

E - bulletin



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“Local development, poverty reduction and enhanced inclusion of vulnerable groups” Programme is financed through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA) 2014-2021. The programme has a total budget of 41,764,706 EUR, with 85% of the funds provided by the EEA FM, and the remaining 15% by the national budget.

The main objective of the “Local development, poverty reduction and enhanced inclusion of vulnerable groups” Programme is to strengthen the economic and social cohesion, ensure a systemic approach in the local development and poverty reduction through integrated measures in the fields of education, employment and healthcare, which contributes to the achievement of the two main goals of the Financial Mechanism of the EEA: reduced economic and social differences in the EEA and strengthening the bilateral relations between the donor states, i.e., the Republic of Iceland, the Kingdom of Norway and the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the beneficiary country, the Republic of Bulgaria.

HIGHLIGHTS 2022

In 2022, the Programme Operator of the “Local development, poverty reduction and enhanced inclusion of vulnerable groups” Programme has carried out activities in the implementation of all programme areas: “Increased social and economic development in disadvantaged municipalities”, “Enhanced social inclusion of children and youth” and “Enhanced inclusion and empowerment of Roma”.

✚ In the period April – June 2022, **12 contracts were signed under the Programme’s procedure “Integrated measures for supporting Roma inclusion and empowerment”** with Smyadovo, Plovdiv, Lom, Samokov, Pernik, Sungurlare, Blagoevgrad, Dupnitsa, Kameno, Montana, Stamboliyski and Maglizh Municipalities. The projects aim to create sustainable mechanisms to improve the condition and opportunities of people living in marginalized Roma communities through effective integrated approaches.

The projects were developed in partnership with non-governmental organisations and partners from the donor states after extensive consultations with representatives of the vulnerable local communities. The participation and cooperation with partners from the donor states in the projects contribute to achieving one of the main objectives of the EEA FM, i.e. the improvement of the bilateral relations between the donor states and Bulgaria.

Project activities are covering integrated measures in the fields of education, social and integrated services, healthcare, employment, vocational training and other specifically needed areas of support, activities for the Roma empowerment and participation in the development and implementation of policies and services that affect the community development, as well as activities to increase the access and quality of sectoral or integrated services for Roma and such that increase the level of acceptance between Roma and the majority population, and counteract discrimination and negative attitudes against the Roma population.

✚ On April 18 and 19, 2022, the Programme Operator **signed ten project financing contracts** with Tvarditsa, Lom, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Malko Tarnovo, Stara Zagora, Maglizh, Kyustendil, Kozloduy, Botevgrad and Sofia Municipalities under the **“Early childhood education and care” procedure**. The projects aim to provide early childhood support to children and their families from vulnerable groups, including Roma communities, improve their access to healthcare, build parenting skills, improve the family environment, increase children’s willingness for inclusion in the education system, aiming to limit the transmission of poverty between generations. Centers and/or complexes of functionally related services (hubs) are to be established for early childhood education and care.

The projects were developed in partnership with non-governmental organisations and partners from the donor states after extensive consultations with representatives of the vulnerable local communities on the territory where the projects are to be implemented. The participation and cooperation with partners from the donor states in the projects is supported and encouraged in connection with one of the main objectives of the EEA FM, i.e. the improvement of the bilateral relations between the donor states and Bulgaria.

Project activities are covering measures for early childhood education, activities related to early childhood development and care, activities for social inclusion, measures for parent involvement and activation, promotion of participation of families, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and the relevant local stakeholders, development and delivery of didactic materials, involvement of highly qualified experts to implement the activities: pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, medical specialists, Roma educational mediators, etc.

✚ The final **call for proposals, the Small Grant Scheme, which will support local development and stimulate job creation**, was published on July 8, 2022 with a total budget of **3,523,000 EUR**. The purpose of the procedure is to support innovative approaches aimed at stimulating economic activity and creating jobs in Valchi dol, Levski, Ivanovo, Dimitrovgrad, Bansko, Brezovo, Belitsa, Elena, Momchilgrad, and Lyaskovets municipalities. Resources will be provided to test and promote innovative approaches for local employment development, to make job vacancies more accessible, to encourage employers to adopt flexible working practices, to organize events that bring employers and job seekers together, as well as to create job opportunities for disadvantaged groups; support will be provided for the implementation of measures included in the local development strategies elaborated by the 10 municipalities under project “Growth by activating local potential – GALOP”, funded under the Programme.

