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CO-PRODUCTION IN SOCIAL SERVICES

BETWEEN

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

AND

NGOS

IN SUPPORTING

THE HIGHLY MARGINALISED

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Empowering youth and grassroots organisations to advocate for social service delivery at local level

Co-Production in Social Services between Local Government and NGOs in Supporting the Highly Marginalised

Disclaimer: All views expressed in this research paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of International Visegrad Fund.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Co-production is one of the most popular recent trends in the field of delivery of social services. Although it has immediately attracted relevant interest at the side of both academicians and practitioners, there are only a small number of international comparative studies aimed at practical experience with co-production in social services. Taking into account this fact, our intention is to contribute to the mentioned knowledge gap, and to provide some insights from several countries, namely from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Albania, and the Republic of North Macedonia.

This report is set out in the following order:

- aim
- key terms
- methodology
- executive summary
- country section I: case studies from the EU membes (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia)
- country section II: case studies from the EU associate members (Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia).

II.   AIM

Based on an in-depth examination of civil society case studies from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, the project outlines the context and good practices that could be applicable to the Albanian or North Macedonian policy environment in terms of co-production (partnership between local government and community organizations) in delivering social services to highly marginalized groups. The Roma form a key focus of the report, however, the experiences of some other vulnerable groups are described as well.

III.   KEY TERMS

Social service is a keyword of this project. The project defines social services in the broadest possible way as social assistance for those individuals who are in some disadvantaged or unfavorable social (including economic and cultural) situation. In general, social services should lead to a higher degree of social inclusion or to the meeting of social needs of vulnerable groups.

Highly marginalized groups are considered as our main target groups. As for their definition, the project has used Sen's Capabilities Approach and the UNDP definitions of the marginalized (UN 2016), where the core indicator is poverty and at least one of the following variables:

- race and ethnicity
- discrimination
- low education
- spatial exclusion
- disability
- gender
- sexual orientation
- victims of crime.

IV.   METHODOLOGY

Several working methods were employed for the purpose of gathering the relevant data within the project implementation:

- desk research
- semi-structured interviews
- case studies
- a deliberative conference in Tirana to frame a draft report based on case studies/desk top research.

The data collection was guided by the *'stages of development model'*.

GUIDING CONCEPTS	STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT TO BE EXPLORED IN CO-PRODUCTION
Community Led Local Development **(a term used by the EU to describe grassroots and bottom up projects which empower target groups and promotes co-production)**	**1. Research – consultation – identifying need and designing solutions** (To what degree are NGOs and service users involved in decision making?)
	2. Getting a project started (Was the pre project planning effective? Did the project need to be redesigned) How were staff recruited? Was positive action in recruitment used?) At what stages were there evaluations? How were they done? Have NGOs and service users been effectively involved in decision making and delivery?)
Inclusive Community Development **(grassroots projects which involve the target group in the design and delivery of an initiatives based on community not outsider aspirations)**	**3. Targeted initiatives and mainstreaming pilot and targeted projects** (Was the project especially tailored for a certain group offering services outside of the mainstream? Did the targeted work become mainstreamed?) Were there obstacles to targeting?
	4. Project sustainability when funding ends or is near to ending (Did the project finish at the end of funding or does it face closure or a reduction in capacity as the initial grant comes to an end?). How has the project evolved? How was new funding found?)
Asset Based Community Development **(an initiative based on the identity or social capital or other important variable connected to group identity and traits and which uses these group strengths and qualities as the foundation for a service action)**	**5. Ensure projects feed into advocacy and policy change** (How was policy change at the local or national level achieved? To what degree have NGOs and service users been involved in this process?)

Figure 1. Stages of development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Evidence collected indicates that coproduction between community organisations and local government can play an important role in service delivery for vulnerable groups.

2. The trust and social capital that community organisations sometimes enjoy with specific vulnerable groups and deep understanding of the group's marginality can be integral in designing, delivering and evaluating services.

3. Targetted services, if properly designed, can be effective tools if care is taken to avoid the ghettoization of services and there are efforts to with time incorporate targeted measures into the mainstream. Despite these benefits, there are a number of impediments to effective and inclusive coproduction.

4. Although the European Union has a commitment to Community Led Local Development the practice of such a model appears to be limited in the selected EU member states of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

5. Community organisations in the selected EU and associate EU member states (Albania and North Macedonia) appear to be lacking sufficient resources and autonomy for more inclusive forms of community development, in some cases being treated as an appendage of local government service delivery.

6. The complexity and associated bureaucracy of some local, state and the EU/international funding streams sometimes precludes smaller community organisations from participating in coproduction.

7. In some cases there is a danger of co-production leading to community organisasations losing sight of a change and challenge agenda as they become dependent on service delivery funding streams and fear criticism could sever funding.

8. There is some evidence of good practice coproduction being scaled up but often there are concerns about sustainability with some projects being confined to specific localities and restricted by short term funding which is difficult to renew.

9. In some cases the prejudices of local populations and in turn local government creates barriers to coproduction for vulnerable groups.

10. Political partisanship is preventing some community organisations, often those with good grassroots support, from accessing state and local funding streams. In some cases, illiberalism is leading to civil society being attacked and marginalized by the political establishment. Both factors impede coproduction. We propose several measures that will assist the coproduction.

11. Improved funding streams to facilitate the empowerment of community organisations and vulnerable communities to become more directly involved in the design and delivery of services, to facilitate a long term and sustainable interventions based on the principles of community-led and asset-based local development.

12. More effort to scale up good practice and learn from good practice case studies.

13. Guidance, training and evaluation toolkits to be specifically design to aim at coproduction with vulnerable groups.

14. Specific units to be established in local and regional government to guide and monitor coproduction.

15. Resources to enable community groups engaged in coproduction with a range of vulnerable groups to share good practice and through coalition-building lobby for change and reform at the local, state, and EU level.

16. Guidance and training to guide and facilitate communication and understanding between local government, statutory agencies, and civil society to overcome barriers that impede understanding and partnership.

V. Country section I:

EU members

V.1. CZECH REPUBLIC

V.1.1. OVERVIEW OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The responsibility for public and social services is divided between the state and local governments, which are 14 regions and approximately 6,258 municipalities (or 205 municipalities with the so-called extended powers).

○ At all three levels, services are provided within the state administration. They are precisely defined by law (i.e. they are performed in the same way in all municipalities) and at lower levels are performed through specialized authorities or within the so-called delegated powers by the bodies of the aforementioned regions and municipalities with extended powers.

○ Self-governments are not limited in the form and extent within which they provide public and ensuing social services. Their form, scope and financial coverage may thus differ considerably across individual self-governments. In compliance with the Act on Municipalities, the municipality independently administers its affairs, which are "in the interest of the municipality and the citizens of the municipality" (128/2000 Coll.), with the exception of tasks falling under the law within the competence of the state (including state administration performed in delegated powers by self-governments).

Both types of services are often combined in practice; for example, the municipality (self-government) is the establisher of a nursing home for the elderly, but the state may participate in the financing.

Similarly, municipal flats are provided to the tenants by municipalities (self-governments), but the state can provide subsidies for their construction and can pay the tenants housing allowances.

In practice, the funds of the European Union are often involved in the financing of both types of services and non-profit organizations often take part in securing specific services.

It follows from the framework outlined above that in addition to playing a role of a provider, the municipalities (especially the so-called municipalities with extended powers, which secure state administration also for administrative district designated for them - neighbouring smaller municipalities) often fulfil the role of a certain coordinator; owing to their administrative apparatus, they are knowledgeable about local problems, are in contact with the region and the state in the matters of ensuring the financing of social services, they often act as establishers of legal entities providing social services, and cooperate with non-governmental and non-profit organizations.

Responsibility for coordination is explicitly assigned to the municipalities by the law according to which the municipality identifies the needs of providing social services in its territory, ensures the availability of information, can draw up a medium-term plan for the development of social services and cooperates with other municipalities, regions and social service providers. (Act on Social Services 108/2006 Coll.)

On the contrary, the responsibility of municipal self-governments for specific social services is not stipulated by legislation (Act on Municipalities 128/2000 Coll.), with the exception of larger municipalities with the so-called extended powers involved in social services within the scope of the mentioned delegated powers. Nevertheless, what is important about their share in the provision of social services is the fact that they can establish legal entities, organizational units of municipalities and contributory organizations,

or they can decide on the provision of funds. Furthermore, they often handle their real estate (suitable for the provision of services) and especially the already mentioned administrative apparatus.

The issue of administrative capacity of municipalities brings us to the problem of asymmetric municipal structure in the Czech Republic. There are huge differences between the municipalities in terms of population, budgets and hence the possibilities for expanding and complementing the spectrum of social services by local governments. Approximately one-quarter of Czech municipalities have fewer than 200 inhabitants. These municipalities often cannot afford to employ civil servants and finance their development, in practice their inhabitants often use social services provided by larger catchment municipalities.

V.1.2. OVERVIEW OF CSOS/NGOS

If, in accordance with the established methodology, we focus on organizations (legal entities) that are of a non-governmental and non-profit nature, we must first list the legal forms of these entities, the most important of which include: associations and branch associations, foundations and endowment funds, special-purpose facilities of the churches, established by the churches and religious societies, public benefit companies, constitutions, school legal entities.

Non-profit, non-governmental organizations involved in the provision of services are classified as so-called service-based (other types are attorney or interest-based). According to the classification of the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations, these service-based organizations focus - among other things - on social and health care, humanitarian aid, and charity. If they participate in the provision of social services, they must be registered as of 2007 in the Register of Social Service Providers (Act on Social Services 128/2006 Coll.), the same as legal entities established by public administration or natural persons. It can be

assumed based on statistical data that out of the above mentioned legal forms associations are most frequently involved in the provision of social services, even though only a small fraction of their total number is involved with social services (however, they make up more than 90% of all registered non-governmental, non-profit organizations). Especially outside large cities, it is common for NGOs to provide social services for a wider area or region, not just for one municipality.

NGOs as social service providers can receive state subsidies or municipal grants. However, the quantification of public funds allocated this way is very complicated, as from the point of view of the state budget, large sports associations and, for example, Mountain Rescue Service are also formally featured as non-governmental, non-profit organizations.

