



Roma integration across the Danube

Best practices in administrative
and social entrepreneurship
models exchange between
Romania and Bulgaria

CRPE Policy Memo 70

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Rationale

The vast majority of Roma population in Europe (80%) lives in the 14 countries of the Danube Region, the population percentage of Roma varying greatly from country to country, – with the strongest concentrations in poor and peripheral regions. Although only estimates of the exact population exist, Romania and Bulgaria, alongside Hungary and Slovakia have the highest shares of Roma within the overall population in the entire European Union.

Joint responsibility within the EU has long been stressed in order to better integrate the Roma communities. In 2011, the European Commission asked the Member States to develop and provide national strategies tackling Roma integration, with common, comparable and reliable indicators, part of the Europe 2020 wider umbrella.¹ By 2012, each country adopted a national Roma strategy, with measures in line with the Europe 2020 indicators. Member States with larger Roma population, such as Bulgaria or Romania, had to explicitly address and improve the situation of Roma in order to meet the Europe 2020 targets. As such, while National Roma Integration Strategies have been in place in these countries in the last few years, it has become a truism to state that their successful and effective implementation is dependent on ‘strong action’ by Member States, which is many times lacking, both in terms of political commitment and allocation of adequate resources.

The 2016 assessment provided by the European Commission targeting the Roma integration measures in the Member States, revealed that both Romania and Bulgaria face common challenges: high poverty rate among Roma people and especially among Roma children, early school leaving and lack of effective access to quality education for Roma children, unclear or low political commitment, lack of practical enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, local actors’ low capacity and lack of coordination at both stakeholders and financing opportunities levels². Alongside European Union institutions’ assessments, other numerous studies have pointed out the shortfalls of these policy frameworks and, more significantly, of their implementation.

Nevertheless, it is the approach of this report to emphasize the fact that, focusing specifically on Roma integration initiatives in Romania and Bulgaria in the last decade, there have been certain projects and initiatives from both the public and private spheres that have been implemented with a noteworthy degree of success and which generated development and integration in Roma communities.

We have chosen two areas of Roma integration which now represent best practices in Bulgaria and respectively Romania and which are specifically mutually relevant for each other as following:

Kavarna, a small town in the North East region of Bulgaria has become in recent years a model for municipal involvement in furthering significant development and integration in its Roma community. In the 2004-2014 period, more than 10 million Euro have been invested mostly (but not entirely) in the

¹ Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020, document available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf

² Effective Roma integration measures in the Member States 2016, document presented by the European Commission, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma-report-2016_en.pdf

Roma neighborhood of Hadji Dimitar³, creating the premises for improved infrastructure, housing and living conditions, reduction of poverty, improved access for Roma children to quality early-childhood and reduction of crime rates.⁴ Apart from a great array of investments carried out by the municipality in the Roma neighborhood (water pipes were replaced, a sewage system was built, sidewalks were fixed, streets were asphalted, the kindergarten and elementary school in the district were repaired, social housing for the poorest Roma families was built), the local administration also carried out awareness campaigns for education, implemented health promotion projects and, most importantly, took anti-discrimination measures by training Roma activists in analyzing the problems of the local Roma community, planning activities to solve them and also coordinating their implementation and "exporting" part of the administration – some employees of the "Minorities Integration" unit to the Roma neighborhood, in order to ensure better access and more efficient use of administrative and other services by the Roma.

Summing up, Kavarna became a positive example in the EU for Roma inclusion (as deemed by the European Commission) and developing a comprehensive approach towards the integration of its Roma community which will hopefully prove to be a lasting, sustainable one. It is undoubtedly a valuable example for Romania, in which the effectiveness and many times the propensity of local authorities to tackle Roma integration in a more integrated manner has been, to this day, scarce.

On the other hand, Romania has experienced noteworthy positive examples in the field of economic integration of marginalized Roma through the use of the social economy instrument.

In Romania, only 19% of men and 11% of women of Roma ethnicity are employed legally with their risk of dismissal being ten times higher than the rest of the population and 40% of job seekers not being employed. Upon the understanding that many of the Roma professional conversion projects have often failed, breaking Roma people away from their culture and communities and with the employment barriers being too difficult to overcome during the economic crisis, Romano Butiq, an NGO active in the field of Roma integration took on social entrepreneurship and the un-capitalized potential of the work provided by traditional Roma craftsmen as an instrument of integration⁵.

