

The majority of Roma in the EU face multiple discrimination, which results in social exclusion and persistent poverty. In rural areas, lack of economic opportunities, poor public services, and sub-standard housing and infrastructure are specific challenges. LEADER and CLLD not only offers opportunities to accomplish concrete improvements, but also stimulates active involvement of Roma in community life.

INTRODUCTION

Around ten million Roma live in Europe, which makes them Europe's largest minority. The largest groups are in the new member states (Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia), but significant Roma (Sinti or Traveller communities) are found in most EU countries. In many countries, a large proportion of Roma live in rural areas.

Roma communities remain weakly represented in the local civic life and political arena, both individually and as a community. Public authorities mostly do not encourage their participation in decision making.

Too often, Roma are approached as passive policy recipients, not as equal citizens that have a stake in articulating needs and solutions. In practice, Roma issues often fall off the political agenda.



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The challenges of Roma inclusion in rural areas

Roma are at high risk of poverty and social exclusion. Many communities are confronted with poor housing and health conditions; low educational status and unemployment. In rural areas they often live in segregated settlements in remote areas, with few or no public services and lack of economic opportunities.

The social exclusion risk is aggravated by negative attitudes of majority populations, leading for instance to labour market discrimination (e.g. local business which do not wish to employ Roma), as well as a lack of dedication in public agencies to provide adequate social support.

Social exclusion of Roma people has so far too often been addressed by simplistic interventions. The inclusion of Roma requires an in-depth assessment of the local context, the specific needs and the potential of communities. Serious efforts to create real participation in decisions that affect communities is vital. This should result in smart integrated interventions that combine a variety of tools, such as personalised itineraries and community building, ensuring basic services, training (including on-the-job training), work placements and incentives to farmers who employ Roma.

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Education

About **50%** of Roma are under 18 years old.

50% of Roma children attend school or nursery.

Only **15%** of young Roma adults complete upper-secondary general or vocational education.

Housing

Around **45%** of Roma households lack at least one of the following basic housing amenities: indoor kitchen, indoor toilet, indoor shower or bath or electricity

Employment

Up to **20%** of new labour market entrants are Roma. **58%** of Roma under 25 are not in education, employment or training (NEETS).

Poverty

About **90%** of Roma live in household with and equivalent income below national poverty lines.

Around **40%** live in households where somebody had to bed hungry at least once in the last month since they could afford to buy food

The contribution of LEADER to social inclusion of Roma

LEADER offers many opportunities for the social inclusion of Roma in rural areas. A number of examples from the previous programming period demonstrate how LEADER can contribute to better involvement of Roma in local life, skills development and Roma business creation (see examples below).

Despite some positive experiences, the overall evidence shows that Roma people are not sufficiently involved in the planning and implementation of local development strategies, even when they represent a large share in local population.

Skills development and business creation in Zala county in Hungary

Employment development resource centres were developed through the cooperation of two LEADER areas (rural development associations, NGOs and other rural stakeholders) in Hungary. The centres offered Roma people training, advisory sessions and on-going consultations on business planning and business creation. This has resulted in the creation of five new social cooperatives and the strengthening of another three.

Employment opportunities and training for Roma in the BÜKK-MAKK LEADER areas in Hungary

One of the main objectives of the BÜKK-MAKK LEADER area in Hungary was to integrate Roma, which comprise 15% of the local population. It supported an initiative that offered employment opportunities to Roma people in the bioenergy production sector by collecting and re-using local waste. In addition, a training was organised with the involvement of Roma leaders for the members of the LAG to raise their awareness about the Roma culture, lifestyle and problems they face. As a consequence, the LAG presented a request to the Managing Authority for the preparation of a comprehensive research on the situation of the Roma population.

Community Centre by Roma in Ispereh, Bulgaria

An example of a project prepared and implemented by Roma is the setting up of Community Center 'Roma-Vazovo' within LAG Ispereh in Bulgaria. The project was implemented successfully as part of the Local Development Strategy. The project's success lies in the fact that a local community based NGO both participated in the management of the LAG and had been able to build sufficient capacity to plan and implement the project. This example highlights the importance of continued support and coaching for community based organisations, to assist in the projects' elaboration and implementation and the communication with the local authorities and institutions.

In 2014, ERGO Network, a European organisation connecting Roma NGOs, investigated the involvement of Roma in LEADER strategies. Case studies in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania have found that LEADER underperforms in promoting the livelihoods of rural Roma and social inclusion in rural areas in general.

Insights from the case studies reveal that:

- There is often a lack or under-representation of Roma communities in LAGs;
- Roma inclusion was not a specific focus in most LAGs and LEADER is often not seen as a method to address the inclusion of Roma;
- There is a lack of capacities and skills of Roma communities to participate in strategy planning and project development.



In Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia over **50%** of Roma live in rural areas, while not possessing land or being employed in agri-business.

Among 160 project ideas in Hungary, only 6 mentioned a Roma target group.

Points for further reflection

What can be done at the LAG level?

- ✓ Genuine participation of local communities in the planning and implementation of LDSs is crucial. Social inclusion should be an integral (horizontal) part of LDSs.
- ✓ Dedicated capacity-building activities throughout the planning and implementation process is needed to ensure the ability of Roma communities to participate in the LEADER/CLLD process.
- ✓ Capacity building may be targeted at enhancing the level of self-organisation of Roma NGOs, creating the ability of NGOs and other relevant stakeholders to design and implement projects, enhance capacity to get involved in decision-making. For this purpose, local Roma expert coordinators/ coaches may be involved.
- ✓ Social inclusion and Roma integration indicators should be included in the LDS framework.

What can be done at the national level?

- ✓ Political commitment, willingness and vision to address Roma exclusion makes a significant difference. For this purpose awareness-raising targeted at policy-makers is important.
- ✓ Managing Authorities should develop and apply a set of 'participation' and 'social inclusion' indicators to assess to what extent hard to reach groups are targeted and participating in the implementation of LDSs.
- ✓ At the same time, appropriate monitoring tools need to be developed to monitor community participation.
- ✓ Rural networks can facilitate the exchange of views between key stakeholders, including Roma NGOs, policy-makers and LAGs.
- ✓ With the involvement of Roma experts, they can organise capacity-building/ training for LAGs (and other local decision-makers) on how effectively engage Roma communities.

What can be done at the European level?

- ✓ European-level networks (such as ERGO Network) can contribute to benchmarking of various LAG practices (e.g. using their Quality Audit tool) and through this help to identify good practices that are transferable to other regions.
- ✓ At the same time, European-level exchange can be facilitated between key stakeholders (including LAGs from different Member States, policy-makers at national and European levels, Roma NGOs, etc.) to exchange views and best practices.