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## ANNEXES

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## ACRONYMS

AMR	Romanian Municipalities Association
CoE	Council of Europe
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FEAD	Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
ICLD	International Centre for Local Democracy
NGO	Non-government organisation
ROMACT	A joint initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Commission aiming to build the capacity of local authorities to develop and implement policies and public services that are inclusive of all, including Roma
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Swedish name is <i>Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting</i> or SKL for short)
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SKL International	SALAR's organisation for international development cooperation
TCC	Transnational Cooperation and Capacity building
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This proposal focuses on how the situation for vulnerable EU citizens can be improved through cooperation between local and regional authorities. While vulnerable citizens exist in all EU countries, this proposal focuses on Romania in order to build on the existing cooperation agreement signed by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of Sweden and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection, and Elderly of Romania in 2015. The agreement focuses on cooperation in the areas of children's rights, gender equality, social welfare and social security in the form of exchange and joint projects, amongst others. Within the framework of these three areas, this proposal suggests a concrete programme of cooperation between local and regional authorities that can, in turn, feed up to and inform the national cooperation. Such a programme can be tested in Romania with the potential to be replicated in and by other countries in future, including Bulgaria (which Sweden also has a cooperation agreement with).

Looking at Romania, the Romanian Government has actively worked to improve the situation for poor, marginalised and disadvantaged citizens. It has put in place a number of institutions, policies and initiatives to reduce poverty and social exclusion, improve education and skills, provide more integrated social services and improve labour market institutions. It has put specific attention on disadvantaged groups including the Roma population, including a strategy for the inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to Roma minority and establishment of a National Contact Point for Roma Issues.

As with other EU member countries, more and more vulnerable citizens from Romania are nonetheless looking elsewhere in Europe for income opportunities. The number of vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden more than doubled between 2014 and 2015, with many begging on the streets as a way to earn an income. Women face particular vulnerabilities including due to lack of basic knowledge of preventive health care and access to sanitation and maternal health care services. These migratory patterns also have a negative impact on children, who are often left behind in the care of other family members and face particular risks.

These vulnerable EU citizens do not have right of residence in Sweden and are not able to obtain it unless they find employment, which is often a challenge due to low education levels, low employability and language barriers. Without this right of residence, they are not able to access welfare services and are only entitled to public social support in emergency situations.

While Romanian and Swedish authorities face shared challenges, it also creates an opportunity and willingness to cooperate in order to address these challenges. In developing this proposal, SKL International has focused on the potential for collaboration between local and regional authorities in each country in order to improve the living situation for vulnerable Romanian citizens. We propose an integrated programme of support that targets the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty.

The proposed initiative is a two-part programme. The first part is an exchange between Romanian and Swedish municipalities and regions that focuses on improving service delivery

and decision making at local level. Swedish municipalities can contribute by sharing their experiences, methods and ways of working when it comes to municipal management and inclusive service delivery. They can share their experience and competence in gender mainstreaming and how to mainstream gender into political decision-making, management processes and service delivery and ensure more equal participation in political and public life. They can also share their experiences and models for integrating children's rights into the decisions and operations of municipalities and regions. As Swedish local and regional governments have greater responsibilities delegated to them, they can also share models for service delivery and decision making within social welfare and social security.

Romanian municipalities can in turn share their experiences of working with vulnerable groups in Romania, and help Swedish local and regional authorities understand the local context and background of vulnerable Romanian citizens that reside temporarily in Sweden.

The second part complements the municipal exchange by supporting activities implemented by NGOs and (potentially) private sector actors at local level in Romania, linked to the areas prioritised in the municipal exchange. Local authorities can initiate cooperation with NGOs and private actors to develop collaborative projects at a local level such as kindergartens, social and education mediators, vocational training, and so on.

The local- and regional-level collaboration would then feed up to a national-level collaboration between the Swedish and Romanian social ministries, the National Contact Point for Roma Issues, and other actors in Romania and Sweden as well as at the EU level.

The programme would be implemented initially through a number of pilot partnerships, so that the approach can be tested and refined. The proposed model for cooperation at a local level builds on an existing Municipal Partnership Programme, delivered by the International Centre for Local Democracy. The municipal exchange mechanism would be coordinated in Sweden through a small secretariat and can leverage the structures and materials that have already been developed for the Municipal Partnership Programme. The sort of results that can be expected would vary by partnership, but may include improved mechanisms to promote the best interests of the child, improved services to women and children at risk, better mainstreaming of gender into municipal operations and decision-making, and increased knowledge of beneficiaries about rights and services.

The proposal is in line with the European Commission's Partnership Agreement for Romania 2014-2020 and supports the priorities of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Romania. The ESF is helping all EU citizens, including disadvantaged groups, to stay in school longer, to be able to enter the labour market, and to benefit from fairer living standards and better health and social services.

Based on experience from the Municipal Partnership Programme, a general budget estimate for such a programme is around 50 million kronor for a three-year programme covering approximately ten municipal partnerships. Given the proposal's solid linkages to European and national priorities, including the bilateral cooperation agreement between Sweden and Romania, we see that there is strong potential to seek ESF funding for the proposal.

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction to the study

In June 2016 SKL International was awarded a grant by the Government of Sweden to study and develop a proposal looking at how a cooperation between local and regional authorities could improve the situation for vulnerable EU citizens.

