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Inclusion of Roma living in Rural Areas

The Social Dimension of European Funds for Rural Development 2014-2020 in Romania

CRPE Policy Memo 73, July 2018
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Executive summary

In Romania, rural poverty often overlaps with areas with sizeable Roma communities. Since 63% of the individuals who declared themselves as Roma ethnics in the 2011 census live in rural areas, almost half of the marginalised rural areas are inhabited by Roma communities.

The social exclusion of Roma and of vulnerable groups, in general, has been approached too often through simplistic interventions, without a profound assessment of the local context, the specific needs and the potential of these communities. The European Funds for Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020 have the potential to change this paradigm, through a bottom-up approach - community-led local development (DLRC).

It is implemented by Local Action Groups (the LEADER axis in the National Rural Development Programme), which, in the current programming period have included among their priorities the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups.

This report is based on research that was set out to analyse (1) first of all, whether or not the existing funds for rural development are aimed at promoting social inclusion and reducing poverty in vulnerable groups and how these funds are designed to achieve this, and, secondly, (2) the extent to which these objectives have been achieved halfway through the programming period. Lastly, (3) it focuses on the stories, needs and proposals of the stakeholders and it makes recommendations - both in terms of content of the measures and in terms of architecture and implementation mechanisms of the funds.

The conclusions are not too encouraging: while, at macro level, the intentions of the LEADER programme were and are good, of the 239 LAGs currently in existence, 130 included social infrastructure measures in the Local Development Strategies (LDS), and 106 had a social measure combined with actions targeting minority groups (mostly, Roma) - totalling € 49 million - halfway through the programming period, none of this money has actually been spent according to the planning.

The main reason for that is the lack of consistency and correlation between the NRDP and the measure in the Operational Programme (OP) “Human Capital” which is supposed to operationalise, in terms of services, what is carried out through the rural development funds, to “give life” to the infrastructure built or rehabilitated through them. The report examines technical elements that describe this bottleneck, problems faced by relevant stakeholders - lack of organisational capacity, financial issues and, sometimes, lack of vision on behalf of the NGOs working with vulnerable groups - and it proposes exploring an alternative architecture for the integrated local development funds beyond 2020.

Moreover, the report includes an extensive compendium of best practices and successful projects in this field in other European countries, which can serve as role models for Romania. The allocation of special funds aimed at building the capacity of organizations representing vulnerable groups to access dedicated European funds, cooperative development programmes and other social businesses, social farms, mediation, counselling and 1-on-1 training to facilitate access to the labour market for disadvantaged young people - these are just a few of the examples presented in Chapter 3.

Methodology

The research carried out in view of the report entitled "Roma inclusion in rural areas: the social dimension of the European funds for rural development 2014-2020 in Romania" was aimed at collecting information on the measures in support of vulnerable groups - in particular the Roma minority - that are included in the Local Development Strategies (LDS), but information on the needs and challenges faced by the stakeholders, the Local Action Groups (LAG) and NGOs at grass-roots level in the implementation of these measures.

The research had three components:

i. a preliminary study aimed at LAGs in Romania. It consisted in the application of an online questionnaire designed to collect information about how LAGs have proposed to assist individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion in disadvantaged communities in rural areas, in particular Roma people. In total, 239 LAGs were invited to fill out the questionnaire. Of these, 152 LAGs responded. (approximately 64%).

ii. Three regional workshops with representatives of the Local Action Groups which included support measures for vulnerable groups, particularly Roma ethnics in the Local Development Strategy, NGOs, local authorities and representatives of Roma organisations.

The location of the meetings was set to facilitate participation, for increased geographical coverage. Tecuci (for the North-East and South-East), Cluj-Napoca (Central Romania, West), Bucharest (South-Muntenia, South-West). In total, there were 52 participants to the three workshops. 16 in Bucharest (seven from LAGs, five from NGOs, four from the local authorities), 17 participants in the Salicea village in the Ciurila commune (Cluj county), twelve representatives from LAGs, five from NGOs and 18 participants in Tecuci (Galaţi county) - eleven representatives from LAGs, seven from NGOs, and one representative of the local authorities.

iii. The research carried out in the second part of the project addressed both LAGs and NGOs whose work focuses on the Roma minority. It was based on an online questionnaire for each target group, as follows:

a) The questionnaire addressed to the LAGs was aimed at identifying the number, theme and status of the social measures or measures concerning minority whose beneficiaries are Roma individuals, as well as proposals for improvement from LAGs of the financing framework in the forthcoming programming period of European funds.

b) The questionnaire addressed to the NGOs was aimed at mapping the problems encountered by these rural organisations whose work is dedicated to the Roma minority, in terms of accessing and implementing the dedicated measures of the LAGs, as well as identifying their development needs. 84 LAGs and 7 NGOs responded (out of the approximately 40 organisations contacted, five of which have their registered office in the area of a LAG).