✚ In 2022, all calls for selection of project proposals under the “Local development, poverty reduction and enhanced inclusion of vulnerable groups” programme, were finalized.

ACTIVE PROJECTS

YOUTH CENTERS

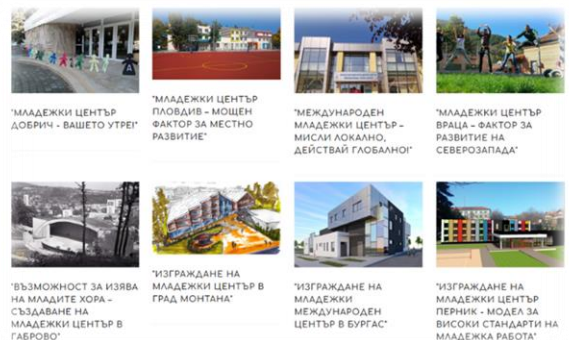
✚ In 2022, the activities for establishment of four new youth centers and expansion of the activities of the four youth centers already built in the previous years, have continued. The strategies for the development of the youth centers include an active training programme, cultural exchange and promotion of international partnerships.

Under the Programme, **four new youth centers are being established** in **Burgas, Gabrovo, Montana and Pernik** municipalities. At the end of 2022, in order to help the beneficiaries cope with the highly increased prices of construction materials, the **Programme Operator** has launched a restricted procedure for additional funding of the projects under the "Construction of Youth Centers" procedure. Funding under the restricted procedure will be annexed to the main contracts of the beneficiaries after the evaluation is completed at the beginning of 2023.

For more information, follow the links below:

<https://yicburgas.bg/>
<https://youth.gabrovo.bg/>
<https://iyc.pernik.bg/>
<https://www.youthmnt.eu/>

All youth centers funded under the Programme are actively participating in National Network of Youth Centers meetings, which aims to bring all centers together and support their efforts to meet the highest European standards summarized in the Quality Mark requirements of the Council of Europe.



The projects for **expanding the scope and activities of the four youth centers** established under the Financial Mechanism in the the previous programme period in **Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Dobrich and Vratsa**, are also under implementation. **Two of those youth centers, in Stara Zagora and Plovdiv, which had been awarded the Quality Mark of the Council of Europe, received a renewal of the prize until 2025!**

<https://youthcenter.plovdiv.bg>
<https://YCD.bg>
<https://IYC.STARAZAGORA.BG>
<https://youthcentervratza.com>

✚ Project “Rehabilitation center for children with oncohematological diseases”



The Rehabilitation center for children with oncohematological diseases is an extremely important and socially significant project implemented in Kostinbrod municipality. The project has a budget of 1,316,649 EUR and is implemented in partnership with the Children with Oncohematological Diseases Association. The center is the first and only one for the Balkans and the

eight in the world. The service that is provided is new for Bulgaria and aims to help children and their families to overcome stress and isolation during the long and difficult treatment and its consequences, to bring the children’s families together and assist in their successful social reintegration after the treatment is completed. The experts’ work in the rehabilitation center addresses children and young people to help them regain their self-confidence, overcome the long isolation in a safe environment through specific programmes either individually or in groups. The assistance includes psychological support, providing help in the learning process, returning to normal social contacts and inclusion activities by developing communication and group work skills, utilizing free time through games, entertainment, various group workshops inside and outside the center, sports activities such as swimming, yoga, ball games, bike rides, walks in the nature, excursions, etc. All activities are tailored to the general health status of children and youth with oncohematological diseases. Special attention is brought to their interests and skills, according to their age and physical capabilities. To date, 75 families have benefited from the services provided, and all of them express 100% satisfaction with the services provided.