The aim of the project co-financed through the European Social Fund was the social and professional integration of Roma craftsmen through the establishment and development of a social community businesses network, as well as to fight against the majority population's negative stereotypes towards the Roma minority by promoting Roma work, culture and traditions. The project created and developed Roma craftsmen cooperatives in 20 communities where their number was significant and their precarious socio-economic conditions called for an external intervention, selected on the basis of a socio-anthropological study. A number of 30 social businesses have been legally established, 892

³ According to Martin Bashev, Roma Expert, Kavarna City Hall

⁴ Background study delivered by the Center for the Study of Democracy, in the framework of the *Roma integration across the Danube: Best practices and social entrepreneurship models exchange between Romania and Bulgaria* project, funded through Danube Region Strategy Start project.

⁵ Presentation provided by RomanoButiQ, also available at

http://www.galasocietatiicivile.ro/participants_project.php?id=149§ion_id=13&year=2013, under the section "Core Problem"

craftsmen benefited from trainings and consultancy on IT skills, marketing, sales, basic accountancy etc, of which 807 were of Roma ethnicity, coming from all five of the country's developing regions (North West, North East, South East, South West, Bucharest, Ilfov), In order to support the craftsmen beyond the temporary boundaries of the project and support the interventions for younger generations, 210 people were trained in the field of social business management. A physical shop and a mobile one were established in Bucharest, respectively Cluj, alongside an online shop – www.mbjq.ro and an intense advertising campaign for the Roma craftsmen products was implemented⁶.

In its latest assessment, the European Commission underlines the need for building capacity and promoting cooperation, both within the Member States, but also between the Member States, involving the three mentioned actors. The tool used at European level to do so is the National Roma Contact Points to facilitate dialogue between the Member States, but in the same time the European Commission “promotes joint programs, twinning of local authorities (under the ‘for Roma with Roma’ transnational campaign or networks of transnational cooperation between authorities at national and local level, as well as Roma NGOs”.⁷

Social economy initiatives dedicated to Roma are yet to be developed in Bulgaria, which needs to tackle a significant economic disintegration of Roma: according to the 2011 census, only 20.6% of Roma of working age (16-64) in Bulgaria were employed. Mass unemployment and employment in low-paid, temporary or seasonal activities led to widespread poverty in Bulgarian Roma communities. Between one-fifth and two-fifths of Roma households have been victims of prolonged deep poverty in the last 15 years⁸.

Summing up, Romania has ample needs and motivations to learn from the successful Roma integration initiative of the Kavarna municipality, while Bulgaria could experiment the social entrepreneurship instrument of Roma economic integration.

It was on this rationale that the project “Roma integration across the Danube: Best practices and social entrepreneurship models exchange between Romania and Bulgaria”, in the framework of which this report is published, was built. It is important for such initiatives and projects to be put forth, analyzed and transferred among countries which face similar challenges, but in a more hands-on approach: what worked well in a certain country and context needs to be adapted to another local context, and local actors often lack capacities and know-how to implement models that have been successful elsewhere.

European Roma integration practice shows that consulting and knowledge transfer has an increased impact when done across regions and organizations, when people – NGOs, local authorities representatives come together and are able to communicate their respective successful experiences in a

⁶ Presentation provided by RomanoButiQ, also available at http://www.galasocietatiicivile.ro/participants_project.php?id=149§ion_id=13&year=2013

⁷ Effective Roma integration measures in the Member States 2016, document presented by the European Commission, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma-report-2016_en.pdf, page 6

⁸ Best practices for integration of Roma at local level, Integro Association, available at <http://integrob.org/images/docs/good%20practices%20for%20integration%20of%20roma.pdf>, p 33-34

more complex manner, explaining their local contexts and the details of their endeavours to those facing similar problems and who could benefit from similar solutions.

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As such, the project “Roma integration across the Danube: Best practices and social entrepreneurship models exchange between Romania and Bulgaria” aimed at facilitating reciprocally useful exchange of experience between municipalities, civil society and Roma entrepreneurs from the two countries on the topic of Roma administrative integration (as experienced in Kavarna) and social entrepreneurship (as experienced in Romania), but also documenting the process and the findings, encouraging potential common projects and informing about financing opportunities, disseminating the findings and approaches with the occasion of an exchange visit organized on 17-19 May 2016.