I. Chapter 1 - Poverty and inclusion of Roma people in the rural area

1.1. Some statistics

In Romania, according to the data provided by the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (2015-2020), one in five Romanians are struggling with poverty, due to insufficient income, and among the most affected are the Roma people living in the rural areas and in small towns. In addition, data on poverty in Romania highlights that 81% of the total population affected by poverty is living in persistent poverty, and has been in the same situation for at least three years.[1]

Poverty in Romania is three times more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas, and in the case of people affected by persistent poverty, the various dimensions of exclusion tend to support each other and to perpetuate it from one generation to the next. Almost half of Romania's population lives in rural areas, and a large part of it is disadvantaged in terms of income, infrastructure and basic services. In this negative picture, there is an ethnic minority with a history of centuries of discrimination and marginalisation which stands out: the Roma people.

At national level, the Roma people are face with a much higher risk of being exposed to poverty - ten times higher than the majority population ("33% of them were living in absolute poverty, on the basis of the national poverty threshold of 2013, while only 3.4% of the non-Roma population had

1 The national strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction for the period 2015-2020 - document available at http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala/3916

consumption levels below the poverty threshold"). [2]

According to the results of the population and housing census conducted in the year 2011, 63% of the number of people who declared themselves as Roma live in rural areas. In particular, in rural areas, poverty and marginalization poles overlap with areas where there are large Roma communities.

According to the Atlas of Marginalised Rural Communities in 42% of the marginalised rural sectors, large percentages of the population is of Roma ethnicity. [3] Moreover, almost half of marginalised rural communities are Roma communities. This percentage is almost ten times higher than the percentage of the national population of self-identified Roma in the total population. [4]

The same document indicates that the rate of marginalisation of the Roma communities in counties such as Braşov, Covasna, Mureş, Ialomiţa, Sibiu, Sălaj, Galaţi and Bihor is substantial (between 5 and 8% of the total rural population in each county). In other counties that have low rates of marginalisation (e.g. Dâmboviţa, Satu Mare, Prahova, Alba, Arad, Cluj and Călăraşi) most marginalised rural areas are Roma communities. [5]

In these areas, the Roma live in precarious and overcrowded dwellings, isolated, without access to the public utilities (water, sewage, electricity), healthcare, services, education, employment.

The lack of ownership over the plots of land prevents the Roma from these settlements from working in agriculture to achieve revenue (they require resources to rent the land), and sometimes they are unable to provide staple food for themselves. In most of these marginalised rural communities, the local economy lacks diversification, and there is de facto no alternative to agriculture. In addition, seasonal work opportunities have been reduced drastically due to the mechanisation of agriculture.

1.2. Inclusion of Roma living in rural areas through community-led local development (CLLD) – a priority in the NRDP 2014-2020

2 Idem, p 20

3 Marginalised rural areas and the Atlas of Local Human Development in Romania - document available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/237481467118655863/Atlasul-zonelor-rurale-marginalizate-%C5%9F-I-al-dez-volt%C4% 83rii-human-local-from-Rom% C3% A2nia, pg. 26

4 Idem, p 30

5 Idem, p 32

The social exclusion of Roma and of vulnerable groups, in general, has been approached too often through simplistic interventions, without a profound assessment of the local context, the specific needs and the potential of these communities.

Both evaluations by the European Union, as well as by the Council of Europe concerning the implementation of the national or regional policy frameworks for Roma inclusion (e.g., the Decade of Roma Inclusion) over the past 10-15 years indicate the need for integrated interventions, based on real participation of the Roma in the design and implementation of activities, which should combine a variety of customised tools (community facilitation of basic services, vocational training, labour market integration etc).

Thus, while in the period 2007-2013, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI) had an integrative approach with regard to disadvantaged groups/regions, without explicitly targeting the Roma population (which means the exact funding for Roma inclusion could not be quantified), for the programming period 2014-2020, the EU and the European Semester have strengthened the links between financing through ESI funds and policy priorities of each Member State.

For example, the rural development programmes for the period 2014-2020 provide support for Roma inclusion as part of priority 6 “Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas”, which includes measures to approach the specific needs of marginalised groups, including, without limitation, the Roma population, but also, as part of measure 19 “Community-led local development” of the LEADER axis - the focus of this report.

The LEADER approach (from French - Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de Économie Rurale) was used by all Members States in the past 20 years to involve local actors in rural areas in decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their communities. Starting with the programming period 2014-2020, LEADER was included in four of the ESI funds: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

The LAGs are the heart of this approach - public-private partnerships between several actors (local authorities, economic operators, NGOs in a region) which identify the development needs in their territories, group them in a coherent manner and formulate action plans to address them - all in the form of local development strategies (LDS).

This possibility to act according to the local realities as a result of consultations with stakeholders in the locality represents a major advantage over other financing approaches, especially regarding the social and economic inclusion of disadvantaged individuals. Poverty is profoundly localised, and the needs of the impacted communities and those of the population differ. Through interventions at local

level, disadvantaged groups can benefit from programmes designed specifically for them. Through their local development strategy, LAGs can optimise the use of funds in favour of social inclusion and poverty reduction.