V.1.3. CASE 1: RAPID RE-HOUSING BRNO

The Rapid Re-Housing project, implemented in the second largest Czech city of Brno, is one of the best-known projects of co-production of social services for disadvantaged groups at the municipal level. The project enables families with children in housing need (in hostels or shelters) to obtain sustainable rental housing. The main initiator of the project is local self-government (or one of the parties of the former city hall coalition); a local NGO *IQ Roma Servis* and two universities (University of Ostrava and Masaryk University in Brno) are also working on the project. The project was in reality launched in 2016 after the preparatory phase, when rental flats were obtained by 50 families from target groups - families with children in various forms of housing need (among others hostels and shelters), which have the potential to retain rental housing. After some lapse of time, several analyses are available, most of which testify to the success of the project, which lies in the sustainability of allocated rental housing by vulnerable families.

In 2019, the new city hall coalition decided to stop the project; however, the families in need will keep the allocated flats.

The problem of housing shortage of socially vulnerable groups is relevant in all large municipalities, i.e. it arises from the very size of the city of Brno (more than 380 thousand inhabitants). The authors of the project assumed that the housing shortage of vulnerable groups leads to long-term restrictions on their access to the housing, which further exacerbates their social problems and may lead to their social exclusion - although they may have the potential to retain rental housing.

In order to grasp the scope of the problem, a so-called registration week was launched, in which 421 families in housing need were enumerated. *It showed that in the families surveyed, the first housing crisis led to long-term housing need in two thirds of them, 92% of homeless families experienced a housing need in a median of eight years during their life. Two thirds of these families are Roma families. Once homeless, these families are typically considered by both private and public lessors to be unfit for housing and thus have very limited access to the housing.* (website of the Platform of Social Housing, https://hf.socialnibydleni.org/rapid-re-housing-brno)

50 city flats were allocated for the project, which were located in various places of the municipality, which owns in total approximately 29,000 flats. These were allocated to the families selected by lot. The ability of families to maintain rental housing in the long term is - among other things - the indicator of success (the situation of all families was continuously monitored and evaluated).

The solution complies with the city's *Strategy for social inclusion* approved in 2016 for the period 2016-2019. The project also contributes to the fulfilment of the national *Strategy to combat social exclusion*, which

aims - among other things - to move families from hostels to rental flats.

After one year, 48 out of 50 families were able to retain rental housing. Furthermore, based on close monitoring, employment, health and school attendance were improved in addition to an improvement in the quality of housing.

The project was initiated politically within the self-government of the city. The city can be deemed the main initiator of this project, it was also the principal researcher of the submitted European project. The local movement *Žít Brno* (*Living Brno*) was the main initiator within the framework of self-government, it was part of the city hall coalition in 2014-2018.

The service provider is the non-profit organization *IQ Roma Servis* (www.iqrs.cz). This local Roma NGO received training from housing experts from other European countries and secured contacts with tenants. The choice of this partner was connected with the fact that a significant part of families in housing need were Roma. The organization mediated visits of social workers in families, which also served to search for employment or settle neighbourhood problems.

An important part of the project was verification and evaluation of success, which was provided by another partner of the project, University of Ostrava.

The main pillar of funding was the European project *Pilot Testing of Rapid Re-Housing of Families with Children* CZ.03.3.60/0.0/0.0/15_024/0002729 financed from the Operational program Employment. As a result, the direct costs of the city were only around EUR 6,000 (while a total project cost was about EUR 390,000). If the project was not financed from European sources, it could be assumed that the state could participate in the funding (of a similar project) through ministerial subsidies.

The economic impacts of the project are a subject of political debates. According to the former leadership of the city of Brno (2014-

2018) and especially according to the evaluation reports of scientists, the project is economically beneficial, for example with regard to lower use of social benefits and receiving unemployment benefits, lower sickness absence or transfer of several children from institutional to home care. The new city hall leadership arising from the municipal elections casts doubt on the economic benefit of the project because it does not include all project savings in the balance sheet (some have an impact on budgets other than the city budget) and, on the contrary, includes the difference between social and current rent in the costs. In general, it can be concluded that similar projects are economically sustainable, in the absence of European funding we can also imagine a more economical option of implementation or obtaining other state subsidies.

The main pitfalls of the sustainability of the *Rapid Re-Housing* project in Brno are not financial but political. Part of the Brno city councillors (including the new city hall coalition) does not want to continue the project for political reasons. They mention, in particular, the fact that families in housing need were allocated city flats "at the expense" of other families registered on the waiting lists, the project was aimed only at families with children and the police had to deal with complaints about some families.

The Brno project has won several international awards, such as the prestigious international SozialMarie Awards, and has been included as an example of good practice in the European Commission's guide to using European funds to tackle homelessness. The project has attracted a great response across Czech municipalities, many of their representatives have visited Brno because of the project. The municipality of Liberec was directly inspired by the project in its housing solution. The project undoubtedly also has an impact on national policy, especially through the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The transfer of experience across municipalities can also be realized through *the Platform of*

Social Housing (www.socialnibydleni.org), whose member organization is *IQ Roma Servis*, which participated in the implementation of the project. The media response of the project in the Czech environment is also crucial.

V.1.4. CASE 2: SOCIO-THERAPEUTIC WORKSHOPS OF CENTRUM MARTIN

Social-therapeutic workshops of the public benefit company *Centrum Martin* (www.centrummartin.cz) in Prague are designed to improve the employability of people with disabilities. They are carried out through a training of work skills realized mainly in training workplaces, such as two cafés and a training shop in Prague (newer cafés were opened in 2013 and 2015). The target group is persons with disabilities (primarily with mental, combined disabilities and chronic mental illness) from the regions of Prague and Central Bohemia aged 16 to 64 years. The activity and project of *Centrum Martin* is closely related to the fact that prior to its transformation the association was originally founded at the Apprenticeship school for pupils with multiple disabilities (www.specou.cz) in Prague's quarter of Žižkov. The service offered within the project corresponds to the definition of social service and social entrepreneurship.

The need to launch socio-therapeutic workshops was related to the activities of the Apprenticeship school for pupils with multiple disabilities (www.specou.cz) and above all to its graduates. In addition to the need, we can also talk about opportunity. A public benefit company can manage a project more efficiently than an apprenticeship school, including the securing of financial resources. In 2013, the public benefit company *Centrum Martin* (created by the transformation from the original *Civil society organization Martin* at the Apprenticeship school for pupils with multiple disabilities in the same year) thus registered for the provision of social services in the form of socio-therapeutic workshops (already since 2012 the company provided

another social service - social rehabilitation). Over the years, the number and location of training centers have changed. In 2013, there were four cafés and two training shops (there were 30 clients of the service), in 2016 there were (already mentioned) three cafés and one training shop. In 2016, these training centers offered a total of 10 full-time jobs for people with disabilities, with 20 clients being the users. The services are also used by several clients who did not attend the apprenticeship school.

The local government plays a relatively minor role in the implementation of the project of social-therapeutic workshops; *Centrum Martin* is dominant in obtaining project funding and project management. On the other hand, the organization has ties with the municipalities in whose territory it resides or carries out its services and social entrepreneurship. These municipalities include Prague and its city quarters (e.g. Prague 3, Prague 8 and Prague 10), the regions of Central Bohemia, South Bohemia and some of its municipalities (e.g. Písek). In the period 2013-2016, the total sum of grants from municipalities for *Centrum Martin* (not only for socio-therapeutic workshops) ranged from around EUR 17,000 to EUR 33,000, while the total yields of the organization ranged from around EUR 200,000 to EUR 400,000 over the same period.

The projects of socio-therapeutic workshops are a textbook example of functional multi-source funding. At the beginning of the monitored period 2013-2016, the European funds were the dominant part of the financing, namely the European Social Fund (for example the Operational program Human Resources and Employment or the Operational program Prague Adaptability). At the end of the period under review, European funding dropped and funding was also received from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (allocated through regions), contributions from the Labour Office, foundations, the above-mentioned grants to municipalities (and regions) and, last but not least, the yields from the training centers

themselves. In case of the European funding, the service was not dependent on a single project, but on a larger number of smaller projects, which in many cases were linked to specific training sites.

The service of *Centrum Martin* uses the idea of integrating the disabled into everyday life, which is not original in itself. It rather represents an effective use of the institutional setting of social services in the Czech Republic, which contributes to the sustainability of the service. Therefore, the portable model does not rest so much in the subject of the service, but rather in the platform that provides it. It is also crucial that social capital associated with the community around an existing public institution (apprenticeship school) can be used to create a more flexible platform and extend the provided services to a wider target audience.

V.1.5. CASE 3: CENTER OF J. J. PESTALOZZI – "HALF-WAY HOUSES"

The public benefit company *Center of J.J. Pestalozzi* has its roots already in 1992, when the foundation *Návrat/Return* was established. It was gradually transformed into the *Foundation of J.J. Pestalozzi* (1994) and subsequently into the public benefit society bearing the same name (1999). The Center provides counselling, educational and social services to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, so it is a broadly focused and strong, non-profit organization (yielding approximately EUR 1,050,000 in 2018), that provides services in many municipalities of two regions, the regions of Pardubice (it has its headquarters in the municipality of Chrudim) and Vysočina. In the history of the company, one can observe a strong focus (among other things) on vulnerable children and youth, or children and youth in institutional care. For our case, we have chosen the "half-way house" service, which should facilitate smooth integration into society for young people aged 18-26 coming from institutional care, imprisonment or difficult social conditions. The service is based

on providing affordable social housing and social training to enhance the psychosocial development of clients.

The concept of a half-way house is not new, a similar service is provided in many other (mostly larger) municipalities. What is, therefore, important is securing and providing this service, which usually must be procured by non-profit organizations. In the case of the public benefit organization *Center of J.J. Pestalozzi,* the half-way house project is based on a focus on children in institutional care. Despite an increase in the number of foster families, the proportion of children in institutional care in the Czech Republic has not been significantly reduced. Children in institutional care often struggle to integrate into society after they are of age. Once they are of age, they lose their housing in the children's home. These children often lack proper education and savings, and they often lack family stability as well. In some cases, these factors are adding to the already difficult situation when it comes to finding a job, affordable housing, or both. Very often, they also cannot deal with the authorities. A half-way house should solve this problem, provide a transitional solution whereby young people get affordable housing associated with social training to help them effectively become independent and find their way into the housing and labour market.