The study is connected to an agreement signed in 2015 between the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of Sweden and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection, and Elderly of Romania to strengthen their cooperation in the field of social policy. The agreement focuses on cooperation in the areas of children's rights, gender equality, social welfare and social security, and may include exchange of best practices and support for joint projects. There is a desire from both sides for there to be concrete actions to follow from this agreement.

Sweden also entered into a similar agreement with the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2016. At the start of the study it was considered whether or not to include both countries in the proposal; however for reasons of cost and time effectiveness it was agreed to limit the study to Romania. However, it was the intention that the study and proposal can also lead to results that are relevant to, and can be applied in, Bulgaria.

In developing the proposal, SKL International aimed to complement the wide body of research and information that already exists by focusing specifically on how Romania and Sweden can cooperate at local and regional levels in order to improve children's rights, gender equality, social welfare and social security.

The study has resulted in a proposal for a long-term programme for cooperation between municipalities and regions in Sweden and Romania, outlined in the later part of this report.

## 1.2 Methodology

The study was conducted by a team of two from SKL International and Anneli Hultén, former mayor of Göteborg and current governor of Skåne region.

The study comprised of consultations in Sweden with the relevant Ministries and authorities in Sweden and Romania as well as non-governmental organisations, associations of local governments, a selection of Swedish and Romanian municipalities and regions, various groups and networks working with issues related to vulnerable EU citizens and/or Roma groups in both countries. The Romanian Embassy in Sweden, and the Swedish Embassy in Romania, provided invaluable support throughout. A full list of consultations is attached at **Annex 1**.

Desk research was also conducted, drawing on the significant materials available. Particular mention should be made of the final report of the Swedish National Coordinator for vulnerable EU citizens (Valfridsson, Mattsson, Leichert, & Solomin, 2016), which similarly studied the situation for vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden and provided valuable background for this study.

Two visits were made to Romania by the project team. The first in July 2016 focused on gathering information and understanding the nature of the issues. The second in October 2016

presented initial ideas for a programme of cooperation in order to gather feedback and input to the project proposal.

A survey was also sent out to a sample of Swedish municipalities and regions in order to gather information and complement existing information with specific questions relating to the proposed programme for cooperation. Responses were received from 26 municipalities and three regions. A copy of the survey is attached at **Annex 1**.

The project team consulted with local and regional politicians on regular basis throughout the process.

## **2 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN ROMANIA**

Romania has achieved high levels of economic growth in recent years, despite several governmental and institutional changes. According to the IMF projections, Romania will have the highest economic growth in Europe in 2016.

In addition to its strong economic growth, another area where Romania has remarkable strides forward in recent years is its anti-corruption efforts. The National Anti-corruption Directorate has been lauded for its efforts in identifying and prosecuting corruption, and registered a record number of cases in 2015. Its credibility was bolstered by the indictment of high-profile figures, including those sitting in office.

Romania's national priorities are anchored in the European Commission's (EC's) Partnership Agreement for Romania 2014–20 and its corresponding operational programmes. These provide 40 billion euros through European Structural and Investment Funds for promoting competitiveness and local development; developing human capital and physical infrastructure; encouraging sustainable and efficient use of natural resources; and building a modern and professional public administration.

The challenges Romania faces in socio-economic development and social inclusion are one of the priorities of the Romanian Government. The country is second to last (before Greece) according to the EU social justice index, measuring poverty prevention; equitable education; labour market access; social cohesion and non-discrimination; health; and intergenerational justice (Schraad-Tischler, 2015) and those of Roma ethnicity are over-represented in the statistics. According to data from 2015, 37.3 % of Romanians are at risk of (relative) poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat) which is a decrease in comparison with 42%, 2012. Children are at the highest risk of being in poverty among all age groups, and the level of poverty among children has not decreased in recent years (World Bank Group, 2015).

### **2.1.1 Situation for children**

Migration and labour mobility may also have an adverse effect on children's wellbeing. In many cases, children are left in the care of elderly relatives or older siblings when parents are abroad for longer or shorter periods of time. Official statistics place the number of children with parents abroad at around 85 000, but UNICEF estimates that the real number is closer to 350 000 (Save the Children Romania, 2016). According to Save the Children Romania, this puts children at

risk in terms of weak family support for children to attend school; limited access to alternative educational opportunities (informal and non-formal education) and low levels of teacher training for specific professional requirements. Recently, legislation has been introduced requiring parents to notify local social services of the assigned caregiver during the time of their absence, however, according to representatives of local authorities in Romania, this requirement is not always fulfilled. In one community visited, the social services cited the high number of parents temporarily residing Sweden as one of the reasons for recent significant increases in school drop-outs.

### **2.1.2 Gender considerations**

Investment in women leads to a number of positive reinforcing effects that can transform the poverty cycle and create better opportunities for the family. Improving girls' education, as well as employability, increases the age of marriage and first pregnancy, which in turn contributes to better maternal and infant health. It also reduces the number of children per family meaning that a larger share of the household budget can be invested in each child's education. As women enter the labour market they are more likely to influence how the family's income is spent, usually resulting in more money going to schooling for girls and boys which in turn improves girls' education. It also provides girls with positive role-models that increases their educational aspirations, as well as the level of investment in their education. This in turn reduces dependence on men as income providers and helps increasing equality both within and outside the household (World Bank Group, 2014).