In Romania, the implementation of the LEADER approach and the Local Action Groups (LAGs) started in the period 2007-2013, through the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP). During the period 2011-2012, in Romania there were 163 LAGs representing approximately 63% of the eligible territory and 58% of the eligible population for LEADER.

115 of the 163 LAGs included various representatives of the Roma community, but of the 7,300 projects involving LAGs in the period 2007-2013 - according to the data provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development - under 3 per thousand were targeting the Roma population.

The paradigm shift occurred with the programming period 2014-2020. The current National Rural Development Program places emphasis on the support of the Roma minority in the LEADER context, through Local Development Strategies by prioritising this issue, which was given extra rating upon selection.

In 2017, as part of this project, CRPE carried out research concerning the manner in which Local Action Groups in Romania proposed to assist persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion within their territory. In total, 239 LAGs were sent invitations to fill out the questionnaires, out of which 152 (approximately 64%) responded.

110 LAGs (72% of the total) stated that they included in the **Local Development Strategies (LDS)** at least one support measure for vulnerable groups, which consisted in: a) social services/ medical services in 68 LAGs (62%), b) measures in the field of vocational training, entrepreneurship, labour market access - approximately one third of the LAGs; and c) financing for projects aimed at preserving traditions and crafts - approximately 25% of the LAGs.

In Romania, in February 2018, out of the 239 LAGs with LDSs with a value of over EUR 600 million, 130 LAGs included social measures in their LDSs (social infrastructure) with a value of EUR 29 million, while 106 LAGs included a social measure combined with actions targeting minority groups (in most cases, the Roma minority), totalling approximately EUR 20 million. In conclusion, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 202 LAGs included in their strategy at least one measure for inclusion of the Roma minority, with a total allocation of over EUR 20 million.

Specifically, these funds on the LEADER axis under the NRDP can cover social projects/ projects for vulnerable groups only in terms of the “hard” infrastructure - construction or renovation of buildings, while all “soft” expenses - salaries of those who provide social services, operating expenses of the

community centres, etc. would be covered either using own resources (which is very difficult), or by accessing the Operational Programme Human Capital (OPHC), measure 5.2 "Implementation of local development strategies in marginalized communities in rural and/or in towns with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants", designed to be complementary to the LAG measure.

In order to correlate the NRDP and OPHC, the social measure within the LAG must be already contracted, and the OPHC project must contain at least two compulsory activities:

1) one activity / measure to support the development / provision of social, socio-medical, medical-socio-educational services related to at least one hard social infrastructure project funded under an LDS through the LEADER measure in the NRDP 2014-2020;

2) one activity/ measure in the field of employment (e.g. counselling, guidance, vocational training, evaluating skills acquired in the non-formal and informal system, subsidising employers to employ individuals in these categories, participating in apprenticeship programmes and internships, entrepreneurship support in the community, including self-employment etc.); [6]

Other measures may be added to these two measures, depending on the needs identified within the area of the LAG, for example:

- Measures in the field of education (ante-pre-school and pre-school early childhood education, primary and secondary education, including second-chance programmes, and reduction of early school leaving);
- Measures in the field of legal assistance for regulation of identity papers, property documents, marital status documents, etc;
- Measures to combat discrimination or segregation;
- Measures in the field of housing (including housing rehabilitation);

The issues of correlating the two measures - the one in the NRDP and the one in the OPHC - so as to generate valuable projects for vulnerable groups in the rural area, were obvious for stakeholders in LAGSs since the launch of the guidelines:

- the target group is a minimum of 250 people at LAG level, which is already a large number, one that is difficult to manage, given the complexity of the problems of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas;
- 50% of the target group (125 persons) should be provided with employment measures (access to and retention of employment on the labour market - apprenticeship at the workplace, internships, finding employment and job placement, and/or supporting entrepreneurship);

6 The Applicant's Guide - Implementation of local development strategies in marginalised communities in rural area and/or in towns with a population of up to 20,000 inhabitants, AP 5/PI 9.vi/OS 5.2, Operational Programme Human Capital

• 25% of the number of the beneficiaries of employment measures (over 30 persons) should obtain a job/ carry out an income-generating activity as a result of the project, which is extremely difficult to achieve in marginalised communities in the areas of the LAGs, where the economic environment does not provide sufficient, nor diversified opportunities for employment.

As part of the second research undertaken in this project between April and May 2018, CRPE aimed to analyse how the LAGs and relevant LAG members manage to implement these measures to support vulnerable groups during the funding programmes described above.