The Center of J.J. Pestalozzi ran two half-way houses, in the municipalities of Hrochův Týnec and Havlíčkův Brod. The half-way houses in Hrochův Týnec were gradually opened in 1996, 2000, and 2001. Reconstruction was carried out in 2008 and a consulting room was built. In the last year of operation of the house (2018), the half-way house had 12 beds and helped a total of 36 persons (in its entire history, it has hosted approximately 400 clients). The second half-way house was opened by the company in Havlíčkův Brod in 2004, and it bought another flat in 2009. The half-way house in Havlíčkův Brod thus has a total of eight beds in two three-bedroom apartments. The houses have separate rooms

for individual clients and shared common areas. The stay in the "house" is charged at approximately EUR 4.3 per day per adult and EUR 0.8 per child. *Clients are offered support especially in the areas of finding a suitable job, housing, care for household, preparation for a child and childcare, financial literacy, debts, personality development, emotional equilibrium, relationship problems and others* (Annual Report 2018 of the Center of J.J. Pestalozzi, https://pestalozzi.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/VZ-2018_web.pdf) While the half-way house in Hrochův Týnec was closed down due to a changing client structure (new users no longer corresponded to the defined target group), the half-way house in Havlíčkův Brod is rated well by the company itself.

The Center of J.J. Pestalozzi is financially supported by several municipalities (Chrudim, Jihlava, Svitavy or Klešice), revenues from three large municipalities accounted for 8% of the company's yields in 2018 and - to a relevant extent - were not specifically intended for the operation of half-way houses. Contributions from the regions of Pardubice and Vysočina are of much greater importance. Half-way houses are operated in specific municipalities, but serve clients from the wider region. The project has strong political support from municipal politicians; for example, the mayor of Havlíčkův Brod and Senator Tecl voiced their support specifically to the half-way house project in the company's annual report for 2018.

In *the Center of J.J.Pestalozzi* as a whole, the revenues from the regions (probably including state subsidies provided through them) accounted for 51% of the yields in 2018, and the revenues from municipalities were the aforementioned 8%. Another 26% were revenues from the projects of the European Social Fund, the Operational program Employment (provided again through regions). The company is also supported by the largest foundations of large Czech companies. If we deal specifically with the half-way house, the service in Havlíčkův Brod is funded by the

European Social Fund, the Vysočina region and the foundations of two large private companies - the Tesco Endowment Fund and the Albert Endowment Fund. The Pardubice region contributed to the financing of the half-way house in Hrochův Týnec (closed down at the end of 2018). Fees from clients themselves are also a source of revenue. Due to multi-source financing, the project seems sustainable; the half-way house in Hrochův Týnec was not closed down for financial reasons, but due to the changing (and less suitable) portfolio of its clients.

As stated previously, the idea of half-way houses is not new, however, the platform that provides the service is inspiring. *The Center of J.J. Pestalozzi* is a solid and respected part of the network providing services in the previously mentioned regions, which includes regional and local governments, social service providers, local action groups, non-profit organizations and others. The case shows that a non-profit organization can provide social services often more efficiently and in a higher quality than the public administration itself. The state and local governments then accept this role of non-profit organizations and are mainly involved financially in the provision of services, either directly or indirectly (through the mediation of subsidies or project funds from another provider). The case of the half-way house in Hrochův Týnec also shows that the non-profit organization can be flexible even in response to the changing needs in social services - the organization cancels some services as needed and vice versa - introduces new ones (the half-way house in Hrochův Týnec was closed down at the end of the year 2018, however, a crisis center was opened in Žamberk). It may also be interesting to note that if the responses to the social services are positive, it automatically implies strong political support from the municipalities, which can also present them as their accomplishment.

V.2. HUNGARY

V.2.1. Overview of civil society in Hungary

According to the 2011 Hungary Civil Society Act, "Civil Society Organizations" can take three forms: civil companionship (civil társaság), association (egyesület) or foundation (alapítvány). These organizations are different in terms of the aim and purpose of their activities and the target beneficiaries (Szalai & Svensson, 2017). There are more than 56,000 civil society organizations in Hungary now (About Hungary, 2017) covering broad areas of activities and policy sectors.

After the collapse of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe, great emphasis was placed on the importance of Hungarian civil society- including human rights organizations, cultural, environmental, and religious movements, as a means to transition to democracy (Guess & Abrams, 2005). President Ader of Hungary has declared civil organizations are "indispensable and respectable" players of democracy (About Hungary, 2017). Nevertheless, it is claimed that democracy and the rule of law have been in serious trouble in Hungary under the rule of the centre-right Fidesz party since 2010 (Gaebee, 2018). This has raised serious concerns within the EU and the international community as evidenced by the declining trend of the USAID CSO Sustainability index scores in all areas, specifically the legal environment, financial viability, and CSO advocacy (Szalai & Svensson, 2017). It has also been argued that NGOs involved in human rights and gender issues, or other foreign-funded organizations have been working in an increasingly unreceptive environment in recent years (Fumarola, 2017).

In recent years, some observers have claimed that the government has directed its funding towards elements of civil society that are sympathetic to its social and political goals. For example, government funding from institutions like the National Cooperation Fund for civil society organization has been reported to be mainly flowing to groups with religious and nationalist aims (Kingsley, 2018).

In 2017, under the guise of transparency, the Hungarian Government legislated so that organizations that receive more than HUF 7.2 million (≈EUR 23,000) a year from abroad, are required to register themselves and must declare themselves as an "organization supported from abroad". These organizations are also obliged to display this information in their media materials and publications. Organizations that do not register - after repeated calls to comply - may be fined and as a last resort, the court may initiate action to terminate the operation of the organization (Gaebee, 2018).

The government has proposed a legal package labeled 'Stop Soros' (Soros is a Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist who donated more than $32 billion to his philanthropic agency, Open Society Foundations) with a superficial aim of curbing illegal immigration. The final measures were not directed precisely at CSOs, but instead, criminalize assistance to those deemed as illegal immigrants to seek asylum and has raised concerns from CSOs working on migration issues. In 2018 the European Commission launched infringement proceedings against Hungary because of the "Stop Soros" legislative package, raising concerns as to whether these are compatible with EU law.

An impediment to local government working with civil society in partnerships to assist vulnerable groups is that, in some cases, local government reflects the wider societal prejudices towards such minorities or is hesitant to challenge such prejudices, this is especially the case with the Roma minority (Roma civil monitor, 2018).

It has been claimed that, in some respects, civil society in Hungary has become too dependent on a support mechanism and has lost its innovative zeal and become disconnected from the public (Gaebee, 2018). Increased co-production between civil society and local government, it could be argued, might have the potential to inject new dynamics, resources and energy into civil society but there are risks involved in such cooperation. In Hungary, the central and local government has recognised the advantages of 'outsourcing' some public duties by contracting civil society. Although this has increased funding for civil society, it may have come at the price of a loss of independence. Another negative consequence is that by shifting tasks to civil society "low financing and a certain degree of neglect have become tacitly accepted and, in the name of efficient cooperation, the public authorities nowadays often feel 'liberated' from investing in the development of social services". Furthermore, such is the highly polarized nature of Hungarian politics and the intensifying links between civil society and central and local government that civil society organisations tend to be viewed as either ally of the state or opposition (Szalai & Svensson, 2017, 26). Correspondingly, there has been a loss in transparency, accountability and quality of services leading to a loss of faith in civil society by frustrated service users (Világgazdaság 2017).

Some important examples of co-production between civil society and local government, which can be considered as good practice, are

presented by the following case studies. The case studies are based on desk-based research and interviews with community workers/researchers involved in these projects.

V.2.2. CASE 1: AUTONOMIA FOUNDATION

Autonomia (http://autonomia.hu/en/) was the first independent foundation, initiated by Roma and NGO development programmes in Hungary after the change of regime in 1990. It has been an important role model and innovator not just in Hungary but in the region as well. It aims to promote civil society development and provide support to civil initiatives for highly marginalized people so that they can organize the available resources to achieve their goals. The foundation collaborates with Roma and non-Roma civil organizaions in development and grant-giving activities among marginalized groups.

The Autonomia foundation mainly focuses on motivating people, for example through methods like art and craft-based programmes to give their client-base the feeling that they can do something important and raise their self-esteem. This can also enhance people's cooperation, problem-solving skills and taking responsibility. Programmes for children such as filming, creative dancing, drawing, painting, slam poetry and hip-hop are important means to attract children and adults from disadvantaged communities. Complex social integration programmes for people living in poor conditions is one of the prime examples of Autonomia's programme that has been running since 2017. This programme is being implemented jointly by Dombóvár City Council, Dombó-Land Land Development Ltd., Autonómia Foundation, and Dombóvári Unified Human Service Provider in a middle-sized county town called Dombóvár where Autonomia is involved as a professional partner.

In cases like Dombóvár, the project idea and the cooperation with Autonomia were initiated by the local government. Autonomia foundation has a grassroots and community empowerment ethos and upholds that each community has its own needs and problems, and solutions coming from the communities are the best way forward. Initiated projects should depend on the needs of the community and available resources if possible. An important example of this is a compulsory 'peer support system' that was initiated in high schools, where young people were offered opportunities to assist their younger peers in the neighborhood as a voluntary service for 50 hours, helping young people become more aware of societal problems and developing their support skills.

In settlements like Dombóvár, the partnership with the local government and the works of the foundation is not only influenced by local but also national politics, professional considerations are not alone in guiding local government as political factors are taken into account. On some occasions, this has created hesitance with the local government in working with NGOs, which can be labeled as critical of the government, and a fear that their cooperation might have negative consequences. However, in many cases, local governments cooperate with Autonomia or other NGOs, if they believe their cooperation will bring some changes and sometimes because of the compulsory requirement of having one NGO in the consortium for project applications. The relationship between the local government and social service provider is also usually characterized as quite hierarchical.

The Autonomia foundation is engaged in different projects with a fixed time span. The projects are intended to build bases and guide future actions and responsibilities of members of the community. Moreover, they have the objective of sensitizing communities by giving

good ideas on how to change their own lives, avoiding a dependency culture and showing that societal problems take time to solve completely and they can solve the problems on their own. The foundation focused on the financial inclusion of unbanked adults who were provided financial education and support in opening bank accounts, their saved amount will be matched at the end of the year by the municipality.