## **2.2 EU initiatives in Romania**

For the 2014-2020 period, Romania will be allocated 22.9 billion euros in EU funds of which 15.95 billion euros will channel through the ESF and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Of this amount, at least a third will be spent on the ESF, with at least 20% of that going towards the promotion of social inclusion and combating poverty including within disadvantaged communities. This translates to approximately a billion euro during the programming period. EU funds are channelled through the Ministry for European Funds.

390 million euro has been earmarked under the Human Capital Operational Programme (OP) for EU-funded measures targeting disadvantaged communities under three investment priorities: socio-economic integration, access to employment and reducing early school drop-outs. (European Commission, 2016). The European Social Fund (ESF) is aiming to reduce the numbers of early school-leavers by supporting second-chance education for young people not in education, training or employment and improving the access to and quality of tertiary education. ESF funding is also boosting apprenticeships, traineeships and lifelong learning, improving teachers' skills, and supporting vocational education and training to better fit labour market demands (European Commission, 2015). Disadvantaged groups are being helped through scholarships; for example the government provides dedicated places for Roma for admission to public universities.

## **2.3 Social policy and relevant government actors**

### **2.3.1 Relevant state institutions**

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly is responsible for several areas related to social inclusion, employment and social protection. It is also of particular interest due to its cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of Sweden.

The Ministry of European Funds is the Managing Authority for the European Structural Funds (ESF) Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020. The Ministry was instituted in 2013 to improve the absorption rate and efficient use of ESF and ERDF. The National Contact Point for Roma Issues is also based within the Ministry (the Directorate General for Analysis, Programming and Evaluation holds this role).

The National Agency for Roma is a state institution mandated to initiate, participate in and promote activities, projects and sectoral programs to improve the Roma situation, in cooperation with other public institutions and non-governmental organizations. The agency also has seven regional offices.

The National Council for Combatting Discrimination is a state institution under the control of the parliament, which is mandated to prevent discrimination through awareness raising and education; mediate in cases of discrimination; investigate, establish and imposing sanctions in cases of discrimination; monitoring cases of discrimination; providing legal advice to victims of discrimination.

The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Roma established under Prime Minister's Decision No 36/24.03.2011 is mandated to monitor the enactment of measures under their specific activity sector and submitting, on semi-annual basis, progress reports in order to assess the impact of actions for the inclusion of Roma minority and, where appropriate, depending on internal and international developments, to review and adapt the Government Strategy.

The Democratic Federation of Roma provides training in areas such as leadership, civic dialogue, income generation etc. Its activities and research are thematically organised in local development, education, social economy, property rights and health. All activities are run by its members, of which approximately 150 members are municipal councillors.

### **2.3.2 Relevant national level policies and initiatives**

The National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015-2020 aims for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and lifting 580 000 people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020 compared with 2008.

An integrated package to fight poverty was adopted in February 2016. It includes several short and long term measures to implement poverty reduction and social inclusion programmes, including in the fields of education, health, social protection and labour. See <http://gov.ro/ro/stiri/pachetul-national-anti-saracie>.

The strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of the Romanian Citizens belonging to Roma Minority (or National Roma Integration Strategy) was originally adopted in 2011, with amendments in 2015. The strategy includes specific expected results and indicators

in the fields of education, employment, health, housing and small infrastructure, culture, and infrastructure and social services. It envisages that a Strategy Assessment and Monitoring Inter-ministerial Committee shall be set up with a view to ensuring monitoring and assessment of the Strategy.

### **3 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN SWEDEN**

In recent times the number of vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden has dramatically increased, from an estimated 2 100 in early 2014 to 4 700 in late 2015 (Valfridsson, Mattsson, Leichert, & Solomin, 2016). The exact number of vulnerable Romanian citizens is usually difficult to quantify; any statistics tend to be for vulnerable EU citizens as a whole.

Generally vulnerable EU citizens travel to other member countries to seek a living, whether through begging, low-paid labour such as berry picking, or other forms of work. In Sweden, a study on vulnerable EU citizens staying in Göteborg found that a third of those interviewed had come in search of a better life and better income; a third had come because they had heard that Sweden in particular provided better opportunities and better income potential than other EU countries, and a fifth had come because they were following a family member or friend (Göteborgs Stad Social Resursförvaltning, 2015).

#### **3.1 Gender-related vulnerabilities**

Women are particularly vulnerable. Göteborg's study found that women in this group are generally more vulnerable to violence and less able to protect themselves in situations of conflict. They had a lower education level than men (which was itself at a low level) and many lacked any formal work experience.

A low level of education means that these women lack basic knowledge of preventive health care. The life of homelessness makes it extremely difficult to manage their health and avoid infections. The women also do not have the money to buy sanitary products.

Pregnant women are usually encouraged to return to their home country due to administrative difficulties surrounding the registration of home that can follow the birth in Sweden, and the legislation that protects children in the event that they do not live in suitable conditions. Reproductive health care services are sometimes provided by non-governmental organisations or by individual health care providers. The counties of Stockholm and Västmanland have indicated that they would be interested to take part in a co-operation as proposed in this study on vulnerabilities on children and health-care of women and early pregnancies.

Another gender related risk is trafficking. Although not covered extensively in the scope of this study, a report produced by the County Board of Stockholm found that of the 34 cases where authorities had been in contact with vulnerable EU citizens that may have been exploited for sexual purposes, all instances related to women and none to men (Stockholm Länsstyrelsen, 2014).