Kavarna Exchange Visit

Prior to the exchange visit, the project team identified three communities from both Romania and Bulgaria to take part in the workshop. There have been specific indicators used in the process, both quantitative (e.g % of Roma population, Roma businesses in the locality, access to basic services) and qualitative (e.g successful Roma initiatives in the community, successful partnerships between local authorities, civil society and Roma community). In the end, those attending the workshop included representatives of public authorities and civil society from Ramnicu Sarat (Buzau County), Ludesti (Dambovita County) and Craiova (Dolj County) from Romania and Kavarna, Lom and Razgrad from Bulgaria.



⁹ Effective Roma integration measures in the Member States 2016, document presented by the European Commission, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma-report-2016_en.pdf, page 6

The two days' workshop focused on three main aspects:

- i) the share of best practices and knowledge between the participants – in the first day the presentation of the Kavarna administrative Roma integration process and in the second day the presentation of Romano Butiq Roma various social enterprises;
- ii) field research – an introduction in the Hadji Dimitar, visits to the main sights and presentation of investments (infrastructure, rebuilding of the school and the kindergarten, the “exported” local administration, the mussels processing factory which employed a significant number of Roma from the community) and
- iii) brainstorming in mixed Romanian-Bulgarian groups on needs identification of the six communities represented in the study visit and possible solutions for those necessities, with an emphasis on the social economy instrument and how it could be translated into practice;

The Kavarna model

The first day of the workshop session was opened by Martin Bashev, who made an overall presentation of Kavarna and the achievements of the 2003-2015 administration and presented the challenges faced by the Roma communities with the new administration. His presentation was followed by a questions and answers session.

Kavarna, a Black Sea coastal town and seaside resort, located in the in the North-Eastern part of Bulgaria and better known as a golf resort and the Bulgarian rock capital, has become in the last decade an example of Roma integration.

According to the 2011 census, out of the 15 358 inhabitants, 2 075 declared themselves as Roma, although the real figures put the Roma inhabitants at over 4 000. In the 2004-2014 period, with the election of Tsonko Tsenev as the mayor of Kavarna, a wide range of projects targeting Roma integration where set up, targeting all the four pillars of education, employment, health and housing. More so, in 2004, for the first time, out of the 17 employees in the city hall, two Roma employees were appointed. During Tsonev's first mandate, the “Department for the integration of minorities” was created, appointing 4 people and a Roma mediator for the community.

The financial approach used by the local authorities followed a simple, yet effective pattern: the municipality budget planning was distributed equally between the residents and, since the Roma community represented, in real terms, around 25% of Kavarna's residents, approximately 25% or even more of the available budget targeted Roma communities.

According to the report „Best practices for integration of Roma at local level”¹⁰, during mayor Tsonev's first term, „He insisted that over a third of the municipality budget to be focused on solving urgent infrastructure and educational problems in the Roma neighbourhood, on the grounds that the

¹⁰Best practices for integration of Roma at local level, Integro Association, available at <http://integrob.org/images/docs/good%20practices%20for%20integration%20of%20roma.pdf>

proportion of Roma is close to a quarter, and their problems are the most severe. In subsequent terms, about one-fifth of the municipal budget continues to be allocated for Public Works in the Roma neighbourhood and social integration of the Roma.” In addition, the municipality developed a special department for attracting and implementing EU projects, both pre- and post- accession funds (following Bulgaria’s 2007 accession in the EU).

Also, in a study published by the Center for the Study of Democracy ,“Socio-economic effects of public investments for Roma inclusion in Kavarna”¹¹, which analyzes the effects of the public investments made by Kavarna municipality in the mostly-Roma neighborhood of Hadji Dimitar, between 2004 and 2014, some key figures stand out:

1. Quality of housing: The share of Roma households with access to indoor piped water in Kavarna is around 92%, while 99.24% have access to the sewerage system or wastewater tank. Assessing the quality of housing at national level, one can underline the lower levels with 61% of Roma population having access to piped water and 83% to sewerage system. The construction of a water pipeline and sewerage system started in 2004 in Kavarna.