An important achievement of Autonomia is that it designed a programme to solve the problem of labour shortages and unemployability of the marginalized group by mapping employers in the town, assessing the skills they demand and the educational or training gap between the demand and supply of labour. Children aged 12-13 were given the opportunity to learn and study different professions so that they have a clearer picture of what they want to do in their lives. Autonomia foundation is also involved in providing career orientation and training for the youth. Training of trainers was provided for the successful replication and implementation of these programmes. Generally, the sustainability of programmes depends on the commitment and strength of the community in which Autonomia may help with the fundraising.

From its experiences and lessons learned, Autonomia foundation always develops policy recommendations for relevant government bodies, the implementation depends on the willingness of the government.

V.2.3. CASE 2: ROMA EDUCATION FUND HUNGARY

The Roma Education Fund (https://www.romaeducationfund.org/) (REF) was established in 2005 and is an international foundation dedicated to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma through the provision of scholarships for Romani students. It also supports the development of quality

education and the end of segregation of Roma students. The REF has an active and growing network of representative offices across Central, Eastern, South-Eastern Europe, and Turkey, in 16 countries in total. REF provides grants and scholarships to entities and individuals who share its belief in quality, inclusive education and desegregated schools and classrooms. REF currently structures its grants around five good practice models for achieving an impact in different countries and policy settings:

○ Expanding Access to Preschool Education: Early Childhood Education;
○ Avoiding Early School Leaving in Primary Education;
○ Expanding Access to Secondary Education;
○ Expanding Access to Higher Education;
○ Second Chance Programmes for Adult; Functional Literacy and Formal School Completion;

In Hungary, the REF has been active since 2005, however, it only has two actively running models in operation. Romaversitas is a component of the higher education model which is intended to improve the retention, performance and graduation levels of Romani full-time tertiary education students. The second one is a special scholarship programme known as the Central European University Roma Studies programme that prepares Roma graduates for postgraduate education in social science at internationally recognized universities.

An important pilot initiative by REF was the desegregation of Roma from non-Roma in education. In this good practice case study of co-production and partnership between civil society and local government, two flagship projects are presented. These are the Hodmezovasarhely desegregation programme and Early Childhood Education projects. Hodmezovasarhely is a small town with a small number of primary schools and one of

these schools had a pupil cohort which was 100% Roma. In 2007, the REF together with the mayor of Hodmezovasarhely and other local NGOs started the desegregation programme and every year more and more Roma children were enrolled from the segregated school to non-segregated primary schools. Desegregation in Hódmezővásárhely involved the restructuring of the education system, curricula reform and elimination of choice in school places to prevent ghettoization. It also included a free bus service for children in rural areas and mentoring and scholarships (Horva, 2012).

The REF designed the five models (see above) with different target groups, focus and results. For example, the 'toy library' and 'tell your story' programmes were focused and used for the development of small children up to the age of six, to improve their school readiness, enrollment and attendance in mainstream preschool services. These programmes were used to enhance the parenting skills of Romani parents; strengthening the link between parents, preschool and kindergarten facilities. This model does not only target children but it also serves as an integrated approach to reach parents as well.

Local government, in some cases, has been an active partner in terms of support and involvement. In Hodmezovasarhely primary school desegregation programme, for example, the local government made a financial contribution and was involved in the programme implementation and took over everything after the pilot programme period was over.

The Early Childhood Development programme (toy library and tell your story programme) which was started by the REF was adopted, renamed (sure start children's house) and has been implemented by the government since 2008.

However, in some cases, both the local and national governments are reluctant to now support or work with the REF due to strains in relationship with REF's chief benefactor, George Soros (See above).

The Roma Education Fund foundation mostly has fixed-term projects and does not make long term commitments. Before 2010, local government tended to take over programmes once its term had ended. Project sustainability has been hindered by the national political environment and schools are now part of a government centralised system. This has limited the activities of the REF to only after school programmes.

The REF has many models which were successful and adopted by national governments and other civil service institutions and were recognized by the European Union as best practice. The Hodmezovasarhely school desegregation programme was scaled up and replicated in those localities where segregation is very present. REF works hard in its other countries of operation to have a professional impact on the government's decision in policy making and enjoys high levels of direct contact between staff members and different ministries based on the lessons learned from the different programmes and actively seeks cooperation and partnership with local government.

V.2.4. CASE 3: HUNGARIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

The Sovereign Order of Malta is a lay religious order of the Catholic Church operating since 1113. The Order has diplomatic relations with over 100 countries as well as the EU, and permanent observer status at the United Nations. Today, the Order of Malta is active in 120 countries caring for people in need through its medical, social and humanitarian works. In terms of day-to-day, its broad spectrum of social projects provides a constant support for forgotten or excluded members of society. It also runs the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service in Hungary.

The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (https://maltai.hu/) has been working actively in Hungary since the political changes in 1989, working mainly with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children and the homeless. An important area of work has been supporting Roma communities. Following the good practice case study, two outstanding projects are showcased, the Monor and Tarnabod project, two small communities with Roma suffering from multiple forms of disadvantage. The story of Monor provides especially powerful insights into Roma exclusion. In the 1990s, a number of Roma families were evicted from their homes due to the non-payment of utility bills. These families in difficult situations were further disadvantaged by being accommodated in wooden circus wagons by the local authority. The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service resolved to reintegrate these families into the community.

The work in Monor and Tarnabod were among the first projects the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service initiated for Roma communities and have formed a model that has since been replicated which involves a presence methodology and diagnosis-based approach. The first step is to send social/community workers to communities to identify needs, areas of intervention and to just be there and build trust with the community.

In Monor, the social worker assessed that a key concern was a lack of sanitation facilities which impacted the health and hygiene of the Roma community and the project constructed common washing facilities and a community centre where a range of services are offered, including an after-school homework club and Sure Start (pre-school/nursery) programmes. An important achievement for the project in Monor was that it was able to reintegrate the

homeless Roma living in wagons back into conventional housing and through the community centre youth work projects, like a football club and after-school club that raise community spirits to facilitate successful school experiences and increase self-esteem.

The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service has learned an important lesson, which is that each community has its own needs and aspirations and that it is best to start from the bottom up inside communities and design initiatives that reflect those needs and aspirations.

In some cases, the local government is hesitant to actively support integration projects initiated by the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service as it is frightened of alienating support from the wider community by being involved with marginalised communities. Sometimes support from local government is in the background and or not publicised. Even this support in the form of endorsements can facilitate a project or be the first steps towards greater cooperation. In other cases, the local government has been an active partner in terms of support and involvement. For example, the local government in Miskolc contracts the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service to run a support center for homeless people. The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service also helps local governments become aware of funding opportunities and helps provide

technical expertise and advice in preparing funding applications for projects that can help the marginalised.

Where possible the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service prefers to make long term commitments to integration projects, noting that some communities suffer from short term projects that are not sustained or developed. Capacity building is another important objective, for example, in Monor, Roma have been employed in a number of projects such as the Sure Start programme. In Tarnabod, an electronic waste recycling factory was established 10 years ago that provided employment for 30 Roma workers. Community workers have given advice and guidance on seeking employment.

The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service is pleased that its work has been replicated and that it has acted as a role model. Its approach and methodology are recognized by the European Union as best practice. One of its successes has been the Sure Start programme, which was replicated in a number of communities and was later adopted by the Hungarian government. Miklos Vecsei, Vice-President of the Hungarian Association of the Order of Malta, was recently appointed State Commissioner in charge of coordinating the drafting and implementation of a diagnosis-based national strategy for the integration of Roma people, directly responding to the Prime Minister.

V.3. SLOVAKIA

V.3.1. Overview of civil society in Slovakia

In Slovakia, social services are delivered by all governments, i.e. central government, regional governments, and local governments. While the national level is represented especially the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, and several subordinate agencies and/or authorities (including sub-system of directly subordinated district offices), 8 regional governments perform their responsibilities at a regional level and 2,890 local governments deliver social services at local/municipal level.

Regional governments were established on January 1, 2002. Their nature is self-government, and their main bodies are directly elected by general population in the regions. Since a population size was the main criterion when the central government was deciding on territories and sizes of the self-government regions, it is no surprise that the regions vary a lot in terms of their economic performance. Some regions are very poor, and their governments must cope, inter alia, with issues like segregated Roma settlements, a high number of very small municipalities, and a lack of economic opportunities for well-educated graduates, etc.

Regarding the tasks, they can be divided into two basic groups. State administration is performed under the supervision of the Ministry, and all standards as well as requirements linked to the performance of these tasks are defined or proposed at ministerial level. However, self-government tasks which are given either to regional governments or to local governments by law are not so limited. It is up to the mentioned regional and local governments how they deliver them, and therefore their performance varies a lot if one compares performance of

self-government tasks between various regional or local governments. Both regional and local governments perform (delegated) state administration tasks and self-government tasks. As mentioned above, there are many small municipalities with very limited capacities in Slovakia, and therefore it is no surprise that they often deliver their services within various cooperation forms. Although multi-task inter-municipal cooperation is likely the most popular option, there are numerous cases of successful cross-sectoral cooperation as well.

V.3.2. Minorities as target groups of social services

Besides Slovaks, the population of Slovakia consists of several other national or ethnic minorities. The largest one is the Hungarian minority (ca 9-10% of the total population of Slovakia). From a political point of view, it is also the strongest minority because it has been also properly represented in Parliament since 1990. Roma minority is the second-largest minority group, however there is no clear number regarding its size. According to the last official census, less than 1.5% of inhabitants of Slovakia describe themselves as members of the Roma minority. On the other hand, recent expert estimations say that ca 7-8% of the total population of Slovakia belong to the Roma minority (UNDP 2014).

From a political point of view, this minority is weak. On one hand, several state authorities with certain powers and responsibilities directly or indirectly aimed at this minority have been established since the 1990s, e.g. the Office of the Government's Commissioner for the National Minorities or the Office of the Government's Commissioner for the Roma Communitiec. A large amount of both internal and external aid has been used as well in

order to improve the living situation of members of this minority. On the other hand, many politicians at national level consider issues linked to the Roma minority to be unsolvable issues, and the minority itself is poorly represented at the national level (inter alia also because of the fact that it is not a homogeneous group, and there are several irreconcilable groups who do not like to cooperate within the minority).