## **3.2 Overview of relevant legislation and regulations in Sweden**

This section provides an English summary of a paper drafted by SALAR on the legal framework concerning vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden (Agnevik, Danielsson, & Hemmestad, 2016).

### **3.2.1 Freedom of movement**

The freedom of movement for workers in the EU is a basic principle of the union, and there are no requirements within the first three months of the individual's stay in another EU country, other than the requirement to hold a valid passport or identity card. However, according to the Swedish Aliens Act, EU citizens can be expelled within the first three months if they present an unreasonable burden on the social assistance services in accordance with the law on social services. To have the right of residence in another member state for longer than three months, an EU citizen must be a worker, a self-employed person, a job seeker with real prospects of finding work, be a student covered by health insurance and sufficient means for supporting oneself and one's family, or simply reside in the member state, but having a health insurance and sufficient means to provide for oneself and one's family.

### **3.2.2 Social protection**

Generally, EU citizens that have the right of residence in Sweden are to be treated the same way by municipal social welfare services as those people residing in the municipality. However, as mentioned above, the right of residence takes into account a person's ability to support oneself. As vulnerable EU citizens may not have the means to obtain right of residence they may not be covered by this arrangement. Municipalities can, however, provide emergency assistance to those who do not have right of residence, such as food, shelter and basic provisions. In such situations (involving those without right of residence) the municipality shall first investigate other means whereby the individual can access services, for example in the home country. If, for example, the embassy of the home country can provide means for a ticket to travel home, the municipality may provide a ticket to the embassy in Stockholm.

### **3.2.3 Health care**

According to the law 2013:407, persons who are residing in Sweden without a permit (for example persons who are avoiding execution of an expulsion decision, or persons who have not yet applied for the necessary permits to reside in Sweden) have the right to certain basic health care (children have the same rights to health care as other children). However, it is not yet clear to what degree the law can be applied to EU citizens who do not fulfil the requirements for right of residence set out above.

### **3.2.4 Education**

EU citizens who do not fulfil the requirements for right of residence do not have the right to access the full welfare system in Sweden. SALAR therefore concludes that municipalities are not required by the law to provide schooling for children in this situation. However, the law does not prevent them from accepting children of parents who reside in Sweden unlawfully and who are EU citizens.

### **3.2.5 Informal settlements**

Regarding possibility to use public space for begging, SALAR concludes that the municipality probably has the possibility to restrict begging through local ordinances, but that this possibility is restricted to certain places and certain conditions where it may affect public order, such as at bus stops. Furthermore, illegal settlements on someone else's property, for example a tent or a caravan, can constitute a crime. The police may remove a person from a place and/or take him or her into custody, if it is necessary to keep public order. The owner of a property may also request the assistance of the Swedish Enforcement Agency to assist in removing persons illegally residing on the property. In the case of littering on a place which is accessible to or visible by the public, it may constitute a crime.

### **3.2.6 The role of SALAR**

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has summarised the experiences of the local level in Sweden and the viewpoint of SALAR in relation to economically vulnerable Romanian citizens in Sweden in a letter to the national coordinator for vulnerable EU citizens (whose mission was to produce a Swedish Governmental Official Report).

In summary, SALAR considers unacceptable and unsustainable the fact that EU citizens are forced to leave their home countries temporarily to make a living from begging. Furthermore, SALAR encourages international cooperation and emphasises the responsibility of countries of origin and the EU, while noting that the activities Swedish municipalities can implement abroad is limited by the law. Concerning the situation in Sweden, SALAR welcomes any efforts to clarify the legal framework, and encourages cooperation between different public authorities. Municipalities may, according to SALAR, remove illegal settlements, but may also provide emergency aid to individuals who are not covered by other forms of social protection. Furthermore, SALAR emphasises the importance of outreach work to identify children at risk, and stresses the importance of civil society actors.

Currently, SALAR coordinates a network of municipal civil servants whose work relates to economically vulnerable EU citizens in Sweden. The network meets on an as need be-basis to receive information from the national and international level, and to discuss common concerns.

The Stockholm County Administrative Board has been designated as the national coordinator with regard to vulnerable EU citizens at local and regional level. This role includes continuously disseminating information; establishing an advisory function to support local authorities in working with vulnerable EU citizens; promoting and facilitating cooperation between different stakeholders, and following the legal position when it comes to: the right of residence; handling and assessment of children of vulnerable EU citizens; emergency assistance; and the rules and procedures for including evictions and spread this knowledge include other county boards.

### 3.3 Non-government organisations

There are 41 Swedish non-government organisations (NGOs) working in Bulgaria and Romania on social and humanitarian support.<sup>1</sup> Nine of these NGOs meet regularly to share experiences: *Hjärta till Hjärta* (Heart to Heart), *Erikshjälpen*, *Räddningsmissionen*, *Svenska kyrkan* (the Swedish Church), *Röda korset* (Red Cross), *Läkarmissionen*, *Hoppets stjärna*, *SOS Barnbyar* (SOS Children's Villages), *SAM-hjälp*. Overall the regular meeting of Swedish NGOs is seen to have improved communication and coordination about how to best support vulnerable Romanian citizens in their home country (Valfridsson, Mattsson, Leichert, & Solomin, 2016).