In addition, with the infrastructure systems being developed in the Roma neighborhood, another issue was left to be resolved by the administration: lack of legal papers of the already constructed houses or houses being constructed. 70 Roma families were provided plots to build houses and to date all the houses in the neighborhood are legally constructed ¹²

2. Healthcare: A health mediator for Roma communities was appointed in 2008 by the local authorities. The mediator was in charge with assisting the work on improving the overall healthcare system through information campaigns, lectures and prevention activities.

In order to improve awareness, 24 lectures were organized per year in schools with pupils, parents and teachers, carried out by the Regional Health Inspection – Dobrich in Hadji Dimitar and villages with a predominantly Roma population.

3. Education access: According to the Center for the Study of Democracy data, 93% of Roma population is enrolled in primary school, 70% for secondary school and 27% for upper secondary school¹³.

Despite some improvements and investments in education (modernizing both the kindergarten and the school from Hadji Dimitar neighborhood, implementing awareness campaign for girls’ education), the figures are still low compared to overall Bulgarian national figures (100% for primary school and secondary school and 97% for the Bulgarian non Roma residents).

¹¹ a specialised household survey conducted among 300 Roma and non-Roma households in the Hadji Dimitar quarter of Kavarna in 2015, available at <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17542>

¹² Mayors Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion, article available at <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/mayors-making-most-eu-funds-roma-inclusion>

¹³ Socio-Economic Effects of Public Investments for Roma Inclusion in Kavarna, issued by CSD, page 41, available at <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17542>

However, it is important to underline the difficulties faced by Roma children in attending school. As 80% of the Roma families in Kavarna are working or are running businesses in Poland, these children are living part time in Poland, part time in Bulgaria, which undermines their possibilities to attend school.

4. Employment: Despite improvements and specific investments in the region (e.g processing factory and warehouse for Black Sea shells and a clothes factory, built with the help of EU funds), only around 10% of the Roma population have permanent employment compared to 36% among Bulgarian population¹⁴. These figures, low as they may seem at first glance, can be explained due to migration as almost all the Roma families in Kavarna have at least one member working or opened a business in Poland. It is important to underline that a partnership between Municipality of Kavarna and 4 Polish cities was signed, in order to ease access to the labor market – Roma people work there legally, have registered companies and pay taxes. More so, according to the study conducted by CSD, the poverty rate in Kavarna is 24%, while the rate at national level is 37%, figures which depict the overall economic impact of the Roma integration measures taken by the local municipality.

According to Martin Bashev, unemployment is close to 0 among the Roma community, as 80% of the Roma population based in Kavarna opened businesses or have seasonal jobs in Poland, while during the summer they return to Kavarna and work in agriculture. They spend 7 months in Poland and 5 in Bulgaria, on average.

5. Non-discrimination: the local administration implemented non-discrimination campaigns in the extended community. Mr. Bashev reported that any discriminatory attitudes or deeds from the private actors in the community (ex. restaurants turning Roma customers away only due to their ethnicity) had been susceptible to fines and reprimands from the municipality. –

6. Justice and crime: Although there are no statistics on ethnically disaggregated data, the overall number of convictions in Kavarna decreased by 46.3% between 2004 and 2014, compared to the national average that showed an increase of 7.4%.¹⁵

The session was followed by a presentation of all the participants (representatives of the civil society, local administration and Roma entrepreneurs), summarizing their activities, main focuses and presentations of each delegate's activity, interests and expectations and afterwards, by a visit to the Roma neighborhood (Hadji Dimitar). The impact of the decade-long investments and initiatives of the municipality was apparent even at symbolic level in the dwellers given name for the quarter: Kavarna's "Beverly Hills".

The second day of the workshop consisted in the presentation of successful social business models developed by Romano ButiQ in Romania. The NGO started to work with Roma craftsmen in 2008 and, nowadays, is supporting over 30 Roma cooperatives with over 500 members. Initially, the model supported by Romano ButiQ encompassed support given to the craftsmen in terms of i) promoting and

¹⁴ Idem, page 49

¹⁵ Idem, page 59

marketing their crafts and ii) administrative and technical support for establishing cooperatives, management, marketing and sales. Nevertheless, Romano ButiQ quickly realized that “one may gather the best Roma craftsmen in the cooperative, produce the best products, all is in vain if there is no market for their products.”