Social services delivered by the local governments are aimed not only on national or ethnic minorities. From this point of view, we can identify several other minorities, especially elderly people, mentally or physically disadvantaged people, etc. The local governments have started to deal with these groups of social services especially since the beginning of the 2000s, when more than 400 various competencies and powers were either delegated or devoluted from the national level to both regional and local levels.

Recently, the rights of LGBT people and migrants have become major and topical issues in national political discourse. Populists have begun to use improper arguments against these two groups in order to achieve higher support from the common population. However, it is important to stress that the local governments do not deal with these issues in any significant way.

V.3.3. CASE 1: CITY OF NITRA AND VISUALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Visually disadvantaged groups must often cope with issues that are seen as unproblematic by majority of population. However, for these groups even common situations might bring serious problems. One of the most serious problems is their movement in public space, which they share with other people and which can be unfamiliar for them. It is important to note that heavy traffic is too complicated for visually disadvantaged groups and even an

unexpected step on the path or other "simple" barriers might be an issue for many of them. From this point of view, it is important to understand that this minority is very vulnerable whenever its members do their activities outdoors, including public space.

City of Nitra decided to deal with this issue in a proper way and it started to cooperate with the Union of Blind and Visually Impaired of Slovakia (https://unss.sk/) a few years ago. This cooperation had two basic objectives: 1) to create a strategy with the participation of the affected groups, which will ensure comprehensive accessibility of public space in the city; 2) to seek, in cooperation with the public and the groups concerned, effective barrier-free solutions in order to ensure equal quality of life in the city for all city inhabitants and visitors (including those who are disadvantaged). The Union is a civic association whose members are people with visual impairments, their supporters, friends and parents of blind and partially sighted children. The Union provides various social services and advocate the interests of people with visual disabilities. Its main goal is to create equal opportunities, ensure proper treatment for people with visual disabilities. Nitra is one of the largest cities in Slovakia. Its population is approximately 80,000 inhabitants, and it is considered a university city because two universities are located there. Concerning urban public space, there are different types of public space in the city, including historical parts with pedestrian zones, large residential neighborhoods as well as industrial areas.

A crucial principle of cooperation between the city and the Union was principle of participation. It means that the main partners agreed on involvement of all relevant groups of stakeholders in order to avoid feeling of exclusion.

Within this context, they organize several events:

- ⭕ Focus groups that try to identify potential areas of problems in urban public space from the perspective of free accessibility. The groups consist of disadvantaged persons who live or regularly visit the city.
- ⭕ In cooperation with students from secondary school (high school), the partners organized a type of "mystery shopping", i.e. the students got an opportunity to spend several hours in the shoes of visually disabled persons, and they personally experienced the seriousness and significance of various barriers which are usually overseen by population.
- ⭕ Public space is not only material space but it includes also virtual space. Therefore, a significant revision of distribution of public information was necessary too. The distributed information had been usually just partial or incomplete, they had been often provided in an inappropriate way (small size, difficult font or insufficiently transparent background had been used) and information linked to the traffic had been often outdated. This revision required also revision of electronically distributed information, and thus several IT experts were invited, too.
- ⭕ A specific city committee was established in order to work on the elaboration of a strategic document aimed at the barrier-free access to information as well as barrier-free urban public space. The committee consisted of representatives of both main partners, and it includes also a few experts whose expertise were linked to urban architecture, urban planning, IT solutions, etc.

A clear added value of the project was the inclusion of other disadvantaged groups because the partners soon understood that visually disadvantaged persons might see various barriers differently in comparison with, for instance, wheelchair users. Collected data was analyzed by the abovementioned committee, and it elaborated on the first draft of a strategic document targeting the removal of all identified barriers in public space of the city. In the final stage, the document was approved by the city council and the planned instruments were implemented. Furthermore, thanks to policy diffusion, this concept has been already taken by some other cities, and they try to follow the same scenario nowadays in order to make common life of various disadvantaged groups more comfortable.

V.3.4. CASE 2: BRATISLAVA REGION AND MENTALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

Mentally disadvantaged groups belong to the most marginalized groups in modern society. Basically, there are two reasons for such marginalization. The first one is connected to the political sensitivity of this policy issue. The second reason is based on the fact that the mentally disadvantaged group is not numerous, however, a much larger group consisting of their family members is also challenged by heavy marginalization and many prejudices as well as stereotypes. Concerning living conditions of the families whose members are mentally disadvantaged persons, they must cope not only with limited incomes (many disadvantaged persons need day-care or day-assistance and it is usually provided by one of the parents) but also with many stereotypes and prejudices.

The regional government of the Bratislava Region signed a memorandum of understanding with the Association to Help People with Intellectual Disabilities in the Slovak Republic (http://www.zpmpvsr.sk/) a few years ago. The core of this memorandum was linked to social and health services dedicated to the mentioned disadvantaged group. The Bratislava Region is the smallest region in terms of population as well as area size. Its office was established in the beginning of 2002, and its authority has a self-government nature.

It means that both individual heads of the region (i.e. chief of the regional government) and collective decision-making assembly (i.e. regional council) have been directly elected by inhabitants of the region. The region itself covers the area of the capital, Bratislava, and more than 70 other municipalities. However, Bratislava has the specific position among the municipalities of the region in terms of social and health services because relevant facilities as well as majority of relevant authorities are concentrated in the capital. The Association performs several activities. First of all, it promotes and advocates the rights and interests of people with intellectual disabilities, and it fights discrimination against these people. It organizes nationwide cultural events and runs campaigns for the general public in order to break prejudices and stereotypes and raises awareness of this marginalized group's problems.

Moreover, it organizes various educational and training events, conferences and seminars for the same purpose. In addition, the Association provides free counseling for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, as well as for their parents or legal representatives especially in fields like education, employment, housing, health care, and various other social services. In order to improve their integration, it annually organizes various reconditioning and integration stays for people with intellectual disabilities and their assistants. Last but not least, it publishes various periodicals and non-periodicals in order to inform about news in legislation, present social services facilities, and interesting events.

The implementation of this project was rather smooth because the Association had already experienced cooperation with the Bratislava Regional Government. The implementation of the project was divided into several stages. The preparatory stage was short thanks to mutual familiarity of the partners and their

capacities. The most crucial stage was the stage aimed at data collection. Lack of relevant data in regard to living conditions of people with intellectual disabilities and their families was identified as the most serious obstacle in strategic planning and decision-making. For this purpose dozens of individual as well as group interviews were organized. The data collectors from the Association had had long-term experience with the fieldwork and they had been known for the required respondents. Such mutual trust significantly helped them to collect all necessary (but often sensitive) data. The Bratislava Regional Government instructed its Department for Social Services to cooperate with the Association, and delegated persons from the Department actively assisted in the data collection as well.

Afterward, the collected data were analyzed by both internal experts of the Department and external experts who had been contracted for this purpose. The main output of the analytical stage was SWOT analysis aimed at the needs, expectations, and issues of people with intellectual disabilities. The SWOT analysis provided a basis for further strategic planning. At this stage, the main role was taken by the Department because it was necessary to prepare relevant supporting documentation for expected decision making at the regional council level. The Department also prepared a strategic document in regard to social and health services that are provided for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. The document was prepared in close cooperation with the representatives of the Association, and then the Association helped the Bratislava Regional Government to share information about the document among the relevant stakeholders.

Both legally required and very formal communication channels and also informal and rather intuitive communication instruments were employed. At the end of the

day, such participatory approach led to improvement of mutual trust, quality and better targeting of provided services as well as general awareness of living situation of those who are directly or indirectly affected by this issue.

V.3.5. CASE 3: ROMA IN SLOVAKIA

Despite that Slovakia entered the EU at the beginning of the 21st century, many Roma persons still live in unacceptable living conditions (Klimovský 2010). One of the most visible examples of such conditions are poor Roma settlements often situated in segregated or peripheral areas. Jakoubek and Hirt (2008) define them as relatively autonomous social formations located in the Slovak countryside inhabited primarily by the Roma population. Although the central government tried to redefine them as dwelling formations on low socio-cultural level, experts have not accepted this definition. Since the state authorities have not been very successful in dealing with the 'Roma issues', other stakeholders, i.e. especially local governments and various NGOs, have been broadly involved in this policy area. For some of them the existence of the 'Roma issues' is at the same time also a chance to allocate additional resources, for instance from foreign donors. However, islands of positive practice can be found too, and there are several cases that should be used as cases of good practice. In general, local governments in Slovakia usually employ one of the following strategies when dealing with the 'Roma issues':

- strategy of wall;
- strategy of misusing the situation;
- strategy of 'normalization' of the problem;
- strategy of external assistance;
- strategy of internal resolution (Vašečka 2002: 277-280).

Strategies 1-3 have rarely led to desired outcomes. On the contrary, they have either led to maintaining the status quo or worsening situation. Much better results have been achieved by local governments and NGOs that have used strategy no. 4 or strategy no. 5.

An excellent example of external assistance is represented by the initiative called "Platform for Support of the Health of Disadvantaged Groups". Created in 2012, when three founders decided to implement the program with the same name. Group of founders consisted of three NGOs, namely Association for Culture, Education, and Communication; Association of Field Health Assistants; and Slovak Association of General Practitioners for Adults. The Office of the Government's Commissioner for Roma Communities has provided financial support (it has been subordinated to the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic).

The founders intended to improve the health of those who live in poor segregated communities and to implement a complex and sustainable model for improvement of the existing situation. Within this context, it has been necessary to identify 12 field coordinators and more than 100 so-called health assistants. They have been employed in more than 100 different Roma communities. Such an example of a strategy of internal resolution is the municipality of Spišský Hrhov (https://www.spisskyhrhov.sk/).

Its local government was very active in dealing with 'Roma issues' in recent decades, and especially when the mayor became leader, he was recognized by many other stakeholders as an expert as well as main driver or most visible representative of positive recent developments in Spišský Hrhov. In total, less than 1,500 persons live in Spišský Hrhov. Ca 300 out of them are Roma.

The local government has decided to use inclusion, and it has started to cooperate not only with stakeholders from the municipality but also with other relevant stakeholders. Thanks to this approach, the local government established several partnerships and networks consisting of various experienced NGOs, educational institutions (e.g. schools), other local and regional governments, and state authorities. However, Roma people have been involved in all activities.

