



The impact on Roma inclusion of applying the CLLD principles in Romania

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Foreword

This research, titled "The Impact on Roma Inclusion of Applying the CLLD Principles in Romania", has been carried out under the framework of the Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation (EQUIP) program. It is conducted by Asociația Nevo Parudimos with support and funding facilitated by the European Roma Grassroots Organizations (ERGO) Network.

The research explores the implementation of the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) principles in both urban and rural areas of Romania during the 2014-2020 programming period. Specifically, it examines two key programs: the LEADER program, aimed at rural development under the National Rural Development Programme (PNDR), and the Urban CLLD initiative funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). These programs were designed to foster local development through community-driven strategies, with a particular emphasis on Roma inclusion and empowerment.

The LEADER program, supported under Sub-measures 19.2 and 19.4, provided funding for the development and implementation of Local Development Strategies (SDLs) by Local Action Groups (LAGs). For urban areas, the CLLD principles were implemented through the "Mecanismul Dezvoltare Locala plasata sub Responsabilitatea Comunitatii (DLRC)," which targeted communities in cities with populations exceeding 20,000. This urban initiative, financed under the Operational Programmes (POCU and POR), emphasized reducing socio-economic disparities in marginalized urban zones.

This initiative is made possible through a contractual agreement, reference number [Insert Contract Number], which defines the scope, objectives, and expectations of this comprehensive analysis. The research also benefits from foundational documents such as the "Implementation guide to implement submeasure 19.2," the "Procedure Manual for the Implementation of the Measure 19," and the "Guide to implement the Local Development Strategies in big cities (2021)," which outline the operational frameworks and funding mechanisms of the CLLD programs.

An integral component of this research is the involvement of the extensive network of Local Action Groups (LAGs) across Romania, The National Federation of Rural Local Action Groups and Urban Local Action Groups Federation. These LAGs, comprised of diverse stakeholders including public institutions, NGOs, and private entities, were instrumental in the development and execution of SDLs. Their collaborative efforts exemplify the spirit of CLLD principles, ensuring local needs and perspectives are at the forefront of development actions.

As the programming period concludes, this research provides a critical opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned and to advocate for more effective implementation of the CLLD approach in future development programs.

We extend our gratitude to all the stakeholders involved, including LAG members, Roma community representatives, NGOs, and public institutions, whose insights and contributions are integral to this study. We believe the findings will serve as a valuable resource for promoting inclusive and community-driven development across Romania and beyond.

Research Methodology:

Objective

To evaluate the socio-economic and community-level impact of the CLLD principles applied through Leader and Urban CLLD programs in both urban and rural areas, with a focus on Roma communities.

We wanted to analyse the impact of applying the CLLD principles in the the implementation of 2014-2021 programming period funds available for rural and urban development mainly with focus on Roma communities in Romania.

Research Design

Our research used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of CLLD principles. This approach ensured triangulation and enriched the research findings.

In the first phase we analysed program guidelines, evaluation reports, and statistical data related to the 2014-2020 CLLD initiatives in Romania, and we studied literature on Roma inclusion policies and their link with CLLD principles.

In the second stage we conducted semi-structured interviews with Local Action Group (LAG) representatives both from rural and urban areas, Roma NGO leaders, and government officials. At the same time we administered 50 questionnaires targeting members of LAGs (urban and rural) and Roma community members and NGO representatives.

In the third stage we made a data analysis and tried to compare the data from urban with Rural bringing up the conclusions about the impact of implementing the CLLD principles in programs which foresee Roma inclusion in Romania

At the end we created a short comprehensive report including the findings from our research.

Key Findings

1. Urban CLLD Implementation

- **Challenges:**
 - Legislative inconsistencies related to urban planning restricted the flexibility of LAGs housing measures faced issues due to mismatch criteria and lack of transparency, prolonged delays in implementing projects undermined trust among Roma communities
 - Focus on marginalized urban zones led to direct interventions in areas traditionally neglected by ROP-funded projects and different levels of Roma participation in LAG activities reflected empowerment efforts
 - Bureaucratic hurdles limited the active participation of Roma NGOs in some LAGs and challenges such as depopulation reduced project scalability.
- **Strengths:**
 - 50% of rural LAG representatives acknowledged consistent Roma NGO involvement.

- Social economy projects were particularly impactful in rural areas.
- Both urban and rural CLLD programs developed inclusion-focused initiatives like multifunctional centers and day-care facilities for Roma children

Recommendations

1. For Urban:

- Alingnement between legal frameworks and the CLLD mechanism for housing
- Enhance the participatory process by allowing permanent and real LAG consultation

2. For Rural LEADER Program:

- Strengthen the collaboration between Roma NGOs and LAGs through capacity-building workshops
- Simplify funding application procedures to enhance access for marginalized groups

3. General Recommendations:

- Foster stronger colaboration between LAGs and government authorities
- Implement real-time monitoring systems for socio-economic data and take into consideration the dynamic migration trends of Roma population.

Conclusion

The implementation of CLLD principles has advantages in addressing the socio-economic needs of Roma communities in Romania. However, overcoming systemic barriers in both urban and rural contexts remains critical for enhancing the effectiveness of future programming. The findings and recommendations of this study aim to serve as a blueprint for refining the CLLD approach in upcoming funding cycles.

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