One of the leading actors in the NGO group is *Hjärta till Hjärta* (Heart to Heart). *Hjärta till Hjärta* has a range of activities in Romania focused on education, literacy, employment, healthcare, local economic development and land ownership. There are a number of examples of how their work has led to improvements for disadvantaged groups in Romania. For example during 2016 they worked in cooperation with the NGO Choice for Children in Borås to support vulnerable children in Buzau. The project included after-school homework tutoring and school lunches as well as vocational training and job creation efforts in various areas to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable EU citizens. Together with the municipality discussed a wider project to improve housing and infrastructure in Roma settlements.

NGOs see the potential to redirect private donations from short-term street support (providing money to begging) towards donations to NGOs that support Roma families in Romania. *Hjärta till Hjärta* runs a campaign selling badges where it describes this as a way for people to contribute in a more long-term and constructive manner.

NGOs, including these Swedish NGOs, are seen as being a credible partner when it comes to community initiatives. They are trusted in the communities they work in, something which is very important to the success of on-the-ground initiatives.

### 3.4 Private sector cooperation

There is potential for the private sector to help improve the life circumstances for vulnerable Romanian citizens in their home country. This could be either through philanthropic donations, corporate social responsibility initiatives or inclusive business models (business models that include vulnerable groups as employees, suppliers, distributors or customers). There is an existing network in Romania for corporate social responsibility (<http://www.csr-romania.ro/>) though an initial review indicates that few of these deal with vulnerable citizens or disadvantaged groups. During our consultations we were told of the ongoing collaboration between the Ikea Foundation, UNICEF and Save the Children in Romania. With funds raised through the Ikea Foundation's Soft Toys for Education Campaign, Save the Children runs a project in Romania which aims to reduce discrimination against Roma children and children with mental health problems. The project targets multiple stakeholders, and develops

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<sup>1</sup> A list can be found at <http://media.hjartatillhjarata.se/2015/03/RPT-Organisationer-i-RU-o-BIU-version-2.2.pdf>

educational and health services for the benefit of vulnerable children and their families. Some 18 000 school children are to be educated in eliminating discrimination and stigma (Ikea, 2014). This type of partnership could be an example for other companies, particularly those with connections to Romania and/or vulnerable groups.

### **3.5 EU initiatives in Sweden**

As mentioned, EU financial support for social inclusion measures is provided through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). For some projects the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) can be most relevant. The ESF is key as a transnational mechanism that may enable municipal exchange and possibly activities implemented by NGOs in Sweden coordinated with Romanian equivalents.

Perhaps the most relevant EU initiative in the context of this study is the programme ROMACT. ROMACT is a joint initiative between the European Commission (EC) and Council of Europe (CoE). Launched in 2013, the programme assists mayors and municipal authorities to develop policies and public services that are inclusive of all, including Roma, by working together with local Roma communities. ROMACT is active in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and the Slovak Republic. Support to almost 30 Romanian municipalities came to an end in 2016.

In 2016 a new component, Transnational Cooperation and Capacity building (TCC) was added to ROMACT. ROMACT TCC aims to assist local authorities in better integrating marginalised people, in particular non-nationals of Roma ethnicity. It focuses on the cooperation between municipalities from or to which movements of marginalised populations occur, with a focus on Roma. Unlike ROMACT, the TCC component is open to local authorities across Europe. Support through ROMACT TCC comprises training sessions on intercultural issues; training to mediators or persons working in a context of mediation between local institutions and Roma populations, and financial support for short-term or long-term working visits to the municipalities of origin (Council of Europe, 2015). ROMACT can be an important option for networking and exchange of experiences but for relatively short interventions. The latest call for proposals opted for a cooperation of 12 months.

Another EU initiative that has been utilised by Swedish municipalities is the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). FEAD focuses on providing basic material support to the most vulnerable, including for example food, shelter, blankets and basic care products. The Swedish support is however focussed on social inclusion. The EU budget for FEAD is around 3.8 billion euro during the 2014-2020 programming period. Sweden's allocation is about 7.9 million euro, but with Swedish co-financing adds up to around 10 million per year. FEAD is administered in Sweden by the European Social Funds Council (ESF Council). In the first call of 50 million kronor in 2015, seven applications were submitted, of which five were granted funding (Valfridsson, Mattsson, Leichert, & Solomin, 2016).

### **3.6 Cooperation between Swedish and Romanian municipalities and regions**

There is experience and know-how among local political leaders and civil servants in Sweden of international cooperation and readiness to take part in joint “people-to-people” activities if funding would be available. However, while a number of Swedish municipalities are interested in cooperating with their Romanian counterparts, the problem is a practical one. Swedish municipalities can be part of support schemes only through external financing; that is, a source of financing that is not from the municipal budgets. This puts a pressure on any potential programme to be fully funded through external sources, which are limited.

Forms of cooperation that are permitted within the municipal framework include (Valfridsson, Mattsson, Leichert, & Solomin, 2016):

- Donating equipment that is no longer needed (including costs for transportation and installation)
- Visiting the home countries of vulnerable EU citizens to learn more about the situation there (as part of developing the municipality’s work with these issues as part of its municipal competences)
- Establishing a “twin city” (*vänort*) relationship with another city in Romania

A number of Swedish municipalities and regions have already taken the initiative to establish contact on the issue of vulnerable Romanian citizens. For example Borås initiated and co-arranged a visit for mayors and county councillors to Romania during 2015 in order to explore and better understand the situation for vulnerable Romanian citizens. Likewise members of Stockholm’s team for vulnerable EU citizens conducted a study trip to Bucharest and Pitesti in 2013 to deepen knowledge of the situation of vulnerable citizens in their home country. Göteborg recently received funding through ROMACT for cooperation with the city of Buzau. The Swedish National Coordinator for vulnerable EU citizens suggested that ROMACT may provide a suitable entry point for municipal collaboration by funding study visits and early contacts between municipalities and regions in Sweden and Romania (Valfridsson, Mattsson, Leichert, & Solomin, 2016).