Local development plan as well as other relating documentation has been elaborated in cooperation with the abovementioned stakeholders (each of them has had an opportunity to present their own interests, priorities, fears, doubts and negotiate). The main objective has been defined as follows: local development must support the complex cultural, economic, and social development of all inhabitants of the municipal community regardless of their ethnicity, age, gender, social status or any other feature.

Nowadays, the local government approach as well as the current situation of cohabitation of the Roma and majority population is presented as model solution, and some other local governments have already tried to repeat the same approach in order to improve situation of their own Roma communities. Interestingly, the popular mayor of Spišský Hrhov has successfully run for mayor office in a few local elections, and recently he even entered politics at the national level.

VI. COUNTRY SECTION II:

EU CANDIDATE MEMBERS

VI.1. REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

VI.1.1. Overview of civil society in the Republic of North Macedonia

Social services provision at the local level in the Republic of North Macedonia is institutionally covered by the municipalities as stipulated by the 2002 Law on Local Self-government. However, in practice, many local and national CSOs step up to provide a various set of social services to a diverse group of communities. Retrospectively, after the breakdown of Yugoslavia, the general observation is that CSOs were mainly involved in humanitarian activates supported by various foreign donors to help the society after the country gained independence.

As the civil sector has been growing, offering space for greater visibility of civil, social and human challenges, CSOs working on specific vulnerable groups and issues, such as LGBT, migrants and minorities, have relevance only in the past 10 years.

In the area of social protection, the Law on Local Self-government has given the following obligations to the municipalities:

○ social protection and children's protection including management of kindergartens and senior homes,
○ social protection of disabled people, orphans, children facing educational and social challenges, children with disabilities, single-parent children, homeless children, people at social risk, people affected by drug and alcohol abuse,
○ housing of people at social risk, and
○ education of pre-school children.

These obligations are mainly focused on the broad protection of children and of vulnerable persons affected by addictions and poverty. This main legal basis has two implications for the social service provision at the local level.

The first one is that other vulnerable groups, such as women, minorities, and the LGBT community are not explicitly covered as they are not considered to be part of the traditional groups in need of social assistance, such as the elderly, children, and the impoverished.

The second implication is that the quality of delivery of the social services at the local level depends on the financial and human capacity of the municipality itself.

Since there are 80 municipalities plus the City of Skopje, these differences in capacities might result in different quality of social services between the communities.

An indicator showing the differences in the regions in terms of provided child support is that per region.

The East, Vardar, and Skopje regions had the highest share of children aged 0-5 in kindergartens in 2017, while the more ethnically diverse Polog region (Law on Social Protection (consolidated text in September 2015) had the lowest share.

Despite the fact that municipalities, as local institutional actors are given responsibilities in regard to social protection, the main authority in this area is exercised by the institution at the central level – the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy which is tasked with creating the policies in the area of social protection.

The Government of North Macedonia has also authority in this area by adopting a National Programme on Social Protection Development which serves as a basis for the municipalities and the City of Skopje to adopt programmes in the area of social protection.

The main legal act in the area of social protection is the Law on Social Protection that includes a various set of social risks, which are defined as the following:

- health risks (illness, injury, disability)
- risks of old age and aging
- risks of single parenting
- risks of unemployment and income loss
- risk of poverty and
- risks of other types of social exclusion

Other non-social rights are comprised within the Law on Prevention of Discrimination, which is under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. This law prevents discrimination based on a broad level of grounds, such as sex and gender, race and skin color, ethnicity, minority, language, religion and belief, citizenship, social status, education level and political views, mental and physical disability and health status, as well as age, family status, income status, personal and social status.

These two laws are being amended to further improve the protection of vulnerable groups. In the case of the new Law on Discrimination Prevention, it is the first time that sexual orientation and gender identity are explicitly mentioned as grounds for discrimination. In the case of the new Law on Social Protection, the focus is on increasing the protection of disabled persons including the service of personal assistance for which the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy finances training of 69 personal assistants in seven municipalities.

There are many CSOs in North Macedonia which deal with various set of activities in the area of social and human rights protection and social service provision. There are some active in the area of health issues, such as Hera (https://hera.org.mk/), disability, such as Mobilnost (http://www.mobilnost.mk/index.php) and Polioplus (http://polioplus.org.mk/), children's rights, such as Megjashi (http://www.childrensembassy.org.mk/),

integrated education in multiethnic societies, such as Nansen Dialogue Center (http://www.nansen-dialogue.net/index.php/), gender equality, such as ESE (https://www.esem.org.mk/), LGBT rights, such as the LGBTI support center (http://lgbti.mk/), humanitarian aid for refugees, such as Legis (http://www.legis.mk/), human trafficking prevention, such as La Strada (http://lastrada.org.mk/), Roma women questions, such as Daja (http://www.daja.org.mk/), orphaned children, such as SOS Children's Village (https://sos.org.mk/struktura-na-organizacijata/), protection from domestic violence, such as Crisis Center Hope (https://www.krizencentar.org.mk/), consumer rights, such as the Organization for Consumer Protection (https://opm.org.mk/), human rights in general, such as the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (http://mhc.org.mk/), poverty issues, such as the Macedonian Platform Against Poverty (http://www.mpps.org.mk/) and local education provision of the youth especially in rural and multiethnic municipalities, such as ZIP Institute (http://www.zipinstitute.mk/). A newer area of hate crimes has also been enthusiastically covered by the civil sector with projects on raising awareness and detecting hate crimes. Relevant projects include Bezomrazno/Without hate (http://bezomrazno.mk/) and Ne mrazi/Don't hate (http://nemrazi.mk/).

The target groups of these CSOs are often the vulnerable groups affected by the respective issues they cover, for example, gender equality challenges, discrimination, violence against the LGBT community, disability, health issues, and similar challenges.

A CSO registry from 2003 counts 5312 registered CSOs in North Macedonia that are active in the following areas of relevance to social and human rights protection: children's

rights, women rights, health, disability, education, rural development, social and humanitarian activities, elderly rights and human rights (MCIC 2003).

Apart from the work the individual services CSOs might offer, there is also a more systematized way of including the CSOs in the social services provision at the local level in North Macedonia. CSOs can be registered at the database run by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to provide services in the area of social protection, and this also refers to religious organizations. The Ministry of Local Self-government also provides a platform on its website where, on one side, citizens can direct suggestions to municipalities, and on the other, CSOs can register themselves to be involved in the work of the Ministry (https://lokalnasamouprava.mk/).

Additionally, the Unit for Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations as part of the Government institutionalizes the cooperation between CSOs and the Government, and enables the CSOs to register at the website (https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/). There is recently a Council for Cooperation and Development of the Civil Society, a body of the Government to enhance the cooperation between the Government and the CSOs (https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/).

One of the three key areas of the latest Strategy for cooperation of the Government with the Civil Society 2018-2020 is the civil society as an actor in socio-economic development and a sub-area of improving the conditions for social service provision by civil society organizations, which is to be adopted in the new Law on Social Protection (https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/).

There are several key challenges detected in the area of social services provision at the local level in North Macedonia in a co-producing way with the participation of the civil society. First, although the cooperation between the Government, municipalities and the civil society is improving over the past few years, there is still unstructured cooperation between these stakeholders that depends on the willingness of the public body. For example, some local authorities, such as the City of Skopje, have a Unit for cooperation with CSOs, a Strategy for cooperation with the civil sector, and a CSO registry (City of Skopje: Cooperation with CSO).

Best and sustainable forms of cooperation between the public sector and the non-governmental sector exist when there is an informal, direct, and personal contact between employees in both sectors which have recognized the benefit of the cooperation (Stojilovska and Lembovska 20013). A good sign, however, about the CSOs providing social services, is that they are more encouraged and accepted by the public sector, unlike the civil society organizations that aim to improve policies by commenting laws and suggesting solutions and face more challenges of being accepted as partners for cooperation (Stojilovska and Lembovska 2013).

Second, the social service provision at the local level is insufficient and does not address the needs of the vulnerable population. The social welfare is too low to cover the basic existential needs of the recipients (Trbojevikj 2012). The latest report of the Ombudsman also highlights that the current social protection system does not respond in a timely manner to the needs of the at-risk citizens by showing the example of the social welfare recipient family in Veles living in a bad, illegal dwelling where a fire killed three children (Ombudsman 2019). One explanation of this lack of social protection and support where it was needed the most is in the National Program, which identifies that the measures are not based on sufficient primary data and analysis (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy 2010).

Third, some of the most affected and vulnerable groups are low-income households and minorities, both of which are often intertwined. Despite that, a decade was devoted to improving the rights and living standard of the Roma population (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy: Roma decade...) resulting in many projects, such as the inclusion of Roma children in kindergartens (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy: Projects resulting...).

The latest Ombudsman report shows that there is still a large part of the Roma population that lives in deep poverty in illegal substandard dwellings without proper access to clean water, face low chances for employment, and face restricted access to healthcare (Ombudsman 2019).

Poverty and unemployment are considered the most prominent social problems in all municipalities, especially in urban areas (Trbojevikj 2012). This situation leads to alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence. Roma and Turkish minorities are more often among the socially vulnerable categories (Trbojevikj 2012).

Forth, the relevant institutions lack the capacity to deliver social services at the local level. The civil sector does not sufficiently contribute to proving a local network of social services that meets the needs of the affected groups (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy 2010). Another issue is that not all municipalities are active in preparing action plans for social protection and they do not allocate adequate budget for this purpose (Trbojevikj 2012).

The municipalities do not have a mechanism for identifying the vulnerable groups and they are missing adequate human capacities dealing with social, health issues, and matters of child protection and protection of vulnerable groups (Trbojevikj 2012).

VI.1.2. Civil society in focus

The cooperation between CSOs and the public sector is unstructured and it depends on the willingness of the public body in question and the work of the civil society. There have been several attempts to structure the cooperation between the government and non-governmental sectors, but none have proved to be sustainable enough to offer systematic and inclusive cooperation.