✚ Project “Innovative Community Care Models in Favor of People with Chronic Diseases and Permanent Disabilities”



is implemented by the Bulgarian Red Cross in partnership with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Health and Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). The project has a budget of 3,863,333 EUR. Under the project, 3 “Home care” centers were opened in Vidin, Belogradchik and Montana, which complement the work of the already existing four centers in Oryahovo, Krivodol, Byala Slatina and Vratsa. The centers provide

integrated health and social care in a home environment for the elderly with chronic diseases and permanent disabilities, through the services of nurses and home helpers recruited under the project. The innovative element in the project is the creation of a completely new and unique model for remote monitoring of chronic diseases, i.e., “teleassistance/telecare services”, by using modern information and communication technologies. In March 2022, the first Control and Communication Center (CCC) in the country was opened to provide such services to elderly people with chronic diseases and permanent disabilities. By the end of October 2022, 636 people were using the service provided by 69 nurses, home helpers and teleassistants. The Bulgarian Red Cross is preparing the standards and legislative proposals that will enable the provision of remote services throughout the country as state delegated activities.

🚩 Project “Growth through Activating Local Potential – GALOP”

Project “Growth through Activating Local Potential – GALOP” is implemented by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria in partnership with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). The project has a budget of 1,200,000 EUR and its main objective is to support the social and economic development of disadvantaged municipalities in Bulgaria by activating unused local resources and potential.



Successful development models that are applicable in other municipalities are being developed, and cooperation between the local authorities is being stimulated, aimed at promoting social and economic progress. The project includes the elaboration of models of effective development that are also applicable in other municipalities, and stimulates the cooperation between the local authorities, which is aimed at promoting the social and economic progress.

In October 2022, “Economic Development by Activating Local Resources” National Forum was held with the participation of a delegation from the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities. Norway’s experience in planning and implementing tools to promote local development and municipalities was presented. The key factors for the economic utilization of local resources were outlined, as follows: 1) The ability to recognize and evaluate the potential and strengths; 2) Follow sufficiently long-term plans for municipal development covering several mandates; 3) The creation of permanent open processes/mechanisms to involve and mobilize the community; 4) Cooperation aimed at achieving economic and institutional sustainability; 5) Systematic financial and expert support by regional and national authorities.

🚩 Project “Healthcare for everyone”



On March 2, 2022, a conference was held to present the “Health for everyone” project promoted by the Ministry of Health in partnership with the National Network of Health Mediators. The project addresses systemic issues in maternal and child healthcare, including family planning and sexually transmitted infections, particularly syphilis and congenital syphilis. The main objectives of the project include improved communication, effective use of resources and coordination at the local level in the implementation of health policies for marginalized communities by optimizing the health mediation

system, identifying and analyzing problems in the system work at the local level; problems in communicating with the local communities and finding workable flexible work models that respond to the heterogeneous specificities of marginalized communities. In March and April 2022, the implementation of one of the key activities, i.e., the selection of 6 pilot municipalities for implementation of the project activities, has begun. A questionnaire was developed and distributed among 73 municipalities, where there are settlements with a high degree of marginalization. Information was collected on the good examples of working with vulnerable communities at the local level, which can be used to test those models and approaches. 10 municipalities were ranked based on certain criteria,

including the involvement of experienced health mediators, marginalization of the most vulnerable groups, systemic problems identified, willingness of the local authorities to cooperate. In May 2022, preparations began for the implementation of one of the key activities, the mapping in the selected 6 pilot municipalities: Burgas, Dimitrovgrad, Dupnitsa, Kazanlak, Novi Pazar and Samokov.

✚ Project “Capacity building for educational and social inclusion”

On February 4, 2022, an introductory conference was held under the **“Capacity building for educational and social inclusion”** project. The project is implemented by the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (CEICSEM) in partnership with Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The main project activities include the preparation of training methods and programmes for youth workers, educational mediators, pedagogues, non-pedagogical experts and municipal employees.



