

**Dear friend, partner!**

Autonomia Foundation, in cooperation with the Hungarian National Association of Municipalities of Local Authorities, has implemented the program "Closer to Communities - Roma Coordinators for Better Use of EU Resources" in 2016-2017. Below we would like briefly present the activities, experiences and the policy recommendations connected to this project. We would also like to recommend you a short film about the program, which is available on the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJOrBLhB4wU>

### ***The program***

In our settlements where a significant number of Gypsies live there are a number of problems that exist for decades, local communities face with various difficulties. A prosperous settlement needs many things, one of the most important is organizing local wills, self-organised communities, winning and organizing local partnerships. Our program is based on the fact that many of these jointly-motivated wills can lead to a number of good initiatives.

The more general purpose of the "Closer to Communities" program was to increase the efficiency of projects from EU development funds. The program was implemented in 15 disadvantaged settlements where large numbers of Roma live, and local development were assisted by Roma co-ordinators of the programme who live nearby. Developments have started with community involvement, which also provided an opportunity for more efficient integration of the Roma. It is important that here we not talk about programmes exclusively for Roma, but also about the realization of events that contribute to the involvement of Roma people.

Hungarian National Association of Local Authorities (TÖOSZ) participated in the implementation, helped national dissemination of the lessons learnt and ERGO (<http://www.ergonetwork.org/ergo-network/>) in Brussels contributed to the presentation of the results at international level.

As a result of the program 11 applications was submitted for EU tenders for Roma integration projects, which will provide close to 1 million euro worth of local development support in case of support. Hundreds of local governments were directly informed of the project at the county forums and workshops organized jointly with TÖOSZ. Apart from this dozens of mayors were involved in discussions on Roma integration challenges and possible



solutions. The experiences and suggestions of the project were presented at a working group meeting in Brussels with different experts and staff members from DGs on 11 of May 2017.

### ***The most important experiences***

When evaluating the experience of the program, we sought to identify the obstacles of implementing effective EU programs in the field of Roma integration.

- One of the most important problems is that EU policies on Roma inclusion and state policies in many cases face each other. Perhaps the best example is the compulsory age limit for 16 years, which contradicts the EU's aspirations to significantly reduce Member States' early school leaving rates.
- It is a serious problem that EU principles and plans do not meet the local reality. The EU's policy on Roma inclusion includes, inter alia, the achievement of full social inclusion of Roma, the use of community instruments and the active participation of Roma in development processes. According to our experiences, however, the central and local willingness to implement the Roma integration plans based on these principles is very small. There is no adequate social climate for integration, the majority tend to accept the existing segregation situations in place, considering them as the status quo, and locals do not feel the change would be in their interests. Integration examples that are in line with these principles were hardly born, and even the intellectuals who shared the idea of inclusive, open society were not won for and integration that is based on human dignity, equality, bidirectional proactivity and efforts by Roma and non-Roma communities.
- There is also a problem with grant allocation, the present system hardly guarantee equal opportunities and the community involvement of Roma. Significant part of the resources for human development were only available for designated major state related institutions thus these gained monopoly in the field, what is more those grants which were announced in the form of open calls were diverted by actors outside the official system of grant allocation. These two phenomena not only undermine trust in the system, but narrow the room for independent, grassroots Roma and pro-Roma organizations to expand their capacities, and invent new integration models.

### ***Policy recommendations***

To address the problems described above, we make the following policy recommendations:

In many cases, invitations to participate in the integration efforts do not reach the communities they have been formulated for, often due to the lack of interest or resistance of local governments:

1. Conduct a communication campaign with "Ambassadors" to integrate examples of integration to help building the majority support at local and national level. The



"Ambassador" assigned to the programs promotes the best practice models, calls and use multiple channels.

2. Introduce a condition for a settlement to have access to development resources more widely if it is active in Roma integration tasks and projects. Each settlement has a Local Equality Program (HEP) but their quality is not uniform, in many cases these documents are not suitable for their original purposes. They should be reviewed and improved, go through a genuine quality assurance process and their implementation should be strictly monitored.

As the effectiveness of the programs managed by the central government is limited, the strengthening of independent agents would be particularly important:

3. There should be an EU-funded, global grant program – similar to EEA / Norway NGO Fund - that would enable independent Roma civil society organizations to develop.
4. There should be a central EU financed civil and capacity development program with independent local monitoring.

The present system is favouring organizations in monopole position, there is no development opportunity for independent actors, innovation and competition cease:

5. Professional implementers of Roma integration programs should be selected in competition. Priority programs for the catching up of the most disadvantaged settlements and social groups seem to be the appropriate resource allocation tool as these places and target groups do not have the resources needed to effectively improve their situation without any equalization aid. At the same time, the implementers of the priority programs in many case do not implement the activities with adequately and do not bring the expected results. The selection of implementers of such priority programs would be necessary on the basis of an open call.

If you are interested, please see the details of this program and further information about the Autonomia Foundation's activities at: [www.autonomia.hu](http://www.autonomia.hu)

Regards:

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