Of the 84 LAGs which responded to the online questionnaire, almost all of them had a social infrastructure measure included in the LDS, of which 70% concerned the integration of Roma through counselling and inclusion measures. Unfortunately, things are not looking good:

29 LAGs had launched this measure, which was either in the contracting phase or the call was still open at the time of the research, but 5 LAGs had closed the call, due to lack of applicants. Furthermore, none of the LAGs had applied, at that time, to the complementary measure under OPHC. During the drafting of this report, according to the Managing Authority of the OPHC, less than two and a half years before the end of the current programming period, at national level, there was no LAGs to apply for measure 5.2 of the OPHC, which would operationalize the social measure in the LEADER axis and would make the amount of EUR 49 million effectively absorbed.

This bottleneck is caused both by the purely administrative elements - non-correlation of the procedures of the two funds - NRDP and OPHC - as well as by substantive issues:

• the LAGs believe that the size of the target group should be smaller in the following programming period, to allow projects to be focused on the issues of a specific local community/ reduced target group, and eligible actions should be correlated with the needs identified at local level, without imposing mandatory activities;

• in addition, LAG representatives requested assurance of complementarity of the programmes at LAG level, through multi-fund management, to allow submission of integrated NRDP and OPHC projects - both for the Roma community, and for the general social infrastructure - and they requested the evaluation to be made by the NRDP and OPHC evaluators, to ensure that a selected project benefits simultaneously from funding from both funds, under joint institutional coordination of MA NRDP and MA OPHC. This system would remove current bottlenecks, delays, non-correlations, meaning that millions of euros remain unspent, money that could be used to solve the serious problems in the rural area.

II. Chapter 2 - Meetings with the LAGs and the Roma stakeholders: needs, obstacles, proposals for public policies

Based on the online research and the information provided by the LAGs in the second half of the year 2017, CRPE organised three regional meetings with representatives of the LAGs that included in the Local Development Strategy measures to support vulnerable groups (especially Roma), partner NGOs, local authorities and representatives of Roma organizations.

In total, there were 52 participants in the three workshops, including: representatives of 30 LAGs, 17 NGO representatives and 5 representatives of local authorities members of LAGs

CRPE wanted to understand what lies behind the statistics presented above, and, in particular, how things look at the grassroots - from the perspective of real people. It also wanted to understand the story of the projects that are attempting to change things for marginalised people in Romanian villages. Moreover, the meetings were also designed to connect the LAGs to relevant stakeholders at regional level, to disseminate good practices and to facilitate partnerships between participants, but also to collect their proposals for improving the public policy framework.

Thus, the topics of the discussions and recommendations made during the meeting could be classified in the following categories:

A. The precarious situation of NGOs specialising in social issues in rural areas

A1. The need to professionalise staff working with vulnerable groups, in particular with marginalised Roma individuals

It is common knowledge that the associative sector is underdeveloped, as is civil society in rural areas, especially the NGOs specialising in social services and in supporting vulnerable groups.

According to the x-ray of the non-governmental sector carried out in 2017 by the Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society, in 2015 only one in four NGOs were registered in rural areas, and the majority of them were working in Development/ Tourism (1 of 3 organizations), religious organisations (1 of 5) and the environment/ ecology (1 of 5). The share of civic organisations or organisations

specialised in education is very low (1 in 10 organisations) [7].

Regarding organisations that specifically targets Roma integration, as a result of interactions therewith, within the framework of this project, we can say that these are often organisations set up around a local leader (ex. a mediator on Roma issues within municipalities) acting as a one-man band. This person doesn't necessarily build a team to support the development of the organisation and to take over when the leader retires.

In addition to the basic problem of human resources (pervasive in rural areas), NGOs working on social issues and with the Roma community, in particular those with a strictly local presence, have limited knowledge and experience in attracting financing - writing applications, project implementation, evaluation and reporting procedures, etc.

"We have undertaken consultations with Roma communities in two communities located on the territory of our LAG. There is also a Roma Association, but it exists only on paper, unfortunately. If in the beginning they were keen on the idea, when they understood the implications of an application and the length of the process, they were discouraged and we never heard from them again." (LAG representative)

The situation of the FDSC referred to above also pinpoints that organisations in rural areas and disadvantaged communities often struggle with a lack of specialised personnel, excessive bureaucracy and lack of flexibility of the personnel specialised in project evaluation and monitoring, rigidity and need for revision of the project guidelines that no longer meet the needs at grassroots level.[8]

There is deficient access by local Roma organisations or other vulnerable groups to trainings targeting access to European funds, and in the absence of dedicated measures aimed directly at this need (even at the level of LAGs or NGOs in the region), this situation will continue. There was one measure that emerged from the discussions, and it referred to the inclusion in the new funding programmes on the LEADER axis/ ESF of projects for infrastructure development and/or for equipping rural NGOs through small grants programmes not exceeding EUR 50,000, coupled with training and mentoring programmes using partners with expertise in attracting financing and implementing projects.