## **4 OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED INTERVENTION**

Given the challenges outlined earlier in this report, we propose that any programme of support targets the structural causes as well as the symptoms of poverty for the most vulnerable, including the Roma minority. The programme would be linked to the priority areas of the current bilateral cooperation agreement between the Romanian and Swedish social ministries: children’s rights, gender equality and social welfare and social security. It would focus on improving the situation for women and children through a family orientation, aiming to break the negative cycle of poverty that can come from education drop-outs and social patterns like early marriages. It would aim to reduce poverty by promoting inclusive social welfare services, and aim to promote a minimum package of services that can be delivered at local level in Romania.

The programme we propose comprises two parts. The first part is an exchange between Romanian and Swedish municipalities that focuses on improving service delivery and decision-making at local level. The second part complements the first by supporting activities implemented by NGOs and (potentially) private sector actors at local level in Romania. Both of these would then feed up to a national-level collaboration between social ministries and other actors, where the findings and lessons from the local level can be taken up for consideration and appropriate action.

The municipal cooperation would be implemented initially through a number of pilot partnerships, in order to test different ways of working and share lessons and experiences with future partnerships. A model for such a partnership arrangement has already been established through the Municipal Partnership Programme, funded by Sida and delivered by the International Centre for Local Democracy. The Municipal Partnership model is based on an application process where municipalities from countries eligible to receive official development assistance, together with a Swedish municipality, jointly apply for funding for a collaborative project. There are also opportunities to seek financing for the preparatory phases of the application. Such a model could be replicated in this programme but with a different source of financing. The actual number of pilots in the first stage will depend of access to funding.

The municipal exchange is also intended to initiate local activities delivered by NGOs and other actors. All together these activities would then feed up to, and inform, the national exchange that currently exists between Swedish and Romanian social departments. During our consultations with the Ministry of Work, Family, Social Protection and Elderly a mechanism for overseeing and facilitating project implementation was proposed by the State Secretary that would include national and local stakeholders.

## **5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME**

The proposed programme builds on a number of principles. These are to:

- Facilitate cooperation and exchange between municipalities in Sweden and in Romania as its main focus
- Be multifaceted in order to target the structural causes as well as the symptoms of poverty
- Be flexible and adjustable to each local context for best fit for the overall objective of addressing the causes and symptoms of poverty
- Be guided by needs assessment, risk analysis and consultations
- Build on what is already done well and the evidence-based conclusions drawn from extensive research targeting the situation for Roma citizens and the extreme poor in Romania

- Add value through a framework of integrated activities that adds value to Romanian policies and services
- Build on cooperation between municipalities that are senders and receivers of vulnerable citizens - to provide for full engagement between the two partners
- Be incentive driven and provide visibility for partners involved
- Promote exchange between peers at political and technical levels
- Support local activities that are anchored to national programs and policies in Romania such as the National Roma Integration Strategy
- Require an integrated approach between services delivered at local level
- Involvement/participation of Roma communities in project planning and implementation
- Build on the practical examples from pilots to develop evidence based policies, trainings etc (option for municipal associations in Romania to be active in this part)

## **6 DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMME**

### **6.1 Municipal exchange**

The programme focuses mainly on establishing a framework for exchange and collaboration between Swedish and Romanian municipalities and regions. Swedish municipalities can contribute to partnerships by sharing their experiences, methods and ways of working when it comes to municipal management and inclusive service delivery. Swedish municipalities have much to offer when it comes to, for example, integration of gender issues and gender equality; a human rights perspective and integrating children's rights in to municipal management and service delivery; and inclusive social welfare services. As Swedish local and regional governments have greater responsibilities delegated to them, they can also share models for service delivery and decision making in a range of areas of interest. Romanian municipalities can in turn share their experiences of working with vulnerable groups in Romania. Both parties can work together to identify ways to improve the circumstances for vulnerable Romanians in their home country.

The exchange can also help set a framework for delivery of activities by NGOs and other private actors in the second part of the programme. Romanian municipalities and/or regions would develop an integrated framework for improving the life circumstances for vulnerable citizens, which then provides a framework to coordinate activities by other actors at local level.

The exchange would lead to

- An exchange of knowledge that contributes to improved organisation, needs-based management and methods for delivering integrated social services built on public dialogue, and dialogue and cooperation with civil society.

