality conditions under the financing contract

R5: Minimum 126 Roma and other disadvantaged people from the target group registered in programs to facilitate access to and permanence on the labour market

R6: 126 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community counselled on access to and permanence on labour market

R7: 80 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community trained

R8: 32 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community employed

R9: Minimum 46 persons from the target group in the programmes supporting entrepreneurship and self-employment

R10: 46 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion beneficiaries of professional training measures to support the development of entrepreneurship / self-employment

R11: Minimum 10 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community beneficiaries of advisory and assistance services for the development of their own business

R12: 2 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion from marginalised communities carrying out independent activities

R13: 2 Subsidies (micro-grants) for self-employment of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in marginalised communities

R14: 2 businesses monitored for a 12-month period

R15: Minimum 250 persons from the target group registered in programmes for the provision of social services

R16: 250 people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community beneficiaries of social services

R17: 1 Community social service developed for persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community

R18: Minimum 124 persons in the target group (children) in programmes to combat discrimination and segregation

R19: At least 124 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community, beneficiaries of information and awareness programmes in the field of combating discrimination or segregation

R20: At least 124 persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the marginalized community beneficiaries of

support programmes in the field of combating discrimination and promoting multiculturalism

8. Please describe the impact:

How many people are in employment as a result of the intervention?

How many people are in education?

How many people are receiving services, which services, and for how long?

Other impact not covered above:

The project increases the social inclusion of 250 Roma and disadvantaged inhabitants of the marginalized community in the territory of the Tecuci LAG Association, Galați County, by implementing integrated measures in the areas of occupation, social services and anti-discrimination for the purpose of poverty reduction and combating marginalisation.

9. Lessons learned from this initiative / activity / project:

From the perspective of the community

From the perspective of the coordinating team

From the perspective of the donor

Other lessons not covered above:

The main lesson learned from the project is the added value of the integrated approach, which targets the needs of the communities as a whole. The project combines a community and individual approach, integrating as beneficiaries of the measures households and household members fulfilling eligibility conditions. The entire set of objectives set out in this project must meet the specific objective 5.2 of the Human Capital Operational

Programme aiming at reducing the number of people in poverty, especially marginalised people. The project aims to implement a set of integrated measures, as well as coordination between social services, anti-discrimination services, and employment services, thus ensuring a complete framework for ending poverty for the target group. Reducing the risk of poverty for 124 children in the target community through information and counselling activities, but also through extracurricular and motivational activities for the individual development of children in the target community, represents a contribution to specific objective 5.2 mentioned above. Through the implementation of information measures, professional counselling, training, mediation, but also through a set of subsidies granted to people who want to develop new businesses, it contributes to reducing the risk of poverty for 126 people in the target group, by creating new jobs and supporting the economic development of the target community.

10. What about the future:

Sustainability – is this project sustainable in the long-run, or was it a one-off intervention?

The centre that offers all project activities, run by the Tecuci LAG Association in partnership with the municipality, will continue to offer services to disadvantaged people after the project ends. Increased employment opportunities and social inclusion of people at risk of marginalisation contribute, in turn, to the development of a sustainable community, through innovative profit-generating activities, constituting an example of good practice in the field of occupation, which can be multiplied at regional and national level.

Replicability – can this project be replicated in another environment?

The project and its results can be transferred both to other inhabitants in the community, as well as at the level of other communities facing social exclusion, marginalisation, unemployment etc. More than 60% of Romanians of Roma background live in rural areas, mostly in secluded peripheral zones, where their already disadvantaged position has worsened over time due to social inequality, discrimination, and reduced access to economic opportunities and the labour market.

Unique selling point – what makes the successful implementation unique or specific for your LAG?

For the first time, the Romanian National Rural Development Programme (PNDR) 2014-2020 includes on the LEADER axis measures targeting the integration of marginalised groups, including Roma communities. One of the priorities designated for the Local Action Groups in the current programming period was the socio-economic inclusion of Roma. At present, in Romania, there are 239 rural Local Action

groups, of which 110 (according to estimates of the preliminary strategies) have foreseen measures for Roma integration in their Local Development Strategies. Through our projects, we aim to provide an example of good practices in the field of Roma integration through the LEADER approach, to contribute to the operationalisation of measures already existing through the involvement of Roma in the design and implementation of activities, increase awareness of the decision-makers in Romania and stakeholders on the economic dimension of Roma integration, and identify solutions to improve the living standards of these communities in the long term.

Please add pictures, website, Facebook, newspapers, videos etc to help disseminate this.

GAL Tecuci: <https://galtecuci.ro/> ;

<https://www.facebook.com/GrupActiuneLocala/>