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7 Romania, 2017, non-governmental sector - profile, trends, challenges, document available at http://www.ies.org.ro/library/files/romania-2017.pdf, p 30

8 Ibidem.

To sum up, with regard to this topic, participants in this research highlighted following needs:

- Inclusion in the project guides of measures dedicated to the process of strengthening the capacity and facilities of these organisations, including projects concerning infrastructure development/ equipping of NGOs through small grants programmes;
- Extensive involvement of the LAGs and of the municipalities in the process of communication regarding the lines of finance and regarding the benefits of the projects (continuing animation sessions, periodic newsletters, inclusion of Roma representatives in the drafting of the guidelines etc.);
- Networking between organisations - incentivising large NGOs to get involved in mentoring, coaching and training programmes aimed at small, rural organisations;
- Involvement of NGOs and LAGs in programmes for the Roma community (professional training, training in entrepreneurship, training in trade, etc.) and providing flat rate support for investments and/or services for the Roma community - with local public authorities or NGOs (including LAGs) as applicants;
- Cost reduction for the accreditation of NGOs/LAGs as social service providers.

A2. Limited financial capacity of rural NGOs to implement projects

Local organisations are often unable to co-finance the projects they apply for. The current system of reimbursement of expenditure is often an obstacle to their implementation by small organisations. The issue of cash flow support was raised by the majority of the participants in this research.

"Our greatest problem is finding pre-funding. We do not have the capacity to implement the projects alone. The current system of expenditure reimbursement is very difficult" (Roma NGO representative)

In addition to this limitation, local organisations are also faced with reduced access to financial instruments (bridging loan) to finance the expenditure to be charged to the project. We are talking about very small organisations, often newly established, with reduced financial turnover and with zero possibilities to finance projects other than from their own sources.

Their reduced financial capacity often prevents them from applying for projects, although they know the real needs of the community and of the solutions which they could adapt/ implement. The NGOs participating in the regional workshops have emphasised the benefits of the manner of reimbursement in the PHARE pre-accession funds: the organisation would receive an advance, expenditures were settled and then the rest of the money was paid. An increase in flexibility would provide opportunities for most organisations in our research to apply for financing within LAG.

B. The incapacity to have an overall perspective of development projects due to lack of correlation between the funding programmes / Increase of allocations and competencies of the LAGs and local NGOs

Often, participants in our research pointed out that they cannot "get stuck" on projects where funding is not predictable from the start. They referred to the lack of complementarity between funding programmes. A relevant example is access to "hard" measures (building construction, renovation, furnishing or fitting with equipment) on the LEADER axis. These are only the basis for the start of the project, while for human resources, hiring staff to manage these buildings or to provide social services, new projects are required, under different funding programmes (e.g. OPHC) or using own resources of the organisations. This lack of complementarity often leads to absurd situations - construction or renovation of buildings that subsequently remain unused for a long period or until financial resources become available.

Thus, LAGs participating in the regional meetings would opt, in the future programming period, for the multi-fund solution, whereby financing through complementary funds would be managed in an interconnected manner. The LAGs believe that, in particular, social measures and those targeting vulnerable groups would benefit from such an integrated application and evaluation system. In addition, participants in the meetings also proposed to supplement the LEADER budget with funds for the implementation of social measures.

"A multi-fund solution is needed. LAGs should be able to also manage funds under OPHC, for example" (LAG representative)

C. The need for public policies to support/ stimulate integration of vulnerable groups in rural areas on the labour market

Participants highlighted the need for public policies to encourage the employment of vulnerable groups, given the reluctance of employers to hire such people - sometimes because of discriminatory attitudes, other times for objective reasons (e.g. people who have long been living in poor material conditions tend not to be stable, not to keep a medium/ long-term job)

Here are some of the solutions set out during the meetings:

- projects to incentivise the business environment in the rural areas, facilities for creating jobs - tax advantages and facilities for both employer and employee;
- employment support mechanisms, as well as retention in the workplace for persons belonging to vulnerable groups;
- supporting the social economy and insertion enterprises;
- functional legislation on dual functional education and apprenticeships.

Also, better correlation is needed between formal education and the labour market. One participant gave the example of a welder qualification training programme funded using European funds with an employment rate of 90%, which was mainly due to the way in which it was designed, with a number of benefits that attracted young people - they were given equipment and a small allowance during the practice period etc.

"In 2012-2013 there was a training for welders and concierges. 90% of the welders got a job. They received equipment and an amount of money. A huge success. And in the case of those in the hospitality industry, it was the same, labour force is needed." (Roma NGO representative)

III. Chapter 3 - Examples of good practice at European level in the field of inclusion of vulnerable groups through the CLLD approach/ in rural

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The challenges highlighted by the LAGs, the NGOs, the local authorities and the experts who participated in the workshops are not specific only to Romania. These are common problems in many European countries, which tried different approaches - many of which are relevant and a source of good practice: proactive steps to include representatives of the Roma community in the debates leading up to the drafting of the Local development strategy, allocation of special funds for the empowerment of organisations representing vulnerable groups to have access to dedicated European funds, programmes for cooperative development and other social affairs, social farms, mediation, counselling and one-on-one trainings for access to the labour market for disadvantaged young people, interinstitutional dialogue at the level of Managing Authorities in charge of EU funds for better linkage and synergy between them, with respect to the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Here are some of them:

- **In Bulgaria, the Roma community participates in the creation of the local development strategy** [9]

The Lyaskovetc-Strajitca LAG in Bulgaria, through the combination of LEADER and OPHC, has included in the local development strategy measures for Roma communities. The working group includes Roma participants from these communities.