- Inclusive operations at municipal and regional levels with measurable targets set out in the local partnership agreement built on accountability, clear division of roles between politicians and officials and local experience of equality and inclusiveness in the distribution of public services in the short and longer term.
- Service improvements through opportunities to jointly develop project proposals and cooperation initiatives with NGOs and national programs that may enable financing and service improvements for socially vulnerable citizens of the Romanian municipalities included in the program.
- Peer to peer support between staff and local political leaders
- Increased understanding of Romanian municipalities on the situation for its inhabitants when they are in Sweden, and vice versa, as well as increased exchange of information between the municipalities regarding needs at individual level
- Scaling up of good examples from the exchange program in collaboration with national organisations/institutions
- Improved capacity to access EU-funds

### **6.1.1 Mechanism for implementation**

The mechanism for the exchange can be a similar or identical format to the Municipal Partnership Programme run by the International Centre for Local Democracy (see [www.icld.se](http://www.icld.se)). Using such a model as the basis, the programme would start with an inception phase where funding can be provided to develop a concrete idea for collaboration and establish the governance arrangements that would ensure the programme has political support and ensure quality during implementation. The costs would cover travel to and from both countries in order to lay the basis for the cooperation. The inception phase would result in a project proposal that would be submitted for evaluation by a funding committee. The proposal would describe a cooperation project lasting up to three years and identify specific goals to be achieved. Funding during this stage may cover, for example, activities undertaken in Romania, joint conferences and seminars, travel, job-shadowing, communications and other costs that enables transfer of know-how between partners. In addition technical support will be provided to support the process.

ICLD has established a number of guiding documents that can be drawn on in the establishment of the municipal exchange project.

## **6.2 Activities implemented by civic and private actors**

The second part focuses on activities implemented primarily by NGOs and other private actors in connection with the areas of municipal exchange. As part of the municipal exchange, partnering municipalities and regions may initiate cooperation with NGOs and private actors and, together with them, develop projects through a collective approach. We see that the programme funding could finance one project or set of activities linked to the municipal exchange. Such activities might include e.g. kindergartens, social and education mediators, after school and summer school facilities, maternal and child health initiatives etc. Further activities

or projects could also be developed within the priority areas of the municipal exchange, but these would need to seek external public funding and/or private donations. The highest priority should be on improving the situation for vulnerable women and children as the most important driver for change and to help break the cycle of poverty.

In this way, the municipal exchange mechanism provides an institutional link that sets the framework for existing and new support schemes implemented by NGOs and other civic and private actors. These local activities would also be anchored to national programs and policies in Romania such as the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction and the National Roma Integration Strategy.

### 6.3 Examples of possible actions

The following table exemplifies the kinds of activities that might be included in a municipal exchange and how this may then lead to activities with NGOs and other actors.

Area of focus for municipal exchange	Potential activities that might be delivered by NGOs and other actors in framework of municipal exchange
Promote school attendance in the best interest of the child	Improved system for dialogue with parents, private grants and/or NGOs in support to school mediators, summer schools, meals at school and clothing for vulnerable children.
Integrating gender equality and/or children's rights perspective into municipal management, decision-making and service delivery	Promotion of gender equal services to communities; increasing citizens' awareness about gender equality and children's rights; consultations to gather input into budgets and plans that take account of the needs of women and men, boys and girls
Reduce early pregnancies, which lead to school drop-outs, restrict access to labour market, and lock in poverty cycles	Provision of health/sanitary mediators (model already successfully supported by UNICEF. Support sexual and reproductive health and education.
Improved integration in service delivery (exemplified above)	Strategic municipal approach to promote cross-cutting approaches to improve public services to vulnerable families
Increase employability among vulnerable youth and women	Local programs for vocational training established in dialogue with the business community
Reducing administrative and attitudinal barriers that hinder access to formal identification and indirectly to public services and job opportunities	Improved cadastre/provision of land/property titles required for long term identification. Job shadowing on administrative procedures/process mapping and integration between authorities involved. Development of inclusive approaches to service delivery that are equal and inclusive for all.
Better access to information (including strategic approach and planning) at local level in order to provide optimal support	Technical assistance in multi-annual planning and budgeting including capital investments/political priorities. Transparent and participatory procedures in order to take account of the needs and rights of women and children and option to set-up local fora for exchange
Improve local economic development in a way that promotes inclusion of marginalised groups and enhances gender equality	Sharing of good practices to improve local business climate focused on equal opportunities for education and vocational training and/or self-employment opportunities e.g. on social cooperatives (farming, housing improvements, small infrastructure projects, sub-contracting etc.)

## 6.4 Anticipated Results

Provision of result frameworks will be mandatory for the partners to provide together with the proposals for funding of the partnerships. The kinds of results that can be expected based on similar programmes<sup>2</sup> are related to decreased drop-out rates; improved parental skills; increased number of schools and kindergarten that provide inclusive provisions on prevention and reduction of school absences; increased knowledge of beneficiaries about rights and services; increased community ownership and awareness about Roma issues and possible solutions; increased valuing of education among children and parents including Roma; increased knowledge of healthy lifestyle among adolescents.

## 6.5 Integration of gender as a cross-cutting issue

Gender equality is an integral part of the programme. Ensuring that women, men, girls and boys have equal opportunity to influence and shape their lives is an important goal of the programme. This is something that is to be mainstreamed through all activities and should be a mandatory consideration in the municipal exchanges, irrespective of whether it is an explicit area of focus for the exchange or not.

Swedish municipalities and regions have a strong competence in gender mainstreaming that can be introduced and shared via the municipal exchange programme. Between 2008 and 2013, SALAR implemented a major initiative in gender mainstreaming (the “Programme for Sustainable Gender Equality”). With financial support from the Swedish Government, SALAR supported in total 240 gender development projects in 70 municipalities, county councils, regions and municipal companies. The funds were used for training politicians and managers and to gender mainstreaming of decisions, steering documents and managerial systems. Many of Sweden’s municipalities and county councils have received funds for development of gender equality in their services to inhabitants and patients.