One important example includes the RIA (Regulatory Impact Assessment) process which aimed at assessing the impacts of adopting a new regulation on society including budgetary implications, but lacked more civil sector's involvement (Selami 2010). The latest attempt was the Open Government Partnership, which was supposed to make the government more accountable, however, it has not been consistently implemented in the country (http://www.mon.gov.mk/index.php/dokumenti/ovp). An important achievement was made by adopting the Law on free access to public information, which has been extensively used by the civil society sector to get access to public data, however, in reality, there is still an issue with the implementation of this law (Lembovska and Bogdanovski 2017). There is a Strategy for Cooperation of the Government with the civil society.

A Council for Cooperation between the Government and the civil society was recently founded (Government of the Republic of North Macedonia: Cooperation with the Non-governmental sector), but it has received criticism from the civil sector about its members and the way it was established. Most of these examples hint at a more passive form of cooperation.

The degree of success regarding project start-ups depends on the type of project.

The main challenge of CSOs is their financial dependence on donors which drives the policy agenda. It can be the case that a CSO wants to pursue a topic and cannot find funding and has to adapt its work to active funding schemes. Getting a project often involves the possibility for new team members or outsourcing, the latter when the CSO lacks certain capacities.

Evaluations are usually done at the end of the project and are internal. If a project is accepted by the public body it targets, it can lead to successful input into the decision-making process.

Concerning targetting and mainstreaming, these aspects depends on the project. Often there is a need of a clear target group which can be measured in quantity and quality regarding their participation in the project. There are many challenges especially reaching out to a certain marginalized group, such as low-income people.

As for sustainability, usually the project ends on time, unless there is an obstacle with reaching out the target group and/or communication with the public body. Another challenge is obtaining funds for a similar project

VI.2. ALBANIA

VI.2.1. Overview of civil society in Albania

Civil society in Albania has a relatively short history, struggling with rapid systemic transformation and a turbulent political and economic environment. The modern history of the Albanian civil society spans less than two decades of intense developments and trends. Human rights organisations were among the first ones to be established with the first formal organisation– the Forum for Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – established in 1991 (Vurmo, 2017).

Key strengths of the sector come from within but are limited by government's policy towards civil society organisations, notably public consultation processes, public funding for CSOs, financial and legal operations of CSOs, volunteering, social service provision and the collection of data on civil society development (Fras & Tahiraj, 2018). Recently, Albania has increased efforts to improve cooperation between state actors and civil society organisations (CSOs) in lieu of the European integration process. Nonetheless, existing mechanisms need to be fully implemented in practice and input by civil society needs to be followed-up more systematically in policymaking.

In October 2014, the Parliament approved a regulation on public consultations, and in December 2014 a resolution that ratifies a "Charter on civil society", recognising the importance of civil society in the country's democratic development. This law (No. 146, 2014) regulates the process of notification and public consultation of the draft-laws, national and local strategic draft-documents, and policies of high interest for the public (Law No. 146/2014). In 2015, the National Council for European Integration was established, which aims to promote and accelerate the implementation of key reforms needed in the process of accession to the European Union and it is operational as of July 2015 and includes eight Civil Society Organizations. Another milestone is the establishment of the National Council for Civil Society[1], aiming to support the strong involvement of the CSOs in the European Integration process and in the decision-making processes, with reinforced focus on obtaining CSOs expertise and experience and channelling it to Albania's integration processes and several ongoing reform processes.

Finally, a Roadmap for Albanian government[2] policy towards a more enabling environment for the development of civil society (extended until 2022) to further contribute to the improvement of a better cooperation and transparency between state institutions and civil society, as well as creating an appropriate and enabling environment to civil society organizations was established with wide consultation in 2015. The roadmap embodies the principles and objectives set out in the guidelines on EU support for Civil Society 2014-2020.

The *EU Albania Report 2018 (European Commission 2015)* highlights that *"Some progress was made towards implementing the institutional framework for consultation with civil society following the approval of the law establishing the National Council for Civil Society. The fiscal framework regulating the activity of civil society organisations (CSOs) was still not conducive to their development and needs to be revised."* The EU Albania Report 2019 confirms again the need for genuine progress in the implementation of the

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[1] http://www.parlament.al/web/Sesioni_i_peste_20693_1.php

[2] http://www.integrimi.gov.al/al/dokumenta/dokumente-strategjike/udherrefyesi-i-shoqerise-civile&page=1

roadmap on an enabling environment for civil society (European Commission 2019).

Furthermore, the EC highlights that the Law on the National Council for Civil Society needs to be amended to reflect changes in ministerial portfolios and provide for appropriate representation in the National Council for Civil Society. Substantial efforts are needed to ensure meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society as part of an inclusive policy dialogue for reforms (European Commission 2019). These efforts should involve comprehensive feedback and follow up mechanisms. The legal and regulatory framework on basic legal guarantees of freedom for CSOs is generally harmonised and in line with international standards. Generally, despite advancements in legislative framework, the civil society sector in Albania remains overall fragmented and overly dependent on donor funding (EC, IPA 2014-2020).

As argued by different national and international analysis of the civil society sector in Albania (CIVICUS Civil Society Index, CSOs Sustainability Index USAID, Monitoring Matrix on enabling environment for Civil Society development – Country Report for Albania 2014-2018) the major challenges still pertaining are: broader and genuine involvement of CSOs in policy making process complemented with follow up mechanisms by state actors; a fiscal framework that is more favourable to CSOs work; collection of data on the CSOs activities and development of volunteerism; Lack of unified available official data continues to put in question the real size of the non-profit sector (Monitoring Matrix, 2019); at local government level, cooperation remains weak; CSOs lack the necessary capacity to spread the democratic political culture and engage citizens to participate in democratic decision-making processes in an informed way; CSOs are overly dependent on funding by foreign donors (Instrument for Pre-

Accession...); CSOs could make a more substantial contribution to addressing many of these challenges through their lobbying, advocacy and oversight activities at national, regional and local level in every sector; financial viability and sustainability and the available public funding is insufficient.

In addition to lobbying and advocacy activities, civil society organisations play a crucial role in providing a range of services to citizens, enabling access to basic services particularly for poor, vulnerable and marginalised women and men, victims of domestic violence, citizens with special needs, and women and girls at risk.

The delivery of such services in Albania, which are essential for a significant share of the population, is insufficiently regulated and monitored, and largely depends on donor funding. Also, CSOs do not have adequate resources to employ professional communications staff or develop communication strategies for advocacy campaigns and participation in consultation processes. While well-established organizations, particularly in Tirana, have established some communication practices, small and local CSOs lack adequate skills.

Civil society needs further strengthening, including capacity building and encouraging of the creation of an enabling environment for its development and greater involvement of stakeholders in reforms, including through greater transparency of government action and spending. Civil society involvement will be ensured in the identification, planning, implementation and monitoring of actions, in particular in key policy areas such as human rights, gender equality, migration, local development, territorial cooperation, good governance, public administration reform, public finance reform, employment, social policies, environment, agriculture, competitiveness and innovation. Civil society organizations have played an important role in

preparing society in Albania for the EU accession, being involved in different sectoral reforms, both *acquis* related as well as with regard to the overall promotion of democracy, the rule of law, fighting against corruption, advocating for non-discriminating policies and human rights (EC, 2019).

While stepping up further in the EU integration, such a process requires further consolidation and support in practice. Indeed, despite various initiatives and mechanisms related to the enhancement of the government – civil society relationship, the overall framework for a structured policy dialogue with civil society still needs to be improved, in order to create synergy among existing initiatives and contribute to the irreversibility of the EU acquis related policy reforms.

VI.2.2. Social service delivery in Albania

The provision of services to Roma and Egyptian communities has always been a challenge. According to the Albanian census of 2011, the numbers of Roma and Egyptians in Albania are respectively 8,301 and 3,368, (0.3% and 0.1% of the total population). However, other sources estimate between 18,276 and 120,000 Roma and over 200,000 Egyptians, which makes their inclusion into public services a real objective and necessity for the Albanian Government.

Despite the successful implementation of important political, social and economic reforms, Roma and Egyptian communities continue to face direct and indirect barriers in accessing public services.

This is for a variety of reasons, however, many of them are due to a lack of information and understanding of administrative procedures. This is compounded by the eligibility criterion for accessing services that cannot be met, sometimes related to the ability to produce the necessary documentation. Importantly, the negative and discriminatory attitudes toward Roma and Egyptian by the majority of the Albanian population also serve to further marginalize and isolate Roma and Egyptian families.

The main challenges faced by Roma and Egyptian communities are related to: securing housing and accommodation, finding reliable and adequately paid forms of income and employment, accessing government services, including health and education.

In particular, the inability to register means that Roma and Egyptian families are often unable to access services that do exist (UNDP Report, 2017).

The current administrative and territorial reforms being undertaken by the Albanian Government aim to increase the cost-efficiency of local government units (LGUs), thus enabling them to provide better services and make sure that all citizens can access these services (UNDP, STAR1 & 2).

Furthermore, the reform of social services, launched in 2013, together with the development and approval of the National Strategy for Social Protection and the Policy Document for Social Inclusion, as well the new Law on Social Services (entered into force on 24th November 2016) and the Law on the Rights and the Protection of the Child (2017) creates a policy and legal foundation for the development of community based social services.

A key document in setting out the type of services and role of each actor is the Strategy of Social Protection 2015-2020 which identifies the establishment of an integrated system of social care services at local level by Local Government Units as a priority, and the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania 2016-2020.

In addition, the new Social Services Law foresees the creation of services delivered at community level. In particular, the new law provides for:

- ''social care services'' representing an integrated and organized system of benefits and facilities that are delivered/provided by professionals of relevant public or non-public entities, with the goal of improving the conditions of disadvantaged persons,
- "para-social care services", i.e. services that include the provision of information, support to families so that they identify their needs for care, initial assessment, and support to the individual to choose the service that they need,
- complimentary "specialized care services" which support at local level services delivered at the regional level for children with special needs such as autism, child victims of sexual abuse and women and girls who are victims of abuse and violence or trafficking,
- "on-line of telephone counselling services" services offered through the help phone line 24 hours 7 days a week, that support and counsel families or children in cases of crisis, domestic violence or for protection of children,
- specialised services (i.e. shelters, centres for children with development disorders, etc.),
- social assistance (ndihma ekonomike), disability benefits, allowances for foster families or orphans, and
- social housing and/or employment programmes.