In January 2010, 30 Roma activists and representatives of NGOs from Lyaskovetc, Strajitca, Popovo and Byala participated in a meeting entitled "Active involvement of citizens in the absorption of European funds at local level". Participants discussed ways to stimulate the participation of local Roma communities in the preparation and implementation of projects.

- **In Italy, minority organisations are provided with support in accessing European funding**

The programme "Promoting Social Inclusion and Fighting Discrimination of Roma, Sinti and Camminants" was funded under the ESF in order to facilitate the participation of these minorities in the economic and social development processes funded by the Cohesion Policy in the regions of Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily and Puglia [10].

- **Spain has set up an inter-ministerial discussion group on the issue of Roma inclusion**

This group fosters communication between management authorities coordinating the ESF, ERDF and the EAFRD and the National Contact Point for Roma, to ensure a comprehensive approach concerning the planning of EU funds in the period 2014-2020.

- **In Hungary, LAGs support the Roma people to set up businesses and to join forces in cooperatives**

In the Zala region of Hungary resource centres were established, to create jobs, with the help of associations, NGOs and other stakeholders in the region, meeting through the Innovative Southern Zala LAG. Through them, the Roma in the region had access to training and consultation sessions to plan and set up businesses. As a result, five social cooperatives were created and the work of the other three existing cooperatives was improved. [11]

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9 Center Alipe, Monthly Newsletter, Issue 1, 2010, available at http://www.amalipe.com/files/bulletin/040310_newsletter_01_2010_eng.pdf , p 2

10 Social inclusion of Roma through LEADER and the CLLD - document available at https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w8_factsheet4_roma.pdf, page 2

11 Ibidem.

The Bukk-Mak LAG of Hungary aims at integrating the Roma community, which represents 15% of the local population. Local development strategy combined two objectives: better use of bioenergy and support for disadvantaged groups. Thus, the aim of the initiative was to provide Roma communities with alternative sources of income, by encouraging their involvement in the production of bioenergy.

During talks with Roma leaders, the members of the LAG realised that it was necessary to have better knowledge of the Roma communities. Consequently, a training session was organised in which the Roma leaders gave a clearer perspective on the problems that Roma communities are faced with.

In 2009, a system for the collection and use of solid waste was created. During the same year, members of the LAGs have submitted a request to the Managing Authority for the preparation of a research on the situation of Roma in the territory concerned, to make sure that in the future LAGs launch calls for proposals specifically tailored to the needs of these communities.[12]

- **In Scotland, two LAGs help unemployed young people and people with mental health problems to find jobs [13]**

In Scotland, within the Okney LAG, an NGO has implemented a one-on-one Career Counselling and Orientation project. The beneficiaries were young disadvantaged individuals in the community. Following the trainings, unemployed young people gained more confidence in their own strength, they acquired new qualifications and became more determined to follow formal programmes carried out partner agencies. As part of the project entitled CONNECT, employment centres have teamed up with local social services organisations. Consequently, a part of the young participants got jobs after completion.

In Scotland a social enterprise - Clydeside Community Initiatives (CCI) - got funding through the LAG to provide vocational training in the field of agriculture to adults with mental health problems. Following the trainings, participants learned how to carry out work in the field of carpentry and horticulture. Their new skills facilitate access to the labour market, but also contributed to increasing self-esteem.

- **In England, one LAG is promoting social inclusion for several vulnerable groups through a social farm [14]**

The Future Roots social farm, funded through the Dorset LAG in the UK promotes tools for social

12 EU Rural Review, Employment and Social Inclusion, 2010 - document available at https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/09AED062-D99D-0744-062C-2B6F6E4785FB.pdf, p40

13 What can a LEADER /CLLD and other bottom-up initiatives do for social inclusion in rural areas? - document available at https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w8_factsheet1_leader_clld.pdf, p2

14 Find out more at http://www.futureroots.net/

inclusion and fight against discrimination of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti ethnics. Participants are taught soft skills (teamwork, communication, problem-solving, planning), as well as practical skills in the field agriculture.

- **In Belgium, LAGs contribute to the integration of disadvantaged groups through access to basic services** [15]

In Wallonia LAGs coordinated initiatives for community development and inclusion of disadvantaged people. These include a transport service in areas where there was no public transport.