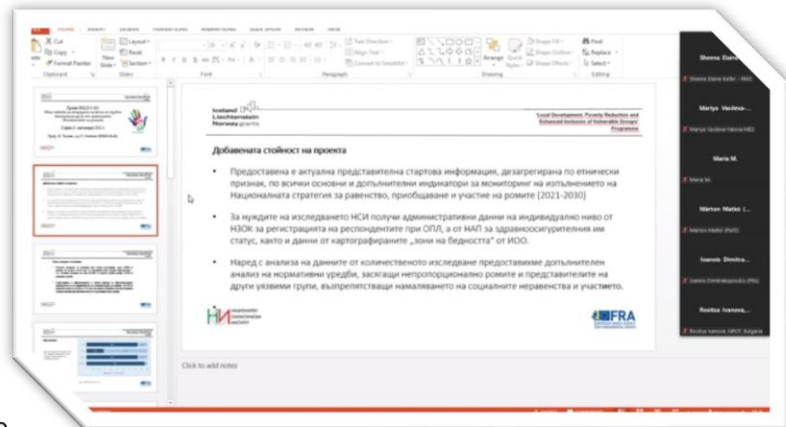
In 2022, a number of trainings were held, which were part of the project activities: training of youth workers trainers, training of university professors, etc., assigned under the Programme’s projects. A public discussion of the methodologies and training programmes developed for the target groups, was held.



In the period August 27-31, 2022, 5 CEICSEM employees and 32 professors from “St. Kliment Ohridski” University in Sofia and other universities in the country participated in a series of workshops and training held at the European Vergeland Center, Oslo, the Kingdom of Norway. Workshops were held at Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training (Regjeringen) at the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, as well as with educational mediators at Oslo Municipality.

✦ Project “Novel Approaches to Generating Data on Hard-to-reach Populations at Risk of Violation of their Rights”

In 2022, the project “Novel Approaches to Generating Data on Hard-to-reach Populations at Risk of Violation of their Rights” implemented by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) in partnership with the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), was finalized. On September 13, 2022, an online conference was held, where the achievements of the project were presented. During the event, the thematic reports that were developed for the four vulnerable groups: children, Roma, the elderly and people with disabilities, reports on the selected indicators for the sustainable development goals and a toolkit for using the data in the development and implementation of policies, were presented. The reports are published on the project website: <https://www.novelelea.bg/>.



TRAININGS, EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE AND GOOD PRACTICE AND ANNUAL MEETINGS

■ In the period May 17-20, 2022, the Programme Operator conducted trainings for the project promoters under the “Early Childhood Education and Care” and “Integrated measures for supporting Roma inclusion and empowerment” procedures. The project promoters under the “Integrated measures for supporting Roma inclusion and empowerment”



procedure also took part in a special module related to the organization of information activities/campaigns, aimed at explaining the project activities and increasing the level of acceptance of the Roma community by the majority.

■ **The National Conference “Under the many guises of youth work”** was held in the period June 29 – July 1, 2022 with the participation of the youth centers that are part of the **National Network of Youth Centers.**

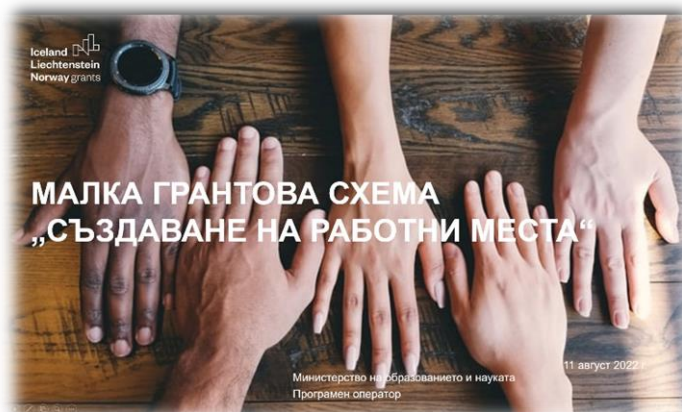
The conference was organized by the International Youth Center, Pernik. The event included work sessions moderated by each center, and also discussions, work groups, informal events, and exchange of experience and good practices.



■ **In the period July 18-20, 2022,** the Programme Operator conducted training for the beneficiaries under the “Integrated measures for supporting Roma inclusion and empowerment” procedure on the following topic: “Activities and results for changing attitudes”. The training was related to the counseling, training, monitoring of the results and evaluation of the achievements by organizing activities to increase the level of acceptance of the Roma community by the majority and vice versa, which are part of the mandatory indicators of the procedure.