As such, Romano ButiQ added a substantial branding component to their social businesses, facilitating the Roma craftsmen’ access to urban consumers and helped them sell their crafts via modern marketing tools. Physical and online¹⁶ stores were created to present Roma crafts and creative partnerships were signed with Swedish, Austrian and Romanian designers to better shape the products, according to contemporary urban taste.

Romano ButiQ emphasized the fact that this stage in the development of the social enterprises was a detrimental one. Another type of Roma social business presented was the Roma Culture Museum, a space which contains not only a series of artifacts related to the Roma culture, but also ideas and stories, illustrated through objects and installations, meant to contribute to the public debate in Romania on Roma history and culture, many times confronted with stereotyping.

Upon the presentations of the participants of their needs and prospects for the future, CRPE presented some financing opportunities (those available at that time, as the European funds guides relevant for their problematic had not yet been published): PIC SUERD platform, developed by the Ministry of Regional Development in Romania, a platform encompassing available funding for the Danube Region and where both local authorities and NGOs can subscribe so they will stay close to all the opportunities. CRPE will provide follow up to the participants when the platform will be fully functional.

Also, another funding opportunity consists of Priority Area 9 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region („Investing in people & skills“) that targets the economic and social inclusion of Roma, with a special emphasis on fair access to housing and employment.

Grass roots recommendations

The last part of the workshop consisted of participants working in mixed groups (Romanian and Bulgarian) brainstorming the necessities of their Roma communities and potential solutions, bearing in mind the experience and information received during the study visit. A representative of each group presented a wider overview of each community involved, their needs, community resources they can use and future plans..



¹⁶ www.m bq.ro

Summing up, the take-aways from the study visit participants regarding the two best practice Roma integration models explored in the project: the comprehensive municipal model in Kavarna and the Romanian social entrepreneurship one could be framed as following:

- ✓ Achieving a tangible improvement in Roma people's living standard requires also political will and a better coordination between Roma representatives, civil society and local authorities. The involvement of regional and local authorities as well as local Roma and non-Roma communities is essential for Member States in order to find sustainable solutions in improving people's living standards, this recommendation being one of the key ideas underlined also by the Commission within its assessment on Roma national strategies.

The participants identified as a series of practical examples of good practice, inspired by the Kavarna model, which they would advocate for in their municipalities

1. the equitable allocation of resources from the public budget to the Roma community, for both tangible and non-tangible investments and development programs

2. The „exported administration” example created by the Kavarna municipality, in the Roma neighborhood, which, apart from facilitating the marginalized Roma citizens' access to administrative services, enables their involvement and feed-back to municipal undertakings, projects and empowers them as citizens in the community and make them provide input and feedback to the projects implemented by the authorities.

3. transnational partnerships with municipalities in other Member States on the topic of Roma integration in the labor market and business establishment in the Diaspora (as the municipality of Kavarna did with the Polish cities in which the local Roma left for work, described above);

- ✓ Representatives from four out of the six Romanian and Bulgarian communities present identified social entrepreneurship as a viable and interesting instrument for Roma economic integration and some even identified various shapes in which they would consider approaching the issue: setting up a Roma farmers' cooperative, establishing a traditional wood carving social enterprise. The participants exchanged ideas and technical information on the various ideas put across and, as a follow up, received the practical information on the Romanian best practice examples in this field that would enable them to further develop their ideas. Another recurrent idea voiced was that projects for Roma communities should be designed by taking into consideration local resources, further building on existent projects and using local input.
- ✓ Young Roma should be supported to take over traditional crafts from their families and to capitalize on existing economic potential by engaging them in trainings both on specific trades, but also on social business management and development.

Summing up, there is an increasing need to bring together representatives of local authorities, NGOs working in Roma communities and Roma representatives and entrepreneurs, brainstorming the necessities of the Roma communities, providing project ideas and, with adequate support, translating the ideas into concrete solutions. Study visits encompassing all the relevant actors should be further promoted and financed as a means to mix together complementary key aspects: input coming from the local communities, share of best practices and project management know how.

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