Also, in Belgium, the Flemish Network for Rural Development created a learning platform in 2015 on the topics of poverty and vulnerability, bringing together LAGs, associations, social welfare centres and representatives of the Flemish action plan for poverty reduction. The network is designed to assess how this theme is integrated into local development strategies and it carries out debates on topics such as poverty of disadvantaged groups, the role of the public social welfare centres and the evaluation of public policies for poverty reduction. [16]

- **In Italy there is a National Forum for Social Farms - a network with 360 members aimed at increasing the quality of the services provided to disadvantaged groups, as well as the well-being of the communities** [17]

The National Forum for Social Farms brought together associations, farms and people who support the increase in the quality of services provided in the agricultural sector to disadvantaged groups, people with disabilities, young people, women and the elderly. At the same time, the Forum contributes to the development of the social farms sector at national and at European level, through public policy proposals, support for networking, training courses, exchange of experiences, conferences and other initiatives.

- **In Slovenia, a local organisation employs Roma people and people with disabilities through the social farm it created** [18]

The Institute for the Training and Employment of People with Disabilities and Marginalised Groups set up the Korenika Social Farm. Its employees are first trained by the Institute and then work on the farm, where they produce and process food. All products are certified as organic and are sold in special shops, at the market or even on the farm. In total, the farm has 17 outlets. Materials used for

15 Find out more at http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/description/?id=29

16 What can National Rural Networks do to support social inclusion, June 2016, document available at https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/w8_factsheet5_networking.pdf, page 2

17 Find out more at http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/description/?id=153

18 Find out more at http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/description/?id=273

food processing are purchased from other organic farms in the region. All this is happening in a region where the unemployment rate is the highest in Slovenia, particularly among Roma ethnics and people with disabilities.

- **In Spain, a LAG along with other partners founded an employment company for people at high risk of social exclusion** [19]

The Sierra del Segura LAG, in partnership with the Entre Todos Association, a Bank and the local authorities, created an employment company. It provides training in various fields for individuals at high risk of social exclusion, but at the same time it also teaches them general skills. The first project was a training in tailoring and dressmaking for women. Following two sessions, 38 women were trained. Six of them already found a job.

In addition, the European Commission identified a number of promising practices with regard to the integration of Roma on the labour market in various Member States, which are very much needed in Romania as well: in Austria - training of mentors for Roma people seeking employment; in Finland -creation of mediator positions in the field of employment for the Roma population, whose work is financed by the EU; in Spain - set up of a programme for employment counsellors. [20]

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

The integrated approach through community-led local development actions (CLLD) concerning the specific needs of the Roma and of other vulnerable groups affected by poverty in rural areas must be maintained and improved. Moreover, for the next programming period of European funds, the possibility of multi-fund programmes should be explored. There are numerous European examples of CLLD partnerships for rural development managing major programmes for social inclusion, which receive funding from both FEADER, as well as the ESF.

In Andalusia, Spain, the Managing Authority for axis 4 of the EAFRD programme (LEADER) set up a broad landscaping system to ensure consistency of policies and to improve the mechanism of drafting and monitoring comprehensive multi-sector local development strategies implemented through different funds. Many local partnerships in Andalusia have access to different European, national,

19 Find out more at http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/description/?id=29

20 Roma integration: EU Framework triggers first results, April 2014 - document available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-371_ro.html

regional and local funds, as well as to the EAFRD. The Managing Authority provides support for a multi-sectoral analysis (MSA) of each LEADER territory and, based on it, it prepares a Global Action Plan (GAP), which sets out all possible interventions that can be subsidised as part of LEADER. With the help of a multi-sectoral analysis and the global action plan, local partnerships then develop comprehensive local development strategies that reflect the broader needs of the area and identify the different sources of funding. [21]

Slovakia - The Roma community will be among the beneficiaries of the Multi-fund programme for the development of human resources, which combines investment in human resources (ESF) and infrastructure (EFDR), allocating EUR 450 million and prioritising 150 disadvantages municipalities with Roma communities. The strategy will include outreach activities, education and care for children of early age, education and awareness raising in the fields of healthcare, social housing, pre-school institutions, community centres and social enterprises.

In Poland, the coordination of DLRC is ensured by the regional authorities (voivodeships) which have a dual role: acting as managing authority for the regional programme financed from the ESF and the ERDF and taking over certain functions of an intermediate body from the managing authority responsible for the EAFRD and the FEPAM. However, in order to ensure a joint approach, the rules concerning the selection process - including the selection criteria - are laid down at national level and are common to all regions. Regional authorities will be able to coordinate support for preparation and - where appropriate - a joint selection process, with a Selection Committee at the regional level. After selection, the Committee will also have the role of coordinating the implementation of the DLRC at the level of the region. Several regions intend to make use of this option. In particular, Kujawsko-Pomorskie provided in the regional operational plan two priority axes for DLRC [one covering investment priority 9d of the ERDF and one covering Article 3(1)(b)(vi) of the Regulation on the European Social Fund]. If the proposal is approved, the local action groups will be able to integrate any of these two funds and the EAFRD and the FEPAM, indicating in their strategies which activities will be funded and from which fund. [22]