■ **On August 11, 2022,** an online information day was held on the “Job Creation” Small Grant Scheme, where the Programme Operator explained to potential applicants the objectives and tasks of the scheme, the important specifics, the rules and main types of eligible activities, and answered the questions raised by potential applicants.



On October 6, 2022, the first of a number of planned meetings between the beneficiary municipalities under the “Early childhood education and care” procedure was held on the territory of Gorna Oryahovitsa municipality. The Municipality was the first host and organizer in the newly created network for exchange of experience and good practices. All participants presented their projects, what had been done so far, what was to come and the difficulties they had encountered in the process of implementation. At the end of the meeting, all participants agreed that the next meeting would be held on the territory of Kozloduy municipality.



On October 26, 2022, Ms. Siri Beate-Berry, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway, Ms. Iolanta Shopova, Counselor for the EEA FM and NFM at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway, representatives of the Programme Operator, and Ms. Yordanka Fandakova, Mayor of Sofia Municipality, visited one of the hubs in “Faculteta” neighborhood, “Krasna Polyana” district, which is part of project “Model for integrated development for early childhood education and care in Sofia”. The project is implemented by Sofia Municipality in partnership with the Health and Social Development Foundation and the Bulgarian-Norwegian Society.



The Programme Operator and the National Focal Point at the Council of Ministers organized and held the first meeting of the Advisory Council to support the implementation of the projects under the “Integrated measures for supporting Roma inclusion and empowerment” and “Early Childhood Education and Care” procedures. The agenda of the event was focused on discussing the implementation of the projects under the two procedures, as well as consultation on priorities and measures that could be implemented.



On December 1 and 2, 2022,

the first of a number of planned meetings between beneficiary municipalities under the “Integrated measures for supporting Roma inclusion and empowerment” procedure was held on the territory of Maglizh municipality. The municipality was the first host in the newly created network for exchange of experience and good practices.

In the event, which was held in a hybrid format, both the beneficiaries and their partners took part, including Mr. Georgi Kenov, the Mayor of Sungurlare Municipality. All participants presented their projects, what had been done so far, what was to come and the difficulties they faced during implementation. The main goal of the meeting was to achieve higher efficiency in the project implementation through the exchange of experience and good practices. The cooperation and sharing of effective methods for solving different and similar issues help to a greater extent for the better implementation of the goals and results of the projects.



In the period 5-7 December, 2022,

the Programme Operator organized the annual meeting of the National Network of Youth Centers (NNYC) to report on what had been done in 2022 and elect a new Chairperson of the NNYC for 2023. The National Network of Youth Centers was established in 2018 and its aim is to provide activities for the effective cooperation, exchange of knowledge, skills,

experience and good practices, with the aim of increasing the quality of youth work in Bulgaria. All four existing youth centers financed under the Programme, i.e., Vratsa, Plovdiv, Dobrich, and Stara Zagora, as well as the four new youth centers that are being established in Pernik, Montana, Gabrovo and Burgas as associated members, are part of the NNYC.



In the period December 14-

15, 2022, the Programme Operator organized a seminar for the exchange of experience and good practices with programme operators under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

The purpose of the meeting was to achieve synergy between the individual programmes implementing projects aimed at vulnerable groups. The event also addressed topics such as lessons learned, experience sharing, future plans and collaboration between all programmes having a similar focus. The seminar was attended by representatives of the Programme Operators in the Ministry of Interior



and Ministry of Justice, and all participants presented their programmes and projects, their progress, work methods and expected results.

■ In 2022, the Programme Operator took an interview “About the inspiration to work with young people” from Lyubomira Miticheva, the first youth worker in the new Youth Center in Pernik under the project “Establishment of Youth Center in Pernik – a model for high standards of youth work”, implemented by Pernik Municipality.



■ In 2022, a large number of projects organized and held their kick-off events, events for exchange of experiences and good practices, events such as “ground breaking”, conferences, need studies and n-level studies, which are part of the project activities.



An updated information about the Programme and the project promoters' activities can be found on the Programme's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), as well as on the Programme's official [website](#).



Programme Operator



Ministry of Education and Science
"External European Programmes" Directorate

Programme Partner



Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)

International Partner Organization



Council of Europe