As a result of the programme, the participating authorities have succeeded to: mainstream gender into political decision-making and management processes; strengthen the capacity among politicians and municipal staff to integrate gender into their daily work; provide services in a way that benefits men and women equally; and ensure more equal participation in political and public life.

In conjunction with the programme, SALAR adopted a strategy for gender mainstreaming within the association itself. SALAR has trained several politicians, managers, controllers and

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<sup>2</sup> For example, a program funded by the Norwegian Government and implemented by UNICEF focused on piloting and scaling up an integrated community-based services model, see [http://www.norvegia.ro/News\\_and\\_events/The-EEA-and-Norway-Grants/The-EEA-and-Norway-Grants-2009-2014/News/Norway-and-UNICEF--a-solid-partnership-for-Romanian-childrens-wellbeing/#.WErYwLLhC00](http://www.norvegia.ro/News_and_events/The-EEA-and-Norway-Grants/The-EEA-and-Norway-Grants-2009-2014/News/Norway-and-UNICEF--a-solid-partnership-for-Romanian-childrens-wellbeing/#.WErYwLLhC00)

officials in order to raise the level of awareness and knowledge about gender issues in general and to develop skills in gender mainstreaming in particular.

As a result of this work SALAR created and maintains a national platform with practical hands-on tools and capacity building material (<http://www.includegender.org/>). This material can be – and has been - reused and distributed in international cooperation programmes.

Furthermore SALAR works extensively supporting the municipalities in their implementation of the European Charter for Equality between Women and Men in Local Life. The Charter<sup>3</sup> (henceforth the “CEMR Charter”) was developed by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) as a means to implement the European Strategy for Equality between Women and Men at the Local Level. SALAR, through SKL International, has successfully used the CEMR Charter as a tool to promote gender equality at the local level in countries such as Serbia and Turkey. It has proven to be an effective way to build political support for improved gender equality in municipalities and regions. In Romania, these experiences could be spread by the Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) or other associations. In Sweden, these experiences can be promoted and spread through the municipal exchanges either by the Swedish partner or by SALAR/SKL International at an overarching level.

## **7 PROJECT DELIVERY AND RESOURCING**

### **7.1 Institutional framework and programme governance**

#### **7.1.1 Administration and programme coordination**

We propose that the municipal exchange mechanism would be coordinated in Sweden through a small secretariat. If appropriate funding could be sought ICLD will be consulted about whether it could take on this role and administer the municipal exchange project. This would represent a highly effective option, since ICLD already has an established infrastructure to manage such a programme and many years of experience. Alternatively, such a secretariat could be set up in SKL International together with its technical expertise to be provided to the implementing partners.

The experiences and lessons learnt from the pilot projects would be captured by the secretariat and disseminated through existing networks (such as the Romanian Municipalities Association in Romania, and in Sweden, SALAR’s network of municipalities and regions that meet on issues related to vulnerable EU citizens) as well as through workshops, conferences and publications in both countries.

The governance structure for the programme would be further detailed at a later stage based on the final agreed form for the programme and financing set-up.

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<sup>3</sup> A Charter for Europe’s local and regional governments to commit themselves to use their powers and partnerships to achieve greater equality for their people. Available at [http://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/charte\\_egalite\\_en.pdf](http://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/charte_egalite_en.pdf)

### **7.1.2 Links to the existing cooperation between social ministries**

The programme links directly to the existing cooperation between the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of Sweden and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection, and Elderly of Romania, by working in the focus areas of that cooperation. Exactly how the programme links in to these two institutions is a matter for discussion by the ministries. However, during our consultations, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection, and Elderly suggested developing a working group that looks at technical solutions to the issues that are identified during the municipal exchange. On the Romanian side, such a working group would be linked to the National Contact Point for Roma Issues where other Romanian ministries and actors are invited in based on the working group's focus. This is a matter for the Swedish and Romanian authorities to discuss further.

## **7.2 Funding options**

One of the tasks of the study was to look for funding opportunities and the European Social Fund (ESF) was foreseen to be a main option given its purpose and targets. In addition to supporting the municipal exchange, there is an option to use ESF for projects in Romania that will be developed through the partnerships and tentatively at later stage for transnational cooperation building on simultaneous calls for proposals by the ESF Council in Sweden and Ministry of EU-funds in Romania.

There is also potential to motivate private donations (eg business, NGOs, foundations, individuals) for visible local projects. There are frontrunners like Airbus and Ikea that have sponsored local schools in poor areas. However, the main regional Chambers of Commerce have been consulted on the issue of private interest to co-finance certain activities of the project and at this stage this the interest is low.

## **7.3 Budget**

The estimated budget for a programme of this scope is 50 million kronor over three years. Given that the proposed actions are still at an early stage the budget can only be considered an estimate. But as the draft proposal builds on evidence from an existing program (the Municipal Partnership Programme) we believe this is a reasonable estimate, and should be able to cover a maximum of ten municipal exchanges. Costs for an inception period might provide some additional costs for fine-tuning of the program to fit the specific purpose of the project. The amount of funding could be increased if, for example, other countries such as Bulgaria were to be included.

## **7.4 Scaling up**

We see that the initial three-year cooperation between Sweden and Romania can provide a good example and test-bed which can then be rolled out to other countries. For example, there is potential to include Bulgaria into such a programme, linked to the existing bilateral agreement between the Swedish and Bulgarian social ministries. The programme could also be spread to other EU countries who are interested in improving the situation for vulnerable EU citizens through transnational municipal exchanges.