This funding option comes with the possibility for local partnerships to develop a single development strategy, covering the scope of all funds since its inception. Everything is integrated into this system: a single call for proposals on providing support for the establishment of the Local Action Group, a single set of criteria and procedures, a single selection committee, joint managing authorities or intermediate bodies, harmonised criteria for selection of projects. This simplifies the process at local

21 El uso de LEADER como instrumento de planificación territorial integrado en Andalucía, España, document available at http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/leader-tool-kit/infosheet/10_infosheet.pdf

22 The European Commission, Guidance on Community-Led Local Development for Local Actors, August 2014 - document available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance_clld_local_actors_ro.pdf

level, as long as the coordination mechanisms at national level are well-established. [23]

Even if the option of funding the integration of the Roma and of other vulnerable groups through a single fund - FEADER - remains, given the experience so far in the implementation of the social measures/ measures for minorities described in the report, in which the ESF serves a complementing role, it is essential to improve consistency and coordination between the funds.

Investments in physical assets (construction or renovation of buildings to be transformed into multifunctional community centres) settled under LEADER will not generate the envisaged benefits for the Roma population and for vulnerable groups in the territory of the LAG, if they are not accompanied by service infrastructure, which is currently funded only through OPHC. They will remain “forms without content”.

Under the current circumstances - no LAG contracted projects on the complementary measure in OPHC on integrating vulnerable groups due to a lack of correlation between guides, procedures, calls and other administrative details - there is a risk that millions of Euros that were meant to bring a positive change in the lives of poor, marginalised, discriminated people are spent without achieving the desired impact.

In terms of the architecture of the programming of EU funds - especially in the social field, there is need for some consolidated monitoring mechanisms integrated in the funding programmes, that are not just focused on outputs, but that are results-oriented. (ex. NRDP). ERGO Network - one of the largest federations of organisations in the EU - supports the need for extended participation indicators for the Roma population, to ensure that they are present both during the drafting of local development strategies, but also during implementation, and that the number of projects targeting them as a group is increasing. Furthermore, they suggest the creation by managing authorities of tools for the assessment and monitoring of the work of the LAGs regarding Roma inclusion, but also that the LAGs undertake the objective beyond strategy, in project implementation.

We encountered during our research on this project anecdotal situations - for the period 2007-2013, a LAG reported as a measure dedicate to the Roma community the purchase of snow removal

23 Ibidem

equipment, which would be used to benefit Roma ethnics living on the territory of the LAG.
Closer monitoring and the use of indicators more focus on the impact and relevance of the measures aimed at vulnerable groups under LEADER - and not only - would minimise the possibility for such illusory reporting to take place again.

Furthermore, it takes better connection between relevant actors for the inclusion of vulnerable groups and the fight against poverty in rural areas. As revealed following the regional meetings organised in the framework of this project, they are in need of learning contexts, new perspectives and models, innovative project ideas, as well as dialogue on administrative aspects regarding the implementation of the social measures under the LEADER axis, which often raises difficulties, as they are new for LAGs.

This connection could be achieved through the activities of the National Network for Rural Development (NNRD). It aims at achieving the links between authorities and national organisations involved in implementing the actions of the national rural development programme (NRDP).

The NNRD has the ability to take over innovative, practical ideas concerning the integration of vulnerable groups in rural areas (such as those listed above) from other Member States and to disseminate them. Also, it can facilitate links between stakeholders at the local level, experts and public authorities, it can create a learning platform on the topic of poverty and vulnerability, it can expedite the debate both on aspects related to the administrative implementation of measures in the LAGs (overcoming bureaucratic bottlenecks), but, especially, on the topic of good (or less good) practices at national and international level in this field.

In addition, strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations in rural areas should be a major priority in the following programming period of EU funds - with a particular focus on those providing social services, specialised in education and facilitating access of vulnerable groups, in particular Roma, to the labour market. As revealed during the discussions, these organisations often consist in (only) one local leader/school mediator/ mediator on Roma issues - with limited experience and expertise in attracting funding, drafting applications for funding, or in administrative procedures related to the implementation of projects, reporting and evaluation procedures, etc.

Thus, rural NGOs require programmes dedicated to human resource development, training courses (in various fields - fundraising, volunteer training, drafting applications for funding, financial management of grants).

The financial perspective of the capacity of these entities to access funds is, also, very important.
The issues raised by the participants in this research - such as pre-financing, modalities and pace of settling expenses, facilitating access to grants for organisational development (etc.) must be resolved, to enable these organisations to truly have access to funds dedicated to the problems of vulnerable

groups in rural areas.

Furthermore, it would be useful to carry out mapping (centralisation) thereof and to enter this data into a database accessible to the public, to allow contacting them for the purpose of participating in various training activities, or of involving them in coaching or mentoring activities or in partnerships. This report is part of the project “Assessment of the involvement and encouraging the potential of Local Action Groups in Romania in order to promote the economic integration of the Roma in rural areas”, funded by the Open Society Institute, carried out by CRPE in partnership with the National Federation of Local Action Groups (NFLAG) and the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities.

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