The target groups include the following societal groups: Roma and Egyptians, people with disabilities, elderly, unemployed, low-income families, children, youth, children and youth in street situations, victims of gender-based violence, victims of trafficking.

Referring to Law 121/2016 on Social Care Services in Albania, social care services encompass "an integrated and organised system of benefits and facilities that are provided by professionals of respective public or non-public fields to ensure the wellbeing, independence and social inclusion of individuals and families in need of social care" (article 3). Law 121 (article 8) has established 7 types of social services: pre-social services, services in community centres, services in residential centres and shelters, services in emergencies, alternative care services to children without parental care, specialised services, and telephone or online services. Social services are divided into public and non-public (Article 9).

Public social services include services funded by the budget of the central government and/or local government. Non-public service providers do not receive funding from the government, and they are divided into profit and non-profit.

Various projects have been funded by international and local organisation. Some key donors and organisations working in this area:

- World Bank and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection on the reform of social assistance and social services system,
- European Union, Italian Cooperation for Development, Swiss Cooperation for Development, SIDA, UNDP on reforming national service system, including social services at central level,
- European Union, Italian Cooperation for Development, Swiss Cooperation for Development, SIDA, UNDP on reforming local government, including provision of services,
- Terres des Hommes, Save the Children, UNICEF, World Vision on social services for marginalised communities.

Local governments provide sub-granting to ensure NGOs access and participation. There is increasing involvement of Roma CSOs and activists in open dialogue with the central government. There is an inter-ministerial group coordinated by the National focal point for Roma. There are the National Action Plans on Roma and Egyptian Inclusion that foresees the involvement of several stakeholders in specific steps. There is an ongoing process of empowering the Roma civil society and also in increasing transparency among CSOs. Monitoring of policies at the central and local level are carried out by Civil Society coalitions. Involvement of Civil actors in drafting local action plans in different municipalities through several projects/measures.

An important challenge remains the synergy and complementarity among different projects and programme; the Government should play a bigger role in ensuring complementarity and synergy. In addition, the involvement of NGOs and local community groups should be integrated and sustainable, not only on project-based. Last but not least community and integrated services model should be implemented.

In terms of education services, the lack of available childcare options also appears to be a significant barrier to preschool enrolment among Roma. Improved childcare services and particularly outreach in the most vulnerable Roma families can increase the enrolment of children in the preschool system. Support to Roma mothers also can improve the access of children to preschool and basic education; Preschool textbooks and additional textbooks and didactic materials needed in the primary education are not provided for the Roma children, causing difficulty for their school attendance. Support can be given in overcoming this difficulty. Increasing number of school dropouts due to family migration, or attraction into the grey labour market, especially among early teenagers. Providing

employment opportunities for parents can minimise the school dropout of Roma children. At least a third of Roma children aged 7–15 were outside the school system in 2017. Improving the outreach in the school enrolment by the use of mediators can affect the school attendance by Roma children. Distance from schools together with commute safety and transport absence can affect the attendance among Roma children, especially the girls.

Criteria set for providing transport for the school pupils can be adapted to provide transportation for the vulnerable children taking into consideration commute safety despite school distance. Quality of services in professional high schools and primary schools with Roma pupil presence. Qualification of teachers, the involvement of support teachers, and adopting an index of all-inclusiveness that involve also parents in the process can be measures that increase the quality of service. An increasingly lower number of Roma children make it to high school and as a result in University, which deepens their underrepresentation, especially in higher education. Moreover, being bilingual and having communication and cultural deficiencies, most Roma graduates with a GPA that does not meet the required minimum (6/10) to enter university. To respond to this situation, it is necessary that, in addition to a decent amount of scholarships for attending high school, to provide adequate education support to vulnerable Roma students thus enabling them to meet criteria for entering university.

In terms of health services, certain medical analyses and pharmaceutics medicaments are expensive and unaffordable by most Roma. Information campaigns targeting the communities must be carried out in order to make accessible the existing services, and family planning methods. Creating space for the involvement of mediators facilitating the

information campaigns and also the immunisation and delivery of other healthcare services into Roma communities.

In terms of housing services, living on informal income excludes Roma from accessing the renting bonus or loans, despite other supporting criteria. Settlement in distant suburban areas, excluding Roma from basic services such as access to water, absence of roads, street lighting, etc. Investments should be encouraged in these areas. The approach of municipalities for the government funds on improving the housing conditions has been contested by Roma families who claimed support and didn't receive it.

More effective approaches are needed in this direction. Hidden discrimination by the landlords when renting to Roma families who benefit the renting bonus. Thus providing the house through an intermediary public agency can ease the process. Displacement of families is still a threat. Absence of housing plans for Roma and Egyptians, by the municipalities.

Capacity building for Roma Civil Society should be upgraded and continued in order to maintain an improving and more vibrant and principled civil society in the country. Romalb system has to be upgraded having regard to availability and collectability of data while better synchronizing it with other mainstream area-specific databases.

VI.2.3. CASE 1: ROMA FOCAL POINTS AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

In 2016, the UET Centre and Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA) implemented the project "Working together and Joint Forces for Roma youth social inclusion through tailored policies and good practices on minority rights" supported by "Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rule of Law Program Southeast Europe". The project aims to mainstream minority rights at the work of policymakers at the local level through the

direct engagement of the Roma communities as Roma Focal Point. The project established a Roma Focal Points network and developed some practical guides to prevent discrimination against the Roma communities as part of the decision-making process at the local level. Roma Focal Points are mobilized into Municipalities to prioritize local needs and implement development initiatives (e.g. self-help activities related to education, health, protection from discrimination, and promotion of human rights) in close partnership with local authorities.

The recommendations provided by this case study draw from the analysis of the current situation on the social inclusion of Roma communities, their engagement with and participation in local governance as well as the insights and findings from the Roma Focal Points at the Municipality of Fieri, Durres and Tirana. Main recommendations: enhancement of institutional capacities at central and local level to cater for marginalised communities and to adhere to social inclusion,

- ❍ a discourse of social inclusion and empowerment,
- ❍ participatory social service provision at the local level,
- ❍ knowledge and understanding of Roma communities,
- ❍ capacity building for access to and quality social services,
- ❍ advocacy and policy implementation,
- ❍ transparency and accountability,
- ❍ free legal aid.

VI.2.4. CASE 2: SOCIAL SERVICES PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AT RISK BY CSO

Social Organisation for the Support of the Youth (ARSIS) has operated in Albania since November 2005 in the area of child protection and service provision for children and youth in vulnerable situations, their families as well as the Roma and Egyptian communities. ARSIS operates a drop-in social centre that provides multidisciplinary services since December

2010. This facility operates based on the following triangle of cooperation.

The Municipality of Tirana provides free of charge the premises, working appliances and a minivan; the donor (UNICEF and the EU) cover the operational expenses and the staffing; and ARSIS is the implementing body that follows up/ensures the provision of services.

Target groups are children, youth, women, and other family members in vulnerable situations.

The core activities are set in the following pillars: multi-purpose services in two daily drop-in facilities (Mon – Fri, 8am–5pm); outreach interventions through the combination of street work and community development; and emergency responses, availability 24 hours/day, 365 days/year.

The House of Colours Centre sets up a model for replication on how the local government can cooperate and interact with the CSOs on delivery of social services.

Recommendations:

- to be updated the standards for the daily drop-in or community social centres as well as the transitory shelters,
- defining of clearer standards and criteria for the CSOs that provide social services,
- enable not-for-profit civil society organisations particularly those who provide social services to be exempt from VAT duties,
- set a percentage of the state annual budget to be provided for the support of civil society organisations that provide licensed and quality social services.

VI.2.5. CASE 3: REGIONAL LOCAL DEMOCRACY PROGRAMME (ReLOaD)

Regional Local Democracy Programme (RELOAD) is a regional initiative financed by European Union and implemented by UNDP is six Western Balkans countries, namely: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The Programme aims to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration process in the Western Balkans by empowering civil society to actively take part in decision making and by stimulating an enabling legal and financial environment for civil society and pluralistic media.

Moreover, its objective is to strengthen partnerships between local governments and civil society in the Western Balkans by scaling-up a successful model of transparent and project-based Civil Society Organisations (CSO) funding from local government budgets towards greater civic engagement in decision-making and improvement of local service delivery.

RELOAD will focus on institutionalising the interaction between local governments and CSOs while strengthening capacities of all relevant stakeholders to engage more productively in such partnerships. Importantly, the underlying intention of the project is to replicate and sustain a transparent, development-oriented and project-based approach to funding of CSOs by municipal budgets that contributes to realisation of legitimate local priorities in line with local development strategies.

Moreover, mechanisms for monitoring/evaluation of projects activities and results implemented by CSOs will be created and adopted, while a monitoring baseline for local government/CSO relations will be defined introducing appropriate tools.

The main results to be achieved under this Programme are as follows:

- local governments and CSOs have a basic understanding of the comprehensive transparent model for funding of CSOs from municipal budgets,
- a model of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs by local governments is introduced and institutionalized in all participating local governments, and thus promoted and anchored across Western Balkan countries,
- services delivered by civil society organisations address the needs of local communities within partner local governments across the Western Balkans countries,
- the capacity of civil society organisations and local governments in the implementation of municipal grant schemes and delivering good quality projects is strengthened,
- enhanced regional networking and dialogue of civil society and local governments across the Western Balkan countries enable multiplication of good practices,
- diversified dialogue and cooperation mechanisms between local governments and CSOs (specific for Bosnia and Herzegovina).

WHERE NEXT?

The project will, first and foremost, increase the crucial cooperation between the local government and NGOs in terms of the co-production of social services for the marginalised community. The current situation with the COVID-19 outbreak has revealed the value and importance that social services provide. In light of this health crisis, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia has approved ZIP's project named Front against COVID-19 in rural Saraj.

The project focuses on the rural municipality of Saraj as one of the several breeding grounds for the virus. It aims to not only inform and provide relief packages for 1500 families that are the most affected but to also help students from low-income families with the online classes. For this purpose, ZIP, with the help of schools in Saraj, will identify 30 students (based on different criteria) from primary and high schools, which will receive a tablet that will ease the process of online education. Other key project activities are the expert-led webinars and trainings for teachers in Saraj. Teachers will have an amazing opportunity to learn more about how to properly use the Internet as a tool for managing their curriculum, how to collect the right content and resources, etc.

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